

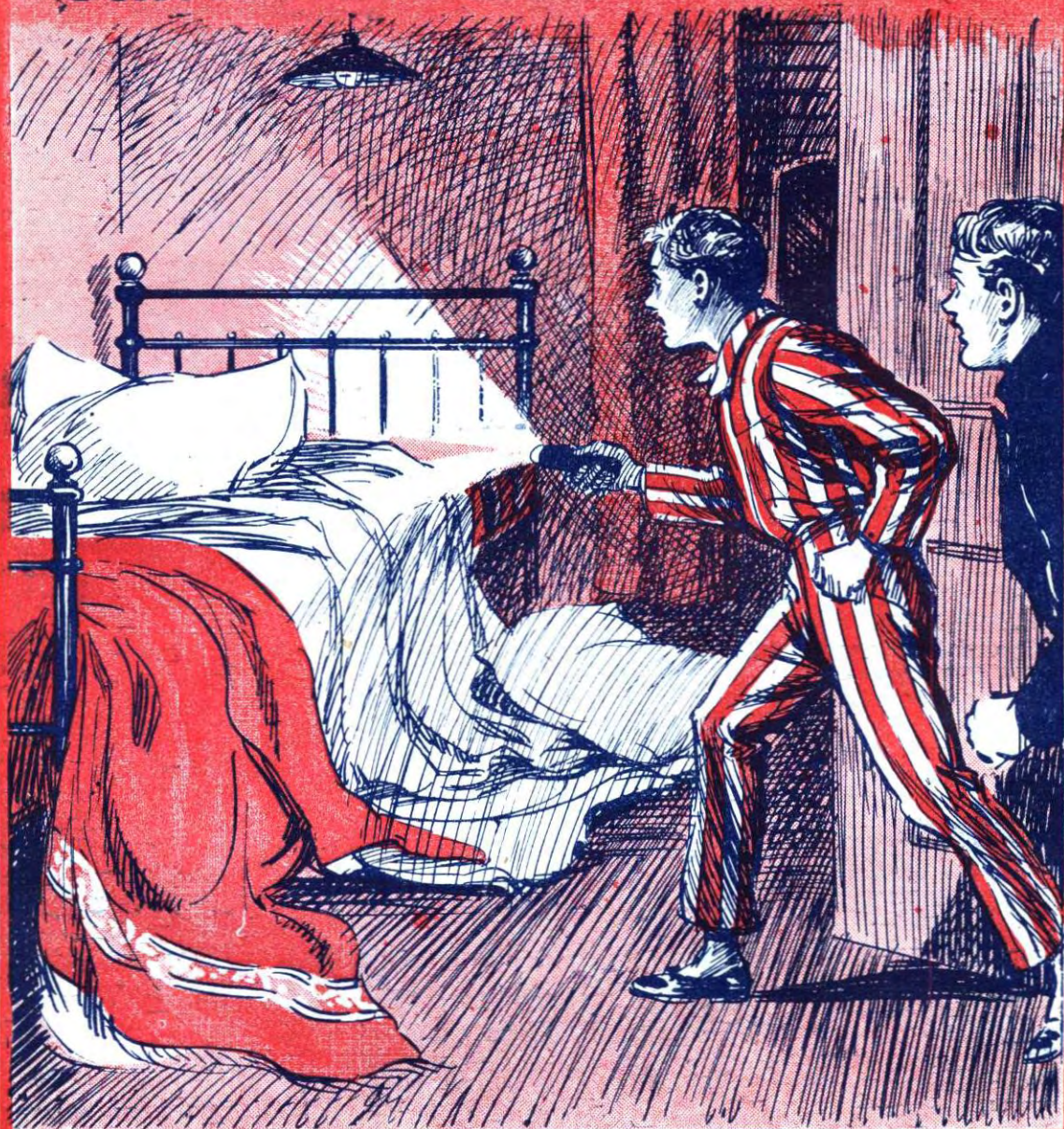
GREAT SCHOOL STORY — "THE MYSTERY OF HOLLY LODGE!" BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 897.
Vol. XXVII.
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1925.

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MONTY LOWTHER?

Awakened at the dead of night by a faint cry, Tom Merry and Harry Manners, visitors at Holly Lodge, make a dramatic discovery! (A startling incident from the grand story of the Chums of St. Jim's, 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.—There is a special item of news this week which will get a hearty welcome. It concerns our new serial. When the curtain falls next week on Mr. Arthur S. Hardy's grand footer serial, its place will be taken by the most dramatic tale of the coal-mine ever written. The special attention of readers who have asked for a pit story is called to this fact. I shall refer to the new feature again.

"D'ARCY DOES IT!"

By Martin Clifford.

This week's grand issue of the GEM contains a really top-line mystery yarn of St. Jim's. The baffling mystification is carried on through in our next number to a conclusion which is something more than merely logical. The follow-on tale boasts of a surprise, and the wind up undoubtedly sends Arthur Augustus pegs higher in popular esteem. With all his chinwagging and prolixity Gussy has a remarkably keen understanding. Next week's story of the old school has heaps of live situations. The disappearance of Lowther's uncle has put everyone on edge. Worse follows when Monty himself vanishes into thin air, puns and all. And then Gussy steps forward, and plays his cards like an old hand at the detective business. Pass this great yarn on to a chum when you have read it. You will make him a Gemite for life.

A "CUPTIE" ISSUE!

The "St. Jim's News" is thrice welcome next Wednesday. It is a very special number, and deals with the great fixture which comes as the big wind up of a sensational a footer season as most of us can remember. An announcement concerning the "St. Jim's News" puts the extinguisher on the gloomy rumours current in a few places that the Supplement had disappeared. That was most inaccurate. The "St. Jim's News" has been squeezed out on occasion, but it could not be helped. I can assure those many friends who have written in complaining about the absence of the Supplement that the failure to turn up was only temporary, and due to circumstances over which the merry little feature had no control. Watch out for the new number. It will knock spots

off all other footer "extras," for this coming number is a particularly bright, smart, and up-to-date affair.

"RAGGY TO THE RESCUE!"

By John W. Wheway.

In fact and fiction we are familiar enough with crafty attempts to bring utter discredit on the innocent by juggling with cash and placing money where it ought not to be. In next week's spirited complete story Mr. Wheway gives a really new turn to the old device. Trojan Tim is up against it once more. Coulson Ferriers and Uncle Nick are set on bringing the young sportsman down, and so taking the handsome legacy which is Tim's by rights. Rogues of that colour stick at nothing, however much offside. But the spirit of fair play works through many agencies. I am not going further into a really fine plot. There is a ring about this yarn, and a sting to boot, you can reckon on that. And if that jolly little sport, the programme-seller, had not been on the spot matters might have gone uncommon hard for Trojan Tim. Raggy's part in this story is noteworthy. He makes a very startling discovery, and comes to a decision which means no end to his stalwart chum.

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

By A. S. Hardy.

After a rattling run, with plenty of clever goals, this serial swings to its culmination next Wednesday. It will have left its mark. Readers of the GEM have testified their approval of the yarn in no uncertain manner.

"DAVE—THE PITBOY!"

By Max Hamilton.

This is our great new serial of the coal-mine, and a record success can be confidently predicted for the story. It is written by a man who knows all that is to be learned of the dim, mysterious under-world of the gloomy pit, with the unending galleries and the perils of the workings. Look out for the thrilling start of this brilliant romance of the depths. We see how Dave is fated to make a tremendous discovery concerning a plot to bring disaster on the mine, the brave men working beneath the surface, and the young superintendent. The latter has an enemy, a man working in the shadow, his own brother—a scoundrel who is resolved to do for his kinsman by hook or crook. A real life story this, palpitating with excitement, absolutely real and convincing from the start. It is bound to make a great hit with all GEM readers, who know a good yarn when they meet it.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

Summer is coming on, and this renowned feature is going on as triumphantly as ever. Send in your best storyettes, and write them on the useful postcard.

Your Editor.

"My Readers Own Corner."

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

GOOD OLD GLAM!

WHY LONDON LAUGHED!

It was a misty day, and also a depressing one. In vain the London lost endeavoured to instil into the caroty head of his guest from the country some show of enthusiasm. But nothing interested him. The Thames was too muddy, the horses were too small, the atmosphere was foggy, and even the great buildings for which London is famous failed to make the least impression. But at Trafalgar Square there came a welcome change. The farmer suddenly stopped short and gazed across the road at the Nelson Column.

"Fine, isn't it?" said his guide hopefully. The farmer's eyes roamed up to the figure of Nelson on the top, then dropped down to the four lions squatting at the base. "By gum!" he exclaimed, interested at last. "They've got the old man fairly treed, ain't they?"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to F. Shaw, 61, Pontypridd Road, Porth, Glam.

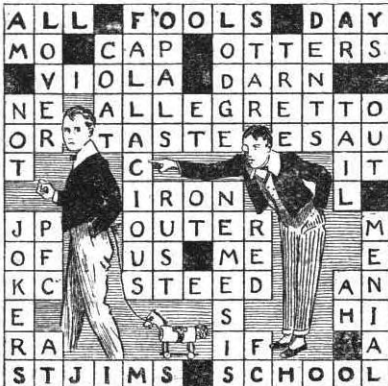
ALL OUT!

One day a young gentleman called to see his friend, when a certain dialogue took place. "Is your master in?" asked the gentleman. "No, sir, he's out," replied the servant. "Then is your mistress in?" questioned the gentleman. "No, sir, she's out, too," replied the servant. "Then I'll sit by the fire till they return." "Faith, sir," replied the servant, "but that's out, too!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Fred Williamson, 280, Stockport Road, Gee Cross, Hyde.

HEARD IN THE TRAIN!

"Wonderful things, newspapers, the-o days, aren't they, Bill? They've got so many different kinds of things in them—stories, cookery 'ints, football news—"

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S CROSS WORD PUZZLE.



something for everybody, in fact." "You're right, they are, Charles." "But what's this 'ere blank space for, Bill?" said Charles, pointing to the blank space left for "Stop Press News." "Oh," replied Bill, "that's for them wot can't read!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Herbert Thompson, 50, Parsonage Road, Withington, Manchester.

MISUNDERSTOOD!

The dear old gentleman got into conversation with the young man on the seat opposite him. "And what is your job, sir?" he asked. "If I may be so bold as to inquire." "I travel in underwear," was the answer. "How curious!" said the old man, rubbing his spectacles. "And—er—what a cold job it must be in the winter!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. L. Biddle, 116, Bunbury Road, Worthfield, Birmingham.

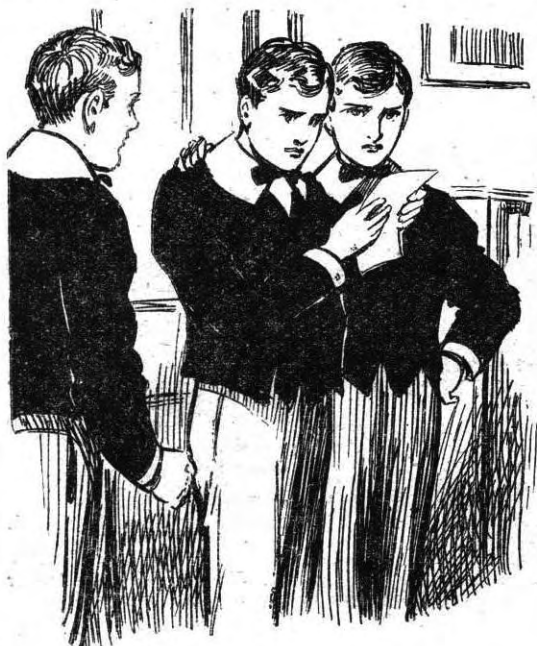
SEE THE POINT!

Mr. Lathom was illustrating the change in position of the decimal point when multiplying by ten. Having written 6.35 on the blackboard, he rubbed out the decimal point. "Now, Baggy Trimble," he said, "where is the decimal point?" "On the duster, sir!" came Baggy's quick response. Mr. Lathom collapsed on the spot.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Goddard, 2, West Terrace, Western Hill, Durham City.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON. THE GEM LIBRARY.

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

There are some queer doings at Holly Lodge—Lowther's uncle is missing! And when the missing man's secretary tries to put off the visit of Monty Lowther and his chums, it breeds no little suspicion.



THE MYSTERY OF HOLLY LODGE!

A Thrilling, Long Complete School
Story of Tom Merry & Co., the
World-Famous Chums of St. Jim's.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy is too Good!

MONTY LOWTHER, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, came into Study No. 10 in the Shell with a frown on his brow.

It was teatime, and Tom Merry was making the tea, and Manners was buttering the muffins.

Uninterested in those preparations, Monty Lowther sat down in the armchair and grunted.

It was the day before breaking-up for the Easter holidays, and most of the St. Jim's fellows were looking merry and bright. And Monty, as a rule, was one of the merriest and brightest fellows in the Shell. Now, however, he was frowning, and looking anything but merry and bright.

"Tea's ready, old scout!" said Manners.

Grunt!

"Anything up?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Give it a name, old man," said Tom cheerily.

"I've just been down to look for letters," growled Lowther, "and there isn't one for me."

"Oh!"

Lowther's frown deepened.

"It's too bad!" he said. "I've been looking for that dashed letter by every post for days. It's really too bad! It isn't as if I'd written to nunky for a tip—I could understand it then. He mightn't be in a hurry to answer. But as the matter stands—"

Lowther finished with an expressive grunt.

Evidently, he was worried.

It was not often that Monty was anxious for letters from his uncle and guardian, Mr. James Lowther, J.P., M.P.

Such missives more often contained good advice than remittances; and though, of course, good advice from a J.P. and M.P. was very valuable, Monty could have managed to worry along somehow without it.

But on the present occasion, the expected communication was a matter of importance—more important than a remittance, more important even than the excellent advice which Mr. Lowther lavished on his nephew.

"It's rotten!" went on Monty. "Nunky might really have weighed in with a letter by this time."

"Easter time posts are often late," remarked Manners.

"There's been lots of time for an answer. Uncle Lowther is a rather crusty old bird, but it's not like him. I—I wonder whether he's ill!" said Lowther thoughtfully.

Tom Merry and Manners exchanged a slight smile.

They had had the pleasure of seeing Lowther's uncle more than once, and they were aware that the description of him as a "crusty old bird" was quite within the mark.

Undoubtedly, he was a good-hearted gentleman, as witness the fact that he had taken charge of an orphan nephew.

But goodness of heart is sometimes accompanied by crustiness of temper; certainly that was so with Mr. James Lowther, J.P., M.P., of Holly Lodge, Hampshire.

"Of course, it's all right," went on Lowther, rather hastily. "Uncle knows that I'm bringing you two fellows home with me. He will be glad to see you, of course. Anyhow, we're only putting in a couple of days before we go on to your place, Tom. It's all serene. But I really think he might have dropped me a line in answer to my letter. I really begin to think that he must be ill."

"May be a letter in the morning," said Tom Merry. "Anyhow, don't worry. If nunky is seedy, or cross, or any old thing, you can come straight home with me to-morrow instead."

Lowther coloured.

It really was an awkward situation.

Tom Merry could have taken any fellow he liked home with him for the holidays, merely apprising Miss Priscilla Fawcett of the fact by letter or telegram. But considering that Mr. Lowther was a crusty old bird, Monty had felt it more judicious to let the old gentleman know in good time that he was bringing Tom Merry and Manners with him. Crusty as Mr. Lowther was, he was a kind guardian, in his own way, and not at all likely to object to such a very simple and ordinary proceeding. But Lowther wanted a reply from him, to make assurance doubly sure, as it were.

And no reply had come, though there had been ample time for Mr. Lowther to catch a dozen posts.

If—which was improbable—he did not want Monty to bring his two chums to the Lodge, at least he would, and should, have written to say so. And if he was indifferent on the subject, as was most likely, an answer to Monty's letter was still required.

Leaving the letter unanswered indicated an unusual crustiness of temper, or else that the old gentleman was ill.

"I tell you, it's all right," said Lowther. "You're coming with me, of course, as we've arranged. Nunky is crusty, but he doesn't bite."

"Of course, old chap! That's all right!"

"But if he's ill!" suggested Manners.

"Well, then, surely somebody would have written to say so!" grunted Lowther. "There's the housekeeper, Miss Skeene, and his secretary, Bosanne. Either of them might have written, if nunky couldn't."

Tom Merry and Manners made no rejoinder to that.

Their own impression was that the "crusty old bird" did not want his hopeful nephew to bring two noisy school-boys into the Lodge, which was a particularly quiet, sedate, and orderly residence. Mr. Lowther had his good points, and many of them; but it was a fact that he did not like boys; he did not revel in juvenile society as some old gentlemen did. It was not exactly a secret that Mr. Lowther

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preferred, as a rule, that his nephew should pass his vacations with his friends, rather than at Holly Lodge, Hampshire.

Tap!

The door of Study No. 10 opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, looked in, his arrival heralded by the glitter of his celebrated eyeglass.

"Lowthah heah—"

"Adsum!" grunted Lowther.

"I believe you are expectin' a lettah, old scout," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Do you?"

"Yaas, deah boy—I have noticed you nosin' aroud the lettah-wack wathah anxiously for two or thwee days," said Arthur Augustus.

"That needn't worry you," grunted Lowther.

Arthur Augustus raised his noble eyebrows.

"It does not wowwy me, Lowthah."

Grunt!

"But, in the cires, knowin' that you are wathah anxious about a lettah, I thought I would mention that there is a lettah for you, and—"

Lowther jumped up.

"A letter for me?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"I didn't see it—thanks!"

Lowther ran to the doorway, brushed past the obliging Gussy, and scudded into the passage.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass after the hurrying Shell fellow.

"Lowthah!" he shouted.

Monty Lowther did not heed. He was scudding down the stairs, very anxious to get hold of the letter, which he had, apparently, overlooked in scanning the rack.

"Bai jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, with a puzzled look at Tom Merry and Manners. "Where has Lowthah gone?"

"Gone to get his letter, of course," said Tom.

"But I've brough his lettah heah."

"What?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy groped in his pocket, and produced a letter. Tom and Manners stared at him.

"As Lowthah seemed wathah anxious about it, I thought I would bring it up to the studay," explained Gussy. "I should have been heah a quartah of an hour ago, only that ass Blake kept me talkin—"

"You silly owl!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I suppose that's why Lowther didn't find the letter in the rack!"

"Bai Jove! Has he been down to see?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Still, it is wathah odd of him to wush off like that, when I have brough his lettah to the studay," said Arthur Augustus. "More haste, less speed, you know. Give him the

lettah when he comes back, will you?" And the swell of St. Jim's tossed the missive on the table.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Duffer!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

There was a clatter of footsteps in the Shell passage. Monty Lowther came back with a red face.

"You silly chump!" he roared.

Arthur Augustus stared at him.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Is this a time to pull a fellow's leg, you silly owl, when he's anxious for a letter?" bawled Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I— Yawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as the incensed Lowther rushed on him and grabbed him, and banged his noble head on the oak door.

"There!" gasped Lowther, "and there—"

Bang, bang!

"Yawwoooo! Welease me, you wuffian!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, I will give you a feahful thwashin' if—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Chuck it, Lowther."

"Yawwoop!"

"He told me there was a letter, and theré isn't a letter!" yelled Lowther. "I'll give him practical jokes—"

"Yow-ow-ow! You feahful beast—"

Bang!

"You cwass ass, you feahful wuffian—"

"Here's the letter!" yelled Manners. "Gussy brought it to the study."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lowther.

He released the swell of St. Jim's suddenly. Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble head, and glared at Lowther.

"You fwithful hooligan—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Put up your hands, Lowthah!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Fathead!"

Monty Lowther grabbed the letter from the table, unheeding the exasperated swell of the Fourth. Tom Merry and Manners collared Arthur Augustus just in time as he was rushing to the attack.

"Easy does it, old chap!" said Tom, chuckling.

"Welease me—"

"Peace, my infant, peace!" said the captain of the Shell soothingly. "Shocking bad form to row at Easter-time, Gussy!"

"I have had my head banged—"

"Nothing in it to damage," said Manners.

"Bai Jove! You cheeky ass—"

There was a sudden, sharp exclamation from Monty Lowther. Heedless of the excited Gussy, he had torn open the letter. He stood with it in his hand, his face white.

"Monty, old man!" exclaimed Tom.

"Bai Jove!" The wrath of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy vanished like snow in the sunshine. "Lowthah! Bad news?"

Lowther nodded without speaking.

"Sowwy, old chap!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quietly retired and closed the door of Study No. 10, and the Terrible Three were left to themselves.

CHAPTER 2.

Startling News!

TOM MERRY and Manners looked at Monty Lowther. He stood holding the letter, staring at it with startled eyes. It seemed as if he could not believe what he had seen written there.

"Monty, old man—" said Tom.

"It's impossible!" muttered Lowther.

"From your uncle?" asked Manners.

"No—no! It's from his secretary, Bosanne. He—he says that—that—" Lowther's voice shook. "He says— Oh, I can't believe it! It's impossible—it's rot!"

"Mr. Lowther—he's ill?" asked Tom, hesitatingly. From Lowther's manner he feared to hear that the news was worse than that.

"No—I don't know—" Lowther was still staring at the letter. "Look at it—you fellows read it! I can't believe it! It's all rot! Only that fellow Bosanne isn't the man to play tricks—it couldn't be a ghastly joke, I suppose. But—but—"

Lowther handed the letter to Tom, and the captain of the Shell and Manners read it together.

It was written in a small, neat hand—a handwriting they had seen before. It was that of Mr. Eric Bosanne, the secretary of the M.P. Sometimes Mr. Bosanne had written to Lowther before, when the M.P. had been too busy to write, and the chums of Study No. 10 knew his "fist" well enough. The letter ran:

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Ask Your Newsagent to Show You
These Books.

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No. 757.—RIVALS OF THE ROVERS.

A Stunning Yarn of Second Division Football, introducing Dick Dare and the Mapleton Rovers. By RANDOLPH RYLE.

No. 758.—THE ISLAND SPORTSMEN.

An Exciting Story of Sport and Adventure, introducing Captain CARR and the Lads of the Challenger. By NORMAN TAYLOR.

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A Wonderful Story of Strong Detective Work and Thrilling Adventure. By the Author of the Popular Gilbert and Eileen Hale Series.

