

MUTINY ON THE HIGH SEAS: SCHOOLBOYS IN PERIL **FULL STORY INSIDE,**

THE GEM 2d



"The SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!"

TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S—

The *Shanghaied* *Schoolboys!* *By* MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER 1.

An Editorial Rush!

WHAT about Rake?" Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell at St. Jim's, glanced up, pen in hand, with a very thoughtful frown.

Tom Merry was seated at the table in his study—Study No. 10. So were his two chums and study-mates, Harry Manners and Monty Lowther. So were Reginald Talbot, of the Shell, and Blake and Levison of the Fourth.

They were all very busy!

It was press-day for "Tom Merry's Weekly," and—as frequently happened—a last-minute rush was in progress to get the "copy" to the printers in time.

Tom Merry, as Editor of the famous "Weekly," had long ago discovered that an Editor's lot is frequently anything but a happy one!

Contributors had a way of being late with "copy"—always with the best excuses in the world, in their own opinion, at any rate; consequently it was seldom indeed that the harassed Editor of the famous "Weekly" was able to arrange his make-up at his leisure.

Fellows who had undertaken to supply a five-hundred word article were in the habit of sending in, at the very last moment, an article of twice that length—and were indignant to find it ruthlessly "cut" when it appeared! Other contributors promised to send something in, and never did, so that at the eleventh hour Tom Merry would find himself with space still to fill.

Altogether, the Editor of the "Weekly," as a rule, had his work cut out!

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A waste of raging seas—unbroken—stretching as far as the eye can reach. And ploughing her way southward goes the Mary Malone on her 6,000-mile voyage—with Tom Merry & Co. on board—shanghaied!



This afternoon was no exception.

It was a Wednesday, and, therefore, a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. would have liked to have been out at footer practice. But there was still more than half an hour's work before them, in the rush to get the "Weekly" to press.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

Pens were scratching busily in Study No. 10.

Blake was busy on his boxing notes. They should have been ready a few days ago, but somehow they had not been! So Tom Merry had sallied forth after dinner and ferociously collared Blake, installing him, with pen and

—FEATURED IN HUNDREDS OF QUICK-ACTION THRILLS BELOW!



Talbot glanced up from his footer article, and shook his head.

"I shouldn't, Tommy. Racke was a bad egg, and since you can't say anything nice about the rotter it's best to leave well alone, don't you think?"

"P'raps you're right," nodded Tom. "No, I won't say anything about him."

"What about poor old Trimble?" asked Levison quietly. "Are you saying anything about him?"

Tom's sunny face clouded.

Baggy Trimble, the fat junior in the Fourth, had vanished from St. Jim's some time ago, very mysteriously. But the truth had come out at last, and it was known that Baggy had been kidnapped by a rascally sea-captain, who had believed Baggy to have wealthy relations who would be able to pay a big ransom for his release.

It had been indirectly the fault of Aubrey Racke that this had happened, for Racke had been in touch with the rascally captain, and had he cared, could have saved Baggy from being carried away in his ship, by explaining that, as a matter of fact, Baggy's relations were anything but wealthy.

Racke had not done so because he had been only too glad to see Baggy out of the way for a while—Baggy having discovered Racke's rascality in connection with Figgins' exam papers, and been blackmailing Racke over the affair.

paper, in the editorial study, with dire threats as to what would happen if the notes were not ready in half an hour.

Talbot, who had also been captured, with many threats, was busily writing up a vivid account of the previous Wednesday's football match against Rylcombe Grammar School. Levison was finishing off an article dealing with the doings of the Eagle Patrol—the School House patrol of Scouts. Manners was struggling to cut down, at Tom Merry's heartless command, a thousand-word article on photography to three hundred words.

Tom himself had been busy with his make-up sheets. But suddenly he had glanced up.

"What about Racke?"

Levison looked across the table at him.

"Well, what about him?"

"I was thinking we ought to have had some reference to his expulsion in the 'Weekly,'" said Tom, with a thoughtful frown. "It's a big event, that cad Racke being kicked out of St. Jim's. Don't you think we ought to refer to it in some way?"

Aubrey Racke, the black sheep of the Shell, had been expelled from St. Jim's only two days before.

It had been discovered that he was the unscrupulous individual who had stolen some pages from an exam paper written by George Figgins, of the New House, with the intention of causing Figgins to lose the exam. The exposure of Racke's dastardly work had put an end to his career at St. Jim's—the expulsion that the black sheep had so often merited had come at last!

As Tom had said, Racke's going had been a big event in the Lower School.

Nearly all the fellows had been heartily glad to see the last of Aubrey Racke. But that fact had by no means lessened their excited interest in his departure.

"Oughtn't I to say something about it in the Editorial?" asked Tom thoughtfully.

What had begun as mere rascality had ended in tragedy, however, when it had been reported that the ship on which Baggy had been carried away from England—the Harvester—had been sunk with all hands!

"Poor old Baggy!" muttered Tom. "No, I haven't said anything about him in the Editorial, either. After all, it's not known definitely that he was drowned when the Harvester went down. And if I put in a sympathetic notice, when he was not really dead, it would be rotten!"

"Not much chance that the poor chap survived the wreck, though," said Levison, with shadowed eyes.

"Still, I don't think I'll say anything about it in the 'Weekly,'" answered Tom, frowning.

He bent again over the make-up sheets.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

The juniors worked busily.

After another five minutes Monty Lowther laid down his pen and glanced round at the others.

"Hem!"

Lowther coughed, evidently with the intention of drawing his chums' attention. But everyone seemed to be too busy even to have noticed this expectant cough.

"I say, you chaps, listen to this, will you?" murmured Monty hopefully. "It's a funny poem for the comic page—"

He broke off expectantly

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

"Hem!" Monty Lowther coughed louder, and picked up the sheet of paper in front of him. "How's this? 'Baj Jove!' hooted Gussy—"

Tom glanced up.

"Blake, old chap, keep those boxing notes down to a column, will you? We're a bit short of space this week."

Lowther glared at Tom, and began again:

"'Baj Jove!'—"

"What's up?" asked Tom Merry, staring at him.

"Nothing, ass! I'm—"

"I thought you said 'By Jove!'"

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"So I did!" roared Monty Lowther. "It's part of the poem—"

"What poem?"

"This funny poem I'm reading to you, you dummy!" snorted Monty Lowther indignantly.

"Oh! Are you reading a funny poem?"

"Yes!" said Lowther, between his teeth. "I'm trying to, anyway. Listen! 'Bai Jove!' hooted Gussy. 'Who thwew—'"

"Who through?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I say, that sort of grammar won't do for the 'Weekly,' old chap. You mean, 'Whom through,' you know."

"Threw! T-H-R-E-W!" roared Lowther. "Not through, you idiot!" He snorted, and began again. "'Bai Jove!' hooted Gussy. 'Who thwew that bwick at my toppah? Did you?'"

Tom Merry, busy again with his make-up sheets, shook his head.

"No," he murmured absently, "I didn't. Must have been somebody else."

Monty Lowther's face went almost crimson.

"You dummy!" he shrieked. "I wasn't asking if it was you! That's in the poem! That's what Gussy is asking—"

"You can tell him it wasn't me, then," murmured Tom, writing busily.

Monty Lowther gasped, struggling for words. He glared at Tom.

"Listen!" he panted wrathfully. "I'll begin again. 'Bai Jove!' hooted Gussy—"

"I say, Tom," put in Manners, rather gloomily, "it's jolly difficult to cut this article, you know. It'll ruin it! There's not a word that isn't really necessary—not a word of it. It's—ahem—rather a good article, too, I think. It's only a thousand words, you know—"

"Make it three hundred, old chap, won't you?" murmured Tom, without glancing up.

Manners, with a very disconsolate face, got busy again with a reluctant pen. Though it was, he felt, absolute sacrilege to cut a single word of that splendid article of his on photography, Tom Merry's word was law on the "Weekly."

Monty Lowther had stopped, red with wrath, at the fresh interruption. He glared.

"Do you fellows want to hear this funny poem, or don't you?" he yelled.

Tom Merry glanced up, and laid down his pen with a sigh.

"Oh—oh, yes! Rather! Let's hear it."

There was not very much enthusiasm in Tom's voice. Monty Lowther's funny poems for the "Weekly" frequently seemed funny to no one but Lowther himself. Lowther, though he knew that all geniuses had to suffer at times from lack of appreciation on the part of Editors, was wont to wax indignant when Tom turned his efforts down—wherefore, Tom's face was distinctly unenthusiastic as Monty Lowther again began to read his latest effort:

"'Bai Jove!' hooted Gussy. 'Who thwew

That bwick at my toppah? Did you?"

With rage he then cussed us,

When we said 'It was just us!'

I'll administrah thwashin's!

Cried Arthur Augustus!

'That you've w'eked my best toppah, you'll

wue!'"

As he finished, Monty Lowther glanced up from the paper in his hand expectantly.

He had hoped for a roar of laughter from his chums—or, at any rate, broad grins.

Instead, most of them were still writing busily. And in the face of Tom Merry there was again an absent, thoughtful expression.

"You know," said Tom, "I think I ought to mention poor old Baggy in the Editorial. I won't speak of him as though he is definitely drowned—though he must be, poor chap. I'll just say how terribly sorry the school was to hear that Baggy was on board the Harvester when she went down."

He drew a clean sheet of foolscap towards him, and began to write out the addition to his Editorial.

Monty Lowther drew a deep breath.

Even the tragic subject of the loss of the Harvester, with Baggy Trimble of St. Jim's on board, was no excuse, he felt, for this disgracefully heedless reception of his masterpiece. Had it not been that it was the unhappy affair of Baggy Trimble that had caused Tom's inattention, Monty Lowther would probably have given vent to his feelings with personal violence.

As it was, he stood up, breathing very hard, and stalked from the room, thrusting his unappreciated poem into his

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pocket. He slammed the door behind him with an echoing crash.

Tom Merry looked up and stared at the door in amazement.

"What the dickens is the matter with old Monty?" he inquired in an astonished tone. "He seems waxy! And I thought he wanted to read a poem or something, too? Funny!"

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

Tom's pen joined in once again with the scraping of the others.

In Study No. 10, the important business of sending "Tom Merry's Weekly" to press continued without further help from Monty Lowther, or his screamingly comic contributions.

CHAPTER 2.

The Man in the Lane

"H!"

Tom Merry & Co. turned their heads.

The Terrible Three were cycling back to the school from Rylcombe at about tea-time, after having delivered the "copy" for the "Weekly" at the printers. Monty Lowther, by now, had forgotten his ire at the lack of appreciation with which his poem had been received; he had decided, secretly, to save it up for the next issue.

The three chums of the Shell had been talking cheerily enough as they pedalled slowly along the lane through the deepening dusk—when suddenly a voice hailed them.

"Hi!"

Glancing round, they saw that it was a man whom they had just passed who had called after them—a rough-looking man who had been tramping along in the direction of St. Jim's.

"What the dickens does he want?" muttered Tom.

The man in the road was not a very savoury-looking individual. From his clothes, Tom Merry guessed him to be a seaman of some kind, for he was wearing a blue sweater and a peaked seafarer's cap.

For a moment Tom Merry wondered whether to stop or whether to ignore the unexpected hail. But the eager expression on the man's weather-beaten face, as he broke into a run towards them, caused Tom to jump from his cycle and wait, with a puzzled look, for the stranger to come up.

Manners and Monty Lowther followed Tom's example.

"Scuse me, young gents—"

The sailorly-looking man had come hurrying up and touched his cap as he halted in front of them.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

The man's eyes were on their caps.

"You young gents from St. James' School?" he inquired hoarsely.

"Yes," nodded Tom. "We are. Why?"

"I was on my way there," went on the man. "Not far, is it?"

"Half a mile down the road," said Tom Merry, staring at him, with surprised face. "You say you are going there?"

The man grinned rather queerly, and nodded.

"I am, sir!"

The Terrible Three glanced at one another. They were wondering—what could this rough, unsavoury character want at St. Jim's?

The next moment, however, their astonishment died away to some extent, as the man asked abruptly:

"I suppose, if you're at the school, that you knows a young gent named Racke?"

"Racke!" echoed Manners, with a significant glance at his chums.

Aubrey Racke, the recently-expelled black sheep of the Shell, was known to have been acquainted with several shady characters, most of whom he had come across on his secret visits to the Green Man in Rylcombe.

If this unknown man were visiting St. Jim's, it was not surprising to Tom Merry & Co. that his visit was in connection with Aubrey Racke.

Tom smiled rather grimly.

He was about to tell the man that his visit would be a vain one, if he hoped to see Aubrey Racke, since Racke had been expelled, and had gone from St. Jim's for good. But before he could do so, the man's next words abruptly checked his intention.

"And you'll know, too, a young fellow named Trimble, eh?" he added, with a leering grin. "A bit of a rumpus, I'll guess, when he sort o' disappeared sudden-like from the school—eh?"

His grin died away the next moment, and his eyes shifted a trifle uneasily, as though he wondered if he had said too much. Tom Merry & Co. stared at him dumbly.

What did this man know of Baggy Trimble?

"Not that I knows anything about the young 'un—"

Trimble, I mean," he added hastily. "I 'appened to 'ear in the village just now that he'd vanished from the school—that's all!"

It was so obvious that the man was lying, to cover his rash remark, that Tom Merry & Co. were not deceived for a moment by his hasty explanation.

Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming with a strange light as he stepped quickly forward and grasped the man by the arm.

"What do you know about Trimble?" he breathed.

"About young Trimble!" grinned the man, his eyes fixed keenly on Tom Merry's.

"What about him?" breathed Tom swiftly. "Trimble went down with the Harvester—"

The man shook his head.

"No," he said, "that's jest where you're wrong, you see! He didn't drown—any more than I did! I was aboard the bloomin' Harvester myself—Cap'n Gallon's steward. My name's Pitt, and I've come along to tell you that young Trimble is still alive an' kicking!"



"Hi!" Tom Merry & Co., pedalling slowly along the lane, glanced round as a voice hailed them.

"Nothin', I tell you!" answered the man nervously. "It's Mister Racke I want to see—"

"Racke?" growled Manners. "Well, if you want to see him, you—" He broke off abruptly as Tom Merry shot him a warning look.

It had occurred to Tom Merry in a flash that they would learn nothing from this man unless they played their cards well. They would have to match cunning with cunning!

If they once admitted that Racke was not to be found at St. Jim's, the man would probably clear off, leaving them utterly in the dark.

"You want to see Racke—eh?" said Tom quietly. "Well, if you want to see him, it's no good your looking farther than me!"

His statement was true enough, seeing that Racke was no longer at St. Jim's, and a visit to the school would, therefore, bring the man no nearer to meeting Racke than he was at the moment. But, as Tom had expected, the man read another meaning in the words.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated. "You mean to say you're Mister Racke?"

He chuckled.

"Well, this is a bit o' luck, and no error!"

He gripped Tom's hand and shook it. Tom smiled grimly.

"Well?" he said coolly.

"I've come all the way from Southcastle to see you, guv'nor!" went on the man eagerly. "I want to talk to you important—and private."

He glanced significantly at Monty Lowther and Manners. "That's all right," said Tom Merry. "You can say anything for my ears in front of my friends here. So you say you've come all the way from Southcastle to see me—eh? What about?"

CHAPTER 3.

Amazing News!

IN breathless, wondering silence the Terrible Three stared at the cunning, grinning face of the man from the lost Harvester.

He chuckled hoarsely.

"That's a bit of a relief to you—eh, Mr. Racke? Wasn't too comfortable-like, was it, to think you'd had his death on your hands?"

Tom Merry's face had lit up wonderfully. So had the faces of Manners and Lowther.

Though it had been largely due to his own stupid rascality that Baggy had fallen into the hands of Captain Gallon, the unscrupulous skipper of the Harvester, the supposed drowning of the fat junior had been a tragedy that had depressed the Terrible Three ever since they had heard of it.

To learn now that Baggy was alive, after all, was splendid news for Tom Merry & Co.—glorious news!

"My hat!" breathed Monty Lowther, with shining eyes. "How ripping!"

Then a shadow crossed Tom Merry's face.

"Is that true?" he demanded.

"As true as I'm standin' 'ere talkin' to you, sir!" vowed the man, with a conviction that could not be doubted. "They said in the papers we was all drowned, didn't they? That's where they was wrong! A Froggy ship picked up most of us, and took us into Bordeaux. They hadn't got a wireless—a little tub, she was—so till they landed us nobody knew about it, and it was thought we'd all gone to the bottom. But we was saved—Cap'n Gallon, and that young fellow Trimble, and me, and most o' the others!"

"Great Scott!" Tom Merry drew a deep breath. "Then, where's Trimble now?"

The man grinned cunningly.

"That's just it, ain't it?" he grinned. "That's what I wanted to see you about, Mister Racke!"

Tom surveyed the man with a grim look. There was something in the other's face and in his voice—a veiled threat, it seemed—that puzzled the captain of the Shell.

"Well?" he said.

"You see, sir," went on the man named Pitt, with a leer, "I knows all about that business! I knows all about the part you had in it. See?"

"What are you getting at?" demanded Tom coolly.

"I 'appened to overhear some talk between Cap'n Gallon an' the second mate, who was a real pal o' his. Thick as thieves, they were. I 'eard all about how young Trimble had been shipped agin his will, an' how the skipper hoped to get a ransom from his folks when he got back to England. And I 'eard mention of you—that you was in it!"

"You did—eh?" said Tom grimly.

"I did, guv'nor!" grinned the man named Pitt. "An' I guessed, too, that you wouldn't be feelin' very comfortable about thinkin' the young gent drowned, as you'd be bound to think—an' that if I came along as soon as I got 'omo and told you he was still alive and kickin', you'd probably be grateful and generous to me—see?"

A grim smile appeared on Tom Merry's face.

He understood now!

The scarcely veiled threat in the man's tone, despite his silky words, was only too evident.

Pitt had come to blackmail Racke! He intended to threaten to expose Aubrey Racke for his supposed complicity in Baggy's kidnapping, unless he paid well for silence.

"I see," said Tom quietly. "You want money from me—eh?"

"Well, sir, I did think as you might see your way to comin' 'andsome," grinned Pitt. "Seein' as how I've gone out o' my way to bring you the good news, like. And, of course, if I liked, I could get you into 'ot water, I suppose. I wouldn't, o' course—oh, no! But, since I'm doin' the decent thing by you, and keepin' silent, I thought as a generous young gent like you would see his way to doin' the decent thing by me. One good turn deserves another, don't it?"

"Quite!" nodded Tom ironically. "But tell me, where is Trimble now?"

"Oh, that's all right!" grinned the steward. "He can't split on you! Don't you worry!"

"Where is he?" cried Monty Lowther, with breathless impatience.

"He's safe enough!" came the hoarse answer. "He was ill after the wreck; he'd been in the water a good while afore they picked him up, you see. He was ill, and couldn't speak for himself, luckily for Cap'n Gallon. And so at Bordeaux, while he was still delirious-like, the skipper got him aboard another ship, belongin' to a pale 'o his—Cap'n Hood. I found that out."

"Yes?" breathed Tom. "And then?"

"Cap'n Gallon was scared of what he'd done comin' out, you see," explained the man, with a leer. "That's why he had him shipped aboard Hood's craft, the Mary Malone. Hood's sailin' for the River Plate soon, and Gallon's told him to take young Trimble with him. They fixed it between 'em, and I'll lay that Trimble never gets there! Before the Mary Malone gets to the Plate, he'll have disappeared—washed overboard! That's it—washed overboard; I don't think!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Tom.

His face had paled.

"Is this true?" he muttered.

"True as I'm standin' 'ere!" nodded the man. "I found it all out, afore I slipped across 'ome on a coaler. You needn't worry about young Trimble splittin' on yer—he won't never be able!"

