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THE GEM 2^d



**BATHING
NOT
ALLOWED**

THE BLACK BOX, THE GREEN CAR, THE "RED" RUSSIAN, AND THE

The Prisoner of The Moat House!

Thrills, Fun, and Footer all play their part
in this rousing yarn of Tom Merry & Co. "of St. Jim's."

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

At the Moat House!

"M—MY hat!"

Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, came to a sudden halt as he stammered out that astonished exclamation.

It was growing dusk. Baggy, the fattest junior at St. Jim's, was on his way back to the school from Wayland, which he had visited that evening to execute a little commission for Gerald Knox of the Sixth. To save himself several hundred yards of the road—Baggy loathed walking an inch that could possibly be avoided—the Falstaff of the Fourth had taken a short cut through the gloomy, uncared-for grounds of the Moat House—an old, grim-looking, moated pile on the edge of Wayland Moor. For years the Moat House had been empty, and Baggy supposed it to be unoccupied still.

But as he had rolled past the dark, scum-encrusted waters of the moat at the back of the house, the faint sound of a softly opened window had caused him to jump in a startled way. Glancing round over his fat shoulder, Baggy had been astonished to see a white face staring down at him from an upper window of the dark old mansion across the moat.

To Baggy, who had believed the house untenanted, there was something very eerie in suddenly finding himself watched from that high-up window under the eaves.

Conscience makes cowards of us all—and the fact that Baggy's conscience was distinctly guilty just-then probably helped considerably in producing the sudden cold, unpleasant shiver that had gone running down his spine.

The reason for Baggy's guilty conscience was a bulge in his pocket which revealed the resting-place of a box of a hundred cigarettes for Knox. The shady prefect had given Baggy five shillings to do that risky errand for him, but for five shillings Baggy would have done almost anything! But, so long as those cigarettes were in his possession, Baggy would be ready to jump at sight of a mouse—let alone at finding a white face watching him from a supposedly empty house, as darkness was falling!

"M—my hat!"

Baggy stood rooted to the spot by the water's edge, staring wide-eyed at the little window from which the unexpected face gazed down at him across the moat.

It was a girl's face. But the window was so high that in the deepening dusk he could make out very little of her features. But the next moment Baggy's attention was drawn from the face at the open window, as something fluttered down from it—a scrap of paper that the girl had flung out. She vanished almost instantly, closing the window, while Baggy watched with wondering eyes the piece of white, crumpled paper as it fluttered slowly down.

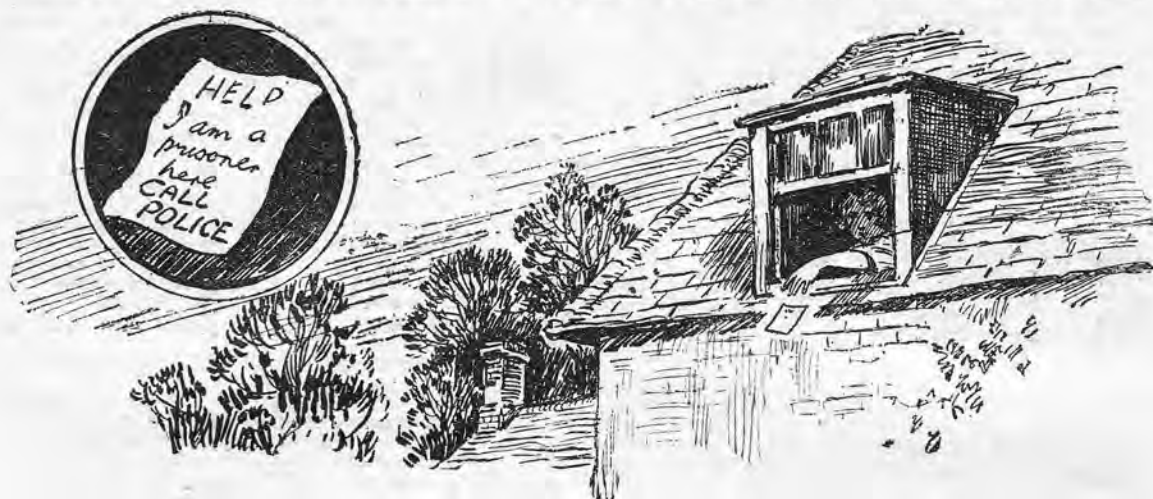
Driven on the breeze, it floated out from the wall of the house, out over the moat. But the wind was not strong enough to carry it across. It dropped on to the surface of the water a few yards from the outer bank, not far from where Baggy stood.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Baggy. "What the dickens! Hang it, that must be a message—"

There was a long stick lying near some bushes behind him. He snatched it up, and rolled quickly along the bank to where the scrap of paper lay sodden on the water.

Baggy's eyes were gleaming excitedly.

—MAN WITH THE YELLOW EYES! MEET 'EM BELOW, CHUMS!



He had quite forgotten all about his anxieties over Knox's shady little commission! His mind was suddenly filled, instead, with romantic imaginings. Suppose the girl whose face he had seen was a prisoner in the moated house? Suppose that mysterious scrap of paper was a message for help? Suppose she were a kidnapped princess, and that Baggy, single-handed, saved her from her enemies? Suppose—

Baggy's excited suppositions ended abruptly, as Baggy, in leaning out to catch the scrap of paper on the end of the stick, lost his balance, and went splashing into the moat with a wild yell.

"Yarooooosh!"

Baggy vanished under the surface, and swallowed a gallon—or what felt like a gallon, at any rate—of the moat water. When his head appeared again, it was plentifully festooned with water weeds, and Baggy looked extraordinarily like a half-drowned rat.

"Oh! Yoooooh! Gug-gug-gug-gggggg!"

Splashing wildly, Baggy succeeded, somehow, or other, in grasping the bank, and hauled himself on to the grass. Water streamed from him, and his soaked garments clung to his fat frame miserably. Baggy gasped and spluttered in utter dismay.

"Oh, lor'!" moaned Baggy. "Grooooooh! Oh, m-my hat!"

His cap was floating merrily on the water, and he retrieved it with the long stick. Almost mechanically, for his sudden immersion had considerably damped Baggy's excited ardour, he also retrieved the mysterious scrap of paper that the girl at the window had thrown out, apparently to him. It was sodden with water, but as Baggy blinked down at it the words that had been scrawled on it in pencil were still visible.

Baggy jumped.

For the moment, at any rate, he forgot utterly his misery over his wet clothes, and the fact that water was still trickling in a chilly way down his fat back. It was as he had supposed! There was no doubt about it. For the words on the paper, read:

"Help! I am a prisoner here. Call police."

Baggy goggled down at it, and breathed fast.

"My giddy aunt—"

He turned his head suddenly at sound of a footstep. His jaw dropped.

A man was striding quickly along the edge of the moat towards him—a tall, foreign-looking man, with dark, flashing eyes and a small, pointed beard. He had appeared from round the corner of the building, where a bridge crossed the moat to the front entrance of the house.

Baggy would have liked to turn and run. But he was riveted to the spot, held, as if fascinated, by those glittering dark eyes. The man halted in front of him, and held out his hand.

"Please let me see that paper!"

He spoke with a faint foreign accent—a steely voice, with a compelling note; he was clearly a man who was used to being obeyed.

Baggy, at any rate, was not the fellow to defy him! For a moment, or less, it did flash through Baggy's mind that if he knocked out this sinister-looking individual

with a clean uppercut, fought his way into the house through all opposition, and rescued the imprisoned girl, he would be acclaimed as a hero at St. Jim's, and—consequently—stood unlimited feeds by the admiring fellows. But Baggy was not of the stuff of which heroes are made! He was as likely to grow wings and fly, as to knock out with a clean uppercut the man whose dark, fierce eyes were now glittering down into his own! His dream of himself in the role of a gallant knight of old died in an instant.

"Please give me that paper!"

"Sus-sus-sus-certainly!" stuttered Baggy.

He held out the sodden message with a dripping, fat arm. The man read it, and smiled coldly.

"I thought so," he murmured. He picked up the damp paper from Baggy's greasy palm and crumpled it into a ball, tossing it back into the moat. He smiled again, revealing flashing white teeth. "I am sorry you got so wet, my young friend, in troubling to get that message from the water."

"N-n-not at all!" gasped Baggy fatuously.

He was fairly quaking with terror. Something about this bearded figure with the dark flashing eyes scared him.

"You do not, of course, take it seriously?" smiled the other, his eyes fixed keenly upon Baggy's damp countenance.

"Oh, rather not!" stammered Baggy. "R-rather not!" He summoned a sickly smile. "Just a joke, I suppose. Ha, ha!"

"Well, not exactly a joke," said the other quietly. "You see—I had better explain—this house is now a private mental home. I am Dr. Brusiloff, the principal. You understand? The poor girl who threw out that piece of paper with the absurd message upon it suffers from the delusion that she is an important personage, kept prisoner under this roof. Actually, of course, she is one of my patients, whose parents have entrusted her to my care. Very sad, is it not?"

The dark eyes glittered down into Baggy's.

Baggy gaped back at the man dumbly.

So that was the explanation! There was nothing thrilling or romantic about it, after all! The place was simply a private mental home, and the message had been thrown to him by one of the lunatics. But it was a relief, at any rate, to know that he was not in danger of falling into the hands of a gang of foreign scoundrels! At first appearance, the man with the pointed beard had certainly appeared a sinister-looking figure to Baggy Trimble's eyes; but now that Baggy knew him to be simply a harmless medical man, there seemed to be nothing frightening about him any more.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "I—I see!"

"I trust that clears your mind of any—er—suspicious you may have entertained concerning this house," laughed Dr. Brusiloff. "But perhaps I should ask what brought you into these grounds at all?"

"I was taking a short cut," explained Baggy. "I didn't know there was anyone in the house, you know; it's been empty for ages."

"I see!" Dr. Brusiloff eyed Baggy's sodden garments with a look of concern. "But really, I cannot allow you

to go back to St. Jim's—his glance had gone to Baggy's school cap, which he evidently recognised—"in that state! You must come in and dry your clothes, or you will be in danger of illness. Come!"

Baggy's face lit up.

"Thanks awfully!" he said eagerly. "I'm jolly well soaked, and although I've got an athletic figure, I'm really rather delicate in constitution, you know, and—"

"This way!"

With Baggy scuttling beside him, leaving a trail of water behind him as he went, Dr. Brusiloff led the way round the moat to the bridge that crossed from the outer bank to the forecourt in front of the main entrance.

"Brusiloff—must be a giddy Russian!" Baggy told himself as he followed his companion up the steps to the big front door, and entered the spacious hall beyond it.

A woman, tall and dark, and beautifully dressed, was in the hall, and she gave an exclamation as they entered. She stared at Baggy keenly, with dark, flashing eyes, very similar to Dr. Brusiloff's. The Russian smiled.

"My young friend has just fallen into the moat!" he explained. "I have brought him in to dry his clothes. One of the patients, poor creature, threw out a message, and he fell in when retrieving it from the water! A most unfortunate affair! I feel responsible, too! The—er—nurses should never have allowed the girl to open the window."

He glanced at Baggy.

"This is my wife!" he added. "Now, come along in here!"

He led Baggy into a small room overlooking the moat, where a bright fire was burning.

A few minutes later, Baggy, provided with a dressing-gown by his new acquaintance, was seated, clad in it, before the fire, while his soaked clothes were carried away to be dried elsewhere. A silent foreigner—evidently a manservant—came in with a cup of steaming coffee and some biscuits, and Baggy began to feel that he had struck lucky.

Before long, Brusiloff was back. He stood by the fire and surveyed Baggy, with a gleaming smile.

"Your clothes are being pressed and ironed now," he explained. "They will not be long."

"Jolly kind of you!" grinned Baggy, helping himself to another biscuit. "I say, these biscuits are prime!"

"Good!" The man's hand went to his pocket. He took out a notecase and selected two crisp green notes before Baggy's goggling eyes. "I want you to accept this little gift, my young friend," he went on smoothly, holding out the two pounds, which Baggy took with a delighted gasp. "I feel that a little compensation is due to you for your unpleasant experience. Besides which, I have a little favour to ask."

"A f-favour?" gasped Baggy, glancing from the notes in his fat fingers to Brusiloff's thin, dark face, with shining eyes. "My hat! Rather! I'll do you a favour! Jolly glad to!"

Two quid! Baggy had not had two quid of his own for a long, long while!

"It is simply this," said Dr. Brusiloff, his eyes gleaming down into Baggy's with a strange, compelling look. "I do not wish it to be generally known that this house has been taken by me as a mental home. People in the district might object, you see. Therefore, I want you to promise to say nothing about your experience here this evening—nothing at all! You understand?"

Baggy nodded, with a fat smirk.

"I won't say a blessed word, sir! He, he, he! Trust me! Mum's the word!"

Brusiloff surveyed Baggy searchingly. Apparently he was satisfied that Baggy would keep his secret, for he smiled.

"Good! That is a promise, then. You say nothing!"

"Rather not!" grinned Baggy, with a leer that was meant for the knowing smile of a fellow-conspirator. "Trust me, you know!"

Soon after, Baggy's clothes were brought in by the silent manservant, dried and pressed, and a few minutes later the fat junior was dressed again, and took his leave. Brusiloff's wife smiled at him pleasantly as he crossed the hall, and the Russian himself not only crossed the moat with Baggy, but set off to accompany him through the gloomy, uncared-for grounds to the distant gate. As they neared it a car turned in from the road—a dark green closed car, with a powerfully-built man at the wheel. As he drove past, towards the house, he glanced at Baggy in evident surprise, and nodded to Brusiloff.

"Remember, not a word to anyone!" murmured Brusiloff, in a steely tone as they arrived at the gates.

"He, he, he! Rather not!"

The Russian stood watching Baggy roll away down the road for a minute or more, till the fat St. Jim's junior

was swallowed up in the gloom. Then, with a muttered exclamation, he turned and hurried back towards the house. In the hall his wife greeted him with an oddly anxious gleam in her dark eyes.

"Did that boy suspect anything?" she demanded fiercely. "He suspects nothing," answered Brusiloff. "He is a dull-witted, stupid fool, that's clear. He believed my story, about this being a private mental home, utterly!"

"But will he keep his tongue still? If he starts talking someone may suspect, and—"

"He won't say a word—I am quite satisfied of that. The money did the trick. Oh, he'll keep silent, like the dull-witted fool he is." His eyes gleamed in a sudden cold anger. "But this ought never to have happened. The girl ought never to have had the chance of throwing out that message. It was Yakova's fault! I'll give that fool of a woman a piece of my mind over this!"

He turned towards the stairs, but paused on the bottom step and glanced back.

"I see Vladimir has just got back. Has he any news?"

"None."

Brusiloff—who might or might not have any claim to the title of "Dr."—gave a muttered exclamation that might have indicated either anger or disappointment, and strode on up the stairs, vanishing into the shadows.

And on the road to St. Jim's the fat figure of Baggy Trimble rolled on through the deepening dusk, with two crinkling pound-notes burning a hole in one pocket, Knox's box of cigarettes—totally ruined after their immersion in the stagnant water of the moat—in another pocket, and on his greasy countenance a fat, contented smirk.

As Brusiloff had said, Baggy suspected nothing. Not for a moment did it occur to Baggy that he had been hoodwinked, and that there were queer doings afoot at the old Moat House!

CHAPTER 2.

Annoying For Knox!

"COME in!" Gerald Knox of the Sixth yelled the words in anything but dulcet tones as there came a tap on the door of his study in the Sixth Form passage. The door opened, and Baggy Trimble blinked into the room.

"So there you are!" Knox surveyed the Falstaff of the Fourth with gleaming eyes. "Where the dickens have you been all this time? I told you to go straight to Wayland and back again, hang you!"

"Oh, really, Knox!" Baggy sidled nervously into the study.

"I—I've been as quick as I could, you know."

"Nonsense! I suppose you spent half an hour in a cafe at Wayland stuffing, you fat porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Knox—"

"Give me those cigarettes, anyway," said the shady prefect savagely, glaring at Baggy in a way that caused the fat junior's countenance to assume an even more nervous aspect. "Where are they?"

"Hem!" Baggy coughed. "I—I—that is—"

"You don't mean to say you haven't got them?" snarled Knox.

"Oh—oh, rather not! Nunno! The—the fact is," stammered Baggy, "I hope they're all right, Knox! You—you see, they got a bit wet—"

"What?" ejaculated Knox.

Baggy produced a box from under his jacket and handed it rather gingerly across to the prefect. Knox snatched it from him with an exclamation, and opened the lid.

His jaw dropped.

"G-good gad!"

The cigarettes were ruined—that was clear at the first glance. Not one of them was smokable, or ever would be! Knox goggled at them dumbly. His face was a picture.

"S-sorry, Knox!" mumbled Baggy, edging for the door.

"I—Oh! Help! Yarooop!"

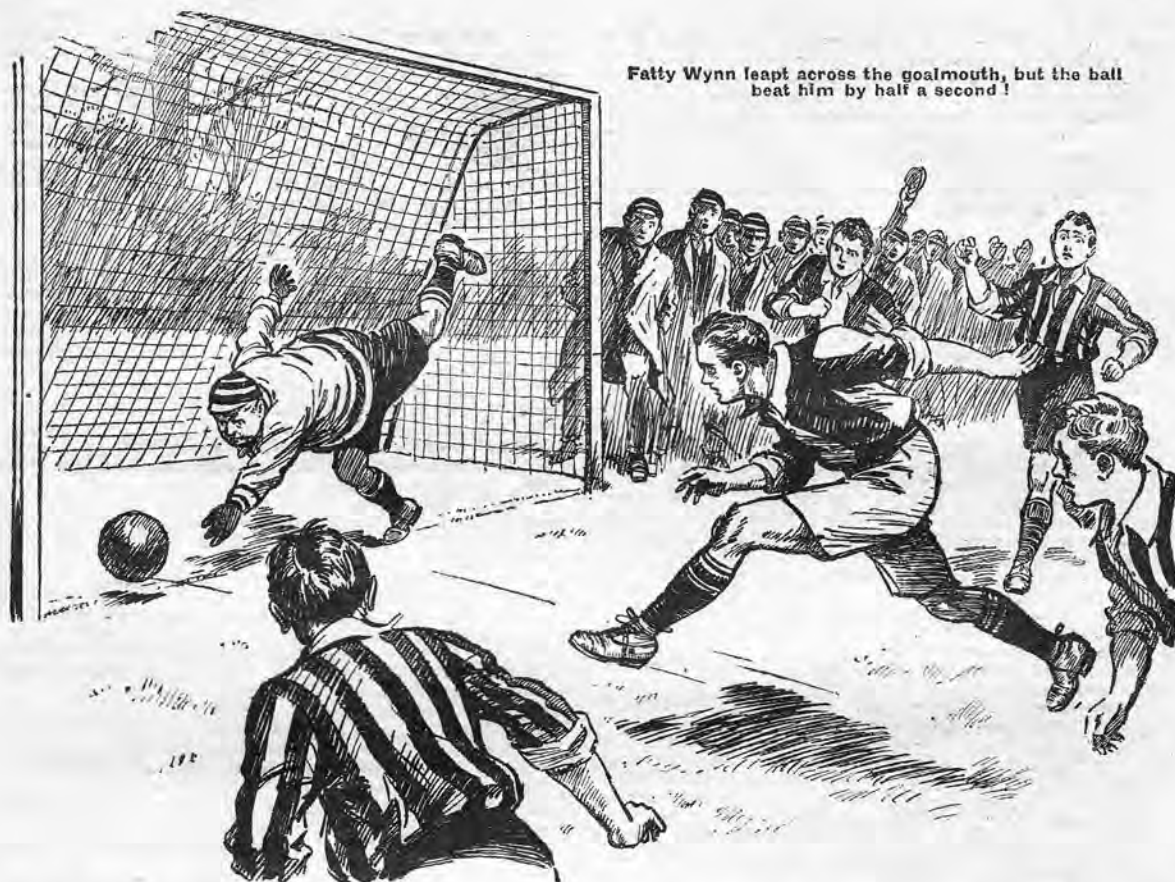
A wild yell of alarm broke from Baggy as Knox jumped to his feet with a yell of rage, and came across the study in a flying leap.

"You—you fat little toad! I—I'll slaughter you—"

But Baggy was not waiting to be slaughtered. He flung open the door and went round the corner into the passage on two wheels, so to speak. He raced for the stairs, with Knox in pursuit.

In ordinary circumstances Baggy Trimble of the Fourth was not a fast-moving individual. He did not like exerting his fat frame. But with Knox raging at his heels Baggy could have given a good race to a champion greyhound.

