

Special Enlarged Xmas Number

THE GEM 2^D

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"The
Menace
of the
Wolf!"

It is a far cry from South America, the land of plots and revolutions, to St. Jim's in peaceful England. But across those thousands of miles stretches the menacing hand of El Lobo (The Wolf)—hovering over the school—waiting to strike!

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy Disapproves!

"CHRISTMAS is comin'!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's who made that impressive remark.

Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's, was standing by the fire in Study No. 10 of the Shell passage. Together with his three chums, Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth, Arthur Augustus had been having tea with Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell. There had been a football match that afternoon—the last match of the season against the New House—and the School House eleven had won by the substantial margin of four goals to two. The little tea-party in Study No. 10 had been in celebration of that glorious victory.

Through the window the old quad could be seen to be in darkness—a chilly, wintry darkness. But in Tom Merry's study, with a cheerful fire crackling merrily in the grate, everything was very warm and cosy.

"Christmas is comin'!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy repeated his remark. He adjusted his gleaming eyeglass and surveyed Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. very gravely indeed.

But if he hoped for an answer the swell of St. Jim's was disappointed.

For one thing, his remark was really rather obvious, seeing that in little more than a week St. Jim's would be breaking up for the Christmas holidays. For another, Tom Merry & Co. and Blake, Herries and Digby, were very busy at the moment—far too busy to attend to Arthur Augustus and his impressive remarks.

Tom Merry was busy mending with solder an ancient tin bath that was lying upside down in the middle of the study floor. Jack Blake was fastening several lengths of thick string into one long piece. Monty Lowther was raking some ashes from the grate into a bucket, and Manners was collecting coal dust from the coal scuttle. Herries and Digby were mixing whitewash in a couple of pails.

Their various occupations might have seemed rather mysterious to anyone visiting the study at that moment. But there was no doubt that they were occupying all their attention.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"I remarked, deah boys, that Chwistmas——"

"I fancy this is enough coal-dust, you chaps," remarked Manners thoughtfully.

"Good egg!" grinned Herries.

"I was wemarkin'——"

"Is this string long enough now, do you think?" asked Blake, as he finished tying a knot.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake, I was sayin'——"

"I should tie another bit on, Blake, old chap," said Tom

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Merry critically eyeing the length of knotted cord in the hands of the leader of the Fourth.

Arthur Augustus snorted an indignant snort.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! You intewwupted me!"

"Eh? What's that, Gussy?" asked Tom absently, busy with the soldering-iron.

"You intewwupted me!" hooted the swell of St. Jim's.

"Did I? Sorry! What were you saying, old chap?"

"I was wemarkin' that Chwistmas is——"

Tom Merry straightened himself.

"There, I think that'll do now," he chuckled. "That'll hold the giddy mixture now, I fancy. Poor old Knox!"

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled. So did Blake, Herries, and Digby. The only person who did not chuckle was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He glared at his grinning companions with feelings almost too deep for words.

"You sillay dummays!" shrieked the swell of St. Jim's.

"I have been twyin' to talk——"

"Doesn't need much trying for you, Gussy, does it?" inquired Monty Lowther innocently. "I mean, you're always talking."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy surveyed Monty Lowther as though he contemplated physical violence. But he controlled himself with an effort. He drew a deep breath.

"Chwistmas is comin'!"

"I've noticed that," nodded Blake, grinning. "It generally does about this time of year, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Chwistmas," went on Arthur Augustus, with a glare at Blake, "is the time of peace and good will, deah boys——"

"A pity you didn't remind Lathom of that when he dropped on you for jawing in class this morning," chuckled Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at, you fwabjous asses! I have been thinkin'——"

"What with, old chap?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowthah, I considah that wemark

—ARE ALL CONTAINED IN THIS STORY OF THE ST. JIM'S CHUMS!

uttrahly widiculous—in fact, wathah offensive. I am stwongly inclined to administrah a feahful thwashin'—"

"I thought you said this was the time for peace and good will, Gussy?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Y-yaas, so it is. I will let you off, Lowthah, since it is Chwistmas-time."



"Jolly decent of you," said Lowther solemnly. "Thanks, awfully!"

The juniors chuckled. Arthur Augustus adjusted his celebrated eyeglass and surveyed their grinning faces very gravely.

"I wepeat, this is Chwistmas-time—the time of peace and good will, deah boys. I know that Knox is a wottah, and in ordinary circumstances I should be as eagah as anyone to awwange this booby-twap for him. We have a lot of gwudges against Knox. He is an outsidah—"

"Go hon!"

"But since it is Chwistmas-time, I considah that we ought to forgive and forget, deah boys," went on the swell of St. Jim's, shaking his aristocratic head. "It is not wight to awwange a tin bath full of whitewash, and soot, and howwible things like that so that a chap will fall into it—not at Chwistmas-time."

Arthur Augustus finished his eloquent words with a shake of his noble head and a wag of his lordly finger.

The juniors stared at him.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Tom Merry.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"Of—of all the burbling lunatics!" breathed Monty Lowther, staring at Arthur Augustus as though he were a rare specimen in a museum.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowthah—"

"You stuffed dummy!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Hewwies—"

"The balny ass!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Mannahs—"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. evidently did not agree with their aristocratic chum that because it was Christmas-time they should give up their plan of settling old scores with Knox of the Sixth.

Gerald Knox was the most unpopular prefect at St. Jim's.

With the term drawing swiftly to its close, Tom Merry & Co. had felt for some days that it was high time they "got their o'm back" for several grudges they had against Gerald Knox. It was all very well to say that Christmas was the time of peace and good will, but Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. felt that where Knox was concerned peace and good will were quite out of place.

The discovery in a field near St. Jim's of the ancient tin bath that Tom Merry had been so busily mending ever since tea had given the chums of the School House a very pleasant idea. Whether Knox would find it quite so pleasant, however, was rather doubtful.

But they had certainly no intention of giving it up because it was Christmas-time. In fact, that seemed rather an additional reason for carrying it out. As Monty Lowther had remarked, they had to celebrate the festive season somehow.

But apparently Arthur Augustus thought differently.

"Look heah! I considah—"

"Br-r-r!"

"Chwistmas is the time of peace and good will—"

"So you've said before, old chap!"

"Peace and good will don't apply to Knox," chuckled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"I considah—"

"Rats!" grinned Manners.

He picked up the pail of ashes and emptied them into one of the pails of white-wash. Herries stirred the mixture, with a chuckle.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"Pway, listen to me, you dummays! I considah—"

"Well, don't keep considering out loud!" suggested Blake. "We're busy!"

"Bai Jove! Look heah, Blake—"

"Can't, it hurts the eyes."

Arthur Augustus said no more. Evidently it was a case for action, not words. The swell of St. Jim's, his face red with wrath, jammed his eyeglass securely into his aristocratic eye and hurled himself at Blake.

Biff!

"Yarooop!"

The swell of St. Jim's fist had landed in Blake's eye, and Blake roared, as he sat down with a bump on the carpet.

"There!" gasped Arthur Augustus, brandishing his fist. "I wefuse to allow you to address me in that wude mannah, Blake! Unless you apologise I shall administrah a feahful thwashin'—"

Blake scrambled up. But he did not apologise. Instead, he flung himself at Arthur Augustus, and the next moment the pair of them were scrapping merrily.

Apparently Arthur Augustus, the exponent of peace and good will, had quite forgotten about both peace and good will for the time being.

Biff, biff!

Blake went down again with a yell, as a result of a punch on the nose from his chum's aristocratic fist. He was up again in a moment, however, and Arthur Augustus went flying in his turn.

Crash!

Arthur Augustus landed on the pail of coal-dust that Manners had collected from the scuttle.

"Yawwooooh! Oh! Gwoooooh!"

The pail had overturned, and most of its contents flew in a sooty cloud over Gussy's face.

"Oh! Gweat Scott! Gwoooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. yelled.

The swell of St. Jim's, sitting dazedly on the carpet, blinked at them with a face like that of a nigger minstrel. He coughed and choked and spluttered.

"There!" gasped Blake breathlessly. "That'll teach you—"

"What did you want to go and upset that bucket for, you dummy?" yelled Manners. "Now you've wasted all that coal-dust!"

"B-b-bai Jove! Gwoooooh!"

"Never mind, let Gussy have the coal-dust if he wants it!" chuckled Tom Merry. "The giddy mixture is good enough without it! Come on, you chaps, no time to waste! We've got to fix our little surprise for Knox before he gets back from the village! We'll leave old Gussy to his peace and good will—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther picked up the tin bath, and the others picked up the various pails of ash and whitewash. Chuckling, they vanished into the passage, shutting the door behind them and leaving Arthur Augustus panting and spluttering and gouging the coal-dust from his eyes.

Whether the swell of St. Jim's was still so anxious for peace and good will, because it was Christmas-time, seemed really rather doubtful.

CHAPTER 2.

Nasty for Knox!

"ALL clear!"

"Good egg!"

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. stepped cautiously into the Sixth-Form passage.

Herries had gone scouting ahead to make sure that there was no one about. Had some Sixth-Former seen them with their curious burdens, questions would undoubtedly have been asked! But the coast was clear, and half a minute later the six juniors were in Knox's study.

The bath was placed a few yards inside the door, and the contents of the various pails were swiftly emptied into it. Blake quickly arranged two chairs on either side of the doorway, just inside the room, and fastened the string between them.

"That ought to do the trick!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

Tom Merry snapped out the light.

"Come on, you chaps!"

He opened the door cautiously. The passage was still deserted. The six juniors slipped out of the study hastily, and away along the passage. At the end of it they ran almost into the arms of a tall figure that had just ascended the stairs.

It was Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare eyed the juniors a trifle curiously. But he said nothing, and passed by with a nod. For all the captain knew, they might have been taking lines to some other prefect. Kildare strode away towards his study, and the six juniors breathed again.

"Whew! That was a close shave!" muttered Monty Lowther.

"Here's someone else!" whispered Blake.

Heavy footsteps could be heard coming up the stairs as the juniors reached the top of them. The next moment the sour face of Gerald Knox himself came into view.

Knox glared at Tom Merry and his companions as he strode past them. Unlike Eric Kildare, Gerald Knox never had a friendly nod for a junior. The unpopular prefect went on towards his study.

"My hat!" gasped Tom. "We were only just in time!"

"A miss is as good as a mile!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

Grimacing excitedly, the juniors drew hastily into the shadow at the top of the stairs, and peered along the passage.

They scarcely breathed as they watched the tall figure of Knox halt outside his study door.

"Now for some fun!" gasped Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sssh! He'll hear you—"

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"Look!"

Knox had opened the door.

The prefect strode forward into the study, reaching out a hand to the electric-light switch as he did so.

But his hand never reached the switch. With a wild yell Knox had gone flying forward into the darkness of the study as he tripped over Blake's string.

There was a crash and a mighty splash.

That Knox had plunged clean into the awful mixture waiting for him in the tin bath was clear enough. The breathless juniors could hear him splashing and gasping and roaring. A few moments later he came staggering into sight, smothered with whitewash and ashes.

"Mum-mum-mmmmmmm! Eugh! Yaroooooh!"

Weird and wonderful sounds were coming from Gerald Knox as he danced wildly in the passage, dripping and smothered. Tom Merry, almost helpless with laughter, gripped Blake by the arm.

"Come on! Scat!" gasped Tom.

Next instant the Terrible Three and the three Fourth-Formers were racing down the stairs.

It would be healthier not to be found near the Sixth-Form passage that night!

Tap!

Tom Merry glanced up as a tap came on the door of Study No. 10.

The Terrible Three were busy with their prep half an hour later.

"Come in!" sang out Tom.

The door swung open, revealing the grinning face of Wally D'Arcy of the Third.

Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, the cheeky leader of the fag fraternity, was the minor of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. He was also Kildare's fag, and it was clear from his first words that it was in this latter capacity that he was visiting Study No. 10.

"Kildare wants to see you!"

Tom Merry jumped.

"Oh!"

Wally chuckled.

"I'd put an exercise-book in your bags, if I were you," he announced heartlessly, and vanished, slamming the door behind him.

"Oh crumbs!"

Tom Merry stared at Manners and Lowther blankly. There was alarm on the face of each.

"Knox!" breathed Manners. "He must have told Kildare—"

"But—but Knox can't have known it was us!" gasped Tom. He groaned. "Oh crumbs!"

"He must have found out!" said Monty Lowther. "I—I wonder why he only sent for you, instead of all of us?"

"Goodness knows!"

Tom rose slowly to his feet and crossed towards the door, looking very much like a martyr of old going to the stake. His chums were looking equally anxious as he opened the door and stepped into the passage.

"I never thought Knox would tumble to who it was," mumbled Monty Lowther.

Tom grinned ruefully.

"Neither did I. Well, it can't be helped. I'll get along!"

Manners jumped up.

"Half a jiff! We'll come, too. We were all in it!"

"Rats! He may only know I was in it. P'raps I dropped a handkerchief or something, and Knox recognised the initials on it. If so—"

"Rot! We're coming!"

And with determined, though anxious faces Manners and Lowther hurried from the study after their chum.



CHAPTER 3.

A Little Misunderstanding!

"COME in!"

The voice of Eric Kildare came to the ears of the Terrible Three in answer to Tom Merry's tap on the door of the study.

Tom pushed open the door, and the three chums of the Shell stepped into the study, closing the door behind them.

The captain of St. Jim's was standing by the fireplace. There was a thoughtful frown on his handsome face. But

a look of surprise came there at the entry of the Terrible Three.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "I only sent for Merry!"

"Hem!" Manners coughed. "Ye-e-es, but—"

"We were all in it, you see," mumbled Monty Lowther.

"What's that?" exclaimed Kildare.

"We were in it, too," nodded Manners. "In fact, I think I suggested it—"

"Oh!"

Kildare surveyed the three chums of the Shell curiously.



"Mum-mum-mmmmm!" Weird and wonderful sounds were coming from Gerald Knox as he danced wildly in the passage, smothered with whitewash and ashes. "Come on! Scat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Almost helpless with laughter, the juniors raced down the stairs."

"I dunno how Knox found out," blurted Lowther, "but it wouldn't be fair for Tom to stand the racket alone."

"It—it was only a rag, of course," put in Tom Merry quickly. "We—ahem—thought a bit of whitewash wouldn't do him any harm—"

"Oh, that's what you thought, eh?" said the captain grimly. "You thought a little whitewash wouldn't do Knox any harm. And so—"

"Well, you know!" murmured Tom awkwardly. "We fixed up that bath for him to fall into—"

"I understand," nodded Kildare in a grim tone. "How did you make sure he'd fall into it, though?"

"Well, you see, there was that piece of string tied across the doorway," mumbled Manners. "He tripped over it—"

"And where did all this happen?" inquired Kildare quietly.

Tom Merry jumped.

"Eh?"

"Where did it happen?"

"Why, in his study, of course!" gasped Tom. "You—you knew that, of course?"

"Not in the least! I had heard nothing at all about it. But since you have volunteered all this interesting information, I'm anxious to learn more! When did all this take place?"

"You—you hadn't heard?" panted Manners.

"You didn't know?" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom.

It was suddenly clear to Tom Merry that they had "put their foot in it" with a vengeance!

What Kildare really wanted to see him for he did not know. But he realised now that it had been totally unconnected with the little trap set for Gerald Knox! Kildare had known nothing about that—until they had told him.

The Terrible Three stared at one another blankly, with feelings too deep for words. Kildare's face was very grim; but suddenly a faint smile flickered at the corners of his lips.

The next moment the captain of St. Jim's had burst into a laugh.

"You silly young asses!" he exclaimed. "You shouldn't jump to conclusions!" Then he frowned, and his lips set in a grim line. "You young rascals! So you've been ragging a prefect, have you?"

It was useless to try to get out of it now. Tom Merry & Co. felt as though they could have kicked themselves!

"Well, ye-e-es," mumbled Tom. "You see—"

He broke off awkwardly.

Kildare was surveying the Terrible Three with an angry gleam in his eyes. A strict disciplinarian, the captain of St. Jim's was more than indignant to learn that a jape had been played on Knox of the Sixth, even though Knox was by no means a friend of his.

"You young rascals!"

Kildare's eyes went to an ashplant that was leaning against the wall in a corner of the room. The eyes of the Terrible Three went towards it, too. The captain seemed about to stride forward to snatch it up; but then he changed his mind.

Kildare was a sportsman to the core.

"You young rascals!" he repeated angrily. "But in the circumstances I don't think it would be quite fair for me to make use of my knowledge, so I'll say no more about it. But if Knox finds out, I—I hope he gives you all the licking of your young lives!"

His eyes were gleaming. But suddenly his lips twitched. Once more he burst into a hearty laugh, to the intense relief of Tom Merry & Co.

"I say, that's jolly sporting of you!" said Tom Merry gratefully. "Thanks awfully!"

Manners and Lowther edged towards the door. Since Kildare had not sent for them they felt they had better go. But the captain called them back.

"Half a minute. Since you two are here as well, you'd better stay, if you will, and hear what I was going to ask Merry."

Kildare picked up a letter thoughtfully from the chimney-piece, and turned to Tom.

"I want to ask you a favour," he said quietly.

Tom flushed with pleasure. Like most of the other juniors, the captain of the Shell would have done anything for Eric Kildare.

"I'll be jolly glad to!" he exclaimed, with a ring of eagerness in his tone that was proof enough of his sincerity.

"Thanks!" Kildare smiled. "It's this!"

He tapped the letter in his fingers. Tom noticed that it bore a foreign stamp.

"I've just had a letter by to-night's post from an uncle of mine," went on the captain. "My uncle has been holding a post under the Rioguanay Government for some time. As you know, Rioguanay is one of the smaller South American Republics—"

Tom nodded.

"A pretty tough spot, isn't it?" he grinned. "They've just had a revolution there, haven't they?"

"That's so!" Kildare smiled. "Like Mexico, revolutions flourish in Rioguanay! But they've got a good man as President at last. And now they've managed to put down this last revolution, they're hoping the country will settle down a bit. As a matter of fact, my uncle was largely responsible for the success the Rioguanay Government had in putting down that revolution. At the special request of the President, he took things in hand, and squashed the rebels!"

Kildare smiled.

"They've given my uncle the Order of the Rioguanay Eagle or something, in recognition of his services."

"My hat!"

"But that wasn't what I wanted to tell you about," went on the captain. "It seems that at my uncle's suggestion, the son of the President of Rioguanay is coming to St. Jim's."

"Great pip!"

"His name is Callao Garcia," said Kildare, glancing at the letter he had drawn from the envelope in his hands. "He arrives to-morrow from the Argentine, where he was sent to be safely out of danger during the revolution. My uncle has never actually seen him, apparently, but he thinks he is a decent sort of youngster. I've seen the Head, who tells me Garcia will be put in the Shell."

"He comes to-morrow!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes. It's rather unusual, of course, for a new fellow to turn up in the last fortnight of the term, but in the circumstances the Head's agreed to it. My uncle lands in England a few days later, and Garcia will spend Christmas with him. In the meantime, I'd be very much obliged if you youngsters would look after Garcia a bit—show him the ropes, and so on. He speaks English well enough, I understand, but everything will seem pretty strange to him, of course, after having lived all his life in South America."

He tossed the letter back on to the chimney-piece.

"Will you do that for me—keep an eye on this chap, Garcia?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Good! Thanks, kid!"

The captain nodded, with a friendly smile, and the Terrible Three left the study. They strolled away towards the stairs, arm in arm.

"Phew!" Monty Lowther drew a deep breath. "Kildare's a sportsman. Anyone else would have licked us when he knew about Knox."

At thought of Knox the chums of the Shell chuckled. It was highly unlikely that Gerald Knox would ever learn the identity of the juniors who had been the cause of his plunge into that strange and horrible mixture.

"It was what young Wally said about exercise-books that made me think old Kildare knew something," growled Tom Merry. "The young idiot said that to put the wind up us, without knowing what we were wanted for."

But the news of the coming of the South American junior next day soon occupied the thoughts of the Terrible Three.

"A giddy Rioguanay," chuckled Monty Lowther. "My hat! And Kildare wants us to take him under our paternal wings."

"We'll have to do it for Kildare," nodded Manners.

"He ought to be an interesting bird, this chap Garcia," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, as they descended the stairs. "The son of a blessed President! Wonder what he'll be like?"

The arrival of the South American junior was certainly an unexpected excitement for the last days of the term.

But keenly interested though they were in the coming arrival of Callao Garcia, the Terrible Three little dreamt, as they headed for the junior Common-room, to spread the news of the amazing adventures in which they were

destined to be involved, thanks to the coming to St. Jim's of the boy from Rioguanay!

CHAPTER 4.

Garcia Arrives!

"ABOUT time the dago arrived, isn't it?"

It was Aubrey Racke, the cad of the Shell, who spoke.

It was the following day, after morning classes, and quite a big crowd of juniors had gathered round the gateway of St. Jim's.

It was known that Kildare had gone off to the station more than half an hour ago to meet Garcia. The captain had been seen striding towards the gates from the windows of the Shell and Fourth Form rooms, while the juniors were still toiling beneath the eagle eyes of Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom. As soon as they had been dismissed most of the two Forms had come out to await the South American's arrival.

"Dunno what St. Jim's is coming to," growled Crooke, Racke's crony. "A blessed dago! We don't want that sort at St. Jim's."

"Rather not!" said Mellish, the sneak of the Fourth, loftily.

"Yes, it is a bit thick," nodded Racke sneeringly.

"Well, if they start picking and choosing as to who's allowed at St. Jim's, I suppose old Racke would be about the first to go out on his neck," said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!" grinned Talbot of the Shell.

Racke glared at Talbot and Tom Merry & Co. There were chuckles. Racke & Co. turned away, rather red.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch.

"Garcia ought to be along pretty soon, if Kildare brings him in a taxi—"

Tom did not finish his sentence.

There was a sudden, excited shout from Jack Blake. The leader of the Fourth was pointing down the road. The juniors stared out through the gates, and Tom gave a startled exclamation.

Thundering towards the gates of St. Jim's was a great bull, its hooves churning up the dust. Round the distant bend, in pursuit, came running half a dozen figures—farmhands, evidently.

"Hallo! Hallo!" ejaculated Manners sharply. "The giddy old bull seems to have done a bolt—"

"I—I say, it looks a bit queer, doesn't it?" stammered Mellish nervously.

Tom Merry was watching the oncoming animal intently. Tom's face had set in rather startled lines.

There was something about the flaming, bloodshot eyes of the bull as it thundered towards the group at the gates that struck Tom as being dangerous. In an instant he realised that this was not merely an escaped animal making the most of its spell of freedom.

"The bull was mad!"

"Good heavens—"

The breathless exclamation broke the lips of a tall figure that had been passing the gates—Mr. Railton, the popular Housemaster of the School House.

Mr. Railton had caught sight of the onrushing animal, and he, too, saw what Tom Merry had seen. The animal was mad.

A mad bull was careering towards the gates of St. Jim's!

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry.