"My hat!" breathed Manners. His voice was hoarse.

"So that's all the truth of it, gents," went on the man named Pitt. "Except for you—an' Cap'n Gallon an' his pals, nobody knows. An' I'm sayin' nuthin'—I'm keepin' mum about it, since I knows you'll make it worth my while! Wouldn't like your part in that bizney to come out, would you—eh?"

He did not trouble to veil the threat in his last words. "It's worth a good deal to you, me keepin' quiet," he urged.

"You hound!"

The words rose to Tom Merry's lips. But he did not utter them. He still had his part to play.

"How do I know this is true?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, it's true enough," grinned the man. "The kid's aboard the Mary Malone as true as you could wish. She's visitin' Southcastle for a few days—get's there to-morrow, I believe. Young Trimble'll be kept under hatches while

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she's in port—you can bet your life on that! Then she sails for the River Plate, out o' Southcastle. That's truth."

"He'll be aboard this ship, the Mary Malone, at Southcastle?" echoed Tom Merry.

"That's it. But don't worry—Hood won't let him get away. No one'll know he's there—"

"And what about Captain Gallon?" broke in Tom Merry.

"Cap'n Gallon? He'll be back in England soon, to fix his insurance, and all that, for the Harvester. He's all right! Nobody knows young Trimble was on board that ship 'cept him and us like—"

"That's where you're wrong," said Tom quietly. "It is known at the school, and by Trimble's parents, that he was on board that ship."

"What?" gasped Pitt.

"It may interest you to know that Racke confessed everything—and has now left the school," went on Tom grimly. "And I am not Racke, either, if it comes to that. You've made a big mistake."

The man's face had gone almost yellow. He stared at Tom Merry's grim face with fallen jaw. He fell back a step.

"You—you ain't Mister Racke?" he panted hoarsely. "No."

There was fear in the man's face now.

He realised that in telling his story to someone other than the fellow he had hoped to blackmail—the fellow who would not dare, so he had imagined, to breathe a word of the story to anyone else—he had put himself in a more than awkward position, to say the least of it.

"But you told me—" he began furiously.

"I didn't!" snapped Tom. "You jumped to the conclusion I was Racke, you hound. Well, you see, your little plan for blackmail won't work!"

"Oh, my—" He broke off; his eyes gleamed with an evil light. "So you've been fooling me all the time, eh? You—you—"

He raised a clenched fist, as if to smash it down in Tom's face. But before he could do so the captain of the Shell had flashed out his own fist, straight from the shoulder.

It took the rascal on the point of his unshaven jaw, and he reeled over, to fall with a crash into the road.

Tom Merry stood over him with clenched fists and blazing eyes. Manners and Monty Lowther had swiftly leaned the bicycles against the hedge, to be ready to lend their chum aid in dealing with the furious ruffian if necessary. But there was no need.

The man named Pitt staggered to his feet, cursing. But he did not attack Tom again.

He had had enough!

"Look here, guv'nor," he whined. "You've had me proper, you have! Well, I'll be straight and tell you I was havin' you, too! That yarn I told you ain't true! I was never aboard the Harvester in my life, but I 'appened to meet a cove in Bordeaux what had been, and 'o told me about that young fellow Trimble. But he's drowned—wasn't never seen again after the ship went down. That's the honest truth."

The next moment he had swung on his heel and hurried away into the gloom.

The Terrible Three stared after him dumbly.

"Great Scott!" breathed Manners in a hoarse, unsteady voice. "So he was fooling us all the time! It was simply a yarn made up to try to blackmail Racke with! And poor old Baggy really did go down with the Harvester, after all!"

It was a staggering, tragic blow to the Terrible Three.

All their relief over the news of Trimble's supposed rescue had been unfounded—so the man named Pitt had now told them.

Trimble of the Fourth had gone down with the ill-fated Harvester, after all!

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry's Plan!

GEORGE FIGGINS, of the New House, tapped at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage in the School House, pushed open the door in answer to a summons from within, and entered.

Tom Merry & Co. were all at home—and they were not alone. It was the following afternoon, and tea was just over in Study No. 10. Seated at the table with the terrible Three were Blake & Co. of the Fourth, and Reginald Talbot of the Shell.

"Hallo, you School House bounders!" was Figgins' cheery greeting.

"Hallo, you New House waster!" rejoined Monty Lowther, equally cheerily. "Come right in and shut the door behind you."

"I will," grinned Figgy, suiting the action to his words. "I just looked in to ask if you School House foolzlers would like to play the New House at footer on Saturday. Of

course, I know it'll be more of a massacre than a match, but—

"Absolutely," grinned Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth. "School House will eat your one-eyed team alive, as you say—"

"Ass!" snorted Figgy. "I don't mean that at all. New House will eat your lot alive was what I meant! Well, what about it? As you know, Saturday is a whole-day holiday, in celebration of some Old Boy from the school who's been made a giddy baronet for doing something or other, and I thought it might be a good scheme to fix the match for the morning. I—ahem!—rather expect to be booked up in the afternoon."

Figgins coloured slightly. Blake chuckled.

"Going out with Ethel?" he inquired, with a wink at the others.

Figgins went quite crimson.

"Hem! Yes! I—I had thought of asking her. But how did you know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a chorus of chuckles in Study No. 10.

George Figgins had a very keen admiration for Ethel Cleveland, the pretty cousin of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, who was at school at Spalding Hall—a school for girls near Wayland. At mention of Ethel, Figgins was always liable to go exceedingly red, and there had been no doubt at all that he had had Ethel in his mind when he had coloured up over mention of his proposed engagement for Saturday afternoon.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and surveyed Figgins with a disapproving stare.

Gussy himself had a very great admiration for his pretty cousin, and he did not at all approve of her warm friendship with a "New House boundah" like Figgins.

"As a mattah of fact, Figgins," exclaimed Arthur Augustus frigidly, "I was thinkin' of invitin' Ethel to go out with me on Saturday aftahnoon!"

"You were?" exclaimed Figgins. He grinned. "Thanks for the tip. I'll make sure now of getting in my invitation first."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were chuckles in Study No. 10. The swell of St. Jim's face was certainly a picture as he glared at Figgins.

"Bai Jove! Look heah, Figgins—"

"Well, what about the footer?" cut in Figgins, ignoring his indignant rival and turning cheerily to Tom Merry.

Tom Merry shook his head.

There had been a frown on Tom's face when Figgins had first entered the study. It returned.

"Sorry, old boss!" he said quietly. "Can't be did. We're booked up for Saturday already."

"Oh!" Figgins looked disappointed. "Not funkng us?"

"Ass!" growled Blake.

Tom glanced at his chums.

"What about telling Figgins?" he said abruptly. "I think he ought to know, seeing how he was mixed up in this rotten business of Racke and poor old Baggy."

"Yes, tell him," nodded Talbot.

"Eh?" ejaculated Figgins. "What's this?"

"Listen, Figgy!" Tom Merry pushed a chair towards the New House leader with his foot, and Figgins sat down.

"We've not told anyone else about it—thought it better not to. But yesterday evening Harry and Monty and I—"

As briefly as possible, Tom Merry told Figgins of the meeting with the man in Rylcombe Lane.

Figgins listened, wide-eyed. When at last Tom had finished, he gave a low whistle.

"My hat! So the whole story was just spoof?"

"That's what we thought," nodded Tom, frowning. "We thought it had all been spoof, as the hound said, to blackmail Racke. But we're beginning to wonder if it was spoof, after all!"

"You don't mean—" began Figgins wonderingly.

"After all," cut in Manners quickly, "if I simply wanted to blackmail Racke, why should he have made up a long yarn like that? It would have been good enough if he'd simply told Racke he knew everything, and threatened to tell of his part in it unless he was paid money to keep silent."

"That's so!" muttered Figgins.

"Anyway," went on Tom Merry, "there seems just a chance that the man's story really was true. I won't pretend to feel very hopeful. If I felt more hopeful that there might be something in it, I'd go to the Head at once, of course. But it's no good taking him a made-up story, that he would pass on probably to Baggy's people and torment them with vain hopes. But, as I say on the other hand, there is the faint chance that the story is true—"

"I fancy it is true!" broke in Manners eagerly.

"Manners is a bit more optimistic than the rest of us, Figgy," explained Tom Merry. "But anyway, we've decided to take advantage of Saturday being a whole-day holiday by taking excursion tickets to Southcastle, and finding out if there is such a ship lying there—a ship called

the Mary Malone. If there is, of course, it'll be pretty convincing proof that the man's story was true, after all, and we'll go straight to the police, and get Baggy out of it! If there isn't such a ship, we'll know there was nothing in it."

"And until we know definitely, we're not mentioning it to anybody—except you," put in Talbot.

"Great pip!" Figgins' eyes were gleaming. "Look here! I'll come with you!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Good! The more the merrier! Herries and Dig here can't go, worse luck, because they've already promised to visit an uncle of Dig's on Saturday, and can't very well get out of it, and Gussy has to go to the dentist in the morning—and wants to see Ethel in the afternoon. I believe, so—"

"Well, deah boy, I—I may not, aifah al!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's hastily.

Now that he knew that Figgins was going to Southcastle with the others, and would not therefore spend the afternoon in Ethel's company, Arthur Augustus did not mind so much!

"In fact, deah boys," went on Arthur Augustus, glancing round at the others through his gleaming monocle, "I wathah fancy I might be able to awwange for anothah day for visitin' the dentist, too. Yaas, I will, bai Jove! I should hate to miss any excitement at Southcastle, and it ought to be pvetty excitin' if Baggy weally is a pwisonah on a ship theah! I'll come!"

"Good old Gussy!" grinned Blake.

"I'll bring Fatty Wynn along, too!" exclaimed Figgins. "I think old Kerr's people are coming down to visit him, or something, so he won't me able to come. But Fatty will."

"Good egg!"

(Continued on next page.)

THE MASKED DANCER



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"And mind, not a word about this to any other chaps!" put in Tom. "If there's nothing in it, the least said about it the better."

"Trust me," nodded Figgins.

He rose to his feet and left the study, to hurry off to the New House, there to tell his chums the wonderful news of the possibility of Baggy Trimble being alive after all.

To Figgins—the innocent cause of the whole affair of Baggy's disappearance—the supposed drowning of Baggy had been even more of a shock than to the other juniors. What he had learnt to-night, though it seemed a fairly faint hope, had cheered him wonderfully.

But Figgins little dreamed, as he hurried into the New House from the dusky quad, of the amazing events that were to result from his visit with the School House juniors to Southcastle in search of Baggy Trimble!

CHAPTER 5.

On Board the Mary Malone!

"HEAH we are, deah boys!"

The train had stopped, and the hoarse voice of a porter could be heard shouting:

"Southcastle! All change!"

The Terrible Three, Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Talbot of the Shell, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn, alighted from their compartment, in which they had travelled down from Wayland, and moved off towards the platform exit.

They had left St. Jim's immediately after breakfast that morning. Southcastle was the nearest coast town to the school, and it had not taken the train long to bring them there.

Their quest for Baggy Trimble, the junior who had long been supposedly drowned, had begun.

The station was not far from the docks, and the little party of St. Jim's juniors set off briskly through the busy streets in the direction indicated to them by the ticket-collector. They were all armed with permits from their Housemasters to visit the town, though they had breathed no word of their true reason for going there.

They soon reached the dock gates, where a tall policeman was standing. He looked at them questioningly.

"Mary Malone?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Lemme see—I believe there is a ship of that name in here. No 5 Dock, I think. Want to see somebody on board of her?"

"Yes," nodded Tom Merry.

His heart had leapt at the policeman's corroboration of the fact that a ship called the Mary Malone was in the dock, vague though the constable's acknowledgment had been.

For a moment he wondered whether it would not be wise, there and then, to tell the policeman everything. But he checked the impulse. After all, the man had seemed by no means sure that there was a ship of that name in the dock—it might well be that a similar name had been in his mind. The juniors would look ridiculous enough to bring out such a wild story as theirs, and then find that it had no foundation in fact!

"Yes, if she's here, we want to see somebody on board her," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Try No. 5 Dock," said the policeman casually, and turned away with a nod.

"Come on, you chaps!" muttered Tom Merry.

The long line of docks was plainly numbered. No. 5 was apparently some distance away.

"This way!" said Figgins rather grimly. "We'll soon find out if that rotter's story was true!"

The party of now excited juniors hurried along the cobbled road that ran along behind the big warehouses, with railway-lines sunk in it. They skirted a group of railway-trucks, and came out between two of the warehouses to the deserted wharf. A line of cargo steamers was tied up along the edge of the dock, and one was being busily loaded by a crowd of stevedores. But on the whole the docks were anything but busy that morning. Most of the ships there seemed lifeless and deserted.

"This is No. 5 Dock all right!" muttered Monty Lowther excitedly.

"I don't see a ship called the Mary Malone," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head.

"We've not looked yet!" said Blake shortly. "Come on!"

They moved along the wharf, past the railway-trucks, from which a ship near them was being loaded, with a great rattle of cranes.

The ship beyond it was Italian—certainly not the ship they had hoped to find. But beyond the Italian, her stern towards them, and hidden by her neighbour's bows, was a rusty "tramp" flying the Blue Peter at her foremast—a sign that she was due to sail that day.

"Can't you see her name?" breathed Tom Merry.

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Fatty Wynn, as they drew nearer, and the high, black stern came into view, gave a sudden exclamation:

"It's the Mary something, I do believe!"

"My hat! So it is!" muttered Manners, shooting a queer look at the others. "Now, what price my being too optimistic?"

As yet, however, the second half of the name of the vessel could not be seen, hidden as it was by the bows of the big Italian. The juniors came level with the stern, and halted, their eyes fixed excitedly, but dubiously, on the tramp.

Its untidy decks were deserted.

The fact that the Blue Peter was being flown showed that she was to sail that day, they knew. But evidently she had finished her loading; and from the lack of life about her it seemed that she would not leave the dock for many hours yet.

Was she the Mary Malone?

And if she were, was Baggy Trimble really somewhere on board—a prisoner?

The first question, at any rate, could soon be settled. Tom Merry hurried along beside the vessel to its bows, the other at his heels.

There was a breathless exclamation from Reginald Talbot.

"It is!"

In big white letters the name of the ship stared down at them from the bows—"Mary Malone."

"Gwreat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "So it's twue, atfah all!"

"Looks like it!" muttered Tom Merry grimly. There was a worried frown on his face. "But even now we can't be sure. Being a sailor, that chap Pitt may have spoken of some real ship—without poor old Baggy really being on board her."

"But—"

"I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry incisively, glancing round at the rest of the juniors with gleaming eyes, "there are eight of us. What about going on board, right now, and seeing the captain? We'll jolly soon find out from his manner if it's really true about Baggy being a prisoner on board—and if it is, good enough! The ship can't get away for hours—there'll be heaps of time to have Baggy rescued."

"Heah, heah!" nodded Arthur Augustus. "We don't want to make twouble ovah nothin'—we've got to go carefully, deah boys. Otharwise we shall be gettin' into twouble ourselves!"

"Yes, we ought to feel dead sure first!" muttered Talbot.

"Come on, then," said Figgins.

A gang-plank ran up from the wharf to the side of the ship, and the juniors were hurrying up it a few moments later, with Tom Merry leading the way.

Tom jumped down on to the rusty metal deck. Manners jumped down beside him, and the others followed.

"There must be somebody about!" growled Fatty Wynn, staring round.

"Look!" breathed Blake.

A figure had appeared at the top of the iron ladder leading up to the short upper-deck beneath the wide bridge.

It was a short man, of wiry build, with two strangely green eyes staring out from beneath bushy black brows. His right hand, Tom Merry saw, lacked a finger, as the man above grasped the rail to stare down at them in evident astonishment.

"What in blazes—" began the man with the green eyes harshly.

"We want to see the captain," said Tom Merry coolly. "Captain Hood!"

"You do, do you?" rasped the man with the green eyes. "And who in blazes are you?"

He came slowly down the ladder to the lower deck where the juniors were standing, their eyes fixed upon him.

He thrust his four-fingered hand into the side pocket of his jacket, and surveyed them with a strange look.

"Well?" he rasped. "Who are you, I asked?"

"We want to see Captain Hood," repeated Tom Merry, quietly.

"What about?"

"That's our business."

The man laughed harshly. His green eyes glimmered. "Indeed?" he grinned. "Well, I happen to be Captain Hood!"

His eyes were riveted on them—as Fatty Wynn remarked later, the juniors almost felt as though those eyes were boring holes clean through them, so needle-like was their gaze.

"So you want to see me, do you?" he said, in a voice that was suddenly oddly quiet. "Very well. Come in here."

He turned and led them into a short alley-way beneath the upper-deck. He pushed open a door on their right, and

led the way into a low saloon, with portholes lighting it from the fore-deck.

The juniors followed, after only a moment's hesitation. After all, there were eight of them. They felt that they would be more than a match for this man, if it came to trouble.

In the saloon Captain Hood seated himself on the corner of the long table, and surveyed his guests through narrowed eyes.

"Well?" he demanded. "What are you doing on board this ship?"

Tom Merry faced the man squarely.

"We're looking for a fellow from St. Jim's school," he said quietly. "A fellow named Trimble, who was kidnapped and shipped against his will aboard the Harvester, a ship belonging to a Captain Gallon."

His eyes watched intently, as he spoke, for any sign that might betray the man's inner thoughts. But Captain Hood did not stir a muscle of his face.

"Well?" he rasped. "You don't expect to find him on this ship, I suppose?"

"Wathah!" broke out Arthur Augustus excitedly. "That's just what we hope to do, as a mattah of fact. You see—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" snapped Tom.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ring off!"

"Bai Jove! I considah—"

"So you expect to find your friend on this ship, do you?" grinned the man with green eyes. He grinned sardonically. "May I ask why?"

Now that the man knew so much there was no point in concealing further information. With a glare at Arthur Augustus, who had properly let the cat out of the bag, Tom Merry explained bluntly that they had information to the effect that Baggy had been shipped on board the Mary Malone at Bordeaux, and was to be taken off on the long voyage to the River Plate, in South America, when the ship sailed from Southcastle.

When he had finished Captain Hood was still grinning sardonically.

"I'm sorry if we've made a mistake," said Tom Merry, his heart sinking at sight of that smile, for he was beginning to feel that he and his chums had made a very bad mistake. "But, naturally, in the circumstances, we can't leave any stone unturned. If our friend is still alive—"

"That's all right!" grinned Hood, his green eyes glimmering. "You did right to come and find out."

"Then—then he's not heah?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, yes, he is!" nodded Captain Hood coolly.

"What?" yelled Monty Lowther.

"He—he is?" breathed Tom Merry. "You admit it? You—you hound! How—"

Tom Merry broke off. The words froze in his throat.

There was a deathly silence in the saloon of the Mary Malone.

For, with a quick movement, Captain Hood had put his back to the door, and his gleaming green eyes were staring at them mockingly from above a levelled revolver that he held in his four-fingered hand.

"Oh, yes!" he purred softly. "That youngster you're looking for is here all right. All you heard is true. But you won't be able to tell anyone ashore!"



"MARY MALONE." In big white letters the name stared down at Tom Merry & Co. from the bows of the rusty "tramp." "Gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What—what do you mean?" breathed Talbot. A flickering smile crossed the face of the captain of the Mary Malone.

"We sail an hour before midnight for the River Plate!" he grinned. "And when we sail, you prying fools will sail with us!"

CHAPTER 6.

Southward Bound!

"OH! Groooh! Oh, my hat!" David Llewellyn Wynn gave a grunt and a gasp. For many hours the St. Jim's juniors had been lying in utter darkness, bound hand-and-foot, with gags in their mouths, and with desperation in their hearts.