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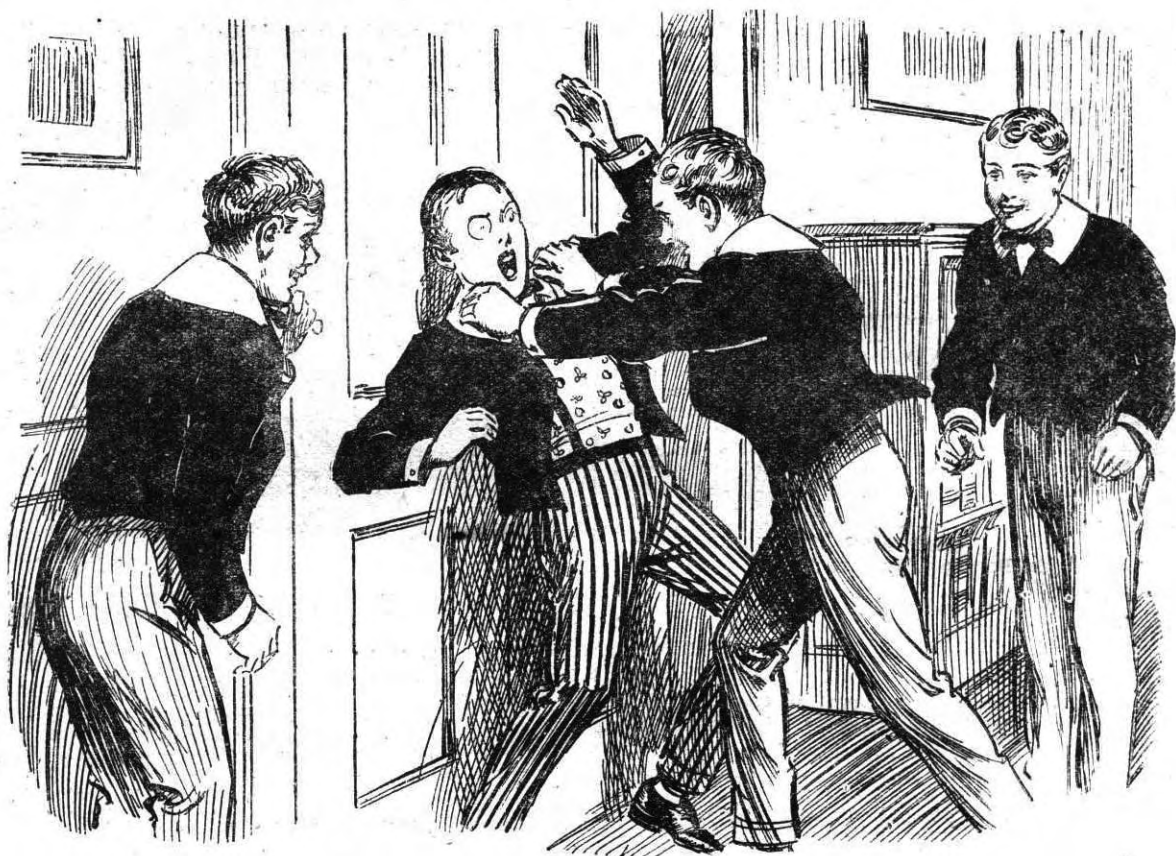
Another Magnificent Story, introducing GRANITE GRANT and MILLE JULIE.

No. 378.—THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN STOOL.

A Splendid Tale of Detective Adventure in England and Africa. By the Author of "By Order of the Soviet," etc., etc.

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Price Fourpence Each!



"Bai Jove! I——! Yawwooooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as the incensed Monty Lowther rushed on him and grabbed him, and banged his noble head on the oak door. "There!" gasped Lowther. "And there!" Bang! Bang! Bang! "Yawwoop! Welsease me, you wuffian!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, I will give you a feahful thwashin'——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Chuck it, Lowther!" (See page 4.)

"Holly Lodge, Hampshire.

"Dear Master Montague,—I have some bad news for you, which will, I fear, cast a shadow over your Easter holidays. Your uncle has strangely disappeared from his home.

"This occurred last Tuesday. He went out for a walk in the evening, taking, so far as can be ascertained, the path towards the cliffs. He did not return, and a very anxious night was passed by all here, as it was feared that he might have lost his way in the mists and fallen from a cliff.

"The police were communicated with early the following morning, and a systematic search was undertaken; but so far, nothing has been discovered.

"I hesitated to inform you, hoping for better news to send you; but as your school is on the point of breaking up for the holidays, I am compelled to let you know what has happened.

"We still hope that Mr. Lowther may be found alive and well; it is possible that it may prove to be a case of loss of memory, or something of the kind.

"In the circumstances, doubtless you will not wish to bring your friends home to Holly Lodge. I understand that they were to stay a few days here with you, and then you were to go on with them to Master Merry's home.

"No doubt you will consider it best to go direct to Master Merry's home with him, as your friends would find Holly Lodge very depressing in the present painful circumstances.

"In the event of any news being received of your respected uncle, I shall, of course, acquaint you immediately by telegram. Yours sincerely,

E. BOSANNEY.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry blankly. "So—so that's why your uncle hasn't answered your letter, Monty!"

"Yes," said Monty huskily.

"Keep your pecker up, old man!" said Manners quietly. "If he'd fallen over the cliffs, as Bosanne suggests, they'd have found something of him by this time—in three or four days."

"Loss of memory," said Tom. "There have been lots of such cases, Monty—"

Lowther shook his head.

"That's not the case with my uncle. He's a hard-headed man, sharp as a razor; nothing wrong with his intellect. Something's happened to him—goodness knows what. Foul play, most likely."

Lowther choked.

"It—it's nearly knocked me over," he muttered. "He was a crusty old chap. You fellows only saw that much of him, but I—I've often joked about the old chap; but he was a good man, and he's been good to me. If he's dead—"

Lowther choked again.

"Don't look on the worst side, old fellow," said Tom. "Bosanne says that the police are looking for him—they may find out something any hour. You may get a wire in the morning—"

"Looks to me as if this chap Bosanne is taking a good deal on himself," said Manners. "He ought to have let you know at once."

Lowther's eyes gleamed.

"Of course he ought, the dummy! I dare say he meant well, but it was cheek—keeping me in the dark like that! Miss Skeene ought to have written; but I dare say Bosanne advised her not to. Confound the fellow!"

"You'll go home all the same?" asked Tom.

"Of course."

"Right!" agreed Manners. "In your place, I should jolly well want to be right on the spot, to see if I could do something to help."

"That's just it," said Lowther. "I'm going, of course. You fellows won't care to come, in the circumstances."

"Rot!" said Tom, at once. "We'll come, if you want us. In fact, you'd better not go alone, Monty; you'll want your pals with you. You only know what Bosanne has told you; we may find out more on the spot. Anyhow, we'll jolly well help in hunting for your old uncle!"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners.

"I'd like you to come just the same, no end!" said Lowther. "But you see what Bosanne says. He's quite

saying that it will be a pretty depressing place in the circumstances."

"All the more reason why you should have your friends with you."

"Right-ho, then," said Lowther. "I'm jolly glad if you'll come!"

"You'll let Bosanne know?"

Lowther grunted.

"Blow Bosanne! I sha'n't answer this. He'll know I'm coming when I get home. Like his cheek to tell me to keep away from home when something's happened to my uncle!"

"I suppose he means well," said Tom. "But it is rather a cheek. We'll give him the pleasure of seeing us walk in at Holly Lodge to-morrow. And—and we'll jolly well hunt for Mr. Lowther, old chap, and jolly well find him, too, if he's to be found."

Monty Lowther nodded, and smiled faintly. His comrades were trying to cheer him up; but deep down in Monty's heart there was an icy fear that he had seen his uncle for the last time—that if the search for the missing man was successful, the result would only be the finding of a dead man. He tried to drive the thought from his mind, and the fear from his heart; but he could not succeed. Monty Lowther's usually sunny face was darkly clouded that evening—the last of the term at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Bosanne Wants to Know!

"LOWTHER!"

"Where's Lowther?"

It was the following morning, and both Houses at St. Jim's were in a buzz and bustle with breaking-up for the Easter vacation.

Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form, was inquiring for Lowther of the Shell in rather impatient tones. Blake of the Fourth was busy with preparations for departure, and had no time to waste.

"Lowther! Where's that ass Lowther?" roared Blake, on the staircase in the School House. "Hallo, Cardew! Seen Lowther?"

Cardew of the Fourth stopped on his way down.

"Lowther? Yes."

"Where is he? The Head wants him, and I've got to find the ass!" growled Blake. "Where is the Shell duffer?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Didn't you say you'd seen him?" bawled Blake.

"My dear chap, naturally I've seen him—lots of times. More often than I've wanted to, in fact."

"You—you—your funny ass!" snorted Blake. "Don't give me any of your silly jokes now, you dummy! Here, Levison—Clive, seen Lowther?"

"Not this morning," answered Levison of the Fourth, and Clive shook his head.

Blake snorted, and tramped on up the staircase. In the Shell passage he almost ran into the Terrible Three.

"Oh, here you are, you ass!" he exclaimed. "I've been hunting for you, Lowther! Head wants you in his study."

"Anything up?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake grinned.

"It's not a licking. It's a telephone call, on the Head's phone, and Dr. Holmes says you're to take it, Lowther."

"Right-ho!"

Monty Lowther hurried away down the stairs, and Blake cast a curious glance after him.

"Anything wrong with Lowther?" he asked. "He's looking pretty sick!"

"Bad news from home," said Tom Merry.

"Oh! Sorry!"

More than one fellow noticed that Monty Lowther looked "sick" as he made his way to the Head's study. Few would have guessed that concern for his uncle would have hit him so hard; it surprised, indeed, his own chums to some extent.

Lowther, when he mentioned his uncle, the M.P., was wont to allude to him in a rather humorous and ironical way, and certainly had given little indication of a deep attachment to the old gentleman. Possibly, indeed, he had not realised himself how deep that attachment was, until the sudden bad news from home made it clear to his mind.

Lowther knocked at the Head's door, and entered. The receiver was off the telephone.

Dr. Holmes gave the Shell fellow a very kind glance.

"Lowther, your uncle's secretary, Mr. Bosanne, has telephoned, and requested permission to speak to you," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Monty.

"He has told me the bad news regarding Mr. Lowther," went on the Head. "I was extremely sorry to hear it. You have my deepest sympathy, my boy!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"Mr. Bosanne thinks that, in the circumstances, you will have but a dull Easter at Holly Lodge," went on the Head.

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"I agree with him that it would be better for you to go home with one of your friends—if practicable. Merry, for instance—"

"Tom Merry's coming to Holly Lodge with me, sir."

"But in the circumstances, Lowther—"

"I'm going to search for my uncle, sir," said Lowther.

"My friends are going to help me."

The Head coughed.

"Quite so; but it is not probable, Lowther, that junior schoolboys will be able to help the official police," said the Head gently. "You might even be in the way, my boy. It would surely be better for you, in every way, to pass your holidays in more cheerful surroundings."

Lowther's lip trembled.

"I sha'n't be very cheerful in any case, sir, so long as I don't know what's happened to my uncle. I don't want to be cheerful, so far as that goes. I—I haven't been as decent as I ought to have been to him, sir—I can see that now. Lots of things—little things—"

Lowther struggled

"Then you will be coming alone, sir?"

"As you think best, my boy, of course," said Dr. Holmes

gently. "Take the call now."

Lowther crossed to the telephone, and picked up the receiver. Dr. Holmes quietly left the study.

"Is that you, Mr. Bosanne?"

"Yes."

"Monty Lowther speaking. What have you rung me up for?"

"You received my letter yesterday?"

"Yes."

"I rather expected a reply by the morning's post, Master Montague. I take it that you will not be arriving here to-day."

"You can take it that I shall be arriving just as soon as the express can bring me home!" snapped Lowther.

There was a moment's pause.

"Then you will be coming alone, sir?"

"I am bringing two friends with me."

"In the circumstances, Master Montague—"

"I'm the best judge of that, Mr. Bosanne!"

"Yes, yes, undoubtedly, Master Montague. Neverthe-

less—"

"Is there anything else?" asked Lowther restively. "Is there any news yet of my uncle?"

"None."

"Then there's nothing more to say."

"Allow me to suggest once more, Master Montague, that it would be wiser to go home with one of your friends. I understand that, in any case, you are passing Easter with Master Merry—"

"Not unless my uncle is found."

"What?"

"I shall not leave Holly Lodge until my uncle is found."

"My dear young sir—"

"That's settled. Anything else?"

"I repeat—"

The secretary's tones had grown sharp.

"You needn't repeat anything," said Lowther. "You jolly well ought to have let me know at once when that happened to my uncle. I could have got leave to come from school."

"I desired to spare you anxiety, hoping—"

"Oh, all right!" said Lowther. "I've no doubt you meant well; but you ought to have let me know, all the same. It can't be helped now, so never mind. Tell Miss Skeene that I shall be home to-day with my two friends."

"But really—"

"We're jolly well going to search for my uncle, and find him, if we can," said Lowther. "Do you think I'm going in for merry-making while I don't know what's happened to him? Not likely."

"I was not aware that you were so deeply attached to Mr. Lowther, sir," said the secretary, and Monty thought that he detected an inflection of sarcasm in the soft, smooth voice.

He flushed over the receiver.

"That's no business of yours, Mr. Bosanne."

"Oh, quite so, sir—quite so!"

"Good-bye!" snapped Lowther.

"One moment! If it is your intention, as you say, to take part in the search for Mr. Lowther—"

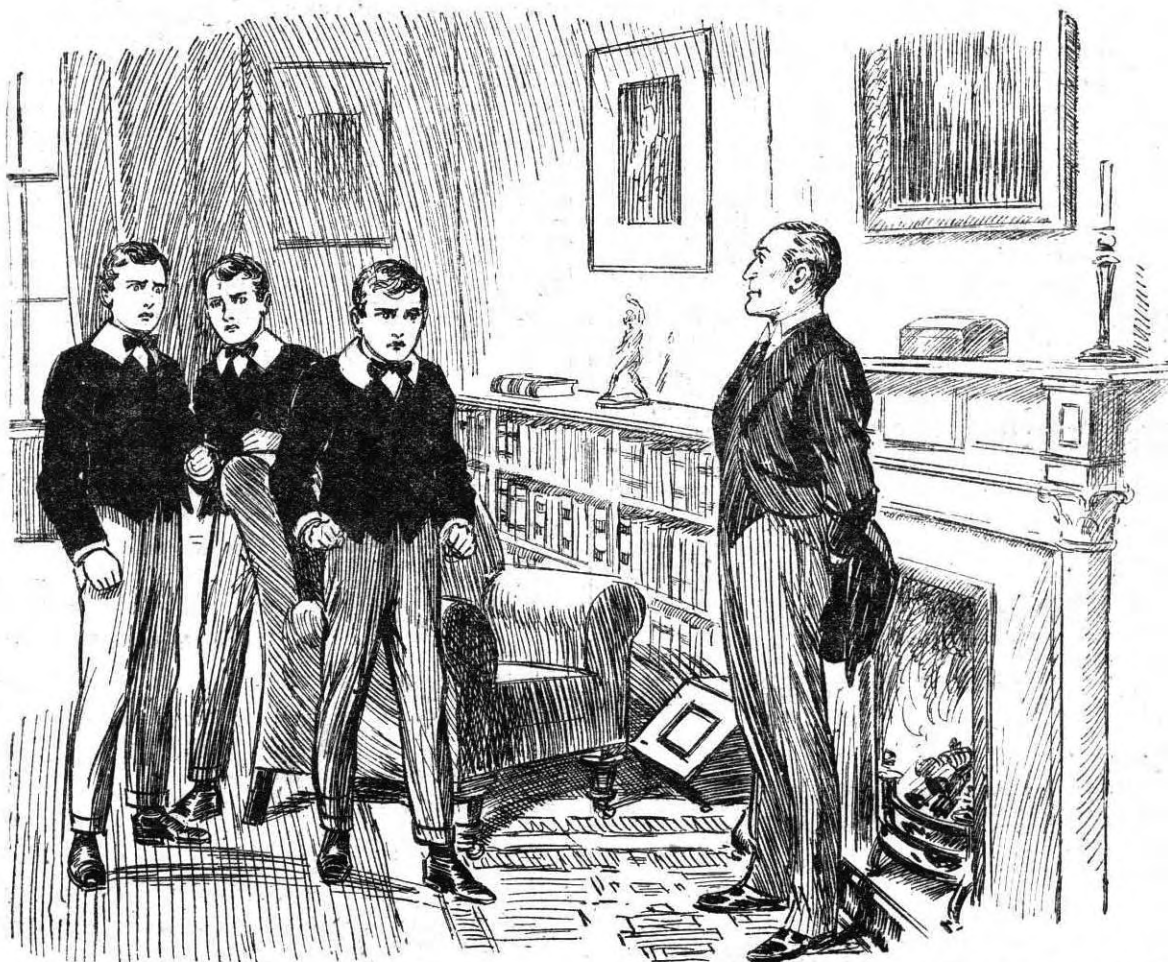
"That's my intention."

"The local police have the matter in hand—Inspector Cheeseman is here now—and I feel bound to say that Mr. Cheeseman will not be pleased by a number of young schoolboys intervening in such a matter—perhaps retarding him in his duties—"

Lowther's eyes gleamed.

"Mr. Cheeseman can go and eat coke, and you can go and eat coke along with him, Mr. Bosanne!" he exclaimed, and he slammed the receiver back on the hooks without waiting for a rejoinder from the M.P.'s secretary.

Monty Lowther left the Head's study with a flushed face, his eyes glinting. The telephone-call had confirmed him, if



Mr. Bosanne faced the St. Jim's junior. "Until Mr. Lowther returns, sir," he said, "I am in charge of Holly Lodge!" "How do you make that out?" asked Monty Lowther, his voice trembling with anger. "Have you forgotten that I am Mr. Lowther's nephew?" "Not in the least," answered the secretary. "Neither have I forgotten that you are a minor, a schoolboy—a young gentleman whom I am bound to respect, but to whom I cannot look for guidance." (See page 9.)

he needed confirming, in his determination to go home at once to Holly Lodge—whether Mr. Eric Bosanne was pleased or not thereby. And when he related the matter to Tom Merry and Manners, they fully agreed with him. Their opinion was that Mr. Bosanne was taking altogether too much upon his shoulders, and that the sooner he learned that he could not dictate to St. Jim's fellows, the better it would be for everybody concerned. And Monty Lowther started for home, with his intention fixed to make that quite clear to Mr. Bosanne.

CHAPTER 4. Off for the Holidays!

LOWTHAH, old man—"Arthur Augustus D'Arey came up to the Terrible Three, on the platform at Wayland Junction. A crowd of St. Jim's fellows were waiting for their trains there.

Lowther stood silent, thoughtful, rather moody, in a troubled and anxious frame of mind. He only glanced at the swell of St. Jim's as D'Arey addressed him.

"You were frightfully wude to me yestahday, Lowthah

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Bosh!"

Arthur Augustus breathed rather hard.

"I am only goin' to say, Lowthah, that although you were frightfully wude to me yestahday, when I was doin' you a service, I entially ovahlook the occuwence, and wish you a mewwy holiday," he said.

"Good old Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

Lowther smiled faintly.

"All serene, Gussy! Many thanks, old bean!"

"And I twust," pursued Arthur Augustus, "that the bad news you weceived yestahday is not vewy bad."

"It's rotten!" said Monty. "But I won't bother you with it, old man."

"I am sowwy, deah boy. If there is anything a chap can do—"

"Nothing, thanks."

"I twust, Lowthah, that your uncle is not ill?" said Arthur Augustus. "I have only had the pleasuah of seein' him once, when he came to the school to see you last term, and I admit that he stwuck me as wathah a cwusty old gentleman. But my patah has a vewy high opinion of him, I believe."

"I didn't know your father knew my uncle," said Monty Lowther.

"It is quite wecent," said Arthur Augustus. "They came togethah ovah the by-election in March. Pewwaps you fellows may have noticed in the papahs that there was a by-election—"

"I think we heard something about it," grinned Manners.

"Yaas, it was considahed wathah an important mattah among political johnnies, I believe," said Arthur Augustus. "I did not take vewy much notice of it myself, as that was about the time of our football match with Gweyfwiahs, you wemembah, so I had more important mattahs to think of. But the patah seems to have taken it vewy sewiously, I weally do not know why, and I undahstand that he was wushin' about in motor-cahs to a vewy great extent, and makin' speeches, and so on. I dare say the by-election seemed as important to him as the Gweyfwiahs match did to us. He made the acquaintance of Mr. Lowthah at a political meetin', and they seem to have become quite friendly."

Lowther nodded, not very much interested, as a matter of fact. But Arthur Augustus ran on cheerfully:

"Both bein' vewy keen on politics and things, they had a topic in common, you know, just like two fellows talkin' football. Mr. Lowthah called aftahwards at Eastwood House to see my patah, and the patah was goin' to return the visit

this week and stay two or three days at Holly Lodge. For some reason it was put off, and he has not gone. So aftah you told me you had bad news, I wondahed whethah the reason was that old Mr. Lowthah was ill—see? I twust not, Lowthah."

"It's worse than that," said Monty. "I dare say your father knows, if he was going to visit my uncle, and his visit had to be put off. Bosannee would explain to him, I suppose."

"Yaas, I pwsome so," said Arthur Augustus. "I am awfl' sowwy, old chap. You know I had a week-end at home a short time ago, and my patah spoke to me about your uncle vewy highly, and I think he was lookin' forward to visitin' him and havin' a chin-wag with him about politics, and I fancy he was goin' to persuade him to come to Eastwood House for Easter. This is weally feafuhl news, Lowthah!"

Lowther nodded.

"Look heah, old fellow," said Arthur Augustus, "I am takin' Blake and Hewies and Digby home with me. But if you like, we'll cancel all that, and come and help you look for your uncle. It is vewy pwobable that I might be able to solve the mystewy. A fellow of tact and judgment, you know—"

Monty Lowther grinned.

Arthur Augustus was very much in earnest; but really it did not seem to him that the swell of St. Jim's was likely to be of much use in searching for the vanished M.P. But he would not have said so for worlds.