In another moment the crowd of juniors had broken and scattered. Cries of alarm rang out. Mr. Railton, his face suddenly pale, was the only one who stood his ground.

"Run, boys!" he cried hoarsely. "Get into the House!"

"Look out, sir!" Tom Merry, seeing that Mr. Railton was staying where he was, as if with the intention of distracting the maddened creature's attention from the juniors, halted, and turned back towards the Housemaster. "Look out, sir, for Heaven's sake—"

As he spoke, with thundering hoofs, the great bull came rushing into the quad. Its eyes were glaring, its heavy head tossing as it came. It swerved towards Mr. Railton and pounded towards him, snorting savagely.

Tom seized the Housemaster by the arm.

"Run, sir—run!"

Mr. Railton glanced round swiftly. Except for Tom Merry the juniors were now all at a safe distance, gathered in white-faced groups within easy distance of the doorways of the two Houses. Through the window of the porter's lodge the alarmed face of old Ephraim Taggles could be seen peering out. Running, excited figures were crammed in doorways, startled faces were staring down into the quad from up-flung windows.

With lowered head, its long, pointed horns directed full at its intended victim, the bull thundered towards Tom Merry and the Housemaster as they turned to run.

Mr. Railton, like Tom Merry, was an athlete. But the bull was covering the ground at terrific speed.



A score of hoarse shouts rang out round the quad as the furious animal was seen to be overtaking the fugitives. Tom Merry glanced round, and saw that the bull was close on his heels. He sprang nimbly aside, and, with steaming breath, the animal rushed blindly past him. A group of juniors in its path, close by the New House steps, raced up the steps to safety.

The bull came to a momentary standstill by the foot of the steps and glared round. It lowered its head again, and charged back towards Mr. Raiton.

So intent was everyone upon the infuriated animal that no one noticed a taxi-cab that came humming in at the gates and stopped by old Taggles' lodge.

The door opened, and the tall figure of Kildare stepped out into the quad, followed by a second figure.

Callao Garcia, the South American, had arrived at St. Jim's! But in the circumstances, no one even noticed his arrival.

The farmhands, armed with sticks, came racing into the quad. But they halted very dubiously within the gates, their excited eyes fixed upon the bull as it thundered to and fro across the quad, driving stragglers before it in wild panic.

Mr. Raiton, with the bull's attention diverted from him for the time being, could have sought safety had he liked. But the Housemaster had no intention of saving himself while some of the juniors were still in danger.

White-faced, but calm, he had snatched up a walking-stick that had been lying near the New House steps—the property of Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, who had emerged from his House just in time to see the bull thunder in at the gates, and had dropped both hat and stick as he had bolted back to safety.

A Third Form fag had emerged from Mrs. Taggles' little tuckshop to see what the excitement was about. It was Wally D'Arcy of the Third. Mr. Raiton shouted to him. But already, before the fag had time to realise his danger, the bull was swerving in one of its mad rushes towards the figure of Wally.

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing by the School House doorway, saw his minor's danger at the same moment that Mr. Raiton did. Without hesitation, the swell of St. Jim's fought his way through the excited crowd, and went racing across the quad towards his startled minor.

(Continued on next page.)



The Oracle sends his greetings to all readers of the GEM and requests them to drink his health in foaming ginger pop at 7.56 p.m. on Christmas Day, when he will return the compliment.

And, adds our whiskery wonder, don't overdo the knife-and-fork exercise!

Q.—What is an insinuation?

A.—It means, "Rustic Lad," to convey a remark in an indirect manner, otherwise, to hint obliquely. For example, if a chap came along one of your country roads and told you to pull your cap well down over your head because there was a woodpecker flying about near—well, he would be insinuating! Yes, "Rustic Lad," he would be "casting nasty nasturtiums," as our office-boy puts it in his malaprop way. Sorry I have mislaid your letter, so cannot remember the other fifty-odd questions. So glad though that "Cold brown cow" has got over the green-fly, or whatever was the matter with her.

Q.—Who was Carl Linnæus?

A.—A great Swedish scientist, Wilfred N. He has been called the father of botany, for his amazing task in life was to provide names for all known plants in the world. Until his time few plants had names at all, and those that had, were of purely local origin. So Linnæus set to work to give Latin names to all, and incidentally provide schoolboys with yet more knowledge to acquire!

Q.—Why does a glow-worm shine?

A.—My aunt! Some of the queries this week are fair teasers! It's lucky I know something about worms in general, including that frabjous species to which our office-boy belongs. However, "Nobby" Clark, of Worcester, where the sauce comes from, here goes to answer your question: The glow-worm is the female of the species and switches on her little "lantern" for the purpose of attracting the male—the fire-fly—which she is able to see dancing like a spark in the air overhead.

Q.—What is a dhobie?

A. This is the Indian name for a washerman, F. C. N., of Newcastle. The dhobie's method of "washing" clothes, is weird and wonderful. Having thrown them all into a muddy river, or equally colourful

water in a huge tub, he takes them out, one by one, and proceeds to hammer them with great gusto against rough stones. The remnants of the washing are afterwards handed back to the lucky owner, plus rents and minus buttons. From washing done by natives you may also acquire an extremely irritating kind of skin disease which is known as "dhobie's rash." Dhobies are just one of the many minor trials of life to residents in the East, and are accepted as such.

Q.—Who coined the expression "blowing like a grampus"?

A.—The poet, Kipling.

Q.—What is a fathead?

A.—Bobby Jones, of Glamorgan, who sent in this strange question, begs me not to try and be funny about the human species as he shares a study with three. No; it is not the human "fathead" he has in mind, but he says he has heard there is actually a "fish or something" that is known by this apparently uncomplimentary name. That is quite true, Bobby. It is the common name for the Californian fish, Pimelometopon pulcher. Glad to hear that by your diligence as a fag you have earned the right to drink the loft-over sardine oil after the prefects' study feeds. You should put on weight, but mind you don't put on "side"!

Q.—What is a malapropism?

A.—The ludicrous misuse of a word, R.J., of Leicester, especially a mistake for one resembling it. For example, the office-boy came in the other morning and said: "A fellow told me there was an awful pandemonium in the hall down the street, but I can't stick 'em. I prefer the piano myself." Yes, of course, the young ignoramus had "harmonium" at the back of his mind. He also always talks about an allegation as an "alligator." The word, malapropism, originated from a character in Sheridan's "Rivals" named Mrs. Malaprop, who misused her words.

Q.—Can a little 'un become taller?

A.—An adult reader who has signed himself "Stopped Growing" has written to propound the query: "Can I do anything to become a few inches taller?" Yes, chum—stand on a stool!



This useful-looking weapon is a dhar as used by the Burmese and Siamese.

Q.—What is a dhar?

A.—A sword of the sort used in Burma and Siam, resembling in appearance the old-time sword of Japan.

Q.—Which tree rivals the elephant for ivory?

A.—Here you've got me whacked, "A Reader for Seven Years," but I know a tree that rivals our office-boy's dog in the quantity of its bark! No, I have heard of trees that supply gum, bread, rubber, butter, and cabbages, but none that duplicates ivory. Still, if any reader can supply a better answer to our chum I should be glad to hear from him.

Q.—What is the Spectre of Brocken?

A.—Johnny Doan, of Berwick, has heard the expression and wants to know what it means. Firstly, the Brocken means the Brocken Mountain in the Hartz Range of Germany, and the Spectre refers to the curious phenomenon that can often be seen on the summit. At favourable times, the shadow of a tourist at the top of the mountain is thrown in gigantic proportions on the mist, giving a most uncanny and ghostly effect.



This is the Spectre of Brocken, and what it means the Oracle explains above.
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Wally, dazed by the sudden realisation of his danger, seemed rooted to the spot, his eyes fixed staringly upon the onrushing bull, as it careered towards him.

"Look out, Wally!"

The yell of St. Jim's voice was strained and hoarse. But already Mr. Railton was running to intercept the bull.

The Housemaster dashed between Wally and the crazed animal, and stood unflinchingly in its path. Armed only with a light walking-stick, he was in dreadful danger. But he stood firm, the stick raised.

Wally, suddenly gathering his wits together, turned and bolted. Mr. Railton, with the bull almost on him, stepped coolly aside the moment he realised that the fag was safely within the tuckshop, with the door closed.

The bull swerved, and again the Housemaster sprang aside, aiming a powerful blow with the stick at the animal's head. But the stick broke across one of the horns uselessly, and the next instant Mr. Railton was down.

One of the massive shoulders of the rushing beast had struck him, sending him crashing to the ground.

Cries of horror came from the onlookers. Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther, Talbot, Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and one or two others went racing to the master's assistance, as the bull halted and turned.

Mr. Railton tried to rise. But his ankle had been twisted under him in his fall, and he sank down again.

"I'll get him!" breathed Levison of the Fourth, his face deathly white.

It was quite clear that the juniors running to the Housemaster's assistance from across the quad would not be in time to distract the mad animal's attention from the figure on the ground. It was pounding towards Mr. Railton at terrific speed, its head down, its terrible horns sweeping along within a foot of the gravel, its bloodshot eyes wild and glaring, its breath steaming in the wintry air.

And then an unexpected thing happened.

No one had noticed the arrival of Kildare and his companion—there had been no time to think of anything but the maddened beast in the quad.

But a sudden lithe figure leapt in front of Mr. Railton—a panther-like figure, with black eyes gleaming from an olive face. For some moments no one realised who it was. Then Tom Merry caught sight of Kildare; and he understood.

"Garcia!"

In one hand Garcia was holding a queer-looking walking-stick. Over his arm was a fluttering red cloth.

It was a lucky thing that old Taggles had spilt some tea over a red tablecloth that morning, and after washing it had hung it out on one of his window-sills to dry! Garcia had snatched up the crimson cloth—and he knew how to use it!

That the South American knew something of bull-fights was soon obvious. No doubt he had witnessed many in his time.

As the bull thundered towards him, he waved the crimson cloth in its face, and snatched it aside. The bull, enraged by the hated colour, swerved blunderingly, and turned in pursuit. A gasp of relief went up as it was seen that Mr. Railton was safe for the time being—and in a few moments he had been lifted by Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the others who had rushed to his rescue, and borne away to safety.

All eyes were fixed on the panther-like figure of Garcia!

There was a gleaming smile on the face of the South American.

That Garcia had been carrying a walking-stick had rather surprised Kildare when he had met the Rioguyan youngster at the station. But now he understood what that walking-stick really was! As he watched, he saw Garcia snatch at the handle. A gleaming ribbon of steel appeared. It was a sword-stick that the South American boy had been carrying!

Tossing aside the useless portion, Garcia stood coolly smiling, every muscle on the alert, the shining sword in his right hand, the fluttering crimson cloth in the other, as the bull again rushed towards him.

"Great pip!" breathed Blake. "Look!"

One or two of the St. Jim's fellows, no doubt, had travelled in Spain, and there seen a bull-fight. But even they had never expected to see a real bull-fight in the old quad at St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 5.

The Boy Bull-Fighter!

FOR a brief instant, Garcia swept a smiling glance round at the onlookers.

He had certainly a good audience for his daring display! Crowds were gathered by the doorways of the two Houses, and there seemed to be faces at almost every window. By the gates, the group of breathless farmhands were watching in amazement.

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Again the red cloth fluttered in the bull's face, as Garcia stepped nimbly aside from its powerful rush.

The animal was in a raging temper now, aroused to the limit by the hated colour of old Taggles' tablecloth! It swung round, and charged again.

With agile grace, Garcia danced before it, flourishing the crimson cloth before its eyes. As yet he had made no attempt to use the glittering sword—evidently he was enjoying the thrill of playing with the maddened beast.

Breathlessly, the watching St. Jim's fellows, juniors and seniors, watched, fascinated.

With tossing head and steaming breath, its hooves pounding thunderously on the gravel, the bull swerved and rushed and charged again and again in pursuit of the lithe figure of its foe.

There was still a flashing smile on the face of the South American. He waved his sword to the onlookers. That he was "showing off" in true matador's style, was obvious. All the thrill of the bull-ring was rousing his Spanish blood.

One slip on the treacherous gravel, and Garcia was done for. Those cruel horns if ever they reached his body, would mangle him terribly, kill him mercilessly. But he did not slip! With amazing grace and agility, he played with the bull like a professional toreador. The crimson cloth fluttered and danced in the air, as he sprang from side to side, his black eyes gleaming.

"My hat!" breathed Blake, watching from the School House steps. "He's a cool customer!"

The South American, well aware of the sensation he was causing, decided at last to finish the combat. Flinging the crimson cloth over his shoulder, he danced round into the path of the mad bull as it thundered over the gravel.

And this time he did not spring aside!

Lightly poised, he coolly awaited its charge, the sword glittering in his hand.

Tom Merry, watching at the end of the crowd by the School House steps, held his breath.

He realised that Garcia meant to kill the animal in the manner of the Spanish bull-fighters—with a thrust of the sword in the fatal spot as the animal reached him. That meant that Garcia would have to stand his ground till those great horns were within inches of him—till he was almost standing between them. And then, if he missed the fatal spot that he must find to make the animal drop dead in its tracks, he would be at the bull's mercy.

"Look!" gasped Digby excitedly. "He'll be tossed!"

It certainly looked like it. The bull was almost on him, but Garcia was still standing his ground. The sword was raised, and as the curving horns swept on to him, the glittering steel darted down, swift and true.

Tom Merry shut his eyes. Though the brute was mad and would have had to be killed in any case, he did not want to see its finish. When he opened his eyes again the animal was lying dead, where it had dropped in its tracks at the feet of Callao Garcia.

A deathly silence filled the quad for several seconds. Then it was shattered by a storm of shouting.

Garcia, sword in hand, bowed smilingly, and came across in a leisurely, lounging way towards the School House steps. He swept the crowd of breathless juniors with his gleaming dark eyes.

"Good-day, senores!" he murmured in a soft, silky voice. His white teeth flashed in his handsome, swarthy face.

"El toro—the bull—he has met his match!"

There was an almost insolent pride in his manner as he bowed again.

Without doubt, Callao Garcia, the son of the President of the South American Republic of Rioguyan, had already proved himself a startlingly queer customer to be a junior at St. Jim's!

"Seen Garcia?"

It was Eric Kildare who asked that question.

Kildare had put his head in at the door of the junior Common-room after classes that afternoon. A big crowd of juniors were gathered in the room, and they had been excitedly discussing the amazing arrival of the boy from Rioguyan.

No one answered Kildare, for no one had seen Garcia.

The South American had not appeared in class that afternoon. When the Shell had been filing into their Form-room after dinner, Garcia had been taken to the Head by Mr. Railton—the Housemaster walking with the aid of a stick, for his ankle was still painful from his fall when he had been knocked down in the quad by the mad bull. Since then no one had seen the South American.

"No one seen him?" exclaimed Kildare.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. He wasn't in Form this afternoon."

Kildare turned to go. Then he paused, glancing at Tom.

"Come along with me, will you, Merry? I want to introduce you to Garcia—when I find him. I didn't get a chance this morning, as you know!"

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry followed Kildare from the Common-room, leaving the rest of the occupants of the Common-room to continue their excited discussion about the amazing arrival that morning of the boy from South America.

There was a faint frown on Kildare's face as he and the captain of the Shell moved towards the stairs.

"We'd better look in his study first, I suppose," said Kildare. "He's been put into No. 12 at the end of the Shell passage by himself, the Head tells me."

Tom nodded.

"He seems a queer customer," he remarked, with a smile.

"He does!" agreed Kildare, his frown returning. "A dickens of a queer customer for St. Jim's to handle!"

"He's got pluck enough for a dozen, anyway!" grinned



All eyes were fixed on the panther-like figure of Callao Garcia. As the bull thundered towards him the South American junior waved the crimson cloth in his face, and then snatched it aside. Enraged by the hated colour, the bull swerved blunderingly, and a gasp of relief went up as it was seen that Mr. Railton was saved!



Tom. "But for him Mr. Railton would have been gored by that beast of a bull in the quad!"

"That's so," nodded Kildare, ascending the stairs at Tom's side. "But—well, a fellow who comes to St. Jim's carrying a sword-stick isn't exactly usual! Of course, considering his upbringing in a country like Rioguary, it's not surprising. But evidently Garcia has got a lot to learn about England. As it happens, it was lucky he had that thing with him, but he'll have to realise that sword-sticks and all that sort of thing aren't the thing at St. Jim's!"

"Rather not!" grinned Tom.

"The Head tells me he's taken that sword-stick from him," said Kildare. "But he's a bit worried, I fancy. He's wondering what Garcia will be up to next, I suppose!"

"Oh, he'll settle down all right!" said Tom encouragingly.

"Well, I hope so! I want you to see that he doesn't try any South American stuff on in the Shell, that's all."

And Kildare laughed, though rather doubtfully.

They reached the Shell passage, and went along towards the study at the far end. The passage was empty—all the Shell fellows were down in the Common-room, discussing Garcia.

Kildare halted outside the door of Study No. 12 and knocked upon it.

"Come in!"

It was the silky voice of the South American that answered. Evidently they had come to the right place in their search for him. Kildare pushed open the door.

The captain of St. Jim's stepped into the study. Tom, about to follow, heard a startled exclamation from the Sixth-Former.

At the same moment a heavy, pungent aroma reached Tom Merry's nostrils.

He stared past Kildare into the study.

The lithe, handsome figure of Garcia was lounging in a chair by the fire. The South American had turned his dark, smouldering eyes towards the door, utterly unconcerned.

And in his mouth he held a long black South American cheroot, with smoke curling from between his lips.

CHAPTER 6.

A Shock for Kildare!

"MY hat!"

Tom Merry gave a gasp.

Though one or two of the black sheep of St. Jim's, such as Aubrey Racke & Co., were known sometimes to indulge in the forbidden habit of cigarette-smoking for the sake of being "blades" and "gay dogs" in their own estimation, Tom Merry had never in his life seen a junior in the Shell smoking a black cheroot! Let alone smoking it with cool unconcern in the presence of the captain of St. Jim's!

Kildare was standing motionless, utterly staggered.

His face had gone dark.

Garcia rose slowly to his feet, puffing clouds of heavy

smoke from his lips. He removed the cheroot calmly, and gave his visitors a flashing smile and a bow.

Then he replaced it between his lips, holding it in gleaming teeth.

"Ah! It is Senior Kildare!" murmured the South American. "The nephew of the Ingles—the Englishman, Sir Napier Wynter! How do you do, Senior Kildare?"

Kildare seemed to wake from a dream. He closed the door of the study sharply, and took a couple of strides towards the South American.

Tom Merry watched with breathless interest.

He knew how Kildare detested the dingy habit of smoking among the juniors in the few cases where he came across it. But the captain of St. Jim's evidently realised that in dealing with Callao Garcia he could not act as though he were dealing with, say, Aubrey Racke.

"Garcia," he said sternly, "I know you are a stranger in this country, and do not know its customs. One of the things you will have to learn at St. Jim's is that you may not smoke those filthy things."

Garcia stared at him. His eyes glimmered.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's, had already made all that kind of thing clear to the South American that afternoon.

But Garcia came from a land where discipline was chiefly conspicuous by its absence. He knew that he was breaking one of the sternest school rules; but he did not care very much.

"I beg your pardon?" he purred, blowing a smoke-ring insolently to the ceiling.

"You heard what I said, Garcia!" retorted Kildare quietly. "Put that thing in the fire!"

Again the South American's eyes glimmered. But he still smiled.

"But why?" he queried softly.

"Because I tell you to!"

Garcia bowed.

"Senior Kildare," he murmured, and his eyes flashed darkly, "I hate to seem discourteous. But may I inquire by what right you command me?"

"Because I am captain of the school."

"Ah! The Senior Kildare is the captain of the school, eh?" purred Garcia. "Of course! Now I remember hearing so. Very well. But surely you will permit me to finish my cigar?"

His eyes were glittering. It was clear to Tom Merry that the South American keenly resented Kildare's interference. Beneath his smooth, smiling exterior Garcia's hot southern blood was boiling at what he felt to be the humiliation of being ordered by Kildare to throw his cheroot away.

Kildare's frown deepened.

He sensed the insolent defiance in the South American's manner, and he was not disposed to argue further. Whatever Garcia's nationality, he would have to learn that an order from a prefect had to be obeyed!

With a quick stride forward, Kildare reached out and snatched the cheroot from Garcia's smiling lips.

The captain tossed the smouldering weed into the fire, and turned again to the South American. As he did so, there was a sudden shout from Tom Merry.

"Look out!"

In a moment Tom was leaping at the Rioguyan.

The instant the cheroot had been snatched from his lips Garcia had seemed to change into a wild animal.

A snarl had appeared on his handsome face. His lithe, panther-like figure quivered, and his hand flashed within his jacket, to reappear the next moment with a glittering knife clenched in his slim fingers.

At Tom Merry's warning shout, Kildare turned swiftly. He gave a startled cry as he saw the dagger in Garcia's hand.

"You dog!"

The words seemed almost to be spat from Garcia's quivering lips. He sprang forward, his hand upraised. But before the knife could come flashing down, Tom Merry's fist crashed on the South American's jaw.

With a choking sound, Garcia reeled against the table. The knife slipped from his fingers.

Tom stooped to seize it. But Garcia was too quick for him. The South American snatched up the knife, with a torrent of Spanish curses streaming from his lips, and again lunged himself at Kildare.

"Carajo! You dog!"

But this time Kildare was ready for him. His hand shot out, grasping the wrist of the hand that held the knife.

"You young hound!" gasped Kildare.

With steely fingers, he bent the South American's wrist back, till, with a gasping cry, Garcia had to let the knife fall again. Tom Merry snatched it up.

It was a thin, evil-looking weapon, with a point as sharp as a needle's. Tom Merry pocketed it with a shudder.

"You young hound!" repeated Kildare, in a voice strangely harsh for the usually good-tempered captain of St. Jim's. "You tried to murder me!"

The glittering eyes of the South American flamed up into Kildare's.

"You insulted me!" he hissed.

Kildare released his grip on the Rioguyan's wrist, thrusting him back against the wall. Garcia stood quivering and glaring, his breath coming in quick pants. He looked like a wild animal, with his flaming eyes—so it seemed to Tom Merry.

Then in a moment his fury seemed to die away. A gleaming smile came back to his face. He shrugged his shoulders and laughed coolly.

"Your pardon, senior!" he murmured in his soft, silky voice. "A thousand pardons! I forgot for the moment that I was not in Rioguyan! In Rioguyan, to snatch a cigar from another's mouth would mean the death of one. But here in England, no doubt it is different."

"I'll say it is different!" ejaculated Tom Merry hotly.

Garcia's smiling eyes flashed in his direction for a moment, then returned to Kildare's set, grim face.

"Give me that knife, Merry!" said Kildare in a quiet tone.

Tom handed him the sinister weapon, and the captain of St. Jim's stooped over the grate. Pressing the point against the tiles, he snapped the blade in two and tossed the pieces into the flames.

Again Garcia shrugged.

"Got any more knives on you?" asked Kildare.

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Garcia smiled and shook his head.