He went down the Sixth Form passage like a streak, and Knox pursued in vain. The sight of Mr. Railton, the House-



Fatty Wynn leapt across the goalmouth, but the ball beat him by half a second!

master, coming up the stairs caused Baggy to slacken speed hurriedly. He passed Mr. Railton with a very innocent air, then shot off along the Shell passage.

He stopped with a gasp outside the door of Study No. 10, and knocked hurriedly. With a frightened glance over his shoulder Baggy rolled in.

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, was seated by the fireplace jotting down the names of the fellows to play in the match against St. Jim's old rivals, Abbotsford, on the following afternoon—a Saturday. The other three occupants of the famous study—Monty Lowther, Harry Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock, the American junior from New York City, were busy with their prep.

"What do you want, porpoise?" queried Monty Lowther. Baggy did not reply. Along the passage he had heard the heavy footsteps of Gerald Knox. With a squeak of terror he shut the door hurriedly and dived under the table.

"For the love of Mike," ejaculated Cyrus K. Handcock, glancing at his chums through his horn-rimmed glasses in great astonishment, "what do you know about that? Say, you fat hunk o' cheese, what's the big idea? Come out—"

Handcock broke off as the door burst open and Knox glared into the study.

"Any of you kids seen that fat porpoise, Trimble?" demanded Knox, breathing hard.

Tom Merry & Co. did not need any further explanation of Baggy's peculiar behaviour. They understood now.

Baggy Trimble might not be a fellow they particularly liked or admired, but they certainly did not mean to deliver him over to the unpopular prefect.

"Why, it's Knoxy-Woxy!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "I never heard him knock. Although his name is Knox he didn't bother about any knocks, did he, you chaps?"

Knox went crimson. It was true enough that he had opened the door without the usual preliminary of a knock—a thing which Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, for example, would never have dreamed of doing. But Gerald Knox had big ideas of how to treat juniors, and to knock at the door of a junior study was a thing he seldom bothered to do.

"I'm looking for Trimble," he said furiously. "I—"

"Trimble?" echoed Tom Merry, as though he had never heard the name.

"You mean Baggy Trimble," put in Manners doubtfully.

"I guess he must mean Trimble of the Fourth," murmured Cyrus K. Handcock. "That fat guy. Is that the bird you're wanting, Knox?"

Knox breathed very hard.

"Yes. There's only one Trimble, isn't there, you young fools? I'm almost certain I saw him slip into here—"

"Slipped in here?" echoed Monty Lowther. "Somebody must have left a banana skin in the passage if he slipped. You didn't happen to drop a banana skin in the passage this evening, Knox? Or orange peel? I know some of the Sixth have got rather messy habits—"

"Look here," said Knox fiercely, "I'm not going to stand here to be cheeked! I'm looking for Trimble—"

"You won't find him here, anyway," said Tom Merry shortly.

His statement was true enough, seeing that the chums of Study No. 10 had not the slightest intention of allowing Knox to search their study. Knox might be a prefect, but he had no right to enter their study uninvited.

Knox, however, took Tom's remark as a denial of Trimble's presence in the room. With a snort and a glare he withdrew, slamming the door, and his footsteps died away along the passage.

Looking rather yellow, Baggy Trimble protruded a bullet head from under the tablecloth and blinked round, like a tortoise looking out from its shell.

"Ow!" gasped Baggy. "Has the beast gone?"

"Yes," laughed Manners. He grasped Baggy's ear with a finger and thumb, and drew Baggy forth. "What's the trouble, Baggy? What have you been doing to Knox?"

"Yooooooop! Yow! Leggo my ear!" Baggy scrambled out, and stood up, rubbing his fat ear indignantly, and glaring at the grinning Manners. "I—I—ahem! I dunno why Knox is after me, as a matter of fact."

"I guess that's a steep yarn!" drawled Handcock.

"Oh, really, Handcock—"

"Been raiding his tuck?" queried Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Oh, really, Merry! Certainly not!"

"Well, scat, anyway!" suggested Monty Lowther. "Knox has cleared off; you can hop it! We're busy!"

Baggy rolled from Study No. 10 with a cautious blink up and down the passage. There was no sign of Knox. The Falstaff of the Fourth scuttled off to make himself

scarce till bed-time. He would have to keep very clear of Gerald Knox for some little time to come!

But though Baggy Trimble had fallen foul of the unpopular prefect, thanks to his fall into the moat at the old house on the moor, Baggy did not care. He still had in his pocket the two pounds that Dr. Brusiloff had given him—the price of his silence regarding the queer incident that had taken place at the Moat House; and two pounds seemed more than adequate compensation for a little trouble with Knox of the Sixth!

CHAPTER 3.

Dick Lang!

"COME on, Saints!"
"Play up, Abbotsford!"
"On the ball!"

It was the following afternoon, and the match between Tom Merry's eleven and the visitors from Abbotsford was in full swing.

It had been an exciting tussle from the first. The visitors had bagged a goal very early in the game, their inside-right beating Fatty Wynn, the St. Jim's custodian, with a clever head-in from a tussle round the goalmouth, and for a long time St. Jim's had failed to equalise. But they had drawn level a few minutes before half-time, when Monty Lowther had scored off a pass from Levison of the Fourth.

Not long after the change of ends St. Jim's had taken the lead, with a long shot by George Figgins, that had got past the Abbotsford goalie by the skin of its teeth, so to speak. And ever since Abbotsford had been fighting to wipe out the St. Jim's lead with every ounce of determination and energy the team possessed.

But the minutes were flying, and still the visitors had failed to equalise.

"Only ten minutes to go," murmured Manners to Cyrus K. Handcock, on the touchline.

Handcock did not play football, though he was a fine athlete in most other spheres of sport. The American junior had never been able to master the no-handling code! But he usually turned up to watch the junior matches in Little Side, even though he was wont to complain that Soccer lacked the "pep" of the American football game—a statement which his chums of the Shell and Fourth laughed at good-humouredly enough.

"Sure ten more minutes," nodded Handcock. "I guess these Abbotsford guys are sunk!"

But even as he spoke the Abbotsford half-back line cleverly checked an attack by the St. Jim's forwards, and sent the ball back to the half-way line, where the visiting centre-forward pounced on it, and sped towards the St. Jim's half with the leather dancing at his toes.

"Come on, Abbotsford!" yelled one of the little group of Abbotsford supporters who had come over with their team in the motor-coach.

Jack Blake, at centre-half, tackled the opposing centre-forward, and sent him spinning into the mud with a shoulder-to-shoulder charge, but not before the latter had flashed the ball across to his inside-right.

The Abbotsford inside-right—the same slim, fair-haired fellow who had scored soon after the start of the match—sped on towards the St. Jim's goal, as the centre-forward scrambled up and raced after the attack. Kerr, of the New House, the Scottish junior who played left-half for St. Jim's, raced up to take a hand in things; but the fair-haired youngster in the Abbotsford shirt tricked the St. Jim's man with a clever feint that made it seem as if his intention was to pass to the outside-right. Instead, he swung round Kerr with the ball still at his toes, and flew on towards the goal, where Fatty Wynn was waiting.

"My hat! That chap can play footer!" breathed Manners, his eyes fixed anxiously on the slim figure of the Abbotsford inside-right. "Oh, look out there—"

Kangaroo, the Australian junior, at left-back, was not an easy fellow to get past. But the fair-haired Abbotsford youngster was too much for him on this occasion!

Kangaroo found himself left standing, while the ball went on towards the St. Jim's goal, at the feet of the other fellow. There was an excited yell from the little group of Abbotsfordians on the touchline and exclamations of alarm from the St. Jim's fellows.

"It's up to Fatty!" breathed Manners. "I— Oh, Great Scott!"

The ball, flying swift and low from the foot of the Abbotsford inside-right, had hurtled from the lower right-hand corner of the net. Fatty Wynn had leapt across to save, but the ball had beaten him by half a second! His finger-tips touched it as it whizzed in the goalmouth, and a long blast from the referee's whistle announced that Abbotsford had equalised!

"He's certainly a slick guy," nodded Cyrus K. Handcock. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,180.

cock, his eyes on the youngster who had just scored again for the visitors. "I guess he's about the fastest guy on the field—and he's some footballer, too!"

The teams lined up. But, despite the desperate efforts of each of the two teams and some exciting moments, there was no further scoring when the final whistle blew shortly after. The footballers came off the field with the game a two-all draw—Abbotsford having saved themselves from defeat almost at the last minute, thanks to the fair-haired youngster, whose brilliant run almost from the half-way line had brought them level with St. Jim's!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, who had been playing outside-right for the home eleven, adjusted his celebrated monocle, and crossed towards the hero of the rival team as the footballers made their way to the dressing-rooms.

"Pway allow me to congwatulate you, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus gracefully. "That was a wippin' goal of yours, bai Jove! Wathab!"

"Thanks!" laughed the Abbotsford youngster. "Jolly good of you to say so! There was a lot of luck in it, though," he added modestly.

He was a very nice-looking fellow, with frank brown eyes and an attractive smile. Arthur Augustus shook his noble head.

"Wats, deah boy! It was a vewy cleavah goal! You must excuse me addressin' you like this," he added, a faint note of anxiety, in his tone, "seem' we have not been intrawduced—"

The other broke into a laugh. He evidently did not realise that Arthur Augustus was speaking seriously. He did not know what a stickler for etiquette the swell of St. Jim's was.

"Well, if it'll save you a sleepless night, old chap, I'll introduce myself," he grinned. "My name is Lang—Dick Lang. You are D'Arcy, aren't you?"

"Yaas! Howevah did you know?"

Dick Lang chuckled. Though this was his first visit to St. Jim's with an Abbotsford eleven, he had heard about Arthur Augustus, and thanks to the swell of St. Jim's eye-glass, had been able to recognise him at once.

Before he could answer, Tom Merry came up. He slapped the Abbotsford fellow on the back in a cheery way.

"That was a great goal of yours!" said Tom good-humouredly. "A pity for St. Jim's you buzzed along to-day! I thought we were going to win, candidly—until you put the kybosh on it!"

Lang laughed, and the footballers passed into the changing-rooms, where the hiss of shower-baths was soon the predominant sound.

The Abbotsford team and their supporters were not staying to tea at St. Jim's. They had a long run before them in the motor-coach, and they wanted to get away soon in consequence. A big crowd of St. Jim's fellows gathered in the quad to see them off, as they piled into their coach.

Dick Lang, alone of the Abbotsford men, did not enter the motor-coach. He stood watching his friends climb in, but made no movement to accompany them. Tom Merry, who was standing near, changed into his ordinary clothes once more, crossed towards him, and touched him on the arm.

"Not going with the others?" he asked, in surprise.

"No," said Lang. "I've got an uncle who lives near Wayland—at a place called Thorpe Court. I'm taking the chance to look him up. I'll go on to Abbotsford by train afterwards."

"Oh, I see!" Tom knew Thorpe Court vaguely—a house on the other side of Wayland, which he remembered having passed once or twice. "Well, look here, I and some pals of mine are going into Wayland in a minute by car. Better let us give you a lift!"

Lang's face lit up.

"That's jolly good of you!"

Followed by a hearty cheer, the Abbotsford eleven—minus Dick Lang—and their supporters, rolled out of the gates in the big motor-coach, Lang waving cheerily to his friends, and the St. Jim's fellows giving their old rivals a rousing send-off. The Abbotsford crowd vanished down Rylcombe Lane, and Tom turned to where Monty Lowther, Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock were standing.

Cyrus K. Handcock was the son of an American multi-millionaire, and was the owner of a magnificent thousand-pound car that was the envy of all St. Jim's, though they were growing more used to it now! Handcock was running it into Wayland for a grease-up at a garage there, after which Tom Merry & Co. intended to look in at Spalding Hall, the girls' school near Wayland, where their girl chums, Ethel Cleveland & Co., were pupils. For once, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was Ethel's cousin, and Blake & Co., were not accompanying them. The chums of the Fourth had arranged to wind up a strenuous day in the

gym, boxing against Redfern & Co., of the New House, who had challenged them.

Tom introduced Lang to his three study-mates, and explained that Lang would like to go with them into Wayland. Handcock agreed heartily to the suggestion, and a few minutes later the American junior had brought his big yellow two-seater round from its garage at the back of the School House, and the Terrible Three and the Abbotsford youngster piled into it, Tom and Lang in the dickey-seat.

As Handcock was about to drive out of the big gates, there was a sudden yell behind them that caused all five occupants of the car to turn their heads.

A fat figure was racing towards the car, streaming with perspiration, and gasping like a grampus, with a look of abject terror on his greasy countenance. It was Baggy Trimble, and behind him, sprinting in pursuit, was the tall figure of Gerald Knox!

Though Baggy had carefully given Knox a wide berth all

"I guess there's nothin' like a bit of exercise for a guy like the Knox bird!" chuckled Cyrus K. Handcock.

The car shot out through the gates, Knox still tearing along with it. But the speed was still increasing—Knox had to let go sooner or later, and he decided to get it over! He let go, and for a few whirling strides he kept on his feet. Then he pitched forward with a yell, and sprawled helplessly in a large puddle that happened to be there to receive him.

"Yaroooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter from the chums of Study No. 10 in which Dick Lang of Abbotsford joined, as they raced away down Rylcombe Lane, while Knox rose dizzily to his feet.

"Talk about biting the dust!" chuckled Lang. "That chap, whoever he is, looked as if he was trying to eat his way through to Australia!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



As they raced towards the car, Tom Merry & Co. saw their foreign friend struck down by his assailant!

that afternoon, the prefect had spotted the fat junior at last, and was now in hot chase, breathing fire and slaughter.

From the look on the Sixth-Former's face, it was quite evident that if he succeeded in catching Baggy, the Falstaff of the Fourth would bitterly regret that he had inadvertently soaked Knox's cigarettes in the none too cleanly waters of the moat of the old house near Wayland!

Puffing and gasping, Baggy fairly flew over the ground. But Knox was overhauling him rapidly, with long, determined strides.

"Stop!" panted Knox. "Stop, you fat little rotter! I'm going to slay you—"

Knox's remarks did not really seem very likely to persuade Baggy to stop. Baggy, it was clear, had no wish to be slain just then.

He was heading straight for the car, his fat little legs fairly twinkling under him. His intention was evident. Baggy meant to gain the car as it was driven away, fling himself on board, and so escape.

"Get moving, Handcock!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We may as well annoy old Knox by getting the fat ass clear!"

"O.K.!" grinned Handcock.

The car began to roll forward very slowly, as Baggy came racing up. Tom Merry and Dick Lang held out willing hands to drag Baggy in. The fat junior collapsed on top of them as they hauled him aboard, and the car leapt forward as Handcock trod hard on the accelerator.

"Speed on, big boy!" grinned Monty Lowther.

There was a roar of wrath from Knox as he saw his quarry being borne away from under his very nose, so to speak. He leapt forward, an arm outstretched as if to grasp the car and hold it back. But though his fingers closed on the folded hood, Knox was not quite strong enough to hold back forty-horse-power!

Zooooo-o-o-oom!

With roaring exhaust, the glittering yellow car leapt for the gates. Knox, since he was holding on to it, went with it! He gave a wild yell as he found himself tearing along at what felt like sixty miles an hour, still clinging on, since he dared not let go for fear of falling headlong.

"Come on, Knox—run!" sang out Monty Lowther.

They saw the raging figure of Gerald Knox shake a furious fist after them. Then he turned and limped painfully into the quad—a defeated, mud-bespattered figure.

Once more, by the skin of his teeth, Baggy Trimble had escaped from Knox's wrath!

"Good heavens! Look!"

The juniors were nearing Wayland when Tom Merry gave that sudden startled cry. Baggy was still with them—in funds as he was, the Falstaff of the Fourth intended to treat himself to a visit to the Wayland cinema, and so had elected to stay in the car with the others till they arrived there, which the others had good-naturedly allowed him to do.

The big yellow car had turned a corner between high wooded banks—just in time to see a startling occurrence!

There was a car on the road in front of them; a big closed green car, travelling in the same direction as themselves. Also going towards Wayland, walking by the grass verge, a man carrying a black, oblong box under his arm had been keeping well into the side to allow the car to pass.

As the juniors had come into view behind them, they had seen the other car suddenly swerve. Had such a supposition not seemed utterly absurd, they might have imagined the swerve had been deliberate. The car had struck the pedestrian in the back, flinging him on the grass by the

roadside—a huddled, senseless shape. The black box he had been carrying was lying in the road a few yards away. "Great junipers!" panted Handcock.

With the powerful brakes he brought his own car to a standstill in a few yards and leapt out. The others tumbled out after him, all but Baggy Trimble, and raced forward to where the still figure lay by the roadside.

From Baggy, left in the car by himself, there broke a sudden exclamation.

"My hat!"

The figure that was jumping out of the car in front was familiar. He recognised the man whom he had seen drive up to the moated house on the previous evening. The car, too, was the same dark green car that he had seen on that occasion, without a doubt.

At sight of the five schoolboys racing up, a queer look flashed into the man's foreign countenance. A stifled exclamation escaped him. He seemed oddly started to find that there had been witnesses of the fact that he had knocked down the man with the black box.

For a moment or two he stood irresolute. Already Tom Merry had dropped on to one knee beside the victim of the accident—for that it had been an accident the captain of the Shell did not for a moment doubt. Manners and Lowther and Handcock, and Dick Lang, the Abbotsford junior, gathered round anxiously. For the moment, the man who had jumped out of the green car was unobserved except for Baggy. And that there was another person in the car that had drawn up a little way down the road behind his own, he probably did not realise.

Baggy, watching with rather a startled face, was astonished to see the man who had knocked the pedestrian down turn quickly and stoop over the black box that the senseless man had dropped. He placed it in the car with a quick, almost furtive glance at the juniors round the unconscious figure. Then only did he hurry forward to join them.

"I trust he is not badly hurt!"

Tom Merry, glancing round at the sound of the foreign voice in his ear, found himself looking into a pair of curious yellow eyes, set in a swarthy face under black brows.

"No, I don't think he's much more than stunned," said Tom briefly. "But you can't tell—he ought to be taken to the hospital at once! Are you the chap who knocked him down?"

"Yes! I cannot think how it happened! He stepped out from the edge as I came along, and I tried to avoid him, but—"

"You mean, you swerved right into him!" said Manners bluntly. "It was clear enough. But what made you swerve?"

"I swerved? Did I?" The man seemed astonished. "I—I am a new driver, you see—I have not driven a motor-car much. I did not know I swerved."

"Well, you did, anyway," said Tom. He glanced at Handcock. "Look here, your car is the faster of the two! What about us running this chap along to hospital in your bus?"

"Sure!" agreed Handcock quickly.

A peculiar look came into the yellow eyes of the swarthy man beside them. He shook his head.

"No!" he snapped, and for a moment his queer eyes glittered with an unpleasant light. "This is my affair—I will drive him to the hospital."

Tom Merry surveyed the man coolly. He did not like the look of the driver of the green car. A vague suspicion was beginning to enter his mind—had the knocking-down of the man with the black box been so accidental after all?

"Rats!" he said curtly. "Your car isn't so fast as ours by long chalks! And this chap ought to be got to the hospital as quickly as possible." He glanced at the others. "Lend a hand, you chaps!"

The man with the yellow eyes seemed about to speak, but he thought better of it, and said nothing, as he watched with glittering eyes while the juniors gently lifted the unconscious figure and carried it towards their car.

They laid him gently on the seat. He was a foreign-looking individual himself, curiously enough—a thin, white-faced man of about fifty, with bristly grey hair. An ugly bruise on his temple showed where he had struck his head in falling.

"Where's that box of his?" said Manners suddenly, glancing round in a puzzled way.

"It was lying in the road," put in Dick Lang.

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There was an eager gasp from Baggy Trimble, who had scrambled out before the senseless man had been lifted into the car.

"He's bagged it!" he ejaculated excitedly. "That chap in the car there! I saw him pick it up off the road and stick it in his car!"

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry. "We've got to get it!" He ran quickly back to the green car. Already the man with the yellow eyes was back in the driving-seat, as if intending to drive off.

"Half a minute!" said Tom angrily. "We want your name and address to give to that chap when he recovers consciousness! And we want that box, too!" he added grimly, as his eyes fell on the box on the floor of the car beside the driving-seat.

The man's face went strangely livid. Before he could speak Tom reached in and seized the box, lifting it out of the car. Its weight amazed him. The man with the yellow eyes gave a choking cry, and made a swift movement as if to try to prevent him. Then, as if realising the hopelessness of pitting himself single-handed against five athletic youngsters, he forced a mirthless smile.