"You're too good, old man," said Monty. "But I wouldn't spoil your holidays for anything. Don't you worry."

There was a roar of an incoming train.

"Gussy!" bawled Blake of the Fourth. "Where's that ass Gussy? Lost, as usual?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Buck up, Gussy!" shouted Herries. "Come and help keep these New House cads back, you duffer!"

"Yaas, wathah—"

"Back up, New House!" roared Figgins of the Fourth.

"School House! School House!"

There was a merry scuffle on the platform, between the old rivals of St. Jim's. Then the express rolled out crammed with cheery schoolboys, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waved his eyeglass cheerily to the Terrible Three on the platform, and vanished from their gaze.

"Here's our train," said Tom Merry ten minutes later, and soon the chums of the Shell were rolling away westward.

Monty Lowther sat very silent during the journey.

His home-coming to Holly Lodge was never very merry at the best of times. Old Mr. Lowther, with a kind heart and a strong sense of duty, was seldom genial, and after a few days at home in vacation time Monty was always glad to clear off to some other fellow's place—Manners' or Tom Merry's or Blake's or D'Arcy's—where he was always more than welcome. On the present occasion his home-coming was less cheery than ever—the deepest anxiety preyed upon his mind.

It was borne in upon him, too, that in many little matters he might have found ways to repay his uncle's untiring kindness and care, a realisation that so often comes too late to so many minds.

The three Shell fellows were glad enough when they reached their destination and left the train.

Lowther glanced round outside the station.

He had expected some conveyance to be there from the Lodge, but no conveyance was to be seen. Apparently Bosannee had not told the housekeeper to expect him, or Miss Skeene would have seen to it, at least. Monty set his lips.

"I never liked that man Bosannee," he said to his chums. "Too soft and quiet and deferential, and all that. I believe he was very useful to my uncle, but I never liked him—too much like a cat! Now uncle's not there he seems to be developing cheek. I'll jolly well put him in his place if he gives me any of it!"

Leaving their luggage at the railway station the chums of the Shell set out to walk to Holly Lodge.

CHAPTER 5.

Monty's Home-coming!

TOM MERRY & CO. walked at a good rate in the keen, crisp, wintry air. Here and there, through the woodlands by the country road, they caught a glimpse of the sea in the distance, veiled in mist. It was more than a mile from the station to Holly Lodge. They came in sight of the house at last—a country house of very moderate size, standing in grounds of a few acres. Monty Lowther threw open the wide wooden gate, and they walked up the

drive to the stone porch, which was flanked by three windows on either side. Lowther gave a thundering knock at the door, adding a little emphasis, perhaps, to let Mr. Eric Bosannee know that someone had arrived who would stand no nonsense.

The door was opened by a parlourmaid—there were no menservants at Holly Lodge. For a gentleman of his wealth and consideration in the county, Mr. Lowther kept a very moderate establishment. When Parliament was sitting his duties kept him in London. He took the Parliamentary duties with a seriousness that became a gentleman of his years and opinions—just as if it mattered somehow, as Monty had humorously told his chums.

Miss Skeene, a somewhat angular lady of uncertain years, in black, with a grave, prim face, came at once into the hall, obviously surprised to see the three juniors.

"Didn't you expect me, Miss Skeene?" asked Lowther, his eyes glinting a little.

"No, Master Montague. I understood that you were going home with your friends," said the housekeeper.

"Bosannee did not tell you?"

"No."

"I suppose our rooms are ready?"

"You are staying, Master Montague?"

Miss Skeene was pretty plainly of Bosannee's opinion—that it would have been a better arrangement for Master Montague to go home with his friends.

"Yes!" snapped Lowther.

"Very good, sir," said Miss Keene, with respectful disapproval. "The rooms shall be made ready at once."

"Where is Mr. Bosannee?"

"In the study, sir."

"I'll see him at once."

"Mr. Bosannee is not alone, Master Montague."

"Who's with him?"

"Inspector Cheeseman, from Mitford—the officer who has the matter in his charge."

"Well, I want to see Inspector Cheeseman, too," said Lowther.

Miss Skeene coughed.

"Excuse me, Master Montague—"

"Well?"

"I am afraid that Mr. Bosannee and Mr. Cheeseman will not like being interrupted."

"Are you?" said Lowther grimly. "Well, Miss Skeene, if they don't like it they can lump it!"

"Oh!" said Miss Skeene, a pink spot glowing for a moment in her faded cheeks.

"Take your coats off, you chaps," said Monty Lowther.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry.

Miss Skeene left the juniors to themselves, and hurried away to superintend the preparation of the rooms. That she disapproved was clear; and that Monty did not care a button was also clear to his chums.

Lowther led the way across the hall, to a door on the left of the entrance. This apparently was the door of the M.P.'s study.

He threw open the door.

It was a handsome room, panelled in oak, with extensive bookshelves stacked with Blue-books and Parliamentary reports and such-like dreary volumes.

French windows looked out on a balcony, with stone steps to the garden, and there was a wide view of frozen woodlands and a glimpse of the cliffs and the sea. On fine days the Isle of Wight could be seen in the far distance.

A log-fire glowed in a deep old-fashioned grate, and in two comfortable old leather armchairs two gentlemen were seated.

A decanter and glasses and a siphon stood on the table. Apparently Mr. Bosannee and the inspector were making themselves comfortable. There was a haze of cigarette smoke in the room.

The burly inspector glanced round as the door opened, but did not move. Mr. Bosannee jumped up.

He was a little slim man, his black morning coat making him look smaller and slimmer. His eyes, which were very sharp and penetrating, set rather close together over a nose a good deal like a beak, glinted as he fixed them on Monty Lowther and his friends. He scarcely troubled to disguise the fact that he was not pleased to see them.

"Oh, you, Master Lowther!" he said.

"Yes, I," said Monty, "and my friends!"

"You startled me."

"Did I?" said Monty carelessly.

"You did not knock at the door."

Lowther stared at him.

"Did you expect me to knock at the door of my uncle's study, in my uncle's house, when my uncle was not present?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Then you were making a little mistake, Mr. Bosannee—and the sooner you leave off making such mistakes the better it will be," said Lowther.

The secretary compressed his thin lips. Lowther turned to the portly gentleman in uniform. "Inspector Cheeseman?" he asked. The inspector nodded, without replying. "You are in charge of the case—my uncle's disappearance?"

"Yes." The plump inspector had a rich deep voice, almost fruity. His manner was brevity itself. The juniors did not need telling that Mr. Bosanne had told the inspector that these schoolboys were "butting into" the search for the missing M.P., and that the inspector was displeased thereby. No doubt Mr. Cheeseman had "no use" for interfering school-boys. Lowther, scanning Mr. Cheeseman's stolid, fruity face, was of opinion that he had no use for the inspector.

Mr. Cheeseman rose to his feet slowly and methodically. He had a good deal of weight to lift. "Well, good-afternoon, Mr. Bosanne," he said. "Rely upon me to keep on doing all in my power—rely on me, Mr. Bosanne."

"I rely upon you absolutely, Mr. Cheeseman," said the secretary, following the inspector into the hall; "and, in turn, you may rely upon me to see that you are not interfered with in your duties."

"I expect that, sir," said Inspector Cheeseman. "I have a right to expect that. I should insist upon that!" "Quite so, Mr. Cheeseman, quite so."

Mr. Bosanne shook hands with the inspector, and let him out of the house.

Tom Merry & Co. stood in the book-lined study, apparently forgotten by both of them.

But when the door closed on Inspector Cheeseman, Mr. Bosanne came back to the study.

He crossed to the fire, and stood with his back to it, with his hands under the tails of his morning-coat. He stood there with an air of proprietorship that incensed Monty Lowther deeply, and had rather an irritating effect upon Tom Merry and Manners, though they had never seen Eric Bosanne before.

Lowther's face was growing redder and redder, but he was trying to keep his temper. Mr. Bosanne fixed his penetrating, rather shifty, eyes upon the junior's face.

"Now, Master Montague," he said, in a crisp voice. "Now we had better come to some settlement."

CHAPTER 6. Having it Out!

MONTY LOWTHER breathed hard. Tom and Manners stood silent; it was not for them to intervene. They had an impression, too, that Monty would be quite able to deal with this secretary, who was assuming so much in the absence of his master.

"We'd better, I think, Mr. Bosanne," said Lowther. "Sit down, you chaps."

Tom Merry and Manners sat down. Lowther remained standing, facing the secretary, as the latter stood warming his legs at the crackling fire.

"In the first place—" began Lowther. Mr. Bosanne raised a slim hand.

"Allow me to speak!" he said. Lowther broke in.

"I shall allow nothing of the kind, Mr. Bosanne, till I have spoken. You are forgetting your place here."

"I think not, sir," said Mr. Bosanne, with a quiet smile. "At the present moment, as it happens, I am the head of this household."

"What?" "I trust I make my meaning plain, sir!" said Mr. Bosanne quietly, deferentially, but with a trace of mockery.

"Mr. Lowther, my respected employer, has disappeared. I have every hope that he will be found, alive and well—I cannot bring myself to believe that anything serious has happened to him. That would be too heavy a blow. I am grateful to Mr. Lowther for many kindnesses, sir, and I shall not believe the worst till there is no more possible room for doubt. Mr. Lowther, I hope and trust, will return. But until his return, I am in charge of Holly Lodge."

"How do you make that out?" asked Lowther, his voice trembling with anger. "Have you forgotten that I am Mr. Lowther's nephew?"

"Not in the least. Neither have I forgotten that you are a minor, a schoolboy—a young gentleman whom I am bound to respect, but to whom I cannot look for guidance," said Mr. Bosanne.

The juniors looked at him. They began to realise that Eric Bosanne's "cheek" was not all unfounded impudence. There was power behind it.

"You were my uncle's secretary," said Lowther, calming himself, determined not to lose his temper. "In my uncle's absence, you are nothing—and nobody, Mr. Bosanne."

The secretary smiled. "In your uncle's absence or death, Master Montague, your guardianship passes to your other uncle, my master's brother, Major Lowther," he said. "Major Lowther is at present abroad, as you are aware. But he was immediately apprised of the unfortunate occurrence here, and he has instructed me to carry on."

"Oh!" "Major Lowther, were he in England, would take charge here," said Mr. Bosanne. "Being unable to come, owing to his military duties in Egypt, he has instructed me, by telegraph, to carry on. I had the good fortune to win the major's confidence when he was in England on a visit here,

(Continued overleaf.)

"THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY."

A Word from Your Editor.

IN calling all my chums' attention to my new Library, I am giving them information which I know everybody will welcome with three times three. For long enough past I have received urgent requests for a Library which should give long complete yarns every month about the favourite characters of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, and the other celebrated schools. The idea has been in my mind for many months past. At last it has become a fait accompli. The two first numbers of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" are now on sale, price 4d. You can get them at any newsagent's shop or book store. The tales given in these numbers are of Greyfriars and St. Jim's, and I am sure that all supporters of the Companion Papers will make sure of their copies at once. Every month the new Library will give stories of the schools which are so deservedly popular. The "Magnet" reader who follows the fortunes of Harry Wharton & Co., not forgetting Billy Bunter, naturally wants to hear more of his favourites, and he will have his chance in the long stories which it is the business of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" to publish. This monthly series puts the finishing touch, as it were, to the weekly stories. There will be more about the junior leader of the school and the sporting champions of the Remove; you will find Peter Todd well to the fore, likewise the learned Alonzo, Peter's worthy

cousin. There will be interesting sidelights on Bunter and his amazing family history, with yarns about that amusing little Chink, Wun Lung, and his compatriot, the agile Hop-Hi. We shall hear of further extraordinary money-making stunts instituted by Fisher Tarleton Fish; also there will be much concerning the languid Mauly, the arch bully Gerald Loder, and his associate, Walker. I doubt if it is necessary for me to enlarge further on the purpose of the new "Schoolboys' Own Library." The new issues will be the books of the season, and will afford immense pleasure everywhere. In the case of the St. Jim's tale, which is out this month alongside that of Greyfriars, I might say that it is certainly one of the finest yarns Mr. Martin Clifford has ever penned. Read these two numbers, and you will see what a grip the Library will have. It gives you the romance of the schools, and shows you D'Arcy, Tom Merry, and Monty Lowther at their best. You will find yourself at once in the cheery company of tried chums—the fellows who mean such a lot to us all, for we have followed their fortunes and their ups and downs for years past. But that is not all, not by a very long way. The new Library has a wide sweep, and as time goes on it will offer the finest stories about other famous schools as well as Greyfriars and St. Jim's. There will be

long yarns of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, with Bulkeley and Carthew playing their parts, and the chirpy Gunner showing others how to do it, while Lovell carries on with his noble efforts to play first fiddle on the most difficult occasions.

And the new Library will keep the ball rolling, too, as regards such schools as St. Frank's, St. Katie's, and St. Kit's, from all which establishments have come legions of good sportsmen and real comrades. You will find in the numbers now on sale, and in those which are to come, just the real romance and the rollicking spirits of the public schools which the Companion Papers have made so popular. But if I dealt with one half of the points which occur in connection with this wonderful new Library I would never have done. It gives you the golden opportunity to pick up the thread and to follow the adventures of scores of old friends. You will find them all represented, doing their part in first-rate "plotty" yarns which appeal to the imagination and leave one plenty to think over after the story is done.

For it is like this: thousands of my chums want school stories all the time. They ask for tales showing the real life of school, and it is on these that they are everlastingly keen. That they are right in this matter I consider there is no doubt whatsoever, for in well-written school stories you get what you cannot look for elsewhere, namely, that special note which gets the heart of everyone, young or old. You are reminded with every line of something that has happened to you. When Mr. Quelch stalks on to the scene you know what fellows are thinking, because it is all so thundering real, and because it is life. And it is all that you will find in the "Schoolboys' Own Library." Get a copy of Nos. 1 and 2 of the "Schoolboys' Own Library," and see what you think of them. Price 4d. each, and obtainable at all newsagents.

and he trusts me, Master Montague; but even were he unacquainted with me, he is fully aware of the confidence Mr. Lowther reposed in me, and would naturally share it. In this house, therefore, I stand as the representative of Major Lowther, and in order to place you fully in possession of the facts of the matter, I may add that my position is legally unassailable. Until my master returns, I give orders here."

"Oh!" repeated Lowther.

He was considerably taken aback.

Mr. Bosanney smiled again.

"I have not gone so far as to forbid you to come here, Master Montague, though undoubtedly I have the power to do so," he said. "But my respect for you—my regard, if I may say so with due deference—"

"Cut that out!" said Lowther abruptly. "If you forbade me to come here, Mr. Bosanney, I should laugh at you!"

"Master Montague!"

"I should have come all the same, and you know it," said Lowther. "And now I am here, I mean to stay, and my friends with me. You can do anything you choose, but if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head, you'll go out of the front door on your neck!"

The secretary changed colour a little. His eyes fairly glittered at the Shell fellow of St. Jim's.

"This language, sir—"

"You've asked for it, and you've got it," said Monty Lowther, "and you'll get plenty more of the same if you are cheeky."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Manners.

"As for your unassailable legal position," went on Lowther, snapping his fingers, "that much for it! We'll see whether you can give me orders in my own home, by Jove! My uncle would have sacked you long ago, if he'd had the faintest idea that you'd turn out like this. We've got our own ways at St. Jim's of dealing with fellows who put on airs and graces. You'd better chuck it before you land in trouble."

"My dear Master Montague, it is very far from my desire to have any trouble with my master's nephew," said Mr. Bosanney smoothly. "I was simply pointing out how the matter stands. I understand, and sympathise with, your very natural anxiety for Mr. Lowther. If you could do any good in joining in the search for him, I should applaud your resolve."

"You can keep your giddy applause," said Monty grimly. "I'm going ahead, without bothering about your opinion, Mr. Bosanney."

"You are aware, of course, that the police have undertaken the search," said the secretary. "Naturally, the inspector is displeased at the bare idea of a party of schoolboys rushing into the affair. Any foolish or reckless action on your part may incommode him seriously."

"I don't see that, and we'll do our best not to be foolish or reckless, if that's worrying Mr. Cheeseman," said Monty Lowther sarcastically. "I can see that you've put his back up already."

"I assure you—"

"That will do, Mr. Bosanney! Now, I want to hear the whole story of what happened to my uncle. Are you going to tell me?"

take a walk in the gardens. He often did this after we had worked together in the evening. He left this study by the French windows, and went down from the balcony. That was the last time I saw him."

"And after that?"

"He did not return," said Mr. Bosanney. "We passed a very anxious night. It was fine and frosty when Mr. Lowther went out; but, later, there was a thick mist from the sea, and I concluded that he must have gone some distance, and lost his way back in the mist. In the morning I called on Inspector Cheeseman at Mitford, and engaged his services to search for Mr. Lowther. The search has been going on extensively ever since. Mr. Lowther's hat was found a mile from here, lying under the cliffs, which proves that he had gone as far as the sea, which he sometimes did in his evening walks. But of Mr. Lowther himself nothing had been discovered."

Lowther knitted his brows.

"What do the police think about it?" he asked.

"I am afraid Inspector Cheeseman concludes that Mr. Lowther lost his way on the cliffs, in the mist, and fell," he answered. "His body may have been carried away by the tide."

Lowther shivered.

"I suppose it's possible?" he said in a low voice.

"I fear that it is only too possible," said Mr. Bosanney. "But I cling to the hope that something less terrible has occurred. Mr. Lowther was very much overworked during the by-election a short time ago—he exerted himself injudiciously for a gentleman of his age. I had noticed of late several instances of an unusual absence of mind. It seems to me feasible, therefore, that the matter is mental—some sort of a mental breakdown, resulting in loss of memory. I cherish the hope that Mr. Lowther may yet be found alive."

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"That's not likely," he said. "I mean not likely that he's had a mental breakdown, or lost his memory. Uncle was getting on in years, but he was as hard as nails. I'm sure it's nothing of the kind."

The secretary made a deprecating gesture.

"We must hope—" he said.

"There's another way of accounting for it," said Lowther. "Has Inspector Cheeseman thought of foul play?"

"Doubtless he has taken that possibility into consideration, Master Montague. But there are no grounds for supposing—"

"Very likely not, but it's jolly probable, all the same," said Lowther. "To my mind, it's the most likely thing. The whole country's full of lawless blighters, since the war. There are robberies and hold-ups every week, if not every day. Uncle had plenty about him to tempt some footpad on a lonely road."

"No doubt; but a footpad would scarcely go to the length of murder. And even so, what has become of the body?"

"He might have been kidnapped!"

Mr. Bosanney smiled.

"I am afraid, Master Montague, that Inspector Cheeseman would hardly entertain such a theory. He does not share a schoolboy's natural taste for the films."

Lowther set his lips.

"Such things have happened, off the films," he said.

"More often on the films than off, I think," murmured the secretary. "Really, Master Montague, this is a serious matter, and—"

Lowther flushed.

"Well, I'm going to find my uncle, if he can be found," he said. "Your Mr. Cheeseman doesn't seem to have done much good, so far. I don't believe my uncle is dead. I can't believe it. And I'm jolly well certain that he's not lost his memory and wandering about. That's rot! But even if he is dead, I'm going to make certain of it."

"I trust you will be successful, Master Montague," said Mr. Bosanney with an intensely irritating irony. "In that event, of course, you will be master of Holly Lodge, under the guardianship of Major Lowther. It is no secret that your uncle's will is made in your favour, and that you are heir to practically everything. You will be a rich man—"

"Chuck that!" snapped Monty.

"And you will be master here, able to eject me at your will and pleasure," said the secretary calmly. "For the present, however, as I have said—"

"You've said enough," said the St. Jim's junior. "Come on, you fellows! You'll want some grub after your journey, and then we'll consider what's to be done."

The Terrible Three left the M.P.'s study, leaving Eric Bosanney in possession of the field, as it were.

Mr. Bosanney stood for some time before the fire, his brow very thoughtful. His lips were tightly compressed. He stepped across to the table whereon stood the decanter, and filled a glass to the brim, and drank down the contents almost at a gulp. His hand trembled slightly as he set down the glass.

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Unaware of Lowther's presence, Mr. Bosanne continued his telephone conversation with D'Arcy. "No, sir. I am sorry to say that Lowther is not here. He left early this morning with his friends." Monty Lowther strode into the room, his eyes glittering. "Are you telling D'Arcy that I have left?" he shouted. (See page 12)

Monty Lowther was deeply troubled and anxious, but it was probable that Mr. Bosanne, too, had his own causes for anxiety.

CHAPTER 7.

What Hopes!

"WHAT about you fellows?" It was a couple of days later, and the three St. Jim's juniors had been far from idle.

The atmosphere of Holly Lodge, never inspiring at the best of times, was the reverse of cheery now.

Miss Skeene provided well for the three, undoubtedly, with a quiet air of disapproval which did not worry them very much. Mr. Bosanne was civil, indeed deferential, but behind his smoothness of manner was a kind of ironic hostility. He had little to say to the juniors, and rather avoided them, only he had a way of turning up suddenly and unexpectedly at odd moments, with his quiet, cat-like tread, that was a little disconcerting and irritating. With Inspector Cheeseman they had had one or two encounters, and the inspector had eyed them, and grunted, making no secret of his opinion that they were three meddlesome young fools.

All this had not deterred the chums of the Shell in the slightest degree.

What had become of Mr. Lowther was a mystery, but Lowther, clinging to the hope and belief that he yet lived, was driven by that very hope to the conclusion that he must have been kidnapped. What motive the kidnappers, if any, might have had, he did not pretend to explain or even guess. It might have been for ransom, though in that case surely something would have been heard from them ere

this. It might have been—anything! Mr. Lowther might have had enemies of whom his nephew knew nothing.

That his disappearance was voluntary was impossible.

His financial affairs were in good order—in exact and precise order, like all his other affairs. Nothing had been found among his letters or papers to give the slightest hint of any reason he could have had for absents himself. It was clear, too, that he had expected Lord Eastwood to visit him, and had given his housekeeper instructions with regard to that expected visit. It was unimaginable that he could have gone away intentionally, without a word.

That Mr. Lowther had been kidnapped was really the only alternative theory to his death. For that reason, probably, Monty Lowther clung to it, and tried hard to believe that it was the correct explanation of the M.P.'s disappearance.

