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"THE SCARLET STREAK!"

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

LIBRARY

No. 949.
Vol. XXIX.
April 17th,
1926.



NOT "EGGS-ACTLY" NICE FOR GUSSY!

(A humorous incident from the grand extra-long school story of Tom Merry & Co. inside.)

OUR "SCARLET STREAK" COMPETITION

First Prize £5.

AND FIVE PRIZES OF £1 EACH.

YOU MUST NOT MISS THIS, BOYS!

HERE we are, you fellows, with a really topping new one-week competition. You will enjoy it, because it is a novel idea, with some jolly good prizes which simply must be won.

You are, of course, all reading our new serial, "The Scarlet Streak," which appears on page 23 of this issue. Well, we have written a paragraph about it, which the artist has put into picture-puzzle form.

This, by the way, is the second of a series of one-week contests, and with each new puzzle there will be more splendid prizes.

In attempting to solve the puzzle it will help if you read the story and see the film; also, the sense of the sentences will assist you. But you should remember each picture or sign may represent part of a word, one, two, or three words, but not more than three words.

Try your hand at solving the paragraph—you can see that the opening words are "John Carson, the inventor..."—and then write your solution IN INK on a sheet of paper. Cut out the puzzle and the coupon together; attach your solution to the

tablet, and, having signed and addressed the coupon IN INK, post your effort to:

GEM, "Scarlet Streak," No. 2,
Gough House, Gough Square,
London, E.C. 4 (Comp.),

so as to reach there not later than FRIDAY, APRIL 23rd. Any efforts arriving after that date will be disqualified.

RULES WHICH MUST BE STRICTLY ADHERED TO.

The First Prize of £5 will be awarded for the correct, or most nearly correct, solution. The other prizes will follow in order of merit. The Editor reserves the right to divide any of the prizes should it be necessary in the case of ties.

You may send as many efforts as you like, but each must be complete in itself, and must consist of a solution, a puzzle, and a signed coupon. Solutions containing alternatives will be disqualified. The decision of the Editor will be absolutely final.

No one connected with the staff or proprietors of this journal may compete.

Our Grand Story, "The Scarlet Streak," has been filmed by the Universal Co. Read the story and see the film.

"THE SCARLET STREAK" NO. 2.

John **CR**on, **3** **P** **N** **T** of the **S** **L** **E** **T** **M** **K** **H** **A** **S** **L** **A** **S** **T** **R** **A** **I** **N** **K** **L** **E** **A** **V** **E** **S** **11:30 A.M.** **11:45**

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C **L** **U** **E** **2** **T** **W** **H** **E** **R** **E** **A** **B** **O** **U** **T** **S** **C** **I** **N** **E** **D** **a** **+** **shall** **WHAT PLACE IS THIS?** **H** **I** **S** **A** **M** **P** **20** **C** **W** **T**

I enter "Scarlet Streak" Contest No. 2, and agree to accept the Editor's decision as final.

Name.....

Address.....

2

GEM. Closing Date, Friday, April 23rd.

ONLY A GROCER'S ASSISTANT! Because of that Aubrey Racke & Co., the shady nuts of St. Jim's, despise Grimes of Rylcombe Village. But he's worth the whole lot of them put together, despite the serious nature of the evidence these cads manage to bring against him!

HIS HONOUR AT STAKE



A Dramatic Extra-Long Story of the
Chums of Greyfriars, introducing Grimes,
the Grocer's Boy.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Against Odds!

LOOK out, chaps! Someone coming!" Aubrey Racke of the Shell Farm at St. Jim's muttered the warning hurriedly.

Such a warning was very necessary from Racke's point of view.

It was a bright spring afternoon—just the sunny afternoon for a pull up-river, or a spin along the green-lined lanes—and Racke, Crooke, and Mellish were seated on a stile half-way between Rylcombe and St. Jim's.

It was a pretty spot. Below them the silvery Rhyl stretched away into the hazy distance, and to their left the sleepy village of Rylcombe nestled in the hollow—church spire and red roofs just showing above the trees. And behind them the field-path merged into the shady woodland path through the green fastnesses of Rylcombe Woods. It was also a very secluded spot—which was just why Racke & Co. had bestowed their shady presence upon it.

A hefty pull upstream, or a long cycle spin did not appeal to Racke & Co. Physical exertion of any kind was very objectionable to them. Their favourite manner of spending "a half" was to find a quiet, secluded spot where they could lounge in comfort, while they smoked cigarettes and discussed "gee-gees" and suchlike "sporting" matters.

They were doing that now when Racke muttered the hurried warning, at the same time flinging the cigarette he was smoking behind him into the hedge-bottom.

Crooke and Mellish gasped in alarm, and did likewise. Someone was certainly coming. Footsteps sounded on the path, and then through the fringe of greenery bordering the woods emerged a figure.

It was that of a rugged, cheery-faced youth, with a scarf round his neck and a basket over his arm. He came trudging on, whistling cheerfully.

Racke recognised him as Grimes, the grocer's boy, of

Rylcombe village, and as he recognised him Racke snorted angrily.

Crooke and Mellish also snorted in disgust, but while Crooke and Mellish retrieved their cigarettes from the dry ditch, Aubrey Racke took out his gold-case and selected another cigarette. A cigarette, more or less, was a very small matter to the son and heir of Sir Jonas Racke.

Yet Racke was annoyed for all that. Certainly it was a relief to find that the owner of the footsteps was not a prefect or a master. On the other hand, Aubrey Racke had been startled unnecessarily by a mere grocer's boy, and this fact annoyed the lofty Aubrey. Moreover, there had been trouble on more than one occasion between Racke & Co. and Grimes & Co.

Racke eyed the trudging grocer's boy with a scowl. "It's only that dashed low grocer boy!" he sniffed. "I say, let's make the cad go round—don't let him pass!"

"Good egg!" grinned Crooke. "We owe that little cad one or two scores. Sit tight!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Percy Mellish. Crooke and Mellish had rejoined Racke on the stile now, and they "sat tight," making no effort to move as Grimes trudged up to the stile.

Grimes came to a halt. He had stopped whistling, and a shade came over his good-humoured features. Grimes saw from the grins of Racke & Co. that they were out for trouble.

He waited a little, but as the St. Jim's juniors still made no effort to move, he spoke.

"Kindly allow a feller to pass, Master Racke," he said civilly.

Three chuckles answered him—that was all; and Grimes' eyes gleamed a little.

"Ere, none of your games, Master Racke!" he protested. "Let a feller pass, can't you!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Crooke, looking round in pretended surprise. "That low bouncer addressing you, Racke?"

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"Seems so," grinned Racke. "Like his cheek, what?"

"Look 'ere—"

"Tell the boulder to be off," said Racke, without looking round. "Tell him that if he tramps back for a mile he'll come to the lane, and he can get back to the village that way. This stile is engaged."

"He, he, he," sniggered Mellish.

"Look 'ere," said Grimes, setting his lips. "I don't want no trouble with you, Master Racke. But I ain't going all that way round jest to give you gents something to laugh at. Lemme come past!"

"Go and chop chips!" grinned Croke.

"Look 'ere. I'm in a 'urry; my boss is expectin' me back at two. And he's in a bad temper to-day, and—"

"Is he?" said Racke, looking round, with a sneering grin. "What a pity now! I'll tell you what, then. If you'll go back to the lane you'll see a heap of sand by the roadside. Fill your basket and take him it—tell him it's to mix with his sugar; that ought to put him in a good temper."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Croke and Mellish.

"Look 'ere. Are you goin' to allow a feller to cross that there stile or not, Master Racke?"

"Not, old nut!"

"Then I'll 'ave to shift you," said Grimes.

And with set face he started to climb the stile, heedless of the fact that Croke and Racke were seated on the top rung, while Mellish was seated below them.

As he did so Percy Mellish—never a brave youth—moved off hurriedly, but Racke and Croke sat tight, clinging on to the arms of the stile.

But this aided them little, for Grimes was a sturdy youth, and he was growing angry now.

Croke yelled furiously as the basket caught him in the face, and next moment a brief, desperate struggle was taking place on the top of the stile.

It ended by Croke taking a dive through the arms of the stile on one side on to the prickly hedge, while Racke, propelled by a lusty lunge from Grimes' knee, went sprawling on to the path, on hands and knees.

The sheer force of Grimes' charge caused that youth to overbalance, and he sprawled headlong after Racke, his basket flying away, scattering its contents into the dry ditch-bottom.

"You rotten little sweep!" howled Racke furiously. "I'll smash you for that!"

He scrambled up, and made a blind rush at Grimes, who was just scrambling to his feet in his turn. Grimes ducked in the nick of time, and as Racke's waving fist slid over his head, he jabbed a hard, knuckly fist into Racke's face.

Racke yelped and sat down with a thump.

"It were your own fault," gasped Grimes, looking down at him. "You started it, Master Racke."

"Ow!" spluttered Racke, clutching his nose. "Ow—wow! You—you low sweep! Why, I'll—I'll—"

He jumped up in a fury, and went for the grocer's boy like a whirlwind. His right took Grimes on the nose, and his left clumped home on his chin. Grimes staggered back, gasping.

"Go it, Racke, old man!" shrieked Mellish. "Let the cad have it!"

Racke went it, following the dazed grocer's boy up savagely, and hitting out furiously until Grimes went to the grass with a crash.

But he was up again in a flash. As a matter of fact, Grimes had always believed Racke to be a funk, and he had scarcely expected this. He was dazed and astonished.

Only for the moment, though. As he jumped up his nose was streaming, but his face was grim and determined.

With a low growl he went for Aubrey Racke, and piled in with stolid doggedness. He knew little of boxing, but despite that Racke was backing away before a hurricane of hefty blows, stalling them off as best he could.

"Back up, you fools!" panted Racke desperately. "Croke, you rotter! Mellish, you rotten funk! Help, hang you! Ow! Oh, you low—Yoooop!"

Crash!

Racke was down, sent there by a straight drive from the grocer's boy's knuckly fist. But at that moment Grimes went down also—tripped up from behind by Gerald Croke.

As he crashed down backwards, Racke leaped to his feet again, his eyes glinting nastily. Now Croke looked like joining in. Racke was ready to continue. Racke & Co. were not troubled by scruples regarding fair play.

And Croke was quite ready to join in for once. His hands and face had been scratched badly on the prickly hedge, and he was in a nasty mood indeed.

As the luckless Grimes staggered to his feet again, Croke rushed at him from behind, while Racke joined in the rush with a vengeful howl.

"Down the cad, chaps! Now, Mellish, you rotten funk! Give the cad what for!"

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"Ere, hold on!" panted Grimes. "One at a time! Two to one ain't—Ow!"

Grimes staggered back before the two black sheep, hitting out and defending himself desperately. But he did not falter, or think of bolting. Then Mellish, who had been hovering in the background, suddenly took a hand—or rather a foot—in the game.

He placed a quick foot behind the retreating Grimes, and once again the grocer's boy went crashing down.

But this time he was not given the chance to get up. In a moment all three of the St. Jim's cads flung themselves upon him and held him down.

"Hold him!" gasped Racke, his face black with rage. "We'll teach the shop cad to hammer St. Jim's chaps. Hold him! By gad, we'll make him squirm for—Oh, hang!"

Racke broke off with a muttered exclamation of disgust as footsteps sounded, and the next moment three St. Jim's juniors shinned over the stile, and Aubrey Racke scowled as he recognised Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners of the Shell.

"Hallo!" snapped Tom Merry, taking in the scene at a glance. "What game's this, Racke?"

CHAPTER 2.

What Mellish Found!

THE faces of the newcomers were grim. Tom Merry & Co. were well aware of the long-standing enmity between Racke and Grimes, and they felt they had arrived in the nick of time to prevent the grocer's boy from getting a rough handling at the hands of Racke & Co.

As a general rule, St. Jim's fellows always backed each other up tooth and nail against outsiders, but when dealing with Aubrey Racke & Co. it was very often necessary—in the interests of fair play—to ignore that rule.

In any case, Tom Merry & Co. were on very unfriendly terms with Racke & Co., whereas they liked the rugged and honest Grimes, and held him in high esteem, both for his sporting capabilities and his cheery, courageous character.

"At it again?" sniffed Tom Merry, as Racke did not answer him. "Three to one is just about your figure, Racke. Get up and give Grimes a chance, you rotter!"

Aubrey Racke scowled, and stood up, while Croke and Percy Mellish lost no time in doing likewise. Grimes staggered to his feet, breathless and panting.

"I don't see why you should interfere, Merry," said Racke angrily. "Just like you to take this cad's side."

"It isn't a case of taking sides," said Tom Merry. "It's a case of seeing fair play. If you want to make mincemeat of Grimey, take your coat off and face him—one at a time, though."

"I'm not fighting that grocery cad," sneered Racke. "You clear out, Merry. We were just teaching him not to cheek St. Jim's fellows."

"Was that all?"

"Yes," said Racke savagely. "He came barging up, and shoved both Croke and me off that stile; didn't even give us the chance to make way for him, the low bound!"

"Phew! What a fib!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Try again, Aubrey, old chap. Didn't he throw stones at you, too?"

"You shut up, Lowther," said Croke, backing his chum up. "Racke's only telling the truth. Grimes barged us both off the stile, the insolent outsider. We're going to give him a hiding for it."

"Well, you can," smiled Tom cheerily. "But it must be one at a time, old top. We'll hold your jackets, if you like. Are you willing to face these chaps one at a time, Grimey?"

Grimes chuckled. He knew he would get fair play now Tom Merry was present.

"I'm ready to fight 'em one arter the other, Master Merry," he grinned, starting to take off his coat. "I knows as you won't let 'em get up to no dirty tricks. It weren't my fault as this started. I asked 'em civilly enough to let me come over this stile, an' they wouldn't let me—told me to go round by the road."

"It's a rotten lie!" hissed Racke. "He didn't give us the chance to move for him. If you don't believe us—"

"We certainly don't," smiled Tom Merry. "You see, we happened to see what was going on from the river there. We didn't hear what was said, of course, but we saw that you wouldn't let Grimey pass, and he only did what any fellow would have done—he tried to shift you. I suppose you don't happen to have bought this stile, by any chance, Racke?"

"Don't talk rot!" snapped Racke.

"Then, as the stile doesn't belong to you, you'd no right to stop Grimey from crossing it, and the fault is yours, old nut," smiled Tom.

"Hang you!" anarled Racke. "It's just like you to take this grocer cad's part, Merry. Why don't you back up your own school-fellows?"

"Being such a hopeless cad, you wouldn't understand if we explained," said Tom. "Anyhow, if you're still yearning for Grimey's gore, why not take your jacket off and lick him?"

"Grimey's all ready," grinned Monty Lowther. "You're all ready to let Racke lick you, aren't you, Grimey?"

"I'm ready, Master Lowther!" grinned Grimes.

But Racke, apparently, wasn't at all ready to do the licking.

"Look here, Merry," he said savagely, "if you think I'm soiling my hands by fighting that low bouncer, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"You won't fight?" exclaimed Tom, raising his eyebrows. "My dear man, we can't allow a St. Jim's chap to show the white feather, you know."

"I won't fight the low hound, hang you!"

"If 'e funks a scrap," said Grimes, "I'm sure I don't want to 'urt 'im! Let 'im run off!"

"Not yet!" said Tom grimly. "You've insulted my friend Grimey, Racke, and you've either got to fight him or apologise. Got that?"

"Apologise to a shopboy?" echoed Racke derisively. "Not likely!"

"You'll neither fight him nor apologise?" queried Tom pleasantly.

"No, hang you!"

"Then you'll fight me, old top!" said Tom Merry, peeling off his jacket cheerfully. "We can't allow St. Jim's chaps to go about acting like hooligans and then showing the white feather. We can't allow you to let down St. Jim's like that. Put your fists up!"

"You—you fool!" hissed Racke, glaring about him savagely. "Look here, I'm not—"

He broke off suddenly and made a wild leap to escape. At the same moment Crook and Mellish followed his example.

But the Terrible Three were expecting something of the sort.

In a couple of strides Tom Merry had overtaken him, and his hand yanked the flying Racke back again. Monty Lowther tripped Crooke up as he turned to flee. Only Mellish succeeded in escaping.

As he jumped away Manners jumped after him and grabbed at him wildly. But Mellish ducked and raced away, leaving only his cap in Manners' clutching hand.

Manners grinned, but did not deign to chase a fellow like Percy Mellish. He kicked the cap after the fleeing sneak of the Fourth. Mellish vanished through the trees, and the cap fell among the brambles.

Manners left it there for Mellish to fetch if he wanted it.

"Let that funky little sweep go!" grinned Tom Merry. "Racke and Crooke are our game. Now, Racke, old son, it's a case of facing Grimey or me, or apologising. Which is it—sharp?"

"Hang you!"

"Apologise or fight!" snapped Tom.



Grimes charged at the grinning Racke & Co. His basket caught Crooke in the face, and that worthy toppled backwards to land in a prickly hedge. Racke, meanwhile, propelled by a lusty lunge from Grimes' knee, went sprawling, to land on the path with a sickening thud.

(See Chapter 1.)

"I won't! Hang— Yoooop!"

Racke yelped as Tom tapped him gently on his prominent nose.

"That's by way of encouragement," said Tom, still retaining his grip of Racke's collar. "For the last time, old tulip! Will you fight Grimey?"

"Let go!" roared Racke furiously, as Tom propelled him towards the grinning Grimes. "I tell you I won't fight, you rotten—"

"You'll apologise, then?"

"No—I mean yes! Hang you!"

"Go it, then!"

"I—I'm sorry!" gasped Racke, his eyes glinting.

"Sorry for acting like a cad?"

"No—yes, yes!"

"Sorry for being rude and insulting to a fellow whose boots you're not fit to clean?"

"Look here—"

"Yes or no?"

"I—I— Yes!" hissed Racke.

"That's good enough for you. Now, Crooke, it's your turn. Are you sorry, like dear old Racke?"

Crooke bit his lip. But he was no keener to fight than was his leader.

"Yes!" he muttered, with a fierce look at Grimes.

"You look it, I must say!" murmured Tom Merry. "Still, if Grimey's satisfied now—"

"I reckon I'm satisfied, Master Merry!" grinned Grimes. "I didn't want no trouble with them, and I don't want no more. It's good of you to chip in like this 'ere, Master Merry."

"Not at all," said Tom Merry politely. "It's up to us to keep up the credit of St. Jim's, Grimey. Now, Racke will pick up your things, and then you can toddle on your way, old chap. Buck up, Racke!"

Racke hesitated; but as Tom held a fist below his nose suggestively he gave him a baleful glare and started to pick up the few scattered articles of grocery from the ditch, his face red with bitter humiliation and rage.

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He placed the last article in the basket, and then he glared at Tom Merry.

"Now let me go, hang you!" he snarled.

"Yes, you can clear now," said Tom grimly. "Perhaps this will teach you to let inoffensive villagers alone, Racke. Let Crooke go, Monty!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Lowther.

He released the scowling Crooke, and as that young rascal jumped away Lowther gave him a parting kick with his shoe. Crooke followed Racke, and the shady pair vanished through the trees.

"That's that!" remarked Tom Merry, with satisfaction.

"Well, we'll be getting on, Grimey. Cheerio, old scout!"

"Cheerio! And thanks, Master Merry!"

After a glance round to make sure that Racke & Co. had really gone, the Terrible Three departed over the stile to continue their interrupted stroll along the towing-path of the river.

As they disappeared Grimes examined the articles of grocery in his basket, and then a shade came over his cheery features and he groaned. A bag of sugar was burst open, a jar of jam smashed, and a packet of butter was muddy and the wrapper was torn open, likewise a package of bacon.

"Oh crikey!" he mumbled ruefully. "I can't take these along to Farmer Crabb like this 'ere. I'll have to get some fresh stuff from the shop. Oh, my 'at! Won't old Sands play 'Amlet—'im bein' in a bad temper, too! Oh crikey!"

And, with dismal forebodings of trouble to come with his "boss," Grimes tramped away with his basket on his arm. It was rather a pity that the Terrible Three had failed to see the damage, for they would certainly have forced Racke to make some compensation for it.

But Tom Merry & Co. had not noticed the state of the grocery, and the luckless Grimes wended his way village-wards with the dismal knowledge that Racke & Co. had scored in one way, if not in another.

He had scarcely vanished along the woodland path when a slinking figure appeared through the trees and cautiously approached the stile. It was Percy Mellish. He was bare-headed, and he was obviously in search of his cap.

Not having seen Manners kick it after him, Mellish started to search round for the cap, a scowl on his crafty, ill-favoured features.

For some moments Mellish searched the spot, and it was while he was rummaging in the dry ditch that he found a rather bulky envelope amidst the dead vegetation in the bottom of the ditch.