They were prisoners in the store-room beneath the saloon of the Mary Malone. And the Mary Malone—as they knew from the rolling of the floor on which they lay—was now far out at sea!

Prisoners, in the ruthless hands of Captain Hood, on board a vessel bound for the River Plate—six thousand miles away!

They realised now, bitterly, how rash their action had been when they had gone aboard the ship at Southcastle. But they had imagined, naturally enough, that eight sturdy youngsters like themselves would be able to look after themselves well enough in a crisis.

They had reckoned without firearms! And the levelled revolver in the hand of the scoundrel with the green eyes had upset their calculations utterly.

Held at bay in the saloon until Hood's giant first mate and half a dozen ruffianly seamen had come in answer to the rascally skipper's call, they had been helpless enough. And though they had struggled and fought gamely before being finally trussed up and hidden, bound and helpless, in the store-room, their resistance had been vain enough.

That they were to lie there until the pilot had been dropped and the Mary Malone was well out to sea, the juniors realised only too well.

And they were helpless to save themselves!

They had struggled futilely against their bonds, only to give up the struggle in despair after a time.

Escape was impossible! When next they saw the light, it would be with the ship far down the Channel—southward bound.

"Grooooooh! Oh, great Caesar!" muttered Fatty Wynn. The fat New House junior had succeeded at long last in ridding his mouth of the gag that had silenced him.

He rolled over in the darkness, altering the position of his cramped limbs.

He could hear stirrings from the other juniors around him. There was a muffled grunt from one of his gagged companions.

The ship was plunging heavily. Evidently she was well out in deep water. By now, as Fatty Wynn guessed, the pilot must have been dropped some time ago.

It was useless, therefore, to waste his strength in vain shouts for help. Had there been a hope of attracting the pilot's attention, he would have done his best in that direction. But there was no good in shouting now, when the only ears to hear would be those of Captain Hood and his ruffians.

"I say, you chaps," said Fatty Wynn, in a voice that sounded queerly unlike his own, "this is pretty awkward, isn't it?"

He tried to speak in a light tone. But the grim desperation in his voice would not be concealed.

No one answered him. No one could. His companions were still tightly gagged.

He heard deep, steady breathing near him. Someone, evidently, had fallen asleep after the long hours of helplessness lying in the dark.

"Wonder what the time is?" muttered Fatty Wynn.

Again he rolled over, trying to ease the aching of his bound limbs.

"There's one thing, you chaps," he said quietly—for his companions, even though they could not answer, could at any rate hear him—"we know now that Baggy is still alive. That's worth this fix we're in!"

He strained his ears, listening. He fancied he could hear faintly the wash of waves as the Mary Malone plunged on with steadily vibrating engines.

"Another thing," said Fatty Wynn, with a plucky attempt at cheerfulness, "if I'd known we'd be sailing to-day for Buenos Aires, I'd have swotted up a bit of Spanish for when we get there!"

But even as he spoke his heart went suddenly cold.

Would they ever get to the River Plate? Or would Captain Hood, in the more than awkward position that his rascality had placed him, solve the problem of his schoolboy prisoners by making sure that the St. Jim's juniors never reached the end of their enforced voyage?

He remembered that Tom Merry & Co. had been told by the man named Pitt that Baggy Trimble was never intended to reach the River Plate—was to "vanish" on the voyage! Would they, too, "vanish" in due course?

Fatty Wynn shuddered.

"Well, keep your peckers up, you chaps," he said, with an effort. "We've got to keep a stiff upper lip, eh?"

There was no answer from the darkness—only faint stirring sounds from his fellow prisoners. Fatty Wynn relapsed into silence.

The air of the little store-room was close and heavy.

The long minutes dragged on.

Tom Merry, lying on the opposite side of the store-room to Fatty Wynn, grunted behind his gag, and began once more to strain on his bonds. The cords that held his wrists had been tied with cruel tightness, and were biting into his flesh. His wrists were sore and swollen, and he soon gave up the useless effort.

Tom's heart was sick within him. They had come to rescue Baggy—only to fall into the hands of Baggy's captor in their turn!

"Why on earth didn't we go straight to the police when we found the ship at Southcastle?" he asked himself bitterly. "What fools we were!"

But, as he realised, it was easy enough to know now what they should have done, with the definite knowledge they now possessed. But at Southcastle it had been natural enough for them to hesitate before taking their wild story to the police.

The floor beneath them swayed and reeled.

But there was one bright spot in the affair, despite their grim plight.

As Fatty Wynn had said, they knew now, at last, without any shadow of doubt, that Baggy Trimble, the missing St. Jim's junior, had not been drowned when the Harvester had gone down in the great Atlantic storm.

Baggy was alive and well!

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CHAPTER 7.

Baggy Again!

TOM MERRY opened his eyes suddenly.

The captain of the Shell had fallen into a troubled doze. But now, at the sound of an opening door and heavy footsteps, he awoke with a jerk. There was the click of a switch, and the store-room was flooded abruptly with a blaze of electric light.

After his long period in utter darkness, the light blinded Tom for a moment or two. Then he made out the wiry figure of Captain Hood standing in the doorway, surveying the bound juniors with his glimmering, green eyes.

He gave a harsh laugh.

"Well, you young cubs," he grinned mockingly, "I hope you've been nice and comfortable down here?"

His eyes met Tom Merry's. Tom met the villain's keen gaze steadily.

Hood bent over him, and jerked the gag from Tom's mouth.

"You scoundrel!" muttered Tom fiercely, as soon as he could speak. "You—you villainous crew—"

"Shut your jaw!" snarled Hood, his sinister face growing dark. "You can cut that kind o' talk right out! I'm captain of this ship, my lad, and you'll do well to remember it! It'll take us five weeks to get to the Plate, and you interfering young cubs are going to work every yard of it! Understand?"

His eyes glittered, green and compelling.

"There are no passengers aboard this ship," he grinned. "You'll work your passage, all of you—if you want to eat. No work, no eats! That's my rule!"

Again he laughed mockingly.

"You scoundrel!" panted Tom.

The other juniors were staring at Captain Hood with gleaming eyes. But, with the exception of Fatty Wynn, their gags prevented them from uttering any coherent sound.

Fatty Wynn stared across at Tom Merry. After their long captivity, without food, all the juniors were hungry and thirsty—particularly the fat New House junior.

"Five weeks!" breathed Fatty Wynn in utter dismay. "Hang it, we—we've got to eat!"

"Glad you see sense, sonny!" mocked Captain Hood.

Fatty Wynn was no coward, and he would have been the last fellow on earth to give in to the rascally captain had there been the remotest chance of successfully defying the man. But the threat of no work no food was no idle one, as all the juniors realised.

To Fatty Wynn, in particular, the threat was a horrifying one!

Tom nodded grimly.

"You're right, Fatty!" he said coolly. "This scoundrel has got us in his power all right, and we can't refuse to work for our food while we're on board this rotten ship of his. But when we get to South America, we'll raise the dickens—it'll be our turn then!"

"Hear, hear!" muttered Fatty Wynn, glaring at Captain Hood. "The British consul will have something to say then, you rotter!"

Hood laughed. It was a sinister sound.

"Don't flatter yourselves!" he sneered. "Do you think anyone will believe your story? I and my officers will swear you all stowed away at Southcastle, and we found you on board when it was too late to put you off. See? You'll never be able to prove your yarn—mine will sound much more likely. There's nothing unlikely in a parcel of schoolboy stowaways—and stowaways have to work, too!"

"You villain!" gasped Tom Merry.

Hood chuckled, and took a big clasp-knife from his pocket.

"Well?" he demanded harshly. "Are you going to be sensible, and do as you're told? Or are you going to be hot-headed young fools, and give trouble? Because unless you give me your promise to make no trouble, you can stay tied up down here and starve for all I care!"

There was no mistaking the reality of the grim threat.

Tom Merry glanced round at his companions. Their eyes were all on him, and he could read their message.

All the juniors knew that there was only one thing for it—to submit to the scoundrel into whose hands they had fallen, and await their chance in the future.

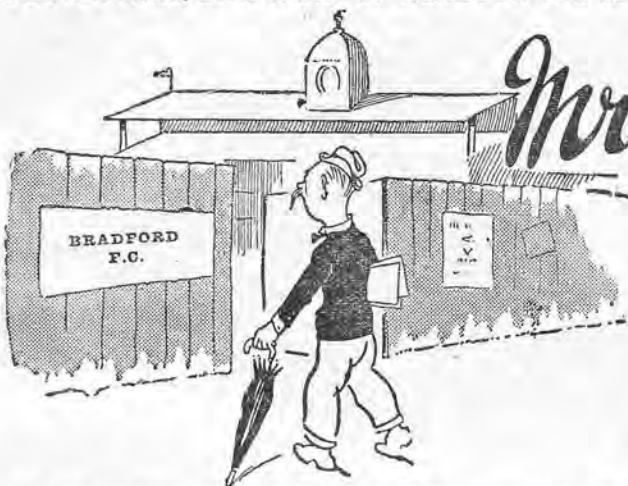
"Very well," said Tom quietly. "We agree to work our passage—hang you!"

Hood gave a triumphant, satisfied laugh.

He was short of hands, and the enforced labour of the St. Jim's juniors would be very useful on board the Mary Malone. Captain Hood was not a skipper who made things easy for his crew, and there had been several desertions at Southcastle.

(Continued on page 12.)

FOOTER FANS, STEP RIGHT UP HERE FOR THE REAL GOODS!



Mr. Parker POPS IN TO SEE BRADFORD.

Mr. Parker's insatiable inquisitiveness for information leads him into a pretty pickle when he goes to Bradford, and he is forced to fill his wagging ears with cotton-wool!

Watch Your Step!

HERE'S a tip, by way of a start to this week's notes. If ever you go to Bradford on any business connected with football, be very careful or you will stumble into a lot of trouble. And as wool is cheap in Bradford—that's where they do things with it, you know—I should keep some handy in a pocket.

The trouble arises from the fact that they play football of both sorts at Bradford. Soon after I arrived I started talking to a casual acquaintance about football. He discovered eventually that I was talking about Soccer, and then the things he said to me—well, I was glad I had taken the cotton-wool precaution. That saved my ear-drums.

Soon afterwards, thinking that the Rugby game was the thing to talk about in Bradford, I entered into conversation with another casual acquaintance. And then found that he was a Soccer enthusiast, so I wanted the cotton-wool for the other ear. That is one of the reasons why I say you should be careful if you visit Bradford on any sort of football business. Be sure you know what kind of football business you are after.

Curious Colours.

HAVING got myself into a bit of a tangle over the Soccer and the Rugby affair, I thought I had better get to the Bradford ground as soon as I could, so I should feel at home. Yet the first man of whom I asked the way, immediately put this question: "Do you mean Bradford City or Bradford?"

Actually, I wanted to go to Bradford (Park Avenue). That's the way they sometimes put it in the newspapers for the people who are not very wise in football matters. But, of course, I knew that they had dropped the Park Avenue. But though the Park Avenue has been dropped from the club's letter paper, you have to be dropped at Park Avenue if you want to interview the Bradford players. So you see all the chances of getting into a mess.

There was scarcely anybody about when I poked my nose inside the ground, so I went round to the dressing-room to see if I could find somebody there. That place was also deserted, but the appearance of it gave me another shock, and made me think I was still blundering. Arrayed round the walls were some strange-looking jerseys; exactly the sort usually worn by teams which play the Rugby game. I am not an expert on colours, but I should say, roughly, those shirts were made up of hoops of red, amber, and black. Then I remembered that Bradford (Park

Avenue) are one of the clubs with original ideas as to how players should be dressed. They never have to change their jerseys because their colours clash with those of opponents.

Spick-and-Span.

AS I was still looking round, a bit bewildered, charming Mr. Claude Ingram came in, and then I knew I was all right. He is the secretary-manager of Bradford, and there is nothing about football in the wool town which he doesn't know, because he was formerly an official of the rival Soccer club, Bradford City.

As it was the players I wanted to see, Claude took me round to the recreation-room, where the lads were engaged in a game of live pool. Now, I have been in a number of football club recreation-rooms in my time, but have never been in one so spick-and-span as that at Park Avenue.

A bit of ash dropped from my cigarette, and you would have thought I had dropped a bomb from the looks on the faces of the lads. I discovered the secret of this cleanliness in the recreation-room. Two players take their turn every week in keeping the room nice and tidy, and the result is that the place is as neat as the football played by the team. Did I tell you Bradford are a neat side? They certainly are, and I have an idea that they will get back into the First Division before very long. They have been there before—in fact, there is no Division in which they haven't been. Perhaps you don't remember, but it is a fact that Bradford (Park Avenue) have played in the Southern League.

Clough, of the Huge Hands.

THEY are a nice-looking lot of boys, these of Bradford, and they have ideas, too. Manager Ingram makes the collection of football photographs a hobby, and some of his boys have found it "catching." Even the recreation-room was decorated with photographs, and some of them were famous footballers in action, mounted on wood. I learned that the player responsible for the mounting was goalkeeper Clough, who just loves his fretwork.

It looks funny to see Clough working with those little saws and things, because he is a tall fellow with huge hands. I was told he could hold eight billiard-balls in one hand, or pick up a football with one hand. And having had a "shake" with this goalkeeper I can quite believe it. Thank goodness he didn't get hold of my nose!

They are a very learned lot at Bradford, too—know all about football. Charlie

Pringle, a one-time Scottish international, who has played for Manchester City, is a knowing half-back, and he is also the son-in-law of Billy Meredith. I think Billy has told him a few things on how outside wing forwards should be stopped, and Charlie is still stopping them.

Well-known Relatives.

THEN Alf Quantrell, who doesn't play in the team as regularly these days as some people would like, is also related to one of the most famous of players—he is the son-in-law of Steve Bloomer. Indeed, as I went round and made inquiries, it struck me that practically every fellow on the staff claims some sort

of relationship with well-known players. There is George McLean, for instance, who is one of the best scheming forwards. He is the younger brother of David McLean. In case that doesn't convey much to your young minds, I can assure you that before the War, David McLean was the much-feared centre-forward of Sheffield Wednesday. Goodness, how he could "hit" a ball! And his younger brother, George, can, too.

The "Boy" and the Giant!

ONE of the favourites of the side is Eddie Parris, who answers to the pet name of "Darkie." This suits him, because he is dark of colour. His parents are West Indians, but he was born in Wales, and some people say that he may play for Wales at outside-left one of these days. "Darkie" is a quiet, studious sort of fellow, but a real footballer.

Jimmy Elwood is the giant of the side—a big fellow against whom opponents bump in vain; and Harold Taylor is the "boy." He plays in the half-back line, and I got the impression that the manager of the club thinks he will go a long way. Taylor is quite a good cricketer, and not a bad bowls player.

When these lads are not training on the field, or playing billiards in the recreation-room, they go in for music on what might be called a large scale. Three or four of them, Scott, Dickenson, and Matthews, are very keen on wireless, and will talk wave-lengths and valves until your head begins to go round.

"Sam" Entertains.

BUT there is one man in the team who doesn't believe in what he calls "second-hand" music. He loves to entertain the boys with first-hand stuff. Unfortunately, the boys don't always give the impression that they love to be entertained. The entertainer is "Sam" Cookson, and when I gave him a little encouragement, he brought out his melodeon, and started to produce what I thought wasn't bad stuff. The other lads didn't agree, however, but that only made Sam—who, by the way, has a brother with West Bromwich Albion—declare that they had no real ear for music.

"As they won't listen to me," he said. "I'll play you back to the station." So to the station I went with Sam and musical honours, and it was only when I was in the train that the thought occurred to me that Sam may have been put up to the dodge to get rid of me!

"Nosey."

The Shanghaied Schoolboys!

(Continued from page 10.)

He went from one to another of the bound figures on the floor of the store-room, slashing their bonds and leaving them to remove their own gags as they staggered with cramped, aching limbs to their feet.

"Oh! Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You—you wotah!"

Talbot, rubbing his aching wrists, met Hood's green, malevolent eyes steadily.

"You hound!" he breathed. "You've got us now, but—"

"Shut your jaw!" snarled Hood. "And get up on deck, all of you!"

Some of the juniors had clenched their fists instinctively upon finding themselves at last free. But Tom Merry stepped quickly forward, pushing Figgins and Manners and Blake back, as they seemed about to hurl themselves at Hood.

"Steady, you chaps!" he said quietly. "We've promised, remember. And, anyway, we can't fight the whole blessed ship—and that's what it would come to. But we've promised."

"I wish now we hadn't!" growled Monty Lowther savagely.

"Rats!" said Tom. "We've got to make the best of things!"

"One of you's got sense, anyway!" sneered Captain Hood. "Get up on deck, I tell you! And remember, I'm captain of this ship!"

"Come on!" muttered Tom.

With stumbling feet—for their legs were still stiff and aching—the juniors followed as the little, sinister captain stepped out into the alley-way and along towards a narrow iron ladder that led up into the steward's pantry. Daylight was streaming down through the open hatch.

"My hat!" breathed Manners. "It's day!"

"No wonder I'm peckish!" growled Fatty Wynn.

Led by Tom Merry, the St. Jim's juniors scrambled up the ladder after Captain Hood, and emerged through the pantry on to the swaying iron deck.

They stared around.

The Mary Malone was plunging along steadily through a moderate sea, in the light of early morning.

On all sides of the ship the tumbling grey water stretched to the horizon. There was no sign of land.

Morning! Since noon of the previous day the St. Jim's party had been lying imprisoned below. Despite their aching limbs and the hunger of which they had all become keenly aware, none of them had realised till then how very long their captivity had been. They had all dozed fitfully now and again during their imprisonment, so that more hours had passed than any of them had been aware of.

The keen wind beating in their faces, the juniors gazed hopelessly round the empty horizon.

Not even another ship in sight! The Mary Malone had the grey circle of ocean to herself.

No help—no chance of help! They were as helpless on board the Mary Malone as though marooned on a desert island with their captors.

There were some members of the crew hammering off the rusty paintwork of the after well-deck—rough-looking men, who had caught sight of the juniors, and were glancing at them curiously as they worked. Captain Hood strode past the galley towards the ladder leading down to the well-deck.

"What are you staring at, you bunch of wharf-rats?" he yelled. "Get on with your job, or I'll know the reason why!"

The men obeyed him. It was clear, though, from their sullen faces that they had no love for their skipper.

Hood returned to the group of juniors.

"Wait here!" he ordered, and vanished for a'rd.

"I say, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus surveyed Tom Merry & Co., Blake, Figgins and Fatty Wynn, and Reginald Talbot, with utter dismay on his aristocratic countenance. "This is frightful!"

"Pretty awkward!" agreed Figgins. But a sudden grin appeared on the face of the New House leader. "But I'm not going to worry over it! Blessed if I am! A trip to South America has its points, Gussy!"

Blake brightened.

"My hat, yes! When you come to think of it, it's better than stuffing in the giddy Form-room!"

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Tom smiled grimly.

"It would be all right if we weren't with such scoundrels," he said quietly. "But this man Hood is an out and out villain! He'd stick at nothing—"

A fat, familiar figure had come rolling into sight from behind the galley. Despite the ridiculously long trousers that flopped round his legs, though a foot at least seemed to have been turned up, and the voluminous coat, the sleeves of which almost hid his hands—nevertheless, the fat figure encased within the out-size coat and trousers would have been recognisable anywhere, even without the familiar face above it.

"Baggy!" yelled Blake.

Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth—the junior who had been thought to be dead, and to whose rescue the Terrible Three and the others had come—was rolling towards them along the deck.

CHAPTER 8.

Grateful Baggy!

"BAGGY!"

Baggy halted in front of the group.

"Bai Jove! Twimble, deah boy—"

"Baggy, old chap—"

The juniors crowded round Baggy Trimble eagerly.