Tom Merry and Manners tried to believe with him, but they could not help thinking that it was a frail reed to lean upon.

It was more probable to their minds that the old gentleman had lost his way in the mists and fallen from the cliffs.

If he had fallen within reach of high tide that would account for his body remaining undiscovered.

Still, there was a possibility that Monty Lowther was right, and they hoped that he was; and at least they were determined to help him in his hopeless quest to the utmost of their power.

During a couple of days they searched and ransacked the whole place, hunting for a "sign" in every conceivable spot. They failed to discover the remotest clue to Mr. Lowther or to his supposed assailants on that dark winter's night.

If he had been, for some unguessable reason, kidnapped, it seemed pretty certain that he was no longer anywhere.

near Holly Lodge, in which case Lowther's search was hopeless from the beginning.

Monty Lowther doubtless felt it so, but he would not admit it, even to himself, for that meant giving up hope.

He argued that there were many remote nooks in the woodlands, and caves along the seashore, where a man might be hidden, or even a body. And anyhow, a hopeless search was better than doing nothing while such a weight of doubt and anxiety lay on his mind. And in that his comrades concurred.

Now the day had arrived upon which it had been arranged that Monty should go on with Tom Merry to his home, to stay there over Easter. Monty was not going. He was in no mood for holiday making. He clung to his search, hopeless as it was, as the one thing left to him. But he was concerned for his chums.

"What about you fellows?" he said. "You don't want to hang up here spoiling your holiday."

"Are you coming with us?" asked Tom Merry.

Lowther shook his head.

"Then we're staying," said Manners.

"It's rotten for you," said Lowther uneasily.

"Bosh! We're sticking to you, old man," said Tom Merry. "I'll let my old guardian know we're not coming yet—that's all right. We're staying on as long as you do."

The Terrible Three were discussing the matter at the breakfast table. Mr. Bosanney was breakfasting, but he had not spoken to the Terrible Three, save for a soft and snave "Good-morning!"

Now he glanced at them, with his keen, shifty eyes.

"It will be a dull holiday for you, young gentlemen," he said.

"It won't be very bright for you, Mr. Bosanney," said Manners.

Bosanney shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not accustomed to pleasing myself, Master Manners—I am a man in employment," he said. "My duty is here, until Mr. Lowther's fate is definitely known. But you—"

"My duty is here, too," said Lowther gruffly.

The parlour-maid opened the breakfast-room door.

"The telephone, sir."

Mr. Bosanney rose to his feet at once.

"You will excuse me, young gentlemen!" he said; and he left the breakfast-room immediately.

Lowther cast a rather dark glance after him.

"I'd like to shift that cheeky beggar out of the house," he said. "But I can't, in the circumstances."

"He's been civil enough, after the first day," remarked Manners.

"I don't like him! Still, he doesn't matter," growled Lowther. "Only his airs of being master in the place—I shouldn't wonder if that telephone call is for me, but he is taking it as a matter of course for himself."

"Well, he'll tell you if it's for you," said Tom Merry, with a faint smile.

"I'm jolly well going to see."

Lowther left his breakfast unfinished, and followed Eric Bosanney to the M.P.'s study, where the telephone was.

Bosanney was already at the instrument.

His back was to the door, and he did not see Lowther, who looked at the slim figure in the black morning-coat surlily.

Lowther saw the man give a start—evidently at something that had been said on the wires.

"What?" he ejaculated. "What name did you say?"

A pause.

"The son of Lord Eastwood?" asked the secretary.

Apparently the answer was in the affirmative. Monty Lowther's eyes glittered.

The telephone call was from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—the only one of the three sons of Lord Eastwood who was likely to be phoning to Holly Lodge. If the telephone call was from D'Arcy, it was meant for Lowther obviously. Mr. Bosanney's reply should have been that he would call Lowther at once to take the call. But his actual reply was very different from that.

"No, sir. I am sorry to say that he is not here."

Lowther compressed his lips.

"He left early this morning with his friends," went on the secretary. "I am sorry—"

Monty strode into the room.

"Are you telling D'Arcy that I have left?" he shouted.

Mr. Bosanney jumped, and spun round from the telephone, so startled that he dropped the receiver, which trailed at the end of its cord.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"You rotter!" shouted Lowther furiously. "What are you telling D'Arcy lies for?"

"I—I—"

"Get aside!"

Lowther shoved the secretary roughly aside and took up the receiver. Bosanney stood breathing hard and fast, and his eyes fairly glittered at the Shell fellow of St. Jim's.

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"Master Lowther—" he panted.

"Hold your tongue while I'm phoning, confound you!" snapped Lowther.

"I—I—"

"Shut up, I tell you!"

Bosanney was silent, his lips shut in a hard line. He looked for the moment as though he would have liked to tear Monty Lowther away from the instrument by main force. But he could scarcely venture upon that—indeed, the slight, slim secretary was scarcely a match physically for the sturdy Shell fellow of St. Jim's.

"D'Arcy!" said Lowther into the transmitter.

Bosanney clenched his hands hard. But he was helpless, and he stood with glittering eyes, almost panting for breath, but evidently at a loss what to do, as Lowther stood at the telephone and spoke to the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Lowther Loses His Temper!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was evidently astonished.

"Bai Jove! Is that you, Lowthah?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, old chap."

"I have just been told that you'd gone away, old bean, with your friends."

"I know! It was a cheeky rotter playing a silly trick," said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

Monty Lowther heard Bosanney's hard breathing close to him. He kept his back to the man and took no heed of him. It occurred to him that Bosanney was trying to hear what was said on the phone, but he did not care whether the secretary overheard D'Arcy's words or not. He was utterly and contemptuously indifferent to the man.

"That was wathah wotten, Lowthah," went on D'Arcy's voice. "I was just goin' to wing off, you know. I was feafully disappointed, because I was thinkin' of givin' you a look-in."

"Yes, old chap."

"No news of your uncle, I suppose?"

"None, so far."

"The police haven't found out anythin', what?"

"No—nor likely to, I think," said Lowther bitterly. "I believe that my uncle has been kidnapped by somebody, though I can't guess by whom, or why. I'm hanging on here till we have definite news—and Tom and Manners are staying with me. We'd be jolly glad if you'd like to run over and see us here, Gussy."

"Good! I'll come ovah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "As I mentioned to you the day we broke up at St. Jim's, what you weally need in this mystewious affair is a fellow of tact and judgment—what?"

Lowther smiled.

"I have some guests heah, as you know," resumed Arthur Augustus. "I am speakin' f'rom Eastwood House, on the patah's phone. But I shall fix up somethin' for Blake and Hewwies and Digby, and wun ovah by myself—you will not want to be bothahed by a lot of thoughtless youngstahs, what?"

"Just as you like, Gussy," grinned Lowther.

He was quite cheered by the cheery talk of the swell of St. Jim's. In his glum and gloomy mood, Arthur Augustus acted like a tonic.

"Shall I wun ovah to-morrow, Lowthah?"

"Do, old chap."

"Vewy good! I'll come by the aftahnoon twain—I have been lookin' it out in the time-table, and there is a twain gettin' into Mitford at three o'clock."

"Right-ho! We'll walk down to the station to meet you," said Lowther.

"Wight-ho! And I twust, Lowthah, that when I awvive, I shall be able to give you some help in this mattah."

"I trust so," said Lowther, as gravely as he could. "You'll stay over the night to-morrow, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, if it won't put you out at all."

"That's all right, old bean. Glad to have you."

"Master Lowther—" came Bosanney's angry mutter at the Shell fellow's elbow. It was clear that he was catching what was said at the other end of the wire.

"Hold your tongue!" snapped Lowther.

Bosanney held his tongue, his eyes burning.

"We'll expect you at three to-morrow, Gussy," went on Lowther. "Jolly glad to see your old chivvy again, too—only you'll find it a bit dull here, of course."

"That's all wight, old bean," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "I'll twy to cheeah you up a bit; though, of course, you cannot be vewy cheeahful in the beastly circumstances. By the way, Lowthah—"

"Yes?"

"That chap who was tellin' me that you had gone away—pwactical jokin' ass, I suppose—"



Crash! Monty Lowther's temper blazed out. The insolence of the secretary was a little too much for him. His eyes flashed, and he struck full at the angry, insolent face before him, and Mr. Bosanne staggered back. Lowther looked at him with flashing eyes. "That's for your cheek!" he shouted. "I've stood enough from you!" (See this page.)

"A meddling cad!" said Lowther, partly for D'Arcy's information and partly for the benefit of the hard-breathing man at his elbow.

"Yaas, wathah! Who is he?"

"My uncle's secretary, a man named Bosanne."

"Bosanne! Bosanne!" D'Arcy repeated the name. "I have nevah heard the name befoah. But it is wathah odd that the man's voice seemed familiar to me. I thought it was somebody I had met, when he was speakin'. However, I have nevah met Mr. Bosanne, so I suppose I was mistaken. What was his reason for twyin' to take me in?"

"Just meddling," said Lowther. "He is putting on airs in the house now that my uncle isn't here."

"Bai Jove! I should jollay well sit on that cheeky ass wathah hard, Lowther!"

"I'm doing it," said Monty. "I'm going to talk plainly to him, I can tell you. I'm glad I got the call, after all, old chap. Mind you come along to-morrow."

"Yaas, wathah! Good-bye for the pwesent!"

"Good-bye!"

Lowther put up the receiver.

Tom Merry and Manners were standing in the doorway now. As Lowther had not rejoined them they had left the breakfast-room to look for him.

"The call was for you, then, Monty?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes—from D'Arcy."

"Old Gussy!" said Tom, with a smile. "Is he offering his valuable assistance again?"

"Just that," said Lowther. "He's coming here by the three o'clock train to-morrow, and staying over the night."

"Good!" said Tom.

Mr. Bosanne breathed hard.

"I must speak to you plainly, Master Lowther," he said. "I have done my best not to use my authority here harshly."

"You have no authority over me, Mr. Bosanne," said Lowther coolly. "Don't be a fool!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

"Against my advice, against my desire, you have come here, in these painful circumstances, with two noisy school-boys," said Bosanne. "Now you are arranging for a third to come. It cannot be done!"

Lowther looked him in the face.

"It can be done, and it shall be done, Mr. Bosanne!" he said grimly. "Just what your powers are here I don't quite know; but I know this—you can't interfere with me! D'Arcy comes here to-morrow, and stays—and if you should forget yourself to the extent of uttering one uncivil word to him I'll knock you spinning!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I've a jolly good mind," went on Lowther deliberately, "to thrash you now, Mr. Bosanne!"

The secretary stepped back, almost panting.

"Monty!" murmured Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther's eyes flashed at his chums.

"Do you know what this meddlesome cad was doing?" he exclaimed. "He took the call intended for me, and told D'Arcy I had gone away. I was just in time to catch him at it!"

"Great Scott!"

"Why, the cheeky rotter!" exclaimed Manners indignantly.

"I was acting for the best!" said Bosanne. "It was the simplest way of keeping noisy and meddlesome schoolboys out of the house. I repeat, Master Lowther, that you will not be allowed to fill this house of anxiety and grief with a mob of unruly boys."

"That's enough," said Lowther. "Keep your meddling to yourself, Mr. Bosanne. I don't want to lay hands on you, but I warn you that I sha'n't stand any more of it. Do you understand?"

"I tell you—"

"That's enough, I say! Don't talk to me!"

"I shall not allow you!" Bosanne panted. "You have no power here, Master Lowther, and I will not be dictated to by an unruly cub of a schoolboy! I— Oh!"

Crash!

Monty Lowther's temper, well held in check until then, blazed out. The insolence of the secretary was a little too much for him.

(Continued on page 16.)

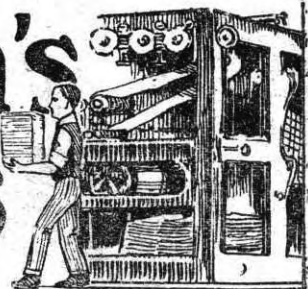
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TOM MERRY



The St. Jim's News



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

AT long last, in response to the earnest and, latterly, well-nigh despairing entreaties of that glass of fashion and mould of form, the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, I have consented to the publication of a special Fashions Edition of the "St. Jim's News."

At the present moment, as most of my readers have no doubt noticed, the great and noble army of knights of the tape-measure and scissors are strenuously conducting their annual spring offensive, and we are being urged to prepare for the coming season of sunshine (if any) by laying in a store of the latest fashions in purple and fine linen. Not literally, of course, because whatever may be said about fine linen, purple is hardly a colour in which an ordinary fellow would care to array himself unless he was prepared to run the risk of being arrested on a charge of attempting to provoke a riot.

Not that some fellows wouldn't dare to wear anything, but as far as we at St. Jim's are concerned, that sort of courage—or cheek, whichever you prefer to call it—doesn't get much chance of being displayed, because, in the Lower School, at least, we're pretty well limited to a conventional type of clothing—Etons.

The utmost that can be done in the way of glorifying that form of attire is the substitution of a fancy vest for the usual black one, and the wearing of very light grey or striped trousers.

It is in the matter of hosiery that our bright, beautiful, and brilliant "bloods" find scope for their originality.

Coloured silk socks, fancy shirts, highly ornamental neckwear, and so on, assist in relieving the somewhat sombre garb in which we habitually live and move and have our being. Not that many of us go in for such luxuries, but, in my opinion, those who do so fully make up for those who don't.

In the Upper School there is more latitude, and certain members of the Fifth and Sixth—particularly the Fifth, and notably St. Leger, Cuttis, and Gilmore—take full advantage of it by wearing the latest style in everything, to the great envy of certain chaps in the Shell and Fourth, who aren't able to.

By the way, I hope you won't take Monty Lowther's contribution too seriously, although I don't really think there is much chance of your doing that. I'm inclined to think you know Monty fairly well by now.

The language of Gussy's article may appear a trifle unfamiliar to you, accustomed as you are to his weird and wonderful accent, but you must remember that although the one and only speaks in a fashion of his own, he writes in similar style to other—and normal—human beings. You will not be bored with it, however, since it is only one column now instead of the twenty D'Arcy turned in.

And that, I think, is all, this time.

Tom Merry

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CLOBBAH!

By
Arthur
Augustus
D'Arcy.

I AM delighted that Tom Merry has at last realised the absolute necessity of paying proper attention to the frightfully important subject of clobber, in order to give me an opportunity for addressing readers of the "St. Jim's News" on the delicate subject of wearing the right thing at the right time and in the right way, with a due and proper regard for their personal appearance.

I am afraid that I shall be unable to do more at present than merely to touch upon some of the more important questions regarding the fashions for the coming season, but I have no doubt that, as a fellow of tact and judgment, I shall be able to compress a very great deal of useful and interesting information into about nineteen or twenty columns.

(And I have no doubt that, as a fellow of no tact whatever, I shall be able to still further compress it into one column.—T. M.)

Nowadays, I am sorry to say, very few fellows pay proper attention to their attire. When one sees chaps walking about wearing suits that are quite three months behind the fashion, and socks that do not match their ties, and that sort of thing, it makes one tremble to think what England is coming to. It is utterly impossible for any fellow to feel up to the mark unless he is properly and carefully dressed, and when one goes about and sees the dreadful number of badly-cut coats that people are wearing one cannot wonder at there being so much illness in the country.

Good tailors are few and far between, and when you find one you ought to treasure him, and take great care of the clothes that he makes for you. It is very cruel to make baggy marks in the knees of trousers that a tailor has taken great pains with, and it is that sort of thing that drives tailors out of their minds.

There is only one time when it is right and proper to sacrifice your clothes, and that is when a lady is in distress and you are springing to her rescue. Like Sir Walter Raleigh laying down his cloak for Queen Elizabeth to walk on, you know—probably the bravest deed that has ever been done in the history of the world, especially if the cloak was a new one.

But at all other times a fellow ought to regard his clobber as sacred, and something to be treated with the utmost respect.

Toppers ought to be selected with the greatest of care. Always go to a first-class establishment, one that gets in a fresh stock at least once a week, because a topper is very soon out of date, and a sixteenth of an inch too much or too little in the width of the brim, or the wrong amount of curl, will make it quite unwearable. A topper a week or so behind the fashion can utterly ruin a fellow's appearance, no matter how carefully and correctly he may be attired otherwise.

Now we come to the question of fancy vests. These important articles of dress require at least two pages of themselves.

(Do they? Well, they're jolly well not going to get it.—T. M.)

FASHION NOTES!

Monty Lowther.

I HEAR, upon good authority, that trousers are going to be worn much longer during the coming year.

This item of news will doubtless be received with satisfaction by all those fellows who, like myself, have to wear them as long as they can be made to hang together. We shall be in the fashion for once, at least.

It is rumoured that the new wide Oxford trousers have not caught on as it was hoped they would do. I cannot understand why this should be so as, considering the amount of material there is in them to flap about in the breeze, I should have thought they would be absolutely certain to catch on anything from a bramble-bush to a barbed-wire fence.

In consequence of their failure to achieve popular favour, it is predicted that they will shortly be going out—which is more than I should have the nerve to do if I'd got a pair on.

While we are on the subject of bags I will pass on to you a little hint that was given to me the other day by my tailor. (He gave me my bill at the same time, by the way.) He informs me that it is his decided opinion, after an experience of many years in the trade, that, as a means of attaching braces to bags, buttons are preferable to safety-pins, although he admits that safety-pins have their good points.

Last week I was shown several rolls of the latest spring patterns in oilcloth suitable for making up into sports suits. I must say they were very smart, although inclined to be a trifle harsh in texture. This, however, is a defect that, I have been assured, can easily be remedied in cases where customers are inclined to be fastidious, and the clothes certainly have the advantage of being hard-wearing.

If, in consequence of the lack of flexibility of the material, the wearer of any suit made from it experiences any difficulty in moving his arms, walking about or sitting down, or anything like that, and considers that it is really necessary he should do so while he is wearing the suit, he should carefully lubricate the garments at the joints with any good lubricant such as vaseline, soft-soap, fish-glue, or half a brick, and hang them up in a warm, dry place for a few weeks. Should this treatment not prove entirely effective, a sandpaper or emery-cloth should be employed.

Spats continue to be worn in place of socks, but for those who prefer the latter I might mention that the custom of wearing them inside the shoe or boot rather than outside is still quite fashionable.

Leaders of fashion in the Second and Third Forms still favour the ink-splashed collar for ordinary wear, with something a trifle less Futuristic for about the first five minutes or so of their appearance on Sunday mornings.

Pyjamas remain the most popular and general form of evening-dress.

As long as permission is never granted for Racke and fellows of his kidney to wear smoking-caps I don't mind!



SKIMMY the SWELL!

By Reginald Talbot.

I HAPPEN to have a rather good memory, but even if I was handicapped with the poorest on record, I'm certain I should never forget the occasion upon which Skimpole blossomed out as a dandy.

Poor old Skimmy! He really is absolutely the last fellow anybody would have suspected of anything of the kind, of course, but it only goes to show that you never know what is going to happen next in this very peculiar life.

If there is one fellow more than another at St. Jim's who is utterly and completely heedless of all that concerns his personal appearance, it is surely Skimpole. Of course, Baggy Trimble runs him pretty close, I know, but there's quite a difference between the two cases. Trimble's untidiness and disarray are due to nothing but downright slovenliness, but Skimmy's is due to his absent-mindedness and preoccupation with other, and in his opinion, weightier, matters.

Trimble is too lazy to keep himself neat and tidy, while Skimpole is too busy.

And Skimmy does bath, clean his teeth, comb his hair, and keep his finger-nails out of mourning—which is considerably more than can be said of Trimble.

Some of Skimpole's little carelessnesses in the matter of attire are really quite comical—in sharp contrast to those of Trimble's, which are for the most part merely disgusting.

For instance, Skimmy is liable to pick up a couple of boots and put them on without noticing that they aren't a pair. He'll turn up in the Form-room with one brown boot on one foot and a patent-leather shoe on the other. Very often they're not even his shoes at all. They may be mine or Gore's, or one of mine and one of Gore's, or some such combination as that. Gore takes a size and a half bigger shoe than Skimmy, and I take a size less, so the result of cramming one foot into a shoe of mine and stopping the other about in a boot belonging to Gore may possibly be imagined.

On one occasion he came limping and slithering into chapel in a carpet-slipper and a football boot, neither of which belonged him.

And such little peculiarities aren't limited to footwear. He gets all his clothes mixed up—and ours as well at times.

He wears his Sunday bags on weekdays, and his oldest pair on Sundays; a straw hat in the depth of winter; forgets to put on a necktie; dresses himself with his shirt inside out; puts on odd socks and all that sort of thing.

I've known him to change into a clean shirt by taking off the one he was wearing, then thoughtlessly throwing the clean one into the dirty linen-basket, and solemnly putting on the soiled one again.

A few weeks ago an uncle of his arrived on a flying visit. He was one of those bright, breezy, pink-complexioned old chaps who seem to have solved the secret of perpetual youth. You know the type, perhaps? Nearer sixty than fifty, yet smartly tailored, well groomed, brisk, and quite "one of the boys."

Well, he was all over Skimmy as soon as he saw him. I don't mean that he made a fuss of him, but that he ran the rule over him in the matter of personal appearance. He wasn't unpleasant about it, no lectures and carping and so on. But he made it clear to Skimmy that, in his opinion, a boy ought to take a certain amount of pride in his appearance as a mere matter of self-respect. Poor old Skimmy was in a state of bewilderment. It had never occurred to him that he was any different from any of the other fellows with regard to his dress, and I don't

believe he understood half of what his uncle said to him, simply because he couldn't appreciate the fact that there was anything wrong with him.

Anyway, a day or two after that a large, brand-new trunk arrived at St. Jim's addressed to Skimmy. When he opened it he discovered that it was crammed full of clothes and hosiery.

And when I say clothes, I mean clothes. Not "reach-me-downs" of a fit-you-where-they-touch type and shoddy cloth, but elegant, well-cut garments that must have cost a tidy figure wherever they were bought. The old gentleman had certainly done the job properly.

There were several pairs of shoes, too—patent leather, some of them. I don't think Skimmy had ever possessed a pair of patent-leathers in his life before, though it's true he's worn several at various times—only they happened to be mine.