He picked it up, turned it over and over, and then opened the flap of the envelope, which was unsealed. Inside was a small account-book such as tradesmen use for their customers. On it was printed in gilt letters the legend:

"A. B. Sands, grocer and tea merchant, Rylcombe."

Mellish glowered at it, and was about to fling it away, when he became aware that there was something else folded up inside the book.

It proved to be three Treasury notes for a pound each.

"Phew!" breathed Percy Mellish.

He guessed at once what it meant. Someone had paid Grimes a bill on his round, and it had either fallen out of his pocket during the scrap or it had fallen out of the basket.

That much was fairly clear to Percy Mellish.

"Phew!" mumbled Mellish. "Well, the careless little ead! Fancy keeping money in a book like that! Deserves to lose it, by jingo! I—I—"

Mellish looked at the money, and then quite suddenly he looked about him, a curiously scared and guilty look on his pasty face.

"Dare, I?" he breathed. "It—it would serve the little sweep right! Besides, it may not have fallen out of his basket at all, or his pocket. I—I think I'll take charge of it for a bit—just to give the low ead a fright. I—I'll send it back to old Sands afterwards sometime. It'll be paying that little ead out. I expect he'll get the sack for this. I jolly well hope he does, hang him!"

For another few seconds Percy Mellish stood in trembling indecision, and then he hurriedly shoved the notes in his pocket, and after replacing the book in the envelope, he dropped it where he had found it.

Then, with a stealthy glance about him, and with a very white face, Percy Mellish hurriedly left the spot.

Cad, sneak, and toady as he was, Percy Mellish had no intention of stealing the money then. His intention was to tell Racke of what he had found, and to get his approval to his idea of keeping the money in order to get the hated Grimes the "sack," and then to return the money to Mr. Sands.

That was Percy Mellish's charitable idea at the moment.

Yet from the look of guilt on the face of the sneak of the Fourth as he tramped slowly back to St. Jim's, it was plain that another and more serious temptation had taken possession of him.

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Whether he would succeed in resisting that temptation before he met Aubrey Racke remained to be seen. Percy Mellish was treading dangerous ground.

CHAPTER 3.

Poor Old Grimey!

"WELL, young 'un?"

Mr. Sands, the Rylcombe grocer, was standing in the doorway of his shop when Grimes trudged along the street with his basket on his arm.

He peered over his glasses rather balefully at Grimes. Mr. Sands wasn't really a bad old chap, but he suffered acutely from indigestion. And when he did get an attack of that distressing malady he was apt to be very irritable and unreasonable indeed.

He was suffering from a bad attack now, and he was in an irritable and unreasonable mood accordingly.

The sight of Grimes trudging along wearily was enough to make him irritable in his present frame of mind. Grimes was ambling along very slowly—naturally not at all eager to report the "accident" to his master.

"Well?" went on Mr. Sands as Grimes trudged up to him. "You've been a long time, my lad. Have you been—Hullo, been fighting agen, eh?"

Mr. Sands almost snarled this out, having just caught sight of the dishevelled appearance and somewhat bruised features of his errand-boy.

"It weren't my fault, sir!" stammered Grimes unhappily. "It were—"

"It never is your fault!" snorted Mr. Sands, making way for Grimes, and following that worthy into the little shop. "You've always got that excuse. What have I told you about rowing when you're taking goods out? And—hallo!"

Mr. Sands caught sight of the goods in the basket then, and his podgy features went red.

"Here, what's this?" he snorted angrily. "What's this mean, my lad?"

He pointed an indignant finger at the damaged goods in the basket.

"Jam, butter, bacon, sugar—all damaged!" he roared. "Why, this means you ain't even been to Farmer Crabb's at all! What's happened?"

"I 'ad an accident, sir," gasped the hapless Grimes. "I were jest goin' there when some fellers tried to stop me crossing the stile far side of Rylcombe Woods, sir. I tried to push past, and they upset me basket. It weren't my fault, sir!"

"Oh! So you've come back for fresh goods, hey?" gasped Mr. Sands. "You—you quarrelsome young rascal! After all I've told you about fighting when you're on your rounds, too! I've had enough of this, my lad!"

"Yessir. But—"

"That's enough!" snapped Mr. Sands, picking up the basket and slamming it on the counter. "I shall deduct the damage from your wages this week, Grimes!"

"Oh dear!"

"You may well say that!" snorted Mr. Sands. "I've more than half a mind to get rid of you—reckless young rascal! You'd better—Here, hold on, though!" said Mr. Sands as if a thought had struck him. "What about Mrs. Jackson's goods? Did you take 'em?"

"Oh, yessir!"

"And did she pay you?"

"Yessir! Leastways, she paid me three pounds on account, and she sent the book to be made up!" said Grimes. "I've got it here, and—oh, crikey!"

A sudden startling thought seemed to come to the errand-boy, and almost feverishly he started to hunt through his basket. He had forgotten about Mrs. Jackson's account till now, and it suddenly occurred to him that he did not remember seeing Racke put that envelope in his basket.

Mr. Sands watched him grimly as he hunted through the basket, and he looked still more grim as he noted the growing look of great alarm on Grimes' rugged features.

"Well?" he demanded ominously, and with some uneasiness.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Grimes.

He hunted again through his basket, and then he patted his pockets as if to make sure he hadn't placed the envelope there—as he realised now he should have done.

Then he gave a deep groan of utter dismay.

"Well?" almost bellowed Mr. Sands.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Grimes. "It—it's gone!"

"What!"

"It—it was in the envelope with the book!" stammered Grimes. "I think I shoved it in the basket. It must 'ave bin upset with the goods, sir!"

"Well, well—" Words failed Mr. Sands.

"I—I'd better go back an' look for it, sir!" gasped Grimes.

almost overcome with dismay. "I know I 'ad it jest afore I got to that there stile, sir!"

"Better go back!" bellowed Mr. Sands, finding his voice at last. "I think you had better go back, my lad. You mean to tell me as you showed that money loose in your basket?"

"Oh, crikey! Yes, sir! I—I thought it'd be safe enough there!" groaned the hapless Grimes. "Ow was I to know as them St. Jim's chaps would make me upset me basket like that there? I forgot about it since."

"You young rascal! You careless young idiot! You reckless, blundering young villain!" roared Mr. Sands, almost foaming at the mouth. "Mrs. Jackson ought-ter have known better than pay you when she knows I always calls for the money!"

"You—you told me to arsk for it, sir!" grunted Grimes.

"Well, never mind that now!" gasped Mr. Sands. "Three pounds, was it? Right, my lad! Well, back you goes, and don't you come here again without it! If you don't find that money, you're sacked! You hear?"

The luckless Grimes could scarcely fail to hear. Indeed, Mr. Sands could almost have been heard at the end of the village street. At all events, a certain, elegantly clad youth, wearing a glimmering monocle, and carrying a natty, gold-mounted cane, heard it and paused in his stroll.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth at St. Jim's, and he looked into Mr. Sands' shop rather curiously. Arthur Augustus was on friendly terms with Grimes, and he guessed that Grimes was getting it "hot" from his master.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus good-naturedly. "Poor old Gwimes is gettin' it wathah hot, I fancy. I think I will chip in and wemonstuate with Mr. Sands. He is wathah wuff on Gwimes at times, and if I speak to him tactfully it may—Ow! Bai Jove!"

Crash!

It was Grimes. That luckless youth had not turned to obey Mr. Sands quickly enough, and that irate individual had grabbed him by the collar and propelled him out of the shop.

Unfortunately Arthur Augustus happened to be in the way—a fact Mr. Sands had been too angry to see. And the elegant Arthur Augustus sat down on the pavement, with a hearty thump, and Grimes sat down upon him.

"There!" gasped Mr. Sands wrathfully. "You know what I've told you—don't you come back without that three pounds, my lad, or it's the sack for you, and perhaps worse. Off with you. Sharp!"

With that, Mr. Sands retreated into his shop. Possibly—being scarcely able to miss seeing the noble D'Arcy sprawling on the pavement—he felt it expedient, under the circumstances. Mr. Sands was generally very careful how he treated the boys from St. Jim's.

As Arthur Augustus and Grimes grovelled on the pavement, three St. Jim's juniors came out of the bun-shop higher up the village street, and they stared at the sight.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Jack Blake—for they were Blake, Herries, and Digby, D'Arcy's chums. "What the thump are you sitting there for, Gussy—begging for coppers?"

"He's been doing acrobatic stunts, I do believe," said Digby. "Fancy old Gussy becoming a giddy street performer, you fellows!"

"Terrible!" grinned Blake, wagging a severe forefinger at Arthur Augustus. "I'm shocked at you, Gussy!"



Crash! "Bai Jove!" Propelled by Mr. Sands' strong arms, Grimes whizzed out of the shop door, to be brought up suddenly against Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who happened to be passing at that moment. "There!" gasped Mr. Sands wrathfully. "And don't you come back without my three pounds!" (See Chapter 3.)

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He scrambled to his feet painfully. Then he started to dust himself down, glaring back into Mr. Sands' shop as he did so. Grimes was also on his feet now, looking very unhappy indeed.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus indignantly. "That was vewy careless of Mr. Sands. I have a vewy good mind to entah his shop and tell him what I think of such wuffin' conduct. Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus was turning as if to enter the shop when Grimes clutched his arm earnestly.

"Please don't, Master D'Arcy," he begged in alarm. "It'll only make 'im more savage if you does! It was an accident—he didn't see you outside."

"I am quite weady to believe it was an accident," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "But Mr. Sands should have taken more care, deah boy. He has wumped my clobber, and my bags are tewvibly dusty. Howevah, if my wemonstuation will have the effect of makin' him more watty with you, Gwimey—"

"It will for certain," said Grimes earnestly, almost dragging Arthur Augustus away from the shop in apprehension.

"He's 'oppin' mad, an' I'e's going to sack me, and perhaps worse, if I don't find that three pound! Oh crumbs!" he mumbled in dismay. "I hopes that there Master Racke ain't done anythin' with it outer spite!"

And Grimes was about to hurry away, when Jack Blake called him back.

"Here, hold on, Grimey!" he said curiously. "What's that about Racke and three quid?"

"I'll tell you agen, Master Blake," mumbled Grimes hurriedly. "I gotter go and try to find that three quid. Oh crikey! I'm for it if it's lost."

"Bai Jove! Tell us all about it, Gwimey, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus in alarm. "Have you lost three pounds?"

"Yes. I lost it near the stile back of Rylcombe Woods," groaned Grimey. "It were Master Racke's fault—'im and his pals. They upset me basket, and the money was in it."

"Then if some of our chaps made you lose it, it's up to us to help you find it, Grimey, old son," said Blake grimly. "Come on, chaps, we're looking into this!"

"Yaas, wathah! Lead on, Gwimey, deah boy."

And Grimes led the way eagerly enough. As they hurried along the errand-boy explained matters, and the juniors looked grim as he told of Racke's caddish behaviour.

"Just like him!" granted Herries. "But there's nothing

to worry about, Grimey, old scout. The money will be in the ditch, I expect."

"As for the jam and stuff in that basket," said Blake, "we'll see that cad Racke pays up for it."

"Yaas, wathah!" added Arthur Augustus. "Wely upon us, Grimey, deah boy."

Grimes brightened up a little at this. After all, it was more than likely that the envelope with the book and cash would be in the ditch, having been overlooked by Aubrey Racke when returning the goods to the basket.

But Grimes' hopes in that direction were short-lived.

The juniors, with their village chum, were soon through the wood, and they helped Grimes to search every inch of the ditch and of the grass round the stile to no avail.

"It's no good, I'm afraid!" grunted Blake, after a good fifteen minutes had been spent searching. "I'm afraid one of those rotters has picked it up. Better come to St. Jim's and see the cads, Grimey."

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Grimes. "They—they wouldn't keep it, would they, Master Blake?"

"Of course not," grinned Blake. "Even dear old Racke is a bit above that, old sport."

"He might do something with it, though—just to spite Grimey!" grunted Herries. "You know what a howling cad the fellow is."

"Well, he might, certainly," agreed Blake thoughtfully. "We'd better see the rotters, anyway. Come along, Grimey—we'll see you through this."

"Yaas, wathah! Wely on us, deah boy."

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Grimes in hopeless dismay. "I'm afraid it's no good, Master Blake. But—but—"

"Come on," said Blake. "No good standing here butting, old chap."

And Grimes went, his rugged face clouded.

CHAPTER 4.

Tracking Racke & Co.

"**H** ALLO, here's old Grimey again, chaps!"

"With Blake's lot, too," remarked Monty Lowther, staring at the group of figures approaching the gates. "Something up, I fancy. Grimey looks fairly pipped."

In some surprise, the Terrible Three watched Blake & Co. and Grimes, the grocer's boy, as they came along Rylcombe Lane. Tom Merry and his chums had been back from their walk along the river some minutes, and they were standing chatting by the gates at the time, it being too early yet for tea.

"You again, Grimey?" remarked Tom Merry, giving that dismal youth a cheery smile. "Still after Racke's gore, old scout?"

"I do want to see Master Racke," said Grimes. "But I ain't arter his gore, Master Merry. I wants to ask 'im about three pounds I've lost."

"You've lost three quid?" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Since we saw you?"

"Yes. But—"

"My dear man, what a pity!" said Lowther. "If we'd known you were rolling in filthy lucre we'd have borrowed some off you. You wouldn't have lost it then. We happen to be on our beam ends, you see—"

"Bai Jove! This is no jokin' mattah, Lowthah!" interrupted Arthur Augustus severely. "Pway tell Mewwy all about it, Grimey, deah boy!"

"Yes, speak up, Grimey," said Blake.

Grimes explained matters gloomily, and Tom Merry whistled.

"Phew!" he remarked. "That's rather queer. Sure you had the cash then, Grimes?"

"Absolutely, Master Merry!"

"And you've searched all about the stile and the ditch?"

"Every inch, Master Merry. We found the envelope and the book," said Grimes, taking an envelope from his pocket, and drawing out the account-book. "This is the book, but the money weren't in it. Some bloke's taken it out."

"Looks like it, I must say," breathed Tom Merry, frowning. "But it's no end of a queer thing. I saw nothing of it at all, and if Racke or any of his pals found it they wouldn't stick to it. That's too thick even for those rotters!"

"That's what I say," nodded Blake. "Unless Racke's keeping the dibs just to pay Grimey out. He wouldn't be above doing that."

"No harm in tackling him about it, anyhow," grunted Herries.

"We'll do that quickly enough," said Tom Merry, looking across the quad. "There's Racke and Crooke now. Come on!"

He led the way across to where Racke and Crooke were

standing under the elms. The two cads saw the group approaching, and, as they sighted Grimes they looked alarmed, and started to walk away.

"Hold on, Racke," said Tom Merry calmly. "We want a word with you!"

Racke scowled, his eyes glinting as they rested on the rather red face of Grimes.

"That cad again!" he snarled. "What is it, Merry? I'm not standing any more bullying, if that's what you're after."

"I like that, coming from you, Racke," said Tom, his lip curling. "But you needn't fear that, you silly ass! Grimes here wants to know if you saw anything of three Treasury notes this afternoon?"

Racke stared.

"Three Treasury notes?" he echoed. "No, of course I didn't! What do you mean, hang you?"

"I mean what I asked," said Tom. "When Grimes' basket was upset an envelope fell out—so Grimes claims. There were three quid notes in the envelope besides an account-book. He's found the book, but the notes were gone. Know anything about them, Racke?"

Racke flushed hotly.

"No, I don't!" he snapped savagely. "Why, you cheeky cad, d'you think I'd keep 'em if I did? You rotter, Merry!"

"I don't say you'd steal them, if that's what you're thinking of, Racke," said Tom quietly. "But I certainly think you're capable of hanging on to them in order to get Grimes into trouble. You didn't see anything of them when you picked up those groceries, Racke?"

"No!" said Racke savagely. "I know nothing at all about any envelope, and I saw none. It's like your confounded cheek to ask me, and for two pins I'd complain to Ralton."

"Better not, I think," said Tom calmly. "He might want to know how it started, Racke. The whole affair does you no credit, you know. Anyway, you say you saw nothing of any envelope or notes, Racke?"

"No. I've already told you once! No, hang you!"

"You didn't go back to the spot after we'd gone, at all?"

"I tell you no!"

"Do you know anything of the money, Crooke?" asked Tom, frowning.

"Nothing!" growled Crooke savagely. "I saw nothing of an envelope. I don't believe there was any cash, anyway. This is a stunt of Grimes to get his own back!"

"Rubbish! Can't you see Grimey's in a blue funk about the money? It means the sack for him if it doesn't turn up."

"Let's hope it doesn't turn up, then!" snarled Racke.

The cad of the Shell regretted his words the moment he had spoken them. But it was too late for regrets. Tom Merry grabbed him by the collar and shook him.

"You rotten sweep!" he retorted angrily. "So those are your sentiments, you cad! Right! We're going to see Grimes isn't sacked, my pippin! It was your rotten fault that the three quid was lost, and it's up to us, as St. Jim's chaps, to see Grimes doesn't suffer by it!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"If that three quid doesn't turn up, then we'll have to make the money up somehow!" went on Tom grimly. "And we're going to see you pay your dashed share, Racke. You ought to pay it all, you cad!"

"I'll pay nothing!" muttered Racke, through his teeth.

"We'll see about that. There's another thing. You say your boss means to stop the cost of those damaged articles out of your wages, Grimey?"

"Yes. But I ain't grumbling about that, Master Merry, though it were Master Racke's fault."

"We are, though," said Tom. "Racke's got to foot the bill for that jam and stuff. You let us know what the damage is, Grimey, and we'll see Racke pays up!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll pay nothing!" hissed Racke.

"Yes, you will, old top," said Tom pleasantly. "I'm going to see to that. Now clear. And here's a parting reminder of what to expect if you don't pay up!"

And, twisting Racke round, Tom planted a hefty boot behind him. Racke jumped away with a howl, and as he jumped, Lowther and Herries each managed to get a boot home behind him. Crooke did not wait for his turn, he fled.

"Rotten!" remarked Tom Merry, frowning, as he stared after the departing two. "Racke's fairly got his knife into old Grimey, but I don't think he does know anything about that money for all that."

"It struck me like that, too," said Blake, nodding. "It's queer!"

"What about Mellish?" asked Manners. "That little worm is capable of anything."

"Phew! I'd forgotten about him," said Tom. "Let's hunt—There he is! Good!"

The rather slouchy form of Percy Mellish was just

emerging from the tuckshop, and the juniors, with the hapless Grimes behind them, moved across to intercept the sneak of the Fourth. Grimes was looking very unhappy and self-conscious. He was feeling far from being at home in the ancient precincts of St. Jim's, with its awe-inspiring buildings and crowds of well-dressed fellows.

Mellish did not sight the little group for a moment, but when he did his face went suddenly whiter than it usually was. But he quickly recovered himself, and his crafty features set hard as Tom Merry stopped before him.

"Hold on, Mellish!" he remarked. "We want a word with you. You remember Grimey's basket being upset this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Mellish sullenly.

"Well, there was an envelope in that basket besides the groceries," went on Tom, eyeing him sharply. "In the envelope was a book and three Treasury notes for a quid each."

"Was there?" said Mellish carelessly. "Well, what's that got to do with me?"

"We want to know if you saw anything of it, Mellish?" said Tom, frowning. "Grimey forgot about the money, and when he went back to look for it, the money had gone,

"I didn't. I don't believe there was a dashed envelope, or cash!" sneered Mellish, with a nasty look at Grimes. "Anyway, why should you come cross-examining about it?"

"I believe I've hit it, Crooke!"

"I'm asking you just as I've asked Racke and Crooke!" snapped Tom. "After all, the whole affair started with you chaps, and someone's collared the money, that's pretty plain. It couldn't walk away, and Grimey swears it was in his basket just before he reached that stile. Anyway, if you know nothing about it that ends it!"

With that Tom Merry turned away with his chums, leaving Percy Mellish staring after them with a thumping heart, and a look of deep relief on his crafty features.

"No good, Grimey," grunted Tom. "If the beggars say they didn't see it, we'll have to accept their statements!"

"I don't want no more trouble, Master Merry," said Grimes, looking hopeless. "I'd rather you didn't make no more fuss about it. I'll 'ave to stand the racket, that's all!"

"It isn't all!" said Tom flatly. "St. Jim's fellows caused the trouble, and you sha'n't lose by it, old scout! You shove off, and don't worry about the three quid. We'll trot over and see old Sands about the affair to-night. What do you say, you chaps?"



St. Jim's Jingles!



No. 32— EDGAR LAWRENCE OF THE NEW HOUSE.

A FELLOW worth his weight in gold,

A sterling sort, is Lawrence;

Some fellows at St. Jim's we hold

In undisguised abhorrence.