"I will follow to the hospital," he explained in a thick tone. "I may as well take that box of his in my car—"

"I guess you won't!" drawled Handcock.

Cyrus K. Handcock, like Tom Merry, was beginning to feel more than a little suspicious of the man in the green car. Could it be possible that he had deliberately knocked down the other man with the intention of getting possession of the black box?

It almost looked like it!

Handcock glanced at the box in Tom's hands. It was of polished ebony, almost two feet long, and there was a crest of some kind on the lid. There was a lock to it, and the lock was evidently fastened.

"We'll take this box with us," said Tom Merry quietly.

"As for your name and address, you can keep it! We've got the number of your car."

He swung on his heel, and the juniors hurried back to the car where the senseless man was. The ebony box was dumped inside on the floor, and Handcock jumped into the driving seat.

"Guess you'll have to walk, Baggy!" said Tom Merry. "No room now!"

With himself in front to look after the senseless man while Handcock drove, and Manners and Lowther and Dick Lang in the dickey-seat, crowding into it somehow or other, there was certainly no room for a fellow of Baggy's ample proportions.

And with the senseless man to be rushed to hospital they certainly did not intend to stay and argue about it with him! Handcock let in the clutch, and the car began to glide forward.

"Oh, all right, then," growled Baggy, with a very bad grace. "But I say, I didn't tell you—that car there, it's a car I saw driving in at the Moat House last night! You know the Moat House—"

Baggy did not finish his eager words. Handcock had accelerated, and the yellow car leapt away down the road in the direction of Wayland, leaving Baggy and the man with the green car staring after it.

Not that the latter stared long. Without a word to Baggy, who had intended to ask him for a lift, the man sprang into his own car and slammed into gear; the green car shot forward down the road and vanished round the bend.

"Oh, blow!" said Baggy disconsolately. "Now I've got to walk!"

With a disgusted sniff the Falstaff of the Fourth set off to trudge into Wayland, little dreaming of the amazing series of events that were destined to follow that queer accident he had witnessed—events in which Baggy would find himself inextricably involved with the fortunes of that mysterious black box.

CHAPTER 4.

To Spalding Hall!

"HIS coming round!"

There was a note of eager relief in Tom Merry's voice.

The juniors had scarcely left the scene of the accident—if accident it had been—before the eyes of the unconscious man had flickered open.

He stared dazedly into Tom Merry's face. Some muttered words came from his white lips; but they seemed to be in some foreign language.

"Don't you worry," said Tom in a cheery tone. "We're just running you into hospital, where they'll see to you—"

He broke off. Their queer passenger had suddenly sat up with a gasping cry. His fingers fastened on to Tom Merry's wrist, and his eyes blazed excitedly. A torrent of foreign words came from his lips—then, as if realising that he was not understood, he changed to broken English.

"The box!" he panted. "The box! Where is it? It must not be lost—no! I—"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry. "Here it is, safe enough."

He showed the man the box on the floor of the car. The feverish light died from the other's eyes. He gave a sigh of relief. A faint smile appeared on his lips.

"That is verree good!" he said in his broken accent.

He put a hand to his head. It was evidently paining him. But from the way he was sitting, it was quite clear that there were no bones broken, as Tom and the others had feared might be the case. It was evident that the man was not badly hurt, after all, although the blow he had received had rendered him senseless for a short time.

"Where you say you take me," he muttered—"the hospital? You are verree kind! But no; I do not need to go to the hospital. There is another place to which I must go—quick! It is urgent—verree urgent! I must go at once to a place called Spalding Hall, a school for young ladies—"

"Spalding Hall?" echoed Monty Lowther, in great astonishment.

The juniors looked at one another in utter amazement. The last place in the world to which they would have expected the foreigner with the black box to want to get was Spalding Hall.

"Sure, we know Spalding Hall, I guess," nodded Hancock, slowing the pace of the car. "But hadn't you better let us take you to the hospital, buddy—let a doctor give you the once over?"

"I am quite all right!" protested the man, the note of feverish impatience returning to his voice. "I must waste no time! Please let me get out now! I must go to Spalding Hall! There is a young lady there whom I must see and speak with."

"O.K.!" said Hancock. "If you really feel fit enough, we'll run you along to Spalding Hall—sure!"

A look of gratitude came into the foreigner's pale face. He smiled.

"You are verree good!" he said simply.

They passed along the old-fashioned High Street of Wayland, and soon after went through the little village of Spalding, just beyond it. The gates of Spalding Hall came into sight. Hancock drew up near them.

"Here you are!" he said cheerfully. "This is Spalding Hall."

The man got out. Though he was very pale, and the mark on his forehead was an ugly one, he seemed steady enough on his feet. He took the black box that Tom Merry handed out to him, and smiled gratefully.

"Thank you verree much!" he said earnestly. "You have been verree good friends to me!"

The juniors saw him enter the big gates. Sammy Thrupp, the Spalding Hall porter, was not in his lodge, apparently, for the man with the black box was not accosted as he entered, but vanished into the quad, looking round him in an eager way. Hancock turned the car. With Dick Lang changing into the front seat from the dickey, they drove back to Wayland.

"I guess there's something mighty rum about that guy," said Hancock thoughtfully.

"If you ask me," said Dick Lang thoughtfully, "I don't believe he was knocked down accidentally. It seemed more or less deliberate to me!"

There was a frown on his good-looking face.

Manners whistled.

"Phew! If it were deliberate, there's something rummy about the bizney all right!"

"It all looks fishy to me," said Monty Lowther, with a shrug. "That chap in the green car wanted to collar that blessed box, I'm pretty sure. Wonder what's in it?"

Near the outskirts of Wayland they came to Thorpe Court, where Lang's uncle lived. They drew up, and the Abbotsford fellow jumped out.

Dick said good-bye to Tom Merry & Co. with a friendly grin.

"So long, and thanks for the lift!" he sang out cheerily, as they got into the car to drive on. "I'll be seeing you again one of these days!"

But had Dick Lang only known it as he vanished into

the drive of his uncle's house, he would be seeing Tom Merry & Co. again quite soon—and in amazing circumstances!

CHAPTER 5.

The Green Car Again!

IT did not take Hancock long to drive into Wayland, where he left his car at a garage. That done, the four chums of the Shell turned to stroll back to Spalding Hall.

The girls were not expecting them till six o'clock, when they had promised to go for a walk with Tom Merry & Co. As they drew near Miss Finch's establishment, Monty Lowther gave a sudden exclamation.

"My hat! We forgot to give that chap the number of the car that knocked him down!"

"So we did!" nodded Tom. "Well, he never said anything about suing for damages, anyway. He wasn't much hurt, after all, apparently. By the way, did you hear what Baggy said, about the green car being one he'd seen at the Moat House?"

"Yes!" Manners grinned. "But you know what an ass Baggy is—he's probably wrong! I—"

He broke off sharply.

The juniors had turned a bend in the lane, and the gates of Spalding Hall had come into view in the distance. But it was something happening only a few hundred yards away that had gripped the attention of the four St. Jim's juniors.

Drawn up in the road was the same green car about which they had been talking. Near it, two figures were struggling fiercely—two men whom they recognised instantly as the pair of foreigners they had met before that afternoon. The man with the yellow eyes, and the man whom they had seen him knock down, and whom they had subsequently taken to Spalding Hall.

In a flash Tom Merry realised what had happened.

The man in the car had followed them unseen. He had followed them to Spalding Hall, keeping well behind and out of sight, and had watched the man with the black box enter the gates. He had waited, and on the latter's coming out from Spalding Hall some time later, his business there presumably finished, his enemy had attacked him in the road, just out of sight of the quad at Spalding Hall.

That the knocking down of the man with the black box had been no accident, was clear enough now to them all! Instinctively all four of the startled juniors felt convinced that in some way the mysterious black box was the cause.

There was no sign of the black box now, however, as at a breathless word from Tom Merry the chums dashed forward to the rescue.

But they were too late!

As they raced towards the two struggling figures, they saw the man they had taken to Spalding Hall earlier that evening, fall, struck down by the fist of his enemy. He lay motionless, evidently stunned, and the next moment his big assailant had stooped and picked him up as though he had weighed no more than a feather, and flung him into the car.

"Come on!" panted Manners hoarsely.

The juniors were fast runners. But even so, there was no time for them to cover the necessary ground. The man with the yellow eyes sprang into the driving-seat of the car, and the engine roared. The car leaped away down the road, thundered past the gates of Spalding Hall, and vanished round the bend.

"My heavens!" gasped Tom Merry, his eyes alight with an excited gleam. "He's been carried off!"

The juniors came to a breathless halt. Their faces were terribly startled. They had been the witnesses of a flagrant outrage—helpless spectators of the abduction of the unfortunate foreigner by what appeared to be a fellow-countryman, whatever their actual nationality was.

"Gee!" Cyrus K. Hancock drew a deep breath. "I guess this is where we tell the cops!" he drawled laconically.

Tom Merry nodded decisively.

"Yes, we've got to tell the police all right, and at once!"

"The quickest way is to phone the police station from Spalding Hall!" exclaimed Monty Lowther eagerly. "My hat, if only we'd got your car, Hancock! They wouldn't have got away then!"

"Come on!" nodded Manners grimly. "We'll phone the police from Spalding Hall, as Monty says."

Again they broke into a run, racing towards the gates of the girls' school.

Three pretty figures were standing in the quad near the gates as they ran in—Ethel Cleveland, Doris Levison, and

Lady Peggy Brooke, the red-headed tomboy of Spalding Hall. Their faces lit up at sight of Tom Merry & Co. Lady Peggy grinned cheerfully.

"My hat!" she said, her pretty brown eyes sparkling. "You seem in a frightful hurry to get here! It's quite flattering."

Ethel laughed, and so did Doris. But the next moment the Spalding Hall trio saw that something was the matter, from the juniors' faces.

"What's up?" cried Lady Peggy.

Rapidly Tom Merry explained. Ethel drew a quick breath.

"Good gracious!" she ejaculated. "I was talking to the poor man only ten minutes ago!"

"You were talking to him?" exclaimed Tom, in astonishment.

"Yes! He didn't know his way about, and when he was going he got into Miss Finch's garden by mistake—I saw him coming out of there, and showed him the right way to the gates. He told me he had come to see a girl named Marie Douvar. She's a Russian girl who was to have come here some days ago, but never came—she's ill, Miss Finch told us, and won't come to Spalding Hall until she has quite recovered. That man did not know this, though, and he had to come to see her, as I say, and he seemed ever so worried that she was not here!"

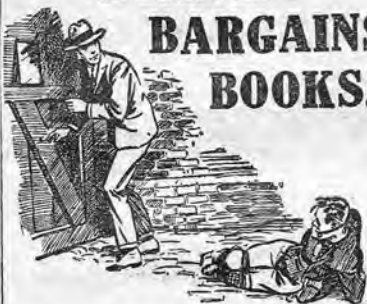
"A Russian girl?" echoed Tom. He glanced significantly at his chums. "So they're Russians, evidently, you chaps!"

"What are you going to do?" cried Doris anxiously.

"Tell Miss Finch about it, and ask her if we can phone the police with her telephone," said Tom briefly. "This is serious! You chaps wait here—I'll see to this!"

"My hat, it's pretty queer!" breathed Lady Peggy, her pretty, boyish face alight with excitement.

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"I guess queer's the word!" drawled Handcock.

Manners suddenly gripped the American's arm.

"Great Scott! Remember what Baggy said, about the green car being from the Moat House? If you ask me, it's up to us to go to the Moat House and look into things."

In a minute or so Tom Merry was back. He had told his story to the police, who were sending an inspector along to interview Miss Finch immediately, as well as circulating a description of the green car.

On hearing Manners' suggestion that they themselves should lend a hand by visiting the Moat House, to see if there was any truth in Baggy's statement, Tom agreed eagerly.

"We'll go there!" he muttered, with gleaming eyes. He turned to Ethel & Co., with a grim smile. "Afraid our walk is off this evening, but I know you won't mind."

They said good-bye to the girls, and a minute later were striding out of the gates of Spalding Hall, on their way to the old moated mansion on the edge of Wayland Moor.

CHAPTER 6.

Prisoners at the Moat House!

IT had not taken the man in the green car long to drive with his senseless captive to the Moat House, for Tom Merry & Co. were on the right track in believing that there was a chance of his driving there. Though they naturally mistrusted Baggy's assertion, knowing Baggy as they did, for once the Falstaff of the Fourth had not led them astray.

As the car drew up in the flagged forecourt across the moat, the big front door swung open, and the tall figure of Dr. Brusiloff, with his pointed beard and glittering black eyes, appeared at the top of the steps.

"Any luck, Vladimir?"

The man with the yellow eyes stepped out of the car, with a scowl on his unprepossessing countenance.

"I've got Lazaroff," he snarled; "bu. I haven't got the box!"

He lifted out the senseless form of the man he had called Lazaroff. Brusiloff's eye gleamed with quick excitement as the man named Vladimir carried his prisoner quickly up the steps and into the hall, laying him down on a couch.

"Where is the box?" snapped Brusiloff harshly.

"I don't know," answered the other sullenly. "I had it, and then some cursed boys interfered! What could I do? They were suspicious of me—I had knocked Lazaroff down, and he was senseless—and they seemed to guess I wanted to take the box away. There were several of them—strongly built youngsters, all of them. Had I tried to get off with the box, they could have prevented me easily. What could I do?"

"You fool!" breathed Brusiloff fiercely. "You let some boys get that box?"

"What could I do?" repeated Vladimir angrily. He seemed afraid of Brusiloff. "They insisted upon taking the bound to hospital, the box with him, in their car. But I followed them. Lazaroff recovered his senses, and so, instead of going to the hospital, he made them put him down at this school—Spalding Hall. They drove off without seeing me, and Lazaroff went in—"

"Well?" jerked out Brusiloff, with bitter impatience. "The box, man?"

"Lazaroff had it with him when he went in at the gates of the school," said Vladimir, with gleaming eyes. "When he came out again, soon afterwards, he had not got it. I managed to knock him or the head, and bundle him into the car, and bring him here, though the same cursed boys nearly stopped me again. And here he is!"

Vladimir made a gesture towards the unconscious man on the couch. From Brusiloff there broke an imprecation in his own tongue.

"You bungled things well!" he snarled savagely. "But one thing is quite clear, if Lazaroff went to the school with the box, and came out without it, the box is still at Spalding Hall. Either he gave it to that woman, the headmistress, to keep for Marie Douvar, or, suspecting foul play when he discovered the girl was not there, he took the precaution of hiding the box somewhere at the school. That is more likely. He would trust no one else with that box, not even the headmistress, I feel sure. He has not smuggled it out of Russia to bring to Marie Douvar, at risk of his life, in order to entrust it to people of whom he knows nothing."

"You are right," growled the man named Vladimir. "That box is hidden somewhere at Spalding Hall!"

"And as soon as Lazaroff returns to his senses we shall force him to tell us where he has hidden it," breathed Dr. Brusiloff.

His eyes glittered with a cruel light as he glanced at the



Come along, boys! Holidays are over, and it's time you set to work to think out a question that the Oracle can't answer. When you've done it, send it along!

"LOOK here, my lad," said the Editor to me the other morning, "I don't want to pick you to pieces, but you've got to pull yourself together. See what I mean?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I pull myself together after you've picked me to pieces."

"You've got to pull your socks up, my lad."

With these words I examined my socks to see if they were coming down.

"And when you go to lunch just pop in and have a shave. I can't stand your whiskers any longer."

"But they aren't any longer," said I. "They stopped growing last Tuesday."

"I don't wonder at it," snorted the Ed. "Your face is enough to stop anything growing."

"I wish it would stop these piles of readers' letters from growing, sir."

"I dare say. Afraid of overworking the old cranium, I suppose!" The old Ed. fairly glared, and I felt all of a dither. "Now come along. We'll start with George Hemming's letter. He's been to sea—"

"See what, sir?"

"I said sea, not see," roared the Ed. "He's seen the sailors scrubbing the decks, and he wants to know what they do it with?"

"Sandstone," said I.

"I always thought they used holystone," said the Editor, looking pleased at having tripped me up as he thought.

"It's called that in the Navy."

"Why, O whiskers, is it called something it isn't?"

"Well, sir, there are two reasons given for that. I will tell you both of them, and you can take your choice, cigars or nuts, just whatever you think will amuse the children most. Some people think it's called holystone because the ship's deck was always scrubbed on Sunday. Others, equally learned, say that it is due to the fact that the stone is naturally full of holes."

"What part of a railway-engine is the smoke-box?"

"The smoke-box is a chamber at the front end of a locomotive boiler which enables the fire-tubes to be got at and cleaned. There are various gadgets hidden in the smoke-box, such as a feed-water heater, a spark arrester, a blast-pipe—"

"That's quite enough of that; let's get on with the next one. William Sharpe, a Wanstead reader, wants to know something about pigeon-flying. Can you utter a few brief, brotherly words on that subject?"

"I can, sir. Racing pigeons, known as homing pigeons, are trained when young. The sport originated in Holland. To train a pigeon to fly from a

"In fine weather, sir, they have been known to travel at over eighty miles per hour."

"What are the rings on a pigeon's leg for?"

"Those rings have the owner's name on them; they are made of seamless metal, and are slipped on to the pigeon's leg when it is a few days old. The bird's flying records are stamped on the long wing feathers. During training they are fed on vetch, beans, peas, rice, and millet."

"What about the pigeon-post? D'you know anything about that?"

"Pigeons have been used to carry messages since the days of Solomon. They have been used in war-time since the year dot, and at one time hawks and falcons were trained by the enemy to attack them. In China they used to fix whistles and bells on their pigeons to scare away other birds who might attack them."

"Tom Wicklow has been reading a yarn about the South African war, in which blockhouses are mentioned, and he asks what they were?"

"A blockhouse is a fortification, and was originally given to small forts that blocked the approach to a bridge, a pass, or any important strategic position. The modern blockhouse is usually built with two storeys, with loopholes all round it. During the South African war they were sent out from England in sections, all ready to be put up."

"What is meant by panoply?"

"Panoply is a complete suit of armour."

"What is a mango?"

"A fleshy fruit grown in India, sometimes eaten ripe, and sometimes used when green in pickles. The name comes from the Tamil word 'mankay,' meaning tree-fruit."

"Which breed of parrot will learn to talk best?"

"The red-tailed grey parrot of tropical Africa."

"Why is a tangerine orange so called?"

"Because it comes from Tangiers, where it is principally cultivated."

"Can you tell Harry Paffard what a henchman is?"

"In the old days, long before I can remember, a henchman was a man who attended to a horse. Hench comes from an old word, hengest, meaning a horse. There was a Saxon chieftain once upon a time named Hengest; you may have heard of him?"

"He was before my time," said the Ed., looking at his watch, and picking up another letter. "A Frome reader wants to know how high the hurdles are that they jump over in hurdling?"

"They vary a little according to the length of the race. In the 120 yds.

hurdle-race the hurdles, ten in number, are 3 ft. 6 ins. high. In the 440 yds. they are only 3 ft."

"Here's another sporting query, my lad. Fred Burnam, of Pevensey, inquires about weight throwing. Now you're always throwing your weight about, whiskers, perhaps you can tell Fred something about it?"

"Weight throwing is the art of throwing a 56lb. weight to the greatest height or distance. It's a form of athletic exercise very popular in Ireland, and their champions have thrown the weight 32 feet without a run. The thrower stands in a chalked circle, with his feet apart and his back towards the direction of the throw. He lifts the weight up from between his legs—like this, you see, sir—swings it round outside his right leg, like that, then swings it round his head, and as it comes down he pivots on his right foot, keeping his arms out stiff—you understand, sir—swings round three times and lets the jolly old weight fly off over his left shoulder."

After explaining all that I felt quite giddy, believe me, chums, and I told the Ed. he would have to wait. Seeing that I was a bit overbalanced, so to speak, and busy unwinding my whiskers from behind my collar, he snapped out:

"What's a watt? Come along, I can't wait! Willie Witt wants to know what a watt is, what is it?"

"What's what?" said I, somewhat dazed.

"You hairy turnip!" chortled the Ed. "You perambulating birds'-nest! You whiskery old humbug! You don't know, you don't know!"

That put me on my mettle, so to speak, and I took a deep breath and one of the Editor's cigarettes.