Though Baggy was not a popular fellow at St. Jim's, their long anxiety over him, and the fact that he was the cause of their present plight, made the other juniors delighted to see him.

But if they expected Baggy to show pleasure, in his turn, they were doomed to disappointment!

There was a very discontented look upon Baggy's fat face.

He sniffed.

"I say, you fellows—"

Baggy's tone was peevish.

Any other fellow would have been delighted, in the circumstances, to find himself face to face again with some of his fellow juniors from St. Jim's. But Baggy was not a normal fellow by any means.

Baggy felt he had a grievance.

"Really, you chaps," Baggy sniffed, "you've managed jolly badly, you know—jolly badly! Of all the silly asses—"

Tom Merry, who had stretched out an eager hand, let it fall. He stared at Baggy blankly. So did the others.

"Eh?" gasped Manners.

"Silly asses!" repeated Baggy peevishly. "Fancy getting caught like you did! Talk about bungling. If you hadn't been a lot of blessed dummies you'd have had me out of this mess at Southcastle, instead of getting landed in it yourselves."

"M-my hat!" gasped Talbot faintly.

Even from Baggy Trimble this monumental exhibition of ingratitude was staggering.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Figgins, staring at Baggy blankly.

"B-bai Jove—"

"Mucked things up properly, didn't you?" growled Baggy.

"My hat!" breathed Fatty Wynn.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed Baggy with an almost dead expression.

"Why, you—you fat wotah!" panted the swell of Jim's. "You—you bowwid fat boundah! Aftah all we have done for your sake, you—you disgustin' fat twog—"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Baggy rudely. "I like that! What have you done for me, anyway, I'd like to know? I'm not any better off through you asses getting collared, too, am I? Br-r-r!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" gasped Manners faintly. "Talk about a grateful nature! Why, you fat cad—"

"Oh, really, Manners—"

"You uttah wotah—"

"Oh, really, Gussy—"

"You blessed fat porpoise!" roared Blake, finding his voice with an effort. "You—you—you—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

Despite his first indignation at Baggy's ungrateful reception of them, the captain of the Shell could not help but see the funny side of it.

It was so like Baggy to treat them in this way!

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Tom. "It's certainly the same old Baggy, anyway. You haven't changed much after your life on the ocean wave, have you, old fat man?"

"Look here—"

Tom Merry clapped him on the shoulder. The face of the captain of the Shell had gone grim.

"Listen, Baggy! We don't want a row with you, so if you can't speak decently, you had better keep quiet. I'd have thought even you would have been glad to see us,

but even if you aren't, you needn't tell us we were asses to get captured—we know that. We came to try to rescue you, remember, although it was all through your own rotten work over that business of Figgy and Racke that you were landed in this mess."

"W-what?" stammered Baggy, a look of alarm leaping into his fat face. "Eh? I—I don't understand what you mean."

"Oh, yes you do!" said Tom Merry sternly. "You needn't trouble to deny it, because everything is known at the school. Racke thought you were drowned, and it so got on his nerves that he confessed everything. It's known it was you who hid Figgy's papers in that tree and black-mailed Racke, instead of taking the papers straight to the Head and showing Racke up, as you ought to have done—as any decent chap would have done."

"Oh, leave him alone, Tom!" cut in Figgins. "He's not worth slanging. Baggy never did know the difference between decency and caddishness!"

"Oh, really, Figgins—"

"You may be interested to hear that Racke has been expelled, Baggy," went on Tom grimly.

"Exp-p-pelled?" gasped Baggy.

"Yaas!" Arthur Augustus surveyed the Falstaff of the Fourth very indignantly through his gleaming monocle. "And if we were at the school now, Twimble, I should feel strongly inclined to administrah a feahful thwashin' to you for having allowed poor old Figgy to leave St. Jim's, when you could have made the twuth known. I considah you an unsewupulous wottah, Twimble!"

"Oh, really, Gussy—"

Baggy blinked round very nervously at the group of juniors.

That his rascality in connection with the affair of Racke and Figgins had come to light had perturbed him considerably.

He was wondering what his punishment would be when eventually he returned to St. Jim's.

"I—I say," gasped Baggy, plucking at Tom Merry's sleeve, "w-w-what do you think the Head'll do? D-d-do you think he'll be waxy?"

"I expect you'll get a flogging," said Blake heartlessly. "Serve you right!"

Though the juniors had been inclined to forget Baggy's rascality over the affair of Figgins' exam papers, when they had believed him drowned, now that they knew him to be alive and well, and had been confronted by his amazing indignation at their failure to rescue him—as yet, at any rate—from the hands of Captain Hood, they were beginning to remember his sins.

But further discussion was interrupted.

Captain Hood had returned, accompanied by a big, bullying-looking man with gigantic fists.

"This is Mr. Galloway, the second officer!" rasped Hood. "He'll set you to work; and I shouldn't give him any trouble."

He turned to the mate, who was surveying the St. Jim's juniors with an unpleasant gleam in his little, black eyes.

"I should put 'em on to swabbing that deck up there first."

"Oh, I'll keep 'em busy all right!" grinned the second mate. "I'll make seamen of 'em before we cross the line!"

"That's the ideal!" grinned Hood wickedly. "Better tell Schlee to give 'em some bread to eat now, and let 'em have some water."

"B-bread and water?" panted Fatty Wynn, in consternation. "Look here—"

To the hungry, fat New House fellow the prospect of bread and water was horrifying. But Hood turned on him, interrupting his protest with a snarl.

"Yes, bread and water. That's all you'll get now—till you've showed if you can earn your proper eats."

Fatty Wynn seemed about to speak, but he did not. He only grunted.

But instantly the big mate swung round on him.

"What's that?" he thundered.

"I didn't speak!" snapped Fatty Wynn.

"You didn't—eh?" roared Galloway. "Well, don't talk to me in that tone, anyway!"

With his open hand he dealt Fatty Wynn a stinging blow on the side of the face. The New House junior staggered back against the rail with a gasp.

"You bully!" broke from Tom Merry involuntarily.

The mate swung round on him.

"What's that?" he yelled, in a savage tone.

"I called you a bully," said Tom Merry, his fists clenched.

His face was pale with anger. He knew what he was up against; but he was risking the consequences. The next moment Galloway hit out at him with a huge, doubled-up fist—a swinging blow that would have knocked Tom spinning had it landed.

But it did not land. Tom neatly side-stepped, striking the man's arm aside.

"You little cub!" roared Galloway, with blazing eyes.

He leapt at Tom.

The captain of the Shell hit out desperately, and his fist caught the bullying mate on the point of the jaw. But strong though the blow was, it did not check the huge sailor. The next moment the mate's knotted fist had crashed into Tom's face, lifting him off his feet, and dropping him senseless to the deck.

There were gasps from the other juniors. Manners and Monty Lowther and Talbot ran to Tom, raising his shoulders.

There was an ugly mark on Tom's cheek. His eyes were closed.

"The hound!" muttered Talbot. "Poor old Tom!"

The mate grinned.

"I'll teach you lads who's who on this ship!" he thundered, in a bullying tone. "I'll have no back-answers from any of you!"

There was a sardonic laugh from Captain Hood. He turned away with a shrug.

The mate, with a laugh, strode to the galley, and emerged from it with a pail that had a long rope attached to it. He dropped it over the side, and hauled it up again filled with sea water.

"This'll bring him round!" he chuckled, and dashed the pailful of water over Tom's face.

The captain of the Shell opened his eyes dazedly. But it was a minute or more before he could stagger to his feet, with aching head, sick, and dizzy. The mate grasped him by the shoulder.

"See?" he snarled. "No more back-answers, sonny, or I'll break you in two next time!"

Tom met the man's eyes steadily, and did not speak.

Galloway glared round at the silent juniors. Their faces were dark. But they all knew how useless it was to attempt to defy the burly mate.

Baggy Trimble, as the man's eyes fell upon him, scuttled nervously behind Reginald Talbot.

Galloway, taking their silence for fear, laughed triumphantly.

There was evidently going to be a rough time in store for the little band of St. Jim's juniors on board the Mary Malone.

Tom Merry, his head swimming, leant heavily on Manners' supporting arm. He gave a faint, bitter smile.

He was thinking of the fellows at St. Jim's—waking just then to the rising-bell. He wondered what they thought—what Dr. Holmes thought of the disappearance of the eight juniors who had asked for permits to visit Southcastle.

They would certainly never dream of the truth!

And the truth was ironical enough. It was the irony of it that had brought that faint, bitter smile to Tom Merry's lips.

They had come to rescue Baggy from the sinister Captain Hood, of the Mary Malone—only to find themselves now being carried away with the fellow they had come to rescue, with a six-thousand mile voyage before them, in the power of a villainous captain and a bullying mate!

CHAPTER 9.

The Schoolboy Deck-Hands!

"OH deah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave that unhappy exclamation.

The St. Jim's juniors were busy swabbing the small wooden deck under the bridge, where the captain's cabin, the chart-room, and the wireless-room were situated. The second mate had left them to their task, after plentiful threats as to what would happen if the job was not done to his liking. But the first mate—a thin, sour-looking individual—was on the bridge, and was keeping a sharp and anything but friendly eye on the enforced new hands of the Mary Malone.

"Oh deah!"

Arthur Augustus, his sleeves carefully rolled up to his elbows, busy with swab and bucket, repeated his worried remark.

"What's up, Gussy?" inquired Fatty Wynn cheerfully.

Fatty Wynn, like most of the others, was putting the best face on things he could—leaving the grumbling to Baggy Trimble, who in his heart was glad of the companionship of his would-be rescuers, if only because he now had someone to whom he could grumble.

"Oh deah! My clobber, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus paused in his task to survey his elegant trousers with a groan. "My bags are attahly wuined alweady! I considah—"

"Blow your bags!" remarked Blake, busy with a hard

brush on the soapy boards. "Stand aside, Gussy; I want to scrub that bit!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake! I considah—"

Arthur Augustus did not finish his remark.

In stepping back hastily to avoid Blake's busy brush, the swell of St. Jim's had caught his feet against a bucket, and he pitched over with a wild yell.

"Oh! Great Scott!"

Crash!

There was a crash and a clatter as Arthur Augustus caught his ankle in the handle of the pail as it overturned. His swab went flying and there was a yell from Figgins as it caught him full in the face, smothering him with soapy water.

"Yawoooooh!"

Arthur Augustus sat down with a thud in the pool of water from the overturned bucket, and gasped.

"Oh! B-bai Jove!"

"You dummy!" spluttered Figgins, wiping the soapy water from his streaming face. "Oh, you—you burbling ass! Grooooh!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Figgins—"

"You silly lunatic!" gasped Figgins. "Take your rotten swab!"

He picked up the swab and pitched it back towards its breathless owner.

It was unfortunate for Arthur Augustus that he was scrambling up at that moment. He got in the way of the flying swab, and it landed on his face, howling him over.

"Ow! Gwoooooh! Yooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins chuckled. Having had the swab in his own face he had no sympathy for Arthur Augustus.

"Gweat Scott! Oh! Gwoooooh!" The swell of St. Jim's staggered to his feet. His face was covered with soapy streams of water, and his trousers were covered in soap-suds. "Figgins you—you boundah! I considah it necessawy to administah a feahful thwashin!"

"Br-r-r!" grinned Figgins.

"Look heah, you New House wottah—"

"Chuck it, Gussy, old chap!" cut in Tom Merry quietly. "This is no time for rows!"

Tom Merry's face bore a dark bruise, where he had been struck down by the huge fist of the second mate. His face was grim as he pushed back the fuming swell of St. Jim's.

"Chuck it, you ass!"

"But I—I considah—"

"Rats!" Tom grinned. "Keep your fearful thrashings for another time, old chap."

"Vewy well!" gasped Arthur Augustus, with a glare at Figgins. "I will let you off, Figgins, considawin' we are not now at St. Jim's. But I considah—"

A harsh voice from the bridge cut in on his words. The first mate was glaring down at them from above.

"Quit that jaw! Get on with that job!"

"Oh deah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Vewy well!"

He picked up his swab, and continued his uncongenial task hastily.

Most of the juniors would rather have enjoyed working on board the Mary Malone in any other circumstances. They did not mind "roughing it." But to Arthur Augustus the job of swabbing decks was thoroughly loathsome!

Thoughts of his ruined "clobbah" caused him to sigh mournfully.

"Oh deah!"

Baggy Trimble glared at him sulkily.

"Oh, chuck groaning, for goodness' sake!" growled Baggy bad-temperedly.

"Bai Jove! I was not gwoanin'—"

"You were!" roared Baggy.

"B-bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus faintly.

At St. Jim's Baggy would never have dared to address the swell of St. Jim's in those truculent tones. But on board the Mary Malone Baggy felt fairly safe, with the first mate on the bridge.

But Arthur Augustus' aristocratic ire was roused!

He stepped forward and grasped Baggy by the nose, pulling it hard. Baggy gave a fiendish yell.

"Yooooooop!"

"There!" panted the swell of St. Jim's hotly. "I wefuse to allow you to address me in that objectionable mannah, Twinnah! I uttably decline—"

He broke off with a gasp.

The head of the second mate had appeared, climbing up the companion from the lower deck. Arthur Augustus hastily released Baggy's snub little nose, and resumed his swabbing.

The mate glared round at the juniors, and vanished with a growl into the chart-room. Baggy rubbed his nose and glared at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Yow! Gussy, you heast—"

"Shut up, Baggy!" snapped Manners.

"Oh, really, Manners—"

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"Kick Baggy, somebody!" suggested Monty Lowther.

Baggy hastily skipped away from Lowther, and, with a glare and a growl, got on with his task, without any more grumbling for the time being, as the Mary Malone rolled on through the grey seas with throbbing engines—southward bound!

CHAPTER 10.

A Cold-Blooded Plan!

"TOM!"

Tom Merry opened his eyes and sat up in his bunk as he was awakened by a hand on his shoulder, and the sound of his name being called softly.

The Mary Malone was rolling wildly in a heavy cross-sea as she lurched onward through the night.

For three days the St. Jim's juniors had been working

Crash! "Yawoooooh!" There was a yell from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he tripped over and sat on the deck, and another from Figgins as he caught the soapy swab full in the face.



as deck-hands, and they had settled down to their enforced role well enough, for the most part; even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had ceased to bewail the ruin of his "clobbah"—his wonderful "clobbah" being now past all hope!

They had had practically nothing to do with the other members of the crew. The men were a rough, sullen crowd, who lived in resentful fear of the master of the Mary Malone, and to whom it would have been utterly useless to appeal for help.

With nothing else to occupy their time, the juniors had worked well, even Galloway, the bullying second mate, had been able to find no fault with them. And if it had not been for the knowledge that they were helplessly in the hands of utter scoundrels, the St. Jim's party might thoroughly have enjoyed their experience as part of the crew of the ship. It would have been far better fun than Form-work at St. Jim's had it not been for an uneasy suspicion that Captain Hood—despite his professed intention of bluffing the affair out by swearing that the juniors had been found on board as stowaways—might even now have some villainous plan in his mind for preventing them ever from telling their story to the authorities.

That grim thought had caused Tom Merry to do a good

deal of thinking, as the battered old tramp had headed southward with stamping engines for three days and nights. "Tom!"

It was Figgins' voice that was softly calling his name. The narrow "dive" in the after-part of the ship, lined with bunks which had been allotted to the "shanghaied" juniors, was down beneath the water-line, an ill-ventilated hole which, as Monty Lowther had remarked with a rueful grin, Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble alone seemed almost to fill! It was pitch dark, and Tom could see nothing of Figgins, standing beside his bunk.

"What's up?" breathed Tom.



"Tom, I've got an idea!" Figgins' voice, though low, was excited. "The wireless!"

"What about it?"

"Why, we must get into the wireless-room and send out a message for help!" muttered Figgins eagerly. "We must be passing about level with Gibraltar to-night—there'll be warships there. If it was known we'd been kept prisoners on board this ship they'd send a warship out—"

"Great Scott!" Tom Merry caught his breath. "Why the dickens didn't we think of that before?"

In an instant he was slipping out of his bunk and pulling on his clothes.

"We won't tell the others, Tom," added Figgins quietly. "Too many cooks spoil the broth. And if we get collared that brute Hood will make things pretty hot for us, and there's no reason why the others should get it in the neck, too."

"That's so," nodded Tom. "Two of us is enough."

Together they emerged, a minute later, on to the deck. The night was dark and moonless, but a faint light from the stars revealed dimly the masts and smokestack of the Mary Malone, reeling against the sky.

"Come on!" breathed Figgins.

They slipped along the deck past the broad hatches of the two after-holds, and mounted the swaying iron ladder to the deck by the cook's galley and the engine-room skylights. They crouched in the black shadow of the galley, peering forward.

The wireless-room was not far away now. They had to cross to the ladder that gave access to the narrow deck beneath the bridge, on the port side of which the wireless-room was situated. The only danger was that the officer on the bridge might see them if he happened to look back from the port end of the bridge as he strolled to and fro.

Clang, clang! came from the bridge, as the two juniors crouched by the galley.

"Two bells," muttered Tom Merry. "One o'clock. That hound Galloway has got this watch—I heard him saying so this afternoon."

"There he is!" breathed Figgins.

A black outlined figure had appeared at the end of the bridge, silhouetted against the stars.

Galloway paused for a minute or so, then slowly strolled back out of sight.

"Now for it!" whispered Tom Merry grimly.

Neither he nor Figgins was wearing shoes, and their bare feet made no sound as they raced forward towards the companion-ladder.

The ship was rolling heavily, with spray flying over the lower decks as each sullen black wave swept against her. The hiss of the waves would all help to drown any sound they might make in their desperate venture.

In a few moments Tom and Figgy were on the deck above, safe in the shadow of the wall of the wireless-cabin.

But even as they crept towards the door of it, the door beyond, that of the chart-room, opened suddenly. A blaze of light poured out from the chart-room, and two figures stepped into view.

Captain Hood and the gaunt first mate!

In a flash Tom Merry and Figgins had darted out of sight behind the bows of the big lifeboat that was lashed at the side of the deck. They crouched there, scarcely breathing.

Tom had expected that the skipper of the Mary Malone and his first mate would go up on to the bridge. But instead they began to pace to and fro along the narrow deck, between the companion-ladder that led up from the lower deck and the foot of the ladder to the bridge.

Tom and Figgins scarcely breathed.

"I've made up my mind, Carson," they heard Captain Hood rasp. "There are eight of them, and they might be believed! Anyway, there would be a darn sight too much trouble and risk. I'm going to play safe."

"What are you going to do?" came the muttered answer.

Hood laughed harshly.

"They're useful at present short-handed as we are. But when we're getting down near the Plate, those youngsters will vanish one night—vanish!"

"But isn't that risky?" muttered Carson, the mate, in an uneasy tone.

"No," grinned Hood. "Nobody knows they're aboard this ship except us. And none of the men will breathe a word of it—they wouldn't dare. They're all scared to death of me. No, that's the easiest way out of an uncommon awkward position, Carson!"

Tom Merry, crouching out of sight behind the lifeboat, felt his heart go cold.

It was only too clear of whom the captain and the first mate of the Mary Malone were speaking. It was of the St. Jim's juniors.

Captain Hood never intended his prisoners to reach the River Plate! They were to "vanish" one night in the wastes of the South Atlantic!

For a while the two scoundrels paced to and fro in silence on the other side of the lifeboat. Then Carson muttered:

"You say the men are afraid of you, captain. That's true, by thunder! They have been, anyway. But they're a sullen lot. They keep complaining, as you know, now, about the food and conditions on this ship—"

"Blazes take them!" snarled Hood. "I'll smash in the face of the next man that dares complain!"