But Edgar's popular with all,

He's made his mark already;

Good-looking, gay, and fairly tall,

The chosen chum of "Reddy."

He does not play so big a part

As Figgins or Tom Merry;

And yet he has a hero's heart,

And is unselfish—very.

He once performed a valiant deed,

No fear of death dismayed him;

Dick Redfern, in his hour of need,

Found Lawrence there to aid him!

With Redfern cut off by the tide,

Death lurking in the distance,

Lawrence the angry waves defied

And dashed to his assistance.

He nearly forfeited his life

In that supreme endeavour;

His battle with the storm's wild

strife

Will be forgotten never!



A STERLING FELLOW.

He boasts no store of worldly wealth

Like boys in Racke's position!

But he possesses glowing health—

A finer acquisition!

His brain is tuned to concert pitch,

He causes mild sensations

By the amazing ease with which

He wins examinations.

He always keeps in perfect trim,

Fit for all games and tussles;

Sound as a bell in wind and limb,

And useful with his muscles.

When rival Houses go to war

He's eager for the foray;

And those who feel his fist are sore,

And often sick and sorry!

When Lawrence comes to man's estate

He'll hold a high position;

For his abilities are great,

And lofty his ambition.

Maybe, he'll be a legal light,

A statesman, or dictator;

But always he will do the right,

True to his Alma Mater!

NEXT WEEK:—PERCY MELLISH, THE CAD OF THE FOURTH.

though the book and envelope were still there. Know anything about it?"

"Of course I don't!" said Mellish indignantly. "Why, you don't think——"

"I'm only asking you a question, Mellish," said Tom patiently. "No need to get excited. If you didn't see the envelope——"

"I didn't!" said Mellish warmly. "You fellows saw all I did, and you saw me go, didn't you?"

"You didn't come back at all afterwards, Mellish?"

"Certainly not, Merry!"

Mellish eyed Manners almost feverishly as he answered that. He was in terror lest Manners should remember that he had left his cap behind him when he bolted. But Manners did not remember it—then; neither did any of the others.

"That's good enough, then!" said Tom Merry, with a grunt. "If you didn't see anything of it——"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus impulsively. "Pwae leave the mattah to us, Gwimey!"

Grimes mumbled his thanks, and when he left the ancient precincts of St. Jim's a little later he was looking not quite so dismal as when he had entered them. Tom Merry & Co. had promised to take the matter in hand, and he knew they would do their best at all events.

CHAPTER 5.

Racke is Ruthless!

"GOOD gad!"

"What the thump's the matter now, Aubrey?" Gerald Crooke asked the question as his chum made that startled remark.

Racke & Co. had only just left Tom Merry & Co., and they were walking indoors when Racke stopped suddenly in his stride with a startled gasp.

"Come along to the study!" breathed Racke. "By Jove;

"Hit what?"

"Come along and I'll tell you," whispered Racke.

Crooke glanced at Racke's startled face, and followed him in silence until they reached the shelter of Study No. 7 in the Shell passage. Racke's face had lost its scowl now, and he was looking excited.

"Don't you see?" snapped Racke, when the door had closed upon them. "That dashed three quid, I mean!"

"There never was any three quid!" sniffed Crooke. "You didn't swallow that yarn. It was a stunt—that low cad's trying to get his own back by—"

"Rubbish!" sneered Racke. "His face was enough for me, you fool! He's lost the three quid, right enough, though I saw nothing of it. But what about Mellish?"

"Mellish!" echoed Crooke blankly. "What's Mellish got to do with it?"

"Can't you see?" hissed Racke, his eyes gleaming. "Didn't Mellish go back for his cap? We expected him to catch us up, but he didn't. Supposing Mellish found the three quids?"

"Oh!"

Crooke took a deep breath.

"He's kept clear of us since he came in," went on Racke earnestly. "And we saw him in the tuckshop. He was scoffing tarts and things, the greedy little beast! And we know he hadn't a halfpenny to bless his dashed self with at noon. Don't you see?"

"Phew!"

Crooke's face was startled now.

"My hat!" he breathed. "I—I believe you're right, old man. You—you think Mellish found the money, and stuck to it?"

"I do!"

"It—it's queer!" muttered Crooke. "But—but even Mellish would draw the line at theft, Racke. He wouldn't be such a fool—"

"Wouldn't he?" sneered Racke. "You know jolly well the little toad is fool enough and rotter enough! He's a slimy little toad, and he's fool enough not to realise the danger he's running."

"But—but—" Crooke was still unconvinced.

"It's plain enough!" snapped Racke. "My hat! He went back for his cap right enough; we know that. We waited for him some minutes, and he didn't turn up. Supposing he was hunting round for his dashed cap, and supposing he found that envelope and stuck to the cash?"

"If there was any cash?"

"I'm dashed certain there was!" said Racke, with a sneer. "I saw what a funk that brute Grimes was in, hang him! Well, it's all to the good, anyway," he added, his eyes glinting. "It will mean the sack for that low cad, right enough."

"We know nothing about it, anyway," said Crooke, his tone showing his relief. "Hang Grimes, and hang the lot of them!"

"Hang 'em, yes!" grinned Racke. "But it would be rather a lark to bowl old Mellish out, wouldn't it? We'd be able to make the little toad dance to any tune we liked to play if we could prove just what we suspect. I say, just run out and find him, Crooke; bring him along here!"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Crooke uneasily. "I'd rather have nothing to do with the rotten biz! It isn't safe, anyway."

"Rot! Go and fetch him; dash it all, don't be an idiot!"

Crooke scowled, but he was a little curious himself to know if Racke's suspicion was correct, and after a moment's hesitation he left the study. He was not absent for long, having met Mellish just coming indoors.

Racke gave Mellish a smiling nod as that junior entered after Crooke, who closed the door carefully. Mellish himself was not looking at all comfortable. He had not failed to note Crooke's curious glances, and he wondered what they meant, also what Racke wanted.

Racke's bland smile did not reassure him, either. He knew Aubrey Racke too well for that.

"You—you want me, Racke?" he grunted, striving to appear at his ease.

"Yes, old chap," said Racke coolly. "What about that three quid of Grimey's? Going to share it round, old bean?"

Mellish staggered back, his face white as a sheet.

"What—what do you mean, Racke?" he stammered. "I—I— if you think I know anything about that—that three quid Grimey's lost—"

"We don't think, we know," said Racke pleasantly. "Which did you find first, Mellish—the cap or the cash?"

"I—I—I—"

"So you thought you'd blue it all in the tuckshop, without letting your pals in—what?" queried Racke, with a nasty grin. "Gad, I always knew you were a pretty slimy sort of worm, Mellish, but I never took you for a dashed thief!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 949.

"It—it's a lie!" said Mellish thickly, his face almost green with fear. "I know nothing about any three quid. My—my pater sent me a quid by the noon post. I—I meant to stand you chaps a feed out of it. You—you fellows must be joking to think I know anything about that low cad's money. I don't even believe he's lost any for that matter. It's all rotten spoof."

"I fancy it isn't," smiled Racke, "and I fancy I know just what happened to it, old chap."

"You—you know nothing, Racke," gasped Mellish. "You—you're only joking."

"Not at all—are we, Crooke? We can prove nothing, certainly," said Racke. "But we're going to find the proof, old chap."

With that Aubrey Racke calmly stepped to the door and locked it. Mellish watched him with growing apprehension and terror in his eyes.

He had need to be apprehensive, for the next moment Racke rushed at him and grabbed him round the waist. Mellish yelled with surprised alarm, and started to struggle furiously.

"Lend a hand, Crookey," gasped Racke. "Hold him a sec. I'll soon bowl this beauty out!"

Crooke grinned and lent a hand willingly enough now. A brief struggle followed, Mellish fighting and kicking like a wildcat to get free. But he did not yell again. He suddenly remembered it would be unwise—very unwise—to draw attention to himself just then.

He struggled, furious, desperately, but Racke and Crooke had an easy task with the weedy sneak of the Fourth. As Crooke held him fast, Racke ran his hand into Mellish's pockets one after the other.

A couple of cakes of chocolate came out first, and Racke grinned at sight of them. Then he grinned again—a nasty, spiteful grin—as he drew out Mellish's purse, and from it took two Treasury notes for a pound each. In the purse was some silver and coppers also.

Mellish's face was livid now.

"You—you cads!" he almost wept hysterically. "Oh, you brutes!"

"Let the dear chap go now," grinned Racke, his eyes gleaming. "I thought as much, Mellish. Well, you thieving worm! I suppose your pater sent you these too, old chap? He would. I know your pater. Sixpence is more in his line."

Mellish did not reply for a moment. He glared at the sneering Racke in speechless dismay and helpless rage.

"He—he did send it," he almost whimpered at last. "Oh, you brute, Racke! My pater did send me that money. If—if you think—"

"Cheese it, Mellish," sneered Racke, with a cruel grin. "My dear man, you needn't turn on the water-tap. You needn't try to pull the wool over my eyes either, you silly idiot! Think I don't know the truth?"

"It's a lie!" hissed Mellish, almost beside himself with rage and fear. "My pater sent that cash I tell you."

"Then you won't mind if I call Tom Merry and ask his opinion," grinned Racke, rising to his feet again.

Mellish almost flew to the door and placed his back against it.

"Don't do that, Racke," he almost sobbed desperately. "I—I'll own up—I meant to tell you fellows all along; I swear that."

"Then it is Grimey's money?" chuckled the heartless Racke.

"Yes," gasped Mellish, gripping Racke's arm appealingly. "Look here, I never meant to really spend a penny of it. I meant to bring it to you, and suggest that you kept it for a bit so that that low cad would get sacked for losing it. I swear I never meant to touch a penny of it for myself."

"Then, my dear man, why did you spend any of it?"

"I—I just borrowed a bit—that's all," groaned Mellish. "I was a fool, I know—an awful fool."

"Sure you weren't something worse?" grinned Racke. "Well, I think I'd better take charge of this money, old chap."

"Give it back to me," said Mellish in alarm. "I'm going to send it back to Grimes. I never intended to keep it at all, only—"

"Only you did," chuckled Racke.

"I swear I meant to pay the money back—I only borrowed five bob of it until to-morrow," muttered the wretched junior. "The mater promised to send me ten bob to get some footer things with."

"Footer things—for you? And we're almost starting the cricket season," jeered Racke. "What a yarn!"

"I wasn't going to spend it on rotten cricket things, of course," said Mellish sullenly. "I only told her that. Anyhow, let me have that money back, Racke. If—if it comes out—"

The junior shuddered, and hid his face in his hands.

Racke chuckled again. The cad of the Shell cared nothing for the feelings of others, much less for the feelings of the wretched toady and sneak of the Remove. Racke "palled"—if it could be termed that—with Mellish solely for the use he could make of him. It was well known that Mellish waited on the purse-proud son of Sir Jonas Racke hand and foot.

"You miserable little worm," he sneered. "I tell you I'm taking charge of this money—for your own good, you know," he added with a smirk. "You might be tempted to spend more of it, old chap."

"I tell you—"

"Oh, cheese it!" grinned Racke, winking at Crooke, who was looking very uneasy. "My dear man, you've no need to be afraid; we've no intention of giving you away."

"Oh!" gasped Mellish, his white face showing sudden relief.

"Not at all," smiled Racke. "But I'm keeping this cash for the present—until I know for certain that Grimes has been sacked, at all events. I'll return it to old Sands then. And if that low cad does escape the sack, then we'll make use of the dashed money to pay him out in another way. I fancy I've got a wheeze that will do the trick!"

And Racke grinned evilly.

"Chuck it, Racke!" muttered Crooke uneasily. "Send that rotten money back and have nothing to do with it. It isn't safe, you fool!"

"Rot! Don't be a funk, Crooke. Anyway, that's the programme," remarked Racke, stroking his swollen nose tenderly. "I'll teach that rotten little grocer cad to knock me about. He'll have learned to keep his dirty paws off public school chaps by the time I've finished with him."

"You fool!"

"Cheese it," grinned Racke. "Now, Mellish, old sport, buck up and get our tea ready. Look lively, and stop that snivelling!"

"Yes, Racke," said Mellish meekly.

And he stopped snivelling and started to get the lordly Racke's tea ready.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy Does His Best!

"WOTTEN!"

That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's well-considered opinion in regard to the Grimes' affair, and it was an opinion shared by his chums in the Fourth and also Tom Merry & Co. in the Shell.

In many a friendly lark, and in many a stiff tussle on sporting field and river, they had met Grimes and his chums of the village, and they had a high regard for his sportsmanship and cheery friendliness.

The chums of St. Jim's could feel sympathy for fellows who had to earn their living at an early age, and they felt deep sympathy now for Grimes in his trouble. They could understand that the loss of the three pounds was a very serious matter indeed to the luckless Grimes.

"It's weally wotten!" repeated Arthur Augustus, as the chums of the Fourth were finishing tea in Study No. 6. "Mr. Sands is a vewy suspicious man, I believe, and I weally hope he does not think poor old Gwimes has stolen the money."

"He might, easily enough," said Blake. "He's a silly, stubborn old hunk!"

"Even if we had the money to wefund for Gwimes," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head, "Mr. Sands would still look upon Gwimes with suspicion, you know. It wathah weffects upon Gwimes' chawactah, deah boys."

"I don't see it," grunted Herries. "If the money is

refunded, and if we explain the facts to Sands, he ought to be satisfied. It's a rotten pity we're all practically stony."

"Rotten luck," agreed Blake. "Sure you haven't got a stray fiver in any of your pockets, Gussy? You know what a careless dummy you are with cash."

"Weally, Blake, I wepudiate that wemark. I am not at all careless with money," said Gussy warmly. "Howevah, unfortunately, there is no chance of that, deah boys. All I have until my next wemittance is a ten-shillin' note."

"Well, we ought to be able to make that up to a quid between us," said Blake thoughtfully. "Old Sands ought to be satisfied with that on account; and we'll make that cad Racke shell out towards the rest, too. We've got to save Grimey from the sack, anyway."

"That was my idea, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, rising from the table. "I wathah think you fellows had bettah leave me to see Sands, howevah. A fellow of gweat tact is wewired for a delicate mattah of this description."

"You silly dummy—"

"I wefuse to be called a sillay dummy, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, reaching for his cane and gloves. "I have already considahed the mattah vewy carefully, and I have come to the conclusion that you thoughtless youngstahs had bettah wemain at home and leave this mattah to me."

"Oh crumbs!"

"You—you silly ass!" snorted Blake. "You keep out of it, for goodness' sake! If you chip in you'll muck the whole thing up."

"Wubbish!"

"Sit down!" roared Blake, in alarm. "Leave it to Tom Merry, you burbling clump! What's the good of making old Sands more ratty still? Don't you shove your silly oar in!"

"Bai Jove, I uttahly fail to see how my goin' will make Mr. Sands more watty," said Arthur Augustus, regarding Blake frigidly through his monocle. "Wubbish! The dangah will be if you thoughtless youngstahs intahfere in such a delicate mattah."

"Why, you silly clump—" roared Blake.

"Wats! I have already given the mattah gweat thought, and I have weached the conclusion that Tom Mewwy would only make a feahful hash of things," explained Arthur Augustus calmly. "Gwimes is a vewy gweat fwend of mine, and I considah it up to me, as a fellow of bwains and judgment, to stand by him, you know."

"But you'll muck the whole thing up," shouted Blake in great exasperation. "You burbling duffer—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Chuck it, Gussy, you awful idiot!" said Herries wrathfully. "Blake's right. You know you can't open your mouth without putting your silly foot in it."

"Wubbish, Hewvies! I am goin' to explain mattahs tactfully to Mr. Sands, and I am goin' to offer him my ten shillings on account, and tell him that I personally will be wespensible for the wost of the money. You fellows have no need to bothah to contwibute a penny, and I am sure Gwimes would wathah not let Wacke contwibute a penny, especially undah compulsion, deah boys. Pway leave the mattah in my hands."

And Arthur Augustus gave his chums a lofty nod and started for the door. But before he reached it Jack Blake gave a wild leap and grasped him fast.

"No, you don't!" he snapped. "Come back, you silly ass! We're not risking—"

"Pway welease me, Jack Blake!"

"Not likely," snorted Blake. "You burbling clump, why can't you see sense, and leave it to Merry?"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, his noble eye gleaming wrathfully. "Unless you welease me at once, Jack Blake, I shall be obliged to punch your nose, you wottah!"

"Punch away, then," grinned Blake, tightening his grip. "I'm not likely to— Yooop!"

As Blake's grasp tightened on the arm of Arthur Augustus, that determined junior kept his word, and punched his nose—hard. Blake howled, staggered backwards, and tripped over Herries' feet. Then he sat down with a thump, while Arthur Augustus leaped away, sending three juniors who had just come along scattering to right and left.

The three were Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners, and they glared after the fleeing Arthur Augustus.

"You clumsy dummy!" roared Tom Merry. "Come back, and I'll dot you one on the nose, Gussy!"

But Arthur Augustus did not heed; he vanished round the corner. Blake staggered to his feet, breathing hard.

"What's this game?" snorted Tom Merry. "Trouble in the family, as usual?"

"Yes. I'll—I'll smash that burbling idiot!" gasped Blake. "Let's go after him, for goodness' sake! He's gone to see Sands about Grimey. I tried to stop him. He'll muck the whole thing up, of course."

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"Oh, my hat!" said Manners. "You ought to have stopped him, Blake."

"Didn't I try to stop him?" hooted Blake in great exasperation. "You silly idiot!"

"Peace, my children," said Tom Merry, bursting into a laugh. "It's nothing to worry about, after all. Sands is not a bad old sort, and we'll soon talk him round, if Gussy does upset his lordly apple-cart a bit. You chaps had tea?"

"Yes," grunted Blake.

"Then let's be off," said Tom grimly. "First of all, we've got to rope in dear old Aubrey Racke, though. Come on!"

"Racke?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes. We're taking him with us, whether he wants to go with us or not," said Tom grimly. "I fancy he won't want to. But he's going. He's got to explain to old Sands just how it happened, and he's got to shell out, or promise to shell out."

"Good wheeze!" said Blake eagerly. "That will satisfy old Sands, I guess. We'll do it."

And a moment later Blake & Co. were ready for the expedition. They started in a determined group for Aubrey Racke's study.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus was walking quickly towards the village, resplendent in shining topper, elegant clothes, and natty walking cane. In his own mind, Arthur Augustus felt convinced that his clums would only put the worthy grocer's back up, and that only his celebrated tact and judgment would save the situation for Grimes. As he walked he mentally went over the speech he intended to make on Grimes' behalf to Mr. Sands.

Unfortunately he never got the chance to make it.

As he reached Mr. Sands' shop, and was about to enter, he met three juniors wearing Grammar School caps, and the three—who were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Harry Wootton—planted themselves in his path firmly.

"Dear old Gussy," murmured Gordon Gay cheerily. "The one and only Gussy—out without his keepers, too! Naughty, naughty, Gussy! I suppose you've run away from your keepers—what?"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gasped with alarm, and eyed the three cheery Grammarians uneasily. He saw that they were in a mischievous mood, and he began to wish now that Blake and the others were with him. Arthur Augustus was always a mark for Gordon Gay & Co.'s japing activities.

"Dear old Gussy!" repeated Gordon Gay, with a chuckle.

"My dear man, why do you walk about in public wearing a giddy mirror, old chap?"

"A—a what?" gasped Arthur Augustus, trying to look himself over. "I fail to undahstand you, Gay, you wottah! Pway allow me to pass!"

"But your mirror!"

"You are twyin' to pull my leg, you wottahs!" said Gussy indignantly. "I am not cawwain' a miwwah at all."

"What's that on your head, then?" asked Gordon Gay, gazing at Gussy's headgear blankly. "Oh, I see! Great Scott! It's a hat, you fellows! I thought it was some kind of a mirror!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cacklin' dummies!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You knew perfectly well that it was a silk hat, Gay. Don't be wedic!"

"I see now that it is a hat, of course," said Gay. "Doesn't it just shine, you fellows?"

"A thing of beauty and a joy for ever!" remarked Monk admiringly. "Isn't it, you fellows?"

"Yes, but it's not on quite straight," said Gordon Gay, in a reflective sort of way. "Here, let me straighten it, Gussy."

And Gay tapped the glimmering topper over Gussy's left eye. He had scarcely done so when Harry Wootton tapped it again, sending it over Gussy's right eye.

"You—you wottahs!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "I shall give you all a fearful thwashin' for this, you fearful wuffians! Oh, bai Jove! I refuse to stand this sort of treatment!"

"Then sit it, Gussy!" advised Gordon Gay; and he gave Arthur a gentle push in the chest. Arthur Augustus did not expect the push, and, staggering backwards, he sat down violently.