"Very well. I'll believe you." Kildare fixed the South American junior with a stern look. "Now, understand once and for all that in England you can't use knives! We use fists over here, when necessary. That dagger business is rotten!"

"It depends on the country in which one is," murmured Garcia indifferently.

"Well, you'd better remember you're in England now, as I say!" snapped Kildare. "I realise that you are a South American, and look at things differently, and I'll make allowances. You lost your temper, too—you'll have to learn to control it better at St. Jim's."

"I apologise!" said Garcia purringly. But there was a faint, mocking note in his voice that Tom Merry was quick to notice.

"In the circumstances, I shall say nothing of what has taken place in this study," went on Kildare quietly. "If the Head knew you had tackled me in that manner he would probably kick you out of the school. I don't want that to happen, for your own sake and for the sake of my uncle, Sir Napier Wynter, who had you sent here. Though I don't suppose the Head would, I'll give you another chance."

"Gracias! Thank you!" smiled Garcia, with glimmering eyes.

"But if anything like this happens again I shall be forced to let the Head know," said Kildare. "Understand? No more of this hot-blooded nonsense, Garcia!"

"I understand," nodded Garcia. "I am sorry for this. It—it shall not happen again, I promise."

Quite suddenly the South American was almost cringing. Apparently the realisation that a repetition of his un-English behaviour would probably mean expulsion from St. Jim's, had frightened him. He laid a hand quickly on Kildare's arm.

"It shall not happen again," he repeated.

"Good!"

Kildare held out his hand. Garcia took it.

"Now we understand one another, I hope," said the captain of St. Jim's in a friendly tone.

He turned to Tom Merry.

"Garcia, I want to introduce you to Tom Merry, the captain of the Form you are in—the Shell! He'll help you learn the ropes here."

Garcia, smiling silkily, held out his hand to Tom, who took it readily enough. The dark eyes of the Rioguyan gleamed into his.

Tom grinned.

Despite the startling scene that had just taken place in the study, Tom Merry had by no means forgotten that Garcia had probably saved Mr. Railton's life in the quad that morning.

"What about coming along to tea in my study, Garcia?" he suggested. "It's time for tea now."

"I shall be honoured!" murmured the South American. "First I have to see Mr. Railton; then I will come to your room."

"That's fine! Study No. 10—next door but one."

"Excellent!" smiled Garcia.

Kildare opened the door, and the captain of St. Jim's and Tom Merry left the room, Kildare turning in the direction of the stairs, Tom going towards Study No. 10.

A moment later the captain called Tom back.

"Don't say anything about that knife business," he muttered. "Tell your chums if you want to, of course, but don't let it get around. It wouldn't do Garcia any good, and I want to make things as easy as possible for him here, so that he can settle down."

"Right-ho!" nodded Tom.

"I think he realises now that he made an ass of himself," Kildare said, with a slight smile. "It was just a fit of temper, in true South American style. I don't suppose he meant to do me any real harm for a moment."

With a nod Kildare went his way.

But could the captain of St. Jim's have seen the look on the handsome, swarthy face of Callao Garcia, as the South American stood staring down at the red-hot remains of his broken knife amid the flaming coals of his study fire, Eric Kildare might have changed his opinion.

"The dog!" Garcia was muttering to himself again and again in Spanish. "The dog!"

CHAPTER 7.

A Lesson for Racke!

"I SAY! Have you heard?"

Baggy Trimble, the fat Paul Fry of the Fourth, burst excitedly into the Common-room with that breathless question.

A group of juniors by the fire glanced at Baggy.

"What's up with you, porpoise?" inquired Jack Blake, who was busy playing chess with Herries.

"About Garcia!" squeaked Baggy excitedly.

As a rule, when Baggy had news to spread no one was particularly interested. Baggy's rumours so often consisted of empty tittle-tattle. But at the name of the South American junior the fellows all turned their attention to Baggy instantly.

"What about Garcia?" demanded Kangaroo, the Australian junior sharply.

"He, he, he!" Baggy giggled breathlessly. "What do you think? The blessed dago tried to knife Kildare."

An utter silence followed his words. Then Talbot strode forward and grasped Baggy by the collar.

"Is this one of your yarns, Baggy?" he demanded grimly. "No! Ow! Leggo! It's true!" howled Baggy. "He tried to stick a dagger in Kildare!"

"Wh-a-at!" gasped Digby incredulously. "Gammon!"

"Baggy's making it up!" growled Herries. "Kick him, somebody!"

Baggy gave a startled squeal.

"Ow! Don't be a beast, Herries! I tell you it's true!"

There was no doubting the ring of conviction in the tones of the Falstaff of the Fourth. Talbot let go his hold on Baggy's collar, staring at him in amazement.

"Great pip!"

The juniors stared at one another. So great was their interest now that Blake and Herries left their game to join the excited crowd that was forming up around the Paul Pry of the Fourth.

"How do you know, you fat frog?" demanded Levison of the Fourth, still suspicious.

"Ahem!" Baggy coughed. "I happened to stoop to pick up a pencil I'd dropped just outside Study No. 10—Tom Merry's study, you know."

"I see, eavesdroppin' again," drawled Cardew of the Fourth.

"Oh, really, Cardew!" Baggy blinked at the slacker of the Fourth in an injured way. "As I was picking up my pocket-knife—"

"It was a pencil just now," grinned Blake.

"Ahem! I dropped both a pencil and a pocket-knife, you see," explained Baggy hurriedly.

"Oh, stop fibbing!" snapped Talbot impatiently. "What's this about Garcia, anyway?"

"I heard Tom Merry telling Manners and Lowther, in their study," Baggy went on hastily. "Tom Merry had just been along to Garcia's study with Kildare. And the dago jolly well tried to knife Kildare, because Kildare pulled a blessed cigar out of his mouth."

"My hat!"

"A cigar—eh?" chuckled Aubrey Racke. "Great Scott! Garcia must be a goer."

"He, he, he! Rather!" sniggered Baggy, delighted at being the centre of interest for once. "Kildare didn't want it to be known—"

"That's why you're spreading it, I suppose?" put in Blake contemptuously.

"Oh, really, Blake, I consider that it's my duty to tell about it. A thing like that's serious, and ought not to be hushed up. Why, the chap's jolly well dangerous! He ought to be kicked out of the school. Fancy trying to knife a chap! It's the limit—"

"Hear, hear!" nodded Racke, with a sour smile at Blake & Co. "Baggy's right to tell us. Kildare hasn't any right to try to keep it dark. If Garcia is that sort of chap, the fellows ought to be on their guard. Why, he might try to knife one of us if he got the chance!"

"He wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole," said Blake shortly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke turned red and glared at Blake. But before he could speak the door of the Common-room swung open.

"Garcia!" breathed Levison.

The South American entered the Common-room with a smile on his handsome face. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were with him.

Tea was over in Study No. 10, and Tom Merry & Co., wishing to be friendly—though chiefly for Kildare's sake—had brought Garcia down to the Common-room. But from

the dead silence that greeted their entry the Terrible Three were quick to realise that there was something "in the wind."

"Hallo, you chaps!" said Tom quietly. He turned to Garcia. "Come along to the fire!"

In dead silence the South American junior crossed to the fire with the Terrible Three.

Aubrey Racke was the first to speak. He stepped forward with a sneer on his face.

"I say, Merry," he demanded coolly, "is it true that Garcia tried to knife Kildare a little while ago?"

Tom Merry stared at him dumbly.

Though Tom had told Manners and Lowther of the startling incident in Study No. 12, he had no idea that the secret was out. But faced as he was by the blunt question, it was impossible to deny the truth.

He looked swiftly at Garcia.

The South American was smiling easily. But somewhere deep in his dark eyes was a queer gleam as he stared at the sneering face of Aubrey Racke.

"Find out!" said Tom shortly.

"That's what I mean to do!"

Racke, always at enmity with Tom Merry & Co., was only too pleased at this chance of making Tom uncomfortable, for he realised that Tom Merry was disconcerted at finding the news common property already.

"That's what I mean to find out," repeated Racke, with a sneer. "I suppose you're trying to hush it up like Kildare? Well, it's not good enough."

"Rather not," sniggered Percy Mellish.

"If Garcia really tried to knife Kildare it ought to be known," went on Racke venomously, glancing at the coolly smiling South American. "I dunno why you should want to stick up for a rotten dago—"

A sudden, quick gasp from Garcia, the smile vanished from his face; his eyes glittered.

"Pardon!"

Garcia's voice was soft as silk as he stepped forward and faced Racke. Racke, looking suddenly a trifle nervous, moved back a pace.

"What did you call me?" purred Garcia.

Tom Merry stepped quickly forward. His face was red with wrath. But Garcia motioned him back.

"I will deal with him myself," he murmured silkily. "I think he called me a dago. I know enough of the English tongue to know that this is an insult. It is dangerous to insult so a Rioguyan."

"Yes, I did call you a dago!" cried Racke blusteringly. "And that's what you are—"

"So?" smiled Garcia; but it was a very dangerous smile.

He made a quick movement. Before Racke could escape, the South American had seized the black sheep of the Shell by the arm, and had twisted it behind his back. Racke gave a yell.

"Ow! Let me go!"

"I think not!" purred Garcia.

He twisted Racke's arm higher, holding it in a grip of steel. Racke struggled vainly, but he was powerless to escape.

"The little incident of the knife, to which you referred just now," said Garcia softly, "is true enough. I am an expert with the knife, my friend! You shall feel it!"

"Here, half a minute!" cried Talbot, in alarm.

He had taken a quick step forward. But Garcia closed one eye at him; and Talbot, realising that the South American had some jape in view, halted.

The next moment the juniors understood.

Holding the wriggling, frightened Racke with one hand, Garcia had taken from his pocket with the other hand a sharp pencil. He pressed the point against Racke's neck, and the black sheep of the Shell gave a howl of terror.

"Help! He's got a knife—"

"Hush!" purred Garcia. "Keep still, my friend, or it will be the worse for you!"

With beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead,

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Racke ceased his struggles. With the point of the pencil pressing against his neck, feeling just like the point of a dagger, Racke dared not disobey.

He rolled his eyes round pleadingly. But the other juniors were very careful that he did not see their grins.

"Now, my friend," murmured Garcia in his ear, "suppose I drive the knife home in your neck for your insult to me?"

He pressed the sharp pencil-point a little harder against the flesh, and Racke gave a strangled cry.

The juniors grinned. Racke's abject terror was funny to them, seeing that it was no more than a lead pencil that Garcia held.

Crooke and Mellish glanced round nervously. They dared not warn their leader that he was being fooled; they knew that the consequences might prove painful to them if they did!

"T-t-take that knife away!" stammered Racke hoarsely, licking his dry lips.

"You apologise for calling me—what was it?—a dago?" inquired Garcia softly.

"Yes!" gasped Racke, almost sobbing with fright.

"You will never dare to call me that again, my friend?"

"Never!" breathed Racke hoarsely. "I swear it!"

"That is excellent! And now you will admit before all these gentlemen that you are nothing better than a dog?" purred the South American, pressing the pencil-point a little harder against his victim's neck.

"Y-yes!" In his terror there was nothing that Racke would not have admitted.

"Say it, then!" commanded Garcia in a hissing tone.

"I—I am no better than a dog!" quavered Racke, his face as white as paper.

"Excellent! I let you go!" smiled Garcia.

He released Racke, and the black sheep of the Shell tottered away from him. He turned his head; and then his jaw dropped.

Racke had expected to see a glittering stiletto in the South American's hand.

The sight of a long lead pencil in Garcia's slender fingers caused his eyes almost to pop from their sockets. He gazed at it, stupefied—and slowly the realisation came to Aubrey Racke that he had been fooled.

"G-G-Great Scott!"

A shriek of laughter filled the Common-room. The juniors yelled and roared. Racke passed a hand dazedly across his eyes.

"A—a p-pencil!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Slowly the colour came back to Racke's face. His cheeks went crimson. The South American junior smiled at him slyly, and quietly returned the pencil to his pocket.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Tom Merry wiped his eyes. "So you're no better than a dog, eh, Racke? Well, you ought to know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

For a moment it looked as though Aubrey Racke would fling himself at the smiling South American; then he thought better of it. He realised that Garcia would make a dangerous enemy.

With a speechless glare at the shrieking juniors, the black sheep of the Shell slunk from the Common-room.

"What a scream!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Manners. "Poor old Racke!"

It was a long while before the laughter in the Common-room subsided. The juniors gathered round Tom Merry & Co. and Garcia. There was no doubt that for the moment, at any rate, the boy from South America had made himself popular by his discomfiture of Aubrey Racke.

No one referred to the startling story of his attempt to knife the captain of St. Jim's. There was a general feeling that it might be safer not to.

But as soon as Garcia, coolly smiling, left the Common-room with the Terrible Three an excited babel of talk broke out.

That Baggy Trimble's story was true enough was evident from the fact that Tom Merry had not denied it. And the knowledge had staggered the juniors.

"Phew! What a chap!" muttered Blake.

"I considah he is wathah a dangewous customah to have at St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, shaking his noble head.

"I'll say he is!" grinned Talbot.

"Thank goodness we're breaking up jolly soon!" remarked Levison, with a chuckle. "Blowed if I feel safe at the school with a chap like that about! Let's hope he'll have quietened down by next term!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

"I say, you chaps," exclaimed Baggy Trimble nervously, "THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,138."

"don't let on it was me that told you about him trying to knife Kildare! He—he might not like it! He might jolly well try to knife me, you know!"

Blake chuckled. "Rats! I don't suppose Garcia goes in for pig-sticking, Baggy!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"It would be rather interestin' to see Garcia stick a knife into Baggy, when you come to think of it, what?" drawled Cardew. "Would Baggy burst like a balloon, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble snorted and glared at Cardew and the grinning juniors, and rolled sulkily from the room, leaving the juniors still busily discussing the great topic of the day—Callao Garcia of the Shell!

CHAPTER 8.

The Captain's Uncle!

"SNOW!"

"My hat, yes!"

"Oh, good!"

It was Saturday morning—two days later—and the St. Jim's fellows were at work in their various Form-rooms.

Ever since breakfast the sky had been leaden and overcast, promising snow. And at last it had come! Big, lazy flakes were drifting down through the still, cold air.

Through the window of the Fourth Form room Blake had been the first to catch sight of the falling snow. He had nudged Herries, with a whispered word; and Herries, in turn, had nudged Digby, drawing his chum's attention to the white flakes that could be seen falling in the quad.

Soon the whole Form was whispering and stirring, their eyes going eagerly to the window. Already the snow was coming down faster, settling on the window-sills of the New House opposite, and covering the gravel in the quad with a white carpet.

By the time the juniors were dismissed from the Form-room, the quad was covered in gleaming whiteness, and the snow was still falling heavily. The sky was dark with it.

Throughout dinner in Hall, the snowflakes were falling softly against the window in ever increasing quantities.

There looked like being some fun in the quad that afternoon!

Dinner over, the School House juniors trooped out joyfully into the swirling snow.

They were waiting for Figgins & Co., and the New House juniors did not keep them waiting long! Figgins and his followers came hurrying out of the New House in a body, ready for trouble—and they soon got it!

In another minute after their appearance, a wild and whirling fight was raging in the quad.

Whiz, whiz!

"Oh! Yow!"

"Yaroooop!"

Snowballs were flying to and fro, and there were gasps and yells from the juniors who got in the way!

"Back up, School House!"

"On the ball, New House!"

"Hurrah!"

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Tom Merry gave a gasp as a snowball landed in his face, almost knocking him over. He wiped the liquid snow hastily from his eyes, and saw the grinning face of George Figgins near him. Snatching

up a handful of snow and pressing it into a tight ball, Tom flung it with all his force.

Figgins, about to follow up his first snowball with a second, took Tom's missile on the nose and tumbled into the snow with a yell.

Tom chuckled, and turned his attentions to Redfern, of the New House, who had got Digby down and was stuffing

handfuls of snow down his neck. A well-aimed snowball from Tom Merry turned Redfern's attention from his victim, however, and Digby was rolling Reddy in the snow in another moment, and getting his own back with a vengeance.

"Bai Jove! Yawoooooop!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a howl as a snowball from the hand of Fatty Wynn of the New House smote him in the middle of his elegant waistcoat. The swell of St. Jim's doubled up with a gasp. A few seconds later it was Fatty Wynn's turn to gasp, however, as he slipped over in the snow and was promptly smothered in it by Kangaroo and Talbot of the Shell.

The fight waxed fast and furious!

To and fro over the trampled snow the juniors surged



with excited whoops and yells, while snowballs whizzed like hail!

Figgins & Co. were outnumbered badly, but they put up a lusty fight for a long while. But in the end odds were bound to tell. The New House fellows were routed at last, and were driven in scattered groups to the shelter of their House, leaving the School House juniors in triumphant possession of the quad.

With a triumphant cheer Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and the others looked around for fresh victims.

"Hallo! Who's this?"

Tom Merry gave a sudden exclamation. He was peering towards the gates.

A tall figure, its overcoat collar turned up about its ears, had come tramping into the quad from the road, and was standing looking round him doubtfully.

"Give him a snowball!" grinned Gore.

"Rats!" snapped Tom Merry. "It's a visitor. Looks like somebody's pater, if you ask me."

"Thanks very much!"

Tom turned and led the way towards the School House steps. Kildare's uncle followed, watched by many interested eyes.

"You youngsters seem to have been having a fine time in the snow!" laughed Sir Napier, eyeing Tom's smothered clothing with a humorous gleam in his eyes as they entered the Hall. He shivered. "After a long spell in South America, this snow chills one a bit!"

Tom hastily knocked the snow from his clothes, and led the way up the stairs to the Shell passage. Outside the door of Study No. 12 he halted and tapped.

The purring voice of Garcia replied. Tom opened the door.



The man at the gates had caught sight of the swarm of juniors. He turned in their direction.

As he drew nearer, Tom Merry made out a strong, good-humoured face, whipped to a glow by the whirling snowflakes. The tall stranger halted.

"I wonder if you can tell me where I can find Kildare, of the Sixth?"

The stranger had a deep, pleasant voice. His eyes, grey and keen, were singularly attractive.

"Kildare, sir? I'm afraid he's gone out, sir. I saw him going out of gates soon after dinner," answered Tom, lifting his cap. "I dare say he'll be back soon, though."

The tall man gave an exclamation of disappointment.

"I'm sorry. Still, it's my own fault. I ought to have sent him a wire to let him know I was coming. I meant to, but it slipped my mind. I am his uncle."

"Not Sir Napier Wynter?" exclaimed Tom.

The stranger nodded and smiled.

"Yes! How did you know that?"

"I knew Kildare was expecting his uncle at the school before break-up," explained Tom. "He mentioned you to me, you see, about Garcia—"

"Ah, yes, Garcia!" cut in Sir Napier quickly. "I want to see him, too."

"I'll take you to his study, sir!"

"Here you are, sir!"

"Thanks very much, my boy!"

With a friendly nod, Sir Napier Wynter strode into the study. Tom Merry heard an exclamation from Garcia as he closed the door.

"What a topping chap Kildare's uncle looks!" Tom told himself, as he retraced his steps towards the stairs.

As he hurried downstairs and out into the quad again Tom Merry would have been amazed to know of the strange adventures that were in store for him and his chums in the company of the man he had just left with Garcia in Study No. 12!

CHAPTER 9.

The Sign in the Snow!

"SNOW'S stopping!"

Blake made that remark, staring into the quad from the window of Tom Merry's study.

It was tea-time, and Blake & Co. and Talbot had been invited to tea in Study No. 10.

The Terrible Three were in funds, and a cheery meal was in process of preparation.

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Tom Merry was boiling some eggs. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was making toast. Manners and Lowther were busy emptying tipped fruit into a couple of dishes, and Herries was opening a tin of sardines. Digby was pouring boiling water into the biggest teapot the Terrible Three possessed, while Talbot put in the tea.

Blake alone had been unable to find a job. He had gone to the window, where darkness had fallen with wintry suddenness.

"Snow's stopping!" he repeated. "By Jove, look at the old moon!"

A gleaming moon was flooding the snow in the quad with a light almost like that of day.

Blake turned from the window. The crisp smell of toast was filling the study with a pleasant aroma. Appetites were raging in Study No. 10 just then, and the smell of the toast was making Tom Merry and his chums feel more hungry than ever.

Tom Merry took the eggs off the fire, and found egg-cups for them. A sudden thoughtful look came into his face.

"I wonder if Kildare's back yet?" he exclaimed.

"Why, what about it?" asked Manners.

"If he isn't back, p'raps his uncle might like to have tea with us?" suggested Tom. "He and Garcia might as well come along here, instead of teeing alone in Study No. 12. I'll go and see."

Tom left the study and went along to Study No. 12. Garcia's voice bade him enter as he knocked upon the door. Garcia and Sir Napier Wynter were alone in the room, evidently deep in talk.

"Excuse my butting in," grinned Tom. "But we're just starting tea in Study No. 10. Thought you might like to join us, sir. You and Garcia. If Kildare is not back, that is."

"No, he is not back yet," answered Sir Napier, with a smile. "Jolly kind of you to ask us! Eh, Garcia?"

"Most!" murmured Garcia. "We shall be delighted!"

"Rather!" nodded Sir Napier, rising to his feet.

"Good egg!" grinned Tom. "This way, sir."

He led Kildare's uncle and the South American junior to the next study but one and opened the door.

Two more chairs had to be borrowed, and Talbot fetched them from his study. Two minutes later the big party was sitting down round the well-laden table in Study No. 10.

Now that he was without his hat and his heavy coat, Sir Napier Wynter was seen to be a tall, lean, athletic-looking man, with a tanned face and slightly greying hair. He soon made himself a general favourite, and the juniors listened with wrapt attention to his stories of adventures all over the world.

"You've only just got back from Rioguary, haven't you, sir?" asked Blake.

Kildare's uncle nodded.

"Landed yesterday."

"There was a revolution out there while you were there, wasn't there, sir?" put in Herries eagerly.

The next moment he rather wished he had not spoken, as he remembered that Garcia's father was the President against whom the revolution had been planned. But Garcia laughed softly and answered for Sir Napier.

"Yes; and thanks to him it was defeated!" smiled Garcia.

It seemed to Tom Merry, watching the South American's face, that there was a queer, veiled gleam in the eyes of Garcia as he spoke—a look that, though almost hidden, seemed somehow to belie the smile upon his face.

"I say, what happened in the revolution, sir?" queried Digby breathlessly.

Sir Napier glanced at Garcia. Then he shrugged.

"All sorts of things!" he answered, with a smile. "The revolutionaries attacked Santagua, the capital, but they never got it. We drove them back into the mountains, and in the end they surrendered, after a good deal of scrapping. Their leader was a scoundrel called El Lobo—that's Spanish for 'The Wolf.' It's a good name for him! Unfortunately, he escaped; we never knew where he got to."

"The Wolf, eh?" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, sir, it must have been frightfully excitin'!"

"It was exciting all right, while it lasted!" agreed Sir Napier, with a smile.

"Do you think they'll ever catch him?" asked Talbot.