The shoes alone took his breath away. I think, quite apart from the spats and coloured socks; but when we dived down further—Gore and I helped him to unpack—and came to the fancy vests, I thought he was going to collapse altogether.

Fancy vests, you know. And they were fancy, too, I must say. Real bobby-dazzlers. I doubt if Gussy has ever possessed anything much more elaborate or startling or gorgeous—whichever you like to term it.

Of course, Gore was highly amused. Well, for the matter of that, so was I, but I kept a straight face and made no comments for fear of hurting poor old Skimmy's feelings. Besides, if we'd shown that we regarded the business as a huge joke—which, I must admit, we did—he'd have refused to have anything to do with the clothes, and that would have been pretty rough on his uncle, who'd taken such trouble and gone to so much expense to provide him with such a top-hole outfit.

Skimmy was completely at sea. He looked from the clothes to Gore and me, and then back to the clothes again, with a dazed sort of expression.

The next job was getting him to wear them. It was a pretty hard job, too, and we only accomplished it by means of strategy.

"B-b-but, really, I cannot, my dear Talbot. I should feel most uncomfortable in such garments as those. Sartorial adornment is a very primitive—that is to say, the passion for it is the outcome of an immature mind. As dear Professor Ballycrumpet said in the thirty-third volume of his work upon Evolution, 'The male savage, like the cock bird, adorns himself in gaudy finery or brilliant plumage—'"

"Never mind about Professor Pottycrumpet and his savage birds!" interrupted Gore. "Let's see what you look like in this waistcoat, Skimmy. Pink rosebuds on a blue background, with daffodils and pansies round the early door. Come on, my lad; this'll keep you warm when the balmy breezes blow."

But all our gentle blandishments—I say "our," although it is scarcely accurate to call Gore's methods of persuasion "gentle"—were in vain.

Skimmy simply would not don the attire of a modern Beau Brummell. So Gore and I had a little talk together, and agreed that as fair methods had failed, we should have to resort to methods more or less foul. It's no end of a shame to play tricks on poor old Skimmy, but in this case it was surely permissible, since it was entirely for his own good.

What we did was to hide his ordinary togs, every stitch of them, and substitute the glad-rags that had been sent to him.

We did it one night, after lights-out in the dorm., and the next morning, when Skimmy climbed out of bed and commenced to prepare himself for the common round and the daily task, they were all neatly folded on the chair waiting for him. He didn't discover what we'd done until after he'd had his tub and was searching on the floor for his socks—where he usually drops them when he takes them off at night.

Not finding his socks had the effect of jolting him out of the state of preoccupation in which he usually performs the task of dressing himself in a purely mechanical fashion, and he commenced to sit up and take notice. He peered about till he saw the pile of clothing on the chair, and then the fun commenced.

Of course, he had to put the new clothes on. He couldn't very well go down to breakfast in his pyjamas, and there was nothing else for it.

When he turned up in the dining-hall, about five minutes late in consequence of his delay in commencing to dress, there was a startled gasp from everybody, with the exception of Gore and myself. Not at once, though, because nobody recognised him at first. As a matter of fact, several of the fellows said afterwards that they did notice him come in, because he was late and entered by himself, but for a few seconds they thought it was D'Arcy. I don't wonder at it. The coat was indeed the coat of Esau, as one might say, but—oh, when he turned towards our table and the fellows saw his spectacles gleaming!

Hair-line trousers, natty, well-cut coat, spotless collar, silk tie, silk shirt, riotous fancy vest, and patent, cloth-topped boots.

The Shell and Fourth simply sat and gaped. They were utterly incapable of words.

Then somebody at the Fifth table turned and saw him, and the Fifth were stricken with the same complaint—speechlessness. They got over it more quickly than the Lower School did, and the first outburst of laughter came from their direction. That laughter broke the spell, and in a couple of seconds or so everybody in the dining-hall, with the exception of Skimmy himself, joined in—even the Sixth and Lathom and Linton.

Now I come to think of it, there was one fellow besides Skimmy who wasn't laughing. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Dear old Gussy failed to see that there was anything in the least humorous in the spectacle of a fellow's dressing himself with due and proper regard for his appearance.

He left his place at the Fourth Form table, and went across to Skimmy, who stood in the centre of the dining-hall, peering about him in an embarrassed, nervous fashion, and although I could not hear a word that was spoken, it was obvious that Gussy was congratulating Skimmy upon his sartorial achievement.

It was some time before order was restored in the dining-hall, and most of the fellows did far more chuckling than eating that breakfast-time.

Skimmy had no time to change before morning lessons, even if he'd had any togs to change into—which, apart from others just as gorgeous, he hadn't—so he was forced to turn up in the Form-room in the same state of splendour.

In fact, he lasted out the day like that, but it was the first and only day in which he blossomed so radiantly. In response to his entreaties, we returned his old familiar garments, and the day after that he made a journey to Ryelombe, taking the trunk with him on a handcart which an out-porter brought up to the school for the purpose.

When he returned, it was without the trunk of clothes, and it was not until some time after that we discovered what he'd done with it—and then it was through an outside source.

He'd sold the whole issue to the cast-off clothing dealer in the village, and handed over the money to the local Poor Boys' and Girls' Summer Camp Society, an institution that arranges holidays at the seaside for kiddies in Ryelombe whose parents are too poor to give them such a treat.

Dear old Skimmy!

He may have the wrong boots on his feet, and his tie may be twisted towards the back of his neck, but his heart's in the right place, anyway, and that counts for more in a chap than anything a tailor can do for him.

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THE MYSTERY OF HOLLY LODGE!

Continued
from
page 13.)

His eyes flashed, and he struck full at the angry, insolent face before him, and Mr. Bosannev staggered back and fell on the carpet.

Lowther looked at him with flashing eyes. "That's for your cheek!" he shouted. "I've stood enough, I tell you! You're ten years older than I, I suppose, and a good deal bigger, but I think I could lick you, you cur! Stand up and let us see!"

"Monty! Monty!" Tom Merry ran forward and caught his enraged chum by the arm. "This won't do, old chap! For goodness' sake—"

"Do you think I'm going to be called names by that meddling cur?" exclaimed Lowther furiously.

"No—no—but—"

"Calmly, old man, calmly!" murmured Manners.

Mr. Bosannev rose slowly to his feet. His face was white, but it was from rage. His eyes seemed to burn like live coals. He did not approach Lowther.

He took out a pocket-handkerchief and rubbed his face, quietly. All the time his eyes burned at Lowther.

"You have struck me, Master Lowther," he said in a low voice that seemed to the juniors like the hiss of some deadly reptile.

"You should have kept your tongue between your teeth!" said Lowther savagely.

"I shall not retaliate," said Mr. Bosannev. "I shall not enter into a hooligan row with a schoolboy. I trust, Master Lowther, that when you are cool you will be sorry for this."

Lowther calmed down.

As a matter of fact, the secretary's insolence had enraged him beyond endurance, in his present state of anxiety and worn nerves. But he realised that he ought not to have raised his hand to a man older than himself, and his cheeks flushed. He had placed himself in the wrong in dealing with a man whom he disliked and despised, and that was a very discomfiting reflection.

"I—I'm sorry I struck you," he said grudgingly. "I—I'm sorry for that. I shouldn't have done it. But you should be more careful, Mr. Bosannev. You should not meddle, and insult me!"

"Very good, Master Lowther."

The secretary glided from the room with his almost noiseless step. The Terrible Three looked at one another uncomfortably.

"Let's get out of this!" muttered Lowther.

And after that scene the chums of St. Jim's were glad enough to get out.

CHAPTER 9. Suspicious!

TOM MERRY & CO. tramped down a muggy lane towards the sea. The morning was to be spent in a search among the sea-caves at the spot where Mr. Lowther's hat had been found. That the search was hopeless was only too well known to two of the party, but they did not think of uttering their opinion. If they could not encourage poor Monty, they would not discourage him. And there was a faint, faint chance that something might be discovered, even if it was only some proof of the missing man's death.

They walked in silence for a good distance. Near the cliffs they sighted a portly form, and recognised Inspector Cheeseman, of Mitford. The portly inspector saw them, but gave no sign of doing so. He was still in a prejudiced and offended state of mind towards the schoolboys—one more little matter that they owed to the kind offices of Mr. Bosannev. They tramped on, and the plump inspector was lost to sight.

"I—I suppose I ought not to have lost my temper with that brute Bosannev, you fellows," said Lowther at last, with a red face. "It was a bit thick to hit the man, I know."

"Well, he asked for it," said Manners consolingly.

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"I'm a bit upset and nervy," said Monty, with a catch in his voice. "When—when I think that poor old uncle may be—may be—you know—" He gasped a little. "When I think that, it shakes me up horribly. You fellows only saw what a crusty old chap he was! You never knew what a decent man he really was! One of the very best, though he didn't look it. That cur Bosannev hinted that I might be glad to get hold of his money. It's true that I shall be a rich man if my uncle's dead. And I'm poor enough now—dependent on him for my daily bread and my fees at St. Jim's, and—and everything. But if I could only see him safe and sound I'd be willing to be disinherited—every penny! I'd give it all to see him as he was, the poor old chap! You fellows believe that?"

"Of course," said Tom softly.

"It hits me hard—harder than a fellow would suppose," muttered Lowther. "All the more, somehow, because I shall benefit if—if he's gone, poor old uncle. I was a little kid when my father was killed in India. I hardly remember him. Goodness knows what would have become of me but for my uncle—my poor old pater left nothing, or next to nothing. And now—wouldn't I give Holly Lodge, and all Hampshire, just to see him alive and well! It's telling on my nerves, you chaps."

"Of course it would, old fellow. You'll have to try to keep a stiff upper lip," said Manners.

"I'm trying to. But it's too rotten to be bothered and badgered by that cad Bosannev at such a time—too bad. I'm hardly sorry I hit him. Fancy telling me I mustn't ask a fellow to my uncle's house—my own house, if—poor old uncle is gone."

"Gussy's coming?" said Manners.

"Yes, rather! He thinks he may be of some use." Lowther smiled faintly. "Of course, that's all rot. But he's a cheery sort of chap, and he will liven up you fellows a bit. And I want Bosannev to see that he can't dictate to me, too."

"That's right enough," said Tom.

"Sit down here a bit," said Lowther, as they came out on the beach, and he sat down to rest on a rock. "I—I've been thinking. I've told you I'm getting nervy—I may be growing suspicious—silly suspicious. But something has come into my mind—"

He broke off uneasily.

Tom Merry and Manners sat down. They hardly knew Lowther in this mood. The humorist of the Shell at St. Jim's was quite unlike his old self that the St. Jim's fellows knew.

"What is it, old man?" asked Tom soothingly.

"About Bosannev. It—it's come into my mind—"

Lowther paused again.

"Well?"

"Did he have something to do with my uncle's disappearance?" said Monty Lowther abruptly.

Tom Merry and Manners started, and stared at their chum.

"Bosannev!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, look at it," said Lowther. "He was trying to keep us away from the house—keep us from searching for my uncle. He wants to get rid of us. He's a false rascal and a liar, we've seen that—he was lying to D'Arcy on the telephone. Could he possibly have anything to gain by my uncle disappearing?"

"Lowther, old man—"

"How could he?" said Manners, staring. "It means the loss of a job to him. If anything's happened to Mr. Lowther, Bosannev will be looking for another job pretty soon. He can't want that."

"I know! But—"

"Is he down in Mr. Lowther's will?" asked Tom. "Do you know?"

"I've seen my uncle's will—he isn't."

"Then how could he possibly—"

"It came into my head," said Lowther, colouring. "I've said I'm nervy now, and the man irritates me past bearing—perhaps that's why I've come to suspect him."

"I'm afraid it is, old fellow. He wants to get rid of us. I know. I think that's because he's a jack-in-office, and feels important, and wants to show his consequence. He doesn't seem to like boys about—lots of people like that." Tom Merry smiled. "I dare say he thinks we're noisy and a bother generally."

"That isn't all," said Lowther. "Of course, I may be suspicious. But it's peculiar. You know that D'Arcy's father was going to visit my uncle here—the disappearance happened only just in time to prevent the visit."

"I know."

"And now he has been lying, and trying to keep D'Arcy away. It's a coincidence, at least. D'Arcy said that Bosannev's voice sounded familiar to him on the telephone, but he didn't know the name. Is it—is it possible that Bosannev has something to fear from that quarter, from Lord Eastwood, somehow—is it possible—"

Monty Lowther broke off, arrested by the grave expression of his chums. His colour deepened to crimson.

"I suppose you think this is all rot?" he said, discouraged.

"Well, old fellow—" murmured Tom.

"I was lying awake last night, thinking it over," said Monty. "I dare say it's because I don't like the man that it came into my head—and it's so impossible to account for uncle's disappearance. Any sort of a theory seems an unlikely one, doesn't it?"

His comrades were silent.

All Lowther's theories seemed to them unlikely enough; but the police theory, that Mr. Lowther had fallen over the cliffs, and that his body had been washed away by the tide, seemed far from improbable. But that idea Lowther was determined to shut out of his mind, as long as he could, at all events.

"Isn't it a coincidence, at least, that my uncle disappeared just in time to keep Lord Eastwood from coming, and that Bosanne had lied like a Hun on the telephone this morning to keep D'Arcy away?" said Lowther.

"I suppose it's a coincidence, in a way," said Tom. "But—but, old man, what could your uncle's secretary possibly have to fear from a visit from the Eastwood House folks? Something so serious that he kidnapped his master to prevent the visit—oh, Monty?"

"I suppose it's too thick," said Monty Lowther. "But there might be reasons—Lord Eastwood is a magistrate—Bosanne may have come before him as an offender at some time—"

"Your uncle's secretary!" ejaculated Manners.

"Well, we know he's a bit of a rotter. He may have a shady past, for all we know," argued Lowther. "On his own statement, he was the last man to see my uncle alive. That's something—the police always take special notice of that, don't they?"

"Ye-es, that's something. But—"

"Suppose he's been in trouble some time, and came before Lord Eastwood on the magistrate's bench—"

"It's supposing an awful lot, Monty," said Tom gently. "That—if true—would, or might, make him take desperate measures to keep Lord Eastwood from coming here. It—it might! But he would be more likely to sack himself and clear than to injure his master, surely, for his job's gone anyhow if his employer doesn't come back. And it wouldn't account for his keeping D'Arcy away. D'Arcy's never been present, I suppose, when his father was trying offenders on the Bench."

Lowther was silent.

His arguments in favour of his suspicion were flimsy enough, knocked easily to pieces with a few words.

Yet it was clear that the suspicion did not leave his mind. Whether it was his dislike of Bosanne, or his state of nerves, or some secret instinct, he suspected the secretary.

"You see, old fellow—" murmured Manners.

"I see! I know it's all flimsy enough," said Lowther. "I—I know I'm liable to suspect anybody or anything rather than believe that my uncle's dead. But—look here! Bosanne has lied to D'Arcy on the telephone to keep him away, and he's failed. Put it that he doesn't like boys about the house, that he's a beggar-on-horseback trying to make himself important—put it how you like. D'Arcy's coming. If I'm right in my suspicion, Bosanne can't afford to let him come, can he?"

"If you're right—no!"

"Well, then, let's see whether Bosanne takes any



LESLIE OWEN.

A scholarship boy of the New House Fourth Form. A thoroughly decent and straightforward fellow and the staunch chum of Redfern and Lawrence, with whom he shares Study No. 5. Owen is a very good sportsman, being a very fast runner and a first-rate swimmer. A staunch supporter of George Figgins, the leader of the New House. Not so long ago Owen nearly lost his life through drowning, but thanks to the courageous action of Edgar Lawrence, he was saved.

measures to keep D'Arcy away," said Lowther. "If he does, won't that pretty well prove that he's got something to hide, at least?"

"But he won't," said Tom.

"Let's see whether he does, that's all."

"What measures could he take?" asked Manners. "He can't get at D'Arcy except on the phone, and D'Arcy wouldn't take any notice of him."

"That's what we've got to see!" answered Lowther. "If anything—anything at all—happens to prevent D'Arcy coming here to-morrow, and staying over the night, I shall take that as a proof that Bosanne is guilty."

"Nothing will happen!" said Tom, shaking his head.

"We shall see! Let it go at that."

Monty Lowther rose from the rock, and the chums of the Shell began their search along the shore, dropping the discussion.

The juniors had brought their lunch in their pockets, and they spent the whole day searching the wintry shore.

But when darkness fell, they had found nothing—no clue to the missing man, no shadow of a clue.

The tide rolled on the beach with a heavy, dull murmur; mist veiled the sea, freezing spray broke on the shingle. What secret did those grey, rolling waters hold? The secret of the missing man's fate?

Tom Merry and Manners thought it only too likely. Perhaps the same belief was forcing itself into Monty Lowther's mind.

He was silent, and his face was darkly clouded, as the

chums of St. Jim's walked back in the darkness to Holly Lodge.

CHAPTER 10.

The Mystery of the Night!

BOSANNEY met the juniors in the lighted hall as they came in.

There was a mark on the secretary's face—the mark of Monty Lowther's hasty blow. But the man's manner was suave, deferential, almost fawning, as he greeted the juniors.

"I am glad to see you back, Master Lowther," he said. "You have been absent so long I began to fear that something had happened to you."

"You needn't have," said Lowther icily.

"One word, sir," said Bosanne, as Lowther was passing on. "This morning, in my master's study, I forgot myself. I am sorry. I had no right to speak as I did. I withdraw my words unreservedly. I have asked Miss Skeene to make ready a room for your visitor. I have instructed the chauffeur to have the car ready to meet Master D'Arcy's train to-morrow."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lowther.

"I have done all I can to make amends for my—I confess it—insolence," said Bosanne. "Is there anything more I can do, sir?"

"No!" said Monty Lowther.

"Then I hope that you will overlook the incident, sir, and I beg you to believe that my unfortunate offence was simply due to nerves—I have been very much upset by all this anxiety, sir."

"Very well, sir!" said Lowther.

"Thank you, sir," said Bosanne, with humility.

He withdrew into the M.P.'s study, and the juniors went

to their rooms. There was a strange expression on Lowther's face. His chums avoided looking at him.

What became of his suspicion now—of his theory that Bosanney would take some desperate measure to keep Lord Eastwood's son away from Holly Lodge?

It vanished into thin air.

When the three Shell fellows gathered to supper, Lowther's face was dark and clouded. They sat over the fire chatting before going to bed, Lowther saying scarcely a word.

"I—I suppose I've been a fool!" he said at last. "If that rotter—I mean Bosanney—means what he said—"

"Well, we shall see to-morrow," said Manners. "But it's pretty clear, old chap. He knows he's gone too far, and he's backing out."

Lowther nodded.

"It looks like it! I detest the soapy little beast. But it looks as if he's made up his mind to make the best of D'Arcy coming here—not to try to stop him coming. If that's the case, my suspicion of him was—was all rot. I—I don't know what to think."

In the hopeless mystery of his uncle's disappearance Lowther had found comfort and hope in his suspicion of Bosanney—it was like a flicker of light in a great darkness.

Now it was gone, and he was all at sea again, with no faint shadow of a clue to concentrate his thoughts upon.

The juniors went to bed at last.

The wind was rising and howling about the old red chimney-pots of Holly Lodge. From the distance, the boom of the breaking sea came to the ears of the St. Jim's fellows. It was a wild night on the coast. They gathered by the fire in Lowther's room for a few minutes before going to bed, and then Tom Merry and Manners went to their own rooms.

The three rooms were next to one another, with doors opening on the same corridor, and windows looking out on the same balcony. The shutters on the windows rattled and creaked in the powerful wind, and it was some time before the juniors slept.

Tom Merry awakened suddenly.

The fire in his room had died down to a mere spark, glowing red in the midst of blackness.

Outside the wind was raging. It dashed on the shutters and roared round the chimneys, and sang deeply in the frozen branches of the trees. Deeper and heavier came the boom of the sea on the rocky shore.

Tom Merry sat up in the darkness, and rubbed his eyes.

Was it the roar of the wind that had awakened him?

It seemed to him that his name had been called—that the voice of Monty Lowther had shouted to him in the night.

His room was next to Lowther's, but the walls were thick. Only a loud shout could have been heard in the adjoining room.

Had he been dreaming?

It seemed impossible that Lowther should have called his name—unless, in the grip of a nightmare, due to his shaken

nerves, Monty had unconsciously called upon him. Tom left his bed at last, and hurriedly slipped on some clothes. His impression that he had been called was strong, and at all events, it could do no harm to look into Lowther's room and see whether he was safe asleep.

Tom's hand went to the electric switch by his bed, but no light came. Doubtless it was turned off at the meter.

But there was a pocket electric torch in his pockets somewhere. He groped for it and found it and turned on the light. With the little torch in his hand, he opened his bed-room door, and stepped out into the shadowy corridor. Lowther's door was open.

Tom Merry's heart beat.

Lowther's door had been shut when the two juniors left him. Tom knew that. Now it stood wide open.

Tom Merry ran into the room, and flashed his light on the bed.

It was empty!

Blankets and sheets were tossed back in disorder, as if Monty Lowther had left his bed hurriedly. The electric switch at the bed-head was turned down—to turn on the light that did not come. Lowther, then, had wanted a light.

"Monty!"

Tom Merry cried out the name, his heart throbbing with a vague, undefined fear.

"Monty!"

He flashed the light round the room.

Lowther's clothes were gone. He had dressed, then. Where was he? Had he gone out into the wild night, driven by his restless anxiety? What did it mean?

Tom Merry ran along to Manners' room, and hurled open the door.

"Manners!"

"What—what—?" A startled voice came from the dark. "Is that you, Tom?"

"Yes. Get up! Something's happened to Lowther."

Manners, in his pyjamas and a coat, joined him in the corridor, with a startled face.

"He's gone!" breathed Tom. "He's not in his room!"

"Dowstairs?"

The two juniors ran down the dark oaken staircase together. There was no light, no sound in the house save the howl of the wind, the boom of the sea. With anxiety that was growing almost frantic, they searched for Lowther, but they did not find him. Monty Lowther was gone—gone in the wild night—where?

There was no answer to that question, only they knew that their chum had disappeared—that another and a darker mystery was added to the mystery of Holly Lodge.

THE END.