Unfortunately, there was a crate of eggs just behind him, and there was a crash and a squelch as Arthur Augustus sat in them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" wailed Gussy. "Oh, you fearful wottahs! Bai Jove, I will!"

He struggled furiously among the smashed eggs, and managed to regain his feet by pulling the box of eggs over with him. A stream of eggs smashed across the pavement from the upturned box.

But Arthur Augustus did not heed them; he made a wild rush at the laughing Grammarians, who scattered, roaring with laughter.

Mindful of the sad state of his clothes, Arthur Augustus shrieked threats after them; and then he returned to the pavement, trying, like a cat chasing its tail, to get a glimpse of his nether garments and groaning with dismay. And just then Mr. Sands came rushing out of the shop, and his heavy hand closed on D'Arcy's collar.

"You little rip!" he howled. "Just look what you've done! My eggs! You—you—"

He almost lifted the hapless swell of the Fourth into his shop, his red features swelling with wrath.

"This is more'n a man can put up with!" he raved. "Ain't it enough to have a reckless, careless young villain for an errand-boy, without you young gents worryin' a man's life out? Look at my eggs! You'll have to pay for them, Master D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, struggling wrathfully. "Pway welease me, Mr. Sands! I am goin' to give those wottahs a fearful thwashin' all wound! Welease me!"

But Mr. Sands did nothing of the kind. For once he seemed to have forgotten his general rule of treating with respect the "young gentlemen" from St. Jim's. He was in a towering rage.

"Not much!" he snorted. "I ain't lettin' you go, you young rascal, until you've paid for them there eggs! If you don't pay I shall report this outrage to your headmaster, my lad!"

"Bai Jove! Pway listen to me, Mr. Sands!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in dismayed wrath. "I came to see you about young Gwimes—"

"Young Grimes!" snorted Mr. Sands. The name seemed to be like a red rag to a bull for the worthy grocer. "Young Grimes, eh? You come here smashing up my eggs and remindin' me about that young rascal!"

"Bai Jove! I twust," said Arthur Augustus earnestly, "that you do not imagine I mentioned Gwimes in ordah to annoy you, Mr. Sands. Not at all! Pway welease me, and I will explain."

"I'll release you when I gets payment for them smashed eggs, and not before!" roared Mr. Sands wrathfully. "Ten shillings' worth gone smashed. Best new-laid they were!"

"Bai Jove! Were they?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I should have thought, frowm the smell of them—"

"That's enough!" snorted Mr. Sands. Arthur Augustus was certainly not showing his usual tact and judgment in referring to the odour of Mr. Sands' best new-laid eggs.

"I want no impudence, Master D'Arcy! I want ten shillings for them eggs! If you refuses to pay I shall phone to your headmaster at once!"

"But Gwimes—"

"I want to hear nothing about that young scamp!" roared Mr. Sands. "Ten shillings—"

"But pway listen, Mr. Sands! I have come heah expressly to speak on behalf of my fwiend Gwimes—"

"Grimes is sacked—he leaves my employ when he finishes work to-night!" snorted Mr. Sands. "Never you mind young Grimes. Are you going to pay for them smashed eggs or not?"

"Weally, Mr. Sands, I must pwotest in wegard to Gwimes—"

"Never mind Grimes, I tell you!" snapped the irate grocer. "Yes or no? Ten shillings, or be reported to your headmaster!"

Arthur Augustus groaned. He saw that it was useless to argue with the irate and stubborn grocer. And he certainly did not wish to be reported to Dr. Holmes, though what had happened was certainly not his fault.

"Oh deah! Vewy well, Mr. Sands; I will pay for the damage if you will welease my collar," he said, with some dignity. "As it happens, I have ten shillings on me, but—"

"Then pay up!" snorted Mr. Sands, releasing the junior, but keeping a close eye on him. "Think I can afford to lose half-a-quid's worth of eggs like that? I'm letting you off lightly as it is, my lad!"

D'Arcy handed over a ten-shilling note reluctantly to the grocer.

"Now clear!" snapped Mr. Sands, pointing to the door.

"One moment, Mr. Sands! I came heah to discuss the

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mattah of Gwimes, and I wefuse to go— Ow! Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remarks ended in a startled gasp as Mr. Sands' heavy hand closed on his collar and he was propelled to the door. Almost before he was aware of the fact, Arthur Augustus found himself standing on the pavement outside, gasping.

"Now clear!" snorted Mr. Sands. And he withdrew into his shop, after a glare at the box of eggs.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh, bai Jove!" That was all he could say at the moment. The ten shillings was gone—the ten shillings that was to have gone towards saving Grimes from the sack. Certainly—if the eggs had been the best new-laid—there was more than that amount's worth smashed, and Mr. Sands' wrath was justified. But Arthur Augustus had intended the ten shillings for his generous intention of helping Grimey, and he was utterly dismayed now. Moreover, he had learnt that Grimes was already "sacked," and he saw it was useless to discuss the matter with Mr. Sands in his present state of mind.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's expedition had certainly not been a success!

CHAPTER 7. Saving Grimey!

"HALLO, you're here, Racke! Good!"

Aubrey Racke looked up suddenly, and as he recognised Tom Merry & Co. he scowled.

"What do you fellows want?" he snapped.

"I'm busy."

"You look it, old chap," said Tom Merry, eyeing Racke as he lounged in an easy-chair, and grinning. "Still, you can find time for a little walk, I'm sure. It will do you no end of good, you know."

Racke rose to his feet. He saw that the crowd of juniors in the doorway meant business—though what that business meant he was far from guessing.

"A—little walk," he stammered. "What the thump do you mean?"

"Just what I say, old chap," smiled Tom, though his look was grim and determined. "You're coming for a little walk with us—a walk as far as Sand's, the grocer's, in Rylcombe. Get your cap, Sharp!"

Racke paled a trifle. He was thinking of the two pound ten shillings in his pocket that belonged to Mr. Sands. He wondered with a shiver if the juniors knew he had it, and if that was why they wanted him to go to Mr. Sands.

"Look here," he almost whispered. "What do you want me to come for, hang you?"

"I'll tell you, my pippin," said Tom. "We want you to explain just what happened this afternoon to Mr. Sands. We want you to clear old Grimey by owning up that it was all your dashed fault. Got that?"

Racke took a deep, deep breath. He saw now that it was nothing like so serious as he had supposed for the moment. So Tom Merry & Co. did not know, after all!

"You want me to do that?" he snapped, his nerve returning.

"Yes. Get your cap."

Racke gave a sneering grin.

"You can go and chop elips!" he jeered. "Think I'm a fool! You won't get me to stir a finger to help that low cad. Not likely!"

"You won't come?"

"Certainly not! Go to pot, the lot of you, and clear out of my study, you cads!"

Tom Merry smiled and nodded.

"I thought you might not like the idea," he said. "That's why we've come in force, you see, Racke. As you won't come and do the decent thing willingly, we mean to make you—see? You're coming if we have to carry you there."

And Tom advanced grimly into the study, and his chums followed him promptly. Racke's face went hard and he set his teeth.

"You rotten bullies!" he hissed. "If you touch me I'll yell for Railton! Understand that?"

"Yes. Go ahead with your yelling," smiled Tom. "Mr. Railton will be interested to hear what it's all about, Racke. I fancy he won't take your part when he does hear, old chap. Railton doesn't like snobs or cowardly bullies."

"You rotters!"

"Besides," added Tom, grim meaning in his tone. "He might even think that you know something about that three quid, too. He might wish to make a strict investigation of the whole business."

"You—you think I've got that dashed money?" breathed Racke.

"Not at all. I only suggest what other people might think," said Tom, eyeing Racke keenly. "Anyhow, I'd advise you to come and give no trouble. Get your cap."

"I—I won't!"

"Get his cap, chaps," said Tom. "Come along. His other arm, Blake. If he kicks up a fuss and a prefect or master chips in that's his own silly look-out. He's coming, anyhow."

"Oh, you rotters!" hissed Racke.

He jumped back as Tom made a grab at his arm.

"Let me alone!" he panted.

But Tom Merry and Blake had no intention of letting Racke alone. On numerous occasions Racke, in his supercilious snobbishness, had played shady tricks on Grimes, and they were determined once and for all to teach Racke to play the game. The honour of St. Jim's required it. There was to be no escape for Aubrey Racke.

"Kim on!" said Blake cheerfully.

He took Racke's right arm, and Tom Merry took his left. Racke looked like struggling for a moment, and then he seemed to realise that his case was hopeless.

"Let me go!" he muttered. "I'll come, hang you!"

"March, then!"

And Racke marched—Lowther had already grabbed his silk hat and jammed it on his head back to front. With a black brow and glinting eyes the cad of the Shell marched out of the study, Tom Merry and Jack Blake at each arm, and the rest of the juniors bringing up the rear.

Crooke and Mellish were just coming along the passage, and they stared in alarm at the sight—Mellish going almost green with sudden fear.

But none of the juniors took much notice of Crooke and Mellish then. Racke was the prime mover in the matter—Crooke and Mellish being only his toadies and under his orders—or so they imagined. They would have been very much surprised could they have known Mellish's dark thoughts and fears at that moment.

Out of the School House and across the quad towards the gates marched the little procession—more than one fellow glancing curiously at the sight.

It was not a pleasant walk to Rylcombe for the black sheep of the Shell.

More than once he stopped and seemed about to turn stubborn, but on each occasion several boots planted on him from behind urged his flagging footsteps.

They tramped into the sleepy High Street of the village at last, and as they approached Mr. Sands' shop they were surprised to see Arthur Augustus in a rather extraordinary attitude on the pavement. Round Arthur Augustus was a crowd of village urchins, all of them chipping the luckless D'Arcy and all of them laughing.

"My hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "What the thump—"

The juniors stopped and stared at Arthur Augustus. He did not notice their approach. He was standing, twisted round and doubled up, and he seemed to be wiping his trousers with a small handkerchief. His silk hat sat on his noble head at a rather rakish angle, and altogether the swell of the Fourth looked far from his usual elegant self.

"Great Scott!" gasped Jack Blake, without releasing his grasp on Aubrey Racke. "What on earth have you been up to, Gussy?"

"And what's that awful muck on your bags, old man?" asked Herries.

Arthur Augustus turned a crimson and wrathful face to his grinning chums.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped. "I am glad you fellows have come. For goodness' sake chase these wotten young wascals away! I have had a wotten accident, deah boys. Those wotten Gwammawians—"

"Oh, it's Gordon Gay, is it?" chuckled Tom Merry. "What the thump have they done to you—that's egg on your clobber, isn't it?"

"Oh, yaas!" groaned Gussy dismally. "The awful wottahs pushed me into a cwate of beastly wotten eggs outside Mr. Sands' shop. My bags are uttally wuined, and I shall give Gay and Monk and young Wootton a most feahful thwashin' when I see them again! Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared with laughter, and Arthur Augustus gazed at them wrathfully.

"It is nothin' to laugh at, you wottahs!" he roared.

"Look at the beastlay state of my clobber!"

"And how did you get on with old Sands?" grinned Blake. "I expect he was delighted when you sat down in his crate of eggs, what?"

"He was in a most feahful tempah," groaned Gussy. "I feah it is quite useless twyin' to speak to him in wogard to poor old Gwimes. I am more sowwy than evah for poor old Gwimey now I know what a stupid mule Mr. Sands is, deah boys. He uttally wefused to allow me to speak of Gwimes at all—why, I cannot imagine, unless he was annoyed about the eggs."

"Very likely that was it, Gussy," said Lowther solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Didn't you offer him the ten bob on account of Grimes' three quid?" said Blake suddenly.

"He didn't give me the chance, dear boy. He insisted upon my payin' for the eggs that were smashed with the ten bob. Then he washed me out of the shop, you know. I am very much surprised and disgusted with Mr. Sands."

"Well, you awful ass!" breathed Blake. "We knew you'd upset the old chap's appercart somehow, you dummy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Just like you, isn't it?" snorted Jack Blake witheringly. "Can't be trusted out of our sight a minute without getting yourself into a mess like this."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Now it's made it all the harder for us, you burbling idiot!" snorted Blake. "Oh, bump the ass, you chaps, and let's get on."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake, you awful— Bai Jove! Welease me!"

Bump!

"Yooooop!"

The remarks of Arthur Augustus ended in a wail as Lowther, Herries, and Digby grasped him, and sat him down violently on the pavement. Then Tom Merry & Co. marched on, leaving Arthur Augustus seated on the pavement, gasping and panting, and with feelings that were too deep for words.

At the doorway of Mr. Sands' grocery store Tom Merry called a halt. Outside Mr. Sands was busy, just clearing up the mess of egg and egg-shell from below his window, but Tom Merry led the way in, all of the juniors—excepting the scowling Racke—being unable to resist chuckling at the sight.

The next moment Mr. Sands, looking like a gargoyle, followed them in. He glowered at the crowd of juniors.

"Well?" he snorted, glaring at them over his spectacles. "What's this mean? You young gents want me?"

"Yes, Mr. Sands," said Tom Merry diplomatically. "I understand that you have lost three Treasury notes for a pound each this afternoon?"

"Oh!" said Mr. Sands, looking sharply at the juniors. "What do you young gents know about that? Is it true what my lad Grimes says—that some young rascals from St. Jim's upset his basket?"

"Quite true," said Tom Merry, nodding towards the black-browed Racke. "Here's one of the rotters. He's come to tell you all about it, and to tell you that the money will be refunded—the three pounds that were lost."

"Oh!" grunted Mr. Sands, a trifle mollified. "Has he? I'm glad to hear that, lads. I always thought my lad Grimes was honest, and I didn't like to think as he was telling lies, and all the time keepin' the money for himself."

"He was telling the truth," said Tom grimly. "This fellow, Racke, and two other rotters, tried to stop Grimes from crossing the stile, and during the struggle the basket got upset. We saw it all from the towing-path of the river. The envelope with that money in must have fallen out with the other things, though what happened to it afterwards goodness only knows. I wish we did know, for Grimes' sake."

"Oh! But that three pound-ain't all," snorted Mr. Sands. "Some of the goods was done for—some bacon, some butter, some sugar, and a pot of jam. That means four bob outer Grimes' wages this week, my lads. I can't help it if he didn't actually upset the basket himself. He should have avoided trouble."

"It won't come out of Grimes' wages, though," said Tom promptly. "Racke's here to pay for the damage, aren't you, Racke?"

"I—I won't!" snarled Racke.

"Very well. Now, chaps, we'll frog-march Racke round the village until he does decide to do the decent thing. Collar him!"

"Here, hold on!" panted Racke. "I—I'll pay!"

He fumbled in his pocket and took out some silver. With a black brow he flung on the counter four shillings.

"Good man, Racke!" said Tom approvingly. "We'll make quite a decent fellow of you yet. That's that. Now, about this matter of the three pounds, Mr. Sands. You've heard nothing about it yet, I suppose?"

"No, I haven't!" grunted Mr. Sands darkly. "But I've been over to Mrs. Jackson's, and I managed to get the numbers of the notes, her being a careful woman, luckily. If anyone tries to pass 'em in this village they'll be spotted, mind you. As for young Grimes—"

"It's the three quid we've really come about," said Tom. "Now, look here, Mr. Sands. What happened wasn't Grimes' fault, was it, Racke?"

"No!" hissed Racke savagely.

"That being the case," resumed Tom, "we aren't going to see him sacked, if we can help it. I suppose you'll let him stay on if you get the money refunded, Mr. Sands?"

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"Well, I suppose I will," grunted Mr. Sands, "though if I thought as that young rascal had got the money, I wouldn't have him round the place at no price. I want no dishonest chaps round me, I tell you that."

"Well, Grimes isn't dishonest—I'd stake my life on that," said Tom. "So you'll let Grimes stay on if the money's paid, Mr. Sands?"

"Yes," grunted the grocer. "I don't want to be hard on the lad, and I'll give him the benefit of the doubt, anyway."

"Right! Then Racke here will find a pound of the money, and we'll find the rest. We haven't it with us—unless Racke has. He's usually rolling in cash."

"I haven't!" said Racke thickly. "And if I—!" He paused, thinking it best not to finish what he was about to say.

"Well, we'll take your word for that, Racke," said Tom grimly. "But if you think you'll dodge out of your share you're jolly well mistaken, my pippin. Will it satisfy you if the money's paid by the week-end, Mr. Sands?"

"Yes. That's good enough for me, Master Merry. I know I can rely on you young gents—leastways, most of you," added Mr. Sands with a hard look at the scowling Aubrey Racke.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Very well. We'll see the money is paid by Saturday," he said. "Now you can clear out, Racke."

Aubrey Racke did clear out quickly enough, only just escaping several boots as he jumped for the door. Then, with a smiling farewell to Mr. Sands, who was looking astonished but satisfied, the juniors left the shop and made tracks for Mother Murphy's little shop for a ginger-pop before returning to St. Jim's. They were feeling quite satisfied with the result of their errand, and they felt they deserved a ginger-pop.

But the eventful day was not ended yet.

CHAPTER 8.

Racke's Scheme!

AUBREY RACKE'S face was dark and savage as he left Mr. Sands' shop and started back for St. Jim's, and it clearly showed the state of his feelings.

His heart was full of bitter hatred, and he was inwardly seething with rage and disappointment. The humiliation of having been forced to accompany his enemies to Rylcombe was bad enough, but what hurt him worse of all was the knowledge that Grimes was to escape losing his job after all.

That fact was the last straw to the vengeful Aubrey Racke.

"Hang them!" he breathed, his eyes glittering with malice. "Hang the lot of them! If only I could think of a way to do them after all!"

As he tramped along Aubrey Racke's brows knitted as he tried to think of a way. He was still thinking hard when he met Crooke and Mellish about a mile from St. Jim's in the lane.

They stopped and stared apprehensively at their leader.

"Well," muttered Mellish, his face showing his fear and anxiety, "what happened? What did those cads want with you, Racke?"

"Have they found out about the money?" said Crooke nervously. "Look here, if they have, Racke, remember I had no hand in it. I told you to leave it alone!"

"Hang you, shut up!" snarled Racke, with a curl of the lip. "Thinking of your own dashed skin as usual! If you want to know, there's no need to worry about that, though. They know nothing."

"Then—then—"

"They forced me to go with them to old Sands," said Racke, clenching his fists. "The cheeky cads forced me to own up that it was our fault it all happened, and they forced me to pay for the goods that were smashed."

"Oh!"

It was a simultaneous gasp of deep relief from Crooke and Mellish. Mellish almost fainted with relief.

"That's not all, either," went on Racke savagely. "They made me promise to pay part of that three quid."

"I should do it, too, Racke," muttered Crooke. "I'll make them leave us alone, anyway."

"Will I?" snarled Racke, his eyes glinting. "I'll see them to blazes first! But old Sands will get his money back, for all that. I'm going to see to that. I'm going to see he gets those two quids I took from Mellish. Yes, I'll find a dashed way of doing that!"

"What do you mean, Racke?" gasped Crooke, staring.

Racke gave a nasty laugh.

"Merry has promised to see that Sands gets his dashed three quids," he explained with a sneer, "and Sands has

agreed to let that settle the matter. He isn't goin' to sack that beastly low cad after all!"

"Oh, what rotten luck!" breathed Crooke. "He's got the laugh of us after all, the little sweep!"

"Not at all," said Racke, his eyes gleaming. "I've thought of a way to put paid to his account, my pip-pins! Listen, you chaps! Sands said he'd take Grimes back; but if he thought the young sweep had taken the money he wouldn't have him about the dashed place, whether he got the money back or not. He said he wouldn't have a dishonest chap in his employ. Well, we're goin' to prove to him that Grimes is dishonest."

"But how?" asked Crooke.

"I think we can work it easily enough," grinned Racke. "You see, old Sands has the numbers of those notes. Well, I told you I was goin' to see old Sands gets them back—or, rather, the two I've got in my pocket now. I mean it. I'm goin' to find a dashed way of planting them on Grimey, and that will do the trick."

"Yes; but—"

"Don't you see?" grinned Racke eagerly. "Grimey's honest—I will say that of the little sweep. He'll take them to Sands as sure as Fate. And what will Sands think? He'll think the little rotter had pinched them after all, and that he'd spent one of them."

"Yes," said Crooke, eyeing Racke curiously, "but how will Sands know—"

"By the numbers, of course!" snapped Racke witheringly. "Can't you see the wheeze, you dummy? All we've got to do is to plant these notes on Grimes so that he won't know where they're from. Sands won't believe him if he can't say how he came by them, will he? He'll think Grimey took advantage of us upsetting his basket to pinch the notes. Then, after he's spent a quid of it, he gets the wind up and thinks he'd better return what he hadn't spent, hoping to save himself being sacked. See?"