"Wait," said I, "if Willie Witt wots not what a watt is, I will enlighten him. A watt is the unit of electric power. When the electromotive force is one volt and the intensity of current one ampere, the—"

"That'll do!" growled the Ed.

"That'll do, my lad. I can see I can't trip you up this morning."

"Oh, by the way," he added, "just one more, the week's easiest query. Reggie Redder, of Reading, asks: 'What is the best Annual?'"

"Well," I replied, "that's not quite so easy as it sounds. It depends what sort of Annual he wants. But still, here's my answer. If he's keen on hobbies, then he should get the HOBBY ANNUAL, price 6s. If he likes adventure, he will find the POPULAR BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES, 2s. 6d., the very thing. If he likes Nature, then the Annual for him is the NATURE ANNUAL, at 6s. If he is of a mechanical turn of mind, he will like the MODERN BOY ANNUAL, price 6s. But whatever he likes in particular, he is sure to enjoy the GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL, which contains a ripping story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, as well as other school yarns. It sells for 6s."

"Not bad," said the Editor. "How long did it take you to learn that off by heart? That's all, out you go."

I hurried out of the sanctum full of satisfaction, though rather empty otherwise, it being past lunch-time, and, so eager was I, that I tripped over the mat, whereupon the jolly Ed. broke into guffaws of ill-timed levity.

THE PRISONER OF THE MOAT HOUSE!

(Continued from page 10.)

inert form of Lazaroff. At the same moment the man's eyes opened dazedly, and he gave a little groan.

"Ha! He will soon be able to speak!" Brusiloff purred evilly.

"One thing troubles me," muttered the other man. "Those boys may tell the police of the car—describe it. If a search is started for a green car, answering to that description, and it is found here—"

"You are right!" snapped Brusiloff. He frowned, deep in thought. "Well, there is only one thing for it, that car must be hidden where it will never be found."

"But where—"

"The moat!"

He crossed swiftly to a bell, after a quick glance at the man on the couch. Lazaroff's eyes had closed again. In answer to his ring a couple of silent Russians appeared. They were Brusiloff's servants and members of the mysterious gang.

"Take this man upstairs," he commanded, in Russian; and Lazaroff was carried away.

With Vladimir at his heels, the man with the pointed beard hurried out of the big door, down the steps into the forecourt, where the car was standing.

"A sad pity to waste so good a car!" said Dr. Brusiloff, with a grim smile. "But we cannot risk its being discovered here."

He got into the driving-seat, started the engine, and engaged the gear. The car ran slowly across the flagstones towards the unprotected edge of the moat, in bottom gear, moving at little more than a walking pace. He swung out of the seat on to the running-board, opened the hand-throttle on the steering-head, and leapt off.

With a roar from the exhaust, the car hurtled forward.

It shot over the edge, and went plunging into the moat. The dark waters closed over it as it sank, hiding it utterly.

For some moments Dr. Brusiloff and his satellite stood watching the air bubbles rising from the unseen depths, and breaking on the disturbed surface. Then they turned and hurried back up the steps into the house, where the man named Lazaroff was now a helpless prisoner.

The big door closed behind them.

The mysterious occupants of the old moated house had nothing to fear now from a search for the car in which Tom Merry & Co. had seen the man with the black box carried away!

"I tell you nothing!"

Lazaroff's voice was hoarse as he stared up into the glittering black eyes of Dr. Brusiloff.

The man who had been to Spalding Hall to see Marie Douvar was sitting on a chair near the window of a room on the top floor of the Moat House. His hands were tied behind his back; his face was very white. But in his eyes there was a gleam of stony determination that showed Brusiloff that it was not going to be an easy task to persuade Lazaroff to say whereabouts at Spalding Hall he had hidden the mysterious black box!

He and Brusiloff were not alone in the room.

Brusiloff's satellite, Vladimir, was sitting leaning forward in a chair, watching Lazaroff with blazing eyes. Madame Brusiloff was there, too, also watching Lazaroff intently.

Two other people were in the room as well. One was a big, unintelligent-looking Russian woman. The other was Marie Douvar—the girl whom Lazaroff had gone to Spalding Hall to find, only to discover that she was not there.

Marie Douvar was a girl of about the same age as Ethel Cleveland—a pretty, fair-haired girl, with brown eyes that were at the moment fastened upon Dr. Brusiloff in utter despair. She was standing in the far corner of the room, the large hand of the Russian woman beside her gripping her arm. Yakova, as the woman's name was, was taking no more chances with her charge since the occasion when Marie had succeeded in flinging from the window a message to Baggy Trimble!

She had been a prisoner at the Moat House for days now—ever since she had been kidnapped by the Brusiloffs while on her way to Spalding Hall. Her failure to arrive there when expected had been apparently explained by a letter Miss Finch had received stating that Marie was ill and would not arrive until she was well again; this letter, apparently from the solicitors who were looking after the girl's affairs—she was an orphan—had been a clever forgery, the work of Dr. Brusiloff!

The reason for her kidnapping was simple enough.

Marie Douvar was the last of a noble Russian family, whose parents had perished in the Russian revolution while she was a baby. She had been brought up in England by an English lady, who had taken charge of her, but who had died a year before, leaving her money in the charge of her solicitors, to be managed by them until Marie was twenty-one. But it had become known in Russia that a faithful servant of the Douvars—Lazaroff—had possession of a box containing the Douvar family jewels—a collection of some of the finest jewels in the world, worth all told the best part of a million pounds. It was known that Lazaroff had smuggled these jewels out of Russia, to take them to the girl to whom they rightfully belonged—Marie Douvar!

Dr. Brusiloff had been entrusted with the task of getting hold of the jewels at any cost, by the Russian secret service. He had kidnapped Marie, believing that she could tell him where the jewels could be found. But she had known nothing, to his chagrin. It was too late, however, to let her go free! Brusiloff dared not let either the police or Lazaroff be warned by her—Marie had to be kept a prisoner until the black box containing the jewels had been found.

His spies had discovered the whereabouts of the man bringing the jewels to England, however, and Brusiloff had been informed that Lazaroff was going straight to Spalding Hall, where he expected to find Marie Douvar. He had kept a keen watch on the roads in consequence—with the result that Lazaroff had finally been seen going to Spalding Hall, and had been captured. But for Tom Merry & Co. the black box containing the jewels would have been captured as well!

Marie Douvar's pretty face was terror-stricken as she watched, from across the room, Brusiloff's tall figure towering over Lazaroff.

Potts, The Office Boy



Maybe he can't play football.....

"I tell you nothing!" repeated Lazaroff, between dry lips. Dr. Brusiloff laughed purringly.

"But I think you will change your mind, my friend!" he said, in silky tones. "There is only one little thing I want to know—whereabouts at this school for charming young ladies you have hidden the box containing those jewels! I think you will tell me—before I have finished with you!"

There was a cold, malevolent threat in the last words that brought a little sobbing cry from Marie Douvar.

"Oh!" she cried faintly. "Let him go! I—"

"Silence!" said the Russian woman who held her.

Brusiloff leaned down towards Lazaroff's face. An evil grin appeared at the corners of his thin lips. His eyes glittered.

"But you shall tell me, my friend! There are many ways of forcing an unwilling tongue. If you do not tell me what I want to know—and at once—you shall learn some of those ways. I should so dislike to have to give you pain," he went on in a mocking voice. "But it will be your own fault if we have to torture—"

He broke off abruptly, staring out of the window with gleaming eyes.

Four figures approaching the house on the far side of the moat had suddenly caught his attention—four figures wearing St. Jim's caps.

At the look on his chief's face, Vladimir sprang up and hurried to the window. He stood staring down. A startled ejaculation broke from him.

"It is they!" he panted. "Those four youngsters who so nearly interfered when I caught Lazaroff—four of the boys who prevented me from getting the box before—"

"What brings them here?" gasped Brusiloff.

"How should I know?" answered Vladimir snarlingly.

Dr. Brusiloff stared down with a deep frown on his face. He swung round and strode quickly across towards the door.

"Gag him!" he snapped, pointing to Lazaroff. "And you—!" He turned gleaming eyes upon Marie Douvar. "If you make a sound it will be the worse for you—and for your friend Lazaroff! Be silent—for his sake as well as your own!"

Faintly to the ears of those in the room came the sound of footsteps crossing the bridge over the moat, as Brusiloff opened the door and hurried out.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, Harry Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock had arrived at the Moat House!

CHAPTER 7.

The Unspoken Secret!

"GEE! It's a gloomy-looking dump!"

Cyrus K. Handcock surveyed the old moated building with an unfavourable eye as the chums of the Shell crossed the flagged forecourt in front of the main entrance.

"Not cheerful, is it?" agreed Tom Merry.

"I guess if I had to live here, it would give me the willies!" sniffed Handcock. "Yes, sure!"

The juniors halted, staring round.

It was evident that the moat encircled a considerable section of the Moat House land. There was room enough for plenty of outbuildings behind the house, any of which,

for all they knew, might be sheltering the green car for which they were searching.

They realised well enough that if it really were there, they might well be interfering with a gang of very dangerous crooks. But they were prepared for a certain amount of risk in their game effort to help the police track down the captor of the Russian from Spalding Hall.

The door at the top of the steps suddenly opened. A tall figure with a pointed beard stood watching them from the big doorway.

"Look!" breathed Monty Lowther. "Who's this bird?"

Brusiloff came slowly down the steps towards them, lighting a cigarette as he came. He nodded to the juniors.

"Good-evening! May I ask whom you have come to see?"

Tom Merry faced the man coolly. He raised his cap.

"Sorry to trouble you," said Tom, in a steady tone.

"The fact is, sir, we are looking for a car—a green car, with this registration number." He held out the scrap of paper on which he had earlier on jotted down the number of the "wanted" car. "This car knocked down a man this afternoon near Wayland." It seemed better not to say more than that. "The driver did not give his name and address, however—"

"I see," Dr. Brusiloff eyed the juniors keenly. "The victim of this accident—he is, I presume, a friend of yours?"

"Yes," said Manners.

His answer was true enough. Seeing that they were taking trouble to help the mysterious Russian with whom they had become acquainted, they felt that they were his friends.

"Ah!" Brusiloff smiled. "I can understand your anxiety in the matter, then—but I greatly fear your visit here is useless. No such car as you describe is here, my young friends, I can assure you."

"We were told it had been seen at this house," said Tom bluntly.

Brusiloff shrugged.

"Then you were told wrongly, I fear. However, if it would ease your minds, perhaps you would care to look for yourselves? Allow me to show you the garage and stables."

He led the way round the side of the house by the moat, the juniors following without a word.

It soon became quite clear to them that the man had told the truth. There was a car in the garage, but it was certainly not the car they wanted to find. Tom Merry & Co. began to feel rather small.

"There—are you satisfied?" sniffed Brusiloff, when the tour was completed, and they had returned to the main entrance by the bridge.

"Sure, I guess we're satisfied," nodded Handcock.

"Awfully sorry to have troubled you, sir," said Tom, flushing slightly. "But we were told so definitely that a car like that had been seen coming in here—"

"The chap who told us was talking through his hat—we see that now," growled Monty Lowther.

"It is of no importance," said Brusiloff, good-humouredly.

"I am sorry I cannot help you. Good-evening!"

"Good-evening, sir!"

Tom Merry & Co. crossed the bridge. As they passed over the moat, Tom glanced down at the dark water that reflected the evening sunset in blood-red colours. A fish

Back to the Land!



..... But it's a good thing he can run!

jumped under the bridge with a faint splash, causing a ring of widening ripples to stir the gleaming surface. Tom looked back. The tall figure with the pointed beard was standing watching them as they strode on over the bridge and down the long, wooded drive towards the gates.

"Rather a sinister-looking sort of johnny, wasn't he?" said Manners suddenly. "Wasn't English, either. That's queer. That other chap wasn't—"

"Just a coincidence," said Tom, with a shrug. "Must be. We can't suspect a chap just because he isn't English. Besides, we've seen for ourselves that the car isn't anywhere here. We couldn't have missed it, if it had been. No, Baggy was talking rot, as usual!"

They passed out on to the road, and turned in the direction of St. Jim's.

There seemed not the slightest reason for them to connect the old moated house on the edge of the moor in any way with the disappearance of the mysterious Russian who had visited Spalding Hall to see the unknown girl named Marie Douvar.

"Well, it's a jolly good thing we didn't tell the police what Baggy had said about his having seen the car coming out of the Moat House gates, or whatever it was the fat ass told us," said Monty Lowther, with a rueful grin. "We'd have looked bigger asses than we even must have looked to that merchant with the face fungus."

"I guess you're right," agreed Handcock heartily. "It sure was a lucky break for us we had the sense to say nothin', and look for ourselves, buddies."

"Nothing for it now but to leave the police to get on with the job, I suppose," said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded as they strode on thoughtfully over the moorland road towards the school.

"Yes, it's up to the police now. We can't do anything," he said, with a shrug. "But it's a pretty rum business. I wish we knew what was at the bottom of it."

"And now, my friend, you speak—you tell me! Or—" Dr. Brusiloff broke off with his sinister threat unspoken. He had returned to the upper room, after the departure of the four St. Jim's juniors, and was standing over Lazaroff with blazing eyes. Lazaroff had been ungagged again.

"I tell you nothing!"

Lazaroff's voice was harsh with determination.

"So you are obstinate? Well, we shall see!"

Dr. Brusiloff's voice was silky and purring. He glanced at his wife.

"You had better go," he said, with smiling, glittering eyes. "And you, Yakova, take the girl to her room!"

Madam Brusiloff opened the door and went out. The other woman followed, her big hand fastened tightly on the arm of Marie Douvar. Marie flung a last terror-stricken glance towards Lazaroff, who smiled at her reassuringly. The door closed behind them, leaving Brusiloff and Vladimir alone with their captive.

"Now!" hissed Brusiloff. "I did not want to hurt you, you fool! But I must be told where those jewels are, hidden! I know that they are at Spalding Hall! I shall find them in the end, in any case. It will save me time, and you a lot of trouble, if you tell me just where you have hidden them."

Lazaroff did not answer.

"Very well," said Dr. Brusiloff, after a few moments of waiting. "You shall be forced to speak!"

He turned from his captive as if intending to get some instrument for the torture he intended to inflict. But he had forgotten that Lazaroff, though his wrists were bound behind him, was not bound to the chair.

There was a sudden shout from Vladimir, a hoarse cry in Russian.

Lazaroff had leapt to his feet, the chair crashing over as he did so. Brusiloff swung round with a gasp, and for a moment it looked as though Lazaroff, bound though he was, would hurl himself at his captor.

But, as if realising the uselessness of such an action, the man turned instead and sprang for the window.

There was a crash of glass as he hurled himself through, shoulder first. He dropped from sight outside, without uttering a sound. Brusiloff and Vladimir stood frozen where they stood.

Lazaroff had believed that he would fall into the moat, where he would have stood some slight chance, despite the fact of his bound arms, of gaining the farther bank and freedom, for he was a strong swimmer. He had not known that the room in which he was overlooked not the dark waters of the moat but the flagged courtyard before the main entrance, and that to leap from the window meant certain death.

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"By heavens!" breathed Brusiloff, his face oddly grey.

He gave Vladimir a strange glance, then went to the smashed window and looked out.

Far beneath, a still, huddled shape lay on the flagstones.

Lazaroff, the faithful servant of the family whom he had loved and served all his life, had died in the service of the last of the Douvars.

The one man in the world who could have told Dr. Brusiloff where the Douvar jewels lay hidden, would never tell him now.

With a shudder Brusiloff turned away from the window and with a bitter smile met his companion's horrified gaze.

"So much for Lazaroff!" he said sardonically. "It is unfortunate for us, as well as for him. I needed the information which he alone could give."



"We must get him out of the way quickly," muttered Vladimir hoarsely.

Brusiloff nodded.

"Yes." His eyes gleamed. "Well, this cannot be helped now. I needed his knowledge badly; but one thing, at any rate, we know—the box with the jewels is hidden at Spalding Hall. We must find means of searching that place from roofs to cellars, if needs be. It may take time, but time is nothing if in the end we find that box. And find it in the end we shall!"

CHAPTER 8.

The "Wanted" Schoolboy!

"ANYBODY seen Tom Merry?"

Baggy Trimble rolled into the junior Common-room and asked the question on the following Wednesday evening.

There was a big crowd of juniors in the Common-room. Though it was only a short time after tea a light drizzle of rain was falling outside, and not many fellows had ventured out. There was a cheery buzz of conversation going on in every quarter of the big room. In fact, nobody heard Trimble speak.

Baggy blinked round the various groups of juniors.

Blake & Co. were intent upon a four-handed game of halma at a table in one corner—a game in which Blake and Herries were evidently completely wiping the board with Digby and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, judging by the disconsolate look upon the aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus. Reginald Talbot of the Shell was deep in a game of chess with Wildrake of the Fourth. Ralph Reckness Cardew, the slacker of the Fourth, was lounging elegantly in a chair and yawning. Herbert Skimpole was engrossed in a massive volume, by the famous Professor Barmy-crumpet, dealing with "The Lesser-Known British Fungi," and numerous other fellows were amusing themselves in various ways.

"Anybody seen Tom Merry?" repeated Baggy.
 No one took any notice of Baggy, with the exception of

As Brusiloff leapt off the running-board,
 the car hurtled into the moat!



Cardew. Ralph Reckness Cardew glanced round and nodded, with another yawn.

"Yes, I've seen him, dear fat man!"

"Oh, where?" asked Baggy eagerly.

"Playing cricket on Little Side," said Cardew gravely.

"Cricket?" ejaculated Baggy, in utter bewilderment.
 "But this is the footer season, Cardew, you ass! Hang it!"

"Yes," agreed Cardew laconically. "But it was during the cricket season I saw Tom Merry playing cricket on Little Side."

There were chuckles from some of the juniors. Baggy glared at the humorous Cardew, and snorted.

"Ass! I mean, has anyone seen Tom Merry lately? I've been looking for the ass ever since tea! Dunno where the silly dummy can have got to. I've got something to give the chump—Oh! Yow! Whoops!"

Baggy broke off with a sudden yell.

Unnoticed by Baggy, Tom Merry & Co. had appeared in the doorway behind him, strolling into the Common-

room. Tom Merry had been just in time to hear the uncomplimentary adjectives that Baggy had been rashly indulging in, and with a grin Tom had reached out a hand and grasped Baggy's fat little ear between a vice-like finger and thumb.

"So I'm an ass, a silly dummy, and a chump?" inquired Tom blandly.

"Yarooooop! Yow! Leggo my ear, you beast!"

"My hat! And a beast?" queried Tom.

"Oh! Yooooops! No!" roared Baggy. "You're a jolly nice chap, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom released Baggy's ear with a chuckle, and the juniors roared. Baggy rubbed his ear and glared at the captain of the Shell indignantly. Manners, Lowther, and Handcock were grinning.

"Well, what do you want to see me about, porpoise?" Tom asked.

Baggy, with another snort, dived a fat and rather grubby hand into his inner pocket and produced a crumpled envelope.

"This is for you!" he growled. "I saw Grimes, the grocer's boy, in the quad, and he asked me to give it to you—said some chap had given it him for you. I—ahem!—gave Grimes a tanner—I mean, a bob, and—and I thought you'd make it up to me, old chap!"

Baggy finished up with a greasy smirk.

The Falstaff of the Fourth had already spent every penny of the two pounds that Dr. Brusiloff had given him to say nothing about his adventure at the moated house, and Baggy eyed Tom Merry hopefully, in the expectation of raising a bob out of the captain of the Shell.

Whether Baggy had actually given Grimes a shilling for his trouble was really rather doubtful, however.

"I wonder if we ought to send flowers?" put in Monty Lowther gravely. "A wreath or something, I suppose—"

"A—a wreath!" echoed Baggy, puzzled.

"For Grimes' funeral," nodded Lowther. "He must have died of shock if you gave him a bob, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"I don't believe you did give Grimes a bob, but here you are, just to make sure," said Tom Merry good-naturedly, tossing Baggy a shilling.

Baggy scuttled off gleefully, while Tom glanced down at the envelope in his hand with a puzzled look. The writing in which it was addressed to him was unknown to Tom.

He ripped it open wonderingly. It was curious, to say the least, for anyone to have given Grimes, the grocer's boy, a note to deliver to him when that worthy youngster visited St. Jim's with goods. It was with a very bewildered expression that he drew out a scrap of paper from the envelope; it was evidently a sheet torn from a notebook, and on it was written a brief message in pencil:

"Dear Merry:—Can you meet me by the woodman's hut in Rylcombe Woods at six o'clock this evening? It is terribly urgent!"