"Whom—the Wolf?" Sir Napier shrugged his shoulders. There was rather a queer look in his face. "Perhaps he will be caught yet. Who knows?"

He changed the subject—rather abruptly, it seemed to Tom Merry—and asked questions about St. Jim's. The talk continued cheerfully, till at last tea was over.

"Now, I wonder when my nephew, Kildare, will be back?" said Sir Napier, glancing at his watch as he rose to his feet.

He crossed to the window and stared out into the bright moonlight of the snow-filled quad.

The snow sparkled like diamonds on the window-sills of

the old grey buildings and along the gabled roofs. The glow of lighted windows shone cheerfully out over the white carpet of snow that covered the quad. It was very smooth; the heavy fall, that had only stopped a short while ago, had almost blotted out even the trampled footmarks left from the big snow-fight between School House and New House during the afternoon.

From Sir Napier there broke a sudden, breathless cry.

Tom Merry & Co. turned, startled, and saw that their guest was staring down at the glistening snow immediately below their study window. His face had set like stone.

"What's up, sir?" cried Tom Merry quickly.

Already Garcia had hurried to Sir Napier's side, and was staring down intently at the snow under the window. From the South American junior, too, there broke a startled cry.

Filled with a vague alarm, Tom Merry darted to the window.

Manners and Lowther, Talbot, Blake, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy followed swiftly. Herries and Digby came crowding to the window with them. The juniors stared down, strangely startled, wondering what it could be that had so amazingly affected Kildare's uncle and the son of the President of Rioguary.

They soon knew.

Traced in the smooth expanse of untrodden snow beneath their window was a picture—a picture in the snow. The gaunt outline of a great wolf's head!

"What the dickens—" breathed Tom Merry.

"Gweat Scott!"

There was a strange light in the eyes of Callao Garcia.

"El Lobo!" he whispered. "It is his sign. He is here!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Tracks That Vanished!

"EL LOBO"—the Wolf!

In a flash the juniors recalled what Sir Napier had told them. The leader of the revolution in Rioguary was known as the Wolf. And here, traced in the snow of the old quad at St. Jim's by some mysterious hand, was the sign of a wolf's head! The lines were deep, as if traced with a thick stick.

The eyes of Kildare's uncle were incredibly startled.

"Good heavens!" Tom Merry heard him breathe.

He swung round on the captain of the Shell and gripped his arm.

"Quick!" he breathed. "We must find out who traced that sign!"

In another moment Sir Napier was crossing to the door with hasty strides. He swung it open and vanished into the passage. The juniors, after their first astonishment, sprang to life and hurried after him.

"That wolf's head wasn't there when we started tea!" declared Blake breathlessly. "I looked out into the quad, you know—it wasn't there then!"

"Caramba!" gasped Garcia, running with the others. "I tell you the Wolf must have been here!"

With Sir Napier leading the way, they hurried down the stairs, across the Hall, and out into the moonlit quad. Round the corner of the building they ran, Kildare's uncle covering the snow with swift, noiseless strides.

Before them, clear in the moonlight, lay the big outline that had so startled the occupants of Study No. 10.

"Look!" snapped Sir Napier. "See these footprints? Those are the marks of the man who traced the outline! We've got to follow them!"

It was easy enough to follow the tracks in the snow. They seemed to be those of a tall man, judging from the length of the stride. Tom Merry, with his Scout's training as patrol leader of the Eagle Patrol, soon realised that.

Across the bright stretches of moonlit snow Sir Napier and the juniors and the boy from South America hurried, following up the mysterious tracks. Past old Taggles' lodge they led, and out through the gates into the road.

"It wasn't just a St. Jim's chap!" muttered Blake excitedly. "It's not simply some silly jape!"

"Wathah not!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in a low, eager tone. "Besides, deah boy, how could any St. Jim's chap know about the Wolf? The chap that drew that wolf's head in the snow must have meant it as a warnin' to Sir Napier!"

The tracks led the hurrying little party round the bend of Rykcombe Lane. There, out of sight of the gates of St. Jim's, Sir Napier gave a swift exclamation.

"Look!"

He was pointing down at the snow.

The footprints that they had been following ceased abruptly. But the churned tyre-tracks of a car showed what had happened.

It was clear that the man who had traced that sinister outline in the snow had come to the school in a car, and had driven away in it as soon as his peculiar mission had been carried out.

"It can't have been long ago that he drove off—quarter of an hour at most!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Sir Napier nodded grimly.

"That's so. I'm going to follow these car-marks! Perhaps in the village I shall be able to find out some details of the car that drove through just now. Anyone coming with me?"

"Rather!"

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

"Yes, yes—I will come!" came the soft tones of Garcia. There was not a dissentient voice. In a body, Sir Napier and the juniors hurried on down the snowy lane.

It was easy enough to follow the tracks of the mysterious car for a while. But as they drew nearer the village, where the Wayland road joined the road to Rylcombe, the tracks of other cars, and the deep ruts left by farm-carts, joined with the footprints of pedestrians in obliterating the wheel-marks of the car they had been following.

Their task grew more and more difficult. At last they were forced to come to a halt.

"No good!" said Sir Napier laconically, with a shrug of his shoulders. "There have been too many people about for us to be able to follow that car, after all. We shall have to give it up, I'm afraid."

"Afraid so, sir," nodded Tom, frowning.

"What wotten luck!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's.

The little party turned and slowly retraced their steps towards the school.

Sir Napier was striding along in silence, a deep frown on his handsome face. The juniors were burning with questions, but none of them liked to put them into words. It was Garcia who spoke first.

"Senor," he muttered, "this is very strange! It can only mean one thing. The Wolf, or his men, are here in England—here at this school! What can it mean?"

"Who knows?" answered Sir Napier quietly.

But, despite his answer, from the look in his grey eyes Tom Merry felt convinced that Kildare's uncle knew very well the reason that had brought the agents of the leader of the Rioguanayan revolutionaries to St. Jim's that night.

As they drew near the gates a soft footfall in the snow behind them caused Blake to glance round. He gave a quick exclamation.

"Here's Kildare, sir!"

Eric Kildare was overtaking them. The captain of St. Jim's had been in Wayland, and was tramping back to the school in ignorance of the fact that his uncle was even in the neighbourhood. As he caught sight of the tall figure of Sir Napier now, he gave an eager exclamation of surprise.

"Uncle!"

"Eric!"

The pair gripped hands. Kildare's eyes were shining.

"By Jove! This is a pleasant surprise!" exclaimed the captain. "I'd no idea you were coming down to St. Jim's this afternoon! If I'd only known—"

"I ought to have let you know, Eric. But I have been well looked after!" Sir Napier's eyes glanced, smilingly, at Tom Merry & Co. "I've come to see Garcia. I've been asked by Dr. Holmes to stay the night."

"Good!" Then a puzzled look came into Kildare's eyes as he glanced from his uncle to the juniors. The fact that they were all hatless, and the look in their faces, bewildered him. "But what's up? Why—"

"What are we doing out here?" said Sir Napier, with a dry laugh. "Well, it's rather a queer story, Eric."

"There's nothing wrong?"

Kildare was staring at his uncle curiously.

"Not exactly."

Briefly Sir Napier explained, as Kildare fell in beside his uncle, and the party moved on towards the school gates. As they passed into the quad the captain of St. Jim's drew a deep breath.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "You really mean to say that you think these revolutionaries you were up against in South America have followed you to England for some reason, Uncle Napier?"

"I fancy they must have!"

"But why?" exclaimed Kildare sharply.

But his uncle only laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" he answered lightly, as they turned in the direction of the School House gateway, where a golden glow of light shone out over the snow. "Who knows?"

In the Hall, Sir Napier turned to Tom Merry & Co.

"I shall be seeing you again before I leave St. Jim's!" he exclaimed cheerily. "Thanks for the tea!"

With a nod, he turned away with Kildare. Taking Garcia with them, the captain and his uncle ascended the stairs on their way to Kildare's study, where, without doubt, they had a lot to talk about after Sir Napier's long absence abroad. The juniors looked at one another.

"Of all rum things—" breathed Talbot.

"That wolf's head in the snow takes the giddy biscuit," agreed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

But, despite that queer mystery, prep had to be done! Back in Study No. 10, the Terrible Three went to the window and stared out. The deeply marked outline of the wolf's head was still plainly to be seen in the snow below the window.

"What the dickens can it all mean?" muttered Manners.

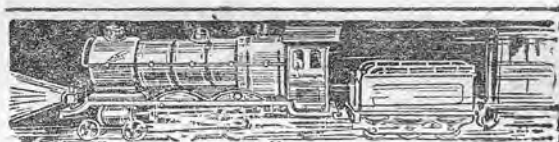
"It must mean something for Kildare's uncle to seem so worried over it," grunted Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes," he said slowly. "He didn't say much; but if you ask me, Sir Napier knows jolly well what it means! He's evidently sure enough that he's been followed to England by some revolutionaries he was up against in Rioguanay, and I believe he knows why they've followed him!"

"Phew!"

(Continued on next page.)



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And on Tom Merry's face, as he stared out into the glittering whiteness of the snowy quad, there was an anxious frown.

CHAPTER 11.

The Warning!

BOOM!

"One o'clock!" muttered Tom Merry. As the deep note of the school clock died away in the stillness of the night, utter silence reigned in the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry turned over restlessly. Somehow he was unable to sleep. He had dozed several times; but each time the puzzling thoughts that filled his mind over the mystery of the strange outline in the snow under the window of Study No. 10 brought him back to wakefulness.

Snow was falling again. He could see it swirling outside the long windows in the moonlight.

He closed his eyes in an effort to get to sleep. But when at last he began to feel drowsy again, a faint sound in the quiet of the dormitory caused him to open his eyes in utter astonishment.

He had heard the creak of the dormitory door.

"My hat!"

Tom Merry sat up, staring across towards the shadowy doorway.

The door was open, and he was just in time to see a dim figure slipping out of the dormitory into the dark passage beyond. The door creaked softly again as it closed behind the vanishing figure.

"What the dickens—"

Tom peered round. In the light that fell through the windows he could just make out a row of beds. One, by the door, was empty.

For a moment Tom could not remember whose bed it was. Then it came to him in a flash who was missing.

"Garcia!"

Why the South American should have left the dormitory in the dead of night was bewildering. But Garcia was new to St. Jim's. It was possible that he did not realise what a serious offence it was to leave the dormitory at night.

In a few seconds Tom was out of bed, slipping on his slippers and dressing-gown. He crossed swiftly towards the door, opened it cautiously, and stepped out into the passage.

A faint footfall somewhere down the stairs sent him hurrying in that direction.

"Garcia!" he breathed.

There was no reply. Evidently the South American had failed to hear his soft, warning whisper.

Tom did not dare call louder, for fear of disturbing a prefect. Pulling his dressing-gown around him, the captain of the Shell hurried noiselessly down the stairs in pursuit.

"The silly ass!" he muttered. "What the dickens is he up to?"

At the foot of the stairs, a faint sound caused him to turn in the direction of Mr. Railton's room. Past the House-master's door he crept, peering ahead in the gloom. But there was still no sign of Garcia.

"Where on earth's he got to?" breathed Tom.

To his left, a passage led to the room where, as Tom knew, Sir Napier Wynter was sleeping. It was from this direction that he again heard Garcia's faint footfalls.

Tom turned quickly along the passage, hurrying down it. Then he came to an abrupt halt.

A low exclamation of amazement escaped him.

Revealed by the dim light of a window opposite, the panther-like figure of Callao Garcia could be seen standing outside Sir Napier's door.

But the thing that caused Tom to stare in sheer staggered bewilderment was a sheet of white paper, pinned to Sir Napier's door by a thin dagger.

Garcia was standing there with a set face, his dark eyes reading the words scrawled on the paper. But suddenly, as if some instinct had told him of Tom Merry's presence, he glanced over his shoulder.

A low, breathless cry escaped him as he saw the captain of the Shell standing watching him in the shadows.

"Caramba!" gasped Garcia.

Tom hurried forward, his face incredibly startled. Garcia grasped him by the arm, and flung out a pointing hand at the paper pinned to the door by that sinister knife.

"Look!" he breathed, in a quivering voice. "Look!"

Tom stared dumbly at the scrawled words that covered the white sheet. But they were evidently written in Spanish and were meaningless to the captain of the Shell. His startled eyes met Garcia's.

There was a strange light in those of the South American. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,138.

"What is it?" breathed Tom. "Who put it there? What does it say? Good heavens! What does it mean?"

For a moment the wild thought that perhaps Garcia himself had pinned that paper to Sir Napier's door with the dagger, leapt into his mind.

"It is a warning, from his enemies!" whispered Garcia tensely. "See the signature—'El Lobo'! It threatens Sir Napier with death, unless he gives back to his enemies a secret paper that they want, that he has brought to England from Riognav!"

Tom Merry caught his breath.

"But what are you doing here, Garcia?" he muttered grimly.

The eyes of the South American glittered in a queer, almost suspicious way.

"If it comes to that, what are you doing here?" he asked.

"I saw you leave the dormitory," snapped Tom, in a low voice. "I followed. But what about you, Garcia?"

"I wanted to go to my own room," answered Garcia.



"You dog!" The words seemed almost to be spat from Callao before the knife could come flashing down Tom Merry's

"I thought I heard a sound in this passage. I came here—and I found this!"

"What did you want to go to your room for?" asked Tom Merry suspiciously.

Garcia's eyes darkened.

"That is my business!"

Tom Merry smiled grimly.

"Perhaps I can guess! I suppose you were going down to have a smoke, eh? One of your cheroots!"

His voice was faintly contemptuous. Garcia's eyes fell for an instant.

"I do not deny it," he muttered harshly. "But that is nothing! It is this that matters—"

Tom nodded. It was none of his business, whatever his private opinion might be, if Garcia chose to steal down to his study in the middle of the night for the forbidden indulgence in a dingy habit. But the paper that he and Garcia had found pinned to Sir Napier's door with a knife—that mattered a lot!

He gripped Garcia's arm.

"You'll wake Sir Napier! He must be told at once, of course! I'll go and tell Kildare. Whoever stuck this here must have entered the building downstairs, and left



quivering lips. He sprang at Kildare, his hand upraised. But
ed on the South American's jaw and sent him reeling.

that way—by a window, probably! With luck he can be
tracked in the snow.”

Garcia nodded, and swung open the door. From within,
out of the darkness of the room, the quiet, steady breath-
ing of its sleeping occupant could be heard.

Garcia stepped swiftly in, as Tom Merry turned and
hurried in the direction of Kildare's room. It was best,
he felt, for him to tell Kildare, and leave it to the captain
to awaken Mr. Railton if necessary.

Tom's face was grim as he knocked on Kildare's door!

CHAPTER 12.

Sir Napier Explains!

“**W**HAT puzzles me, Sir Napier, is how the scoundrel,
whoever he is, knew in which room you were
sleeping!”

It was Mr. Railton who spoke.

He was standing in Sir Napier's room, together with
Kildare, Darrell, and several other prefects, Tom Merry
and Callao Garcia.

Upon being aroused, Kildare and Sir Napier Wynter had
wasted no time in taking steps to discover the wherea-

bouts of the unknown individual who had pinned that
sinister warning to Sir Napier's door. Mr. Bailton and
several of the prefects had been hastily awakened and
acquainted with the facts, and a search was soon in pro-
gress downstairs. A small window at the back had been
found to be unfastened, and seemed to be the only way by
which the mysterious intruder could have entered the
premises. But there had been no sign of footprints out-
side the window. The fast-falling snow had apparently
obliterated them already.

Baffled, Mr. Railton and the prefects and the two juniors
had returned to Sir Napier's room.

Fortunately, in the excitement, Mr. Railton had not
thought of asking Tom Merry and Garcia how they came
to be on the scene—a fact which saved what would have
been a very awkward explanation.

“Yes, how did the chap who stuck that paper on your
door know it was your room?” echoed Kildare, glancing
at his uncle with an anxious frown.

Sir Napier, clad in a dressing-gown like the others, was
standing by the fireplace. In his hands he held the
mysterious warning notice. The dagger with which it
had been attached to his door lay on a small table near
him.

“That may not have been very difficult for the
scoundrel,” he responded thoughtfully. “I sat up read-
ing rather late, and the curtains were not drawn. If
the man were lurking about in the quad he could have
seen me easily, and once he had broken into the building
a little intelligence would have brought him to my door.”

Mr. Railton frowned deeply.

“It is all very astonishing! You say, Sir Napier, that
this paper is a threat against your life?”

“Exactly!” nodded Sir Napier, with a dry smile.

“I presume you will inform the police?”

“I suppose so,” agreed Sir Napier, with a shrug. “Not
that that will do much good, really.”

“But, Uncle Napier, what are they after?” cried Kil-
dare. “These revolutionaries haven't followed you to
England for nothing!”

His uncle shrugged and did not reply.

Mr. Railton turned towards the door.

“Good-night, Sir Napier. There seems to be no point in
staying longer from our beds.”

“None at all!” agreed Sir Napier. “I can only say I
much regret being the cause of these alarms and excurs-
ions!” he added smilingly.

“Merry—Garcia! You had better return to your dormi-
tory,” said the Housemaster quietly, turning in the
doorway.

Sir Napier stepped quickly forward.

“May I first have a word with these youngsters?”

“Certainly, if you wish!” agreed Mr. Railton, in faint
surprise. “Good-night!”

The Housemaster vanished along the passage, and the
prefects followed him, all but Kildare. Sir Napier closed
the door. His eyes went with a queer smile from his
nephew's face to the faces of Garcia and Tom Merry.

“Before you go,” he said, “I feel that it is only fair to
explain to you three. You”—he glanced at Tom—“have
been mixed up in this queer business on both occasions,
and I feel it is only fair to let you know the facts. And
you, Garcia, ought to know in any case.”

He paced thoughtfully across the hearthrug.

Tom Merry watched him curiously. On the face of
Kildare there was a deep, anxious frown. Garcia's hand-
some, swarthy face was expressionless, but his black eyes
gleamed oddly.

“As I told these two youngsters at tea,” began Sir
Napier, his eyes on his nephew, “the leader of the recent
revolution in Rioguary was never caught. El Lobo, as they
call him, got away from us in the mountains, and vanished
as if off the face of the earth.”

“He is cunning—El Lobo!” breathed Garcia, his eyes
flashing darkly.

“Cunning isn't the word!” nodded Sir Napier, with a
grim smile. “Yes, the Wolf escaped us. We caught some
of his chief followers, and the Government of Rioguary dealt
with them as they deserved. But the top men of all—the
Wolf himself and half a dozen of his most trusted leaders—
we never caught.”

Sir Napier paused, staring thoughtfully down at the
paper covered with scrawled Spanish that he had dropped
on to the table by the bed.

“But we captured their headquarters,” he went on
abruptly, “and there we found a valuable clue. One of
our prisoners admitted that a certain scrap of paper with
half a dozen meaningless names upon it was the secret of
the identity of the Wolf's most trusted agents. Their names
were written on this scrap of paper we found, but they
were written in code.”

“In code?” echoed Kildare.

"Yes, in code. And, try as we might, we could not solve them. I have that paper in my possession still. I have not yet given up hope of decoding those names, and so discovering the true identity of the Wolf's lieutenants. It is known well enough that most of them, at any rate, are high up in the service of the President and the Government—traitors who, while pretending to be loyal to President Garcia and his party, were all the time secretly helping the revolution."

"Caramba!" breathed Garcia. "The dogs!"

"The Rioguyan Government had a copy of this paper I speak of," went on Sir Napier, "but it was stolen by the agents of the Wolf while they were still endeavouring to decode the list of names upon it. I have the only copy of it now—the original paper. I have promised to decode those names and cable the identity of the traitors to the President as soon as I have discovered them. I feel sure I shall succeed in solving the secret of the code in the end. But, in the meantime—"

He broke off, pointing to the table where the sinister warning in Spanish lay beside the dagger that had pinned it to his door.

"You see? I have been followed to England by the Wolf or his agents with the sole purpose of recovering that fatal paper. That sign traced in the snow in the quadrangle this evening was the first warning. It has been followed by this still more definite warning!"

He brought a clenched fist crashing down upon the table. His eyes were gleaming.

"They threaten to kill me unless I hand over that paper to them!" He laughed grimly. "That's only a threat, however, I feel sure. They certainly will not want to kill me until they have discovered where the paper is hidden—to do so might spoil their chances of obtaining it. But there is no doubt that they are desperate. They will leave no stone unturned to get hold of this paper I was telling you of before I have been able to decode the names upon it and cable the result to Rioguyan."

A tense silence filled the room as he finished.

Outside, through the partly open curtains, the snow could be seen falling thickly through the darkness. Not a sound broke the hush of the night as Kildare, Tom Merry, and the son of the President of Rioguyan stared at Sir Napier Wynter's set, handsome face.

"My hat!" muttered Tom.

"The dogs!"

Garcia's voice was low and excited.

Kildare crossed swiftly to his uncle's side.

"But, good heavens, Uncle Napier, if these villains are after you—"

"Don't worry, Eric!" His uncle laid a steady hand on Kildare's stalwart shoulder. "This threat to kill me is all bluff. As I say, they will not kill me till they are sure they can get hold of this paper with the coded names upon it. It is that which they want. My life is immaterial, though they hate me badly enough, of course, having been the chief cause of the failure of their bloodthirsty revolution. No, they certainly will not kill me till that paper is in their hands—and I intend that it never shall be in their hands!"

He patted Kildare's shoulder reassuringly.

That the captain of St. Jim's was desperately anxious for his uncle's safety, however, was very obvious. He seemed about to speak, but Garcia had stepped quickly forward.

"Senor Napier," he muttered, "this is bad news! You may laugh at the danger, but you are in danger, I feel sure!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Sir Napier cheerfully.

"This paper!" muttered Garcia quickly. "Where is it hidden, then—this secret paper that you feel so sure that the agents of the Wolf will not be clever enough to find it?"

Sir Napier frowned.

"I am telling no one that, Garcia," he answered quietly. "It is better that I keep that secret to myself."

Garcia's eyes flamed strangely.

"You mean you do not trust me," he said venomously—"I, the son of President Garcia himself?"

Evidently Sir Napier's refusal to tell him the whereabouts of the secret paper had seemed to the South American to be a direct insult, and his hot Southern blood had boiled up on the instant.

"Nonsense, Garcia!" said Sir Napier quietly. "You are being ridiculous! Why, I am not telling my own nephew! It is better that I tell no one."

The angry gliter died from Garcia's eyes immediately.

"A thousand pardons, senor!" he muttered, his eyes dropping in a shamed way. "I—I did not think—"

"That's all right, Garcia," Sir Napier smiled. "I know you did not mean anything." He glanced at the little clock on the chimney-piece. "Great Scott, it is nearly half-past one! You and Tom Merry had better get back to bed."

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As he spoke he picked up the paper with the Spanish scrawl, and struck a match, holding the little flame to the corner of the sinister sheet. It flamed up, and Sir Napier tossed it into the grate.