"They're ugly customers, some of them," warned the mate. "That fellow Blagdon—"

"I'll teach Blagdon who's skipper aboard this ship, if I hear any more of him!" muttered Hood venomously. "Bah! If you're trying to warn me to look out for the men, you're on a fool's errand, Carson. I'm not afraid of the lot of 'em!"

The mate did not answer.

"I'm turning in now, Carson."

"Same here!" grunted the first mate.

The pair vanished from the deck, and Tom Merry grasped

Figgins by the shoulder with a hand that was strangely cold.

"You heard?" he breathed. "About us?"

"Yes," nodded Figgins quietly, though his face had gone pale in the gloom. "They mean to murder us before we get to the River Plate!"

"My heavens!" Tom's voice was hoarse. "Whatever happens, we mustn't let Hood realise we know this!"

"And the more reason why we've got to get at that wireless," said Figgins. He was breathing quickly. "Come on, Tom! Now's the time!"

"Look out for that chap on the bridge!" Tom warned him.

They slipped noiselessly from their hiding-place, and across to the door of the wireless-room. Tom's hand closed upon the handle, turning it.

A breathless exclamation of dismay escaped him.

"We're done!" he groaned. "The door's locked!"

CHAPTER 11.

Trouble Brewing!

"LOCKED?" repeated Tom hoarsely.

Somehow, neither Tom nor Figgins had realised that they might find the door of the wireless-room locked. The discovery came as a staggering blow to them.

"Can't we break it in?" gasped Figgins.

"No; that would be hopeless!" muttered Tom despairingly. "The noise would be heard before we could do any good. We're done! Come on! Best get clear as quick as we can!"

Sick at heart, the two juniors turned and slipped down the companion-ladder to the lower deck, and returned to the safety of the after well-deck. Tom and Figgy looked at one another in grim silence.

Their plan had come to nothing. During the day-time it would be impossible to get to the wireless-room with any hope of transmitting a message for help, and at night the door was evidently always locked.

"Dished, diddled, and done!" said Figgins quietly. Tom nodded.

"Yes. This knocks that plan on the head. But we've not wasted our time, anyway! We know now definitely what we're up against. Hood means to have the lot of us overboard before we get to the River Plate, like the cold-blooded villain he is."

"We'll be bound to sight some ships on the way down," muttered Figgins, with sudden hope. "Maybe we'll be able to signal across—"

"Not much hope," said Tom quietly. "Ships don't pass too close to one another, as a rule. Without flags, we'd be unlikely to have our message read, if we tried to semaphore for help with our arms. And if we rigged up flags, we'd soon have Hood on us!"

"Then what the dickens—"

Tom gripped his companion's arm.

"Remember what the first mate said about the men? He was warning Hood, though Hood wouldn't listen! The men are a dangerous lot; they're simmering with discontent at the bad conditions. Suppose they—"

"You don't mean—" broke in Figgins breathlessly.

"Mutiny!" breathed Tom. "Suppose there was—"

"Mutiny?" echoed Figgins. "But mutinies don't happen, not these days!"

"Sometimes they do!" said Tom grimly. "Tough crews, goaded into it by foul conditions—like there are on this ship—have been known to take possession of the ship and bench it somewhere, and vanish! All they have to do is to put the wireless out of commission first thing—"

He broke off, with a grim shrug.

"Not that we can expect that to happen," he said. "But if there was trouble, it would be up to us to lend a hand against Hood! Our lives are at stake, Figgy!"

"There's one thing," put in Figgins, "we're safe enough for days yet. The villain won't want to get rid of us till we're near the Plate; he wants us to work, being short-handed, as we heard him say."

"Yes; we've plenty of time to take our bearings," nodded Tom. "She's a slow old tub, luckily. It'll take her a long time yet to get down to the Rio Plata!"

"Better turn in again now," said Figgins.

Tom Merry nodded.

Baggy Trimble was snoring lustily in one of the upper bunks when Tom Merry and George Figgins got below again, and from the satisfying grunts that were issuing from him as he slept, it seemed probable that Baggy was dreaming of whacking feeds in Mrs. Taggles little tuckshop under the old elms at far-off St. Jim's!

Manners and Lowther, Talbot and Fatty Wynn, Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were all sleeping peacefully

enough, little dreaming of the grim discovery made by Tom and Figgins that night!

But it was a long while before Tom Merry could sleep.

"Those youngsters will vanish one night—vanish!"

The sinister words of the master of the Mary Malone seemed to echo in his ears.

For seven more days the Mary Malone battled southward through a strong, adverse sea. Gradually the weather was growing warmer; and when, at the end of a week, the wind changed, they were steaming over a sea of deep blue beneath a hot, blazing sky, and there were flying-fishes to be seen.

The days had passed uneventfully enough, to all outward appearances. But to the juniors, who all knew—with the exception of Baggy Trimble, who had not been told—of the evil shadow that was hanging over them, though they were still in no immediate danger, were beginning to feel desperate enough.

But one thing they noticed—the dissatisfaction of the crew was growing to a head!

The men were clearly simmering with bitter discontent. The juniors soon noticed that the crew were in the habit of gathering in muttering groups, which always broke up, however, at the appearance of Hood or any of the mates.

"There's going to be trouble all right—I'm sure of it!" muttered Tom Merry one day to Lowther, as the two were at work on the fore-peak, cleaning the donkey-engine by which the anchor was raised and lowered.

"That fellow Blagdon is stirring up the crew as fast as he can," nodded Monty Lowther, in an undertone.

Blagdon was a big greaser—the man whose name Tom and Figgins had heard mentioned by the first mate, Carson, on the night of their vain attempt to gain access to the wireless-room. He was an undoubted ruffian; but when thieves fall out, honest men come into their own. That was a saying which Tom Merry was remembering now.

"If there is trouble, it may solve our difficulties!" he said grimly.

His eyes gleamed at the thought.

Monty Lowther straightened himself, to mop his face. It was very hot on the plunging fore-peak. The Mary Malone was already in semi-tropic seas, and daily nearing the equator.

"Let's hope—" he began.

He broke off suddenly.

From somewhere aft there had come the sudden crack of a revolver-shot.

"Great Scott!" breathed Tom Merry. "Hear that?"

"Listen!"

There was a noise of shouting, and running feet on an iron deck could be heard faintly from the after-part of the ship.

Above the noise of the distant turmoil a second shot rang out on the still, hot air.

Tom Merry dropped the brush he had been holding, and turned an excited face to Monty Lowther.

"Come on!" he panted.

A moment later the two chums were scrambling down to the well-deck, racing aft.

CHAPTER 12.

Mutiny!

TOM MERRY and Monty Lowther emerged from the short starboard alleyway that led aft from the foredeck, to find a desperate struggle in progress by the galley.

Captain Hood, his green eyes glimmering, had his back to the door of the galley, and was hitting out fiercely against odds.

A dozen of the crew surrounded him, striving to drag him down. Near by the first mate was lying senseless on the deck, a revolver still clenched in his hand. And farther on, huddled against the rail, was the big figure of Gallows, the second mate, also senseless.

Even as Tom and Monty Lowther came to a breathless halt, watching the struggle with bated breath, the skipper of the Mary Malone knocked two of his assailants flying in as many seconds, and with a sudden desperate rush fought through the ring surrounding him, and raced for the companion-ladder leading up to the deck below the bridge.

He would have gained it but for Tom Merry.

Tom, his eyes gleaming, his jaw set, hurled himself forward, clasp the racing figure of Hood round the legs and bringing him back to the deck with a crash.

In this struggle between Hood and his officers and the mutinous crew Tom Merry knew which side he was on.

But Hood was a difficult man to hold.

A smashing blow in the face sent Tom spinning, and the man struggled up, with a snarl.

But Tom's plucky tackle had done its work!

The big figure of Blagdon, the greaser, had raced across towards the fugitive as Hood sprang for the companion-ladder. In his hand Blagdon held a bunched length of rusty chain.

Hood was already leaping up to the deck above when Blagdon caught him by the heel. With a powerful jerk he brought Hood tumbling down on top of him, and as the skipper fell, cursing, the greaser brought the heavy chain crashing on to his head.

Hood collapsed in a huddled heap. Blagdon did not wait to deal further with Hood. It was quite evidently not necessary. He swung up the companion-ladder and rushed to the wireless-room.

The rest of the men seemed to be in utter confusion. But one of them, after stooping with a triumphant grin over Hood's inert form, turned to Tom and slapped him on the back with a great gnarled hand.

"Good for you, sonny!" he roared. "He'd ha' got his revolver if you hadn't pulled him down."

Tom Merry, still half-dazed from the smashing blow that Hood had dealt him, glanced round swiftly as running footsteps came pounding towards him. His face lit up as he saw that the rest of his chums had now arrived on the scene from the after-deck, where they had been working.

"Bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "What's happen in?"

"Mutiny!" said Tom tersely.

"It was fine, the way you brought Hood down!" gasped Talbot, his eyes gleaming excitedly. "We saw it!"

From the wireless-room the big figure of Blagdon had appeared, dragging out the struggling, white-faced figure of the wireless operator. At the skylights of the engine-room, behind the galley, some of the other mutineers were yelling down to the men below, apparently inciting them to deal with the first engineer, who was down there.

The second engineer came racing from his cabin, and was promptly fastened on and dragged, fighting and struggling, back to his cabin and locked in. A dozen others of the excited, yelling crew were now racing up on the bridge, where the third officer was on watch.

The St. Jim's juniors watched the amazing scene of wild pandemonium with beating hearts.

There was nothing for them to do. Already the mutiny was victorious.

"How did it start?" breathed Tom, gripping Talbot by the arm. "Did you see?"

"Galloway!" panted Talbot. "He was talking to Blagdon, and Blagdon suddenly hit him—knocked him out with the first punch! It was an impulse, I think—it wasn't planned. But the first mate happened to be up here and saw it—and pulled out a gun. He must have been scared something was going to happen."

"We heard him fire," muttered Monty Lowther.

"But Blagdon knocked him out," cut in Figgins grimly. "Then Hood came out of the saloon—"

"Look!" breathed Blake.

The third mate and the wireless operator were being hustled down to the lower deck. They had both capitulated. Blagdon was roaring orders to his followers.

"We'll lock the lot in the saloon!" he bellowed. "Hood as well! And Galloway and Carson! The ship's ours, boys!"

There was a wild cheer.

Blagdon's glance fell on the group of St. Jim's youngsters. He paused.

"You did well, sonny!" he rasped, his eyes on Tom Merry. "You lads are on our side, eh?"

"Rather!" squeaked Baggy Trumble hastily.

"Yes," said Tom Merry quietly. "We're up against Hood, if that's what you mean."

Blagdon's hatchet face took on an ugly smile. He turned away.

From the engine-room a couple of huge greasers were dragging the first engineer up on to the deck. From the way in which the men below had acted, it was evident that

although Blagdon had started the mutiny on the spur of the moment, it had been agreed by the whole crew that when he did give the signal they should back him up to a man.

The first engineer had been knocked about badly. They dragged him past the corner of the deck where the St. Jim's juniors were standing, and he was bundled into the saloon with the others.

The ship's engines were still throbbing, and the man in the wheelhouse was still holding the Mary Malone to her course by Blagdon's order. But that the course would soon be altered now there was no doubt.

The ship was in the hands of the ruffianly crew. What would they do?

That was the question that filled the thoughts of the St. Jim's fellows.

But one thing was certain—the villain who had intended that they should "vanish" one night before the vessel reached the River Plate was now a prisoner on board his own ship—and the Mary Malone would never reach the River Plate after all.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

The situation was serious enough, he knew. Mutiny on the high seas was a big crime by law. And he, at any

rate, had helped the mutineers.

"Great pip!" breathed Tom. "What's going to happen now?"

CHAPTER 13. Treachery!

THE juniors were not kept long in ignorance of the intentions of the mutineers.

Half an hour later they were sitting in an excited group on the hatch of one of the after-holds when one of the deck hands—a ferrety-faced little scoundrel with a bristly chin—yelled to them from the deck above.

"Hi! You young 'un there—Merry's your name, ain't it?—you're wanted!"

"Right!" answered Tom.

He jumped off the hatch. It was evident that the mutineers wanted to see him with the idea of acquainting him with their intentions, and finding out where the juniors stood.

"Look out, Tom!" breathed Manners. "They're a lot of scoundrels, even if they aren't so bad as that hound Hood."

"You're right," growled Fatty Wynn.

"I'll see what they want," said Tom quietly.

He climbed up to the other deck, and followed the ferrety-faced deck-hand to the captain's cabin.

Blagdon was there, sprawled in a chair by Hood's desk. A dozen other members of the crew were crowded in the cabin. They eyed Tom curiously as the leader of the St. Jim's juniors entered.

Tom was cool enough. He nodded to Blagdon, who had evidently constituted himself as chief of the mutineers.

"You wanted to see me?"

"I did," nodded Blagdon.

The beady eyes, staring out of his hatchet face very keenly, fastened on Tom Merry.

He took a cigar from a box on the desk at his elbow—evidently Hood's cigars. He lit it, and clamped the butt of it in the corner of his mouth.

"You understand what's happened?" he said grimly. "This is mutiny."

"I realise that," nodded Tom dryly.

"Nothing to joke about!" thundered Blagdon. "It's a serious matter, as maybe you'll find out. The shore people would lock the lot of us up for this—you included. See?"

Tom nodded.

He realised the man was trying to scare him.

"Well?" he asked coolly.

"We've got that brute, Hood, and Galloway, and Carson, and the third officer, and the engineers, and the wireless-operator locked up," grinned Blagdon. "They're finished. I'm skipper of this ship now, sonny. See?"

Again Tom nodded.

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"We're turning the ship," went on Blagdon, chewing at his cigar in a way that showed he was nervous and uneasy beneath his blustering exterior. "We're running for the African coast. We're going to sink the old tank when we're near enough to the shore, and get ashore in the boats. We're making for a bit o' coast near Casablanca."

"I see," muttered Tom. "What'll happen then?"

"We'll have to make ourselves mighty scarce," growled Blagdon. "Mighty scarce!"

"What about Hood, and the others?" asked Tom, watching the man's shifty eyes keenly.

An ugly smile flitted across Blagdon's face.

"We haven't quite decided," he said slowly, with a glance at the others.

Tom saw that the man was lying. He guessed that Hood and the other prisoners in the saloon would never be allowed to set foot on shore again, if the mutineers carried out their plan.

But he did not voice his suspicion. Blagdon was watching him with half-closed eyes.

"You youngsters were supposed to be stowaways, weren't you?" he rasped. "That wasn't the truth, was it?"

"No!" snapped Tom. "We were shipped against our will—"

"As I thought," grinned Blagdon, breaking in. "Well, I suppose you youngsters haven't much reason for lovin' Hood either, have you?"

"None at all," said Tom quietly.

"Fine!" chuckled Blagdon. "If you're honest on our side, you're all right. See? But if you aren't—"

He paused, rising to his feet, and grasping Tom by the shoulder with a powerful hand.

"If you split on us, or try any funny business, you'll be sorry," he snarled. "See?"

"I do," nodded Tom.

"Know anythin' about wireless?" snapped Blagdon.

"Yes."

"Then you're my wireless-operator. But, see here." Again the man's hand tightened grimly on Tom Merry's shoulder. "All you've got to do is to take down weather reports and such. You won't transmit a word, except p'raps under my orders. You won't send out any messages, sonny, or you'll go over the wall."

"Over the wall!" That meant over the side of the ship, as Tom knew. And he knew, too, that it was no idle threat.

Isn't it annoying—

Annoying when the other fellow talks about the numerous foreign stations "all round the dial" and you know that it is only with difficulty that *you* can get Radio Paris, for instance. Annoying, too, when the folk next door are enjoying a particularly good programme which no amount of tuning will bring to *your* 'speaker or 'phones. POPULAR WIRELESS will show you how to bring your set up to scratch; how to get all the long-wave stations with perfect clarity.

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"If you try to send out anythin', I'll know," growled Blagdon. "You can hear when something's being sent out, as you may know. So don't try any crooked games on us, or it's over the wall for you."

Tom nodded without speaking.

"Swear not to try?" demanded Blagdon harshly.

"All right," said Tom. "Yes."

It would have been no good refusing that promise, as he realised.

"Good!" grinned Blagdon, releasing his shoulder. "Maybe some of your pals know how to cook, too?"

"Yes," nodded Tom Merry. "You want us to run the galley?"

"That's it. The cook's goin' to be locked up with the others. We don't trust him! Anyway, his cooking's rotten. He couldn't cook a spud in the galley o' the Mauretania, he couldn't. You youngsters can take over his job."

As he spoke the door from the chart-room was pushed open, and the cook himself appeared—a sullen-looking man with a swarthy complexion. He was just in time to hear the finish of Blagdon's words, and a look of alarm leapt into his face.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with me, Blagdon?"

"I don't like you—that's what's the matter with you!" snarled Blagdon viciously.

The cook's face paled.

"Now, what have I ever done to you?" he whined. "I'm in with you—"

"You're not," grinned Blagdon wickedly. "We don't want you with us, you perisher!"

The cook turned pleadingly to the other mutineers.

"You all know me, boys—"

"Yeah; an' what you put in the stew!" jibed one of them. "Old boots, ain't it? And old lifebelts chopped up."

There was a chorus of rough laughter. The cook stood trembling. A vicious gleam of desperate fury came into his eyes, however, a moment later, and he turned on Blagdon.

"You—"

But whatever epithet he was about to hurl at Blagdon's head was never uttered.

The greaser's fist shot out, crashing on to the cook's jaw. The man went reeling against the wall of the cabin, dazed and sickened.

"Take him down to the others," ordered Blagdon.

And the half-senseless cook was dragged from the cabin, out through the chart-room on to the deck.

Blagdon turned to Tom Merry.

"Go and fix with your pals to take over the galley," he growled. "And you get into that wireless-room."

Tom nodded.

"Right!"

He left the cabin. Blagdon held out the box of cigars to his companions with a guffaw.

"Help yourselves, boys!" he said, with a grin. "Plenty more in Hood's locker. Say, those boys are goin' to be useful."

"Can we trust them?" muttered one of the men.

Blagdon stared at him.

"What do you take me for, you fool?" he demanded. "Of course, I don't trust 'em—not a yard! But that kid in the wireless-room can't send out anything without our knowing, and being able to stop him in time. And the others'll be mighty useful for a while, too, if they can cook. And when we're near shore—"

"Yeah? What'll happen then?" grinned one of the crew.

"Why, it'll be over the wall with the lot o' them, along with Hood and the rest," snarled Blagdon. "They'll never live to tell the true yarn as to how the Mary Malone was lost, mysterious-like."

There was a chorus of evil chuckles in the cabin.

Had the St. Jim's juniors only known it, they were very much out of the frying-pan into the fire.

CHAPTER 14.

What Taibot Heard!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Buzz off, Baggy!"

"Oh, really, you know!" sniffed Baggy. "I say, Wynn—"

"Seat!"

Baggy Trimble grunted, and blinked in at the door of the narrow galley with a very injured air.

For two days the Mary Malone had been steaming towards the African coast.

During that time the juniors had been taking turns at the cooking, under the able direction of Fatty Wynn. The

only ones who had not taken a turn in the galley were Tom Merry, who now occupied the wireless-room, and Baggy Trimble, who was far more nuisance in the galley than he was worth, and, despite his eager efforts, had been refused to be allowed to lend a hand.

"Look here!" roared Baggy. "I'm peckish!"

"Dinner'll be ready in an hour," grinned Fatty Wynn, busily slicing up bully-beef.

"I can't wait an hour!" groaned Baggy. "I've got a very delicate constitution, which can only be kept up by constant nourishment—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who with Figgins and Blake was helping Fatty Wynn that morning picked up an empty saucepan and surveyed Baggy grimly through his grumbling monologue.

"If you don't buzz off, Twimble, I shall whack you over the nappah with this saucepan, dear boy!" warned the swell of St. Jim's. "Go away and don't bothah!"