But it was not so much the message, even, as the scrawled signature that drew an astonished exclamation from Tom Merry's lips. "Dick Lang" was the name scrawled at the foot of the sheet!

"Great Scott!" muttered Tom. "What the dickens—"

There was a postscript underneath the signature—"Please tell nobody about this!"

Tom stared down at the scrap of paper with wondering eyes.

What could it mean?

That Dick Lang, of Abbotsford, was in the neighbourhood was surprising enough. But that he wanted Tom to meet him secretly in Rylcombe Woods was still more astonishing.

Monty Lowther, Manners, and Handcock were watching Tom's face curiously.

"Anything the matter?" asked Monty.

Tom shook his head and thrust the note into his pocket. Since Dick Lang had asked him to tell nobody about the affair, he felt that it was only right for him not to tell his chums what the message was, or whom it was from.

"I don't think so," answered Tom quietly. "Something rather funny, though, that's all. It's from a chap who particularly asks me not to say anything to anybody, so I'm afraid I can't tell you anything just now."

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly six o'clock already. He must go at once, if he were to answer Lang's strange, urgent call.

"I—I must buzz out, you chaps," said Tom shortly, "So long!"

He turned and hurried from the Common-room, leaving the other three staring after him in utter astonishment.

"For the love of Mike!" ejaculated Handcock. "I guess there's something in the wind!"

"Must be!" nodded Manners, with a puzzled frown. He shrugged. "Oh, well, none of our business. Tom would have explained if he could have done."

Five minutes later, Tom Merry was hurrying along Rylcombe Lane, his cap pulled well down, his overcoat buttoned against the drizzling rain.

"What the dickens does it mean?" he asked himself yet again, as he took the footpath into the woods.

Well, he would know soon. There was nothing to be gained by puzzling his brains in the meantime.

It was very gloomy under the big trees, as he drew near the woodman's hut, that stood in a little clearing some distance from the road. But when within fifty yards of it he made out a dim figure sheltering against the wall of the hut. As he strode towards it along the sodden path, the figure detached itself from the shadows and came quickly to meet him.

"Merry!"

Tom held out his hand, staring at the Abbotsford fellow in startled astonishment, as Lang's hand gripped his.

The Abbotsford fellow was looking strangely different from the last time Tom had seen him. He was wearing a threadbare overcoat, and the bottoms of his trousers were mudstained—he seemed utterly soaked, as though he had been out in the rain for many hours. He was hatless, his hair gleaming with wet, and his good-looking face was pale and drawn.

Tom saw him shiver, although the other forced a faint smile to his lips as the two stood surveying one another in the dim light.

"Lang! What on earth—"

"You got my message, then?"

"Yes! Only just now—that's why I'm a bit late, old chap. But what the dickens is the matter? What's happened? Why on earth aren't you at Abbotsford?"

A bitter smile appeared on the youngster's face.

"I've bolted!" he said quietly.

"Great Scott!"



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Tom stared at the pale, haggard face incredulously.

"I've bolted," repeated Lang, almost harshly. "And what's more, the police are after me!"

"The police?" echoed Tom, in a breathless voice. "Good heavens, Lang! What—"

"Come into the hut, out of this beastly rain, and I'll tell you!" said Lang anxiously.

They turned towards the hut and entered. As they faced one another again, the bitter smile returned to Dick Lang's lips.

"It's quite a simple yarn," he said, with a mirthless laugh. "The day after the match at St. Jim's, on the Sunday, some money was stolen from a prefect's study. A fiver! There was an official search, and the fiver was found in my desk."

Tom caught his breath.

"You—you don't mean—"

"Oh, I didn't steal it, if that's what you are wondering! I don't know who did, but whoever he was, he got the wind up, evidently, when the search was started, and he took a chance to slip the fiver into some other fellow's desk. Unfortunately for me, mine was the desk he chose!"

Tom stared into Lang's face searchingly. What he saw there reassured him. He felt quite certain, from the frank look in Lang's brown eyes, that the Abbotsford junior was telling the truth.

"Go on," he said. "What happened?"

"The Head never doubted it was I who was the thief, of course. Can't blame him for that. He told me that it was so serious that a flogging and expulsion was not severe enough. It was a matter for the police. That would have meant a reformatory, very likely. Rather than face it, I bolted!"

"I see!"

"I decided to walk to London," went on Lang quietly. "I'm on my way there now, to get work. I've hidden mostly during the day, in woods and so on, and tramped on at night. With the police looking for me, I've had to avoid the main roads where I could, and keep to the lanes. It's been pretty rough going sometimes, and my shoes are worn through—unfortunately I hadn't a chance to get to my other clothes when I escaped from the school. This overcoat I'm wearing I got in exchange for chopping some wood in a village."

He lifted his foot, showing the sole of his thin shoe. It was worn through, as he had said, practically to the sock.

"My feet are pretty wet, as you can guess," he said, with a wry grin. "That's why I bothered you. I'm sorry to come to you in my troubles, but you are the only person I know near here who might help me. Can you let me have a pair of old boots?"

"Great Scott! Of course! But look here, you can't carry on like this! Haven't you any money?"

"A few coppers, thanks! I've not eaten much since I left Abbotsford, but I've had a few decent meals that I've worked for." He flushed as Tom's hand went instinctively to his pocket. "No, I'm not going to touch you for any money, thanks. That's a thing I won't do! I didn't even like the idea of asking you for some old boots; but that's a thing every tramp does, isn't it?" he finished bitterly.

"Don't be an ass!" exclaimed Tom, in almost an angry tone. "You aren't a tramp! But, look here, Lang, is it as impossible as you seem to think to prove your innocence of this theft? Can't you go back—"

"No"—Dick Lang's voice was hard—"I can't go back! It's hopeless to attempt to prove my innocence. And I don't mean to be sent to a reformatory for something I haven't done. I can't face my guardian, either—not after this disgrace. There's my uncle at Thorpe Court, too. I'd sooner cut off my right hand than go and present myself to him like this—a supposed thief, hiding from the police!"

Tom nodded sympathetically.

"I can understand your feelings," he said quietly. "I won't start being sympathetic, though. You know how I feel about this, and sympathy would only waste time. You are determined to walk to London?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll let you have some boots, old chap. And if you won't let me lend you some money—"

"How can I, when I don't know that I should ever be able to pay it back?" exclaimed Lang, in a bitter tone.

"But thanks awfully, all the same! You're a jolly good sort—"

"Rats! Look here, Lang, there's one thing I'm jolly well going to do. I'm going to stand you a feed, whether you like it or not! You can't walk to London or anywhere else on an empty tummy, you ass! You're going to come into the village with me now; it's safe enough. Old Crump, the village bobby, won't spot you, even if he's had your description! So come on! Grub first—boots afterwards!"

Lang hesitated. His pride jibbed at the idea of accepting

even a feed from a fellow whom he might never be able to repay for his kindness. Only dire necessity had induced him to ask for the boots Tom had promised him. But he was sick with hunger; and the prospect of food was one that Nature would not let him refuse. He nodded.

"I'll come," he said. "I only hope that one day I shall be able to repay you for being so decent, Merry."

"Oh, rot! Come along, then, old chap!"

Tom took Dick's arm. He felt that the youngster was quivering as they left the hut and turned along the footpath to the road.

Lang was silent as they strode together towards the village along Rylcombe Lane. The rain was still coming down in a light drizzle, but it seemed to be stopping. Tom made a mental note that Lang would need a cap as well as boots.

As they approached the village the rain stopped altogether.

"Thank goodness for that!" muttered Lang, and shivered.

As he spoke, a big closed car turned the bend ahead of them, coming towards them from the village. Tom scarcely glanced at it, expecting it to pass. But, to his surprise, he heard a sudden ejaculation from within the car; a man in the back called out sharply to the chauffeur in some foreign tongue, and the car came to a standstill beside the two hurrying youngsters.

Tom glanced up, and found himself staring into the black, glittering eyes of the man he had seen at the Moat House.

The window of the car was down; and Dr. Brusiloff and his companion, a lady in expensive furs—Madame Brusiloff, though Tom did not know that, any more than he knew the name of the bearded Russian—were both staring at Dick Lang with queer, startled eyes!

CHAPTER 9.

A Staggering Proposal!

DICK LANG gave a startled exclamation.

To the Abbotsford youngster, wanted by the police as he was, it was unnerving for the moment to find himself the cause of such queer interest as the occupants of the car were displaying at the sight of him.

Brusiloff glanced at the lady beside him in an odd way. "Just alike!" Tom thought he heard him mutter. "An astonishing likeness!"

His wife nodded, and whispered something in reply. Dr. Brusiloff swung open the car door and stepped quickly out. For the first time he glanced at Tom Merry, and gave a start of surprise as he recognised him. Then a pleasant smile appeared on the Russian's thin lips.

"Why, it is surely my young friend of the other night who was looking for a green car!" he said, with a laugh.

Tom smiled and coloured.

"Afraid we troubled you rather unduly that evening, sir," he said apologetically.

"Not at all!" Brusiloff's eyes had returned to Dick's face. The queer look was still to be seen in them. "But this, surely, was not one of your companions on that occasion?"

"No," said Tom shortly. He glanced at Dick. "We ought to get on, oughtn't we?"

In the circumstances, he realised that Dick Lang wanted to get away. But Dr. Brusiloff raised a hand quickly to detain them.

"One moment, please!" He smiled, showing his white teeth. "I am afraid I was not very hospitable the other night, my young friend, when you visited my house. I wished after you had gone that I had invited you in, with your friends, to enjoy a little refreshment after your disappointment at failing to find what you sought!"

He finished with a laugh. His eyes gleamed from one to the other of the youngsters. He turned again to Tom.

"Perhaps it is not too late, however!" he went on smilingly. "My wife and I would be delighted if you and your friends would drive home with us now and enjoy a little supper with us! Will you come? But, of course, you will! We can accept no refusal."

Tom glanced at Dick Lang. He saw that Lang's first natural anxiety had gone on finding that the man was, apparently, an acquaintance of Tom Merry's. And the offer was such a friendly one that Tom felt it would be rather ungracious to refuse—if Lang were willing to go to the Moat House.

Lang read the question in Tom's eyes.

It occurred to the fugitive youngster that if Tom Merry happened to be hard up, to accept the man's kind offer would certainly save the pocket of the fellow who was befriending him. He nodded.

"That's very kind of you, sir!" he said frankly, turning to Brusiloff. "I'm afraid I'm not quite dressed for a visit—"

"Nonsense!" smiled Dr. Brusiloff. "Come along!"

His quick eyes had long ago noticed the muddy, dishevelled appearance of Tom's companion—the fellow in whom he and his wife had evidenced such curious interest. It was clear to him that Dick was not a St. Jim's junior, for that reason—he looked more like some waif whom Tom had come across, he thought. It was a guess that was very near the truth!

A minute later Tom Merry and Dick Lang were seated in the luxurious interior of the big car, as, with the chauffeur at the wheel, it sped silently across Wayland Moor in the direction of the Moat House.

Dick Lang leant back in his chair with a little sigh of contentment.

His aching hunger had been appeased by the splendid meal that had been provided by his host in the handsome dining-room at the Moat House, and for the first time since his bolt from Abbotsford, he was feeling more or less fit again. He grinned across the table at Tom Merry quite cheerfully.

It was quite dark outside now, and the striking of the clock on the chimneypiece suddenly reminded Tom that he had to be back at St. Jim's in time for call-over.

He rose to his feet.

"Afraid I must be getting back to the school now," he said.

Dr. Brusiloff rose with a regretful exclamation.

"So soon? I am sorry. But your friend here—" He glanced smilingly at Dick. "You are not a St. Jim's boy, I understand; you need not go yet. Please stay a little longer, will you not?"

"Please do!" exclaimed Madame Brusiloff, the fourth member of the little party, in her sweetest tones.

Dick glanced doubtfully at Tom.

The rain pattering against the window of the cosy room certainly made temptation to stay a very great one for the homeless waif! The prospect of a tramp to the shelter of the woodman's hut in Rylcombe Woods was the very best that the night could offer him in the dreary world outside the warmth and comfort of the Moat House.

Tom Merry read his thoughts.

"Don't you bother to come along, because I've got to go, Dick," he said quietly. "I'll see you to-morrow morning at the same place, eh? At seven o'clock."

"That's jolly good of you!" said Dick, his face lighting up. He knew from Tom's voice that the captain of the Shell would bring him the boots he had promised—and perhaps something in the way of breakfast besides; but Tom had naturally not mentioned that fact in front of their host and hostess.

Tom shook hands with the Brusiloffs, and left. The Russian closed the door behind him after watching him cross the moat, and returned with a queer smile on his face to the room where Dick Lang and Madame Brusiloff were now talking by the fire. He lit a cigarette and crossed towards them, dropping a friendly hand on Dick's shoulder.

"And now, my young friend," he said softly, "tell us what the trouble is, I beg!"

"The—the trouble?" echoed Dick in rather a startled voice.

"You are surely in some kind of trouble?" smiled Madame Brusiloff kindly. "You may confide in us! We would like to help you!"

Brusiloff nodded, his dark eyes glittering down into Dick's.

"It is clear that there is something wrong," he said bluntly. "You came here hungry—half-starved, if I am any judge! Your shoes are worn, your clothes are wet and muddy—" He raised a protesting hand as Dick, flaming red, seemed about to speak. "I beg you to forgive me speaking of it, my young friend. I merely wished to prove that you need not try to deceive us as to your plight. Because we should be so glad to help you!"

Dick's colour faded. He glanced from one to another of them. He had received such surprising kindness from them already that he felt he could confide in them safely enough; and since they pressed for an explanation, to have refused one would have been ungrateful. And if he was going to explain, he would tell the truth.

"Yes," he said in a quiet tone, "you are quite right. I am homeless, as a matter of fact."

He told them what he had told Tom Merry. When he had finished, Dr. Brusiloff glanced at his wife with an odd gleam in his eyes.

"So!" he said softly. For a moment it almost looked, from his expression, as though he were very pleased with the information he had received. But he hastily corrected

his expression. "How terrible, terrible! My poor young friend! To be wanted by the police—ah, that is very bad!" "Of course," said Dick, flushing, "you quite understand that I did not steal the money—"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Brusiloff. "I would not suspect you of that for one moment!"

Again he glanced at his wife. She seemed to nod slightly. Brusiloff took a few strides to and fro over the carpet, drawing at his cigarette—a queerly scented Russian cigarette, Dick noticed.

"Well, I had better be going," said Dick quietly. "I did not tell you this in order to cadge off you, but simply because you have been so kind. I—"

"No!" said Brusiloff, halting in front of him, laying a hand on the youngster's shoulder. "You shall not go! I shall help you. I insist!"

"Thanks, but I couldn't accept help, if you don't mind," said Dick rather bluntly. "You see—"

"But if you could do me a good turn?" smiled Brusiloff. "Then you would not mind me doing a good turn for you?" Dick's face lit up.

"Well, that would be different," he admitted eagerly. "If I could really do you a good turn in any way—"

"You can!" said Madame Brusiloff softly.

"But how?" breathed Dick, with puzzled face.

Dr. Brusiloff laughed.

"Quite easily," he said in a silky tone. "Oh, quite easily, my young friend! If you will agree to my proposal. You will be safe from the police; you will live in comfort meanwhile—and when your task is finished, I will pay you one hundred pounds, with which you can go, say, to Canada—Australia—anywhere you like, to start life afresh!"

Dick Lang stared at the Russian as though he could not believe his ears.

"You—you're joking!" he stammered.

"Not in the least! I mean every word."

Dick shook his head.

"You are awfully kind," he said, in an unsteady tone. "But there is nothing I could do for you that would make it a fair bargain. I've already explained that I don't want to take advantage of your kindness to sponge on you, sir—"

Brusiloff interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"Tchah!" He gave a guttural exclamation. "I promise you, upon my honour, that I shall be doing no more for you than you will be doing for me. I swear it!"

Dick stared at the man wonderingly. Then he drew a deep breath. His eyes were shining.

"Then I can accept the bargain, sir," he said in a hoarse, excited voice. "What is it that you want me to do?"

Brusiloff threw his cigarette into the fire in an almost triumphant gesture.

"Do you know Spalding Hall?"

Dick remembered that Spalding Hall had been the name of the place to which he and Tom Merry and Co. had gone with the mysterious man whom they had seen knocked down by the green car near Wayland.

"Yes," he said, in surprise. "I know it."

"Good!" Dr. Brusiloff nodded with satisfaction. "What I want of you, my young friend, is this—to help me find some jewels that are hidden somewhere at Spalding Hall."

"Jewels—hidden at Spalding Hall?" breathed Dick.

"But—but what right—"

"The jewels are mine!" snapped Brusiloff. "They were stolen from me, and hidden there," he went on, lying easily. "It is a long story, and I need to tell you no more than that—"

"Of course not," said Dick quickly, ashamed of the momentary suspicion that had crossed his mind, as to whether or not this task he had promised to carry out was an honest one. "I didn't mean to be inquisitive. But if these jewels of yours are there, and you want them, why cannot—"

"Why cannot I go there and demand them?" cut in the Russian, with a sardonic smile. "Because, my young friend, though I can assure you that the jewels are mine, it would be highly difficult for me to prove that! Therefore I wish to find them without fuss, and take possession of them without a word to anyone at Spalding Hall. You see, it is not known by anyone there, that these valuables are hidden at that place. Only the scoundrel who hid them knows that, with the exception of myself. You understand?"

"I see," Dick nodded. "Naturally you would like to get them without any fuss, then?"

"Exactly!"

Brusiloff surveyed Dick searchingly. He saw from the

youngster's look that Dick did not for a moment suspect that his story explaining the presence of the jewels at Spalding Hall was a string of lies. Dick believed what he had been told, without a shadow of suspicion in his mind.

"But how can I find them for you?" asked Dick eagerly.

"By going to Spalding Hall, my young friend, as a pupil. And, while you are there, searching for my jewels until you find them!"

"As a pupil?" Dick gave a puzzled laugh. "But you've made a mistake! Spalding Hall is a girl's school."

"I know," said Dr. Brusiloff calmly. "That does not matter very much. You see, a— a young friend of mine, a girl, who was to have gone to Spalding Hall, and is expected there, has fallen ill. I was to have informed the headmistress of the school that this young lady will not, therefore, arrive after all, as she is so ill. But I will not do that! You, my young friend, are most astonishingly like this girl—you might well be her twin brother, I assure you. Her name is Marie Douvar."

He selected another cigarette from a glittering gold case, and laughed softly.

"You, my young friend, shall take her place! You will be disguised as a girl, and will adopt the identity of Marie Douvar, and will be sent to school at Spalding Hall!"

CHAPTER 10.

A Strange Bargain!

DICK LANG gazed at the Brusiloffs in dazed astonishment.

Their proposal had utterly staggered him.

They were watching him with scarcely veiled anxiety. His reply meant a lot to them!

Not only so that he could look for the jewels that Lazaroff had hidden somewhere at Spalding Hall, did Dr. Brusiloff want Dick Lang to go there in the guise of Marie Douvar. There was another, and urgent reason, which he certainly did not intend to confide to Dick.

Marie Douvar had to be kept a prisoner at the Moat House until the jewels were found—otherwise she could inform the police of the whole scoundrelly business. But, though Brusiloff's forged letter to Miss Finch had apparently explained her non-arrival at the school for the time being, every day that the girl failed to arrive at Spalding Hall spelt danger for the Brusiloffs.

At present, Marie's solicitors believed her to be at Spalding Hall, and Miss Finch believed her to be ill at her home. Any day a letter passing between the solicitors and Miss Finch, would reveal the fact that, actually, Marie was at neither place—had disappeared!

Such a discovery would undoubtedly start very awkward investigations to be made in the neighbourhood. And even if the fact of Marie's being kept a prisoner at the Moat House was not discovered, the activities of the police would seriously hinder Dr. Brusiloff in his search for the jewels that were hidden at Spalding Hall. For which reason, he had already decided that, at any cost, a substitute must be sent to the school in the name of Marie Douvar—when the chance meeting in Rylcombe Lane of Tom Merry with a youngster, who bore an astonishing likeness to the prisoner of the Moat House, had provided the wanted substitute ready to hand—if Dick would agree to play the part!

That Dick was sufficiently like Marie, both in face and colouring and in height, to deceive even the short-sighted old solicitor whom Dr. Brusiloff knew to run the real Marie's affairs, both the Russian and his wife were convinced. It was an essential point, for it was quite likely that the old solicitor would visit Spalding Hall one day to see her.