"So much for the Wolf and his threats!" he murmured carelessly.

Tom Merry opened the door.

"Thanks for telling us all this, sir!" he said. "Come on, Garcia!"

"I felt it was only fair to let you know," explained Sir Napier. "Good-night!"

Tom Merry and Garcia left the room, and a few moments later Kildare followed them.

Back in the Shell dormitory, with a muttered "Good-night!" to the South American, Tom climbed into bed.

"My only aunt!" he breathed to himself, as he drew up the blankets round his shoulders. "What a business!"

Across the snow-filled air of the quad came the sound of the school clock chiming the half-hour.

"I wonder why Garcia wanted to know where Sir Napier had got that secret paper hidden, anyway?" Tom asked himself suddenly.

And, with that rather odd thought in his mind, Tom Merry went to sleep.

CHAPTER 13.

On the Ice!

"THERE are the girls!"

"Oh, good!"

"Wippin'!"

Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Talbot of the Shell were strolling along the towing-path by the River Rhyl. They were carrying their skates, for with the spell of cold weather the river had frozen hard.

They had arranged to meet Ethel Cleveland & Co., of Spalding Hall, by the old boathouse for an afternoon on the ice. It was Monday, and, therefore, not as a rule a half-holiday at St. Jim's. But, in honour of so distinguished an Old Boy as Sir Napier Wynter visiting the school, Dr. Holmes had given a special "half" to celebrate the occasion, and, in consequence, Sir Napier's popularity at St. Jim's was at its highest just then, even with fellows who had never even spoken to him.

Cousin Ethel, Doris Levison, and Lady Peggy Brooke, the pretty, red-haired tomboy of Spalding Hall, were coming towards the juniors along the snow-covered towing-path with very bright smiles on their faces.

The three girls were looking very pretty indeed in their bright scarves, their cheeks flushed with the cold, wintry air. The juniors hurried to meet them, raising their caps.

"Hallo, hallo!" sang out Tom Merry cheerfully.

"What-ho, deah gals!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with a flourish of his topper. "Fwightfully pleased to see you! With the wivah fwozen it is a splendid opportunity for you gals to let me teach you to skate, don't you know?"

"Thank you, Arthur, but we can skate a little already, you know," laughed his cousin.

The swell of St. Jim's shook his head.

"Yaas, but I want you to let me teach you figgah-skatin', and all that," he explained. "Fway let me help you on with your skates, Ethel, deah gal!"

The rest of the St. Jim's party looked at one another, and grinned. The idea of Arthur Augustus teaching anyone figure-skating tickled them.

"I hope the ice is nice and soft this afternoon, Gussy," grinned Blake. "Gussy does most of his figure-skating sitting down, you know," he explained gravely to the girls.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors chuckled. So did Lady Peggy. The swell of St. Jim's glared at Blake through his gleaming eyeglass wrathfully.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake! You are well awah that I am wathah a dab at skatin'!"

"Did you say a dab, or a dud?" inquired Monty Lowther solemnly. "I'm only asking, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, let's get our skates on, anyway," chuckled Tom Merry. "Then we'll see what we shall see! Let me lend you a hand at putting yours on, Doris."

Tom Merry knelt on the bank and fastened Doris Levison's skates for her. Blake did the same for Lady Peggy. Arthur Augustus, after carefully spreading a handkerchief to kneel upon, bent over his pretty cousin's feet and began fastening her skates, with a final indignant glare at his grinning chums.

At last the skates were fixed. Jack Blake and Lady Peggy slid out over the ice, followed by Tom Merry and Doris, Talbot and Manners.

"Pway allow me to get on the ice first, Ethel, deah gal, then I can help you down the bank," suggested Arthur Augustus gallantly.

"Thank you, Arthur," said Ethel, a little doubtfully.

"I shall not keep you a moment, dear gal! I—
Oh! Yow! Yawwoop!"

Arthur Augustus had stepped on to the ice. But instead of standing there to help his cousin down the bank, he had shot forward—or at any rate his feet had—and the swell of St. Jim's landed on the ice with a crash.

"Wow! Yawwooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled. Arthur Augustus scrambled up dazedly.

"B-bai Jove! The ice seems wemarkably slippewy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, there is nothin' to gwin about!" snapped Arthur Augustus frigidly.

"Sorry—our mistake!" gasped Herries.

"So that's how you do figure-skating, is it, Gussy?" chorled Monty Lowther. "What sort of figures were those, anyway? They looked to me like vulgar-fractions!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You sillay dummays!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I was not doin' figgah-skatin'! That was a most extraordinary accident! I have no ideah how it happened, but my skates got slightly out of control—"

"Only slightly?" grinned Talbot.

"Wats!"

The swell of St. Jim's turned again—to find that Cousin Ethel was safely on the ice with the rest, despite the fact that she had had to do without the invaluable assistance of her noble cousin. She was speeding away over the ice with Reginald Talbot. Blake and Lady Peggy, who were great chums, had gone off on an impromptu race—a race in which Jack Blake had great difficulty in keeping the lead. And the others were curving and gliding merrily to and fro over the smooth ice in fine style.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and snorted.

But he did not again suggest teaching anyone figure-skating. Perhaps at the back of his mind the swell of St. Jim's had a vague doubt of his abilities to do so, after all.

Going very gingerly, Arthur Augustus joined the others. Blake and Lady Peggy came skating back towards the group, and at Tom Merry's suggestion they set off in a body to skate down the winding, frozen river.

"Jolly decent of Miss Finch to let us off this afternoon, wasn't it?" cried Lady Peggy.

"Rather!" grinned Blake.

"Of course, you've all got a 'half,' haven't you?" put in Doris Levison.

Tom nodded as he skated at her side.

"Rather! An uncle of old Kildare's is staying at the school for a few days—till the end of the term, I believe, is his latest plan. The Head's given us a 'half' in his giddy honour."

At the thought of Sir Napier a shadow came into Tom's face.

Since that night when the mysterious, sinister warning had been found pinned to the baronet's door, and Tom Merry had heard the startling story of the reason for it from Sir Napier's own lips, the mysterious agents of the Wolf had not shown their hand again.

But Tom felt sure that these elusive desperadoes from South America, having taken the trouble of following Sir Napier all the way to England, would be certain to act again very soon. He knew that Kildare was alarmed and anxious.

"Penny for your thoughts, Tom!" laughed Cousin Ethel a minute later.

Tom forced a smile.

"Nothing worth a penny, Ethel!"

The cheery party sped on along the ice. They had covered half a mile or so when there was a sudden exclamation from Doris Levison. She slowed down quickly.

"Oh dear!" Her hand had gone to the pocket of her coat. "I've dropped my purse!"

The others curved back to her on their skates. Tom Merry looked back along the ice.

"Don't worry!" he said. "I'll go back for it. It must be lying on the ice somewhere."

"I'll come with you, Tommy," sang out Talbot.

Leaving the others to await their return, Tom Merry, and Reginald Talbot shot off smoothly up the river, and vanished round the bend.

"Oh dear! What a shame for them to have to go back!" exclaimed Doris.

"They won't mind!" grinned Manners. "We'll hang about here, shall we? Perhaps Gussy will show us that figure-skating he was talking about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors chuckled. Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"Wats!"

But though Arthur Augustus had declined the offer, Monty Lowther was a clever figure-skater, and at the request of his chums he began to perform figure eights and other intricate patterns on the ice. Watching him, the rest scarcely noticed the passing minutes.

(Continued on the next page.)

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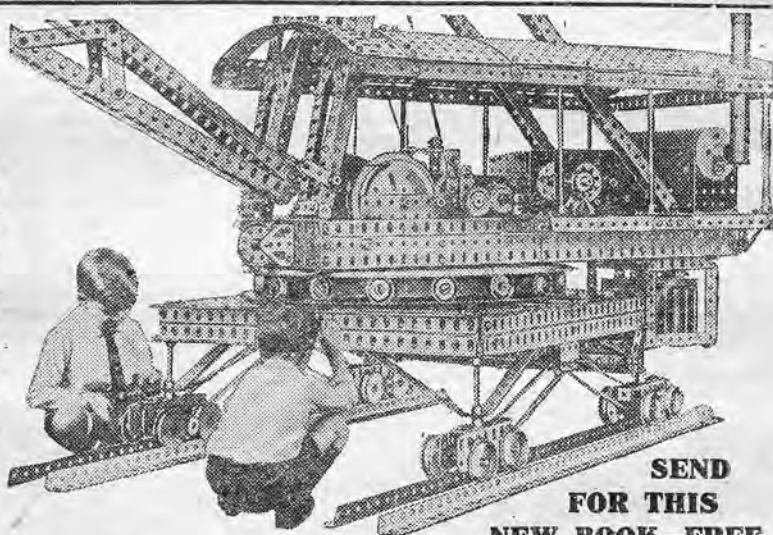
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But they would not have been so light-hearted had they known what was taking place higher up the river, while they curved to and fro on their skates with cheery talk and laughter!

CHAPTER 14. The Wolf's Victim!

"WHAT'S that?"

Tom Merry gave that sudden exclamation. He and Talbot had found Doris Levison's purse not far from the old boathouse. They were now skating leisurely back down the river, when a faint, wavering call had come to Tom's ears.

"Listen!"

The two came gliding to a standstill, Talbot glancing at Tom questioningly, Tom Merry straining his ears to catch again the sound he fancied he had heard.

This time it was clear, as it came again—a far-off, weak cry:

"Help!"

"Great pip!" ejaculated Talbot sharply.

"Where did it come from?" cried Tom.

They were not far from the end of a narrow, frozen backwater, where great trees hung low over the ice. Talbot pointed.

"Up there—"

He broke off. Again had come that faint, wavering shout.

"Help! Help!"

"Come on!" breathed Tom Merry, with set face.

There was no doubt about it. As Talbot had thought, the cry had come from somewhere up the backwater. In a moment the two Shell fellows were skating hard towards it.

The ice under the trees did not look very safe; but Tom Merry and Talbot did not hesitate to take the risk. They went shooting into the backwater at racing speed.

The backwater curved round, lined with willows that glittered white with their burden of snow in the cold, wintry sunlight.

"Help!"

It was louder now, nearer.

"Someone must have fallen through the ice!" gasped Talbot breathlessly.

Tom nodded without speaking. They shot round a curve of the backwater, and a startled shout broke from Tom Merry.

An amazing, terrible sight had met their eyes.

Under the low-hanging boughs of a big tree, an old weather-worn stake, sunk in the mud of the backwater, rose near the bank. It had evidently been used at some period for fastening up boats, for the remains of a rusty ring could be seen attached to it.

The ice had been broken for a yard or so around the thick, old stake, revealing the dark water beneath.

From the water protruded the head and shoulders of a man, evidently bound to the stake. A cloth hanging round his neck showed that he had been gagged as well. But in some way he had succeeded in freeing his mouth from the gag that had silenced him, enabling his frozen lips to call faintly for help.

The man's face was so terribly haggard and ghastly from his ordeal that for a moment Tom Merry did not recognise him. Then a shaking cry broke from the captain of the Shell.

It was Eric Kildare's uncle!

Tom Merry and Talbot, their hearts cold with horror, turned in the direction of the black hole in the ice where the baronet was immersed in the freezing water. He had seen them, and a faint gleam came into his eyes. They could hear his teeth chattering.

"Thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!"

The words were practically incoherent as they burst from his blue lips. His eyes closed.

"Look out for the ice! It doesn't look strong!" muttered Tom, dragging a pocket-knife from his pocket. "Who are the fiends who can have done this? The inhuman fiends—"

But, luckily, the ice was stronger than it looked.

Lying full length by the edge of the water Tom Merry groped beneath the surface, while Talbot held his feet, ready to drag him back if the ice broke. It was some moments before Tom's numbed hands found the rope that held Sir Napier fastened to the stake, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could bring his frozen fingers to saw it through with the knife. But at last it was done.

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With the binding rope cut away Sir Napier sank forward against the edge of the ice, and Tom grasped him, supporting the frozen figure in the water. He felt the ice crack.

"Can you get him out?" cried Talbot.

"No!" answered Tom despairingly. "Talbot, old chap, you must fetch the others. I can hold him till you get back."

Talbot scrambled to his feet and sped away down the backwater, his skates flashing swiftly as he vanished round the bend.

It seemed an eternity to Tom Merry that he waited, his hands growing more and more numb. Sir Napier was unconscious now, breathing faintly.

Tom's teeth began to chatter. He longed to shift his cramped, aching limbs. But he dared not, lest any alteration of his position should cause the ice to crack beneath his weight.

After what seemed many hours he heard a shout.

Talbot was back with the rest of the juniors, and they had a long rope with them. Their faces were very white.

Tom turned his face, blue with cold, towards them.

"Keep back, you chaps!" he breathed hoarsely. "If you come too near, the ice won't stand it. It's nearly breaking already. Make a noose on that rope."

Hastily Manners obeyed, and flung the noose to Tom. With almost helpless fingers the captain of the Shell managed somehow to get the noose over Sir Napier's shoulders, and it was drawn tight.

"On the bank!" shouted Talbot.

Kicking off their skates, Manners and Lowther, Blake and Herries, scrambled on to the bank behind, holding the rope.

"All right," said Talbot thickly. "You can let go, Tom!"

With a little groan of relief Tom let go his hold. Talbot and Digby drew him back from the dangerous edge, and the captain of the Shell crawled painfully on to the bank.

His limbs were stiff and numb, his teeth still chattering. But he did not mind. Sir Napier was saved.

He scarcely saw how his chums managed to get the senseless figure of Kildare's uncle on to the bank. But they did, and Talbot and Manners began to chafe the baronet's chilled form, gradually bringing back the circulation. Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bent over Tom, and rubbed his stiff limbs energetically.

"Thanks!" gasped Tom, with a wry smile. "That's better! I don't feel so much like a blessed iceberg now!"

He managed at last to rise painfully to his feet.

"Where are the girls?" he muttered.

"By the boathouse," Blake told him. "We didn't explain what was the matter. They think it's simply that someone has fallen through the ice."

They turned to where Sir Napier lay, with Talbot and Manners slowly bringing back the warmth to his body with their vigorous chafing. There was a mutter of satisfaction from Blake as he saw the baronet's eyes flutter open.

"He'll be all right soon," he whispered.

Tom Merry was staring about in the snow. A little farther along the path on the river-bank the snow was churned and trampled—evidently the spot at which Sir Napier had been walking when attacked by his enemies.

Who those enemies were, Tom Merry knew well enough.

The agents of the Wolf had not been long in their attempt to carry out their sinister threat. Had they tied their victim's gag tighter, it would have been a successful one. For no one would have been likely to find Sir Napier there under the overhanging trees of that lonely backwater.

Tom Merry shuddered.

Sudden, crunching footsteps in the snow along the path caused the juniors to turn their heads.

A lithe figure came into view round the bend of the backwater. The newcomer halted abruptly in an almost startled way at sight of the St. Jim's fellows gathered on the bank.

It was Callao Garcia.

The South American was evidently out for a lonely walk. He came hurrying up, and at sight of Sir Napier lying on the bank a low cry escaped him.

"Caramba! What has happened?"

Tom Merry told him. Garcia's eyes glittered. But before he could speak there was a low sound from Sir Napier. Tom Merry stooped quickly over him.

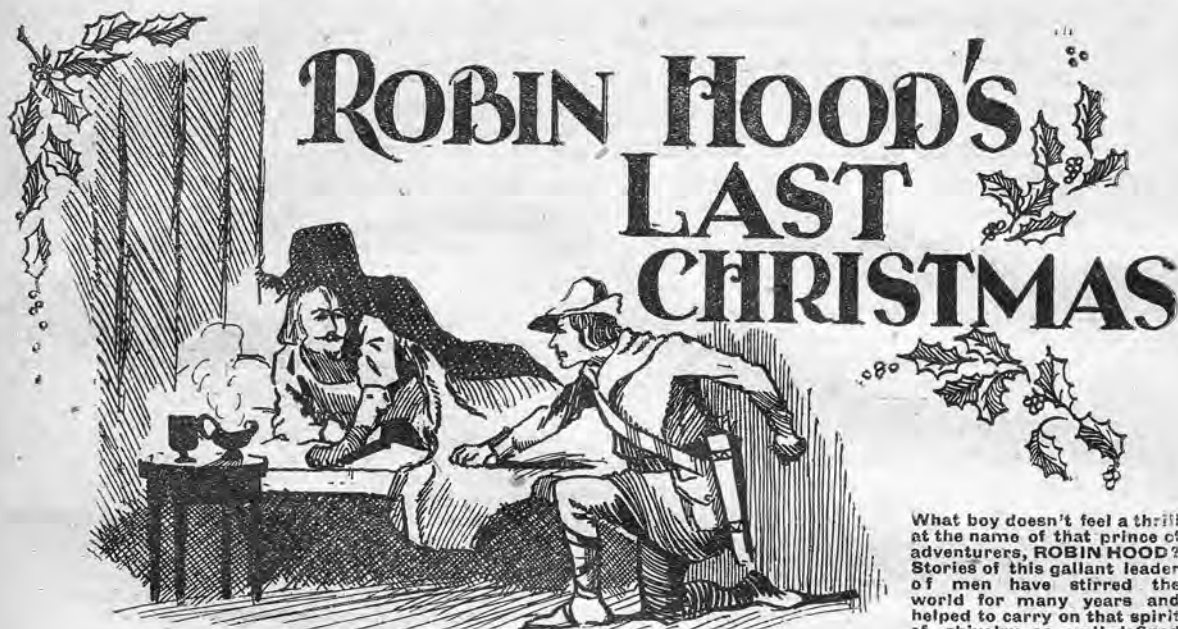
"Thank Heaven you came!" Sir Napier's words were so hoarse as to be barely articulate. "I was just about finished."

The suspicion of a grim, bitter smile curved the corners of his lips.

"That secret paper I told you about, Tom. The hounds guessed my secret—where it was hidden. I had it in a belt worn under my waistcoat. They attacked me on the path here, and found it. There were three of them.

(Continued on page 22.)





What boy doesn't feel a thrill at the name of that prince of adventurers, **ROBIN HOOD**? Stories of this gallant leader of men have stirred the world for many years and helped to carry on that spirit of chivalry so well defined in English heroes. Here is the story of **ROBIN HOOD'S** last **CHRISTMAS DAY**!

THE Merry Men in Lincoln Green, who befriended the poor but were "dead nuts" on all who showed themselves to be enemies of Robin Hood's band, had many and many a jolly and boisterous Christmas in their snug retreat deep in the fastnesses of Sherwood Forest.

Little John and Friar Tuck, Much, the Miller's son, Maid Marion, and all those others who flocked to Robin's outlaw standard, had much to talk about and laugh over at each successive Christmas dinner—the feast made merrier by the thought that scores upon scores of poor folk who otherwise would have gone hungry at the Season of Good Will and Peace to All were then feasting their full on good fare provided by the outlaw band.

They talked, between bursts of merry laughter, of how this feat was performed and how that was done. Of the day when they all held up the fat old Abbot of St. Mary's, at York, and convinced him—painfully, and sorely against his will—that no more was he to extort money from the knight, Sir Richard-at-the-Lee.

Of how Robin had put "paid" to the account of the Sheriff of Nottinghamshire, who had attempted to arrest him. Of how the King, in disguise, had once visited them in the green glades of Sherwood, and, delighted at Robin's marvellous prowess with the bow, had taken him into the Royal household.

Of how Robin had hastily returned again to freedom and the beloved garb of Lincoln green. And of many other events that in 1929 are a matter of history—or legend.

As was bound to be, there came the very last Christmas of their leader, when the gay and chivalrous band was to be split up and divided over the kingdom, and Sherwood Forest was to know no more the sound of Robin's horn or the shouts and laughter of the band—the hearty merriment led always by fat and jovial Friar Tuck.

It happened in this wise. In the year 1247, Robin became very ill. Sorely it went against the grain of his followers to let him go to be doctored by strangers, but so it had to be. On Christmas Eve of that year, Robin betook him, with Little John, his lieutenant, as his only companion, to the Abbey of Kirkstall, between Wakefield and Halifax, in Yorkshire, there to be bled.

Bleeding in those days was reckoned to be a sovereign cure for most of the ills to which flesh is heir, and as the abbot of that abbey was a relative of Robin's, he had no hesitation in entrusting his cure to her hands.

But Little John, after many loud protestations, was not allowed to remain by his master's side after the wound had been made in Robin's arm. The abbot commanded him to wait outside, in the abbey gardens, until she should send him word to come.

There Little John took up his vigil. And what a contrast, he thought, this made with all those other boisterous Christmas Eves when they had all been merry and well in the heart of Sherwood Forest!

At last Little John could tramp about no longer. He came to a halt, where he could stand and gaze up at the room in the abbey where he knew his beloved Robin lay. Dusk was now falling rapidly, and just as Little John was thinking of braving the displeasure of the stern and vinegary abbot and invading his master's room, there came to his ears the note of Robin's horn.

But how weak it was! Robin had been accustomed to blow hefty music from that horn. These sounds were weak and timid, as though the lips pressed to the horn were feeble and— It was enough for Little John. Abbot or no abbot, he was going to Robin's side!

He tore through the grounds and into the abbey, brushing aside all resistance as though it were not there. Mighty bounds took him swiftly up the steep stone stairs to the chamber that he had been forced to leave. One mighty push with his massive shoulders sent the locked door flying.

And there on the bed lay Robin Hood—dying. The treacherous abbot had purposely neglected to bind the wound she had made in the outlaw chief's arm—at the instigation, as it turned out, of a knight named Sir Roger of Doncaster—and he had been bleeding to death all the time that Little John had been engaged in his restless vigil.

There remained to Robin just sufficient strength to ask Little John for his bow and an arrow. With his comrade's assistance he managed to move, painfully and feebly, to the window—for one last shot.

"Where the arrow falls," he murmured, "there let me be buried, Little John."

Robin's arms were now terribly feeble. His strength had all but ebbed away. And the arrow fell only a few yards distant. But Little John, scarcely able to speak, so overcome with emotion was he, declared it to be an excellent—a surprisingly excellent—shot.

And Robin was hugely content, and as his soul departed he murmured to trusted Little John: "Ah! A good shot, was it?" And his lips were sealed for evermore.

They buried him where that arrow fell. Neither history nor legend tells of the vengeance the Men in Lincoln Green took next day—for you can be sure that Christmas Day was not spent in revelry—on the traitorous abbot and all that in the abbey were. But they will show you, the folk who now live there, where Robin's grave is placed.

He was eighty-seven when he passed out of this world, and still the very name of Robin Hood conjures up visions of chivalry, of splendid combats, of good deeds done for the poor, of jollity and laughter and splendid good-fellowship.

The history books are thoroughly undecided as to whether the Lincoln Green Men are worthy of a place in solemn archives, or whether their lives and heroic deeds should be relegated to the chronicles of legend and old lore. But at least Robin Hood has been perpetuated in the naming—by days of old—of many a hill and dale in England.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,158.

The Menace of the Wolf!

(Continued from page 20.)