(The mystery was fairly staggering to the chums of St. Jim's! Be sure you read next week's splendid yarn entitled: "D'ARCY DOES IT!" By Martin Clifford.)

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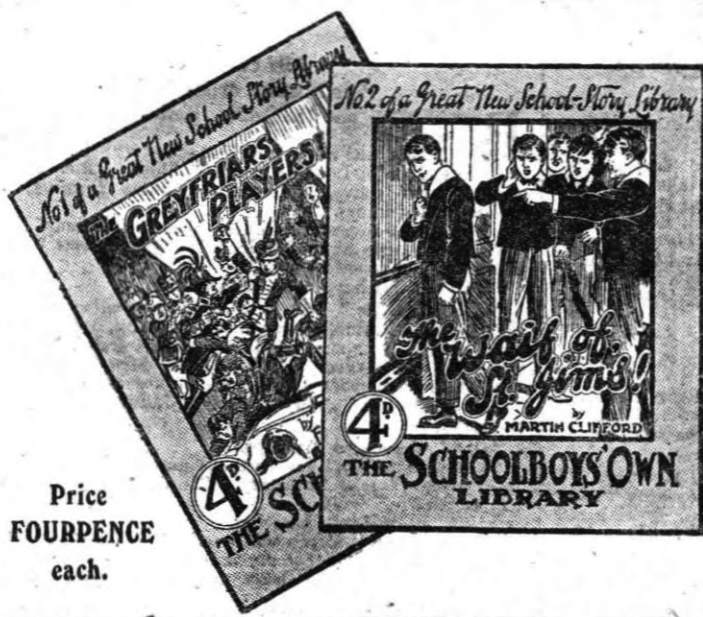
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CHAPTER 1.

A Village Vendetta!

"**B**EDAD, it's the laziest, deadliest, never-never-land that iver was, has been, or will be. Huckfield, d'ye call it? Slapey Hollow, ye mane, where nothin' iver happens, where life's just one iverlastin' dhrameless dhrame!"

Jerry O'Gorman snorted. He eyed the village resentfully and longed to kick its stagnant beauty. He ached to run amok down its spotless, cobbled road, to do something—something outrageously noisy—to scandalise its slow-moving, stolid inhabitants. He had a feeling that Huckfield, a mere cluster of tiled cottages, was snugly sniggering at his indignation. He felt certain that it had browsed along, calmly content, for a thousand years before he happened, and that it would continue to browse along, calmly content, a thousand years after he was forgotten.

Nor was his chum sympathetic. Lounging on a hillock that overlooked the village, Lyle Lindsay found a silence, broken only by the drone of bees, very soothing and restful after weeks of hectic activity. So, not having the energy to argue, he chuckled, and closed his eyes in lazy content.

"Wake up, ye gossoon!" Jerry howled in his ear. "Twas you who brought me here, sayin' I'd better convalesce afther havin' a bullet in me shoulder. An' shure, it's yerself that's slept twenty hours a day and ten a night, iver since we came."

"Nothin' else to do," Lyle murmured drowsily.

"An' never will have—that's what I'm tellin' ye," Jerry grumbled.

Two minutes later he revised his opinion and roused his pal with a lusty lunge of boot.

"Faith, Lylesey, I belave Huckfield's rousin' up at last," he exclaimed. "There's plump Humpedick strollin' down the street like Falstaff in a state procession, wid half the town creepin' afther him."

"And look, Jay," Lyle answered, now wide awake and interested. "He's got

two darkies on his heels—ugly-looking beggars, and as proud as Nabobs, for all their rags."

For a time the radio chums watched in silence. Sergeant Humpedick, a weighty member of the force, was advancing in majestic isolation. Only when he reached the last two houses in the village street did he pause and frown at their inanimate walls.

Jerry grinned.

"Bedad, he's got something up against th' queerest pair in Huckfield," he said, with an interest which surprised his chum.

"Been listenin' to village gossip?" Lyle demanded.

"I have," Jerry admitted shamelessly. "According to that same gossip, those semi-detached cottages house two rare originals—two ancient sailormen, who hate the sight of each other, and who have only one idea on which they agree."

"And what is that?" Lyle asked, his eyes still on the ample Humpedick.

"They each live absolutely alone—Nick Freud in Hyacinth House, Bowleg Benlyne in Acacia Cottage," Jerry chuckled. "They arrived in Huckfield a month ago, bought the only two houses available, and have refused to allow a single villager past their respective doors iver since."

"And they hate each other?" Lyle mused.

"Loike poison, so the gossip goes," Jerry laughed. "In fact, they dislike the sight of one another's face so much that they've arranged alternate nights on which to visit the village club—one agreein' to stay away the night the other mixes with his fellows."

"Um! A village vendetta!" Lyle smiled. "Anyway, it begins to look serious, for the sergeant's got tired of banging on Freud's door, and he's breaking a way in."

"P'haps Bowlyne's turned cannibal an' wolfed his foe-head, hide, and hoofs," Jerry grinned, jumping to his feet. "Faith, I'm goin' down. Slapey Hollow's wakin' up—an' it's a sight too good to miss."

Lyle followed readily enough, though

at a more sober pace than his impetuous chum. Somehow, despite the humorous twist that Jerry had given the affair, he realised that a quarrel between two hard-bitten, elderly sailormen might easily have a serious side.

But there was nothing at all serious about the faces of the idlers who lined the low wall fronting Freud's house. Joining Jerry, and finding his chum all a-quiver with suppressed glee, Lyle glanced across the strip of green and nearly collapsed with the sight that greeted him.

There was Humpedick—twenty stone, five yards round, a limb of the law who needed a double dose of good broadcloth to hide in—there he was on hands and knees, questing the garden like a bloodhound, and, incidentally, watering it with the perspiration that oozed from his purpling forehead.

Ignoring the sniggers that broke from the villagers, Humpedick laboriously ploughed a lonely furrow round the strip, paused to rescue a scrap of paper half hidden by a bush, and finally worked a slow way back to the doorstep. Heaving his mighty bulk on this, he fished out a fat notebook and began to register his evidence.

The sight of his solemn, perspiring face proved too much for one unkind on-looker.

"Look at 'un, the moiner's dyin' child!" he moaned in a stage whisper. "Th' hunt f' garden worms a wash-out. Starved an' 'opeless, little Eric scrawls a weepy fare-ee-well to gran'ma. Reel foive follows immejiately."

It was cheap wit, but was rewarded by shrill giggles. Looking up with a heavy frown, Humpedick stared at the idlers until they began to shuffle uneasily. Then he voiced his annoyance.

"Obstructin' the law in its dooty, eh?" he wheezed ominously. "You get along, Joey Dobbin, else I'll be asking where that jugged hare came from, come Tuesday. Clear off now; no back-chat."

Master Joey Dobbin muttered something uncomplimentary, but dutifully faded away. Nor were the other no-

goods of Huckfield long in following when Humpledick fixed each in turn with a basilisk glare.

Feeling rather guilty, the chums were likewise turning away, when the village vigilant beckoned them forward.

"You come along in here, young gents," he invited. "I'll be glad to show you summat interesting."

Lyle wondered if this signal mark of favour arose from the fact that they lodged with Humpledick's missus, or from the fact that they had created something of a sensation by arriving for their holiday in their famous bus the Lindman Linnet.

They quickly found that it was Humpledick's monumental conceit to which they owed the invitation.

"Mr. Lindsay, you've told me about the way you hunted Ultima, the wireless crook, down," he said. "Very stupid I thought it of the Yard to leave it to you. No offence meant, but I don't approve of amateurs, you understand."

"Quite sergeant, quite," Lyle murmured sweetly.

"Well, we having got a little mystery down here," Humpledick continued, "you'll be glad to study our methods, to see that we don't need outside help in Huckfield, like."

"Quite, sergeant, quite," Lyle murmured again.

"Shure now, an' phwat's th' mystery?" Jerry asked, adding gently: "Some omadhaun mislaid a garden hose, be-lie."

Humpledick slowly shook his head and struggled more slowly to his feet.

"Murder!" he breathed, rolling the word on his tongue as though he liked its flavour. "One Nicholas Freud, late of this house, has been done in, and I've got my eye on him that 'soked it."

Lyle was sufficiently shocked to keep silent. It was left to Jerry to demand details.

"Nick Freud killed!" he exclaimed. "How did it happen? Where did ye find him?"

"I haven't found him—not yet," Humpledick admitted. "I only know that he hasn't been seen in the village for days, and now his hat, stick, and wallet have been picked up on the river bank."

A hoarse chuckle made all three turn towards the house next door, to stare at a full-whiskered, peaked face that protruded over the wattle fence separating the gardens. The chums guessed that this must be Bowleg Benlyne—Freud's declared enemy, and, they were sure, the object of Humpledick's suspicions.

"Bunkum, cap'n—all bunkum!" Benlyne bellowed. "Don't you go a-filling by'e's head with bunkum. Humphy, Nick Freud's not been done in—not 'im, he hasn't, worse luck!"

"Oh, ho! O' course ye'd say that," Humpledick answered, adding darkly: "It's what I expected. It's a clue, in fact."

"Clue be blistered!" Benlyne yelled; then, with an ingratiating smile, he leaned farther over the fence. "I say, cap. I spotted two nigs a-comin' down th' lane with ye. What's become of 'em—cleared off, haven't they?"

"They have not!" Humpledick answered. "They're in the house here, askin' to see Freud."

"In Freud's house—you pudden-headed porcupine!" Benlyne howled. "What's they doin' there, you—you—I'm comin' round to argy this out."

Calmly ignoring Humpledick's protests, Benlyne nimbly climbed the fence and faced the irate officer.

"I got as much right 'ere as these byes," he said coolly. "Anyway, I'm

not havin' a pair of niggers mauling old Nick's goods about—an' I'm a-goin' in to see what mischief they're up to."

"Getting very particular about Freud all of a sudden, aren't you?" Humpledick demanded hastily.

"Not more'n he'd be f' me," Benlyne snapped. "Oh, I know the thought that's buzzin' in your silly head, and I'll tell you now that if me an' Nick had our quarrel, that was our affair, an' one that don't consarn no one else."

"Oh, don't it?" Humpledick grunted. "Anyway, you've got to tell me what you know about this—er—business!"

But Benlyne evidently thought he had wasted enough time. Circling the ample sergeant, he charged down the narrow lobby and dived into Freud's front parlour.

The next moment those outside heard him bellowing like an angry bull, and shrill squeals floated out as though he had disturbed a flock of broody hens.

Hurrying within, the chums paused in amazement. Their first inclination was to laugh at the sight of Benlyne facing two scared brownies across the table; but soon they realised that the sailor-man was in a towering rage, that the men from India were openly displaying cruel stabbing knives, and that the sudden flare-up was likely to have a disastrous ending.

"Belay there!" Benlyne was howling. "Slash old Nick's traps about, would yer, you pig-stickin' pair o' tarbrushes? Drop it! Clear out, else I'll souse yer ridin' lights with me fist!"

But the Hindus clearly had no intention of leaving. Chairs, sofa, cushions, had been ripped to shreds, pictures torn from walls, and the contents of a desk strewn about until the room bore the appearance of an abandoned rummage sale. Yet, when Benlyne tried to round the table, one or other of his enemies would aim a vicious stab that warned him to keep his distance.

"Sahib Freu!" they chanted. "Sahib Freu!"—im come Bwana! Him dog—im come Bwana!"

At last, after several ineffectual attempts to edge them towards the door, Benlyne stepped back a pace, his face set and venomous.

"All a-right!" he said hoarsely. "If you will have it, you will!" He flashed an automatic from his hip pocket, and waved its barrel impatiently at the two dusky faces. "Now, let up with them toy baynits, an' hop off, or Indy'll be two short of its mess."

It is doubtful if the Hindus understood a word of Benlyne's tirade, but it is very certain that the pointed gun and ominously crooked finger made his meaning clear. Yet, in spite of the black bore that wavered within three feet of their eyes, they drew themselves up proudly, folded their arms and calmly waited the lights out that Benlyne was so obviously signalling.

Then Humpledick squeezed through the doorway, took in the situation at a glance, and turned scandalised eyes on Bowleg.

"Put that down, Benlyne!" he spluttered. "What you mean, sir, intimidatin' my witnesses with a lethal weapon?"

"Fudge!" Benlyne snapped. "Look what they've done to old Nick's goods, bluebottle! Put 'em outside, warn them to keep clear of this locality, else I'll put 'em where they'll do no more harm."

For the first time Humpledick noticed the ruthless hacking performed by the Hindus.

"Aha! Malicious damage with intent," he purred. "Evidently you two black gents had a grudge against Nicholas Freud." His glance hesitated between the three armed men. "Now, I

wonder, I just wonder if it wouldn't be safer to lock the lot of you up until I've finished my investigations?"

"On what charge?" Benlyne demanded.

"The doin' away with Mr. Freud, o' course," Humpledick snapped.

"He, he, he! Listen to 'im, byes!" Benlyne sniggered. "Him a hoffer of th' law, an' doesn't know 'e can't make an arrest until he's located the copsey-wopsey. You find Nick Freud first, me fat sleuth, then we'll talk about arrestin'!"

The constant mention of Freud's name seemed to throw the Hindu beggars into a frenzy of excitement. For a time they jabbered in their own tongue, then turned appealingly to Humpledick.

"Sahib, Freud pig!" one hissed venomously. "Im come Bwana—im pig!"

Then Lyle took a hand in the game. Stepping calmly up to the nearest Indian he dumped a handful of silver on the table, pointed first to the door, then to the coins.

"Sahib Freud gone away," he said slowly and distinctly. "Him come back, perhaps. You buy food, you wait for him. Him come back with Bwana."

Puzzled frowns ridged the brown foreheads. They stared doubtfully from Lyle to the money he offered, exchanged comment that sounded to Jerry like the back-fire of a motor engine, and finally salaamed to Lyle so low that their foreheads brushed the table.

"Im come back!" one said impressively, nodding a thin-lipped smile. "Im come back—come Bwana!"

Then, disdaining the cash and ignoring all except Lyle, they again bent low and walked quietly to the door.

"Ere, what's the meaning——" Humpledick began indignantly.

"Better let them go," Lyle interrupted quietly. "Benlyne's right—you can't arrest them until you really know what has happened to Freud. Besides, I'm sure they're as anxious as you are to find Freud, though I wouldn't like to be in his shoes when the meeting takes place."

"You promised 'em Nick'd come back with this Bwana they're groaning about," Benlyne said scowlingly. "What d'you know about the Bwana thing—or about Nick, either, come to that?"

Lyle grinned. "Less than nothing, old dear," he admitted cheerfully. "Only I merely wanted to get rid of them."

Humpledick abruptly flung back to his original suspicion.

"Now, Mr. Bowleg Benlyne, I want to ask you a question or two," he began importantly, adding, regretfully: "An' I'm bound to warn you that anything you say may be used against you. So be careful."

"Thanks," Benlyne snapped dryly. "I'll be so careful that I'll say nothing at all." He grinned maliciously. "When—I say when you've found Nick's carcase, you can rest me, Humphy. Until then, me mouth's an oyster—only opens for cats. He, he, he! G'-day to ye, byes!"

CHAPTER 2.

Lyle Is Mysterious!

HUMPLEDICK looked about the most dissatisfied man on earth at that moment. For the first time in memory, Huckfield owned a mystery—a real, a 1, copper-bottomed, ghastly crime. And he, Sergeant Humpledick, had his hands on the criminal—or criminals, he wasn't sure which—yet he was forced to stand aside, and watch them walk away to un-

deserved freedom. It was maddening, most abominably maddening. He came near admitting to his secret self that the law was an ass—refusing to permit an arrest, just because a body hadn't come to hand!

But Lyle and Jerry were supremely indifferent to his troubles. They appeared to be more interested in a wireless set, smuggled away in a corner of the room—a toy to which the sergeant was quite content to leave them whilst he hunted for fresh clues and entered voluminous records in his notebook.

"A really posh outfit," Lyle commented. "A four valve Fellmann, completely enclosed in this dinkum rosewood cabinet—an elaborate affair for a chap like Freud to run."

"Shure, it'd pass the time, the nights he wasn't allowed at the club," Jerry suggested.

Lyle smiled. "It would have done—if he'd ever taken the trouble to use it," he replied quietly.

Jerry stared. "For why should he be spendin' the money if he didn't want to use it?" he demanded. "It's put up in a nice box, but it's hardly an ornament. What's bitin' ye, Lylesey?"

"Only the fact that the lead-in has never been connected," Lyle answered. "Look, Jay, the wire's hanging loose—a clumsy bit of work that makes the set as responsive as a tinkack."

"Perhaps the pin's worked loose lately," Jerry suggested.

"It's never been connected, I tell you," Lyle persisted. "If it had been the bend would show, however deftly it was straightened out." With rapid movements he fastened the lead-in pin in place, turned the aerial switch, and tried the valves. "Um—still no result. Accumulator run down or battery gone phut, I expect."

To his expert eye the colour of the acid proved that enough power was still imprisoned in the accumulator to have worked the set. Picking up the heavy battery he examined it closely, turning it over and studying its glazed sides and bottom. Smiling slightly, he replaced it in the position it had originally occupied, closed the doors that hid the whole apparatus from view, and strolled back to the table where Humpledick was finishing his notes.

"Now, sergeant, you promised to show us how to work the case up," he suggested, adding pointedly: "You haven't tabled the clues yet."

Humpledick complacently leaned back in his chair and beamed on the two radio chums.

"My privilege and your benefit, young gents," he said affably. "To begin, I might almost say that Freud's sad end was inevitable, that the signs were plain as this room days before he disappeared, and that he knew what was about to happen, pore chap."

The smile still lingered on Lyle's face. "I expect he did," he agreed. "Well, sergeant?"

"The first sign that came to my notice officially, was when Freud walked into my station a week ago and demanded police protection," Humpledick continued. "Naturally, I, in turn, demanded reasons, which he refused to give, and not very politely, either. He stormed, raved, said his blood be on my head, pore chap. Wish I'd paid more attention to him. However, he went out, and next day I heard about the beggars."

"Bedad, there's millions av 'em," Jerry interrupted. "Which particular beggars have ye in mind?"

"The nigger lads you saw Benlyne baiting not long ago," Humpledick answered calmly. "Reports began to come in that two niggers were drifting about country, begging their way, knowing practically no English, but always asking for Sahib Freud. Of course, I told Freud, warned him they were gradually working in toward Huckfield, and well I remember his fear when I finally told him I had word they were in Edgley, three miles away." He shook his head and sighed profoundly. "That was my last sight of the man—next morning he'd vanished."

"Bedad, but that doesn't say he's been murdered!" Jerry exclaimed.

"You've got to find the victim first," Jerry reminded him.

"And that's a job you'll never do," Lyle drawled.

"For why? Because the river runs swift, you mean?" the sergeant asked.

"Nunno," Lyle replied. Then provokingly he changed the subject. "D'you know who put this wireless of Freud's in for him? A local amateur, perhaps?"

"Lunnon chap, so I heard," Humpledick replied, eyeing the cabinet contemptuously. "Now, about the warrant I'm going for—"

Lyle jumped to his feet.

"Don't go for it yet, sergeant," he said briskly. "Jerry, can we get to Croydon and back before dusk?"

Jerry glanced at his watch.

"With an hour to spare," he answered.

Lyle turned to Humpledick.

"Go easy on the warrant, sergeant," he warned. "We're very interested in your theory, but I've just thought of something I must have from London to-day." He tapped Humpledick affectionately on the shoulder. "Now, please don't make any arrests before we return."



The first inclination of the two aero chums was to laugh at the sight of Benlyne facing the two scared darkies across the table, but they soon realised that the sailorman was in a towering rage, and that the men from India were openly displaying cruel knives.

"No; but the fact that his hat, and so on, have been found on the river bank hints at it," Humpledick replied. "Also this bit of paper that I found in the garden is a threat, plain enough."

Jerry studied the paper with interest. Roughly outlined in charcoal, two glaring eyes were portrayed, topped by the following: "Through time and eternity we follow. Bwana lost—you die. Bwana found—you live."

"Looks bad for the darkies," Jerry commented. "What d'you make of it, Lyle?"

Lyle never even glanced at the paper. "Oh, a fake!" he said absently, adding impatiently: "Have you finished yet, sergeant?"

"Not quite," Humpledick answered. "I've got to keep in mind the threats that Freud and Benlyne were always making against each other, and I've got to make up my mind which party did the deed, the niggers or Benlyne, before applying for a warrant."

"I'm getting men out to drag the river, first of all," Humpledick answered. "Couldn't do better," Lyle agreed cheerfully. "Make all the show you can, take care Benlyne does his share of the work. Get the whole village on the job, and, to-morrow, every newspaper in the land'll be praising our Humpledick!"

And, with a playful punch in the sergeant's well-covered ribs, Lyle hurried from the room, leaving a much mystified Irish chum to follow at his leisure.

CHAPTER 3.

Benlyne's Treachery!

IT was dusk when the Lindman Linnet returned from London, and full night when she was securely pegged down on the field hired in place of a drome.

At eight o'clock, the hour when they

knew the village hall usually held a full coterie of gossipers, the chums strolled casually in. As Lyle had ardently hoped, the talk was all of the missing Freud, and they had hardly entered the place when Bowleg Benlyne began to air his opinion.

"I'm afeard you're right when you say it's a 'opeless mystery, lads," he sighed. "This morning I laughed at Humpy, made sure as how Nick'd come home any minute." He shook his head and slowly smoothed the bushy whiskers that framed his face. "Poor old Nick, I've a feelin' we'll see him never no more."

"You didn't praise him much, master, when he lived next door to 'ee," one villager suggested slyly.

"No, I didn't," Benlyne admitted. "But that was a private argument over a trifle. D'y'know, come next month, Nick an' me's been shipmates this thirty years, an' good mates at that." He laughed bitterly. "An' now Humpy arys as I've had a hand in his going—me as loved him like he loved his dinner." For a time he stared morosely at his grimed hands, then turned sad eyes on the silent company. "Suspects me! Me that's toiled and toiled with drag-net and boat-hook wi' the best of ye!"

"Seen anything more of the niggers?" Lyle asked quietly.

"I haven't!" Benlyne growled. "Nor wants, to, drat 'em!"