"Look—look here, Racke—"

"That's enough!" sniffed Racke. "You chaps are in this as much as me, and you've got to back me up. If you don't, you'll know about it! As for you, Mellish, you sneak-thief—"

"Oh, please don't, Racke!" muttered Mellish, glancing about him. "I—I— Of course I'll back you up, old chap! What do you want—"

He was interrupted with startling suddenness.

With a hissed "Look out!" Aubrey Racke grabbed Crooke and Mellish by their arms and fairly swung them into the shelter of the hedge.

"What—what—"

"Can't you see?" hissed Racke, peering along the lane towards St. Jim's. "Here's that little cad, Grimes, now. Oh, what a stroke of luck! Get through that gap! Sharp!"

Crooke took a quick glance along the lane. Trudging along with a basket on his arm, was Grimes, the grocer's boy. His eyes were fixed on the ground as he trudged along, and it was plain he had not seen the St. Jim's juniors.

"Sharp!" breathed Racke. "Get behind the hedge, you fools!"

In some bewilderment Crooke and Mellish squeezed



Grimes' assailants were on him in a flash, and the errand-boy was brought crashing down. "Ow!" yelped Grimes. "Ow! Oh, crikey! Ow! Mum-mum!" His gasping remarks ended in a mumble as Racke drove his face in the dust. Then, while Crooke and Mellish held his thrashing arms and legs, Racke wrenched off Grimes' own scarf and wound it swiftly round his face. (See Chapter 8.)

through the hedge, and Racke followed them, snatching out his handkerchief as he did so.

"Now get your hankies out and mask your faces!" hissed Racke. "Twist it round just so that you can see. That will be disguise enough."

"But—but what—"

"Get on with it, hang you!" snapped Racke, tying his own handkerchief into place. "We've got to get that kid down without his recognising us. Understand? And while you chaps are holding him I'll shove these dashed notes into his pocket. That will do the trick."

"Phew!"

Crooke and Mellish looked as if they were far from keen on the rascally scheme, but they obeyed promptly enough now they understood. They knew better than to refuse to obey their leader in anything—certainly Mellish had good reason to know better.

In a very few seconds the handkerchiefs had been tied into place, and then Racke hurriedly turned his own jacket inside out. His chums followed suit at once.

"Here he comes!" muttered Racke thickly. "Mind he doesn't get a chance to see us, though he won't know us in any case. I'll bring the cad down, and then you chaps hold him. Let him go, and make a dash for the hedge when I give the word."

"Right!"

The trudging footsteps came nearer, and suddenly Racke gave the word.

"Now!"

Racke had chosen the moment well. The hapless Grimes was taken utterly unawares, and he had no chance even to glimpse his attackers.

They were on him in a flash, and, coming from behind, Racke leaped on his back and brought the errand-boy crashing down.

"Ow!" yelped Grimes. "Ow! Oh, crikey! Ow! Mum-mum!"

The village boy's gasping remarks ended in a mumble as Racke drove his face into the dust. Then, while Crooke and Mellish held his thrashing arms and legs, Racke wrenched off Grimes' own scarf and wound it swiftly round his face. Grimes' mumbling ended in a choking gurgle.

It was over in a flash almost.

Swiftly Racke snatched out the folded notes which he had placed in readiness, and he crammed them into Grimes' pocket. Then he gave a low whistle and leaped away.

At the same moment Crooke and Mellish released their victim and also leaped away.

They followed Racke as he dived through the gap in the hedge, and by the time the unfortunate Grimes had loosened the scarf from his face their flying footsteps were heard as they crashed their way through the wood beyond the hedge.

"Ow!" gasped Grimes, tearing off his scarf and sitting up dazedly. "Oh crikey! Well, I'm blowed! Ow!"

He staggered to his feet and glanced about him dazedly. There was nobody to be seen, but to his ears came the distant crashing in the woods. The sounds died away suddenly.

"Well, my 'at!" panted Grimes. "If this don't take the bloomin' biscuit!"

He picked up his basket, which was, luckily, empty, and looked blankly about him. Then he started to trudge away again, his face showing his blank bewilderment. What the attack meant he could not for the life of him imagine.

"It could 'ardly be Racke and those rotters!" he muttered glumly. "Though I knows nobody else as 'ates me like they does! I wonder— My 'at!"

A sudden remembrance of feeling one of his attackers at his pocket came to the dazed errand-boy, and he drove his hand quickly into the pocket in question.

He almost fell down as he withdrew the two folded Treasury-notes.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he gasped. "This 'ere fairly takes the bun!"

He blinked at the notes as if he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own eyes. Why somebody unknown should attack him in order to place two Treasury-notes for a pound each in his pocket was utterly beyond Grimes just then.

He walked on towards the village like a fellow in a dream. That it was in connection with his loss of the three pounds he was very soon convinced.

But who had placed the two notes in his pocket?

That they were actually two of the missing notes he was far from dreaming.

"Crikey," murmured Grimes, as he went along, "this 'ere beats me holler! It looks as if it was them rotters arter all! They got sorry they kept 'em and thought as 'ow they'd return 'em so's I would know it was them!"

But there was a flaw in this theory, as Grimes had to admit to himself. Why if Racke & Co. had had the notes should they only return two instead of three? Not for one moment did Grimes dream that either of the three shady juniors were capable of making use of the money for their own ends—except to get their own back out of him. Grimes was a singularly good-natured and unsuspicious youth. He was as honest and straightforward as the day, and he judged everyone else to be the same.

"No, I suppose it ain't that," he murmured, shaking his head. "My 'at! I wonder if it was Tom Merry or any of them chaps? Though I can't see them 'andling a chap like I was 'andled! It might 'ave been done by somebody who was sorry for me and wanted to help a feller without a feller knowing."

Grimes couldn't make it out at all; but one thing he was certain of. The two pounds was in connection with the lost three, and whoever had planted it on him had done so intending him to give it up to Mr. Sands.

"That's it," said Grimes to himself. "The money's for the boss so as I shan't get inter trouble. I'd better 'and it him when I gets in."

And greatly relieved in mind at the prospect of handing two of the three pounds to Mr. Sands, Grimes hurried back to the shop. He was convinced now that the money was for his "boss." And his heart was lighter far than it had been when he had started out with his basket of goods to take to Farmer Crabbs. It was to have been his last job as Mr. Sands' errand-boy, and now Grimes hoped his master would relent and take him on again now he could return two of the three pounds.

He little dreamed of what was in store for him.

CHAPTER 9.

Poor Old Grimes!

"WELL, you got back then, Grimes?"

Mr. Sands looked over his spectacles rather grimly at Grimes as that worthy came into the shop and dropped his basket behind the counter. But his voice, though gruff, was not so sharp and grim as it had been when Grimes had started out, and Grimes looked quickly at his boss.

This looked a bit more hopeful, at all events, thought the errand-boy.

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Perhaps Mr. Sands had already decided to relent! Grimes hoped so with all his heart. It wasn't so much the losing of his job that hurt Grimes, but the loss of his character. Mr. Sands would certainly not give him a reference, and without a reference it was scarcely possible that he would be able to get another job. Moreover, though he knew he was looked upon as rather a mischievous youngster, Grimes took an honest pride in the fact that he had a good character—both as regards honesty and willingness to work.

He looked hopefully at Mr. Sands now.

"Yessir, I've got back," he said eagerly. "And I've brought you two pounds off that three I lost, sir. Here it is."

He took from his pocket the folded notes and handed them to the astonished Mr. Sands.

That gentleman slowly unfolded the notes. Then he looked at Grimes. It was a look that almost made that unhappy youth shiver up.

"So—so you've brought this back from that three pounds you lost?" said Mr. Sands in a very grim voice, laying tremendous stress on the word "lost."

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Hold on, my lad," said Mr. Sands.

He grasped poor Grimes by the collar and led him round behind the counter. Then, still retaining his grasp on the boy, he took down a wire file and slipped the topmost slip of paper off. On the paper was scribbled some numbers. He compared these numbers with the numbers on the Treasury-notes Grimes had handed over.

Then he gave a growl that made the apprehensive and scared Grimes fairly jump.

"The same numbers," he said grimly. "The same numbers, my lad! You—you young villain! You—you dishonest young rascal!"

"Oh, crums!" groaned Grimes.

What was the matter he could not imagine, but he knew something serious was the matter.

"So that's the truth of the matter!" snorted Mr. Sands, peering grimly over his spectacles at the hapless and astonished Grimes. "Where's the other pound, hey? Where is it, you young villain?"

"'Ere, 'old on, sir!" gasped Grimes. "What—"

"Think I can't see it now, my lad?" snorted the grocer. "Them young rascals from St. Jim's upset your basket I've no doubt. But that didn't satisfy me—oh dear, no! I guessed at once what had happened. You made that your excuse to steal that three pounds thinking as I'd think they must have taken it. But I gave you the benefit of the doubt. This here settles the matter, though."

"You—you think as I stole the money?" panted Grimes, his eyes flashing. "It's a rotten lie, sir!"

"What!"

"I never did nothing of the sort, sir," cried Grimes wildly. "I'm not a thief. It weren't my fault, I—"

"That's enough," snorted the grocer wrathfully. "It's as plain as a pikestaff. You saw your chance and took it. You spent a quid, I reckon, and now I gives you the sack you gets afraid and brings me the other two pounds back again, hoping as I'd keep you on if you did. But you little knew as I'd got the numbers."

"Oh!" groaned Grimes. "Was them the same notes as these, sir?"

"Of course—the very same numbers, my lad! You've given yourself away nicely. It's a good job as I had the numbers from Mrs. Jackson as it would never have come out. I was going to give you another chance, but this settles it—this settles it. I've no room for a dishonest young villain in my employ. Have you spent that other pound?"

"I've spent none of it," panted Grimes, almost weeping with utter dismay. "I tell you I didn't take the money. Those two pound notes were shoved in my pocket as I was coming along jest now."

"What!"

"It's true, sir," said Grimes wildly. "Honour bright! I was comin' along the lane when some fellers jumped on me. I never seed who they was, and while some of 'em held me down, them notes was shoved in my pocket. Then they rushed away."

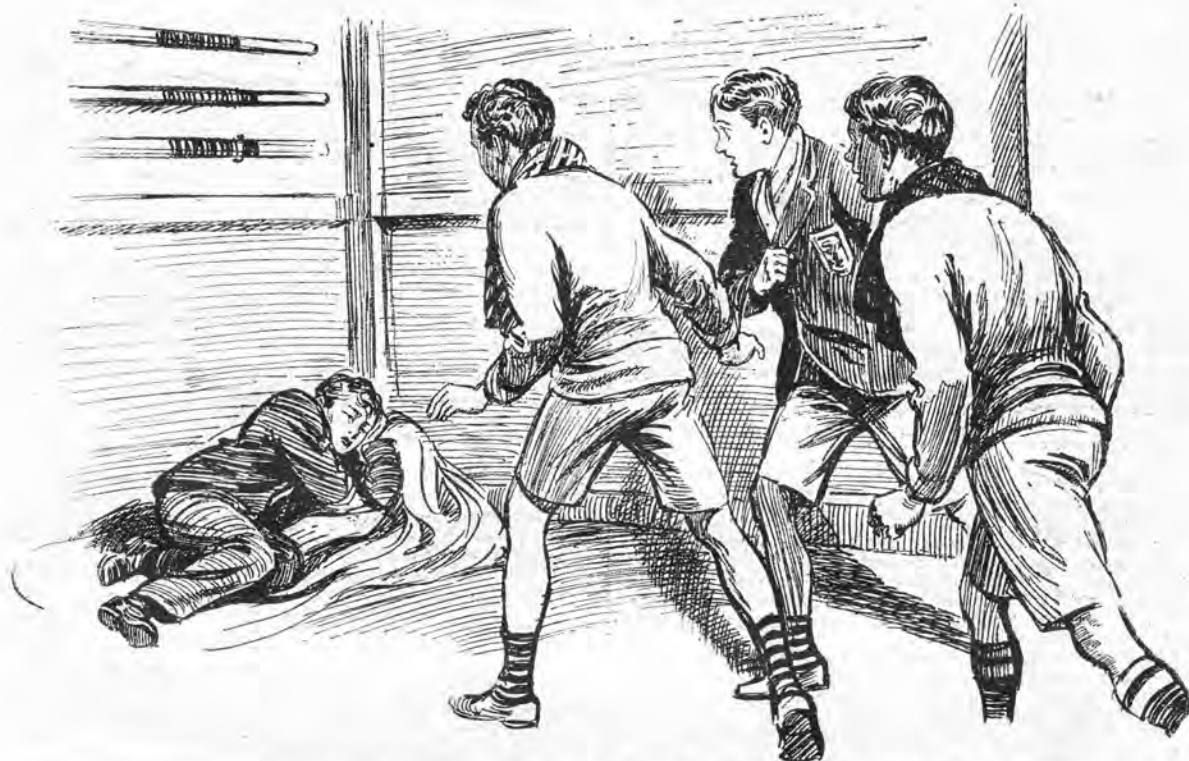
"You—you lyin' young rascal!" gasped Mr. Sands. "You dare to come here tellin' me a yarn like that? Bunkum! Stuff and nonsense, my lad! That sort of talk won't wash with me. Have you spent that other pound or not?"

"I tell you I haven't touched them, sir," panted Grimes sobbingly. "You oughter believe me, sir—I ain't never told you lies afore, have I?"

"Have you spent that other pound or not?" bellowed the grocer.

"No. Of course I 'aven't," almost shouted the unhappy Grimes. "Don't I tell—"

"Then where is it?" stormed Mr. Sands. "Now, look here, my lad, I don't want to be hard. Own up to the truth and confess to me now, and I'll take no further action. You



"Great Scott!" yelled Tom Merry suddenly. "Come here, you fellows!" Manners and Lowther rushed across to their chum. Then they jumped as they saw what had attracted his attention. Lying in the corner fast asleep on a heap of canvas was a youth whose features the Terrible Three knew well. "Grimes!" gasped Tom Merry. "Great Scott!" (See Chapter 10.)

can take your week's money and go. But if you won't own up I shall have to bring someone here as will soon make you own up. You don't want to be sent to a reformatory, do you?"

"Oh, my 'at!" groaned Grimes. "If you'd only listen—" "I'm listening," snorted Mr. Sands. "I'm listening for you to own up. It ain't good for you to be allowed to hide your wrong like this. You'll do it again if you ain't found out. I'll ask you again, for the last time. Will you own up, and tell the truth? If you've spent the other pound then you'd better tell me now, my lad. I'm only asking you to confess."

"I've nothing to confess, sir—"

"Right! I'll have to fetch Mr. Crump here then. Perhaps he'll make you talk. You stand there."

And Mr. Sands moved round the counter towards the doorway.

Grimes almost fainted with sudden fear.

In the ordinary way the cheery village youth had little fear or respect for the pompous and podgy Police-constable Crump. But this was a different matter altogether from larking. In this case Grimes did fear the village constable very much indeed. Grimes was a very sharp youth in many ways, but he was curiously innocent and gullible in others, and he believed Mr. Sands' threat without question.

As a matter of fact, however, Mr. Sands had not the slightest intention of bringing the police into the matter—far from it. At bottom, the little grocer was a good-natured gentleman and he was frightening Grimes—for his own good as he thought. Mr. Sands was a great believer in the old saying that "He who hides the wrong he did does the wrong thing still." He honestly believed his view of the matter was the right one, and secretly he was far more grieved than angry at discovering—as he imagined—that the hapless Grimes was a thief.

He fully intended to "sack" Grimes, of course, but he was sorry for him, and he meant to give him a fatherly talking to before dismissing him.

But he had got to be made to confess first—for his own good!

It was a kindly-meant intention, but Grimes did not know what was in Mr. Sands' rather stubborn mind. He thought Mr. Sands intended to have him arrested and the thought terrified the youngster.

As the little grocer made for the door, Grimes acted with sudden desperate resolution.

He vaulted clean over the counter, just scraped a box of apples, and shot for the door. Mr. Sands gave a yell and grabbed at him—too late.

Grimes dodged his grasping hand and bolted through the open doorway.

Then he took to his heels down the village street like a streak of lightning.

"Come back, you young villain!" bellowed Mr. Sands.

He ran out into the street waving his podgy arms, and bellowing after the fleeing youngster.

There were several people in the street, and they gazed blankly after Grimes. Then they seemed to grasp what Mr. Sands was bellowing and waving about, and they started in chase of the unlucky errand-boy.

"Stop thief!"

Someone raised the cry and it was taken up in a flash.

"Hallo, what's wrong?"

Six juniors came running out of Mother Murphy's little shop. They were the Terrible Three and Blake, Herries, and Digby, and they stared in astonishment first at the bellowing grocer and then after the fleeing Grimes.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tom Merry in dismay. "It's poor old Grimey again, Phew! What's happened now?"

That was the question. At that moment, from a side-street before Grimes' fleeing figure, a podgy, uniformed figure appeared.

It was P.-c. Crump, and he stared at the approaching Grimes, and then, as he caught the shout of "Stop thief!" he planted his bulky form in Grimes' way.

But Grimes was not to be stopped so easily. He was really frightened now, and he dodged swiftly as the constable made a blind grab at him.

"Got you, you young raskil!" snorted the constable.

But he spoke too soon. As Grimes slipped beneath his arm the fat constable overbalanced and sprawled across the pavement.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Come on!"

Too startled to laugh at what had befallen the arm of the Law in Rylcombe, the juniors raced after Grimes—not with the intention of trying to capture him, however, but in order to prevent others from capturing him if they could.

They need not have worried, however. Grimes was not to be caught.

The juniors soon outdistanced the rest of the pursuers.

and as Grimes vanished from sight down the little lane that led to the river they stopped, panting.

"He's safe enough now, I think," breathed Tom Merry. "What the thump does it mean, I wonder? I don't like the look of it."

"Nor do I," grunted Blake. "Why not run after the kid?"

"He'll only think we're after him if we do," said Tom. "Let him get clear. Come on back."

"Right."

The juniors hurried back to the village. All the pursuers had given up the chase now, and as they reached Mr. Sands' shop they found a little crowd of curious villagers outside. Mr. Sands himself was not to be seen.

At that moment P.-c. Crump stumped up angrily, panting and wheezing, and he stumped into the shop. The juniors saw Mr. Sands appear from the room at the back then.

But what happened after that the juniors did not see. The village constable followed Mr. Sands into the room at the back, and after a few moments he came out again alone, and marched out of the shop, shoving something that clinked into his pocket as he did so.

"Old Sands has tipped him, I bet," grinned Lowther. "Look out!"

P.-c. Crump waved a fat, gloved hand at the crowd.

"You clear off!" he ordered. "Move on! There ain't nothing to stand staring there for. Move on!"

And as the crowd dispersed the portly constable clumped away down the village street looking very satisfied.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry grimly.

He marched into the shop with his chums at his heels. Tom Merry was determined to find out what was wrong.

Mr. Sands, looking considerably flustered and upset, met them with a gloomy look.

"Well, young gents," he grunted, "you here again?"

"What's wrong, Mr. Sands?" asked Tom eagerly. "What's Grimes done now? You might tell us."

Mr. Sands regarded them gloomily.

"What's wrong?" he grunted gloomily. "You might well ask that, young gentlemen. You was wrong, after all, about that young rascal. I'll soon tell you what's wrong."

And the worthy grocer told them. He did not seem to find much pleasure in the recital, nor did the chums at hearing it. Unfortunately, Mr. Sands did not deem it necessary to tell Grimes' story of the fellows who had attacked him in the lane and "planted" the notes on him. Mr. Sands did not believe that "yarn" for a moment.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Tom Merry. "Is that a fact, Mr. Sands?"

"I'm sorry to say it is, Master Merry," said the grocer glumly. "I'm disappointed about that lad, I can tell you. Of course, I never meant to bring the police into the matter. I ain't as hard as all that. But I've managed to square Mr. Crump, so the young rascal needn't fear that. But I've finished with him, of course. He's gone, and I hope this will be a lasting lesson to the young rascal. Anyhow, you young gentlemen needn't bother no more about that money. I'm only too anxious to let the matter rest as it is."

And with that Mr. Sands nodded, and retired into his inner sanctuary, as it were—obviously not desiring to discuss the matter further.

In great dismay, Tom Merry & Co. left the shop and started homewards. They could scarcely believe what they had heard. Yet it seemed only too true.

Grimes, the fellow they had believed as honest as the day, had proved a thief, after all.

"I can scarcely believe it, even now," grunted Tom Merry. "It's rotten!"

"Too rotten for words!"

It was rotten—all the juniors were agreed upon that.

And it was in a very gloomy mood that Tom Merry & Co. returned to St. Jim's. They had never dreamed for one moment that their expedition would end like this.

As they neared the gates they overtook three juniors who were strolling homewards. They were Racke, Crooke, and Mellish.