Instead of knifing me then, as they meant to do at first, they planned to leave me to that awful death in the freezing water."

Tom Merry gave a startled cry. "They've got the secret paper?"

Sir Napier nodded.

"Yes."

There was an excited, hissing exclamation from Garcia. The eyes of the South American were strangely gleaming.

"Carajo! Then the Wolf has won!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Fight in the Snow!

IN a moment Tom Merry was on his feet. He gripped Talbot by the arm.

"Quick—no a moment to lose!" He flung out a pointing hand. "We've got to follow those scoundrels in the snow!"

Already his keen eyes had seen the lines of footprints leading away across the fields to a distant stile; the way that Sir Napier's assailants had gone was clear enough.

Tom turned swiftly to Herries and Digby.

"You two help Sir Napier to the school!" he rapped out. "Garcia'll lend you a hand. And let the girls know that skating's off for this afternoon. Come on, you chaps! We might be in time yet!"

Monty Lowther and Manners, Blake and Arthur Augustus needed no second bidding. Together with Talbot, they followed Tom as the captain of the Shell broke into a run towards the stile to which the footprints in the snow led from the bank of the frozen backwater.

With snow covering the countryside, Tom felt that there was more than a chance that they would be able, at any rate, to get some idea of where the three villainous South Americans had gone after leaving their victim, as they thought, to die in the ice-bound pool.

Manners and Lowther knew the story of the secret paper in Sir Napier's possession; Tom had told his chums about it, with Sir Napier's permission. Now, as he ran, Tom gave Talbot, Blake, and the swell of St. Jim's a brief, breathless idea of what the paper meant.

"But s'pose they've destroyed it already?" gasped Blake, his feet pounding through the snow.

"Their first idea will be to get away from here," answered Tom, with conviction. "It won't occur to them to destroy it at once, I feel jolly sure! If we can find them, there's a chance, anyway, that that paper's still on 'em!"

The six juniors scrambled over the stile. Beyond, a field-path led them along a snow-laden hedge to a narrow lane at the top of the hill. As they dropped over a second stile into the lane Tom gave a mutter of satisfaction.

Clearly to be seen in the smooth snow were the three sets of footprints that they were following.

They raced off in the direction that the footmarks led them. Round a twist in the lane—and then Talbot gave a cry of chagrin.

"Look! They've had a car!"

As on that night when, with Sir Napier, they had followed the footmarks from the quad into Rylcombe Lane, the prints in the snow ended by the wheel-marks of a car.

Evidently the scoundrels had had a car waiting in the lane; and from Tom Merry there broke a hopeless exclamation.

Though they could follow the tyre-tracks in the lane well enough, he knew that as soon as the car picked up the main Wayland road they would lose them among the marks of other vehicles.

But even as he made a despairing gesture, there was a breathless ejaculation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Gweat Scott! Look, deah boys—"

Arthur Augustus was staring over the low hedge on the farther side of the lane. Beyond the hedge the ground dropped steeply. The lane, twisting down the hill, curved round in a great horseshoe at that point; so that directly below them, at the far end of the long, sloping field, they could see a distant stretch of the same lane.

Staring down the hillside, in the direction of the swell of St. Jim's excited gaze, the juniors saw that a car was

stationary in a deep drift that had piled up in the stretch of lane below them. To their ears came the noise of the car's engine.

It was evident that the car was "stuck." With the wheels unable to get a grip in the loose snow of the deep drift, the occupants of the motor-car were stranded. The sound of the running engine told the juniors, however, that the motorists were still trying to get their car out.

"It's them, for a cert!" gasped Monty Lowther, with more excitement than grammar.

Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming with renewed hope.

"Come on!" he cried grimly. "This way—over the fields! If it's the chaps we're after, we've got 'em!"

Through a gap in the hedge the captain of the Shell led the way. The juniors raced down the hill, well out of sight of the men in the car below. They scrambled through another hedge, and found themselves with another field, a narrower one, to cross. Beyond the opposite hedge they could hear the engine of the car and the churning of wheels in the snow.

"Don't let 'em see us!" muttered Tom.

"Wathah not!"

"Quiet, Gussy! Don't make a row!" breathed Blake.

"Who's makin' a wow?" snorted the swell of St. Jim's indignantly, glaring at his chum through his gleaming eyeglass.

Blake, however, was already creeping across the snow after Tom Merry.

With their feet noiseless in the soft snow, the six juniors gained the opposite hedge.

They could hear men's voices now—excited, voluble voices. It was not English that they heard.

"It's the South Americans all right!" breathed Talbot.

Tom nodded. His face was set in grim lines.

The hedge behind which they were crouching was a low one. But it was thick. There was no way past it except over the top! And a moment later, at a sign from Tom Merry, the St. Jim's juniors went over the top after the style of soldiers in the Great War!

To the three men with the car, busily trying to get it out of the deep drift that had trapped it, the appearance of the six youngsters was so startlingly unexpected that for a few seconds they could only stare blankly.

The next moment two of them found themselves bowled over, a couple of juniors to each man. The third man, a little, swarthy-faced scoundrel, with black beady eyes, was seated at the wheel of the car. He gave a shout as Talbot and Manners leapt on to the running-boards, one on each side of the car, and pinned him in his seat.

"On the ball, St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah!"

But though the surprise of their attack had taken the three men off their guard, they were not to be beaten easily.

Talbot and Manners found their captive more slippery in their grasp than an eel. With a torrent of furious Spanish pouring from his lips, the swarthy little figure, his face contorted with rage, fought free of them and leapt to his feet on the seat of the car, as if to jump out.

There was a jolting thud a moment later. Talbot's fist had flashed out, taking the South American clean on the jaw. The man dropped dazedly into the car, nearly knocked-out.

Manners jumped into the car, and pinned him down across one of the seats. There would be no more trouble from one of the scoundrels, at any rate!

"I've got him!" chuckled Manners grimly.

Talbot turned and sprang to the aid of Blake and Arthur Augustus, who were struggling fiercely in the snow with a big, evil-looking ruffian, whose features were by no means improved by the possession of a twisted upper lip—the result, evidently, of a knife wound in the past.

With Talbot's aid, Blake and the swell of St. Jim's succeeded at last in pinning their man down. He lay gasping and writhing, glaring up at them with unutterable hatred in his eyes.

A stream of Spanish curses came from his lips. Blake chuckled breathlessly.

"Lucky we can't understand what the rotter's saying!"

Talbot, kneeling on the scoundrel's chest, glanced quickly round.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were not having an easy time with the third ruffian.

He was a very foreign-looking individual in a black hat that had certainly never been bought in England. His thin, sallow face was more intellectual than those of his companions, and his clothes were better cut—evidently he was the leader of the trio.

With a lightning blow of his fist, he sent Monty Lowther reeling into the snow. Tom Merry sprang at him, but the South American was as agile as a cat. He darted aside,

and his hand flew to his coat. The next instant a knife was gleaming in his hand.

"Look out!" yelled Talbot.

But Tom Merry had seen his danger.

As the man came at him, the knife upraised, the captain of the Shell saw that a number of stones had been placed under the back wheels of the car, evidently in the Rioguanys' effort to get the wheels to grip. Like a flash, Tom snatched one up and flung it with unerring aim.

It was a wonderful shot!

The stone struck the hand that held the knife, and with a cry of pain the man let the glittering blade fall. Monty Lowther, scrambling up, pounced upon it and flung it far over the hedge.

Evidently the man's intention was to destroy that fatal paper at all costs—even at the cost of capture! So long as that was destroyed, the purpose of the Rioguanys' presence in England was accomplished.

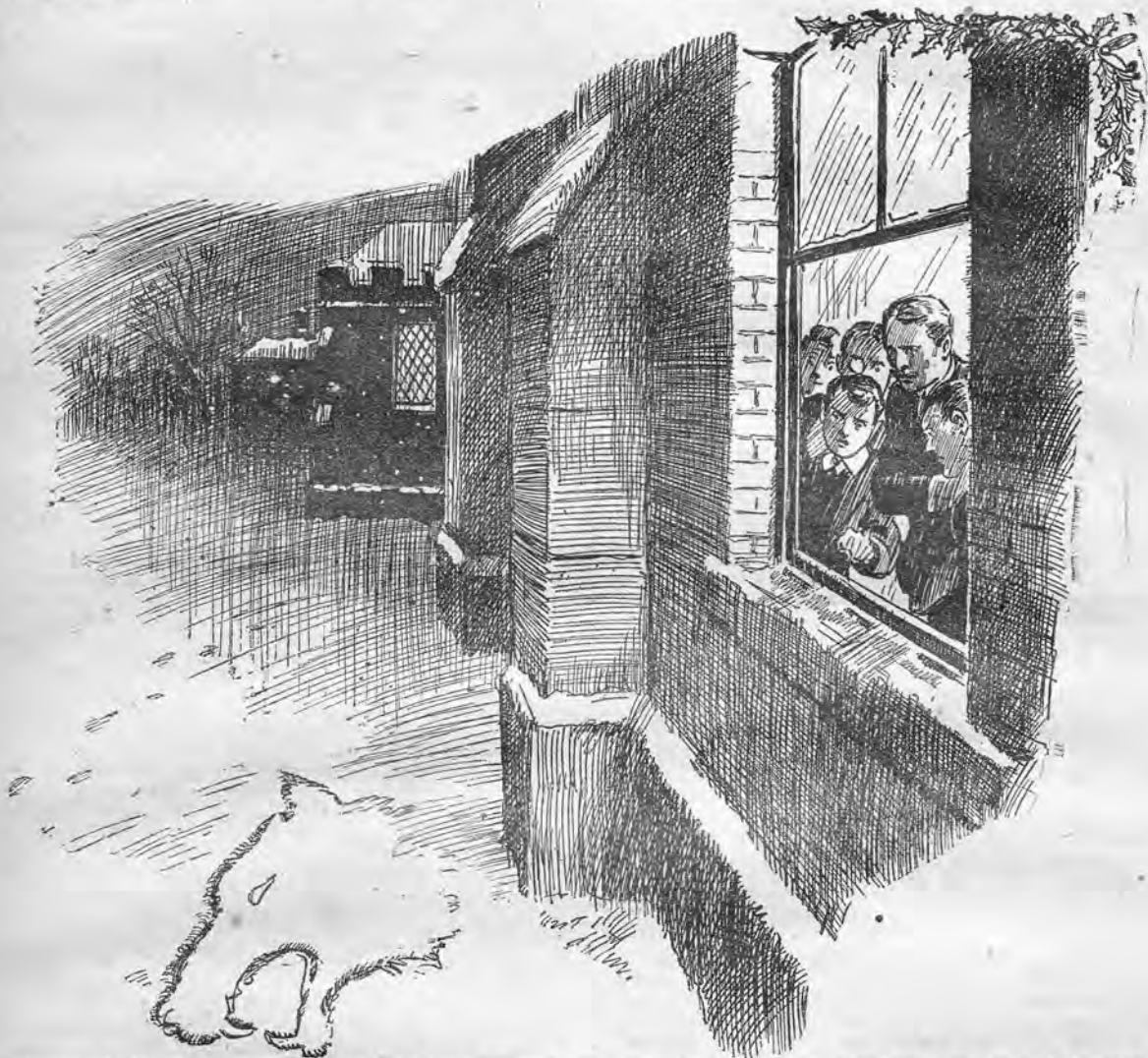
One corner of the paper burst into trembling flame.

With a leap that would have won him a prize for the long jump at any junior sports meeting, Tom Merry hurled himself through the air.

The Rioguanys leapt back with a snarl. But he was too late. Tom's hand had closed upon the paper, crushing out the flame at the burning corner, snatching it from the scoundrel's fingers at the same moment.

"Carajo!"

Like a savage animal, the man in the black sombrero



Crowding to the study window, the startled juniors stared down into the quadrangle. Traced in the smooth expanse of untrodden snow was the outline of a great wolf's head. "What the dickens—" breathed Tom Merry. "Gweat Scott!"

"The wolf!" whispered Callao Garcia. "He is here!"

The man in the black sombrero glanced round swiftly.

He saw that his two companions had been overpowered—knew that without his villainous weapon he, too, could not hope to stand up long against the two athletic English schoolboys. With a snarl, he turned and raced away down the lane.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther darted in pursuit.

At the bend, to the juniors' surprise, their quarry halted. But the next moment Tom Merry saw the reason, and he gave a startled gasp.

The man had snatched from an inner pocket a scrap of paper. In his other hand he held matches, and as the two juniors ran towards him he struck a match. The tiny yellow flame burnt steadily in the still wintry air.

With a harsh laugh, he thrust the sheet of paper to the flame.

"Stop him!" yelled Tom Merry.

Sir Napier's secret paper—with the flame of a match licking the edge of it!

sprang at Tom Merry. Tom's fist flashed out straight from the shoulder.

Without a sound the man collapsed in a heap in the snow. Tom's fist had landed clean on the point of his jaw.

For the time being the man in the black sombrero would take no more interest in the proceedings.

Tom Merry stood staring down at him. Then, with a grim smile, he opened the clenched fingers of his right hand.

The paper was crumpled and torn, but it was safe.

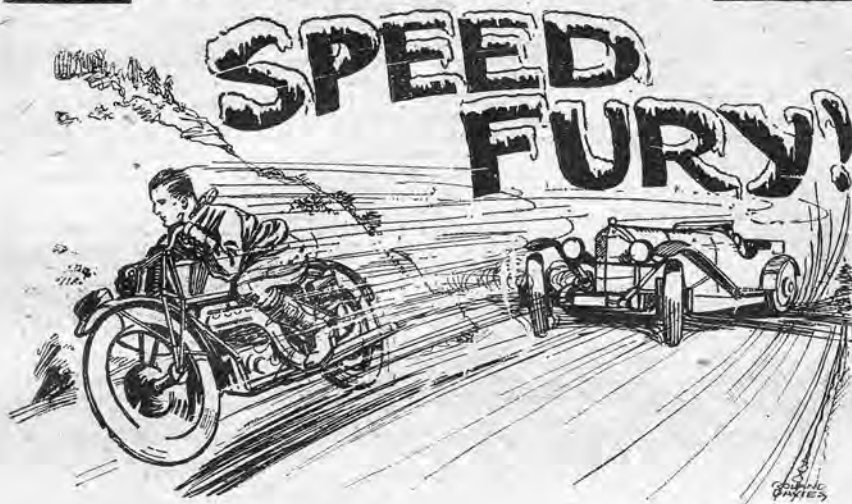
A list of apparently meaningless words was written upon it in a florid, foreign handwriting. An inch or two at one corner had been burnt away; but to his relief Tom saw that none of the writing had been destroyed.

It was a strange thought to Tom Merry, there in that

(Continued on page 32.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,138.

SPEED! THAT'S WHAT YOU GET IN THIS STORY—AND THRILLS!



Many miles to race at terrific speed, with handlebars that are almost uncontrollable on the narrow, bumpy road. Jack Blair, on his motor-cycle, duels with his challenger, a big sports car—and death!

By
**ALFRED
EDGAR.**

CHAPTER 1.

Jack Accepts a Challenge!

A MOTOR-CYCLE came streaking down the dead-straight road, travelling so fast that the roar of its engine and the blare of wide-open exhausts merged to a sonorous, rushing scream on the wintry afternoon air.

Hunched in the saddle, fists clamped on the kicking grips, was Jack Blair, crack rider for Hawke Motor-Cycles. His knees gripped the tank pads as a broncho-buster grips the flanks of a rogue horse; his nose was down on the steering damper, and his eyes gleamed behind rubber-rimmed goggles.

Steady as a rock, the machine rode the crown of the road, with the threshing front tyre stamping the surface, but never shifting an inch out of the straight. Like a projectile, flashing with polished nickle, the speed iron came on, and in the distance behind, more than a quarter-mile off, showed three dark blurs that stormed in pursuit.

A group of men stood at the side of the road. As the machine came up, one of them stepped out from the rest, whirling a yellow flag above his head, and poising it. The bike approached at unchecked speed until it was almost level with the man, and the flag flashed down.

Instantly the driver cut out his engine, both feet stamping simultaneously on twin brake pedals. There followed the scuttering scream of over-stressed tyres, and the screech of brake-shoes gripping in their drums.

The bike slowed as though it had run into mud, with never a wobble and never a skid. Behind it appeared a straight black line of rubber torn from the tyres, and on the air rose a pungent odour from the burnt threads. From hundred miles an hour the rider brought his machine to a dead stop in a distance that was incredibly short, and on the grass at the roadside young Stan Blair—Jack's brother—started a cheer which was taken up by the motor-cyclists around him.

They were still cheering when Jack swung the speed-iron off the road, stopping on the grass before them. The bike was a four-cylinder Hawke, the only one of its kind. It was so low, so compactly built, that it appeared to be all engine and exhaust-pipes. The words "Super-Four Hawke" were painted in red along the broad, silvered tank.

"You licked 'em all ends up!" Stan yelled. "You did well over a hundred miles an hour, Jack—an' I helped build the machine!"

He was less than half Jack's age, but he had the same cast of features, except that they weren't so weather-beaten or so grim. Jack had heavy eyebrows and a short, strongly-hooked nose; his jaw was as square-cut as a cliff, but he had a friendly smile.

The fellows with Stan all belonged to the Chadley Motor Cycle Club. More than a score had gathered that Saturday afternoon to watch the final trials of the Hawke T.T. machines, and all of them were proud of the fact that the famous Jack Blair was president of their little club.

They stopped yelling as the three following machines came hurtling in. One was a new "Tornado" model, and the other two were bikes which had run in the previous T.T. race. The Hawke firm had not won the T.T. for years, and Mr. Hawke, who owned the company, was not satisfied.

Knowing this, Jack had designed the Super-Four on his

own; the Tornado had been constructed by the firm's technical adviser, and both machines had been tried out against the old T.T. models. The Super-Four had beaten the Tornado in every possible way, from sheer speed to cornering and stunt braking.

Mr. Hawke had promised that whichever machine came out best in these trials would form a basis for the Hawke team for the big race, yet some months away. But it takes time to build a set of high-powered speed machines, and for that reason he wanted to make his decision before Christmas, so that work could commence with the New Year.

It was now the Saturday afternoon before Christmas Day. Most of the club bikes carried sprays of holly tied to the handlebars; and all the fellows were infected with the Christmas holiday spirit.

Near the parked bikes stood a car; it was a long, low-built 250 h.p. Mercedes, about the fastest sports machine in the world. The car was painted a flaming red, and armoured exhaust-pipes drooped from the engine-cover, with the sunshine flashing on them. The car belonged to Finnemore Lloyd, the designer of the Hawke Tornado, and who now stood muttering to himself because he had just seen Jack's machine beat his own.

The Tornado pulled up near the crowd, and as the rider dragged his goggles down from his eyes Lloyd strode towards him, thin chin jutting, and his lips set.

"What was the matter with you—afraid to let the bike out?" he rasped.

The rider sat back in the bucket saddle. He had been a racing man all his life, and there were scars on his body where he had crashed—and still carried on.

"Yeh," he said, "I was scared stiff!" He met Lloyd eye to eye. "I was scared stiff that this bunch of junk would fall to bits under me—but that didn't stop me flogging ninety-five miles an hour out of it! An' if you think you can make it go faster, get aboard and have a go!"

"That machine can lick the Super-Four if it's properly handled!" Lloyd snarled. "I designed it, and I know what it can do!"

"Then get on it and show us some speed," the rider grinned. "You used to be a T.T. rider—you've told us often enough. Let's see you ride your own bike at speed!"

"I'm—I'm a bit out of practice now," Lloyd muttered.

The rider grinned again. The fellows about Stan and Jack grinned as well. The Super-Four was a better machine, and they all knew it. So did Lloyd. But he had his reputation as technical adviser to the firm to maintain; besides, he had always disliked big Jack Blair.

"It's no good arguing, Lloyd! Your machine may be all right, but I like Blair's Super-Four better!" It was Mr. Hawke who spoke. He was a little man, but he had extraordinarily keen features, and he had raced in the days when nothing on wheels could do a mile a minute, except railway engines. "Jack, I think I'll build a team of your Super-Fours for the T.T."

"Well, I'm ready to put the bike through any other test that you like," Jack said slowly, while the watchers pressed about the little group and the rival speed-irons. "You see, Mr. Hawke, I've built into this machine all the knowledge I've gained in modern T.T. racing, and if you put a team of Super-Fours in the race we'll wipe up everything else, with luck!"

"With luck!" Finnemore Lloyd glared as he spoke. "It's a lot of good trusting to luck. How fast d'you think this machine of yours will lap the T.T. circuit?"

"Faster than your car!" Jack answered swiftly; and he jerked his head towards the giant Mercedes.

Before the previous T.T. race, Lloyd had taken his car around the Isle of Man Circuit, and he had broken the existing lap record by nearly five miles an hour. It meant that his car had gone around the T.T. course faster than anything had ever travelled before. And Jack was claiming that his Super-Four would be even more speedy!

"Would you like to try and prove it, as a last test?" Lloyd asked slowly. "We can't go over to the T.T. circuit—but I'll use my car to race you around Chadley Heath any time!"

Silence dropped. They all knew that Finnermore Lloyd could handle his super-powered machine as well as Jack could ride his racing bike; they knew, too, that the great car must be faster than the motor-cycle.

"I'll ride against you on Chadley Heath, or anywhere else that you like, and when you like," Jack said; and his jaw set as he spoke.

Chadley Heath was not far away, and a six-mile circuit was employed by young Stan and the other members of his club for "illegal" races. They used to go out there and hold their meetings at sun-up—wild, furious, fifty-mile affairs, that were like miniature T.T. events, and were just as desperately contested.

Early in the mornings they could count on the roads being empty, and by breakfast-time the racing would be finished, and everybody have cleared off home.

"All right!" Now Lloyd smiled, while his eyes narrowed.

"We can't ride to-morrow because it's Sunday, and—"

"All the club chaps will turn out and scout on the roads for you, to keep them open," Stan cut in eagerly, as he caught at his brother's arm. "But we couldn't turn out until next Saturday because we've all got to work."

"You won't be working on Wednesday," Lloyd said.

"That's Christmas Day. What about racing me there at sunrise on Christmas morning, Blair?"

"That will suit me," Jack answered. "Will you chaps come?"

He turned to the motor-cyclists.

A chorus of cheerful assent answered him.

"All right, then, I'll meet you on Chadley Heath at seven o'clock on Christmas morning, and we'll start as soon as it's light enough," Jack eyed Lloyd with level gaze as he spoke. "We'll ride frost, snow, or hail."

"One lap!" suggested Lloyd, and Jack nodded.

"And if the Super-Four wins," Mr. Hawke cut in, "it will be Super-Four Hawkes that will run in the T.T.!"

CHAPTER 2.

Foul Play!

THE Super-Four had been in a big workshop at the bottom of Jack's garden—a place to which most members of Stan's club brought their machines when they wanted to tune them.

Every member of the club spent every minute that he could spare in the shed after Jack had accepted Lloyd's challenge to race; most of them hoped to be permitted to hold a tool or do something to help in the retuning of the speediron.