Then, recognising the voice, he looked up and glared sourly at the chums.

"Oh, it's you pair o' no-marks, is it?" he sneered. "Pokes yer noses into what doesn't consarn ye, but when ye find there's a job o' work to do, off you go in that airypine while someone else does it!"

"Well, it's hardly our affair," Lyle drawled. "Freud didn't strike us as a particularly nice chap when he was here, so you can hardly expect us to weep tears now that he's gone."

Indignant murmurs from several villagers answered Lyle's callous words. Even Jerry stared, and would doubtless have protested, had not a warning tap from Lyle's boot kept him silent.

"Anyway, where you been all day?" Benlyne asked suspiciously. "Looks funny, you hoppin' off just when we really start to search for poor old Nick."

"It does, doesn't it?" Lyle agreed cheerfully. "Matter of fact, we've been on a joy-ride to London, to do a bit of shopping." He coolly ignored the disbelief and growing suspicion that surrounded him, and stared straight into Benlyne's eyes. "Queer that those Indians cleared out so quietly. I wonder what they meant by Bwana?"

Benlyne's expression was absolutely wooden as he gave Lyle back stare for stare.

"I dunno—sich rubbish I don't worry over," he grunted. "But I've heerd they've been searching for Nick this month past, an' if Humpy don't have 'em jugged pretty quick, he ought to be booted out of his job."

Lyle yawned elaborately. He was certainly most abominably indifferent to Freud's fate, and made not the least attempt to hide the fact.

"Well, wish you luck an' all that, when you go fishin' to-morrow," he said, and yawned again. "Heigh-ho! Tirin' job, holidayin'. Coming, Jay? I'm for supper and bed!"

"Artless varmin't!" Benlyne grunted, as the chums turned on their heels.

"Faith, ye've not left us many friends in Huckfield," Jerry murmured, as they walked down the village street.

"No; but I've convinced Benlyne that

we've no interest in Freud," Lyle grinned. "Now, Jay, Bowleg Ben's where he is for another hour—during which time we've got to unpack the Linnet's locker of all those wireless gadgets and get them fixed where we want them."

"An' where's that?" Jerry demanded.

"In Freud's house," Lyle answered. "I've got ideas about poor old Nick. We're going to try 'em out to-night."

Fortunately for Lyle's plans, very few of Huckfield's inhabitants ever ventured abroad after nightfall. Certainly, the lads of the village seldom left the hall until the caretaker rattled his keys, and Lyle banked on the fact that to-night would prove no exception—with such a delectable titbit as Freud's disappearance to argue over.

So, in a solitude hardly credible to town dwellers, the radio chums opened the Linnet's locker and portered several heavy parcels the short distance to Freud's abandoned house.

"How d'we get in, Lyle?" Jerry whispered, as they dropped over the low wall.

"If Humpy's carried out the promise he made this ante emma, we'll find the back door unbolted," Lyle answered. "If he hasn't, a window's going to meet a sad end."

But window smashing proved unnecessary, and the chums had no difficulty in making their way to Freud's front room. Here, again, the blind had been carefully drawn and the small electric lamp that Lyle focused on the wireless cabinet would throw no tell-tale beam to the outside world.

"Now, Jay, we've got to get at the innards of this Fellmann set and to leave the thing as though it had never been touched," Lyle explained. "First, we'll substitute the accumulator and battery we've brought—same make—for these belonging to Freud. The old accumulator you can dump in the back garden, but the battery you'll please carry to the Linnet."

Obedient without question, Jerry returned several minutes later to find that Lyle had already laid the four valves aside and unscrewed the ebonite panel.

"You'll notice, Jay, the peculiarity about a Fellmann set is the size of the cabinet and the absolute minimum of wiring it contains," Lyle said, with a smile.

"Bedad, one pays a lot for polish and space," Jerry chuckled.

"One does," Lyle agreed. "And, in this instance, one uses the space to advantage."

On the base of the box he fixed a small wooden stand on which were mounted five test tubes filled with delicately-tinted acids. From each tube a golden wire was exposed, and these, with deft fingers, he attached to the inner valve wiring. From a coat pocket he fished a corded microphone, placed it in handy position near the set, and bored a hole through the back of the cabinet. Into the tiny aperture he inserted the cord, carefully clipped it to the apex of bright wire, and, following a minute examination of his work, quickly replaced the panel and drove home its multitude of screws.

"Now we plug in the valves—so!" he muttered. "Then we fix in the tuner on wave-length two hundred, turn the juice on, and close the dear old cabinet doors all snug and comfy. All that remains is to find a spot where our Lindman microphone will hear but not be seen."

He risked a flash of light round the room, and, for a moment, allowed it to rest on a tall bookcase.

"Sound has a way of rising," he

mused. "Not a perfect place by any means, but the only one we can use, I'm afraid."

Two minutes later the microphone dangled from the third shelf of the bookcase, hidden by the frame of a door that was open just far enough for sound to penetrate. The length of cord that connected it with the Fellmann set ran beneath the carpet and only a scant two inches showed where it lifted from floor to furniture. That chance had to be taken; but Lyle was satisfied that keen eyes would be needed to detect this minute strip of wire.

They had barely sided up the disorder they had created, when they heard a click that broke startlingly loud in the quiet house, followed by the clump of a heavy boot from somewhere above.

"Grab the tools, Jay," Lyle whispered. "Mustn't be seen here, or Humpy's chance of fame goes west."

By the narrowest margin imaginable then the aero chums won a silent exit via the kitchen, whilst the unknown was still negotiating the landing above. Crossing a hundred yards of open country on the run, they reached the Linnet breathless but satisfied, and found Humpledick impatiently waiting their appearance.

"So you've come, eh?" he wheezed. "Fine fool you're making of me—getting me to leave them niggers alone, while you play about with a silly listen-in toy. Burr-r!"

But Lyle fairly flung himself into the Linnet's well, snatched up headphones, and set the dynamo pumping power into the plane's wireless. Only when he had tuned in to 200 did he drop two pairs of phones overboard for the other's use.

"Um! Nobody about, yet I could ha' sworn I heard the sound of a chair being moved," came faintly to the ears of the three listeners.

Then, as if the speaker had moved close to the microphone, the voice came louder and clearer:

"Ha, ha, ha! That blundering police booby little thought he was helping me when he pulled the blind down—to save the furniture from sunstroke, so he said. Ho, ho! It'll encourage those I expect to come prying round, an' Heaven help 'em if they do come." Then, growing fainter, as the fellow moved across the room: "Well, we'll see, we'll—"

Humpledick tore the phones from his head, dropped them to the ground, and started stolidly off for the high road.

The chums followed.

"Faith, an' where d'ye think you're off to?" Jerry demanded.

"If that wasn't Freud's voice we heard, I'm a pump handle," Humpledick answered. "I'm going to find out what he means by it."

"You're not, unless you wish to give Benlyne a fine old laugh!" Lyle snapped. "I warn you, sergeant, Benlyne's the keystone of this little mystery. He's watching Freud's house to-night with both eyes, and the first sign of our approach means good-bye to all my merry schemes for helping you."

Humpledick paused, impressed by Lyle's earnest warning.

"But he called me a blunderin' police booby," he reflected sourly.

"You'll make him pay for that before morning," Lyle answered soothingly. "Now, be a good Humpy and wait until Benlyne shows his hand—as I'm sure he will do very soon."

Reluctantly, Humpledick turned back to the plane. But he proved anything but tractable in the hours that followed, and only by tact and diplomacy did the chums prevent him from smashing their carefully baited trap.

For a time Lyle busied himself in the Linnet's well, and, later, climbed to the tiny emergency tank that showed above the upper wing. He refused to satisfy Humpledick's curiosity beyond saying that he'd found a mascot and was putting it in its proper place. Towards midnight he was completing the work, when a call from Jerry drove him down to the well and to the adjusting of headphones.

"The nigger minstrels, Lylesey," Jerry explained. "Bedad, ye reasoned right when ye said the house'd draw 'em like a magnet."

"Dry up, Jay," Lyle growled. "It isn't your gas we want to hear."

For a time, guttural whispers drifted through the ether, words in a tongue that conveyed nothing to the unsuspected listeners; but thuds and tears told how industriously the Hindus were making hay of Freud's belongings.

Then, abruptly, Benlyne's powerful voice vibrated in their phones.

"Hands aloft, priests!" he yelled. "Up with 'em—no second warning! Ah! That's sensible! Keep 'em there while I gather in the cutlery!"

The tinkle of steel as he threw the knives across the room came startlingly clear, followed by a sneering laugh at the easy victory that had come his way.

"Now, my dusky beauties, you've been hunting a sheep and found a snake, eh?" Benlyne jibed. "You've chivvied Freud half round the world, now I've taken a hand in the game. To-night, my lads, you've either got to make terms, or you'll cease making anything in this sad life!"

Surprisingly, the Hindus answered in good honest English.

"We make no terms," one said sourly. "Until Bwana, torn from the temple of Nana Tol, is handed over to us, we hunt the despoiler, alive or dead."

"If you'll listen to me, Run Dass, Bwana will be in your hands before dawn," Benlyne answered. "Nick has grown tired of this eternal hide and seek. Comply with his terms, give him a just sum of money, and Bwana is yours."

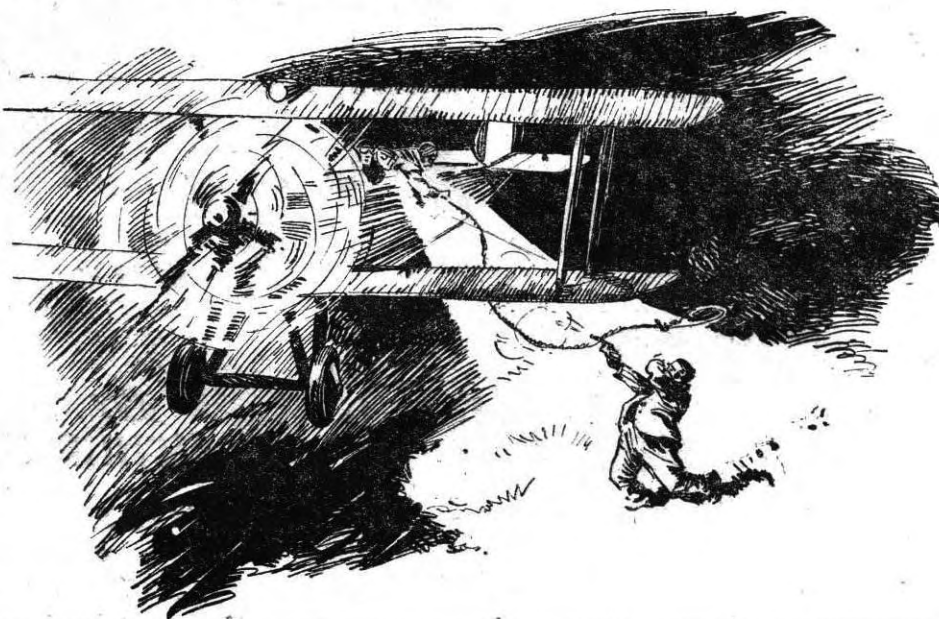
"Tell us his terms—though we promise nothing," Run Dass replied.

"You'll first pledge your honesty," Benlyne answered dryly. "In Nana Tol, so Nick tells me, you think less than nothing of a promise—unless you seal that promise in wine. There to your hand, priests, is wine of your own country. Drink to your sacred word, then only will I speak."

At first the priests demurred; then, tempting them with constant mention of "Bwana," Benlyne won his way. Following that, the three moderated their voices, and for several minutes the listeners could only gather that Benlyne was haggling for the payment of some impossible sum of money.

Quite suddenly his hoarse tones broke into shrill laughter.

"Fooled you, by hokey I have!" he yelled. "Know, O stupid, sheep, that



As the "Linnet" almost touched the ground, Lyle Lindsay sent the rope sailing through the air to encircle Benlyne's head.

you are now incapable of moving." He laughed again, a shrill crescendo of hate. "Soon you will sleep, and, sleeping, will die!"

Lyle tore the phones from his head a split second before the others followed his lead. Leaving Humpledick to his own leisurely pace, he and Jerry raced across country, tearing through hedges and being torn in turn, floundering into and out of a noisome ditch, and finally reaching Freud's house in a condition indescribably filthy.

Pausing at the back door, not a sound reached their ears. Only when they crept down the dark passage and cautiously opened the door of the front room did they realise the enormity of Benlyne's treachery, and his abysmal brutality.

Flames from oil-soaked furniture were leaping almost to the ceiling. The Hindu priests, sprawled across the table in drugged slumber, were untouched as yet; though, from the door, it looked as if they were ringed with fire.

"Stand still, Jay!" Lyle yelled. "There's one chance—"

Never completing the sentence, and never pausing to think of the awful danger, Lyle dived into the smoke-laden room and leaped a little wall of flame that was already gaining hold on carpet and boards.

Dressed in flimsy cottons as they were, it was simply confirming the priests' fate to attempt to drag or carry them through that fiery barrier.

Lyle did better. With lightning heaves, he flung the inanimate men on the table, took firm hold, and sent it crashing towards the door. And Jerry, realising his object, bundled the Hindus from table to passage, and helped Lyle over the barrier he had made for himself.

"Outside with 'em, Jay!" Lyle panted. "Humpty'll be near; we're going for that brute Benlyne."

Humpty was near. He came floundering through a broken hedge as the chums were dumping the sleeping priests at the foot of the garden.

"Look after these drowsy warriors, sergeant," Lyle yelled. "We're for Benlyne's lair."

"Shure, there's no need!" Jerry cried. "There he goes, makin' beyont the fence yonder."

Jerry's words, or Humpledick's shrill whistle, warned Benlyne that he was discovered. A bullet, probably fired as a warning to keep their distance, whined over the chums' heads, and the half-seen form raced for open country.

"Out o' sight, he's gone for good!" Lyle cried. "After him, Jay!"

"Tally-ho!" Jerry howled, a warning that turned the attention of several scantily-clad villagers who were hurrying to the blazing house.

The radio chums found themselves leading a straggling line—a bewildered crowd who vainly yelled for information, and only realised that someone was ahead who must be captured.

For a time the chase led straight towards the Linnet; then, veering towards a tiny wood, the shadowy form vanished and the chums perforce waited the arrival of the villagers.

"Gone to earth!" Jerry panted, and hurriedly explained the position.

"Or perhaps he's simply crashed through the trees, and is quietly trotting away to freedom," Lyle answered. "Anyway, if you Huckfield men will surround the wood—remember, he's armed—we'll hunt the country in the Linnet."

"Good f'you, Lylesey!" Jerry yelled.

Within a minute the plane took to the air, Jerry at the stick, Lyle with glasses glued to his eyes. The powerful searchlight they carried lit up great slices of countryside as Jerry swiftly ringed Huckfield in ever-widening circles, and, at last, they sighted a black, forested figure—obviously winded—running towards Huntingdene, two miles from where the hunt began.

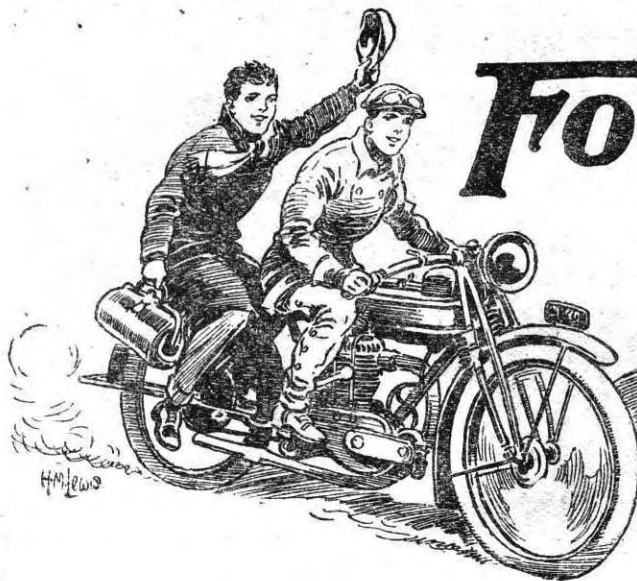
"Tend the light, Lyle!" Jerry cried. "I'll head him off before he gets into that wilderness of brick."

Circling the criminal in one swift rush, Jerry performed an amazing stunt, made possible only by the fact that his pet bus could poise almost as accurately as the helicopter that aviators dream about.

(Continued on page 28.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 897.

James Henson sees at last that he has misjudged his stepson!



FOOTBALL CHUMS!

By
ARTHUR S. HARDY.

(The Most Popular Football Writer of the Day.)

A thrilling yarn, telling of the trials and tribulations of young Hal Chester, in his bid for fame on the footer field.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

HAROLD CHESTER, a well-knit youngster in his teens, and a member of the Kingsdown Football Club. His love for football earns for him the disapproval of

JAMES HENSON, his stepfather, a Nettingham grocer, in whose employ Hal Chester is. Like the rest of the employees at Henson's, Harold finds his guv'nor a very hard taskmaster. First of all, his stepfather dislikes him; secondly, James Henson hates football; and, thirdly, he believes that, he—Harold—is an idler.

An important match is down for decision on Saturday for which Hal had already been granted permission to assist his team. But when the great day comes Mr. Henson cancels his promise.

Suffering from a sense of injustice, Hal is determined to turn out for his team, come what may.

But luck is against the lad, for in the match he is badly fouled by a man named Stevens, one of the opposing backs. It is late when he returns home, weary and in great pain, and he finds the door locked against him. He meets an old school friend, however, in Tommy Bell, who is well in with the management of the Nettingham Football Club, and who gets him a place in the team.

Hal proves a great asset to his side, but, nevertheless, earns the enmity of some of the older players in the team.

Having realised his ambition, Hal pays a visit to his sick mother, and, on learning of his stepfather's slump in business, the lad offers to find the necessary cash to send his mother away. It is

a rude awakening indeed for Mr. Henson to find Hal doing so well, and at football, too—the game he hated!

Hal sees his club's manager, and, after getting permission to accompany his mother to the seaside, returns to convey the good news.

He arrives at the office just in time to warn his stepfather against Stevens, the man who had brought so much trouble upon his shoulders, and who is applying for a vacant position in the shop.

Stevens, in consequence, is turned down.

Seeking revenge, the unscrupulous Stevens waylays the errand-boy that same day, and asks him where James Henson keeps his money. Finding the lad an easy pawn to assist him in carrying out his dastardly scheme, Stevens makes an appointment to meet him at half-past seven to talk things over.

Ably assisted by the traitorous errand-boy, Bill Stevens carries out his burglarious mission. The two are disturbed in their work, however, for Mr. Henson makes a sudden appearance upon the threshold. Stevens rushes at the storekeeper and knocks him unconscious. Then, realising his fateful mistake, he saturates the shop with oil, sets it alight, and hurries away, leaving the unconscious Henson to his fate.

Luckily, however, that same night Hal and Tommy Bell are near at hand, and the storekeeper is rescued and taken to hospital.

Feeling dejected and tired out, the two chums return home, but they could not sleep. With anxiety in their hearts, they awaited the morrow

(Now read on.)

Hope!

WHEN Harold hurried to the infirmary first thing next morning, before he had breakfast, he was greeted by the welcome news that James Henson was progressing very favourably. He had recovered consciousness, had seemed to remember things, and was now sleeping under the influence of a drug.

"Is my stepfather out of danger, then, sir?" Harold asked of the doctor.

"I could not go so far as to say that, but he is certainly doing even better than I dared hope when I first examined him last night," replied the doctor. "Unless a crisis intervenes, I see no reason why he should not, in a day or two, be well upon his way to recovery."

It was indeed cheery news. Harold's spirits soared as he listened to it.

"I have not let my mother know yet," he said. "I did not want to alarm her unnecessarily. There is no need for me to stay in Nettingham any longer, then, sir?"

"I don't think so, my boy," replied the doctor. "Go to Silversea, and take your mother the news in person."

"I'll call again before I go," said Harold; and, hurrying home to breakfast, which he ate with unexpected zest, he told Tommy Bell how well his stepfather was doing.

"That's great news, Harold," smiled Tommy Bell. "It must take a weight off your mind. I didn't think things

would turn out so well last night when they took poor Mr. Henson away in the ambulance."

"Neither did I," confessed Hal.

Now the boys began to call on him. There was scarcely a member of the Nettingham Town team who did not look in at Mrs. Sandy's during the next hour or so. George Bliss, accompanied by Ben Robinson, the trainer, also called.

The news of the fire and attempted murder of James Henson had created an immense sensation in the town. The later editions of the morning papers contained a short and graphic account of it, but Harold noticed that none of the papers published outside Nettingham reported it.

He had no reason to believe that the news would reach Silversea before he got there himself. He decided to run down to the seaside by the 12.30 train, which was due in at Silversea at a quarter to two.

At twelve o'clock, taking the good wishes and heartfelt sympathy of his comrades with him, he called at the infirmary again.

He was not allowed to see Mr. Henson, but was informed that the patient had rallied slightly, and his condition continued to improve. There was no immediate danger.

With this cheery news, he hurried off to see his mother.

The moment he entered the sunlit sitting-room at the hotel Harold could see that his mother, who rose, with a glad smile, to greet him, knew nothing of the burning of the stores or the brutal attack upon Mr. Henson.

It gave him immense relief, for he knew then that his mother had been saved much fretting and suffering, which,

after her recent breakdown, would have done her a great deal of harm.

After talking for a while, Harold took his mother out for a walk, and it was while they were pacing along the hard, smooth sands, within a few yards of the breaking waves, that he told her all that had happened.

He began by saying that the stores had been broken into, and that Mr. Henson had been attacked by a burglar and rendered unconscious, but that he was now out of danger. Having reassured her upon all points, he then told her of the fire and the utter destruction of the stores, the house, and all that her home had contained.

Mrs. Henson, with face as white as a sheet, lips that trembled, and eyes that stared in horror, looked hard at her boy. She did not weep.

She possessed, in large measure, the courage that was her son's own finest quality. The loss of her home, and the burning of the stores which meant ruin she believed, were as nothing when weighed against the life of her husband. James Henson had many faults, he had always dealt unfairly with her boy, but still Harold's mother had cared for him, and the thought of his lying ill; perhaps dying, with none but strangers around him thrilled her with horror.