"Look here, Gussy, you beast, I—"

Bang!

True to his word, Arthur Augustus had brought the big saucepan down on to Baggy's bullet head.

Baggy gave a yell. But it was a very muffled yell he gave. It was a large saucepan, and it had come right down over Baggy's face, fitting nicely over his head, completely extinguishing him.

"Oh! Grooooff! Tak 't off!" gasped Baggy, inside the saucepan.

He struggled frantically to remove his strange-looking helmet. But it jammed tightly, and his efforts were unavailing.

"Ow! It's stuck!" roared Baggy, with muffled fury. "Pull it off, you beasts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn, Blake, Figgins, and Arthur Augustus yelled with mirth. The sight of Baggy prancing on the deck with the saucepan jammed down almost to his shoulders struck them as being decidedly funny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins stepped out of the galley and grasped the saucepan by the handle in an effort to drag it from Baggy's head. Baggy gave a fiendish yell.

"Yow-ow! Yarooooo! Stoppit—"

"You asked somebody to pull it off, you ass!" grinned Figgins.

"You're pulling my blessed head off, you dummy!" came Baggy's muffled voice, in tones of despairing fury.

Again Figgins seized the handle of the saucepan, and heaved. Again Baggy let forth an anguished howl.

"Yooooooo! Stop it—"

He stumbled blindly across the deck, and tripped over a pail that was standing near the door of the galley. There was a crash as the Falstaff of the Fourth went flying.

Biff!

"Yarooooooooh!" Baggy gave a wild yell as he landed full-length on the deck. But the handle of the saucepan, in hitting the deck, jerked his helmet from his head, revealing his crimson, breathless countenance.

"Oh! Yow-ow!"

Baggy sat up dazedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Yah!" Baggy scrambled up disconsolately, and gave the saucepan a savage kick, which sent it flying over the rail, to vanish in the waves. "Yah! Rotters! Beasts!"

And Baggy, rubbing his nose and his ears painfully, rolled away, with a final glare at the grinning four.

It was quite evident, even to Baggy, that there were no "snacks" to be had in the galley that morning!

Fatty Wynn and his assistants carried on with their work. But they had not been at it for long before there was a quick step on the deck. The next moment the bare-footed figure of Reginald Talbot stepped swiftly into the galley.

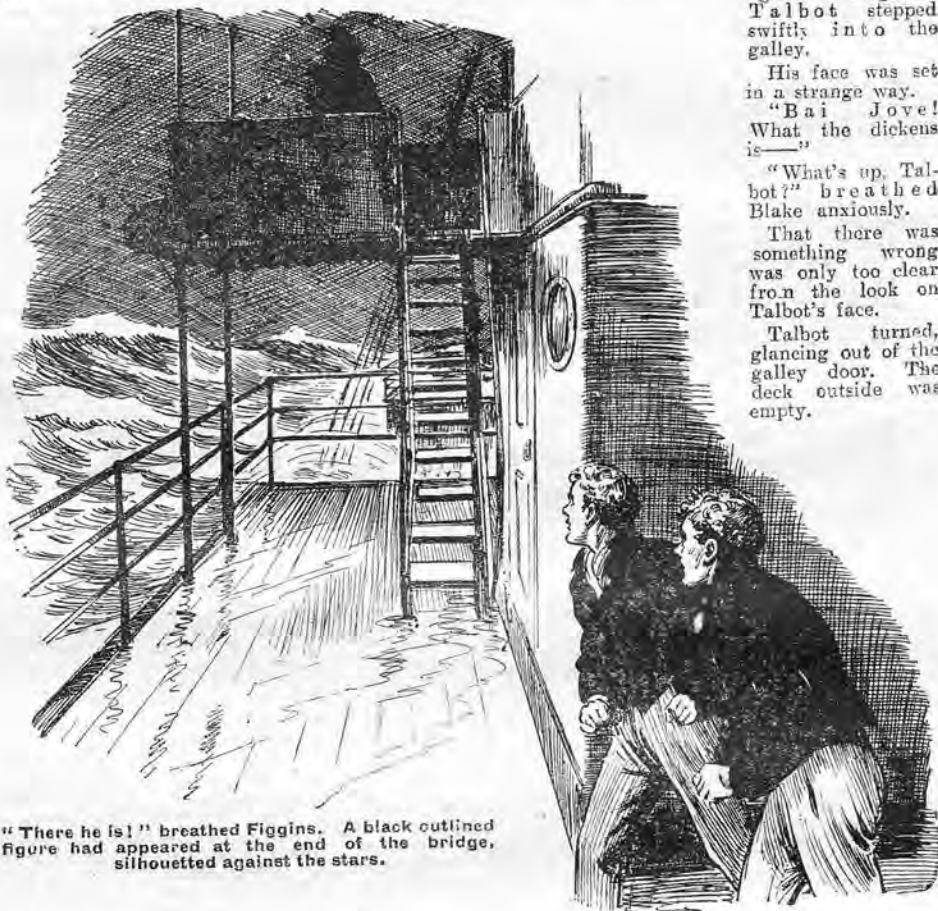
His face was set in a strange way.

"Bai Jove! What the dickens is—"

"What's up, Talbot?" breathed Blake anxiously.

That there was something wrong was only too clear from the look on Talbot's face.

Talbot turned, glancing out of the galley door. The deck outside was empty.



"There he is!" breathed Figgins. A black outlined figure had appeared at the end of the bridge, silhouetted against the stars.

"Listen!" he muttered. "The villains! I've found out what they mean to do with us—"

"To—to do with us?" echoed Figgins.

"Yes," nodded Talbot, his face grim, his eyes gleaming. "Blagdon isn't playing straight with us!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Blake.

Talbot gripped him by the arm.

"I was going up to see Tom, in the wireless-room!" he muttered hoarsely. "I haven't any shoes on—I didn't make a noise, I suppose. And I heard Blagdon talking to one of the others, in Hood's cabin. The porthole on to the deck was open."

He paused, and again peered cautiously out of the door of the galley. But the coast was still clear.

"Yes?" whispered Figgins. "What—"

"As we guessed, the scoundrels mean to murder Hood and the other officers—all their prisoners," said Talbot, in a quiet voice. "Yes, murder them in cold blood! When they sink the ship they're going to let them all go down with it!"

Blake's face paled with horror.

"The villains!" he breathed.

"And as for us," went on Talbot, "they're afraid we wouldn't stand for that—that we'd tell the authorities, if we were allowed to get ashore again. So we're all to go down with the ship as well!"

The St. Jim's juniors were no cowards; but the news of the mutineers' cold-blooded plan struck them with horror.

"Does—does Tom Merry know?" muttered Blake.

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"I haven't told him yet," said Talbot quietly. "But as soon as possible we must all get together and see what's to be done."

The five St. Jim's juniors stared at one another with pale, set faces as the Mary Malone, with its cargo of villainy, steamed on steadily towards the lonely coast of distant Africa.

CHAPTER 15. A Desperate Plan!

"TOM!" Tom Merry turned his head, with the ear-phones clamped to his ears, as he heard his name called.

Blake was standing in the open doorway of the wireless-room.

"How's things?" inquired Blake, in a cheery tone that utterly belied the look upon his face.

Tom stared at him.

"What's up?" he breathed.

Instantly Blake put a finger to his lips, nodding significantly to the wall. It was a flimsy enough wall, and on the other side of it anyone might be listening, as Blake knew.

"Just looked in to see how you are, old hoss, up here all by yourself!" said Blake in a loud voice, that was evidently intended for any possible hearers, as Tom realised now.

Blake thrust out his hand and tossed a crumpled sheet of paper on to the table at which Tom was sitting.

Tom snatched it up, and opened it. His eyes widened as he read the words written upon it, in the handwriting of Reginald Talbot.

"Must see you as soon as possible. Blagdon's playing crooked. Means to murder the lot of us, together with his prisoners," he read.

He turned a white, startled face to Blake. A meaning look flashed between them.

"Cheerio!" said Blake loudly, and vanished, leaving Tom Merry gripping the edge of the table with white-knuckled hands.

He crushed the scribbled note in his hand, and thrust it into his pocket.

So, despite the mutiny, which had saved them from Hood, they were doomed to suffer the same fate at the hands of the villains now in possession of the Mary Malone!

Tom felt the perspiration standing out on his brow.

He took the ear-phones from his head and laid them on the table.

His brain was in a whirl.

What could they do? They could not wait tamely for their fate at the hands of these cold-blooded villains. They must do something!

For a moment the wild idea of transmitting a message for help leapt into his mind. But he dismissed it.

Such an attempt could only end in disaster. The men on the bridge would be bound to hear the deep, spluttering buzz of the transmission, as he tapped out his desperate message in Morse. He would be stopped before he could do any good.

And then another idea came to Tom Merry—an idea that caused his eyes to gleam.

A wild, desperate idea, if ever there was one!

"But it's our only hope!" he told himself. "The only hope we've got!"

He rose to his feet, and stepped out on to the deck. He could see the big figure of Blagdon pacing restlessly to and fro at the end of the bridge.

The man caught sight of him, and stared down.

"Nothing doing on the radio!" sang out Tom, in as casual a voice as he could command. "Just taking ten minutes off!"

"Don't be longer!" growled Blagdon. "It looks like dirty weather, and there may be reports from other ships."

Tom nodded, and moved off aft.

"It's the only way!" he was telling himself. "The only way!"

In the galley, Tom was being awaited by the rest of the juniors, with the exception of Baggy Trimble. The faces of the others were as pale and set as his own.

Tom stepped quickly in.

"Tom!" began Manners hoarsely.

"Listen!" muttered Tom, in a quiet voice, his eyes going steadily from face to face. "There is only one thing to be done."

"What, dear boy?" breathed Arthur Augustus. "That scoundrel Blagdon—"

"I've got an idea!" cut in Tom. "It's our only hope, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,146.

you chaps—our only hope! We've got to take command of this ship ourselves."

For a moment or two his words were followed by a silence of utter amazement.

"But how the dickens—" began Monty Lowther hoarsely.

"I know it sounds a wild idea—pretty well impossible," said Tom incisively. "But it might be done. We know that all the firearms on board the ship have been put in Hood's cabin—Blagdon's cabin, as it is now. If we could get possession of them, we could keep the scoundrels at bay, and navigate the ship ourselves. We would take her to the nearest port—"

"But the men in the engine-room!" breathed Manners. "They wouldn't keep up steam!"

"We would make them—at the point of a gun!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Great Scott!" Figgins' face had lit up. "It might be done—"

"We've got to try it, anyway!" cut in Tom. "It's our only hope! If it comes off, we'll not only save ourselves, but save Hood and Galloway and the others from being murdered, too. They're scoundrels, we know—but we can't let them be murdered if we can help it! And as I say, our only way to stop it is to get command of this ship!"

The eyes of the juniors were gleaming.

It was a wild, desperate plan—but it was their one hope!

"You chaps are game, of course?" muttered Tom.

"You bet we are!" nodded Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!" breathed the swell of St. Jim's. "We'll beat Blagdon yet!"

"When do we make the attempt, Tom?" asked Talbot quietly.

"To-night! No time to lose! We're getting near the coast now. By three bells, Blagdon is sure to have turned in, having been on the bridge all day. He'll want some sleep while the going's good—he won't be reckoning on getting much to-morrow night, I suppose! At three bells we'll get into his cabin—collar him; then collar the firearms and take charge of the bridge and the engine-room."

Tom's voice held a steely ring.

"Once we're in charge—if we succeed to-night—we can wireless for help!" he went on. "But we want charge of the ship first."

"Good!" grunted Figgins. "Blagdon'll find we're a tougher nut to crack than he thought!"

"But shall we be able to navigate the ship?" muttered Fatty Wynn.

Tom nodded.

"I know a bit about that game!" he answered. "Our position is marked on the chart, in the chart-room. They marked it at noon, when the bo'sun shot the sun. All we've got to do is keep her on a straight course for wherever we decide is the best point to make for. We can check our position to-morrow, by the sun."

"Look out!" breathed Blake suddenly.

A shadow had appeared on the deck outside. A man came lounging into view—one of the mutineers. He stared into the galley.

"By thunder!" he ejaculated, with a grin. "Does it take the lot o' ye to cook the dinner?"

It was clear from his face that he had heard nothing suspicious. Tom Merry forced a smile.

"More or less!" he answered lightly. "Well, I'll get back to the wireless-room, you chaps! Thanks for the snack! So long!"

He stepped out on to the deck. The man chuckled.

"I see! That's the game? Having snacks, eh?"

He strolled away, and Tom Merry hurried back to the wireless-room.

His heart was beating fast.

In little more than twelve hours the desperate attempt of the St. Jim's juniors to take possession of the ship would be taking place.

Could they hope to succeed?

It was a question which Tom Merry dared not try to answer even to himself.

CHAPTER 16. In the Night!

CLANG, clang, clang!

Three bells rang out from the bridge.

An hour and a half past midnight.

The Mary Malone was plunging along through the darkness, under full steam, her lurching bows smashing through the foaming waves. A hot wind was blowing, beating the smoke from her grimy funnel down over the after-decks—a hot wind from the direction of Africa.

On the wide bunk in the captain's cabin, Blagdon lay fully dressed, sleeping heavily.

He was muttering in his sleep. His dreams were filled with uneasy fears, that he stifled well enough during the day, but which haunted him in his sleep now.

He rolled over, and opened his eyes, staring at the grey porthole opposite.

"That wireless!" he muttered after a while, as he lay increasingly wakeful. "We're getting near now. I fancy it might be best to put it out of action—no chance then of those cursed youngsters trying any games, if they suspected—"

He swung his legs to the floor, and staggered as the ship rolled.

"I'll do it!" he muttered. "It's safest."

He crossed the cabin, and went out through the dark chart-room on to the deck. The wind beat in his face as he turned towards the wireless-room.

He kicked it open, entered, and snapped on the light.

He knew nothing of wireless. The only way he knew of putting it out of commission was by complete destruction.

Blagdon picked up the chair by the table, and using it as a weapon, began utterly to wreck the apparatus.

A few crashing blows, and the wireless of the Mary Malone was smashed and useless. Blagdon lowered the now broken chair with a sardonic grin.

Then he turned his head, listening.

He fancied he had heard a sound below, where two of his men were on guard outside the door of the saloon.

"What was that?" he muttered.

He strode quickly out on to the deck and turned towards the companion ladder leading to the deck below, where the alley-way from the door of the saloon emerged. He stared down in the gloom.

"All right down there?" he shouted.

There was no answer.

"What in blazes—"

He broke off. Shadowy figures had emerged from the alley-way. To his astonishment, the greaser recognised Tom Merry, Talbot, and Monty Lowther.

But before he could speak, the three youngsters were scrambling up the companion-way to his side.

"What do you want?" he demanded harshly.

His answer came.

He had not seen that Tom Merry was carrying a heavy crowbar. But the next moment it had landed on Blagdon's head, and he collapsed without a sound.

"Well done, Tom!" muttered Talbot.

The rest of the juniors were scrambling up the ladder now. Tom turned swiftly towards the door of the chart-room and ran through into the cabin beyond, with Talbot and Lowther, Manners, Blake, and Figgins at his heels.

The look-out on the bridge had been talking to the man at the wheel. But he had heard Blagdon call out, and he came to the top of the ladder that led down from the bridge to the chart-room, and peered down.

"What's up, Blagdon?" he shouted.

Then he gave an exclamation as he saw Fatty Wynn and Arthur Augustus by the door of the chart-room.

"Hallo, there!" he exclaimed. "What the—"

"Blagdon's ill!" answered Fatty Wynn—truthfully enough.

The man came hurrying down the ladder. But as he set foot on the deck, an unpleasant surprise came to him! It was a straight left to the jaw from Fatty Wynn's fist, and the man reeled back dazedly.

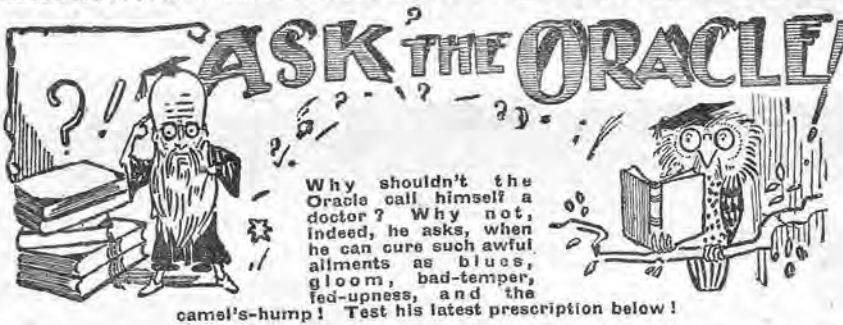
The next moment he had been dragged into the chart-room and a handkerchief was being stuffed into his mouth, while Arthur Augustus lashed his arms behind him.

"Got the wottah!" breathed the swell of St. Jim's. "Wippin'!"

The writhing prisoner glared up at his captors ferociously, but helpless.

A moment or two later Tom Merry appeared through the doorway leading out of the captain's cabin. There was a heavy automatic in his hand. He was followed by Talbot and Manners and Figgins, similarly armed.

(Continued on next page.)



Why shouldn't the Oracle call himself a doctor? Why not, indeed, he asks, when he can cure such awful ailments as blues, gloom, bad-temper, fed-upness, and the camel's-hump! Test his latest prescription below!

Q.—What are Monitors?

A.—There are many kinds of monitors, Joe Billing, of Highbury, though from what you say you're evidently one of the bright ones. Congrats on knocking the Form bully on the jaw—you can give him one from me next time as well. You wonder how the word came to be used for school-boys, Joe? Quite simple. A monitor is one who admonishes, and that is what a senior pupil has to do to keep discipline. There's a certain type of gunship, constructed for coast attack in shallow water, called a monitor. Their usefulness was proved in the War, though at the beginning of hostilities we had very few. The name is also used for armoured railway-trucks carrying heavy guns, and for a jointed nozzle used in hydraulic mining. A species of African lizard is the unpleasant owner of the name. He has a powerful tail that swishes like a whip, a tenacious grip, and when frightened, he rolls on his back, puts one hind-foot in his mouth, and keeps perfectly still. Among the natives he is said to give warning of the approach of crocodiles.

Q.—Why do we say "Not worth a rap"?

A.—"Fed-up," of Fulham, having received a rap on the head for saucing his big brother, has thought things over. He wants to know what a rap is really worth. I should say it's worth one back, only harder. The expression originated, "Fed-up," in the days of George I, when

a counterfeit Irish coin called a "rap" was circulated as a halfpenny.

Q.—What is a Wayzgoose?

A.—This is a curious name, "Nimrod," given to the annual outing of printers' staffs. How it came to get the name is something of a puzzle. Probably the bean-feast was an imitation of the great goose feast held every year at Waes, in Brabant, at Martinmas. On the other hand, it may be a misspelling of "wase-goose," "wase" being an old English word meaning "sheaf" or "harvest." In the old days they spoke of the "harvest goose," so you can see the connection. Anyway, the goose has walked away from the wayzgoose nowadays. It's usually held in July.

Q.—Have I ever had a close shave?

A.—This query comes to me from a reader who signs himself "Dirt Track Rider." Perhaps he has had several. Perhaps he's trying the ancient pastime of pulling the Oracle's leg. Well, I've had a fairly adventurous life,

and many close shaves in my time. The last two were both in Fleet Street. One was at Sweeney Todd's barber's, about seventy years ago, and the other was in the middle of the road. I was reading the GEM, and just missed being knocked over by a sedan chair.