Tom Merry caught a glimpse of Racke's face, and he clenched his fists as he noted a grin of triumph upon it. He guessed at once that Racke knew what had happened to Grimes. But he did not feel up to dealing with the grinning cad of the Shell just then.

Had he only known the reason for Racke's triumphant grin he would not have disregarded it so easily, however. But he did not dream of the truth, and Racke was allowed to grin without hindrance. And he did grin. His scheme had "come off" better than he had expected, and the rascally Shell fellow gloated over his triumph.

Whether it would be a lasting triumph remained to be seen, however.

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CHAPTER 10.

A Startling Surprise!

TOM MERRY awoke bright and early the following morning; he had fully intended to wake bright and early. During the last few spring mornings the Terrible Three had made a point of rising early for a short pull in the skiffs up river, with Mr. Railton's permission and approval, and now Tom was awake and ready, keen to be out of doors and on the river.

The early morning sun was streaming in at the tall windows of the Shell dormitory, but every fellow was still asleep but himself, for there was yet another hour or more to go before rising-bell.

Tom Merry chuckled as he glanced at the sleeping forms of Lowther and Manners. Slipping out of bed, he crossed to Lowther's bed and swept the clothes off him. After which he did likewise with the bedclothes on Manners' bed.

Both Lowther and Manners awoke and sat up, rubbing their eyes. They blinked round, and then they both started on missing their bedclothes.

"What—what the thump—" Lowther was beginning, when he met Tom Merry's cheery grin, and he grunted.

"You silly dummy!" he snorted. "It ain't rising-bell yet."

"My bedclothes!" gasped Manners. "What—Oh, it's you, you awful ass!"

"Tumble up!" grinned Tom Merry cheerfully, emptying water into his washbasin. "Tumble up, you slackers! Have you forgotten the river? Buck up!"

"Oh, blow!" grunted Lowther. "I could have done with another hour's sleep easily."

"Better get up, unless you want the contents of my sponge down your giddy necks," warned Tom.

But, though they grouched, Lowther and Manners were soon out of bed and dressing at top speed, eager as Tom himself was to be out of doors now they were fully awake. None of the other fellows had been aroused, and the three early risers quietly left the dormitory and made their way at a trot down to the boathouse.

Tom had got the key the night before, as he usually did, and he soon had the boathouse doors wide open, letting in the bright morning sun.

They very soon had their skiffs out, and it was when Tom ran to the far end of the boathouse, where the racks of oars were kept, that he made the startling discovery.

"Great Scott!" he almost yelled. "Come here, you fellows!"

Wondering at the tone of their chum's voice, Lowther and Manners ran over to him. Then they jumped as they saw what had attracted his attention.

And no wonder!

In the corner, lying fast asleep on a heap of canvas, was a youth. His features were dirty, and his eyes were rather red-rimmed, but they knew him at a glance.

"Grimes!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Great Scott!"

It certainly was Grimes, the grocer's boy, or the fellow who had been the grocer's boy until the previous night! The juniors gazed at him blankly. And as they did so Grimes opened his eyes and blinked up at them. Then he sat up with a startled gasp.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped.

"Grimes!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in utter amazement.

"What on earth are you doing here?"

The youth's rugged face went crimson, and he blinked at them dismally.

"I—I didn't expect nobody 'ere so early as this, Master Merry," he faltered. "I was goin' to clear out afore it got late. I—I hopes you won't let on as I'm 'ere."

"You—you don't mean to say that you've been here all night, Grimes?" demanded Tom Merry blankly.

Grimes nodded, and eyed the chums uneasily.

"I 'ad to sleep somewhere!" he muttered. "I sneaked about and 'id in the woods until late. Then I remembered as the winders were left open in the boathouse here, and I sneaked in. You—you fellers won't—"

"But why?" gasped Lowther. "Why the thump should you sleep here, you silly ass? You've got a home, haven't you?"

Grimes nodded dully, his face crimsoning again.

"I—I daren't go 'ome!" he groaned. "You fellers will know why, I reckon. Old Crump was after me. Sands was goin' to 'ave me arrested for stealing. I 'ad to bolt. I wasn't goin' to be had up and sent to a reformatory—especially as I hadn't done it!" he added doggedly. "So I run away."

"Oh, my hat!" Tom Merry & Co. understood now. The miserable Grimes had taken Mr. Sands' words more seriously than even Mr. Sands had expected him to. He had actually run away—had been sleeping out all night.

The Terrible Three gazed at the hapless youth in utter amazement. Yet they felt deep pity for the luckless fellow.

"But—but your mother," said Tom gently. "You ought to have thought of—"

"I did, Master Merry!" groaned Grimes. "I scribbled a note on a scrap of paper, and sneaked round to the cottage where my pal Pilcher lives after it was dark. I told 'im to tell them at 'ome as I was all right."

"But what did you intend doing?" stuttered Tom.

"I don't know. I just lost me head and run away," groaned Grimes dismally. "I know as I can't hang about here for ever. I'm in a fair old 'ole. But I'm not goin' to stand for bein' locked up—no, not—"

"Well, upon my word!" gasped Tom Merry, looking at his chums. "You—you silly dummy, Grimes! Why, you had no need at all. Sands never meant what he said at all. He was only frightening you. He thought he'd make you own up and confess if he mentioned the police. He had no intention of telling old Crump at all!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Grimes. "Is—is that true, Master Merry?"

"True? Of course it is!" said Tom, almost smiling. "You silly fellow, Grimes. He was only frightening you. Now, for goodness' sake run home and see your people. You've nothing at all to be afraid of. You have my word for that!"

"That's so, Grimey," agreed Lowther. "Trot off home, old scout, and get to bed, you silly ass!"

Grimes gasped. He seemed overcome with utter relief. He staggered to his feet, and then he crimsoned again, seeming to note that the juniors' eyes were fixed curiously upon him, and to understand why.

"Look 'ere!" he muttered appealingly. "You—you fellers don't believe as I stole that three quid, do you? I didn't—I swear I didn't! It was them villains as slipped the money in my pocket. They downed me, and while two of 'em held me down, the third shoved them notes in me pocket. I swear that!"

"What—what's that you say, Grimes?" said Tom Merry, with a sudden start. "Say that again."

"I suppose you fellers ain't 'eard my side of the matter?" said Grimes huskily and bitterly. "Old Sands wouldn't tell you that, of course! It's true, anyway, though 'e wouldn't believe me—wouldn't even listen to me. But I knows who it was," he went on, his voice trembling with indignation. "It was that feller Racke and his pals. I see it all now. They knowed old Sands 'ad the numbers of them notes, and they shoved them in my pocket arter they'd downed me, knowing as I'd take 'em straight to the boss. I see it all now, the villains!"

Tom Merry looked at his chums, and then he set his lips.

"Tell us all about it, Grimey," he said gently, after a pause.

Grimes told them, his voice husky. They listened with growing excitement as he told them of the attack in Rylcombe Lane, and of the "planting" of the notes on his person.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tom, when he ended at last.

In a flash it came back to Tom how he had seen Racke, Crooke, and Mellish returning the night before, and he could not forget Racke's triumphant grin. He felt he understood it now—at least, he suspected that he understood it.

"You—you don't believe me?" stammered Grimes.

"Yes, I thundering well do believe you, Grimey," said Tom frankly, taking the youth by the arm gently. "I don't pretend to understand just what it means, but I've got a jolly good suspicion of the truth now. Look here! You clear off home now, old chap, and leave it all to us. We'll see you through this, Grimes!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther grimly. "I'm beginning to smell a rat over this—and that rat is Aubrey Racke, the howling cad!"

"He's worse than a cad, if what we suspect can be true," said Tom quietly. "Now, cut off, Grimey, old chap!"

Tears were glimmering in the village youth's eyes.

"You fellers 'ave always bin good to me!" he muttered, his lips quivering. "I—I—" He broke off abruptly, and hurried from the boathouse without a backward glance.

"Poor kid!" muttered Manners. "This is beginning to look jolly fishy, chaps!"

"It is," said Tom Merry, taking a deep breath. "I believe Grimey is speaking the truth. If he is, and if it was Racke who planted those two notes on him—"

"Then Racke must have had the notes all the time," breathed Lowther. "By Jove! It's scarcely believable, chaps! But—but how on earth was it done? Racke must have come back afterwards, I suppose. I—"

Lowther was interrupted by a sudden exclamation from Manners. That junior's eyes were gleaming.

"I've got it, I do believe!" he snapped excitedly. "Mellish—that worm Mellish!"

"Mellish? Why—"

"Don't you see?" panted Manners. "When Mellish bolted yesterday afternoon, he left his cap behind. I kicked it away—it fell among some bushes, I think—and I've only just remembered it. Phew! Supposing he came back for his cap? He must have done, in fact!"

It was Tom Merry's turn to grow excited.

"Well, why didn't it strike us before!" he snapped. "My hat! I believe you've hit it, Manners! Wasn't Mellish suddenly flush yesterday? I heard Trimble gassing about him changing a pound note, or something, in the tuckshop. And we ourselves found him gorging there, you'll remember."

"Phew!"

"And Mellish never has a blessed bob to bless himself with!" said Lowther. "I believe we've hit on the truth. Mellish found the money when he was searching for his cap. I—I can't think even Mellish, sneak and worm that he is, would descend to that. But—but—"

"It looks like it," said Tom, frowning uneasily. "And yet where does Racke come in, and why—"

"Depend upon it, Racke found him out, and took the cash from him," said Manners cynically. "It's just what Racke would do. Then, when he heard Sands say he had the numbers, he thought of that scheme. He must have met Crooke and Mellish afterwards, and I suppose they stumbled by accident on poor old Grimey, and pulled it off straight away. Racke wouldn't touch the money for his own use, but he'd do any dirty trick to get his own back."

"He is a vengeful cad," said Tom quietly. "Well, don't forget these are only suspicions yet. We'd better move carefully."

"How on earth can we bowl the rotters out?" said Lowther glumly.

"There is one chance—though it's a slender one," said Tom thoughtfully. "Mellish changed that pound-note at the tuckshop, according to Trimble. If Mrs. Taggles has it still we could compare the number with the three Mr. Sands has—he'd give us the numbers quickly enough."

"Good wheeze!" said Manners. "Well, I'm blessed if I feel like going up river now!"

"Isn't time, in any case," said Tom. "Let's get those ships in and get home."

And his chums agreeing, this was done—the light "shells" were quickly housed again; and then, after closing the doors of the boathouse, the chums returned to school for chapel and breakfast.

CHAPTER 11.

On the Trail!

TOM MERRY lost no time in acquainting Blake & Co. with the latest development in the Grimes affair, and those juniors were astonished, to say the least of it. They agreed with Tom, however, that the matter required careful handling, and it proved a very difficult matter indeed to prevent Arthur Augustus from rushing off to tackle Racke & Co. about it there and then, and thus ruining the programme.

Arthur Augustus was very indignant indeed, and he could scarcely restrain himself all through chapel and breakfast. He, at all events, did not doubt Grimes' word for one moment.

When breakfast was over Tom Merry slipped into the prefects' room while his chums kept guard at the door, in case a prefect came along. In the prefects' room was a telephone, and Tom was soon ringing up Mr. Sands at Rylcombe. It was scarcely likely that the shop would be open so early, but as Mr. Sands lived on the premises it scarcely mattered.

He was through in next to no time and speaking to the grocer.

"This is Tom Merry, at St. Jim's, Mr. Sands," said Tom, speaking as loud as he dared. "I wonder if you would mind letting me have the numbers of those lost pound-notes?"

Tom heard a grunt, and then Mr. Sands' voice came through.

"I was hoping never to hear about the wretched affair again, Master Merry," he answered, rather crossly. "But if you really want them—"

"I do, Mr. Sands," said Tom grimly. "I'm afraid I can't explain just why at the moment, but you'd be obliging me very much if you let me have them."

"Oh, very well, though—"

Mr. Sands had evidently left the telephone, for his voice broke off then, and Tom waited, a scrap of paper before him, and a pencil in his hand.

The grocer's voice soon came through again, and he read out three numbers to Tom, who rapidly scribbled them down.

"Oh, good! And thanks very much, Mr. Sands. I'll probably be over to-day to explain why I wanted them."

And Tom rang off hastily before the astonished grocer could ask any questions. He rejoined his waiting chums, looking satisfied.

"Got them, Tommy?"

"Yes," said Tom, glancing at the numbers on his paper.

"I'll keep this until noon, chaps. And when the tuckshop opens we'll tackle Dame Taggles. It's a chance—"

"A jolly slender chance!" grunted Blake. "But it's worth trying. It all depends on whether Mrs. Taggles has banked her yesterday's takings or not, and whether she kept that particular note separate from others, which isn't likely, you'll admit."

"I know," said Tom. "But that really matters little, after all. It all depends if she has the note still, though. If it's among others, and it is one of these numbers, we shall know who cashed it all serene."

"Well, that's so! We're trying it, anyhow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

To the juniors that morning seemed endless—they were all of them eager to put their suspicions to the test. During morning break they talked the matter over again, and the more they discussed it the more convinced they were that they were on the right trail.

But the second lessons ended at last, and as they trooped out of their Form-room the Terrible Three joined Blake & Co. in the passage, and they all hurried out to the old tuckshop under the elms, anxious to get their errand done before business started there.

They found the tuckshop empty, save for Mrs. Taggles, and Tom Merry soon announced his business.

"I wonder if you could tell us if a junior cashed a pound-note here yesterday, Mrs. Taggles?" asked Tom.

Dame Taggles blinked at him.

"A pound-note!" she echoed, in surprise. "Why, yes, I believe I did change one for Master Mellish—just before tea-time it was. It happened to be the only pound-note I took, though I had plenty of ten-shilling ones. Why, I hope—"

"It's nothing to worry about, Mrs. Taggles," smiled Tom. "Only I wondered if you happened to have it with you still—that particular one, I mean? I'd like to see it just for a second, if you have."

The old tuckshop dame blinked in astonishment at Tom as he made the extraordinary request. But the junior captain of St. Jim's was one of her favourites, and she only hesitated a moment.

"I've got it, I know," she said, turning to the till behind the counter. "I only banks the money twice a week,

and— Yes, here it is, Master Merry. Leastways, I think that's it."

She passed the note across to Tom without hesitation. There were certain fellows at St. Jim's with whom Dame Taggles would have hesitated a very long while before doing such a thing. But Tom Merry was not one of them.

Tom picked the note up swiftly—eagerly. He compared the number with the numbers on the scrap of paper he held in his hand. Then he drew a deep breath and handed the note back to Dame Taggles.

"Thanks very much, ma'am!" he said, his voice rather tense. "That was all I wanted. Much obliged!" And, raising his cap, Tom hurried his chums out of the tuckshop just as several fellows came trooping in.

"Well?" snapped Blake, the moment they were outside.

"Why don't you speak, you ass? Was it—?"

"It was," said Tom, his face hard as iron. "The number of that note—the note Percy Mellish cashed there yesterday—is the same as one of these numbers Mr. Sands gave me this morning."

"Then—then we're right?"

"Yes." Tom's voice was grim. "Yes, chaps. We'll now go and interview friends Mellish and Racke. Come on!"

The juniors hurried indoors, excited and grim now. They soon found Mellish, and they stood no nonsense from that junior. He was hustled along to Racke's study, his face white and alarmed. Tom Merry knocked on the door of Study No. 7, and led his chums inside the room, Blake dragging the shivering Percy Mellish.

Aubrey Racke was lounging in his luxurious study, as usual, and he sat alone. He stared and his face lost colour as he saw Mellish in the grasp of Jack Blake.

"What—what's this mean?" he muttered. "Get out of this! What the thump are you barging in here for?"

"Shut the door, Lowther," said Tom, ignoring Racke's savage outburst. "Now we'll deal with Mellish first. We want to know, Mellish, why that pound-note you cashed with Dame Taggles yesterday was the same number as one of those notes Grimes lost yesterday."

Mellish went white to the lips.

"It—it isn't true!" he stammered, his eyes showing stark fear. "I—I don't understand you. My pater sent me that note yesterday."

(Continued on the next page.)



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.

A GREAT WEEK.

"WHO'S going to win the Cup?" If that query has appeared in my daily mail once it must have appeared hundreds of times. Readers do me the honour of thinking I'm a prophet. But I'm nothing of the kind. I wish I were. Being diplomatic in a situation like this, the only answer I can give is, "The best team, of course." And really, you must admit that is a very sound one. But seriously, though, you footer fans would do well to get next week's "Magnet," for it contains a special four-page Football Supplement, compiled by experts, which deals with every phase of the greatest tussle in Soccer history the season can give us. "Paul Pry," he's a nosy individual who seems to get about all over the place, gets behind the scenes at Wembley and ferrets out lots of useful and interesting information. In fact, the whole Supplement brims over with interest. Take my tip and get next week's "Magnet."

THOUGHT READER WANTED.

A reader who neither gives his name or address sends me the following communication: "Please answer the letter I wrote you." Now that's a tall order, isn't it? My correspondent, I take it, is a bit upset at not hearing from me, and is inclined to think that his letter has been ignored.

Perhaps it has not occurred to him that the letter might not have reached me. Anyway, the office-boy was set the job of tracing this mysterious correspondent by his handwriting. But nothing in my gigantic file of letters corresponds with the writing of the anonymous letter, so I'm afraid I shall have to let it go at that. I wish I were a thought-reader, or something, then I might be able to fill in the blanks of that very brief epistle. Seriously,

though, if my chum will take the trouble to write me again, this time putting in his name and address, I'll be able to oblige him with a reply. I'll say no more.

LONGER ST. JIM'S STORIES.

What enthusiasts you fellows are when it comes to the Tom Merry yarns! Letters reach me every day asking for "longer Tom Merry stories." The opinion seems to be growing amongst those of my readers who write to me that the GEM would be better off without any serial, if the amount of space now devoted to it would be occupied with more "Martin Clifford stuff." The Supplement appears to be in favour. Well, well, if the demand for these longer Tom Merry yarns grows I shall have to do something. Those of you who haven't written, please do me the favour of expressing your views on this subject on a postcard. Many thanks.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

"TRIMBLE'S CUP-FINAL PARTY!"

By Martin Clifford.

Ha, ha! I bet that's got you guessing. Trimble at Wembley—Trimble doing the grand. Seems impossible, doesn't it? But with the fat Fourth-Former almost anything is possible. Just you read how he manages to take a party of St. Jim's fellows to see the great Cup-Final in next week's issue. It's great!

GRAND "CUP-FINAL" SUPPLEMENT.

Tom Merry & Co., too, have caught the spirit of Cup-Final week, for they have given us a special fiction number dealing with the great event. Look out for it, chums.

"THE SCARLET STREAK!"

There will, of course, be another powerful instalment of this serial, and the offer of £10 for solving the simple picture-puzzle which is based upon the story and the film will be renewed. Mind you go after it. There will be another "Jingle," too, so keep your eyes open for next week's

YOUR EDITOR.



"In with them, chaps!" cried Tom Merry. In the grasp of many willing hands, Aubrey Racke was sent hurtling into the village pond. Mellish followed the next moment. Both juniors raised a tremendous splash, and both raised the echoes with a tremendous howl! (See Chapter 11.)

"You didn't find it when you went back for your cap yesterday, then?" said Tom calmly.

"No, I swear I didn't!" stammered Mellish.

"Then how do you account for it bearing the number of one of those missing notes—the notes Grimes was charged with stealing?"

"It—it wasn't! It couldn't have been!" breathed Mellish.

"It was!" said Tom. "I've seen it, and I've compared the two numbers only this morning. That won't wash, Mellish. I think—Here, no you don't, Racke!"

Tom was across the room in a flash, just in time to stop Racke as that sharp schemer made a sudden leap for the door. He grasped Racke by his coat-collar and slung him across the room again like a sack of coke.

"Watch him!" said Tom, nodding to his chums. "He was going to try to get that note back from Mrs. Taggles, of course. Not that it would matter much, as it happens. The very fact of Racke trying to get it back would be proof enough for Railton or the Head, I fancy!"

"The—the Head!" burst out Mellish in a whisper. "You—you mean to bring the—the Head into this?"

"Certainly, if we fail to get satisfaction from you ourselves. If you don't want that to happen, Mellish," said Tom quietly and deliberately, "you'll own up here and now, and tell us just what happened and all about it. And afterwards you'll accompany us and friend Racke to interview Mr. Sands."

"I'll see you hanged first—" Racke was beginning, when Blake sent him spinning back into his corner again. Blake was not likely to be gentle in his dealings with Racke just then.

"You'll have your chance to speak presently, Racke," said Tom Merry calmly. "I advise you, for your own sakes, not to give trouble and cause a row. It might bring the beaks on the spot. That would be awkward for you."

Racke said nothing. His face was livid now. Mellish was on the verge of tears.