Stan was the only one Jack allowed to do anything, and he didn't do very much. All Christmas Eve he worked with his brother; fellows who turned up in the afternoon amused themselves decorating the shed with holly and stuff,

but they all cleared off fairly early, to fortify themselves for a turn-out before the sun was up on Christmas morning.

"What's going to happen if you beat Lloyd to-morrow," Stan asked, when the brothers were alone. "I mean, it'll prove that you can design a better bike than anything of his, and he gets goodness knows how much for being technical adviser to the firm!"

"I hadn't thought much about that," Jack said slowly. "But Lloyd doesn't like me. He's played me one or two dirty tricks, and last T.T. he saw to it that I got the worst bike of the team."

"And still you came home third!" Stan exclaimed.

"That was luck," Jack grunted.

"Luck he blowed!" Stan gasped. "Why, you nearly fell off the bike at the finish; you'd ridden so hard that you almost cracked yourself up. And I'll tell you what—if Super-Fours do run in the T.T. it'll mean that you'll get Lloyd's job—Mr. Hawke doesn't like him much, anyhow!"

"I wouldn't want to take his job from him," Jack answered, "although I'd like one like it. I feel sometimes that I haven't got many more T.T.'s in me. The strain's pretty fierce, and once your judgment begins to go you're finished."

It was then that, for the first time, Stan noticed the tinge of grey in his brother's hair. It surprised him. He realised that it wasn't because Jack was old, but because of the nerve strain of high-speed work and the labour that he had put into the bike he had designed.

"You're a long way from finished," Stan said stoutly.

"And that reminds me—the club chaps have subscribed for a Christmas present to you—but you won't get it until after the race to-morrow!"

The two worked silently after that, and it was late when they turned in. They were both up at four o'clock on Christmas morning, and were putting the finishing touches to the machine half an hour later.

Darkness still shrouded Chadley Heath when the morning's quiet was broken by the roar of arriving machines. The air was cold and the heather around was tinged with frost, as was the rough surface of the road.

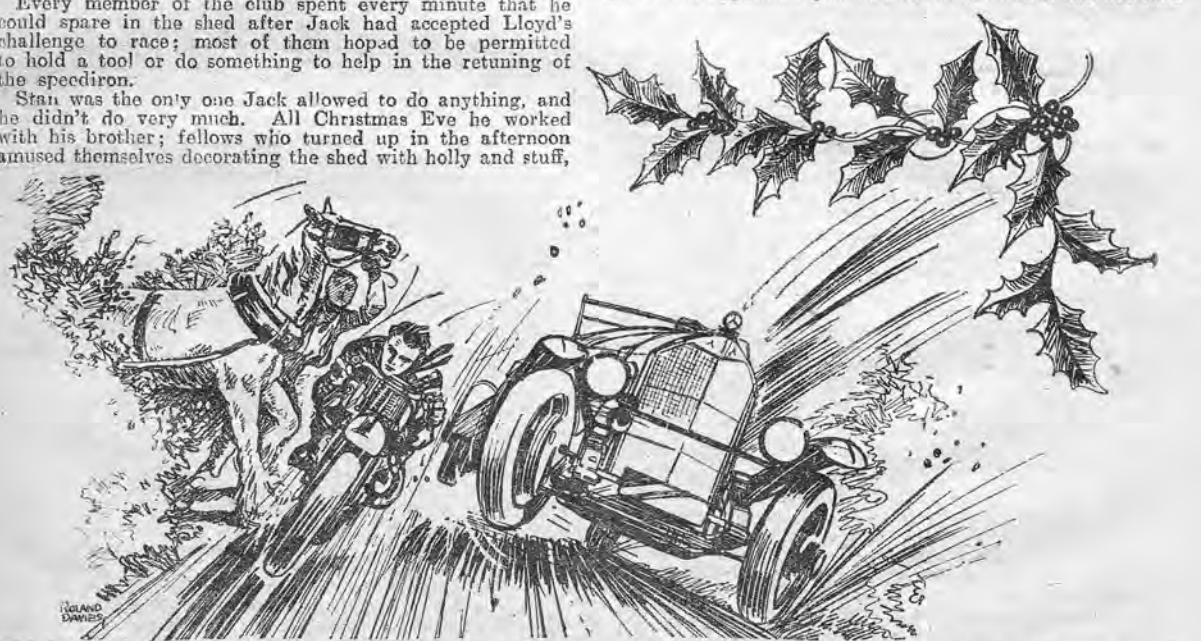
When the sun began to tint the eastern sky it showed lowering snowclouds that were drifting heavily before the wind.

"That lot'll make everything look like a Christmas-card before long," Stan commented. "Here's Lloyd!"

The growing crowd heard the distant roar of the giant Mercedes. It swept into view on the road, coming with the rising sun behind it. Lloyd had his foot hard down on the throttle, and the shattering bellow of the exhaust made the frosty air quiver as the machine slid like some red meteor towards the starting-point.

He brought the car to a stop, while from a side road appeared a light lorry bearing the mechanics he employed to look after his machine. Mr. Hawke came up on a car, and preparations went forward swiftly.

Presently the club motor-cyclists went off, bikes roaring. Their self-appointed job was to watch where the six-mile



Like lightning Jack gave his machine full throttle, ducked right down low on the petrol tank, and the next moment roared beneath the horse's head, with Lloyd, grinning evilly, still racing beside him.

circuit was intersected by other roads, and to hold up any traffic which might happen along. Not that there was likely to be anything much on Christmas morning.

Jack waited in the strengthening light with Stan and two other boys; after the start the trio were to cut across the heath on their own machines to where a level-crossing sliced over the road. Stan wanted to make certain that the gates were open to let the fighting machines through.

Presently the sun was high enough to show the road clearly before them. Mr. Hawke took his place at the side with the starter's flag; Stan and the others bunched behind Jack's machine, its engine roaring.

The big red Mercedes slid into position beside them, exhaust snarling monstrously.

"All set, Jack?" Stan gasped.

"Yes!"

"Good luck, then!"

"Thanks!"—and he crouched forward, watching the flag. It quivered in the sunlight. Across the heath came a flurry of snow, skimming the heather before it settled.

The flag swished down. Stan and the others thrust with all their strength, sending the bike away with a jump.

Beside them the red car howled furiously, then went away with rear tyres scrabbling for a grip on the frost-bound road, taking hold and hurling the long machine into the lead.

Jack was deafened by the shuddering roar of the huge Mercedes as it went past him. It drew a length in front while he spun the throttle wide, held the car, and then began to overtake it. He was level with the cockpit when Lloyd changed up, and again the monstrous machine began to slide ahead.

The car was moving at a terrific pace, sitting the crown of the road, and forcing Jack to the side, as he flattened along the tank and set himself to catch it.

The road ran almost straight for half a mile to the first real corner on the circuit. There were bends on the road before they reached it, and Lloyd took them with the tail of his car wagging, fighting desperately to keep the lead. Twice Jack almost passed him, and each time Lloyd seemed to find more speed.

Continually the man was glancing over his shoulder, eyes glittering behind his goggles, and he was still in front when the bushes marking the bend swept up.

The road was lined by frost, and the grassy edge was rimmed white with it. Air, icy, seared Jack's face and screeched past his ears as he made a last effort to be first at the corner. He drew level until he was forced to ease

his speed, then the car swept ahead, for the brake-shoes to sing in their drums as Lloyd trod on the pedal.

Jack saw the tail of the car slide sideways, swing straight, then the red machine was into the turn. Jack braked, and in that moment he hit a bump in the road.

It felt as though some giant fist had crashed at the side of his front wheel. The handlebars were almost wrenched out of his hands. The Super-Four slewed sideways, tyres skidding, as he wrenched on the steering and forced it straight.

Again the speediron skidded. In the heart of the turn he was carried broadside to the verge of the road, to pull away and go streaking on; but now with his handlebars kicking and whipping, so that he had to pile his weight forward to control them.

And it was then that he saw what was wrong with the machine. Instead of steering true on the bend, it had carried him all over the road, and the big Mercedes was twenty yards ahead of him now—all because the nuts holding his steering damper had been slacked off, making it useless!

That damper had been tight when Jack had tried it on the way to the start. He was sure of it. The nuts might have slacked off by themselves, but it was more likely that they had been tampered with.

Lloyd, Jack knew, hadn't been near the bike—but he might have arranged something with one of his mechanics.

Crouched in the saddle, all the strength of his broad shoulders piling down to arms and wrists as he held the machine, Jack's jaw set. Lloyd was scared that the Super-Four would beat him, so he'd fixed things either for the speediron to crash or else for it to be uncontrollable, so that Jack could never show its speed.

He growled to himself as he stared at the jerking red tail before him; then his hand twisted again on the throttle control, opened it to its limit, and left it there as he spread himself along the tank.

He gathered speed again, coming down the road like an unleashed tornado. On the next corner his front wheel wobbled until it looked like two, jerking his arms and shoulders, making the bike weave on the road. He mastered it by sheer strength and got the wheel steady again as he came from the turn, closer to the Mercedes now.

The giant car had come out of the turn like a scalded cat, its exhaust spouting a yard-long streak of ruddy flame, its supercharger screaming through the furious howl of the engine. Lloyd was driving all out, he was using every ounce of power in his monstrous engine, but still the half-lamed speediron gained on him as they rocketed over the icy roads.

They went down a quarter-mile slope, where a group of scouts stood at the bottom. The fellows heard the scuttering screech of Lloyd's brakes, and they saw the red machine slide sideways as it flung into the abrupt turn at the bottom and shot round it. Ten yards behind came the Super-Four.

Out of the bend into the straight the pair roared, racing neck-and-neck, when suddenly from a narrow lane not twenty yards ahead a farm labourer appeared, leading a horse pulling a load of hay.

Jack had a split second in which to act. He must get past before the ignorant farm-hand led the horse right out into the highway, or he would hit man and horse! Like lightning he gave his machine full throttle, ducked right down low on the petrol-tank, and the next moment he roared underneath the horse's head, with Lloyd, grinning evilly, still racing beside him.

It was a narrow escape for Jack, and Lloyd had not made it any easier, for he had increased his speed to stop Jack from cutting in front of him.

When the pair took the next bush-lined turn Jack was still beside the car. He rode with the Mercedes' wheel-hubs almost touching him, with its engine howling in his ear—with death waiting for him should his wobbling front wheel make him skid, or should he lose control for the fraction of a second.

Like that, always together—the fastest sports car in the world and one of the speediest motor-cycles ever built—they duelled on.

CHAPTER 3.

A Narrow Escape!

STAN BLAIR slid off his bike as he reached the little level-crossing and dumped the machine on the frost-bitten grass beside the gates. He saw that they were closed to railway traffic, and he watched the two fellows who had come with him riding farther up the road to a byway which crossed it.

Fifty yards from Stan was a bend which the racing-machines must take before they gained the crossing. As he knew, it was a long, easy curve, and both would be

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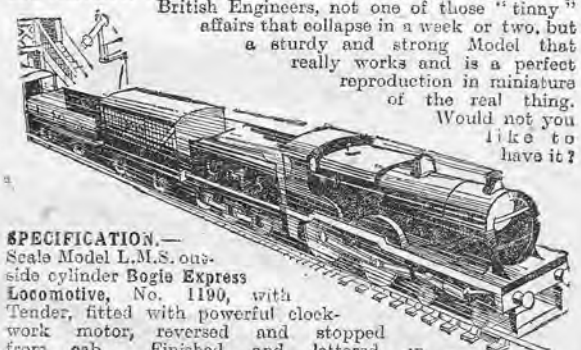
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doing better than a hundred miles an hour when they came out of it.

Standing there by the closed gates he could hear the blare of the warring monsters. The sound of their exhausts rose and fell fiercely as they took corners and came out of them. In another half-minute they would come streaking around the curve.

He moved out to where the railway lines crossed the road. Wooden planks and sleepers kept the surface fairly smooth, and it was as he was examining it that he caught the ring of hobnails on the other side of the gates. He looked up.

A railway man was running towards him. The man looked as though he had dressed hurriedly, and his expression was bad-tempered. He had come from the cottage at Chadley Halt, hardly a stone's throw off. Stan glanced from the man to the frost-rimmed buildings there; then, beyond, he sighted a puff of smoke and heard the shrill whistle of an engine.

"What's up?" he asked, as the man reached the gates. "Special goods train comin' through," the fellow growled. "They've fetched me out o' bed on Christmas mornin' to open these darned gates to let it go by!"

"Open the gates!" Stan stared at him. "I say, you can't do that; we've got a race on!"

"Then you'll have to stop y'r race!" the man granted, and he clicked the big latch of the gate. "You ain't got any right to race on these roads! Stand away!"

He started to open the gate. Stan heard the engine whistle again, and through its squeal he caught the roar of the approaching machines. He flung himself at the gate, and the railwayman went half-staggering as it slammed shut again.

"You can't open them now!" Stan panted. "They'll block the road! There'll be an accident! There's a car and a bike coming round at a hundred miles an hour; and it's too late for me to run into the bend and try to stop them—they couldn't pull up in time!"

"What th' heck d'you think you're playing at?" the man growled. "There'll be a long sight worse accident if that goods train hits these gates when they're shut ag'inst it! Come out o' the way!"

He reached across the gate and shoved Stan aside, then started to push it outwards across the lines. Again Stan barred his way, crowding his shoulders against the iron bars.

"The machines'll smash into it!" he yelled. "Stop the train!"

"I can't stop the train!" came the answer. "An' I wouldn't if I could! It's bad enough to be fetched out o' bed on Christmas mornin' without havin' a lot of mad motor-cyclists tryin' to upset the workin' of the railway! Get away from that gate, or—"

His voice was lost as the Mercedes and the Super-Four hit the far side of the long curve. The wild roar of the car was merged with the fierce machine-gunning of the bike's exhausts. A glimpse Stan had of them through the bushes which lined the long bend, streaking at an affrighting pace.

"Keep these gates shut!" he yelled, and even as he spoke the man used his weight from the other side, pushing the boy off his balance, and sending the big gate half across the line in one vicious drive.

Stan scrambled up. He saw the railway-engine approaching the little station, and now the air was growing thick with snowflakes as the sun went in and the heavy clouds loomed low above. Desperately he hurled himself at the gate, jabbing his heels into the rails, forcing it back just as the Mercedes and the Super-Four came out of the curve and the goods engine roared past the buildings of Chadley Halt!

Stan saw that his brother was level with the car's front wheels, and neither machine seemed to touch the ground as they rocked at the crossing. Madly the boy strove to force the gate wider; he heard the man at the other side shouting as he heaved to close it.

The steel rails underfoot were vibrating from the weight

of the approaching train. The air was quivering from the wild bellowing of the battling machines.

Struggling desperately, Stan forced the gate back another yard, and then car and speediron were on him, while the locomotive loomed enormous behind him and over the scene.

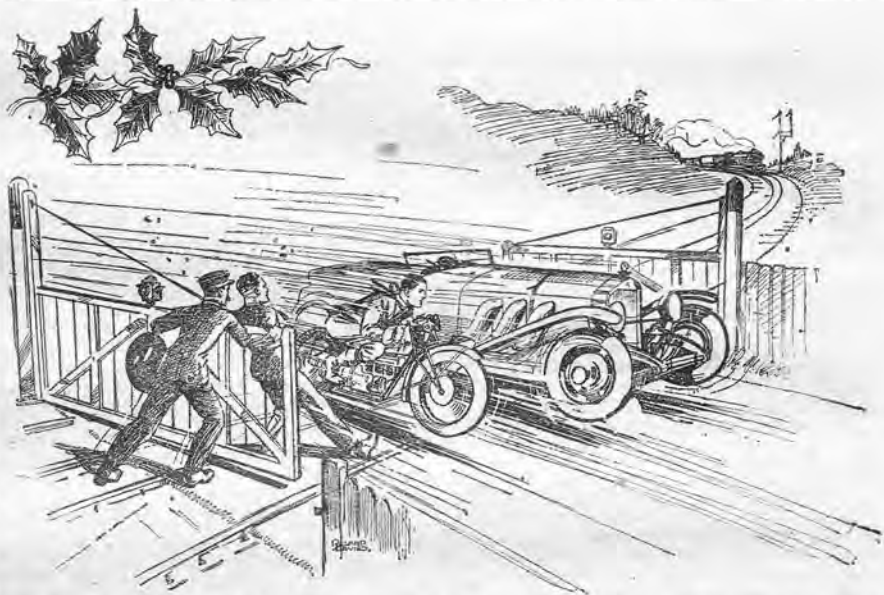
He saw the Mercedes' front wheels patter on the road; but Lloyd did not draw over to give Jack room in which to clear the half-opened gate! He was holding him to the side of the road—forcing him to drive straight at Stan!

Again the boy thrust on the gate, and it opened farther. Then the Super-Four seemed to fairly leap. A yard it came in the lead, then the wildly-wobbling front wheel leaped into the air.

It missed Stan and the edge of the gate by the fraction of an inch. Then it was past, with the red car leaping beside it. Both kicked high from the rails as they crossed them, and the instant that they were through Stan flung himself away from the gate, letting it crash shut as he jumped for the other one.

The engine was on him then. He loosed the latch, hauled the gate towards him, and sent it swinging over the crossing. The locomotive's buffer beam missed it by no more than the thickness of the gate's paint, then the gate had locked home, the way was clear, and the long goods train thundered safely past.

Panting and gasping, Stan leaned against the gatepost, and it was as the last van rumbled by him that he saw a



Again Stan thrust on the gate, and it opened farther. Then the Super-Four seemed fairly to leap. A yard it came in the lead, then a wildly-wobbling front wheel leaped into the air, missing Stan and the gate by a fraction of an inch. The bike was past in a moment, with the red car beside it, and the oncoming goods train was only a matter of seconds away!

rocket burst in a smother of green stars above the start-and-finish point.

It was the signal that the club had agreed to send up if Jack won!

Mr. Hawke himself investigated the matter of the loosened steering damper then and there. One of the motor-cyclists thought he had seen one of Lloyd's mechanics tampering with the machine; between them, Stan and his companions scared the fellow into telling the truth, even to producing the five-pound note which Finnmere Lloyd had given him to do the work.

As a Christmas-box, Mr. Hawke gave Finnmere Lloyd a check for a month's salary—and told him to get out of the works!

As another Christmas-box, he appointed Jack Blair technical adviser in Lloyd's stead.

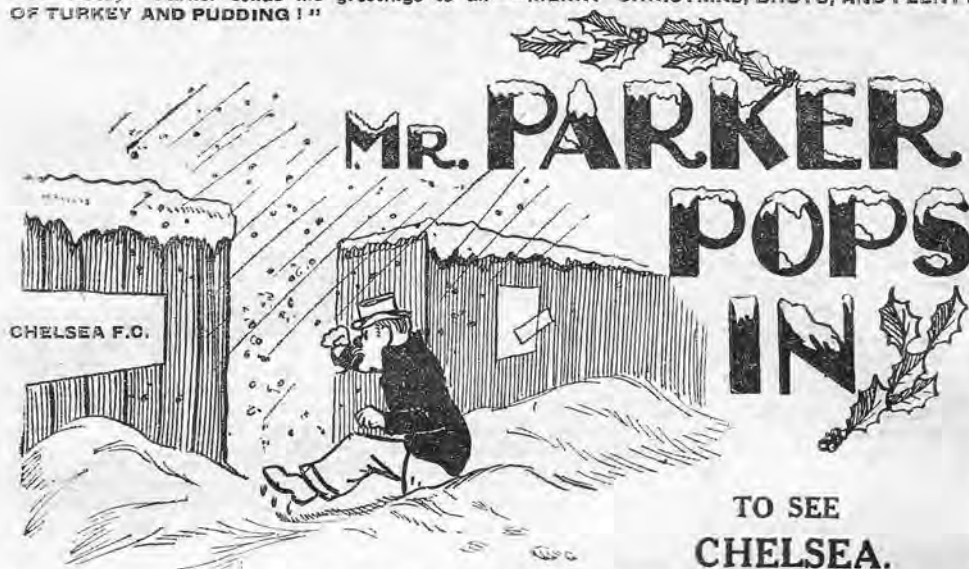
Months later, Jack took a Super-Four Hawke across the finishing-line in the Isle of Man, winning the T.T. The crowd noticed that he wore a white crash-helmet; some who were observant saw that it had a silver band above the rim, and in this band was a faded sprig of holly to which a withered red berry still clung.

That crash-helmet was the Christmas present Stan and the rest gave him during the snowstorm which swept Chadley Heath after Jack had beaten Lloyd's red car.

THE END.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,138.

Mr. "Nosy" Parker sends his greetings to all—"MERRY CHRISTMAS, BOYS, AND PLENTY OF TURKEY AND PUDDING!"



Like a Christmas cracker, old "Nosy" Parker, our special representative, can always be reckoned to make a BIG NOISE. North, South, East, and West, his far from fairy footsteps have been heard to clomp through the gates of football grounds. There he stays a little while, and then—Clomp, clomp, clomp! "Nosy" comes away with his head filled with NEWS—news for all lovers of the Great Winter Game!

LET us talk of ghosts—because this is the time when they "walk." They are not supposed to haunt football grounds, but I am told that there is a ghost which has stalked about the Chelsea ground at Stamford Bridge for several years past.

This ghost carries a banner with this strange device: "PROMOTION."

Many times have the Chelsea players chased that ghost; often have they come up to it—almost. But always it has eluded them at the finish, as all really well-brought-up ghosts are trained to do. One of these days, however, it will be well and truly laid, and I guarantee that if you go into the Stamford Bridge ground—as I did just recently—you would be told that promotion is sure to be gained this season. They have been saying that for years and years, but I am beginning to wonder if the reply to promotion questions, so far as Chelsea are concerned, should be, "Not this season but next season." And always next season.

As a matter of fact, if you do want to get into the Chelsea ground you must, unless you are armed with a properly signed ticket, do as the ghosts do—get there without any one seeing you. Chelsea's gatekeepers are indeed Pensioners, and they act like real soldiers. They look at you suspiciously and if you walk up you are immediately greeted with the old army watchword: "Who goes there?" And unless you can produce one of those magic rickets by way of reply then you know very well that you can only get into the ground over the dead body of those soldiers who stand to attention at the gates.

Mirth-Making Midgets.

STILL, little things like that don't worry yours truly. I got in—never mind how—and there met just the cheeriest lot of fellows you could come across anywhere. They may be scared of the ghost which stalks across the pitch, but they don't show any signs that their vain efforts to catch the ghost have got on their nerves.

Over the offices of the club they have a billiard-room, and these Chelsea players might gain promotion right away if they could meet all their opponents on the billiard-table instead of on the football pitch.

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,138.

I saw a game in progress between Jacky Crawford and George Pearson, and the match was causing some fun. Every time either of them had to play a billiard shot when the white ball was some distance away from the cushion some other member of the team would run round the table with a little footstool. You see they are the midgets of the team—the Jack-in-the-boxes, if you prefer it put that way.

Christmas Misadventures.