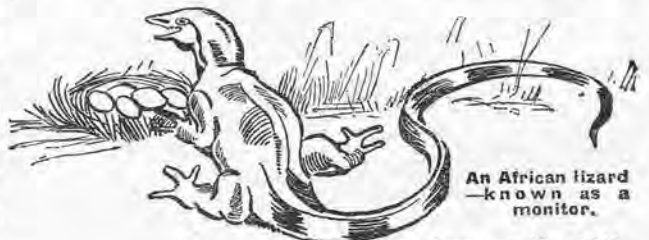
Q.—What does "Ap" mean in Welsh?

A.—James MacDonald, of Glasgow, sends this query. Mac, I'm a wee bit surprised ye no ken that "Ap" in Welsh means the same as "Mac" in the Scots. It means "son of." Thus, Prichard is ApRichard, son of Richard, but the "a" has been dropped.

Q.—Was Lindberg the first man to fly the Atlantic?

A.—No. "Cobhamite," of Westcliff-on-Sea, He was the sixty-seventh. That's the truth, but it in no way diminishes the splendour of his achievement. Sir John Alcock and Sir A. Whitton Brown made the first non-stop flight from Newfoundland to Ireland in 1919. Later in the year, R34, with 31 men on board, crossed from Scotland to America. In 1924 the German ZR3, the Los Angeles, flew from Germany to New Jersey with 33 men. So you see, Cobhamite, 66 men flew across the Atlantic before Lindberg!

(Our wise old Oracle is wearing out the carpet pacing up and down waiting for readers' queries. Keep him busy, chums, he's a stickler for work!)



An African lizard—known as a monitor.

The dismayed prisoner was yanked out of the way on to the bench that ran along the wall of the chart-room, and in the gloom his staring eyes saw the juniors hurry silently out on to the deck, some with automatics, and two with rifles in their hands.

The complete collection of firearms on board the Mary Malone was in the hands of the juniors of St. Jim's.

On the deck, Tom Merry was issuing swift orders in a low voice.

"Blake and Gussy—up on the bridge! Truss up the chap in the wheelhouse, and one of you take the wheel. Keep her on her course for the present; we'll alter it later."

Blake and the swell of St. Jim's vanished silently up on to the bridge.

"Figgy, go for'ard, and see that nobody comes out of the fo'c'sle! It's not likely anyone will—they'll be sleeping. But we can't risk the men there taking a hand. Wynn, get aft, with that rifle, and don't let anyone come for'ard, if any of the men there turn out. But it's not likely they will till morning, of course."

He glanced at Manners and Lowther and Talbot.

"You three buzz off to the engine-room hatch," he muttered. "The fellows down there are going to be the trouble! We'll let 'em carry on without interfering till they find out what's happening, then we'll have our job cut out to force them to keep the engines going, and the boilers fired. But I don't think they'll argue much with our guns!"

He turned to the door of the wireless-room.

"I'll be with you three in a minute," he said quietly. "I'll just find out if Blagdon really was smashing up the wireless, as it sounded like."

He swung open the door of the wireless-room and snapped on the light. He gave a gasp at the sight of the chaos within.

The others, hurrying off to their posts, paused and turned.

**MARTIN CLIFFORD'S
LATEST and GREATEST
MASTERPIECE—**

**"ONE HUNDRED
POUNDS REWARD!"**

**WATCH OUT
FOR IT IN NEXT
WEEK'S "GEM"!**

Tom Merry gave a grim, bitter laugh.

"Yes, we thought right," he said savagely. "The wireless is smashed! Never mind—come on!"

The juniors hurried away into the gloom. But Tom stopped suddenly, grasping Talbot by the arm.

"Great Scott! We nearly forgot Blagdon!"

They hurried back, and a minute later Blagdon, still senseless from his knock-out blow, was safely trussed up in the chart-room.

When Blagdon recovered his senses, it would be to find a vast difference in the command of the Mary Malone!

**CHAPTER 17.
Winning Through!**

"LAND!"

The excited cry burst from the lips of Tom Merry. Tom was standing on the bridge, a pair of binoculars held to his eyes, staring across the tumbling blue waters to a far-off streak of grey that appeared over the horizon.

"Land!" repeated Tom, lowering the glasses and glancing at Monty Lowther, who was in the little wheelhouse, his hands on the wheel.

"Hurrah!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Tom, we've done it!"

"Pretty well," nodded Tom Merry, with a grim smile. "But it'll be a good many hours before we get close enough to the shore to signal. But if our navigation is right, that ought to be Casablanca over there!"

It was the following morning.

The Mary Malone was steaming quietly along through the oily sea, as though nothing unusual had ever taken place aboard her!

For the threat of the juniors' firearms had cowed the men in the engine-room effectively enough!

Under the threatening muzzles of a couple of rifles and an automatic, in the hands of Figgins, Paddy Wynn, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at the present moment, they were sullenly keeping up steam. The fate of one of the stokers, who had attempted to smash Talbot over the head with a great lump

of coal early that morning, and had been shot in the shoulder, had shown the rest of the men that the juniors meant business.

The rest of the crew, raging and helpless, were prisoners now in the fo'c'sle. With Jack Blake seated on the hatch outside the fo'c'sle, with a rifle in his hands, they dared not even show their noses on deck!

Manners, more or less helped by Baggy Trimble, was at the moment preparing a meal in the galley for the other juniors.

The rest of the individuals on board would have to go without for the time being! It would have been too dangerous to risk approaching them, even to take them food. And since the ship would soon be close in-shore now, Tom Merry had decided to let them go hungry until the Mary Malone was safely handed over to the authorities at Casablanca.

The prisoners in the saloon—Hood, Galloway, and the rest—were still there, for Tom had thought it wisest to keep them under lock and key.

Whether they would have stayed there so quietly had they not been under the impression that some of the juniors were on guard outside the opposite doors of the saloon, with firearms, was a point that had caused Tom Merry to smile grimly.

With the sun streaming hotly upon her decks, the Mary Malone steamed on towards the grey streak of distant coast.

"Yes, I think we're going to pull it off all right," grinned Tom quietly, standing with his eyes riveted on the land ahead. "I don't think those chaps in the engine-room will give any more trouble; and the blighters in the fo'c'sle certainly won't!"

He stepped to the front of the bridge. Blake could be seen sitting on the hatch by the fo'c'sle, his rifle gleaming in the sunlight.

"All right, old scout?" yelled Tom.

"Fine!" answered Blake, without taking his eyes for a moment from the door he was guarding.

With throbbing engines the Mary Malone steamed on.

"Bring her round to port a

bit!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Figgins, who was taking his turn at the wheel, obeyed. The bows of the Mary Malone swung round a little.

It was late afternoon, and they were so close to the shore now that they could make out clearly the foaming breakers that boiled over the bar outside the little Moroccan coast town of Casablanca.

Tom chuckled, as he surveyed the white buildings on shore through his binoculars.

"Wonder what they think, Figgy?" he chuckled. "They must be wondering who the dickens we are and what we're doing here? Since we aren't expected, they'll be mighty puzzled, for a cert!"

"They won't guess the truth, anyway!" grunted Figgins, with a grim laugh.

"Here's somebody coming out to us!" yelled Tom, a minute later. "Pilot-boat, I suppose, or Customs, or something."

A small steam-vessel was approaching the Mary Malone from the direction of the harbour.

Tom snatched up a pair of semaphore flags that he had found in the flag-locker, and ran to the end of the bridge.

With quick, swinging motions he began to spell out a message. But then an exclamation of chagrin escaped him.

"Blow it! I don't suppose they'll understand English! They'll be Frenchmen!"

"Give 'em S.O.S., and they'll twig there's something wrong all right!" suggested Figgins.

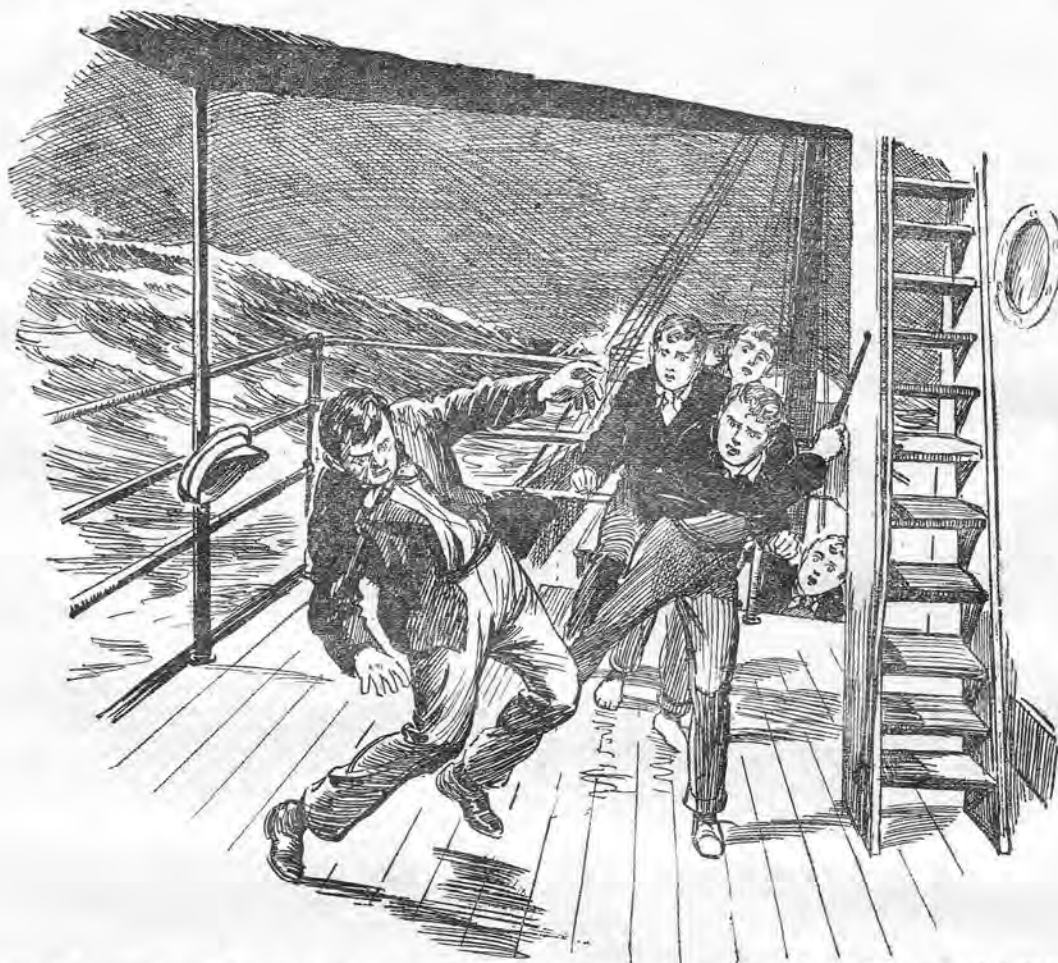
"Good egg!" nodded Tom.

He signalled the grim message, again and again. Then he hurried to the engine-room telegraph, and signalled "Slow."

Talbot, Manners, and Monty ought to be able to make 'em obey that, down there!" he chuckled.

Evidently the three juniors now taking their turn on guard in the engine-room had succeeded!

The ship began to glide less swiftly through the dancing waves.



"What do you want?" demanded Blagdon harshly, as the three juniors reached him. Next moment a heavy crowbar landed on the man's head, and he collapsed without a sound.

"Better stop her altogether, perhaps!" muttered Tom Merry.

He went to the telegraph again, and the bell tinkled as he switched the handle over to "Stop!"

The little vessel approaching was not far away now as the Mary Malone slowed down finally, and came to a stop, rolling in the swell.

"We've done it!" breathed Tom, with shining eyes. "Piggy, old chap, we've done it! We're all right now."

They had! The intrepid little band of juniors from far-away St. Jim's had brought the ship on which they had once been prisoners safe to port—in absolute charge of the Mary Malone and its ruffianly officers and crew!

Casablanca, the sleepy, little dried-up French town on the coast of Africa had never known quite such a sensation as the St. Jim's juniors had provided for it!

They were the heroes of the hour when, some time later, they landed in the harbour, with the Mary Malone safely anchored outside, in the hands of the authorities.

The English residents had turned out in a body to welcome them. And there was a rousing cheer as the juniors stepped ashore, watched by hundreds of faces—white and brown!

But though they were the heroes of the hour in Casablanca, and were entertained royally during the time they had to wait there before the British consul had arranged for them to travel on by train to Tangier, where they could join an England-bound liner, their reception in the little Moroccan town was nothing compared to their welcome at St. Jim's!

A fortnight had elapsed since their arrival at Casablanca, when at last they turned up at St. Jim's, tanned and cheery. By that time the whole school had been simmering with excitement for days over the story of their adventure; and when they alighted from the train at Wayland, the crowd of fellows, seniors and juniors, there to greet

them and bear them in triumph to St. Jim's, seemed to consist of half the school.

The Head himself was waiting in the quad to welcome them, and the cheering that echoed round the grey old school buildings was such as St. Jim's had seldom heard before.

The only fellow who was not completely happy of the little band of adventurers was Baggy Trimble.

Baggy had still to face the music for the part he had played in the affair of Figgins' examination papers for the Armitage Scholarship!

But, in the circumstances, the Head wisely considered that Baggy had had his lesson. A severe lecture on the error of his ways from the Head reduced Baggy to a terrified jelly; but there was no further punishment.

There was punishment in plenty, however, for the villainous captain of the Mary Malone, as well as for the other ruthless scoundrels who had been on board. And Captain Gallon, the man who had arranged with Hood for Baggy Trimble to be taken off on board Hood's vessel, also met his deserts.

"And serve 'em all wight, deah boys!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, on the day that the juniors heard of the long sentences that had been awarded to the scoundrels for their various rascalities. "I considah—"

But no one waited to hear what the swell of St. Jim's considered—his chums were hurrying off to Little Side. After their several weeks' absence from St. Jim's they felt that footer on Little Side was more worthy of their attention than the considerations of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

Back at St. Jim's! It was wonderful enough for them to find themselves there after the desperate adventures they had been through in rescuing Baggy Trimble!

But it would be a very long while before Tom Merry & Co., and Blake, Arthur Augustus and Talbot, Fatty Wynn and George Figgins forgot their amazing voyage on board the Mary Malones!

THE END.

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You Can Start Reading this Full-o'-Thrills Serial To-day, Boys!



THE VALLEY OF FORTUNE!

By JOHN SYLVESTER.

(Introduction on next page.)

Saved from death by his arch-enemy, Pedro Lopez, only to be offered as human sacrifice to the "GOD OF THE SHRIEKING PIT"!

A Terrible Predicament!

DICK BLACKWOOD was startled by the ugliness of his companion's wound. He realised now that Trent had vastly underestimated its seriousness. All their bandages and antiseptics had gone. What was he to do?

"Leave me here, Trent managed to say. "You go on and catch those devils."

"But I can't leave you like this!" the boy protested.

"Guess you've got to. If you don't get some of the stuff back the game's up. But if you can trap them in that pass—"

He broke off, his brain swimming. His head fell back, and the effort to speak was too great. But he moved his hand, a blind gesture urging Dick to go on.

Dick caught his breath; then, all at once, he made up his mind.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'll be back again by daylight."

He stood up and set his teeth. In other circumstances he wouldn't have hesitated to admit that to carry this task through single-handed was an impossibility, but he dared not admit it now, even to himself. Whether they failed or succeeded, perhaps whether they left these mountains alive, depended on him alone.

He threw a quick glance at the man panting on the ground. Picking up Trent's rifle he slung it across his shoulders, and with a determined glitter in his eyes, he jumped on the mule. A moment later he was plunging through the darkness.

The moon appeared, and Dick was concentrating so hard on preventing himself from being thrown that it seemed to come with astonishing abruptness. A blue light enveloped the crags, the fantastic, wind-eroded rocks, the snow-clad peaks with magic and mystery. Dick had been riding for nearly an hour, trusting until now to the almost animal sense of direction which he found he possessed.

He was not far out of his course. He remembered those immense pillars of limestone on his left, standing up like colossal tombs. In another mile he would reach the brink of a precipice which commanded a view of a deep, narrow gorge, crossed by a flimsy suspension bridge. The Indians would come around by the lower road and they would have to cross the bridge.

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That would be his opportunity. Concealed behind a boulder he would have them at his mercy. There would be only three of them—since he had accounted for two comparatively easy—if only he were in time.

He kicked the flanks of his mount recklessly. The nearness to his goal gave him a new confidence; but there was still suspense underlying it, for suppose they had already crossed the bridge?

The stony ground flew by, glinting like platinum in the moonlight. Trees, rocks, great heaps of stones, all the savage features of these desolate uplands flashed past until he was dizzy. A horse would have been quicker; but a horse would never have been so sure-footed.

He pictured himself, when it was all over, returning in triumph to Trent, with a string of pack mules he had captured entirely by himself. Yes, this was his chance to-night to prove that they hadn't made any mistake in letting him join the expedition.

Perhaps by the time he got back West would have turned up. Unless— But he refused to permit himself to look upon the black side. He was going to succeed. Nothing could stop him—

Suddenly this burst of optimism was pricked like a balloon. There was a familiar crack, alarmingly close, and a bullet spat on the ground.

Dick's heart sank. Before he could think of an explanation a storm of bullets whizzed around him, one missing his shoulder and ploughing the mule's neck. With a scream the animal bounded forward and to Dick's dismay they were over the edge of the precipice. The mule was sitting on its haunches, waving its head wildly, and sliding with an avalanche of stones towards the chasm yawning underneath.

The firing had stopped. It was no longer necessary. The men forming the ambush regarded him as doomed, as assuredly he was. There was only one forlorn chance of saving himself. Without another second's hesitation he took it, and jumping clear of the mule, tried to stop his fall.

But the stones and gravel swept him on like an irresistible tide. His hands and face were bruised and cut and bleeding. He could see the narrow strip of road, forming a sharp, metallic edge of the abyss. There was the bridge, but how could he reach it? Wouldn't he be swept clean over the road, to hurtle down a thousand feet, with this thundering avalanche?

He was rolling downward with ever increasing momentum. His hands clawed for something to break the fall, but the stones and branches and roots he touched were carried with him. He was on top of the road. The whole side of the cliff down which he had fallen seemed to be roaring, like coals down a chute, into the yawning crevasse.

Had he been a few feet to the right he might have been flung on to the bridge itself. He could see it looming up as he was about to disappear. He made a last despairing effort and hurled himself into space.

It was a thing he had done often, swinging from

trapeze to trapeze, in the gymnasium. But now his life depended on it. Almost to his amazement, his hands touched something solid, the base of the bridge. He gripped with all his might.

For a minute he swung to and fro, like a pendulum, his arms straining over his head, his feet pointing downward to the black, terrifying depths of the chasm, which roared and reverberated with the stones pouring from above. Then, as he looked up, about to attempt to hoist himself to safety, he saw to his horror that a man was standing on the bridge looking down at him.

He was staring into the mocking face of Senor Lopez!

In the Hands of Lopez!

LOPEZ! Standing there, his hands gripping the rope side, looking down with malicious triumph at the white, strained face below the level of his feet. The merest touch of those iron-shod boots, and Dick would have gone plunging after the avalanche.

A sick horror rushed over the boy as he realised how utterly he was at the mercy of their arch enemy. He could do nothing to save himself. He was swaying over an abyss of darkness. Why didn't the Brazilian end matters? Or did he extract some pleasure from torturing him, waiting, perhaps, until his benumbed fingers could no longer retain their hold?

The noise had died down. A few last stones trickled and clattered by, rebounding from side to side. With great deliberation Lopez pulled a revolver from his holster, and Dick momentarily closed his eyes. This was surely the finish!

"Get up!" said the suave voice.

He opened his eyes in amazement. He wondered if he could have heard aright.

"I'm not going to shoot you," Lopez continued. "That is, unless you try to be too clever. Will you give me your word not to attempt to escape?"