"Well?" said Brusiloff, trying to hide the eagerness in his tone. "Do you agree?"

"I—I don't know!" stammered Dick. "It's such an amazing suggestion!"

"Not in the least!" snapped Brusiloff. "It will be easy enough!"

He gripped Dick by the shoulder.

"And remember, my young friend—when your task is finished, when the jewels are found, there is a little matter of a hundred pounds waiting for you! You, who are now a penniless waif! Think of it—one hundred pounds! It will save you."

"But, I—I don't know that I could do it!" said Dick breathlessly. "Suppose I was found out?"

"You will not be found out!" said Brusiloff impatiently. "This girl, Marie Douvar, who is supposed—I mean, who is ill, is supposed to be arriving at the school in three

weeks' time. That was what the solicitors who look after her affairs told the headmistress, when they wrote to her." Brusiloff would have been nearer the truth, had he admitted that this was what he himself, not the solicitors, had told Miss Finch in the forged letter he had sent! "You will not have to go for three weeks. In any case, it is safer not—believe me, I am as little anxious as you for the—er—innocent deception to be discovered! So you have three weeks to study and perfect your part, my young friend. You will go to London with my wife, and there she will train you herself in your role. Surely you cannot want more than that?"

Still Dick hesitated. Madame Brusiloff laughed. "Well?" she asked. "You will not mind coming to London with me, surely? You will soon learn your part—and I am sure you will find it less irksome than you think! It will be better, anyway, than being sent to a reformatory," she finished softly.

Dick did not answer. He was listening to the rain, lashing the window now furiously. A stormy night had set in, and at the thought of being out in it, without a roof to cover him, the youngster shivered suddenly.

The sound of the storm had decided him. That and the thought of the hundred pounds that he would be earning while masquerading at Spalding Hall as the girl named Marie Douvar.

"Very well," he said quietly. "I agree!" An exultant laugh broke from Brusiloff. His wife's eyes gleamed triumphantly.

"Good!" purred Dr. Brusiloff, rubbing his hands. "You are wise to accept such a splendid offer, my young friend. To-night you shall drive up to London—"

"To-night?" echoed Dick. "Yes, to-night." Brusiloff did not mean to take the risk of allowing Dick to spend the night at the Moat House, where some unlucky chance might have betrayed the fact that a prisoner was kept at the house—the very girl whom Dick was to impersonate! "Let me see, you said something about meeting that boy from St. Jim's in the morning. I am afraid that is impossible. You will write him a note, telling him that you have had the offer of a drive to London, and that you have gone there in your search for work. For, remember, you must confide in no one!"

"I understand that," nodded Dick. He felt regretful to go off without seeing Tom again, to thank him. But it could not be helped.

"You must say nothing when writing to him to let him guess that you have left us to-night to return later again," went on Brusiloff. "You must, in fact, from now on pretend to have no acquaintanceship with me!"

"But if you are a friend of the real Marie Douvar—this girl who is ill—I should, naturally, see you when I turn up at Spalding Hall!" exclaimed Dick, in astonishment.

"Not so," said Brusiloff sharply. "Though I am a friend of this young lady, it is true, her affairs are arranged by her solicitors utterly. And, in the circumstances, it is better for you to appear to know nothing of me. When you find the jewels, you must bring them here in secret."

"Very well," said Dick, rather surprised.

"These jewels, now," muttered Brusiloff eagerly. "They are contained in a black wooden box, with a crest upon the lid. This box is concealed somewhere at Spalding Hall, as I have told you. It should not be very difficult to find. Remember, you must search for it till you do find it, my young friend! It may take time. You must seize your opportunities, however, as best you may. But always be careful not to arouse any suspicion."

He pressed an electric bell.

"Tell Pavel to bring the car round," he ordered the man who appeared. "He is to drive Madame Brusiloff to London to-night, and my young friend here."

The man vanished. Brusiloff turned again to Dick.

"The best of luck!" he said in his pleasantest tones, clapping the youngster on the shoulder. "I will come to London soon to see how you are progressing in your role, and then I will give you all necessary details that you should know. When I come, I shall hope to find a very charming young lady! Ha, ha!"

He laughed, and Dick grinned. Now that the Abbotsford youngster was more used to the idea, he was beginning to see that there was the prospect of some good fun to be had as a pupil at Spalding Hall, in feminine guise.

And at any rate, he was telling himself, his disguise would be complete. He would have nothing to fear from the police now; and when his task was over, with luck, the search for him would have died down.

"It ought to be quite a rag, really," he muttered to himself. "And with a hundred giddy quid hanging on to it—"

The sound of a motor-car came to the ears of the three in the room, drawing up in the forecourt before the main entrance.

"Come!" said Brusiloff.

His wife rose and watched, reappearing a minute later in her hat and furs. Dick slipped on his threadbare coat and followed her down the steps to the waiting car. He had scribbled a brief note to Tom Merry in the meantime, which Brusiloff was going to post to St. Jim's.

The tall Russian stood in the lighted doorway, watching with glittering eyes as the big limousine swung round to cross the bridge over the moat.

With glaring headlights, the car vanished among the rain-swept trees beyond, on its way to distant London. From Dr. Brusiloff there broke a low, triumphant laugh.

"Good!" he muttered softly. "Lazaroff, my friend, I am afraid that your silence will be of no avail, if you really thought to prevent me from gaining possession of those jewels! The boy is clever; he will find them, I feel sure."

His eyes lit up with an evil gleam of greed that would have astonished considerably, had he been there to see it, Dick Lang, the boy whom Dr. Brusiloff planned to use as an innocent tool for his nefarious plan—the schoolboy who was to become a pupil at Spalding Hall!

"Hallo, Tommy! Letter for you!"

Tom Merry had just entered the Hall of the School House from the quad, to be greeted by Jack Blake's cheery voice.

The captain of the Shell had risen early—it was the morning following his meeting with Dick Lang in Rylcombe Woods—and had set off for the woodman's hut, with a pair of boots and a parcel of food. But he had found no sign of Dick at the hut, to his surprise.

He had, however, left the boots and the parcel there, on the chance that Dick would go there, after all, and returned to the school to find that the post had just arrived.

Blake held out a letter to Tom, who gave a low exclamation as he recognised the writing on the envelope as Dick's handwriting.

He ripped the envelope open, and drew out the enclosed sheet with eager fingers.

"Dear Tom," he read,—"I am afraid I shall not be seeing you again, after all, for the present. I have had the luck to get a chance of a free lift to London, and I thought it was too good to be missed. I am afraid by the time this reaches you, you will have had a journey to the hut in Rylcombe Woods for nothing. Awfully sorry, but I know you will understand. I can't thank you enough, old chap, for being so decent to me; but you know how grateful I am. I hope, well, I expect I shall see you again one of these days. In the meanwhile, mum's the word, if you don't mind. Cheerio!—Dick."

Tom put the letter in his pocket with a thoughtful frown.

"So he didn't spend the night at the Moat House, then," he told himself. "Well, I hope the poor chap has luck in London."

The breakfast bell clanged, and Tom made his way to the dining-hall with the crowd of juniors.

"Penny for your thoughts, Tommy!" grinned Monty Lowther across the table. "Why the giddy brown study?"

Tom glanced up and laughed.

"Oh, nothing!"

He could say nothing to his chums, in face of the ex-Abbotsford fellow's wish. He had to keep Lang's secret—so far as he knew it.

But all through breakfast that morning Tom Merry's thoughts were of Dick Lang, the "wanted" schoolboy. They were worried, anxious thoughts.

He liked Lang, and was troubled about him. But he told himself that it was no use worrying. Dick Lang had his own furrow to plough, unaided. In his letter Dick had said that he expected to see Tom again "one of these days," but to Tom Merry it seemed unlikely enough that they would ever meet again.

Dick Lang himself, in writing that sentence, had scarcely expected, as a matter of fact, to meet Tom Merry again, either. For he did not know that the St. Jim's juniors were friends of some of the girls at Spalding Hall. Such a possibility had somehow never even occurred to him. Never for one single moment had Dick imagined that when he went to Spalding Hall in the role of Marie Douvar he would sooner or later be bound to meet Tom Merry and his other acquaintances of St. Jim's.

That was a danger of which Dick Lang and Dr. Brusiloff had both been ignorant, when it had been planned for Dick to arrive before long as a new pupil at Spalding Hall!

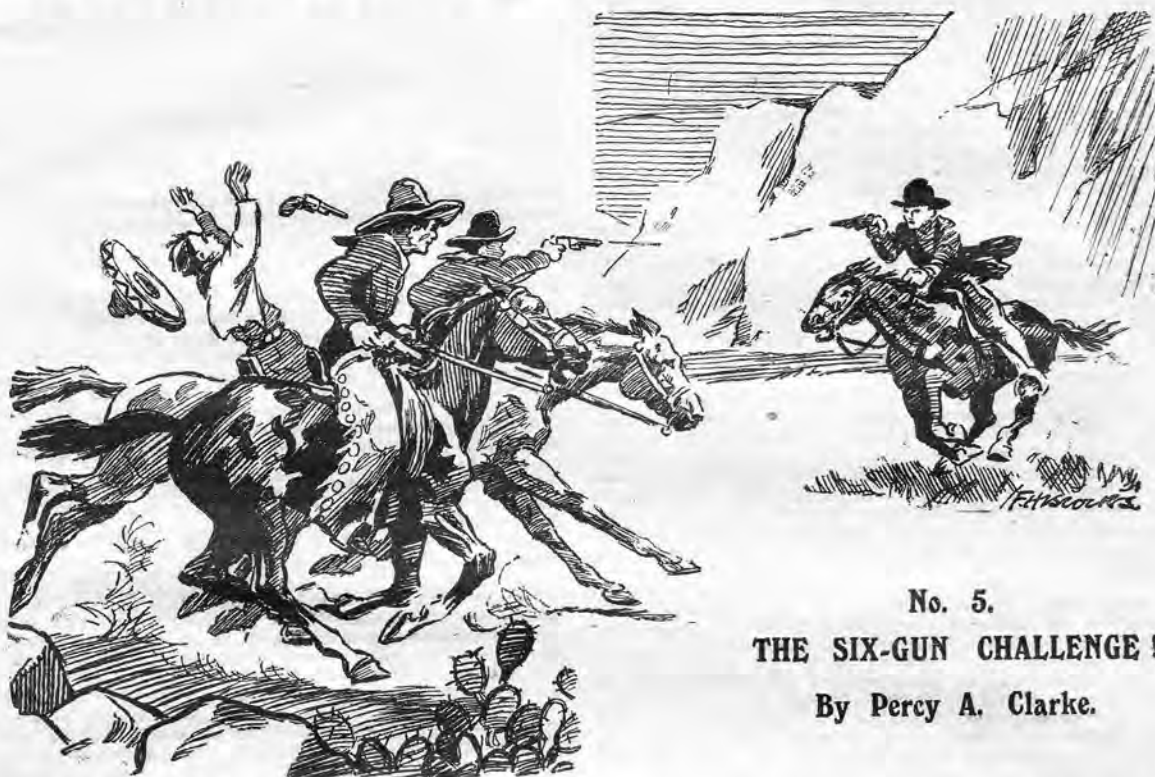
THE END.

(Well, there have been some surprises this week, haven't there, chums? Believe me, there are some bigger ones coming in next week's long complete yarn of Tom Merry & Co.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,180.

"WHOOPEE! HI! YI! YIPPITY!" BUCK'S ON THE TRAIL AGAIN, BOYS!

Buck of the Broken K.



No. 5.

THE SIX-GUN CHALLENGE!

By Percy A. Clarke.

CHAPTER 1. The Notice!

THERE was a shout, and Buck Moran, foreman of the Broken K Ranch, came running from the bunkhouse in time to see the rider coming over the mesa. The Broken K waddies were running out to meet the newcomer, because it was obvious he needed help. He swayed limply in the saddle, and his horse walked carefully, as if afraid of unseating its rider.

The cowpunchers held the horse, and the man just dropped from the saddle. Strong hands caught him, held him, then gently carried him to the bunkhouse. He was unconscious, and it was easy to guess that he'd done a spot of fighting. There was blood on his face and blood on his shirt; more than one bullet had found its billet in his body.

Buck watched the scene, face suddenly stern, lips compressed. He stepped up to the senseless man and pulled the guns from his holsters. They were empty of cartridges, but the barrels were dirty and reeked of gunpowder. The man's cartridge-belt was empty.

"Gee whiskers!" exclaimed Buck. "He fought to the last shell over some-at and against somebody. What d'you know about that, boys?"

"And you see who it is?" asked somebody.

"Sure!" said Buck. "It's Jed Hunter, the guy who was mixed up with Laredo in that try-on with the hosses for the remount outfit. You'll remember how he was helping Jim Brewer and Caleb Carn to doctor the pedigree hosses so's they'd be sold cheap as throw-outs. Laredo, the Mex crook, aimed to buy 'em up for a song and sell 'em for a fortune. Waal, boys, Jed's come home with his carcass full o' lead, and we've sure got to do something about it."

Colonel Worth was examining the senseless man.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,180.

"S'pose you ride for Doc Williams, Buck?" he suggested. "I kin do surgery for ord'nary wounds and accidents, but this yere is plumb beyond me."

"Yeah," agreed Buck, "it's a doctor's case. I'll git."

He went to the corral and roped his leggy mustang. It was a weird horse; but the cow waddies didn't laugh at Smoke, Buck's mustang, any more, because they had had more than one example of the brain that animal carried between its ears.

Smoke was noted, however, not only for brain power, but also for speed and endurance. Buck had the utmost confidence in his long-legged cayuse, and asked for no better mount. There was a perfect understanding between him and Smoke; and he rode out of the ranch and headed for Pecos with all the self-assurance in the world.

Buck set his horse at a loping gallop over the mesa. The pace was fast and wasted no time, yet it wasn't so fast that Smoke would tire before reaching the foothills. Buck knew his job and understood what was demanded of him and his horse.

"It isn't only you'n me, old hoss, what thinks alike," he

said. "There's me and the colonel. Sure, we thinks alike, sees alike, and purty nigh says the same things. And I guess I got to put a word in to the sheriff at Pecos as well as fetch Doc Williams. There's something plumb weird and mysterious about Jed Hunter coming home that-a-way."

He was right. He guessed that the colonel did not want to betray his uneasiness before all his cowpunchers, and he had slyly, yet seriously, winked at Buck when he told him to ride for the doctor. The doctor was badly needed; but there was more in it than that, and Buck knew it.

The homecoming of Jed Hunter meant something, and Buck had to find out what it meant. Jed had at one time been a cowpuncher at the Broken K outfit, until—when Buck discovered him and two more fellows doctoring horses on behalf of Laredo, the Mexican outlaw bandit—he had fled

Buck Gets a Challenge!

And he keeps it—but, oh, Jerusalem, there's
a 100% SURPRISE for his Challenger!

in a hurry. When Buck had ridden over the border to the rescue of Colonel Worth from Laredo's gang he had seen Jed Hunter in the Mexican village of Puerto Bambino. That could only mean one thing—Jed had definitely and openly joined Laredo.

But Jed had returned home shot all to pieces. What did that mean? Had he quarrelled with Laredo? Had he been about to turn informer, and had Laredo done his best to kill him before he got to the sheriff at Pecos?

It was impossible to do anything but guess; but it was obvious that Laredo's gang could not be a great way off, and the colonel had sent Buck for the doctor, because Buck would have the wit to warn the sheriff and also keep his eyes and ears skinned for news.

"Yeah, Smoke, you ole critter," said Buck, "I smells trouble, like the colonel does. Hit her up!"

When he got to Pecos he called at the saloon; but everything was peaceful there, and no one knew a thing about Laredo. After that he called on the sheriff, who scowled, eyes and ears skinned for news.

"Waal, Buck," he said, "I allows it sure looks like trouble, and I'll amble down that-a-way with a posse not far off; but I won't start till to-morrow, 'cause there's nothing to start me."

"No, I guess not," said Buck. "Jed won't be in a condition to talk for a long time—if ever."

Then he called on the doctor, who reached for his black Stetson as soon as Buck showed his face round the door.

"You can explain while we're riding," said Doc Williams. "Shucks, but you're the sorter man I like!" said Buck.

They rode out of Pecos and hit the trail for Snake Springs and the Broken K at a steady, loping gallop. The doctor had his instruments in a case strapped to his saddle, and he listened intently to what Buck had to say, which was brief and to the point. The doctor made no comment. It was nothing to him really who and what Jed Hunter was, or had been. A man needed medical assistance, and that was the end of it, although he was so far interested in the nature of the man's wounds and how he had come by them.

They reached the mountains and entered the pass, where the trail wound in and out amongst the trees and rocks. And suddenly a gun cracked and a bullet drilled a hole neatly in the doctor's black Stetson.

"Gee!" Buck's gun was out in a flash, and he looked about for the skunk who had fired the treacherous shot. "Gee whiskers! Who's getting fresh?"

"Rather highbanded," remarked the doctor calmly. "To say nothing of ruining a new hat. But isn't that some sort of notice on that tree?"

Buck stared, and his jaw dropped.

"It wasn't there when I came this way before," he said. "Let's take a look-see at it."

He dismounted and strode over to it, screwing up his face as he read it. It ran:

"NOTICE!

"Jed Hunter don't get no doctor. Buck Moran kin go home, and so kin Doc Williams. The doc don't go no nearer than this to the Broken K, or he gets a bullet."

The thing wasn't signed, and the writing was bad.

Buck looked at the doctor quizzically. "Waal," he said drawlingly, "what's the next move?"

"There's no question about it!" snapped the doctor. "Skunks like that can't keep me away from a bedside unless they kill me."

"Yeah, I sure knew you was that kind, doc!" said Buck. "Do we ride?"

"We high-tail it!" snapped the doctor, clapping spurs to his horse.

Buck followed suit, and they galloped madly along the trail. The watcher on the mountainside let loose a fusillade of shots, but they all went wide; and Buck began to think they had got clean away, so did the doctor.

"Sheer bluff, I reckon," he said.

Then he knew he was wrong; for as they rounded a sharp bend they found the way barred by three masked men, who sat their horses, their guns levelled.

"Stop and put 'em up! Pronto!" snarled a husky voice.

There was nothing else to be done. Buck and the doctor reined in their horses. Smoke reared up protestingly, then came down on all four feet, eyes bloodshot,

nostrils agape. Buck quietened him with a word; but there was no chance to get at a gun, and it was madness to try it. They sat there waiting for what was to follow.

"What's the meaning of this outrage?" snapped the doctor.

"Yew saw the notice, doc," said the leader of the masked men.

"I did; but if you think that can keep me away—"

"Nope, we don't think nothing a-tall, doc. But us have guns, and us have sure got the drop on you. Us ain't letting no doc treat Jed Hunter and give him a chance to talk. That's all. Jed wasn't supposed ever to git as far as the Broken K. Understand that? Not that it matters a lot whether you do or you don't. Buck kin go home ef he wants to; but you're to ride back to Pecos, doc, or you'll get yours for keeps."

"You low-down skunks!" raved the doctor. "Stand out o' my way!"

"Nix!" snapped the bandit. "Turn back, doc."

"Yeah, p'raps you'd better, doc," said Buck thoughtfully.

"I won't!" stormed Dr. Williams. "It's an outrage—it's devilry—"

"Yeah, I know," said Buck. "Ef they put a bullet through my head—waal, it wouldn't matter a lot, 'cept to me; but if they kill you, doc, I guess it'll be a long time before we gets as good a man to fill your shoes. And Jed Hunter ain't worth it, doc. Better turn back."

The doctor stared at Buck, his jaw dropping. He had expected help from Buck, and he was amazed that the foreman of the Broken K should side with the bandits.

While he thought it out the leader of the bandits spoke.

"You kin go through, Buck," he said.

"Thank you f'r nothin', Jim Brewer!" snapped Buck. "But I'm guide to the doc, and sorter responsible f'r his safety. Ef the doctor goes back, I goes with him as-far as Pecos."

"Have it yore own way; but the doc don't go to the Broken K. Make dead sure o' that!"

"Yeah, I will," said Buck. "Come on, doc. What's the use o' butting our heads against a brick wall? It's an outrage, like you said, but—Aw, waal, what's the use? Come on!"

The doctor looked stunned; but he agreed sadly, turning his horse; and they rode back the way they had come. When they reached the spot where the notice had been nailed to the tree a gun cracked up on the mountainside, but this time the bullet passed behind the doctor as if it were a warning to him to stay out of the pass.



The way was barred by three masked men, who sat their horses, their guns levelled.