"Buck up, Mellish!" said Tom. "We can guess just what happened, but we want the facts from you. If you value your own skin you'll take my tip and speak out now. It

will be better than being obliged to speak out before the Head. He'll jolly soon get the truth from you!"

"I—I—It's all lies!" stammered Mellish.

Tom Merry set his lips and took out his watch.

"I'll give you half a minute, Mellish," he said. "The proof of these numbers can't be blinked at. One last chance. In half a minute I go to Railton if you don't speak. We're going to see justice done to Grimes. Buck up!"

Mellish licked his dry lips. He saw there was no help for it.

"I—I'll own up!" he gasped, hanging his head. "I—I did find the money, but I swear I never meant to stick to it. I meant to hand it to Racke to do what he liked with. But—but—"

"But what?"

"I—I thought I'd borrow a few shillings," groaned Mellish. "I was expecting ten bob from home, and I meant to pay it back out of that. I swear that's the truth!"

"I believe you there," said Tom grimly. "But that makes little difference, you worm! And now where does Racke come in? I suppose he discovered you'd got the money, and made you hand it over?"

"Yes," breathed Mellish, with a frightened glance at Racke. "He—he took it from me by force."

"That's another lie!" said Racke, steeling his voice to calmness. "If you fellows believe that sneaking toad you must be mad. I know absolutely nothing whatever about that three pounds, and you can prove nothing against me. That's that!"

"Is it?" said Tom, just as calmly. "You didn't plant the remaining two quid on Grimey last evening, of course?"

"Certainly not! I don't understand what you are talking about."

"You rotten liar!" roared Blake, unable to restrain his anger. "Of course you do! It's as plain as a pikestaff now. You took the money from Mellish, and, having heard old Sands say the numbers were known, you planted them on poor old Grimey to get your own back, you vengeful brute! Don't waste time on them, Tommy; come on to Railton! He'll jolly soon make Racke own up."

"I'll give Racke another chance, anyhow," said Tom, his anger rising. "I don't want to get you sacked, Racke; but you may as well understand here and now that we mean to see justice is done, to Grimes, whatever happens to you boys."

"Hang you!" hissed Racke, fear showing in his face now. "You'll get nothing out of me."

"Very well. Don't think you can get that note back from Dame Taggles, though, Racke. We'll see you don't do that. These chaps will guard you while I slip out to Railton."

And Tom started grimly for the door, his face showing his determination. Racke's features went ashen, and he shouted:

"Hold on, you fool! I—I'll own up. I—I— Oh, you sneaking cads! You've beaten me, after all!"

"That's so," agreed Tom Merry. "Now you and Mellish will come with us to Rylcombe. We've got most part of an hour, and, in any case, it's worth being late for dinner to get old Grimey set right. We'll all get our bikes and we'll soon be there."

Racke gritted his teeth. His face was fiendish.

"What do you want me to do there?" he hissed.

"We want you to tell the whole rotten story to Mr. Sands and clear Grimey," answered Tom. "That's all—excepting that you'll be expected to hand Mr. Sands a pound, Racke, to clear the debt. You can't grumble at that. It was all caused through your caddish hatred, in the first place; and a quid's nothing to you—more's the pity! You'll come, of course!"

Racke was silent for a moment, his face working. Then he nodded.

"I'll come," he breathed. "Oh, you sneaking cads!"

"We'd rather have hard words from you than compliments," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Come on, chaps! A spin over to Rylcombe for all of us."

With Racke and Mellish in their midst, they crowded out and hurried round to the cycle-shed. Racke's eyes strayed more than once to the tuckshop; it was plain he was still thinking of getting the proof and destroying it, but he never got the chance of setting foot near the tuckshop.

In five minutes the juniors were whizzing towards Rylcombe at a great pace. Mellish was looking relieved now, rather than otherwise. He saw that Tom Merry did not intend to report the matter now, and he thanked his lucky stars that it was not going to be necessary to do so. He shuddered as he thought of the narrow escape he had had. It had been quite true that he had intended to replace the ten shillings he had spent with his remittance from home, but he realised that he would have had a hard task to convince the authorities of that fact.

But Racke's face was black with baffled rage and chagrin. In the moment of triumph he had been bowled out.

The juniors dismounted outside Mr. Sands' shop, and, leaning their machines against the window, they filed into the shop—Racke and Mellish still guarded carefully. Mr. Sands was weighing sugar at the rear counter, but he stopped as the juniors crowded in.

He stared at them, as well he might.

"Here—here!" he gasped. "You here again, Master Merry? What's all this? Look here, I've had more'n enough of this—"

"Just a moment, Mr. Sands!" said Tom Merry quietly. "You've got a good name in Rylcombe and district for fair play and straight dealing."

"I hopes I have," said Mr. Sands, considerably taken aback.

"Then you'll hear what I've got to say, I think," said Tom. "We're here in the interests of fair play and justice, Mr. Sands. Grimey did not take those three pound notes. He's innocent, and we're here to prove it and clear him. Those are the fellows who found the notes and stuck to them."

And then Tom pointed to the scowling Racke and the trembling Mellish.

"You mean that, Master Merry?"

"Yes, I mean it. But before I prove it I'd like your assurance, Mr. Sands, that you won't let this get to the ears of the authorities at St. Jim's. We don't want the rotters sacked, and I'm sure you wouldn't want it, either."

"I don't want to get nobody into trouble—there's trouble enough," grunted Mr. Sands.

"That should be good enough for you, then, Racke, my pippin," said Tom, turning to Racke. "Now go ahead, my beauty. You'll tell Mr. Sands all about it—that's all we want you to do. But it's got to be the truth, mind. Hand Mr. Sands a quid first, though, before you forget it."

Racke hesitated a moment, and then he took out his wallet, and flung a pound-note on the counter.

"What's this?" asked Mr. Sands with a grunt.

"That's the other pound to make the three up. Racke

has agreed to pay it, as he was responsible for the loss in the first place. Now go ahead, Racke. Mellish doesn't seem fit to use his chin to tell his part, you can do it for him."

Racke licked his lips. But he did not hesitate long. After all he realised he was getting off very lightly indeed—or he felt he was—and he started at last.

He told the story in a low tone, his voice showing his suppressed rage. But he told it. And the staggered grocer listened with his spectacles hanging over his nose and his eyes glued on Racke's savage face.

Racke finished at last.

"Does that satisfy you, Mr. Sands?" asked Tom Merry. "I have seen that note, and compared it with one of the three numbers you gave me on the phone. It was the same number!"

"Bless me!" gasped the grocer, almost overcome with emotion. "And this fellow," he added, nodding at Racke, "calls himself a young gentleman, does he? A young villain I call him. If I was his father, or his master, I'd whip that wickedness out of him, that I would. I never heard of such a young villain!"

And Mr. Sands fairly swelled with indignation.

"You're satisfied now that Grimes was innocent, Mr. Sands?" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove, I should wathah think so," said Arthur Augustus.

"Satisfied!" gasped Mr. Sands. "Of course I'm satisfied, I'll send a message round at once to Grimes, and have him back here quick. I always thought a lot of that lad, and it was a blow to me to find as he wasn't honest. I lay awake all last night thinking about him. Don't you worry about him, Master Merry. He's a lucky youngster to have such friends as you young gentlemen, though, I must say."

"That's good enough, then," laughed Tom Merry. "We'll leave it at that. And now come along, Racke, and you Mellish. We've got a bit farther to go yet."

"A— a bit farther," said Racke, looking sharply at Merry.

"What do you mean, Merry? Where—"

"Only to the village duck-pond," explained Tom Merry calmly. "You don't suppose you're going to get off so easily as this, do you? You've escaped the sack, little as you deserve to escape it. But you've got to learn that you can't play caddish tricks like this, and disgrace St. Jim's as you've done over this affair. This is going to be a lasting lesson to you."

"Fall in the guard!" chuckled Blake.

Racke howled with rage and pain as he was bumped over on the floor, and then he was yanked up by the arms and legs in the grasp of Blake, Herries, Digby, and Lowther.

Down the village street and on to the green marched the juniors, all of them cheery and satisfied now with the exception of Racke and Mellish.

Racke was struggling furiously and unavailingly, but Mellish was taking it quietly, though Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus and Manners guarded him for all that.

They reached the village green, and they reached the green-covered village pond, with a grinning crowd of urchins at their heels. Racke went in first, and Mellish followed him the next instant. Both raised a tremendous splash, and both raised the echoes with a tremendous howl.

Tom Merry & Co. did not wait to see them climb out. They were satisfied to see them go in, and they trooped away, grinning, and got their bikes and rode back to St. Jim's in quite a cheery mood. In the gateway they found Crooke standing somewhat anxiously, and he stared at the juniors curiously as they came in wheeling their bikes. He regretted that he had come down to the gates to look for Racke the next moment. For with one accord Tom Merry & Co. dropped their bikes and went for Crooke. They had forgotten his share in the affair. But they remembered it now, and Gerald Crooke fairly flew with boots shooting at him from every angle. Then, feeling quite satisfied and cheery, the chums of the School House at St. Jim's housed their bikes and went in to dinner.

That evening Tom Merry & Co. met Grimes in the village, and he was a very chirpy-looking Grimes.

"All serene, old top?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, thanks to you fellers!" said Grimes somewhat huskily. "What do you think? Old Sands 'as promised me a rise of two bob in my wages. It's a fact."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a smile. "I'm jolly pleased to hear it! But, after all, it's no more than you deserve."

"Hear, hear!" agreed his chums heartily.

And Grimes, happy now, passed on his way.

THE END.

(Look out for another topping tale of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "TRIMBLE'S CUP FINAL PARTY!" By Martin Clifford. You will laugh loud and long over this amusing yarn.)

BEGIN THIS FINE SERIAL TO-DAY!

MONARCH OF THE WORLD! "Once the Scarlet Streak is in my hands I'll rule the world!" No idle words these, for the "Streak" is capable of demolishing a city in the fraction of a second. And to secure this all-powerful instrument that arch-soundrel, the Monk, will stop at nothing!



A Sensational Story of Romance and Adventure based upon the Death Ray—the greatest scientific discovery of modern times.

The Menace of the Monk!

BOB EVANS saw the locomotive looming above him; the fraction of a second later, and it caught the car broadside on.

For Bob, the whole world seemed to dissolve in one stupendous crash; a fount of broken woodwork and metal blotted the mighty engine from his vision. He felt the car lifted bodily and carried for a moment by the speeding locomotive. Next instant, and the machine was flung clear to the side of the track.

Bob was hurled headlong. Above the thunder of the express he heard the final crash of the wrecked car, then he was rolling over and over, his hands ploughing the dirt, his brain whirling as, every moment, he expected to feel the giant wheels of the train grinding down on him.

On the road behind the level crossing Mary and her father watched with horror-filled eyes. The whole thing was over in the fraction of a second. They saw the car struck, saw it flung from the front of the locomotive—then all that was left was a cloud of smoke, and dropping debris. Even that vanished a moment afterwards as the train flashed over the spot.

Mary pressed on the brake-pedal as their car roared up to the splintered gate of the level crossing. The machine skidded to a halt as she jerked open the door and leaped to the ground, her father at her heels. She dashed forward, jumping over the broken woodwork that strewn the ground, and her heart bounded in relief as she saw Bob lying on the permanent way.

He was moving, trying to sit up, and shaking his head in a half-dazed way; beyond him showed the smoking wreckage of the car.

Mary and her father helped Bob to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" she gasped. "Are you—"

"I'm all right," Bob answered, and he stared about him, unable to believe that he had escaped what had looked like certain death. He put his hand to his throat; something had struck him on the side of the neck, and that was the only hurt of which he was really conscious. "Wh-where's the Monk?"

He looked round. There was no sign of the arch-soundrel whose attempt to kidnap Mary's father had

been frustrated by Bob. Mr. Crawford gazed about the track, staring at the smashed car, now burning furiously.

"Perhaps he was carried on by the engine," he said slowly.

"Whether he was or not, we oughtn't to stop about here," Mary said quickly. "He was not alone—there may be others of the gang about. If they followed him, they may see us and—"

"Yes. Can you walk?" asked Mr. Crawford, as he caught Bob's arm; and between them they helped the youthful reporter to the car.

"Don't you think we ought to go a little way up the line, and see if the Monk was pitched off?" asked Bob suddenly. "He might be—"

Richard Crawford stopped him with a gesture.

"If it were a case of common humanity I would not hesitate," he answered quickly. "But once the Monk or his gang get on my trail, anything may happen. He is after the Scarlet Streak—with it he can terrorize the world. And he will if he gets it. It's safest to get away at once."

He helped Bob into the car, while Mary took the wheel.

The object of Bob's concern had not been carried away on the front of the train. The Monk was lying on the far side of the smouldering wreckage, even less hurt than Bob himself. Both he and Bob owed their lives to the fact that the car had been caught and carried along by the speeding locomotive, thus lessening the impact.

But the Monk spent no time in thinking about how he had escaped, nor did he trouble to see what had happened to his accomplice, who had been driving the machine—the man whom Bob had knocked out just before the train hit them.

The crook rose cautiously to his feet. Beyond the wreckage he got a glimpse of Bob and Mary and her father, standing by the car just beyond the level crossing gate. The Monk's eyes glittered evilly, and his bearded jaw jutted as he crept forward, diving under the low, bush-lined fencing beside the track.

He crouched, listening, at the back of the car; his ugly teeth showed in a grin as he heard Mr. Crawford's words and saw the three climb into the machine.

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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

BOB EVANS, a young reporter on the "Daily Times," has been ordered to find the inventor of the Scarlet Streak, a wonderful invention which emits a ray that will annihilate anything upon which it is turned; possession of it will mean kingship of the world. The inventor of the Scarlet Streak is

RICHARD CRAWFORD, whose real name is John Carson, and who has been working on the invention for years with the sole assistance of his daughter.

MARY CRAWFORD. The inventor has changed his name because he fears that his invention will fall into the hands of **THE MONK**, who, with his aides, **LEONTINE** and **COUNT K.**, seeks possession of the Scarlet Streak that he may terrorize the world.

After the proved success of his invention, Mr. Crawford is captured by the Monk, who gets away in a car, pursued by Bob and Mary. During the pursuit Bob jumps from the following car into the one in which the Monk is escaping. Mr. Crawford falls out, and is picked up by Mary. Bob knocks the Monk out, then tackles the driver of the machine. It is while Bob is fighting with him that the car smashes through the gates of a level-crossing, and is absolutely wrecked, as it is struck by an express train.

(Now read on.)

All the evil in the bearded man's nature was roused as his gaze lighted on the grey-haired figure of the inventor, then the Monk's eyes took on a cunning gleam. Had he found the man he sought only to lose him again? In a matter of moments, now, the inventor would be off in the car—as lost to the Monk as though he had never seen him!

It was imperative to the master criminal that he should know where the inventor lived—and where he had hidden the Scarlet Streak and its plans.

The car was all but moving away ere the Monk acted. From his screen of bushes he darted forward; his muscular hands gripped about the two spare tyres clamped to the back of the touring machine, and he swung himself up, getting a foothold on the petrol-tank and crouching there, hidden by the folded hood from the view of the others.

The car moved smoothly away, neither of the three guessing that the man whom they had most to fear was within feet of them all the while they were discussing him. The Crawfords' house on Euclid Terrace was outside the town, and the approach to it was by lonely roads; the Monk ran little enough risk of anyone drawing Mary's attention to the fact that he was clinging on behind.

During the short drive Bob Evans recovered sufficiently to remember the purpose for which he had got himself involved in the mad events of the morning. His paper, the "Daily Times," had commissioned him to track down the inventor of the Scarlet Streak, and to do his utmost to haul the gang of crooks who sought to gain possession of the death-dealing invention.

Something of this he told to the inventor as Mary drove them along; from Mr. Crawford Bob learned of the complete success of the Scarlet Streak, and more than once as they talked Bob's gaze turned to the winsome girl at the wheel of the speeding machine.

As the car came to a stop before the house the Monk slipped off the back, stepped over a low privet hedge, and ensconced himself behind a tall bush that grew at one side. Through the leafy screen he watched.

It was as Bob was helping Mary out of the car that she said:

"Mr. Evans, how can I ever repay you for rescuing father?"

Bob grinned cheerfully.

"Don't worry about that!" he exclaimed. "It was my duty—and it'll make a good story for the 'Daily Times.'"

Mary's smile died away, and a startled look came into her eyes.

"Please don't print anything about our accident," she said quickly. "We have enemies, and if they should learn where we live it will mean constant danger to us!"

Her father heard her words. Bob glanced from one to the other, and he saw that both wore worried frowns.

"That'll be all right," he said cheerily. "I won't say anything, if you don't wish it; but it's all very mysterious."

And, behind the bush, the watching Monk smiled sardonically.

Mr. Crawford stretched out his hand, and Bob shook it heartily.

"It is impossible for me to thank you enough!" said the inventor. "I am—" He broke off, and put a hand to his head, half swaying. "It's all right—just a momentary dizziness!" he added slowly, but he was glad of the butler's arm to assist him towards the house.

The Monk watched him go, and the evil expression on the bearded man's face boded ill for the inventor if ever he got his hands on him again.

"Well, I'd better be getting along," said Bob. "You'll want to see that your father isn't hurt; I think he's all right, but the Monk wasn't any too gentle with him. I'd make him lie down for the afternoon, if I were you. When shall I see you again? I want to know more about the Scarlet Streak."

"Why not to-night? I'm giving a masque ball—" "Is that an invitation?" asked Bob quickly.

Mary nodded, and she was smiling still as she hurried up the steps towards the house.

"Yes," she called. "I'll be expecting you."

She disappeared a moment later, and Bob moved to the car. He turned to wave a hand as he drove off, and he saw Mary in the house doorway smiling down at him.

Mary watched Bob go before she entered her home, then she found that her father had gone straight up to his laboratory. She followed him, determined to make him take some rest after the excitement of the morning.

But Mr. Crawford was not the sort of man to spend much time resting. His one anxiety was the safety of his invention; he was looking over the massive structure of the Scarlet Streak when Mary came into the room.

At the sound of the opening door he jumped and swung round.

"You startled me!" he exclaimed, relief in his tones as he saw Mary's face. "I—I expect the Monk at every turn!"

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Mary stepped across to him and took his hand.

"You ought to lie down for a little while," she said. "You're all nerves, and—" She broke off, and looked away thoughtfully. Then she went on: "Don't you think, daddy, that I'd better call off the masque ball to-night?"

The inventor shook his head. All arrangements for the ball were made, and he was determined that his daughter should have some pleasure after the many months of working at his side in that laboratory. He had another reason, too.

"No, my dear," he said. "Let the invitations stand—and while the ball is in progress I will be free to work on a plan that may defeat the Monk!"

Mary smiled. She had been looking forward to the ball.

"Thank you, daddy; I'd hate to—"

A crash sounded behind them as the laboratory door slammed shut. The inventor jumped nervously, and both turned to stare apprehensively at the closed door.

"Who was that?" he gasped.

"No one—there can be no one there!" Mary said quickly. "I'll look!"

She stepped towards the door, but her hand hesitated even as she touched the door-knob. Then her fingers closed on it firmly, and she whipped the door open.

There was no one in the hallway beyond. She stepped through and looked in every direction.

"There's nobody here!" she called as she came into the room again. "It's all right."

Her father turned to the glittering structure of the Scarlet Streak again.

"For a moment I thought that someone might have followed us," he said. "The Monk or—what's that?"

With shaking hand, he suddenly pointed to the curtains that shrouded the laboratory window—curtains that were hardly ever drawn back. They were thrusting inwards to the room, as though impelled by some invisible hand; as the two watched, the curtains billowed again and again.

"The—wind," said Mary. "Only the wind!" She spoke boldly in an effort to reassure herself, then she stepped firmly to the window, her father behind her. She pulled cords that hung there and the curtains whisked back; she flung open the window and looked round at her father. "Nothing at all—only the wind!" and she smiled.

She knew that her father's nerves were in a bad state. Many months of labour in the close confinement of that laboratory, preceded by years of preliminary work on his amazing invention, had left him in a shaky condition—and ever the Monk was in his mind. The Monk, and his plans to get the Scarlet Streak and dominate the world!

In the massive, bulbous head of the powerful machine was the strength to blast mountains into nothingness, the power to wipe out cities and whole armies at a single touch of its livid ray. The inventor had good cause for apprehension.

The two sat down on a seat by the window. Mary told her father that she would ask Bob to try and find out whether or not the Monk had escaped and suggested that, in the meantime, her father should lock up the laboratory and rest for a while.

"All right, I'll take your advice," the inventor said as he rose from his seat. "We'll shut the window and—Ah!"

His voice ended in a choked cry. On the stucco wall below them, its lower part screened by bushes, showed the shadow of a head. It was gone an instant later as the inventor stepped back from the window.