Dick clenched his teeth. The impulse that came over him was crazy, in the circumstances, but it was ungovernable.

"No, I won't!" he cried back.

"Your candour is most refreshing." Instead of being angry Lopez was actually smiling. "The opportunity will scarcely arise, but bear in mind that I have you covered."

By this time Dick's hands were so cramped that he almost doubted whether he could manage to climb to safety. He let go with one hand and grabbed one of the posts. For an awful instant he felt his fingers slipping. But somehow he managed to retain his hold, and the next minute his knee was on a solid plank, and he was drawing himself upright, although the entire structure was shaking.

"Remember," continued Lopez warningly, "the slightest pressure of my finger will send you back. I don't know what's at the bottom, but I'm sure you wouldn't care to investigate. Before we drop into polite conversation will you throw away your revolver?"

Dick had no alternative but to comply. He was utterly bewildered, however, by the other man's manner.

"Finally," said Lopez, with ironical smoothness, "I think we will find some less draughty spot to talk in. Walk straight on in front of me, and I will tell you when to stop."

It was when he had left the bridge and turned the corner that light began to dawn on Dick. On the other side of the gorge he saw a number of camp-fires, and at last the explanation of the behaviour of their bearers became clear. They had been instructed to murder Trent and West, and, of course, himself, and return to this camp.

Lopez had been in hiding all the time. He must have actually been in a position to watch them cross the gorge on their way to the lake. But what still remained to be explained was the mystery of the shot that had first awakened him, and which had been fired from the caves West had gone to explore; also the riddle of the trees that had been cut down by the side of the lake.

Dick counted nine Indians as he entered the camp, and more were arriving. He recognised two of their old carriers.

Lopez beckoned to a couple of Indians and gave an order in Spanish. They advanced quickly, and Dick had to submit to having his hands bound behind his back. What was to happen now? Why had his life been spared?

He watched his captor roll a cigarette and light it. His movements were unhurried. Lopez still seemed to be secretly amused. Then his eyes came to rest appraisingly on Dick.

"So you are the only survivor?" he began.

"Not a bit of it!" retorted Dick quickly. "You'll find out before long that Trent and West are very much alive."

"It is useless to try to bluff me. I know they are both dead."

Dick caught his breath. It was possible that something had happened to Trent since he had left him; and he had no certain knowledge of West.

"Have you made sure?" he asked. "Or are you relying on what the natives have told you?"

With a rush of relief he saw from Lopez's expression that he had merely accepted the reports of the natives.

"If they have escaped," said Lopez, after a pause, in which a shadow momentarily darkened his eyes, "it will not be for long. They are without weapons. They will soon be without food. But I shall put them out of their misery."

"I wouldn't start counting your chickens in the incubator," retorted Dick, his defiant cheerfulness restored.

"Take a look around you," Lopez resumed. "I have a dozen Indians, all of whom are near enough the savage to enjoy nothing better than rounding up a pair of defenceless whites. I have all your equipment, all your animals—everything. It can hardly need much imagination to see that your lives depend entirely on me. I grant that you have done very well in the circumstances. But you must acknowledge defeat."

"And if we don't?"

"I shall assist you," replied Lopez grimly. But his manner changed again. "West and Trent are finished. You can take that for granted. You will never see either of them again. I set my trap, and they have walked into it. I knew you would get as far as this, but I do not intend you shall get any farther. Unless—well, I am going to make an offer."

Dick waited, a curious suspicion breaking on him, which Lopez's next words proved to be correct.

"I made Trent an offer in London. He refused it, and he must pay the penalty. But I can be generous to a brave opponent. I was inclined to despise you at first, but you have proved yourself. In many ways—and you can believe me or not—I admire you. Not many minutes ago your life

hung by a single thread. But I decided not to waste it. I decided to give you a chance of saving yourself."

"You mean—"

"I mean if you change sides, and swear loyalty to me, I will spare your life. In fact, you will not have any cause to complain of your reward."

"You actually think I would desert the others and help you to play your dirty game?" cried Dick, almost incredulously.

"You no longer owe them any loyalty. You cannot be under any obligation to the dead."

"There's the obligation to hunt their murderer," exclaimed Dick hotly, "and shoot him—shoot him like a mad dog! You blackguard, I suppose that's the idea that would come natural to you! You've got the upper hand now, but the game isn't finished, you rotter! We'll beat you yet!"

"The game is quite finished," said Lopez, with deadly calm. "If you prefer to cherish a



TRENT, the leader of the Radium Seekers.

HOW THE ADVENTURE STARTED.

Convinced that Pedro Lopez, a clever, suave Brazilian, has unlawfully gained possession of a map disclosing the whereabouts of a fortune in radium, Robert West, a scientist of great repute, and his companion, John Trent, together with a plucky, full-of-egg youngster named Dick Blackwood, determine to follow the arch-villain to Brazil. Reaching a desolate plateau in the Andes, the three explorers, accompanied by a party of Indians with pack mules, find their advance blocked by a large lake bounded on either side by unscalable mountains. Leaving his companions to make a raft, West rows across the lake in a collapsible boat, which the party had brought in case of emergency, to explore some distant cliffs. That same night, however, the Indians, having been bribed by Lopez, mutiny, and after a futile attempt to murder Trent and Dick, both with everything they can lay their hands on. Capturing two mules which have been left behind, Trent and Dick are racing off like the wind to cut off the Indians, when Trent, dazed by loss of blood from a wound in the ribs, reels from his mount.

(Now read on.)

delusion than to face the hard facts, you must take the consequences. But you are throwing away your life."

"I don't want it on your terms!" Dick flashed.

"I could shoot you as you stand," Lopez continued, almost meditatively. "But that would be uneconomical. The point is that somebody has to be killed if I am to continue on my journey. You discovered, I believe, that the way lies along a subterranean river. You would soon have discovered, as I did two days ago, that no native can be persuaded to go that way. They believe that an evil spirit called Ayachacha lives in the heart of the mountain we have to go through. The legend can be traced back to Inca times. Ayachacha can only be appeased by human sacrifice. There remains to this day an Inca altar in one of those caves. The victims were garlanded with flowers, and thrown into a whirlpool, where they were devoured by Ayachacha. The natives swear that the god has actually been seen devouring his victims. I rather doubt that myself."

Dick listened, and it would not be strictly true to say that he felt not a trace of fear. But his expression remained defiant.

"I have a theory about Ayachacha," continued Lopez. "I shall be interested to see whether it is verified. I believe he's real in a sense. What I think to be the true explanation is very horrible. I will only say that I do not believe you will die by drowning."

"Nor do I," said Dick, setting his teeth. "And I don't believe you will die in your bed."

Lopez gave a sardonic smile, and shrugged his shoulders. "I regret it—genuinely. But the very quality I want in you—and which is hard to find—is the one I can't get. I mean you are loyal."

He turned away, and for a moment his whole attitude and expression were curiously melancholy. But it quickly changed again. It was as though for a brief moment he had become conscious of his exile from the world where

men obeyed a code of honour; but the regret was no more permanent than the shadow of a passing cloud.

"I hope," he reflected, "Ayachacha will live up to his reputation."

Hope!

ONE thought dominated Dick when he awoke the next morning, to find himself a prisoner in the hostile camp. It was not merely how to escape, but how to get away with the all-important paper in the possession of Lopez, which would enable them to reach their destination. He refused to admit to himself even the possibility that his two companions might be dead.

"It's like an obstacle race," he told himself. "Lopez has had the luck in his favour during the first lap. But there's plenty of time."

The sun blazed down from a cloudless sky. There was the clean, strong smell of pines in the air, which had the champagne lightness of high altitudes. He hardly noticed the minor injuries he had received. He felt energy pouring into him, and the irksome part was that his arms were still bound. Lopez was taking no chances. Apparently he didn't even mean to give him anything to eat.

He watched the Indians in the distance, greedily stuffing a mess of maize and potatoes. He licked his lips, which were dry and cut.

"I thought," he murmured to himself, "it was the rule to fatten the victim before the sacrifice. Poor old Ayachacha won't have much of a meal."

He was tremendously relieved to find he could joke to himself about it. Anyway, that would annoy Lopez. But who was the Indian coming towards him? The man only had one eye, and in his hand he carried a water flask.

"Will you drink, señor?"

Dick wondered if it was a trick. Perhaps, with some native sense of humour, he would presently empty the bottle before Dick's eyes. But actually he did nothing of the sort. He held out the flask, and Dick eagerly swallowed the ice-cold liquid.

"That's darned good of you, old sport! If you could get me a bit of bread to munch, you'll be my friend for life—which, I'm told, isn't likely to be for long."

"Bread? Si, señor!"

"The man's a marvel!" he declared, as a hunk of bread was produced, and the Indian broke it into small pieces, placing a piece at a time in the boy's mouth. "Like feeding the 'Dicky' birds. That's a joke, you know. You are supposed to laugh."

However, there was no sign of mirth on that bronzed face. The man did everything with deliberation and intense seriousness. All the time his solitary eye remained fixed on Dick unwinkingly.

"Have no fear, señor," he said suddenly.

"What do you mean?" asked Dick, in surprise.

A ray of hope shot through him. This man, if he chose, might be useful.

"Trust to me. I have a plan. We shall both escape together."

"Both escape? But you—"

He got no further. There was a dramatic interruption. Someone darted between them. It was Lopez, no longer smiling and ironic; but his eyes dilated with fury.

"Caramba!" he cried. "Take that, you dog—and that!"

He was carrying a heavy riding-whip. He raced up and brought it down on the upturned face of the native, making a weal from which the blood commenced to flow as though the man's face had been struck by a sabre.

"You filthy coward!" Dick gasped, straining at his bonds, and bursting with indignation. "The man was only feeding me!"

Lopez swung round, rage still uppermost.

"Another word, and I'll treat you the same!" he snarled.

The Indian was on the ground. Lopez gave him a vicious kick in the stomach, causing him to writhe and twist in agony. Then, with a venomous glance at Dick, he strode off, shouting orders to some bearers who were loading the mules.

Dick stared at him in anger and bewilderment. He wondered what could



"Caramba!" cried Lopez. "Take that, you dog—and that!" The man brought his heavy riding-whip down on the upturned face of the native.

have happened to have produced this violent change in him. He could only think—or, rather hope—that Lopez had verified the truth of his assertion that Trent and West were still alive.

Once more hope surged over him. There was one other incident that day to strengthen it. His bonds were not loosened, and he was placed between an armed escort as the whole camp moved on, and finally halted at the spot where Trent and West had stopped, on the shore of the lake.

There was a hum of excitement, and presently Dick saw the reason. A number of men had gone off, and they returned with three long, narrow boats and a raft. These had been concealed in a creek, no doubt artfully camouflaged. If he had only been able to find them before.

The mules were unloaded, and then the thing occurred which made Dick think that his companions must be alive—and that Lopez knew it. Every one of the animals was shot.

"The brute!" thought Dick, in disgust. But a rifle-butt prodded him in the back, and he was forced to enter one of the waiting boats. They commenced to row across the lake.

By now Dick's nerves were tingling, not so much with fear as with tension. He could see the sandstone cliffs on the opposite shore looming up. Soon he would know the mystery they concealed. But would he ever know what lay on the other side? Would he ever get through and see the vast forest of the Amazon spreading underneath—a forest which rolled away to the Atlantic?

He turned and threw a last glance at the shore they had left, and the boulder-strewn plain behind. He was convinced that, lurking somewhere on that mountain-shelf were both West and Trent, and that the mules had been shot so as to prevent them from getting out alive. It would be impossible for them to make the journey back on foot, equally impossible for them to think of following, with no equipment. No doubt they would try, but they wouldn't get far.

His first eager joy at discovering—as he believed—that his companions were alive began to fade. A chill descended on him as the boat entered the shadowy mouth of a cave.

Abruptly the atmosphere changed. There was no longer any invigorating sparkle in the air. They were entering a damp, sunless tunnel, where the water remained only a little above freezing point. In fact, along the sides, congealed lumps of ice began to gleam as torches were lighted.

The effect was eerie. They had lost sight of that square of daylight which marked the entrance. The tunnel narrowed, and unexpectedly opened out again, so that the river appeared to flow between terraced banks of rock in an enormous cavern, dripping with stalactites. The glow from a dozen torches was reflected in the water.

The cavern ended abruptly, and once more it was possible to touch the sides. The water was now flowing fast. There was no need to paddle, only to steer. Another cavern came into view, and for two hours they continued their strange progress under the earth, passing from one gigantic cave to another, like enormous rooms of some bizarre palace Nature had hollowed, but for no human dwelling. There were places where the river branched into tributaries, deep gorges where the sound of rushing water was like thunder. The strange thing was that the air was so fresh.

Dick watched the faces of the natives in his boat. They were uneasy, he thought. Nor was that hard to understand. You did not need your mind to be haunted by superstitions to feel the weirdness of these caves, so uncannily silent, except when a torrent roared in the distance, so utterly remote that they might have been exploring the hidden hemispheres of the moon.

But all at once the silence was broken by a terrifying sound. It was a howl, increasing and increasing until it shrilled overhead, bursting into an awful scream, fantastic and unearthly, and dying away into mournful echoes.

The God of the Shrieking Pit!

FOR the first time in his life Dick knew the meaning of the expression "to feel your blood run cold." It was as though a lump of ice were passing down his spine. He stared, open-mouthed, and after a paralysed silence the natives dropped their paddles and



Lick gave a gasp of horror as the waving tentacles encircled his arms and body in a deadly embrace!

began to shout in terror. They were shouting—it sounded like a chant—one word:

"Ayachacha! Ayachacha!"

In their own language that word meant the God of the Shrieking Pit.

Lopez was also shouting. He was uttering the direst threats, and urging them to go on, but it was in vain. Not a man would move. Quickly he saw that it was useless to argue, or even to menace. Only one thing would satisfy them. The god had just cried out for a victim, and the victim must be found.

"What do you want me to do?" he cried.

"Alomba!" The terrible answer came as though one man were speaking. It meant, translated, sacrifice.

Dick did not understand the words spoken; but he grasped their import. He saw every face turned in his direction. He heard Lopez give an order, which was promptly obeyed.

The two natives guarding Dick seized him, and he was forced to stand up and then step from the boat on to the rock against which it was scraping. It was the signal for all the boats to be secured, and for their occupants to go ashore.

The boats were in a miniature canyon. To go ashore meant climbing, with considerable difficulty, the rocky and almost perpendicular bank. But presently Dick saw to his surprise that steps had been cut, steps worn with age, and perhaps with the feet of countless other victims. Finally, he reached the top. He wondered if he could escape; but, with his hands bound behind his back, he realised that even if he made a bid for liberty, he would not get far. In the pitch darkness he would only be dashed to pieces on the rocks.

The torches were formed into a kind of procession, and he was in the middle of it. They continued along the edge of the canyon, until a breath of air warned him they were about to enter one of the big caverns.

He was right, but this cavern seemed to be immeasurably vaster than any of the others. It seemed to be a meeting-place of a number of streams, and they came together with such violence that the water in the centre was agitated, forming a whirlpool. It would have been dangerous for a

boat to attempt to cross; certainly no swimmer could survive for long.

Lopez approached him.

"You've only yourself to blame," were his first words. "I would have made one of the Indians take your place if you hadn't been so infernally obstinate."

"That's obliging of you," responded Dick, determined not to show any fear.

"Let me tell you what is in store for you. I am afraid it's not pleasant. You see, we are standing on the edge of a cliff. Carved on the walls, very difficult to make out in this light, are rows of idols, the handiwork, no doubt, of the ancient Incas. Whether these Indians are their true descendants, as they like to claim, or merely descendants of the race the Incas subjugated, I leave to experts. But the manuscript I took from Spaulding contains an interesting description of this place. According to the writer, a monster dwells in the whirlpool. I am now going to witness a scientific experiment in which I shall be able to prove whether this monster is a myth or something real. So in one way you are a martyr to the advancement of learning."

"I should think," murmured Dick, "the monster must be on the retired list. Let me see—he'd be about three hundred years old, wouldn't he?"

"You are forgetting the possibility that it bred."

"So I'm going to be thrown to his great-grandchildren? That's amusing. But I don't think I believe in fairy tales."

Lopez repressed a movement of impatience.

"Have you any last request to make?"

"I'd like my hands free. If you'll permit that I promise you a sporting finish."

"I'm sorry," said Lopez grimly, "that isn't allowed by the rules. The natives are sticklers for etiquette. Your hands must be bound and a wreath placed around your neck."

"Flowers by special request, eh? Well, carry on with the good work. I want—"

The rest of the sentence was drowned. Once more that horrifying sound filled the entire cavern. It was a wailing shriek, rising and sinking to a moan. The air quivered with weird, mournful echoes, while the scream itself still seemed to go through Dick's ears like a knife.

"Pronto! Quick! Quick!" called the natives overboard. "The sacrifice! The sacrifice! *Ayahu! Ayahu!*"

"The god," said Lopez, fixing his penetrating eyes on Dick, "is calling!"

What happened next was a matter of seconds. Dick was thrust forward, the Indians crowding excitedly around him. A garland of flowers was twisted around his neck. They had a strong, sickly smell, but he could not resist. Two pairs of hands gripped his shoulders and others his legs.

He was lifted off his feet and carried by four natives to the brink of the cliff while the others rushed up, waving robes. They were intoning a chant, pounding the ground with their feet, and swaying from side to side.

Dick was lifted high in the air, and he remained poised. It seemed, for an eternity, far below he could see the

troubled surface of the water, agleam with reddish light. Then the arms supporting him strained and stiffened, and he was flung outward.

With an effort he straightened himself as he hurtled through the air. He struck the water feet foremost, plunging down, down, until his lungs nearly burst. But he must hold out at all costs. He might be able to float to safety; he might be able to sever the ropes binding his arms against the sharp rocks. It was a feeble enough hope, but he clung to it, refusing even now to admit it was impossible to save himself.

At last he was beginning to come to the surface. His head felt as though it was in an iron clasp. But he managed to hold his breath a few more seconds, and with a gasping exhalation he blinked and began to tread water.

High overhead he caught a glimpse of torches and motionless figures. It was as though he had fallen to the bottom of a well and was staring up at the faces peering at him. They were waiting—for what?

The awesome sound that he had heard, and which had admittedly startled him at first, no longer worried him. In some way—he guessed correctly enough—the wind blowing through the various caves utilised their curious acoustic properties, the scream was little more than an exaggerated version of the whistling sound he himself could make by blowing through his fingers. If that were all—

But it wasn't. All at once he realised that there was something else. What the natives were waiting for, what they called *Ayachacha*, was no mere figment of the imagination. It was coming towards him now.

There was a stir in the oily darkness, a new rippling movement in the water. Something glowed like blue moonlight underneath the water, getting stronger and nearer the surface. Dick was aware, too, of a stench of putrefaction, utterly nauseating.

All at once a long, snaky coil of leprous whiteness flashed out of the water. Then another and yet another, until, newly risen to the surface, was a creature many times his own size, resembling an octopus, yet bigger than any known species. It had a white, shapeless, jelly-like body, and a mass of writhing tentacles. It had the property of pinching, as was stated by certain legends, so that it moved like a veritable lightning. Also, like a shark, it gave off a foul odor so powerful that his victims were usually asphyxiated.

Dick saw those waving arms sweeping towards him. His own hands were tied behind his back, so that he could neither swim nor defend himself. He gave a gasp of horror, and the next moment he tried to plunge under water, but before he could do so he was caught in the loathsome embrace of a worm-like tentacle!

It looks as though young Dick Blackwood's great adventure is to meet with a terrible end. Can he possibly escape the clutching tentacles of this fearsome octopus? You're an enterprising reader to read next week's gripping instalment—won't you? Well, avoid being disappointed by ordering next week's GEM in good time!

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