CHAPTER 21 The Challenge.

NEITHER Buck nor the doctor took any notice. The sun was fast approaching the western horizon, and the shadows were lengthening. The riders spoke not a word for some time. When Buck did break that dismal silence he spoke without turning his head.

"Doc," he said grimly, "I ain't what you're thinking; and I axes you to do jest what I do. Ready?"

"Go ahead!" snapped the doctor.

Buck jerked his reins, and Smoke suddenly broke into a furious gallop. The doctor followed. They left the trail and rode madly along a valley between the foothills, across a grassy plain, and again into a gully, with the mountains towering all round them. Buck knew that country like the palm of his hand, and he led the way to a narrow pass, then brought his horse to a standstill, the doctor doing the same.

He dismounted and placed his ear to the ground.

"They've found out we ain't on the Pecos trail, doc," he said. "They're high-tailing it after us. We've got to be purty quick. Off with that coat!"

"What d'you mean?" faltered the doctor.

"Your way lies straight up the pass and right on over the mesa. You can't miss it. Give me yore coat and hat, and I'll fool them crooks. You get me?"

The doctor nodded grimly and stripped off his long black coat, which Buck took from him and donned; then they changed hats.

"You'll have to ride like the wind, doc," said Buck.

"Trust me," said the doctor. "So-long, Buck!"

They shook hands and parted, the doctor heading through the narrow pass for the Broken K; Buck turning back to meet the crooks. He turned aside a bit until he was riding close under the mountains, with a sheer cliff above him. If he had moved farther out from the cliff the crooks might have thought he was going back to Pecos, and have contented themselves with following the man they thought was Buck Moran, and that way looked dangerous for the doctor.

Buck had to make those crooks believe he was Dr. Williams, deliberately going back to the main pass, in order to lead them away from the real doctor. He rode at a furious pace, and he was glad that the sun was taking such a long time to sink, because he saw the dust of the bandits ahead of him, and he wanted them to see his black coat and black Stetson before the night fell black and menacing.

His wishes were granted. He bent low over Smoke's head and rode at a terrific speed close under the cliff until the bandits were fairly close. They saw him and shouted. Their guns spat fire; but the range was too long, and they missed. Buck had his gun in his hand ready for use, and refused to budge an inch from his chosen course. The bandits rode to intercept him, guns blazing, bullets whistling.

Buck was a great believer in bluff. The sun went down behind a mountain-peak, and the light was dim and uncertain. Buck turned his horse and rode direct at the oncoming bandits, his gun blazing furiously. There were four bandits, and as he rode at them one man threw up his arms and dropped from his horse. Another man clutched at his gun-hand; and then Buck wheeled his horse and darted away towards the main pass.

The two remaining bandits were still firing at him, but their aim was erratic. Buck felt a hot, searing pain in his leg, but he gritted his teeth and kept on. He guided Smoke cleverly round a great boulder, and before he was really behind it he leapt from the saddle to the ground.

The bandits saw what he had done, and, thinking he was going to make a siege of it, they halted, dismounted hurriedly, and rushed for cover. Then Buck leapt to the saddle again and galloped furiously on his way, keeping the boulder between himself and his enemies. He was a quarter of a mile away before they tumbled to the ruse and set out after him again, cursing vainly.

But Buck had beaten them. He had the lead and he kept it. Smoke had speed and used it then, while Buck patted the horse's neck and urged him on.

"Good for you, Smoke, you old critter! Ef you ain't the best pal a hombre ever had I'll eat the doc's Stetson—bullet-hole an' all! Keep her going, boy!"

He came to the main pass, and without hesitation galloped along the rocky trail towards the Broken K territory. He saw before him the tree on which the notice had been nailed, and a movement high on the mountainside caught his eye.

In a flash Buck seemed as if about to fall from his horse; but he dropped half-way and hung on, one arm round Smoke's neck, so that the body of his horse was between him and that marksman on the crag. The bandit's gun blazed and bullets whistled over the galloping horse. Buck

had his gun in his right hand, and he poked the weapon under Smoke's outstretched neck.

The bandit let fly again. Buck saw the flash of his gun and fired at it. One shot—but enough. A man started up from amongst the rocks, staggered there on the crag for a moment, then slumped down, with a dose of lead in his shoulder that put him out of action.

After that the way was clear. There were two bandits still pursuing Buck, thinking him to be the doctor, but they could not catch him. Buck held on to his lead and even increased it. Smoke's thundering hoofs aroused the mountain echoes to some purpose, and in less than an hour he was careering over the dark mesa, with the moon rising in the east.

There was no chance of surprise on the plain, and Buck had it all his own way. The bandits remained in the mountains and gave it up as a bad job, while the foreman of the Broken K rode home at his leisure.

When he got to the Broken K outfit Doc Williams was already hard at work saving the life of Jed Hunter, so Buck limped into the bunkhouse, took off his chaps, bared his leg, and extracted the bullet that was buried in his flesh a little way. Fortunately for him, it was only a spent bullet that had hit him, or the result would have been worse.

Colonel Worth sought him out before he turned in to rest. "I'm glad you made it, Buck," he said. "Hear anything in town?"

"Nope," said Buck. "Sheriff may be over in a day or so."

"Good! Jed's got it bad, but he's tough. Doc Williams allows he'll win through, though it'll be a long job. Jed hasn't said a word, and won't be able to speak for hours yet."

"Sure, it's a pity," said Buck. "For it strikes me there's something pretty important he could say. Or why should them ord'nary cusses try to stop the doc fixing Jed up for speaking a-tall?"

"Waal," drawled the colonel, "these things'll get an answer sooner or later. You turn in, Buck; you look done up."

"Sure, I will, then!"

Buck turned in and slept the sleep of the just; and he nearly overslept himself the next morning. But a shot rang out, and the Chinese range cook screamed with terror as the bullet smashed a pan he held. Then there was the splintering of glass as something was hurled through the window of the bunkhouse and dropped at Buck's feet. It was a note wrapped round a stone.

Buck carefully took the paper off, straightened it out, and read it.

"Buck Moran" (it ran).—"You done let Doc Williams through to tend Jed Hudson after we warned you not to, so you'll get yours before twenty-four hours!"

Buck tossed the note down and rushed out without a word of explanation. He saw a rider out on the mesa heading for the foothills. Buck roped Smoke, and, without waiting to put a saddle on him, leapt to his back, and set off in pursuit.

What a race it was! Smoke could foot it when he had to, and Buck knew how to help him along. He wasn't burdened with the weight of a saddle, and he was fresh from the corral hay, whereas the other horse had been out the best part of the night.

That cowboy ahead flogged his horse unmercifully, but it made no difference. Buck was travelling like a train and coming up with him. The fellow whipped out a gun, half-turned, and let fly. Buck crouched low on Smoke's back, and suddenly realised he had no rope, and not even his belt on. He was unarmed, but he refused to turn back. The other chap's horse was faltering in its stride.

Buck steered Smoke on a zigzag course. He lost distance a bit, but he escaped the bullets. Six times the fellow fired, and then his gun was empty. Buck got Smoke back on the straight and all out, gaining on his quarry. Out came another gun, and Buck steered all zigzag again for another six shots. After that the fleeing man had both guns unloaded, and Buck chanced it.

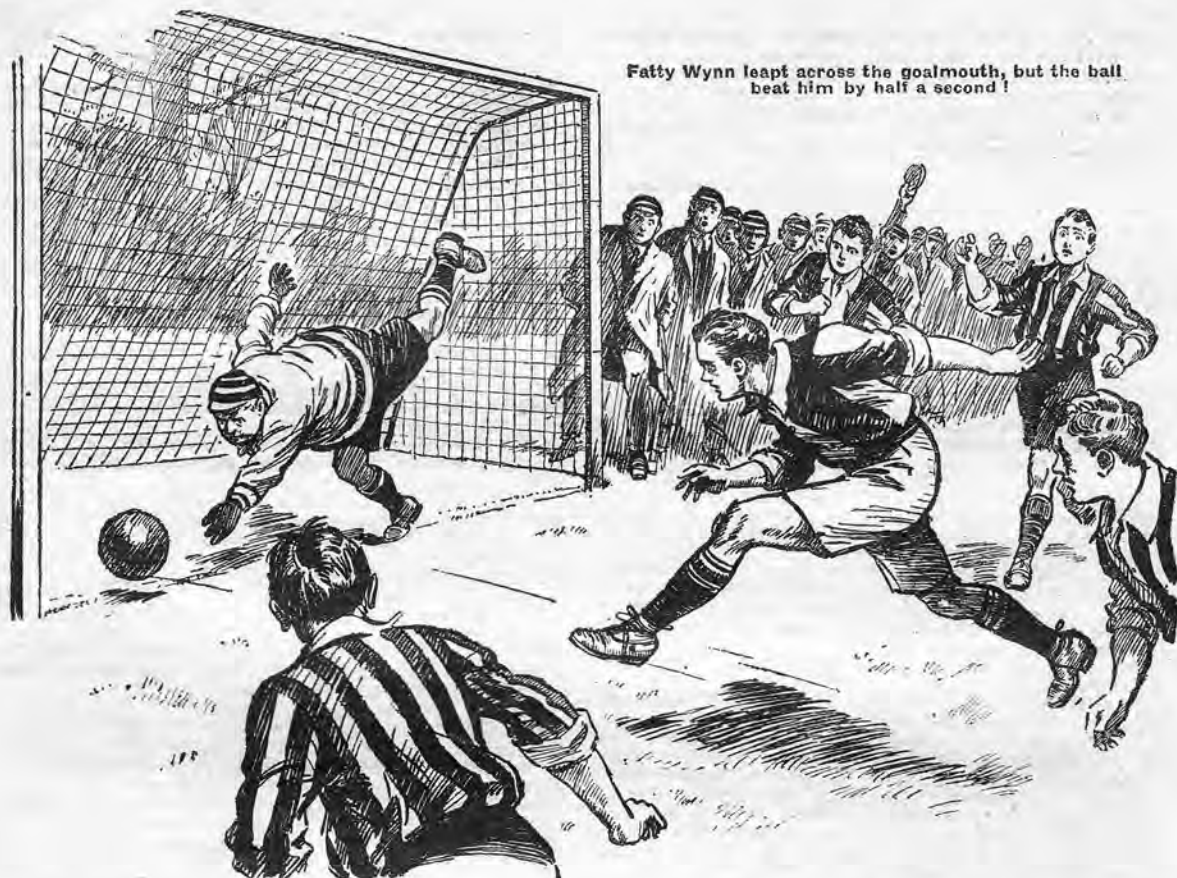
"At him, boy!" he yelled.

Smoke seemed to leap the rest of the distance. The quarry got panicky and dug his spurs hard into his horse's flanks. The animal bounded forward, made a false step, and toppled over in a heap, throwing his rider.

Buck seemed to jump off his horse long before Smoke could come to a standstill. He dropped squarely on the cowboy, got his hands on the fellow's throat, and held him down on the ground.

"Now, what d'you know about that, eh? What you want to run away for? Sure, I only wanted to answer the billet-doo!"

The fellow's eyes goggled, and his tongue lolled out. He was choking. Buck released him, and with a quick movement



master, coming up the stairs caused Baggy to slacken speed hurriedly. He passed Mr. Railton with a very innocent air, then shot off along the Shell passage.

He stopped with a gasp outside the door of Study No. 10, and knocked hurriedly. With a frightened glance over his shoulder Baggy rolled in.

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, was seated by the fireplace jotting down the names of the fellows to play in the match against St. Jim's old rivals, Abbottsford, on the following afternoon—a Saturday. The other three occupants of the famous study—Monty Lowther, Harry Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock, the American junior from New York City, were busy with their prep.

"What do you want, porpoise?" queried Monty Lowther. Baggy did not reply. Along the passage he had heard the heavy footsteps of Gerald Knox. With a squeak of terror he shut the door hurriedly and dived under the table.

"For the love of Mike," ejaculated Cyrus K. Handcock, glancing at his chums through his horn-rimmed glasses in great astonishment, "what do you know about that? Say, you fat hunk o' cheese, what's the big idea? Come out—"

Handcock broke off as the door burst open and Knox glared into the study.

"Any of you kids seen that fat porpoise, Trimble?" demanded Knox, breathing hard.

Tom Merry & Co. did not need any further explanation of Baggy's peculiar behaviour. They understood now.

Baggy Trimble might not be a fellow they particularly liked or admired, but they certainly did not mean to deliver him over to the unpopular prefect.

"Why, it's Knoxy-Woxy!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "I never heard him knock. Although his name is Knox he didn't bother about any knocks, did he, you chaps?"

Knox went crimson. It was true enough that he had opened the door without the usual preliminary of a knock—a thing which Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, for example, would never have dreamed of doing. But Gerald Knox had big ideas of how to treat juniors, and to knock at the door of a junior study was a thing he seldom bothered to do.

"I'm looking for Trimble," he said furiously. "I—"

"Trimble?" echoed Tom Merry, as though he had never heard the name.

"You mean Baggy Trimble," put in Manners doubtfully.

"I guess he must mean Trimble of the Fourth," murmured Cyrus K. Handcock. "That fat guy. Is that the bird you're wanting, Knox?"

Knox breathed very hard.

"Yes. There's only one Trimble, isn't there, you young fools? I'm almost certain I saw him slip into here—"

"Slipped in here?" echoed Monty Lowther. "Somebody must have left a banana skin in the passage if he slipped. You didn't happen to drop a banana skin in the passage this evening, Knox? Or orange peel? I know some of the Sixth have got rather messy habits—"

"Look here," said Knox fiercely, "I'm not going to stand here to be cheeked! I'm looking for Trimble—"

"You won't find him here, anyway," said Tom Merry shortly.

His statement was true enough, seeing that the chums of Study No. 10 had not the slightest intention of allowing Knox to search their study. Knox might be a prefect, but he had no right to enter their study uninvited.

Knox, however, took Tom's remark as a denial of Trimble's presence in the room. With a snort and a glare he withdrew, slamming the door, and his footsteps died away along the passage.

Looking rather yellow, Baggy Trimble protruded a bullet head from under the tablecloth and blinked round, like a tortoise looking out from its shell.

"Ow!" gasped Baggy. "Has the beast gone?"

"Yes," laughed Manners. He grasped Baggy's ear with a finger and thumb, and drew Baggy forth. "What's the trouble, Baggy? What have you been doing to Knox?"

"Yoooooop! Yow! Leggo my ear!" Baggy scrambled out, and stood up, rubbing his fat ear indignantly, and glaring at the grinning Manners. "I—I—ahem! I dunno why Knox is after me, as a matter of fact."

"I guess that's a steep yarn!" drawled Handcock.

"Oh, really, Handcock—"

"Been raiding his tuck?" queried Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Oh, really, Merry! Certainly not!"

"Well, scat, anyway!" suggested Monty Lowther. "Knox has cleared off; you can hop it! We're busy!"

Baggy rolled from Study No. 10 with a cautious blink up and down the passage. There was no sign of Knox. The Falstaff of the Fourth scuttled off to make himself

scarce till bed-time. He would have to keep very clear of Gerald Knox for some little time to come!

But though Baggy Trimble had fallen foul of the unpopular prefect, thanks to his fall into the moat at the old house on the moor, Baggy did not care. He still had in his pocket the two pounds that Dr. Brusiloff had given him—the price of his silence regarding the queer incident that had taken place at the Moat House; and two pounds seemed more than adequate compensation for a little trouble with Knox of the Sixth!

CHAPTER 3. Dick Lang!

"COME on, Saints!"
"Play up, Abbotsford!"
"On the ball!"

It was the following afternoon, and the match between Tom Merry's eleven and the visitors from Abbotsford was in full swing.

It had been an exciting tussle from the first. The visitors had bagged a goal very early in the game, their inside-right beating Fatty Wynn, the St. Jim's custodian, with a clever head-in from a tussle round the goalmouth, and for a long time St. Jim's had failed to equalise. But they had drawn level a few minutes before half-time, when Monty Lowther had scored off a pass from Levison of the Fourth.

Not long after the change of ends St. Jim's had taken the lead, with a long shot by George Figgins, that had got past the Abbotsford goalie by the skin of its teeth, so to speak. And ever since Abbotsford had been fighting to wipe out the St. Jim's lead with every ounce of determination and energy the team possessed.

But the minutes were flying, and still the visitors had failed to equalise.

"Only ten minutes to go," murmured Manners to Cyrus K. Handcock, on the touchline.

Handcock did not play football, though he was a fine athlete in most other spheres of sport. The American junior had never been able to master the no-handling code! But he usually turned up to watch the junior matches in Little Side, even though he was wont to complain that Soccer lacked the "pep" of the American football game—a statement which his chums of the Shell and Fourth laughed at good-humouredly enough.

"Sure ten more minutes," nodded Handcock. "I guess these Abbotsford guys are sunk!"

But even as he spoke, the Abbotsford half-back line cleverly checked an attack by the St. Jim's forwards, and sent the ball back to the half-way line, where the visiting centre-forward pounced on it, and sped towards the St. Jim's half with the leather dancing at his toes.

"Come on, Abbotsford!" yelled one of the little group of Abbotsford supporters who had come over with their team in the motor-coach.

Jack Blake, at centre-half, tackled the opposing centre-forward, and sent him spinning into the mud with a shoulder-to-shoulder charge, but not before the latter had flashed the ball across to his inside-right.

The Abbotsford inside-right—the same slim, fair-haired fellow who had scored soon after the start of the match—sped on towards the St. Jim's goal, as the centre-forward scrambled up and raced after the attack. Kerr, of the New House, the Scottish junior who played left-half for St. Jim's, raced up to take a hand in things; but the fair-haired youngster in the Abbotsford shirt tricked the St. Jim's man with a clever feint that made it seem as if his intention was to pass to the outside-right. Instead, he swung round Kerr with the ball still at his toes, and flew on towards the goal, where Fatty Wynn was waiting.

"My hat! That chap can play footer!" breathed Manners, his eyes fixed anxiously on the slim figure of the Abbotsford inside-right. "Oh, look out there—"

Kangaroo, the Australian junior, at left-back, was not an easy fellow to get past. But the fair-haired Abbotsford youngster was too much for him on this occasion!

Kangaroo found himself left standing, while the ball went on towards the St. Jim's goal, at the feet of the other fellow. There was an excited yell from the little group of Abbotsfordians on the touchline and exclamations of alarm from the St. Jim's fellows.

"It's up to Fatty!" breathed Manners. "I— Oh, Great Scott!"

The ball, flying swift and low from the foot of the Abbotsford inside-right, had hurtled from the lower right-hand corner of the net. Fatty Wynn had leapt across to save, but the ball had beaten him by half a second! His finger-tips touched it as it whizzed in the goalmouth, and a long blast from the referee's whistle announced that Abbotsford had equalised!

"He's certainly a slick guy," nodded Cyrus K. Handcock.

cock, his eyes on the youngster who had just scored again for the visitors. "I guess he's about the fastest guy on the field—and he's some footballer, too!"

The teams lined up. But, despite the desperate efforts of each of the two teams and some exciting moments, there was no further scoring when the final whistle blew shortly after. The footballers came off the field with the game a two-all draw—Abbotsford having saved themselves from defeat almost at the last minute, thanks to the fair-haired youngster, whose brilliant run almost from the half-way line had brought them level with St. Jim's!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, who had been playing outside-right for the home eleven, adjusted his celebrated monocle, and crossed towards the hero of the rival team as the footballers made their way to the dressing-rooms.

"Pway allow me to congwatulate you, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus gracefully. "That was a wippin' goal of yours, bai Jove! Wathah!"

"Thanks!" laughed the Abbotsford youngster. "Jolly good of you to say so! There was a lot of luck in it, though," he added modestly.

He was a very nice-looking fellow, with frank brown eyes and an attractive smile. Arthur Augustus shook his noble head.

"Wats, deah boy! It was a vewy elevah goal! You must excuse me addressin' you like this," he added, a faint note of anxiety in his tone, "seem' we have not been intwahduced—"

The other broke into a laugh. He evidently did not realise that Arthur Augustus was speaking seriously. He did not know what a stickler for etiquette the swell of St. Jim's was.

"Well, if it'll save you a sleepless night, old chap, I'll introduce myself," he grinned. "My name is Lang—Dick Lang. You are D'Arcy, aren't you?"

"Yaas! Howevah did you know?"
Dick Lang chuckled. Though this was his first visit to St. Jim's with an Abbotsford eleven, he had heard about Arthur Augustus, and thanks to the swell of St. Jim's eyeglass, had been able to recognise him at once.