With a stricken cry she placed her hands upon Harold's shoulders.

"Dear," she cried, "is it the truth you have told me, or are you keeping back the worst?"

"It is the truth," Harold answered. "I have not exaggerated or minimised one fraction. It is as I have said. Mother, when first we brought Mr. Henson out of the burning shop into the street, I believed that he was dead. He had been severely handled, and the smoke had nearly suffocated him. But the doctors really do believe that he will live, and so I shouldn't worry yet."

"When does the next train start for Nettingham?" asked Mrs. Henson.

Eying his mother critically, Harold saw that her nerves were as steady as a rock. Her eyes were bright with resolution.

It needed only this test to show how completely she was herself again.

The long rest in bed and the brief stay by the sea had restored her health and spirits.

"You have to pack, dear," said Hal, "and there is no need to hurry unduly. We had better go back by the fast train at five o'clock."

"And now I have no home to go to—I don't know where I shall stay in Nettingham, Harold," said the mother, forcing a sad smile.

"I have anticipated that, mother," said Hal. "Before I left I asked Mrs. Sandys to let you have a room, and she is going to give you her own until you find some other place to suit you."

"That is very kind of her."

"She is kind, mother. She would do anything for me and Tommy Bell. You need not be afraid to take advantage of her kindness."

They returned slowly towards the hotel, Harold giving her the story of the fire and the rescue of James Henson in full detail.

"Harold," said Mrs. Henson, when Hal had finished, "I am proud of you. You are my own, brave, true son. If James lives he will owe his life to you."

"And to Tommy Bell, mother; without Tommy I could never have carried him out."

Upon their arrival at the hotel, Harold and his mother acquainted the nurse with the position of affairs. Then the two women retired.

Whilst Harold paid the hotel bill, they packed their things and after having partaken of a cup of tea were driven to the station.

At half-past six they had arrived in Nettingham. Six minutes later, the taxi they hired stopped at the door of the infirmary. Together Harold and his mother entered.

Harold was feeling nervous now. If the worst had happened, what then?

He dreaded the effects of such a shock upon his mother, only just recovered from an illness.

Mrs. Henson faced the situation with a courage that startled him.

When the doctor came she put to him the question that had been on her lips every moment of the seemingly never-ending journey home.

"How is my husband, doctor?" she asked anxiously. "Tell me the best or the worst without fear, please!"

"Madam," the doctor replied, "you have arrived at a happy moment. Your husband, though still weak and ill, and suffering from shock, has now fully recovered consciousness. I have been speaking to him, and I have even allowed a police officer to question him. He is now resting quietly, and to-morrow morning, if his progress is maintained, I shall allow you to see him."

Tears appeared in Mrs. Henson's eyes.

"Thank you, doctor," she cried, trying to force a smile.

"Thank you! I had scarcely dared to hope for such good news as this. I need not worry then—until to-morrow!"

"Please, do not worry at all," said the doctor. "Go home and rest. I promise you that if there is any change for the worse I will send for you instantly. At the moment you need not fear. We are doing the best for your husband that lies within our power."

Mrs. Henson faltered as she made her way to the waiting cab, leaning upon Harold's arm. When she spoke her voice was level and free from emotion.

"There is a silver lining in every cloud—already I have seen this silver lining in mine," she said.

James Henson Makes Amends!

JAMES HENSON continued to make good progress, and next morning when Harold and his mother called at the infirmary together for the second time, they were allowed to go up into the ward and see him.

His bed was situated in the corner of the great ward. He lay propped up upon pillows and was doing his best to read a picture paper, screwing his eyes at it behind the lenses of his reading glasses.

The sun streamed in through the uncurtained windows. His face looked younger than Harold had known it for a long while. The bandages upon his injured head gave his face heightened colour.

As the two entered the ward Mr. Henson set his paper down, and stretching out his arms folded his wife into them. "James," she choked, "James—"

He kissed her fondly, stroking her shoulders tenderly, and seemed more human than Harold had ever known him to be.

His lips formed a smile; his eyes were bright.

"There, dearest," he returned, "don't worry. I am out of danger and shall be about again in a few days I hope and trust, and then a brief sojourn by the sea will give me back my health and strength. Already I have found something that has been a stranger to me of late—mind ease."

Mrs. Henson shyly raised her brimming eyes, and smiled, too.

"Nothing else matters now that you are well, dear," she said. "But we are ruined! The stores has gone, our home also, and with it all hope of a prosperous future, Jim."

"I am not so sure about that," answered Mr. Henson. "Things are not half so bad as one might at first think. I shall not have to pay those overdue accounts now, my dear—they will settle themselves."

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Henson, looking puzzled.

"The goods and contents of the shop were fully covered by insurance," Harold's stepfather explained. "So were the fittings, to their fullest value. The furniture in our home was similarly protected. I have already had letters from the respective insurance companies. My combined burglary and fire policies protect me in every way, and there will be no disputing my claims."

"James—then—does that mean that when you are strong and well again, you will be able to start afresh?" asked Mrs. Henson anxiously.

"Yes; but I shall take a rest first. I want to fully restore these jaded nerves of mine."

"What of the premises—the unfortunate landlord?"

"I understand he was protected too. I have fifteen years of my lease still to run. I have no doubt that the premises can be rebuilt on modern lines, and there is nothing to prevent my starting in business there again, with, perhaps a better chance than I had before."

As Harold listened to his stepfather's bright and breezy forecast of the future amazement overcame him. He scarcely knew the man who had always disliked him. James Henson had changed. He seemed a younger, broader-minded man. The boy had never known him smile like this, or talk so happily. What a strange awakening was here.

"There is another thing," Henson went on, still smiling. "I daresay you have read all about the burglary—the story has been published in fullest detail. The rascals who did it were interrupted by me, and before they could break open the safe. The safe may have been old-fashioned, but it defied them, even as it defied the fire. It was found lying amid the smouldering debris, and although a key could not open it, it was forced by the makers and the money it contained was found almost undamaged. Only some of the notes were scorched at the edges, but the bulk were almost untouched. They have been paid into my bank, and have swollen my account there."

Mr. Henson now turned and looked hard at Harold, his brows coming together for a brief moment in the frown that Hal knew so well. But only for a moment.

Henson's face cleared then.



"Harold, my boy," cried Mr. Henson, "I scarcely know what to say to you. I owe you my life. I've thought some bad things about you in the past, but—but I'm sorry!"

"Harold, my boy," he cried. "I scarcely know what to say to you. From the very first moment I disliked you. I chose to believe that you were a feather-brained boy, whose heart was set on games to the neglect of all other thoughts. I thought you lazy, idle, indifferent, undutiful, and defiant. I am afraid that there have been times when I have sadly misused you. Upon the day when I turned you away from home I believed that you were a worthless scamp, and I acted as I then thought for the best. It seemed to me to be the only way to save you—to put you face to face with the reality of things. I hardened my heart for your own good—but I want you to know now that if I had been aware that you had been badly hurt as I now know was the case, I would have done otherwise."

Harold, with flushed face and kindling eyes, moved forward.

"Please don't say any more, sir," he pleaded.

"Ah, but I must say more. I owe you my life. Many a time while I have been lying here, forbidden the relief of speech, I have thought over my treatment of you in the past. I know the risk you ran in coming to my aid amid the blazing fire. I know also that your friend, Bell, the footballer"—Henson spoke stiffly as was his habit, but there was a shake in his voice—"was equally fearless. He also risked almost certain death in helping to save me."

Henson broke off, flushed hotly, and grasped Harold's hand.

"Even the best of men do not always see clearly," he declared. "I know now that I am a man of many faults. I have begun to realise that there must be something else in this playing of football for money than the mere love of show, and gladiatorial display that I have imagined was the beginning and end of a game that I had counted had no sport in it. Harold, my boy, I thank you for your bravery from the bottom of my heart and I ask you to forgive me."

Harold answered in a quiet voice, blushing like a school-girl.

"I did that long ago, sir," he replied. "I never bear malice. I knew that you acted from what you thought were the best of motives, and mother came to me. You did not try to prevent her coming—"

"But I would have forbidden you coming home had I dared," broke in Henson contritely. "Harold, not only have you earned your own living since you left the stores, but you have done well for yourself. I shall never forget my feelings when you came to me and said that you would pay for your mother's stay at Silversea. Harold, you humbled me then, bowed my head into the dust!"

"Don't sir," choked Harold. "I don't want you to apologise to me! It's all past and done with. Let us forget it. As

long as you don't think evil things of me in the future, I'll be happy enough."

"Think evil things of you, my dear boy; I should be the worst of men if I did that. I owe you my life. I want you to bring Tommy Bell, your chum, to see me when I am better able to interest myself in strange visitors. He must be a nice lad."

"He is—simply splendid, sir!" laughed Hal. "And he's not the only one. You remember how you used to rail at Bert Roberts, my pal of the Kingsdown Athletic, the friend who gave me the only real joy in life I experienced until—Harold was going to say—"until you drove me away from home," but he checked himself, and said hurriedly instead—"until I joined Nettingham Town Football Club. Bert's the whitest and the truest chum any boy could hope to have, and I'm sure you'd like him if you knew him better."

"Another footballer—but thank goodness," said Henson, with a laugh, "this time he is an amateur!"

"He won't be for long, sir," said Harold, with a smile. "He is going to play a trial game at centre-forward for the Town against Aston Villa, and I know what that means. They'll sign him on at once, and so he will be earning his living out of the game as well as me."

Harold's stepfather gave the boy a curious, calculating glance, then shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me that I am a mere child in my views of this popular game. Well, bring Bert Roberts to me—he is the young man with the Norton motor-bike, another form of sport that I have taught myself to hate—and I will try to like him."

It was plain that the invalid was beginning to tire.

The nurse made a sign and spoke to Harold's mother.

"It is time that we were going then," said Mrs. Henson rising. "We must not tire your stepfather too much, Harold."

The boy dutifully backed away.

"Good-bye, sir!" he said.

His mother, kissing the invalid and weeping again, this time for joy to find him so much better than she had ever dared to hope, also said good-bye!

"One moment," said Mr. Henson, "I have something more to say. Harold, I want you to know that before the burglar struck me down I recognised him. I caught him in the very act, and he attacked me in the most savage manner. But I knew him. I have informed the police. They are on his trail. He was the man who came to me for a job—and whom you denounced in my office."

"Bill Stevens!" cried Harold, in horror.

"That is the man! He must have set fire to the shop in the belief that he had killed me, in order to conceal his crime. It was a miraculous thing that you should have come upon the scene in the nick of time."

"I had been out to dinner with a friend—Bert Roberts—the man with the Norton!" Hal explained.

"The footballer? In spite of my prejudices against the game it seems to haunt me everywhere, and to play an important part in my life whether I would have it so or no," smiled Henson. "Good-bye, my dear lad, and may I learn to know you better when I am about again."

So they left him and the infirmary and returned together to Mrs. Sandys', both mother and son feeling as if they could afford to smile.

Life for them both seemed, of a sudden, to take a different hue.

They were happy again!

The Trial at Villa Park!

ON Friday James Henson was discharged from the infirmary and was fit to go about his duties again. His head was plastered, but he was strong and mentally in active mood.

That night Harold travelled with the Nettingham Town team to Birmingham so that they would be ready for to-morrow's game with the Villa.

Bert Roberts went with them, and a cheerful, bright, and merry fellow he proved to be.

When he spoke about the morrow's match it was with an eagerness that surprised manager George Bliss.

"Instead of the fellow being scared stiff, Ben," said Bliss to Robinson, the trainer, "he seems to look upon his trial as a sort of gala performance, and has the confidence of a master."

"That's because he knows the game, sir," returned Robinson. "I've watched him very carefully during the week while he's been training at the City Ground, and he

has pace and dash quite out of the ordinary. I've never seen a man with such perfect balance. You ask Tommy Bell, Dick Double, Low, Smart, and Seymour, what they think about him. Low and Smart have often tackled him and they say he's as hard to shift as river mud. He knows where the goal is, too. Dick says he's never fielded a ball that came at him as hard as when Roberts drives it."

"It's an astonishing thing then, if he is so good, that Kingsdown Athletic want to get rid of him."

"So it is; but they're jealous of him! They're jealous of the reputation Hal Chester's made since he came and played for the Town. Roberts isn't popular with some of the officials of the Athletic because he's championed Harold and told them just what he thinks about them. There's the secret, sir, and they'd rather lose a good man and have their own way than have to eat humble pie to keep him."

George Bliss nodded.

"There may be something in that as you say," he said, "but still—we shall see what we shall see. I hardly dare hope that he is another star, but I sha'n't cry if he proves to be the flyer that Bill and young Chester say he is."

They all turned in to bed early that night, and in the morning rose to find a stiff wind blowing, and rain beating on the roof.

It had been blowing half a gale all night, and the conditions of play promised to be none too easy.

So much the better. A real footballer reveals himself when the ground is not too hard and the elements have to be battled with.

The Villa were a rare test team. Always a side for a big game, they played fine football even when the going was easy.

Their League record was by no means too good, but then they had had bad luck in some of their games, and with no chance of winning the championship had been taking things philosophically in some of their games when the luck had run against them no doubt.

Yet they were able to break out at their best at any moment, and the Town would do well if they managed to scrape a point at Villa Park.

By the time the team was ready to start for the famous football ground the sky had cleared, the wind had died down a bit although it was still blowing strongly, and the sun was shining brightly.

There was the usual rush for the football enclosure, and outside the gates the scenes were of the busiest and liveliest.

Through the many turnstile entrances the people were pouring as fast as they could.

Harold went down to have a look at the playing-field, and Dicky Double, Tommy Bell, Bert Roberts, and one or two of the others joined him there.

In spite of the heavy rain that had fallen, the pitch seemed to be in good order. The stand was filling fast. All the best points upon the banks were full to overflowing. The colours of the rival teams could be seen everywhere. A band was playing splendid music, and one little group of crazy Nettingham Town enthusiasts, who stood behind the goal at the Aston Hall end of the ground, were literally covered with the red and white of Nettingham.

They were singing to the tune of the band. One of them was waving a red and white flag above his head.

"It's Jim Burrows!" laughed Harold. "What a chap he is, Tommy!"

"Not a bad chap, Hal," smiled the centre-half. "I know there are a lot of people who would blame him for being so crazy about football, but I understand he works hard during the week, and makes a good deal of money. So if he chooses to find relaxation like that, it's his own look-out, isn't it?"

The chums went back to the dressing-room and changed for the game, taking their time.

"Feeling nervous, Bert?" asked Harold.

Roberts laughed.

"About as nervous as when I used to turn out for Kingsdown Athletic with you!" he cried. "And you know how that was. Hal, I never felt so sure of myself as when I used to play with you. I always knew you'd be in the right place when I passed the ball, and when you gave it back to me I knew you would slip it just in the way I wanted. It was just like clockwork. I've played with a lot of inside men, but never one who could give me a pass like you. And if we were to change places, you go to centre-forward and me to inside-right, I believe the result would be just as good."

"Excepting Bert," Harold reminded the good-looking, stalwart centre-forward. "I haven't got your weight and size, and couldn't bustle the backs as you do."

"I'm not so sure about that, Hal, lad. You're as clever as any forward I've ever seen and a sight more elusive than most. You'd succeed by sheer skill, because you just can't help it."

Ben Robinson, who had drawn near, listened to them in surprise.

"You ain't got any nerves, Roberts!" he cried.

"I know what I can do. I sha'n't fail," said Roberts. "I'm not so conceited as to believe that I can walk past one of the best centre-halves in the game. And I shall be up against some good backs. I may not even get a goal; but I think even the Villa are going to know that there's a live centre-forward on the field."

The words were boastful, but they did not sound boastful. And when the call came for the team to go on to the field, Roberts was the first to reach the door. Opening it, and stepping outside, he waited for Tommy Bell to pass, ball in hand, then fell in behind, and so made his way on to the pitch to play his trial game for the Town.

His eyes were bright, his face was beaming, his cheeks flushed rosily, and his lips were parted in a smile.

As Tommy kicked the ball towards the left-hand goal he sped after it, got to it as it took its second bounce, and, flashing goalwards, drove it into the net with a low hard shot that made Dicky Double cough.

"My word, that one was on the target!" yelled Dicky Double.

Now the Villa turned out. It would be impossible to imagine a smarter-looking lot than the men in claret and blue, with white knickers and ringed stockings, presented. Spiers; Smart and Bowen; Moss, Dr. Milne, and Johnstone; York, Kirton, Capewell, Walker, and Dorrell—such was the side. It was odd to see two inside-rights with the same name, and two backs whose names were Smart. These were almost equally clever footballers also, he it said.

Harold studied them all as they came out, but the man he admired most was Walker, considered by the majority of critics to be the finest forward in football.

It thrilled the boy to think that within a minute or two he would be striving to beat these famous Cup-fighters, the pride of Aston.

As he studied the physical make-up of the centre-half against whom Bert Roberts was soon to operate he felt sorry for Bert. He could have wished his chum an easier trial. Still, there it was. After all, what was the good of any test unless it were a real test?

The captains met, and as Hal saw Tommy Bell smile, and point to the end of the ground from which the strong wind was blowing, he also laughed. They had won the toss. They would have the easier task during the first half, he considered.

And then the game began. From the kick-off the Villans worked their way down the field, and quite early Walker, by sheer brilliance of footwork, worked his way across the goal and shot from an angle.

The shot was right on the target, too, and had not Dick had all his wits about him it must have scored.

However, Dick got to the ball, stumbled headlong with it, and touched it over the goal-line for a corner.

From the flag-kick, Low volleyed the ball far down the field. And then it was the Town's turn. Their forwards were fast. First time passing made a lot of ground for them, and Bert Roberts, freeing himself from the attentions of the centre-half, dashed for goal, his shot sailing inches over the bar only and giving the home crowd a fright.

That run alone proved to George Bliss and the directors of Nettingham Town that Bert was a player of real class.

The exchanges were now fast and furious, each side making ground in turn. In spite of the treacherous nature of the pitch, the players kept their feet well, and after Dicky Double had twice saved in half a minute, Tommy Bell beat Capewell and slipped the ball to Harold. He then ambled after him to watch the result.

Harold here performed as brilliant a piece of dribbling as ever he had shown.

The ball seemed to be tied to his boots with strings, and he glided over the mud at a rare pace, drawing the defence and turning the ball to the centre when a pass out to the wing seemed the better way.

But Harold knew Bert Roberts. He did just as he had done many a time and oft when playing for Kingsdown Athletic.

Roberts was ambling easily along, apparently completely shadowed.

But as the ball was passed he became galvanised into new life. With a leap and a rush he was away, fastening upon the slowing ball whilst speeding forward.

In towards him came the backs, and after him sped the halves.

Harold, his pulses beating fast, raced on in support.

(The Villa, undoubtedly, were up against a tough side in the Town. Don't miss the concluding and most thrilling chapters of this powerful football serial next week.)

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"THE STOLEN GOD!"

(Continued from page 23.)

From a height of five hundred feet, he flashed straight at the terrified creak—an unswerving line that gave the fellow no real chance to dodge this way or that. They had a vision of Benlyne firing wildly—a man blinded by the blue glare dead in his eyes—then Jerry had the Linnet almost level, and Lyle threw a rope as coolly and accurately as ever rodeo audience has applauded.

"Nicely bagged, with his elbows sticking into his ribs," he grinned. "Let her go, Jay, but slowly, else we'll suffocate the beggar."

Two minutes later, the population of Huckfield had the sight and the laugh of its life. The Linnet, barely sweeping the housetops, poised over the village green, until such time as Benlyne was unhooked and held by two beefy yeomen. Then the plane touched lightly down, and the chums found themselves surrounded by a cheering, laughing crowd, who, as yet, only half understood the exciting events of the night.

It was Humpledieck who stilled the noise, and took entire charge of the situation.

"Benlyne, you're arrested for attempted murder, arson, and kidnap-

ping," he boomed, laying a heavy hand on the culprit's shoulder.

"Shure, and who's he been kidnappin'?" Jerry demanded.

"Nicholas Freud, of course," Humpledieck replied tartly.

Lyle laughed.

"You'll have to drop that charge, sergeant," he said, his eyes twinkling.

"Freud's still missing, that's all I know," Humpledieck snapped.

"He isn't, he's here!" Lyle chuckled.

"In fact, old dear, you're hugging him now; if you'll tear Bowleg's whiskers off you'll find the missing Freud!"

"Why—what—" Humpledieck paused, open-mouthed, his glance divided between the bushy beard he held in his hand, and the sight of the man whose disappearance had caused so much trouble.

Then quickly the dear old sergeant recovered his dignity.

"Clever youngsters, I wondered how long it would take you to spot the ruse," he wheezed. "Of course, I had to pretend innocence, to give Freud an opportunity of revealing all his crooked ways."

"Of course," Lyle agreed modestly. "Also, of course, you tumbled to the fact that Freud and Benlyne, though they were next-door neighbours, were never once seen together. You also guessed that Freud had stolen something valuable from the Hindu priests, that he was working off a clever attempt to bilk them by making Freud vanish and by leaving traces about that he had met a watery end?"

"Tarnation smart you think yourself, Lindsay," Freud sneered defiantly. "But the laugh's with me. What I have I hold, and I've hidden it where neither you nor the niggers'll ever find it."

"Wrong again, Nicholas!" Lyle drawled. "What you hold is only what you think you have. You think you hold a fortune snugly embedded in the wax of a wireless battery; actually, old dear, you hold quite an ordinary battery. I put it there myself, so I know, and the fortune is—there!"

With a deft touch of the Linnet's gadget-board, Lyle turned the searchlight so that it illuminated the fringe of the upper wing. And there, securely fixed on the emergency-tank, a golden tiger crouched—a mascot whose eyes flashed fire, the fire of diamonds worth a king's ransom.

For this tiny object, Nicholas Freud had despoiled an Indian Temple, torn an emblem from a people who regarded it as a god, and started the hue and cry that so nearly ended in a most atrocious crime.

The visible proof that all his efforts had been vain, nearly drove the schemer insane.

But with his wrists firmly manacled he was led away by the plump Humpledieck.

THE END.

(There will be another of these thrilling adventures soon, chums, but in the meantime, be sure you read: "RAGGY TO THE RESCUE!" next week's thrilling yarn of Trojan Tim.)



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