THE trouble with this Chelsea team is that there are so many Jacks. I went from the billiard-room to the dressing-room, and called out: "Is Jack there?" Immediately half a dozen players came forward, with Jack Whitley, the trainer, first to answer the call. Perhaps it is because there are so many Jacks that all the Chelsea players have been given nicknames. Full-back Smith, for instance, is called "Reverend Smith." I am not quite sure why, though it was hinted to me that he got the name when he turned up one morning in a bowler hat instead of the cap which is the usual headgear on training days.

Anyway, why shouldn't Chelsea have a Rev. Smith, seeing that they have also a Bishop? Bishop ought to play chess, but he doesn't, though he has made many moves on the football field, having, so he assured me, played in every position except right full-back at some time in his career.

Being on the look-out for Christmas atmosphere, however, I asked Jack Townrow for a story of his Christmas experiences, and he told me this one relating to the time when he was with Clapton Orient. One Christmas-time they went to play a match at Grimsby when the ground was inches deep in slush. Immediately after the match they had to catch a train in order to get to a far-distant place for another game the next day. So great was the hurry that the players had no time for the usual wash and brush up. They changed in the taxi's on the way to the station, and were duly planted in the train with the mud of battle all over them.

Even the train had no proper facilities for a wash, but eventually just one bucketful of water was obtained, and with this the players did their best to make themselves look respectable. But—so Jack assured

me—the last player who washed in that bucket of water had rather a "streaky" face when he had finished!

TOM LAW, who has played for Scotland at full-back, and who is called "Ginger," also told me a Christmas story. During the festive season of 1927 Chelsea went to Hull. After the match they went by train to Doncaster in a reserved saloon. At Doncaster this saloon was shunted to wait the coming of the main-line train to London, to which it had to be attached. The main-line train came in all right, and it duly went out again, with the Chelsea players still in their reserved saloon in a siding. They had been forgotten; once more left behind in the "promotion" race!

Turkey Taboo!

SKIPPER "ANDY" WILSON has been long enough away from Scotland to have lost his Scottish accents; but he hasn't lost it, and when I chatted with him I felt as though I wanted an interpreter. But, believe me, Andy can not only talk about sport—he can plan it—almost every game there is. He had prizes galore for playing bowls; is much sought after as a referee of boxing matches in the Stamford Bridge part of London, and can golf with the best of them in spite of a War relic in the shape of an almost useless left hand.

Little Harold Miller will take on any of Chelsea's other players at the royal and ancient game of golf, however, and he can also handle a billiard-cue to good purpose, as any frequenter of a certain billiard hall in Watford will tell you.

Dirt-track racing also interests these Chelsea players, too, because the ground at Stamford Bridge is one of the places where this sport is very popular. Cricket is Albert Thain's most popular pastime apart from football, and my general impression after visiting Stamford Bridge is that there is no sport known in this country about which the Chelsea players are not prepared to talk at length.

Why, they even have a dummy rowing boat as part of their training equipment. It has a sliding-seat and oars, and is fine exercise for the muscles. Jack Whitley knows all the tricks of the trainer's trade, and he knows what the players should eat, too.

No turkey or plum-pudding at Christmas-time, but good, wholesome food after the match. On the grandstand there is a Royal Box which has been occupied by both his Majesty the King and the Prince of Wales.

And one of these days that ghost will be laid and Chelsea will be back where they ought to be—in the First Division. "When do you think that will be?" was question put to me by Millington of the "safe hands."

Taking my courage in both hands I said: "This year, next year, sometime, never." And then I had to get out of the ground quicker than any dirt-track specialist has ever gone round the track at Stamford Bridge!

"NOSEY."

ANOTHER STIRRING INSTALMENT OF **DAVID GOODWIN'S** Grand New School Serial, dealing with the amazing and amusing adventures of Taffy Wynne & Co., heroes of—

THE WORST FORM AT CODRINGTON!



(Introduction on next page.)

Dereker on the Warpath!

BUT it didn't come off," said Birne. "Sir Harry looked jolly well upset by it at first, and no wonder. Did you see the way he looked at Lambe?"

"He didn't believe it!" exclaimed Taffy. "No gentleman would take any notice of an unsigned letter, and such a dirty one as this. He just threw the thing away, and showed what he thought of it by jolly well drinking Lambe's health. The old boy's a brick. We—"

"There's nothing to show who wrote this," said Birne. "It's printed, so as not to leave any handwriting that might be recognised. So was the envelope, for I got a glimpse of it when it was brought in."

"I know who did it, though," said Dereker. "It was that worm Ferguson; he and his gang were confabulating up in the boot-room half the afternoon."

"That's true," said Jellicoe. "I saw them myself."

"The sweeps! But it's hard to say which one actually wrote it," said Taffy.

"It was Kent-Williams. He's the partner who always works these sort of dodges, and I saw him in the Post Office, sendin' off a letter by express post to catch the evenin' mail, which is delivered here at eight-thirty."

"Ah!" said Taffy. "So Kent's the 'well-wisher,' is he? He'll wish himself well out of it before we've done with him. They've played some rotten tricks this term, but that's the rottenest of the lot. You were right to read that note, Derry."

"And I'm going to keep it," returned Dereker grimly, folding the note and putting it in his pocket. "I vote we—Hold on, here's Sir Harry!"

Their host entered the room, looking very cheery; but when he saw the grave faces of the boys he paused a moment and considered them.

"By the way, my lads," he said quietly, "do you happen to know of any enemies that your Form master, Mr. Lambe, has?"

"Well, sir," said Taffy, feeling the question was rather awkward to answer, "I should say he's got a lot more friends. But some fellows are such beasts that—"

"Ah, yes! Well, I don't want to know anything about that," said the baronet. "But surely he is very popular at the school?"

"With nearly everybody he is, sir, even in the Remove,

"Look after your gold plate. The man who calls himself 'Lambe' is a thief, and the police are after him. He has done one burglary near here already. Your house will be the next!—A Well-Wisher!"

where we all get sat on now and then. It's only one or two cads that don't like him. But I won't say any more."

"Quite right. If such a master as Mr. Lambe were not popular I should believe there was something very wrong with the boys. Come along; we're going to have a shooting-match. Any first-class shots here?"

All went merrily again when the party came together, and after coffee in the warm conservatory they went to Sir Harry's miniature rifle range in the Long Gallery, which was beautifully fitted and lit by electric light. They shot four or five matches with keen rivalry, Birne coming out a winner among the juniors, while Jellicoe contrived to plug a chairback that was not more than six feet away from the target.

"You'll improve in time," said Sir Harry. "The best I ever saw was poor Major Caley; and yet I remember the time when he was advised by the musketry instructor to fix a bayonet to his rifle and charge the target, because that was his only chance of hitting it."

"Wasn't he the man who was found guilty in the Army contracts scandals?" asked the Head.

"Yes; but I'll never believe he was guilty," said Sir Harry warmly. "He was a brave man, and I don't believe a man who does a gallant action will ever do a dishonourable one."

"I don't agree with you," said Mr. Lambe quietly.

"What, sir! Have you ever known such a case?" said the baronet.

"Yes; I know of one case very well indeed," replied the Woolly Lambe dryly. "I could convince you, Sir Harry, if I chose. My turn to shoot? Thank you!"

He took the little .220 rifle, and the boys glanced at him uncomfortably, wondering what he meant. He shot coolly, making a very good score, and the match concluded with a good deal of chaff and merriment. The shooting competition made everybody wonderfully keen, and they had another one.

"Bless me! It's past ten!" said the Head. "I shall have to send these youngsters home, Sir Harry, as we agreed."

"Oh, hang it, no!" said the baronet. "Let 'em stay, canon, and all go together. Pity to split the party up—it'll be dull without 'em!"

The Head protested, but he did not seem able to hold out against Sir Harry, who carried his point. It was seldom enough that any Codringtonians got visiting-leave. And so cheerily did the party go that the time was hardly noticed, and it was past eleven before the Head insisted on making a move.

The old family brougham from Codrington was so long in being made ready that the motor-bus which had fetched the boys was at the door long before it. The Head would not let them wait any longer; his conscience rather pricked him for not having sent them home before. So he insisted on their going ahead at once.

They bade the heartiest of farewells to the genial Sir Harry, and thanked him for the evening's pleasure.

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,136.

Dorothy told Taffy that there were three ponies in the stables, and that she meant to get the chums invited over on a half-holiday for some pony-racing on the old training-ground. In high spirits the boys got into the comfortable station motor-bus and departed.

"Rippin' people," said Dereker, as the park was left behind. "What we want is more governors like Sir Harry Beckford. I never took much stock in girls before, but Dorothy's a regular brick. That pony-racing will be a capital sport."

They discussed the incidents of the evening during the journey, and the bus ambled along serenely. It was a slow concern, though comfortable, and not very sure, either. In about twenty minutes' time there was a jar and a bump, and it stopped dead.

"What's wrong, uncle?" said Dereker to the chauffeur, getting out. "Water gone off the boiler?"

"The differential gear's gone wrong," said the chauffeur gloomily. "This here's going to be a job."

He got out his box of tools and disappeared underneath the car. The boys, finding they could not help, went inside again out of the cold, and were so engrossed in the discussion of the evening that they found three-quarters of an hour had passed and still the car was under repairs.

"By gum, this is a go!" chuckled Birne. "Lambe an' the Head will have got home before now. Had we better walk it?"

"No jolly fear! I don't mind if it takes all night," said Taffy. "It isn't our fault; besides, she's about ready now."

"Lucky there's no horse near—it'd die of laughing at us," said Birne. "The family brougham's beaten the stink-car, after all."

The motor rolled along again, and presently slowed down and turned into a side road.

"He's going a long way round," remarked Dereker at last, looking out of the window. "Where are we?"

"There's a lot of fresh stone down on the main road, an' he's afraid of his tyres," said Taffy. "That's why we're goin' this way. Shortest in the end, unless she—Oh, skittles!"

There was another bump and a bang, and the car was stopped again. This time it was the sparking-plugs that were out of action, and the boys all got out feeling exasperated.

"Look here, we shall have grown whiskers by the time this rattle trap gets us home!" said Taffy. "How long are you going to be?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour this time," was the reply. "The blessed ol' car's playing the fool to-night; she hasn't broken down before in the last two months."

"Let's go for a walk an' get warm, then," said Dereker. "It's jolly cold sitting in there now the foot-warmer's cooled off."

The chums stepped out briskly down the road. It was still a good distance to the school, and the car had brought them so far out of the way that they were not sure of the route. And, besides, there was something novel in being out all night. So they decided to let the car land them at Codrington, if it took a week.

The night was clear and frosty, with a quarter moon that shed a faint light over the fields. The boys went through a gate into a meadow on the left.

"Hold on, you fellows—squat!" whispered Taffy suddenly. "Who's coming yonder?"

They crouched close to the hedge, as they saw two dark figures approaching near the river. It did not look as if they were up to any good, for they were sneaking along rapidly and cautiously, each bearing some kind of a bundle on his back.

"Poachers!" whispered Dereker.

The men passed within twenty yards, and disappeared under a little stone bridge that spanned a dry backwater of the river. In a few moments they came out again, without the bundles, and hurried off as fast as they could go, looking furtively behind them.

"There's an old, dry sluice-pit, with a board over it," said Taffy. "I've seen the place. You'd think somebody must be after 'em. It's not on Sir Harry's land, though."

The hoot of the motor's horn sounded down the road,

and they heard it approaching. It decided the boys to leave the poachers' spoils alone and get back to bed, for they were pretty well tired out. They got into the motor again, and Jellicoe promptly went to sleep.

"Been quite an excitin' evenin'!" said Dereker, yawning. Then he pulled out the anonymous note and read it again by the light of the lamp inside the car, and his wrath rose afresh. "I tell you what," he said. "I'm going to give the skunk who wrote this a fair warning what he'll get, and he shall know his dirty game is spotted before he's an hour older."

They eagerly discussed the ways and means of bringing it home to the culprit, and were in the middle of it when the car drew up at Codrington. It was then past midnight, and the Head himself, looking very worried, received them at the door. The chauffeur explained what had made them late, and drove off.

"I am beginning to wish this visit had never been paid at all," said the Head, in a distracted voice. "Get to your dormitory quickly, and into bed without delay!"

"Quite a pleasure to obey the old bird for once!" yawned Taffy, after they had reached the dormitory, as he pulled off his jacket. "He seems very sick about something. Can't be only the car's delay that upset him."

"He's always worrying about something," said Birne. "You're in a dickens of a hurry, Derry! Where are you off to?"

"No, by gum!" said Dereker hesitatingly, to himself. "I'll do it now! The beggar shan't wait for it!"

He took the hand-printed note out of the pocket of his coat, and, paying no attention to the questions of his comrades, left the room and ran down the corridor in his bare feet. There was a dangerous look on his face, and his teeth were set. He stopped at the door of No. 4 Dormitory, and went in. An inch of gas was burning at the jet half-way along the wall, as usual, and the rows of beds, all tenanted, were quiet, save for here and there a snore. Kent-Williams' bed was the third one. Dereker went straight to it, and, seizing hold of the sleeper, hauled him out bodily.

Kent-Williams awoke with a yell that roused the whole dormitory, and, finding himself leaving the bed precipitately, he clutched hold of the washstand, bringing it down with a crash. Dereker hauled captive, washstand, and all on to the floor, and Kent-Williams struggled to his feet.

"What are you doing, confound you!" cried Kent-Williams, while everybody in the dormitory sat up in bed and stared.

"Stand up, you earth-worm!" said Dereker hotly. "Look here, do you see that?"

He held out the crumpled, anonymous letter, and Kent-Williams, catching sight of it, turned pale.

"You sent that to Sir Harry Beckford, you cad!"

"I didn't! I don't know what you're talking about!"

"That's a lie! You sent this caddish message to try and queer Lambe when he was Sir Harry Beckford's guest! I'll show you up, you beauty! I'll have you sent to Coventry by the whole school! Sir Harry treated your dirty letter as it deserved, and chucked it away without taking any notice. But I'll see you don't get off so cheaply!"

Kent-Williams made a spring and snatched at the note, but Dereker, stepping back, blazing with anger, cuffed him across the face with all his might.

"That's for a liar and a cur!" he said.

The whole dormitory was in a commotion at once as Kent-Williams staggered back.

"Go for him, you chaps!" cried Ferguson, springing out of bed. "We'll teach him—"

Dereker faced the enemy, caring nothing for the odds against him; but just then somebody cried "Cave!" and a door was heard to open along the corridor. Everybody bolted back to bed, and Dereker, finding himself alone, hesitated a moment, and then, finding there was nothing for it but flight, he darted out of the room and down the passage.

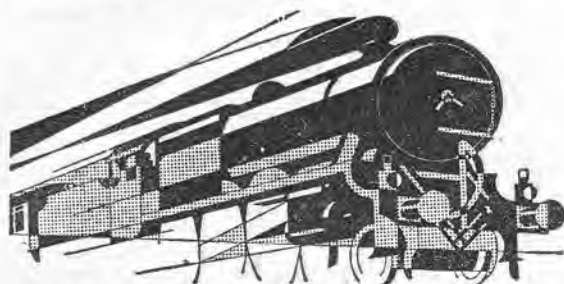
(For the continuation of this grand school serial see next week's GEM.)

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

Convinced that Mr. Wollaston Lambe, their new Form master, is an escaped convict, Taffy Wynne & Co. and Ferguson & Co., rival factions in the Remore, the most unruly Form at Codrington, determine to bring pressure to bear to rid the school of the new master's presence. Their efforts prove of little avail, however, for the Woolly Lambe not only shows that he is capable of taking care of himself and his Form, but sturdes the school by catching a crackman in the act of fooling the school's strong-room. Although Wynne & Co. are now ready to back up the Woolly Lambe, Ferguson and his cronies are still determined to expose their new Form master. Later Taffy Wynne is instrumental in saving the life of Dorothy Beckford, the pretty daughter of one of the governors of the school. As a recognition of his bravery he is invited, together with his chums and a new boy named Jellicoe, to dine at Sir Harry Beckford's house that same night. Canon Wyndham, the headmaster of Codrington, and Mr. Wollaston Lambe, are also invited. Seizing the chance of putting a spoke in the Woolly Lambe's wheel, Ferguson expresses an anonymous letter to Sir Harry, warning the wealthy baronet that the Form master is a thief. Sir Harry, however, throws the incriminating missive into the fire-grate, and promptly drinks to the health of Mr. Lambe.

"The skunk!" says Wynne, retrieving the letter at a favourable opportunity. "So Ferguson reckoned to get Lambe disgraced right here at the table!"

(Now read on.)



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The Menace of the Wolf!

(Continued from page 23.)

snow-bound English lane, that he held in his hand the secret of the identity of the traitors who had planned the revolution against Garcia's father in far-off Rionguay!

"Just a minute, kids!"

There was a silence in Study No. 10 as Eric Kildare rose smilingly to his feet.

The study was full. Tom Merry & Co. had eight guests at their tea-table. Blake & Co. were there, and Talbot of the Shell, and Garcia, the South American. Eric Kildare was one of the cheery tea-party—an honour that made the juniors feel very proud.

But the most important guest of all was Sir Napier Wynter.

Everyone was in high spirits, for in two days' time St. Jim's would be breaking-up for the Christmas holidays.

All eyes were fixed on Kildare's smiling face as the captain, who had risen suddenly to his feet in the middle of the festivities, glanced round the table.

"I want to thank you youngsters for standing my uncle and myself such a ripping tea, while I'm about it," said the Sixth-Former, with a laugh. "We've neither of us been to such a cheery tea-fight for a long while—"

"Hurrah!"

"But, of course, you can always trust the Shell and the Fourth to give you a rattling good time when you are their guests, I know—"

"Cheers!"

"I mean it!" laughed Kildare. "But I really got up to tell you that I believe my uncle has something to say to you all—an offer which I hope you will all accept!"

Kildare sat down. The juniors glanced at one another quickly, surprised.

An "offer" from Sir Napier? What could it be?

There was an eager silence as Kildare's uncle stood up at the head of the table.

Thanks to his athletic constitution, the baronet was none the worse now for his terrible ordeal in the frozen waters of the backwater a few days before. Where most men would have gone down with rheumatic fever, Sir Napier had pulled through after only a day in bed.

He glanced round the ring of listening juniors with a smile.

"First," he said quietly, "I should like to echo what my nephew has said about the hospitality of the junior school at St. Jim's! We appreciate it very much."

"Only too jolly glad to have you with us, sir," murmured Manners.

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"I want to thank you all again, more than I can say, for the bravery you all showed that afternoon," went on Sir Napier, with gleaming eyes. "The recovery of that paper from those scoundrels who are now awaiting their trial in prison, thanks to you youngsters, meant everything to me, as you know. I have it safe now, and I don't intend to let it out of my possession again, I can tell you!"

He paused. The grim look that had appeared for a moment in his face vanished with a smile.

"Now, the offer my nephew referred to is this. I want you all to come and spend Christmas with me, at my house in Wales!"

For some moments there was a breathless silence in Study No. 10. Then an echoing cheer rang out.

"If you will all write to your people to-night, you'll be able to let me know pretty quickly whether you can come or not," the baronet added, with smiling eyes. "Garcia is coming with me, and my nephew, Eric Kildare, will be with us, too. But I fancy you know him well enough to realise that during the holidays you won't have to worry because he is a perfect!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare laughed heartily with the juniors. Tom Merry jumped to his feet.

"I, for one, will be jolly glad to accept your invitation, sir!" he exclaimed eagerly. "It'll be just ripping! And I fancy I can answer for the rest of the chaps, too, sir!"

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

"What-ho!"

"Splendid!" murmured Callao Garcia, with a flashing smile on his handsome, olive-skinned face. "We shall spend a real English Christmas, eh?"

"We certainly shall!" laughed Sir Napier. "And I don't think you will have any fault to find with our English Christmas, Garcia!"

There was a chorus of agreement. Garcia laughed, his dark eyes gleaming round the ring of cheery faces that encircled the tea-table.

But as Tom Merry and his chums joined in a lusty cheer for Kildare's uncle they little dreamed that Sir Napier's enemies were by no means beaten yet, though three of their number were safe in an English prison—little dreamed of the strange adventures that were awaiting them in the wild Welsh mountains where they were to spend Christmas as Sir Napier's guests!

THE END.

(And you bet adventures fall thick and fast upon the heads of the St. Jim's Chums. Don't miss reading "Betrayed!" next week's stirring long story in this special Christmas series.)

Christmas Greetings

From Your Editor.

A Merry Christmas.

MY job this week is one that I would not miss on any account. It is just about the pleasantest duty of the whole twelve months, namely, to offer the heartiest Christmas greetings to all chums up and down the world. And in tendering best wishes to everybody for a jolly Christmas and a prosperous New Year, I have the pleasure of presenting a regular bumper 100 per cent issue of the GEM. It's the real goods, and exactly what you are looking for.

There are no doubts about this number being an out-and-out good one. It contains, of course, the important, unfailingly popular yarn of the old star company of St. Jim's, whose fame extends with the years—and no wonder, for they are a first-class crowd, always on the spot, and figuring in the brightest yarn of the whole week.

There are plenty of seasonable extra features, just the kind of thing to give unstinted pleasure at Christmas-time. I am sure this Bumper Number will have a triumphant reception—the same as has ever been the case, for the GEM always rolls up something better with each season. No more need be said. Here you have a record issue—with cheery salutations to a legion of good friends from authors, artists, and staff.

I feel sure the GEM Christmas Number will help in making the season enjoyable. I ask for nothing better than that.

Peace on Earth!

Just a word about this question of how to spend Christmas. Some people seem to be in doubt about how to tackle the business. Gemites, however, are not among this crowd. I am judging from letters to hand. Giving the next fellow to you a good time, or trying to, is, maybe, the best way. But that's neither here nor there. Some other tips for Christmas include one to be precious careful as to your choice of presents. For instance, it's not a bit of use giving Aunt Jane, aged ninety, a top-speed bike, or a football to uncle who has the gout. The attention in the last instance may be taken kindly, but perhaps not—you never know, do you? Then again, it's no use being disappointed because Christmas does not fit in with some of those old-time pictures of snow and holly and stage coaches rolling up to the doors of hospitable inns, with the jolly landlord standing ready to welcome in the guests. But Christmas as we know it these days means tons more than that. It spells the best of fellowship, and a complete wipe-out of misunderstandings and old quarrels. It's a grand time for clearing up and starting anew.

New Chums and Old!

So, it just remains to offer the old wish to all my friends. There are more than ever this time. Some are spending their first Christmas in the company of the GEM and Tom Merry & Co. The heartiest welcome goes to these newcomers. I hope they will find this the best Christmas yet.

One more thing about this special grand issue. Isn't it jolly well up to the splendid record of the old paper? Times change, but the new days and the new Christmases find the GEM just as bright and up-to-date as of yore. So it will always be, for the GEM stands for the real spirit, the big thing, and for all else which helps the world onward. Good luck and a Merry Christmas!

YOUR EDITOR.