"The Monk!" he gasped. "The Monk's shadow!"

"No; a bush—a bush moving in the wind," Mary told him quickly. "Look, it's gone now!"

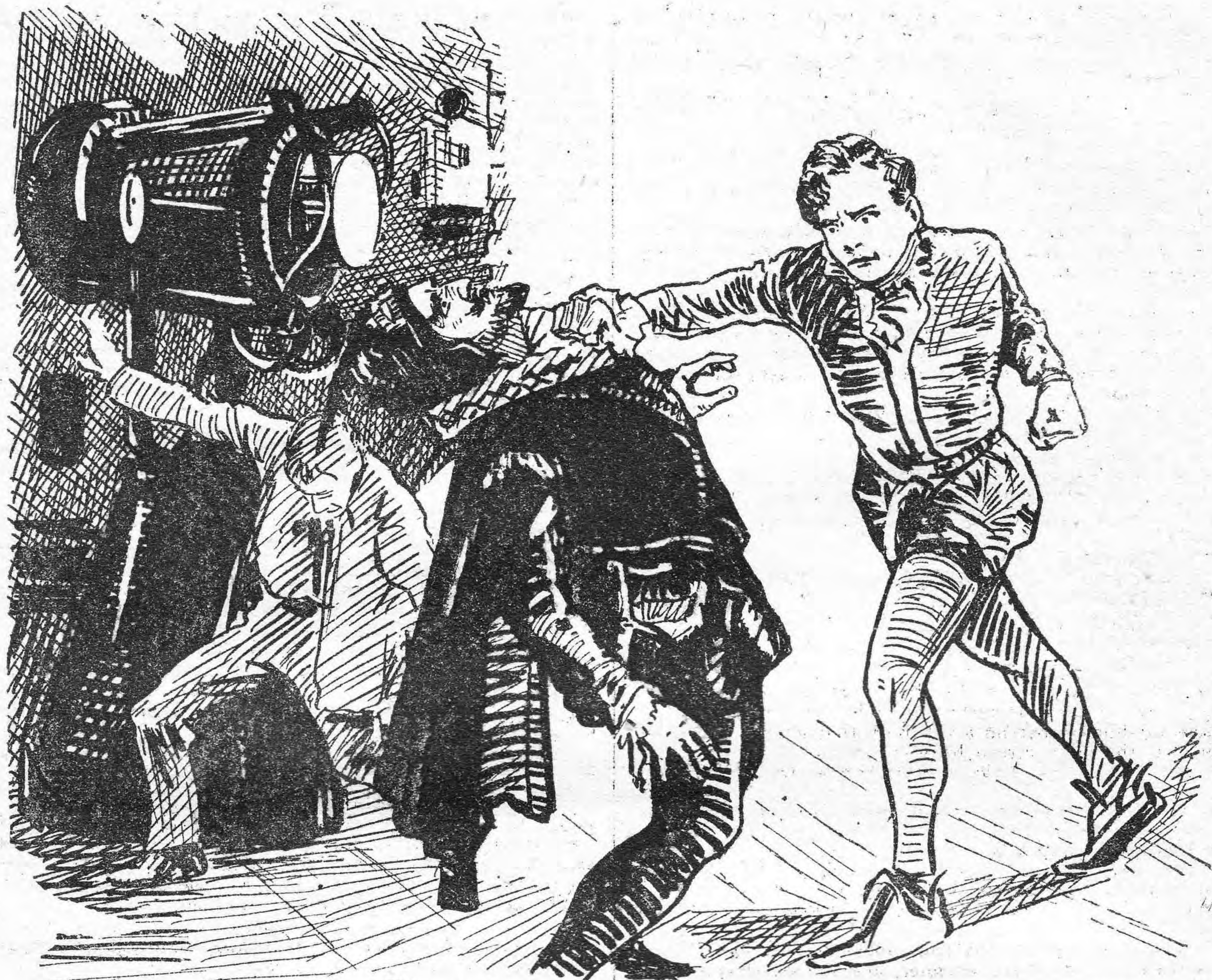
The inventor looked again, and even as he gazed the shadow reappeared. Beyond all doubt, it seemed to be the shadow of the Monk's head. There was the tufty beard, the hooked nose, the lowering brows.

"It's the Monk—he's here!" gasped Mr. Crawford as he stared down at the shadow. It disappeared, only to come again. "He's followed us here! He's—"

The sound of clinking metal came to their ears. From around the corner of the bushes appeared a man, trimming the top of the hedge.

Mary's tensely-held breath came again in a sigh of relief. Her father relaxed his strained attitude, and he forced a smile in response to hers.

"Just my nerves!" he muttered. "I'll go to my room and get a little sleep, Mary." And he helped her to close the window and to draw the curtains again—neither knowing that the shadows had indeed been those of the Monk, seeking a way into the laboratory, and scared off by the arrival of the gardener!



With all his strength, Bob smashed at the Monk's face. Staggering, the arch-scoundrel released his hold of the inventor, who reeled against the foot of the Scarlet Streak. (See Page 27.)

Masks and Men!

OUTSIDE the dismal house that was his headquarters, where the shuttered windows frowned down on the lonely pavement, the Monk paused, glancing about him quickly ere he hurried to the blank door at one side of the building.

He opened it by means of the metal spike concealed at one side, thrusting it through the secret hole and lifting the latch beyond.

Hurriedly, he made for the big room upstairs. There was excitement in his very tread as he crossed the threshold. He found Leontine and the Count awaiting him there.

Both turned as the Monk entered.

"I've located Carson!" he exclaimed. "He's known by the name of Richard Crawford!"

Surprise showed on the Count's smooth features as he heard his words.

"I know a Richard Crawford," he said. "Is he the one who lives with his daughter on Euclid Terrace?"

The Monk laughed.

"Yes, he's the man!" he said. "We've got him at last—got him at last! What's more, I know where he keeps the Scarlet Streak!"

The Count stared at him, and a slow smile spread on his face.

"I have known Crawford some time, but I never dreamed he was the man we're after."

"He is," the Monk told him gloatingly, "and I had my hands on him this morning—but he got away! And now, a little careful work, and the Scarlet Streak is ours! And then—then, riches and power! I'll be King of the World!" And he laughed again, exultant and triumphant.

The Count rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Crawford's daughter is giving a masked ball to-night," he said slowly. "I have an invitation"—his voice died to a hissing whisper—"leave the rest to me!"

As he spoke he drew an envelope from his pocket and passed it to Leontine. She drew out the gilt-lettered invitation, showed it to the Monk, and then passed it back to the Count.

The Monk nodded as he saw it.

"All right—you go. See what you can find out, but don't make a false move, or—"

For a moment he stood staring at the Count, and the moustached man quailed under the glare of those fierce eyes. Then he shrugged his shoulders, kissed Leontine's hand, and the Monk watched him leave the room.

The moment the door was closed the Monk crossed to Leontine.

"Why wait?" he asked abruptly. "I don't trust the Count—we will attend the ball to-night and get the Scarlet Streak for ourselves!"

Leontine shrugged her shoulders.

"The Count is safe," she said. "There is no fear of—"

The Monk broke in on her words.

"This thing is too big for us to take any risks. I'll make my own plans. I don't know enough of the Count to trust him too far!"

Light blazed from nearly every window of the Crawford home that night. The street was crowded with cars, and at the top of the long flight of steps leading to the entrance, Mary stood, welcoming her guests.

She wore the simple habit of Juliet, with a head-dress of pearls; the hall behind her was thronged with costumes of every colour as guests made their way to the long room which was being used for the ball.

Mary was watching for Bob Evans, but it was the Count whom she saw first. He had, somehow, learned that Mary would wear Juliet's costume at the ball, and he had come attired as Romeo—all swaggering crimson and gold.

He bowed as he took her hand, and she recognised him despite his mask.

"Count K—you are discovered!" she said as she smiled up at him.

"It should have been easy!" he exclaimed. "Would I were your Romeo, fair Juliet!"

Mary laughed.

"You must have known what I would be wearing," she said. "But you must excuse me now—I'll see you in the ball-room presently. There are other guests—"

The Count moved on, and Mary welcomed fresh arrivals, while the Negro orchestra on the balcony jutting out at one end of the ball-room, filled the air with the lilting strains of a fox-trot.

In a little, the smooth floor of the ball-room was filled by a shifting mass of brilliant colour as Mary's guests moved to the melody from the balcony above—and the harmony in the ball-room was in contrast to the discord in the big kitchen below it.

Mr. Crawford had hired a French chef to prepare refreshments for Mary's guests, and the chef was having trouble with the cook who normally ruled the establishment.

She was a short, energetic little woman, and she came striding towards the big kitchen table, where the refreshments were spread. The chef, turning from it, bumped into her.

"Vat ze—vat do you want?"

"I want some o' that!" said the cook. "I've got—"

"You cannot touch ze food. Eet is—"

"I'm still the reg'lar cook here! An' I got me rights!" she answered him indignantly. "If you think I'm agoin' to be turned out o' my place by a nasty snail-eatin' froggie, you're mistook! I got a visitor, an' I want some o' them caviare sandwiches, so you can get out of it!"

Angrily she pushed him away. And by the stove a big negro waiter guffawed heartily. The waiter had been having a rough time with the French chef, and he was glad to see him getting told off.

It was as the cook began to help herself from the pile of caviare sandwiches that the chef interfered. He grabbed the tray that she held and pointed to the door.

"You go. Queeki!" he raved angrily. "I am in ze charge here. You go an'—"

"All right. I know somebody who'll handle you!" the cook exclaimed; and she called through the half-open door.

In response, a policeman appeared. He was easily three times as big as the Frenchman, and he was scowling angrily. The cook usually gave him his supper, and, through the chef, he was being kept waiting for his grub.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

The chef gulped heavily; then he forced a grin.

"Think I'm goin' to wait all night for me supper?" the policeman went on. "Why, for two pins, I'd—I'd—"

Instantly the chef was all smiles. He helped the cook to the food on the table. Smiling and bowing, he followed her as she carried the loaded tray to the door. Smiling and bowing, he ushered them through. Smiling and bowing, he got in the way of the door as it swung shut, and the edge caught the top of his head with a crack that sounded above the sizzling of good things by the stove.

The negro guffawed again as the chef leaped back, rubbing his head. He got a glimpse of the negro, holding his sides and rolling with mirth.

"You—you bete no!" snapped the chef. "I vill—"

Words failed him. He grabbed a tart that was half as big as his head and hurled it with all his strength at the negro, who dodged it deftly.

"I haf' no time to vaste rit' you!" the chef raved at him as the tart shattered on the wall. He jumped to the stove, to burn himself on the heated top. And that was only the beginning of the chef's troubles for that evening!

Up above the ball was getting into swing. Mary had left the door, and the butler was now receiving the guests. Because of that it was easy for the Monk and Leontine to get through with their forged invitation-cards.

The Monk was dressed as Mephistopheles; Leontine wore the flamboyant garments of an Eastern maid. And together they entered the ball-room, swinging into the dance as a shower of balloons dropped from above.

In the heart of the colourful throng Mary was dancing with a man whose dress was a mixture of the tressor and a soldier of the Middle Ages. It was the best fancy dress that Bob Evans had been able to scratch together at short notice. He was masked, but Mary recognised him as the music stopped.

"Your smile betrays you! You're Bob Evans!" she exclaimed.

"Right first time!" Bob answered. "Let's get out of this and talk. How is your father now? Is he all right?"

Mary nodded. And she said no more as they danced their way through the crush to where doors gave on to a balcony that overlooked the grounds at the side of the house.

The cool night air was welcome after the heat of the ball-room, and they leaned side by side over the stone balustrade.

"Father is up in the laboratory, but I am not certain what he is doing," Mary said. "Something to foil the Monk, so he told me."

They talked there for a while. In the ball-room the Monk and Leontine made their final plans.

"You keep an eye on the girl!" the Monk said quietly. "I'm going to find Crawford. Everything is ready. Get her outside and away as soon as the trouble starts!"

He slipped away, and Leontine moved towards the doors through which Bob and Mary had passed. She opened them, lifting her mask as the cool air came to her features. And it was as she did so that she saw the Count step to where Mary and Bob stood by the balcony.

"Good-evening, Miss Crawford!" The Count bent and kissed Mary's hand, while Bob glowered down at his affectation. "Will you take the next dance with me?"

Mary shook her head.

"Later, perhaps, Count," she answered; and in the background Leontine laughed as she saw the Count move on, flinging a malicious look at Bob as he went.

Leontine moved quietly from the doorway to where tall ferns would screen her from discovery; while at the back of the house the Monk slipped the catch of a door and stepped out on to a continuation of the balcony.

He beckoned into the darkness. Instantly the figures of a group of sailors materialised out of the night. The Monk turned, and they followed him inside the building.

Behind the glitter and the gaiety of the big house that night lay dark scheming. While the colourful costumes swept and swayed over the polished floor of the ball-room the Monk led his hirelings towards the laboratory that held the Silver Streak. And while Bob and Mary talked happily on the moonlight balcony Leontine watched and waited the moment to play her part.

Disaster!

REMOTE from the sound of the band, behind a door that was tightly shut, Mr. Crawford worked at his desk. His brow was puckered as he frowned over the sheet of paper spread out before him. It was a strangely shaped Cross Word puzzle, and he was working out the definitions. That puzzle held the secret of the hiding-place of the plans of the Scarlet Streak, while the machine itself towered—grim and massive—behind him.

READ THE STORY!

"THE SCARLET STREAK"

WILL BE SHOWING AT THE FOLLOWING CINEMAS, APRIL 10th to 17th, INCLUSIVE.

THEATRE	TOWN
GEM	BRISTOL
PALACE	PETERBORO'
ELEPHANT	WALWORTH
HIPPODROME	WISBECH
PALACE	OXFORD
KING'S	OSWESTRY
PUBLIC HALL	SWINDON
EMERALD	ROCHDALE
MARLBORO'	SWINDON
GRAND	MIDDLESBROUGH
SHIPCOTE	S. SHIELDS
CENTRAL	GATESHEAD
ARCADE	GREENOCK
CENTRAL	COWDENBEATH
LYRIC	SWINDON
W. LONDON	WANDSWORTH
GRISHA	EDGWARE ROAD
HIPPODROME	BOW
BULL	REIGATE
ROYAL	BIRMINGHAM
EMPIRE	FENTON
VICTORY	WOMBWELL
PALACE	CHESTERFIELD
PRINCESS	WIGAN
BUFFALO	PRESTON
WORKMEN'S	ASHINGTON
	OGMORE VALE

SEE THE FILM!

He started suddenly as the door clicked open. He saw a masked, cloaked figure, clad in vivid red. Slowly, the inventor rose and stepped towards him.

"Do you want—?" He broke off as the man removed his mask, and he started as he found himself staring into the bearded features of the Monk.

The man's eyes gleamed into his own; his thin lips writhed off his set teeth.

"John Carson, again we meet!" he snarled.

For a moment the inventor stared at him. Then he crouched suddenly. Despite all his care, all his worry, the Monk had found him out. He was on the threshold of the room which contained the Scarlet Streak; his talon-like hands were all but outstretched to grasp the secret that would give him lordship of the world.

In that moment all the inventor's fear for the master criminal dropped from him. He leaped at the man, pulling a revolver from his pocket.

The Monk caught the glitter of the nickelled barrel, and his muscular fingers wrapped about the inventor's wrist. An instant later and the two were locked, struggling furiously. With all his strength, the inventor fought to get his hand free, but the pressure of the Monk's fingers all but numbed his forearm.

He set his teeth. Slowly his forefinger contracted on the trigger. He felt the revolver kick in his hand as it exploded. An instant later and it dropped to the floor as the Monk sent him staggering back into the room.

Clear through the music and the laughter down below the shot sounded.

Out on the balcony, Bob and Mary heard it, and started for the door; a shot from within the house could mean only one thing—the Monk.

The butler heard the shot, and the direction from which it came. He raced up the stairs in time to see the inventor battling with the powerful figure of his assailant, but ere he could aid him a man in the uniform of a sailor leaped on him from the door behind and hauled him backwards.

The butler was flung headlong. Other men gripped him and shot him out of the laboratory, then they piled on to the grimly struggling figure of the inventor.

Bob, with Mary at his side, made for the steps.

"I'll go ahead!" he shouted back to Mary, and he raced on.

Mary ran after him, to pull up suddenly, as a hand caught her arm. She found herself staring at a woman in a glittering costume, who bent towards her as she said swiftly:

"They've got your father! Come with me!"

Insistently, Leontine pulled on Mary's arm, and the woman pointed to steps which gave on to the drive beyond the balcony.

"But I can't! I—!" Mary tried to protest. With a gesture, Leontine silenced her.

"There's no chance of saving him unless you do as you're told!" she said quickly. "Quick! There's the car!"

She urged Mary towards a closed limousine that showed at the foot of the steps. Ere the girl well realised what was happening, Leontine had opened the door and had thrust her inside.

Mary turned as the door closed on her.

"But my father is—"

Her words ended in a smothered scream. Two hands wrapped about her lips from behind. Something was pressed over her mouth. She was drawn backwards into the darkness in the rear of the saloon. She struggled violently, striving to break free. Her head reeled, and her struggles grew weaker.

Outside the car, Leontine slammed the door, spoke a hurried word to the driver, and the car sped away; then Leontine hurried into the house, making for the stairs up which Bob had raced, oblivious of what had happened behind him.

The stairs took Bob to the landing, from which a door led to the laboratory. He saw the groaning figure of the butler huddled up at the foot of one wall. Through the doorway of the laboratory he saw the sailors and the Monk striving to bring the inventor to the ground, and Bob went at them with a yell.

A smashing punch under one jaw knocked a sailor headlong; his left slammed full on the ear of a second man, and the fellow hit the floor with a crash. Another of the gang was scrambling up in Bob's path; the young reporter helped him to his feet, and then planted his fist between his eyes and put him on the floor again.

He tore another of them from the inventor's shoulders, then smashed with all his strength at the Monk's face. Staggering, the crook reeled back towards the door, but he did not release his hold of the inventor until Bob had crashed another full-armed right between the man's beetling brows.

The Monk released Mr. Crawford then, and the inventor reeled away, bringing up against the foot of the massive shape of the Scarlet Streak.

A sailor plunged into the scrap, only to be sent headlong as Bob let him have a punch which held all his weight. Bob

(Continued overleaf.)

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"The Scarlet Streak!"

(Continued from previous page.)

was fighting mad now. He saw the Monk's contorted face before him, and he went at the man like a young tiger, hurling him out through the laboratory door, then closing with him again and trying to bring him down.

Above the tumult of the fight sounded the strains of the band in the ball-room, where the dancers had resumed after their first surprise at the sound of the pistol-shot.

Leontine, running into the passage, saw Bob crashing at the Monk with both hands. She saw that even the arch-criminal's great strength was no match for the power of the young reporter's sinewy muscles. The woman brought all her innate craft to bear as she slipped behind the velvet curtains that shrouded a near-by door.

"Help—help!" she called—and her voice sounded like Mary's.

With a last drive Bob sent the Monk crashing to the floor, and made a leap for the curtains, only to bring up as one of the sailors tackled him again.

"Help, help!" Once more the voice sounded, and, pitching the sailor full against the wall, Bob dashed forward, just as Leontine opened the glass-panelled door beyond the curtains, and slipped through.

Bob was on her heels. He plucked the curtains aside, and found that the half-open doors led to the balcony on which

the dance orchestra was playing. An instant later, and he was hurled through the doors as four of the gang leaped on him from behind, while the Monk scrambled to his feet and darted into the laboratory, towards the half-stunned figure of the inventor.

Glass shattered and wood splintered as the fighting group went through the door to the little balcony. A heave of Bob's broad shoulders sent one of the sailors hurtling head-long into the band, scattering the scared musicians; then he was hitting out with both fists as the gang piled on him anew. They thrust him backwards against the piano, and he felt it give.

It slid away from him as the gang came at him. He smashed at an ugly face, plugged red-knuckled fist to another's brute's jaw; and then he heard the rending crash of the wooden balustrade as the piano crashed against it.

Broken wood showered down to the dancers below. They scattered as they saw the bulk of the piano heaving over. It smashed down, its tremendous weight landing with a terrific crash on the floor.

The floor caved under it; the piano crashed through to the kitchen below.

Bob, thrust by the weight of the attacking men against the broken balcony, closed with them, fighting back. But they were too many for him.

He felt his foot stab on thin air. An instant later, and the fighting, struggling group heaved through the gap the piano had made and came crashing down, splintered wood flying all about them, crashing down to the ragged hole in the floor thirty feet below.

(What will be the Monk's next move now that the inventor is in his power? There will be a thrill in every line of next week's powerful instalment, chums. Don't miss it whatever you do.)

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