Before he could answer, Tom Merry came up. He slapped the Abbotsford fellow on the back in a cheery way.

"That was a great goal of yours!" said Tom good-humouredly. "A pity for St. Jim's you buzzed along to-day! I thought we were going to win, candidly—until you put the kybosh on it!"

Lang laughed, and the footballers passed into the changing-rooms, where the hiss of shower-baths was soon the predominant sound.

The Abbotsford team and their supporters were not staying to tea at St. Jim's. They had a long run before them in the motor-coach, and they wanted to get away soon in consequence. A big crowd of St. Jim's fellows gathered in the quad to see them off, as they piled into their coach.

Dick Lang, alone of the Abbotsford men, did not enter the motor-coach. He stood watching his friends climb in, but made no movement to accompany them. Tom Merry, who was standing near, changed into his ordinary clothes once more, crossed towards him, and touched him on the arm.

"Not going with the others?" he asked, in surprise.

"No," said Lang. "I've got an uncle who lives near Wayland—at a place called Thorpe Court. I'm taking the chance to look him up. I'll go on to Abbotsford by train afterwards."

"Oh, I see!" Tom knew Thorpe Court vaguely—a house on the other side of Wayland, which he remembered having passed once or twice. "Well, look here, I and some pals of mine are going into Wayland in a minute by car. Better let us give you a lift!"

Lang's face lit up.

"That's jolly good of you!"

Followed by a hearty cheer, the Abbotsford eleven—minus Dick Lang—and their supporters, rolled out of the gates in the big motor-coach, Lang waving cheerily to his friends, and the St. Jim's fellows giving their old rivals a rousing send-off. The Abbotsford crowd vanished down Rylcombe Lane, and Tom turned to where Monty Lowther, Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock were standing.

Cyrus K. Handcock was the son of an American multimillionaire, and was the owner of a magnificent thousand-pound car that was the envy of all St. Jim's, though they were growing more used to it now! Handcock was running it into Wayland for a grease-up at a garage there, after which Tom Merry & Co. intended to look in at Spalding Hall, the girls' school near Wayland, where their girl chums, Ethel Cleveland & Co., were pupils. For once, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was Ethel's cousin, and Blake & Co., were not accompanying them. The chums of the Fourth had arranged to wind up a strenuous day in the

TIP-TOP YARN OF LIVELY ADVENTURE IN THE ROYAL NAVY!



(For opening chapters, see resume on page 26.)

The Friendly Steward!

NED rose and began to tramp up and down the room restlessly.

The more he considered it the worse the outlook seemed to him. Here he was caught in the act of changing one of the very notes for which his brother Ralph, having failed to guard, had been turned out of the Service in disgrace. And there were many who believed Ralph Hardy was guilty of worse than mere carelessness.

Ned knew his brother was innocent—Ralph's word was enough for him. But that was no help.

"Wonder what will be the end of this?" said Ned to himself. "I suppose there'll be a court martial. Perhaps they won't think it worth while with a midshipman. Only a snottie turned out of the Service," he added bitterly. "Nobody cares about that, I suppose. I never heard of a midshipman being court martialled. Perhaps I shall be the first."

"This will pretty nearly kill the dad. First Ralph, and then me. Never a stain on the name till now!"

Ned was looking on the black side of things. Any ordinary danger in the open he would have cared little for, but this ugly threat of ruin, and the taking up of the family disgrace again, shook him badly. He thought over the position rapidly.

"Can there be any doubt about those banknotes? Did they come from father?" he pondered. "No, I'm ready to swear that on the Book."

"Next thing is, did those men who went for me in the train really put them in my pocket-book? If so, what should they do such a rotten thing? Why should they want stolen notes to be found on me?"

It occurred to Ned that they were afraid of changing the notes and took the opportunity of taking his "tenner" which they could dispose of without risk, and putting the two stolen ones in its place.

"But that isn't what they tackled me for," said Ned to himself. "It was that message for Mr. Elking they were after—the one I sewed into the lining of my coat. They didn't get it, and they must have changed those notes as an afterthought. Or did they mean to do it all along?"

"How on earth am I going to explain that? Here I am, landed in this beastly fix, and very likely poor old Ralph will be dragged into it again! I wish Mytton had never

given me the message at all—it's the cause of all the trouble."

He paused and listened to the sound, which he could just hear, of the Marines changing guard overhead. The sentry at the door was silent. It made Ned feel his position all the more. He was no longer an officer, commanding the smartest cutter on the ship, but a caged prisoner with an armed man to guard him. A doubt crept into Ned's mind.

"Was I right to refuse to tell the captain?" he said. "He's my chief, after all. I belong to the Navy. What have I got to do with the Secret Service, or whatever it is? My job is to do my duty here, and obey orders."

"I believe I've been a fool. What right had I got to keep my mouth shut when the owner told me to speak? And yet a fellow can't do less than keep his word. Oh, what a mess it is! They'll have to send for Mr. Elking, and he must put me right. I wonder what the skipper's doing?"

Captain Raglan, monarch of the Victorious and all her nine hundred men, was fully as worried as the midshipman, and perhaps more so. When Ned had left the cabin in charge of the file of Marines, the captain took up the fatal banknotes again and examined them with a grim frown.

He looked through a series of papers—the depositions of Lieutenant Hardy's court martial, and other documents—which he took from a drawer. He studied these for some time, and then lay back thoughtfully in his chair. Presently he struck the bell and sent a message to the commander, requesting his

attendance. That officer at once appeared.

It was not every captain in the Fleet who would have confided in his commander in such a matter, but there was a strong confidence between the two, and the captain knew how thoroughly Commander Langford was in touch with the ship's company—a thing no battleship's captain ever is.

"Two of the stolen banknotes, found on Hardy, the midshipman," said Captain Raglan briefly, pointing to them.

The commander was thunderstruck. He could hardly believe his ears. Captain Raglan told him in a few words what had happened.

"It's rash to make shots," said the commander, "but I will stake a year's pay that youngster is innocent of any hand in it."

A FOREIGN SPY ABOARD!

Ned Hardy's proved himself.

"That's easy to say, Langford. We've got to face the facts. Those are the notes, beyond all doubt, and the boy refuses to say a word. As good as defied me here in my cabin!"

"Where is he now, sir?"

"Under arrest. It's an ugly business, Langford—an infernally ugly business," said the captain, biting his lip. "Rather against my judgment I allowed this midshipman to remain on the Victorious, when he should never have been sent at all. But I find I was wrong!"

"I hope this business will be cleared up, sir, for up till now the boy could not have done better. He's quick and well disciplined, handles his boat well, and that was a very plucky rescue of his when the first cutter was run down."

"I like the boy myself. But nothing could be more appalling than this, for him and for us. His silence is more than I can understand. I ordered him to speak."

"Perhaps he's afraid of injuring his brother. He may have had the notes from Lieutenant Hardy, sir, without knowing what they were."

"That does not excuse his refusal to explain when ordered," said Captain Raglan. "It makes matters all the worse. But I do not believe that is the reason. It was never my opinion that Lieutenant Hardy had anything to do with the actual robbery, though he was guilty of neglect."

"The notes being found on his brother has a very ugly look," said the commander, "but if the youngster had known anything about it he would not have been such a fool as to try and change them on this ship, of all places. I suppose it means more trouble," he added gloomily.

There is nothing a naval officer hates more than any slur on the name of his ship. The Victorious' crew were sore enough already over the affair.

Captain Raglan tapped his foot on the floor impatiently.

"My obvious course now would be to report the case and call a court martial. But I would avoid that if I could. I hate to have this scandal raked up again publicly when it was beginning to be forgotten."

"Suppose we have Hardy in, sir, and give him one more chance to speak?" suggested the commander. "Now that he has had a taste of the guard-room, and time to think it over, he may come to his senses."

"I shall give him one more opportunity," said Captain Raglan; "not now, however, but this afternoon, in the second dog-watch. Come again at six bells, Langford; I wish you to be here and watch the boy's demeanour. In the meantime, I shall make private inquiries elsewhere about these notes."

The commander departed, and, sharp disciplinarian though he was, when he passed the door of the guard-room, he felt a strong touch of sympathy for the youngster inside.

Could he have seen through the door, he would have found Ned Hardy keeping his spirits up under difficulties, and getting plenty of exercise by tramping round the cell. He did it to keep himself from thinking over his troubles, which were depressing to dwell upon. The room, for that matter, was a depressing place. It is not usual to send arrested officers to the guard-room, but the circumstances of Ned's case—involving not mere insubordination, but felony—were so grave that it had been done.

Ned thought he had never known the time to drag with such deadly slowness. The minutes seemed like hours. None the less, he did not fare badly as regards food. Every man—especially in the Navy—is considered innocent until he is proved guilty. At the usual meal-time, the second gun-room steward was admitted, and brought Ned a good, sound luncheon on a tray.

"Uncommon sorry there's any trouble. 'Ope it'll be all right, sir," murmured the steward, as he set the food down, for, with the exception of Grimshaw and Wexton, everybody in the gun-room liked Ned.

"I expect it will, Jessop," said the midshipman, glad to hear a friendly voice. "It's precious dull in here. No letters for me, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think there's one, sir."

"Is there, though?" said Ned, with a sudden flash of hope, he hardly knew why. "I wish you could bring it along to me."

"I'raid they wouldn't let me, sir," whispered the

steward quickly, with a glance at the sentry in the doorway. "No communications allowed. But I'll get orders to get you tea, an' bring it in then, sir, if I can."

"Do, there's a good fellow!" said Ned, under his breath; and the door was locked again.

Ned's appetite was a thing nothing could damp, and though he had not much heart for food at first, he dismissed his troubles from his mind for a while, and made short work of the lunch, feeling much better for it.

When that was done, he wished it was tea-time. Not that he was hungry, but because he wanted to get hold of the letter. He could hardly have told why he was so anxious for it—there was not the least likelihood it would do him any good. But it would give him something else to think about. Most likely it was from his father. News from home would be welcome, at any rate, in his present crisis.

The afternoon seemed longer than the morning, but at last the steward appeared, bringing tea. He gave a quick wink at Ned as he came in, and slipped a letter into the midshipman's hand as he put the tray down. Ned transferred the letter swiftly to his pocket.

"Thanky, Jessop," he murmured. "I'll make it a good tip when I come out."

"I don't want no tip for doin' that, sir," returned the steward, under his breath. "Mr. Jinks, he told me to tell you they're all wishin' you luck, an' to keep your upper lip stiff."

It was something to get a cheering message from friends outside, at any rate. As soon as the door was shut and locked, Ned pulled the letter from his pocket and was disappointed to see the address was typewritten—it was only a bill or a circular, he supposed. But as he ripped the envelope open, and recognised a well-known handwriting inside, his face lit up.

"From Ralph!" he exclaimed.

The missive was dated from an address at Southampton. His brother had changed his quarters from Chatham. Ned read it eagerly, his eyes opening wider with amazement at each line.

The Sham Marine!

"MY DEAR NED,—I hope you're pulling along all right on the big war-canoe, and am delighted to hear you're getting on well with the fellows on board, after all. I've had some news of you, you see—not very much, though—although you don't know it. It seems you've done a gallant rescue act, and are getting quite popular. Good for you, kid."

"I've heard from Mr. Elking"—Ned was startled to find his brother knew that mysterious personage—"about your adventure in the train, which you came out of so luckily. That was a queer business—more so than you've guessed. Now, I want you to do something for me."

"You will probably know those men again who went for you in the railway carriage. Elking tells me you described them exactly, and I know you've sharp eyes. I may tell you they're known to us, and are both of them foreign spies. They are not Germans. We licked Germany, and we're on pretty good terms with her. They and their bosses are worse enemies of England than Germany ever was."

"These men are paid agents of the robber gang in Red Russia, and now that there's nothing left to rob in their own country, they're out after Britain. They hate our Government, our King, our People, they're working underground to try and wreck us—they're not out to play for liberty, but to destroy it and loot us. But most of all, they hate the British Navy, because they know it stands for freedom, and it's the first defence of the British people. They're trying to make the Navy rotten from the inside, like maggots gnawing the core of a healthy apple."

"They have gone for me because they know that I know a bit too much about them—not everything, but enough to be dangerous to them. And so they've done their best to out me—and succeeded."

"One of them, especially, had a down on me, for I once crossed his hawser, and made things hot for him. I can't prove it, for he's done

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

MIDSHIPMAN NED HARDY, son of a line of sea captains, is appointed to the Victorious, the same ship from which his brother Ralph has been cashiered in connection with a robbery. Ned succeeds in winning his footing among the middies by saving a bluejacket's life. Misfortune, however, soon befalls the new snotty, for a note stolen from the ship's safe is found in his possession. Bound to secrecy, Ned is unable to state the true facts of the case, with the result that he is placed under arrest and put in the guard-room.

(Now read on.)

it very cleverly indeed, but I'm pretty sure he was at the bottom of the plot that got me court martialled and broken over that safe-robbery on the Victorious. There was more spying than stealing, in that job."

Ned lowered the letter, and gave an amazed whistle.

"I'm blessed if here isn't the clue to it!" he exclaimed. "This is the reason those swabs shoved the stolen notes on to me—to make things look all the more black against Ralph! They knew I was his brother, then!"

The rest of the letter, however, was still more startling.

"So much for your two assailants of the railway. But here is a piece of news which you'll probably laugh at. It is my belief, from information at hand, that one of them is on board the Victorious at the present moment and you may possibly even recognise him. It is not the

test it should get into the hands of someone it's not intended for.

"Yours always,
"RALPH."

Ned sat down with a bump on the bench, and stared before him with knitted brows. Ralph's news started a sudden train of thought in his mind.

"By Jove, I remember now!" he exclaimed. "That chap in the black clothes, who helped the red-bearded brute to scrag me! I've somehow been reminded of him once or twice lately—though I can't tell how, or why. Those rammy eyes of his! I wonder—"

It was as if a kind of vague recollection had struck him in the last day or two, of noticing somebody on the ship whom he had seen before, but could not quite place.

"A Marine?" he said to himself. "No, I can't call



"That's the man I got the notes from!" cried Ned. "He's a spy! Arrest him!"

one with the red beard, whom you described to Elking, but the other.

"Mind, I won't swear to it, but I think it is so, and I want you to keep your eyes open. If I am right, this man has changed places with a Marine private named Beckett, whom he closely resembles, and is at present on board in Beckett's place. Private Beckett—whom I believe to be a shady customer himself—had not been on the Victorious long, and if I'm not mistaken, this spy of yours is successfully impersonating him.

"Now, I want you, Ned, to get a look at this man when you have a chance, and see if you think he is the ruffian who attacked you in the train. His uniform and other matters, will, no doubt, disguise him more or less; but it's my belief you've sharp enough eyesight to spot anyone you've once seen, and he's no ordinary man.

"If you are convinced he is the one, communicate at once with Mr. Elking or me, and you had best say nothing to anyone else if you can help it, and leave the job in Elking's hands, for they don't want any more public scandals aboard the Victorious.

"But if there is any trouble with the man, of course you will at once tell the captain all you know, if he asks you. Always instantly obey your commanding officer; for, remember, your first duty is to your ship and to the Navy, before me and my work, or anything else.

"In any case, burn this letter as soon as you've read it.

any one of 'em to mind in particular. And yet it's as though I'd seen those queer eyes of that fellow in black somewhere lately. I must look out for him. What's his name—Beckett?"

Ned glanced through the letter again, and then jumped to his feet.

"My Christian aunt; but this is the limit!" he said. "Is it possible the man's aboard here? Old Ralph must be doing Secret Service work, too! For he said he meant to help the Navy yet, even though he was kicked out. Who is the spy? Fancy, the beast daring to come on to the Victorious!"

Ned began to pace up and down, his excitement rising. "This ought to help me out," he exclaimed. "And good old Ralph's right—the skipper's my chief, and he's the one for me to obey. I've made an ass of myself! By George, I wonder if the captain'll ever forgive me now, whatever happens?" he added in dismay. "I reckon I've torn it!"

There was a sudden tramping in the alleyway outside; the voice of the sentry answered an order, and the key grated in the lock. Ned hurriedly stuffed the letter into his pocket, as the door swung open. The Marine corporal and file entered.

"Mr. Hardy to the captain's cabin, sir, please!" said the corporal, and the midshipman marched off between the two men.

As they approached the cabin, Captain Raglan appeared

in the doorway, but stopped as he saw Ned. The Marine sentry on guard took a pace to one side, and as Ned's gaze fell on his face, the midshipman halted as if shot.

Ned's eyes scanned the sentry's features keenly, and instantly the signal flashed itself into the boy's brain—here was his man; Ned might easily have passed him twenty times without noticing him particularly. But now, with Ralph's warning fresh in his mind, the boy's eyes were opened.

The face seemed altered; there was a stiff military moustache on the upper lip. The man certainly had the bearing of a soldier. Yet those strange, dark eyes, and a tiny scar on the point of the jaw, recalled to Ned in an instant the whole scene in the train.

To find the spy at the very door of the captain's cabin, unsuspected by anybody, was a stunning surprise.

"That's the man I got the notes from!" cried Ned, the words leaping from his tongue. "He's a spy! Arrest him!"

Captain Raglan and the corporal's file were all astounded at this sudden outburst; the sentry himself, losing his nerve and turning pale, gave such a visible start that the excited Ned thought he was going to make a bolt for it, and impetuously hurled himself at the man.

"Look out for him! He's as slippery as an eel!" exclaimed Ned, pinning the Marine back against the wall.

"What's 'e playing at? Hold him off!" gasped the sentry, his rifle falling with a clatter, and the next moment he was struggling violently with Ned.

"Are you mad, Mr. Hardy?" cried the captain angrily, as the astonished corporal and file dashed forward to separate them. "Back, sir! Stand back instantly!"

"Don't let him go!" panted Ned to the file, as he obeyed and relinquished the sentry. "He's no more a Marine than you are, sir. He's the spy who drugged me in the train! I know him, the swab!"

"What?" said Captain Raglan.

"Spy? Why it's Private Beckett!" said the corporal, surprised into speech, even in the face of discipline.

"The young gentleman's off his rocker!" gasped Beckett. The corporal stared at Ned, evidently thinking him a dangerous lunatic. Yet, extraordinary as the midshipman's assertion was, Captain Raglan gave one keen glance at the panting sentry's face, and thought he saw him wince slightly.

"Silence, all!" said the captain quietly. "Mr. Hardy, I shall give you an opportunity of explaining this extraordinary behaviour. Corporal, remain here on guard with your file!" He turned to the sentry. "Come into the cabin!"

The man saluted silently, and followed the captain and

Ned. The sentry's manner was one of such astonishment and bewilderment that Ned might well have thought he had made a foolish mistake. But he glanced again at the Marine's eyes, and felt more certain than ever. He needed to, for Ned realised that he had got himself into a pretty fix if the man was innocent.

Commander Langford was in the cabin, wondering greatly at the fracas, all of which he had naturally overheard. The captain signed to him to remain, and then turned sternly to the young officer.

"Well, Mr. Hardy," he said briefly, "have you any proof of what you say?"

Ned pulled his wits together—he saw he would need them.

"Yes, sir," said the midshipman quietly.

"What did you mean by saying this man is not a Marine?" asked the captain curtly. "Do you assert that to his face?"

"Yes, sir. I know that he is a spy! He and another man attacked me on the train on my way here the day I joined the ship, chloroformed me, and tried to rob me of a valuable document!"

"I have heard nothing of this," said the captain sternly. "You did not mention it this morning."

"No, sir; but I'm sorry," Ned blurted out. "I'd been told to keep it secret."

"Proceed, Mr. Hardy," said the captain grimly. "You say this man tried to rob you?"

"He did not find what he was after, sir. But I am convinced he placed in my pocket-book the two stolen banknotes, in place of the ten-pound note which I had before. And I believe him to be here as a spy, and that he's not Private Beckett at all."

The captain turned to the sentry, who was standing to attention.

"You have heard Mr. Hardy's charge, sentry," he said curtly. "What reply do you make?"

The Marine's rather stupid stare of wondering innocence was convincing enough.

"I dunno what Mr. Hardy means, sir," he said. "I don't think 'e can be well. I'm Private Beckett, that came from the depot six weeks ago. All my company knows me."

Captain Raglan struck the bell.

"Send the sergeant-major of Marines here!" he said to the relief sentry who answered the bell.

(Ned Hardy's dropped a bombshell, and no mistake. But he's not proved his innocence yet by long chalks! Don't miss the next instalment of this gripping yarn of the Fighting Navy, whatever you do, chums!)

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