

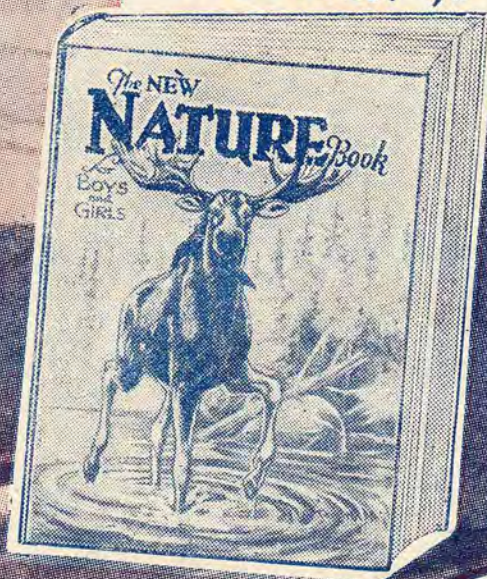
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BAGGY, THE LADY-KILLER, FALLS FOR MARIE DOUVAR—



The Mystery

A long complete mystery and school yarn, featuring
Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy is Determined!

"MY hat! Here is the ass!"
"Talk of giddy angels—"

"Where the dickens have you been, Gussy, you chump?"

Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and George Herries and Robert Arthur Digby, also of the Fourth, surveyed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, their noble chum and study-mate, with exasperated faces.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were sitting at a table in a teashop in Wayland, the little town near the school. The door of the shop had just opened, and the immaculate figure of Arthur Augustus had come sailing in, his glossy topper gleaming gorgeously, his eyeglass carefully adjusted in his aristocratic eye.

"Bai Jove! Hallo, dear boys—"

"You silly footer—"

"G'weat Scott! Weally, Hewwies—"

"Where the dickens have you been?" roared Blake.

Arthur Augustus sat down at the little table, and surveyed his chums with a haughty glance through his famous monocle.

"Weally, Blake! I have f'wequently told you that I st'wongly wesent bein' woahed at!" said the swell of St. Jim's severely.

Blake breathed hard.

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—HE GIVES HER A DIAMOND RING—AND GETS HIS FACE SLAPPED!

Schoolboy Schoolgirl



Gussy's long-suffering study-mates felt that they had every reason to roar at Arthur Augustus.

It was Tuesday evening, and the chums of Study No. 6 had agreed to go into Wayland as soon as afternoon school was over and visit the cinema there, where rather a special film was being shown. It was, in fact, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself who had suggested it, the swell of St. Jim's having received a handsome remittance from home that morning, and wishing, in his generous way, to stand his chums a little treat on the strength of it.

But after classes that afternoon Arthur Augustus had mysteriously vanished! Blake, Herries, and Digby being all "broke to the wide," the visit to the cinema was impossible without their noble chum. They had only a shilling or so between them—just enough to stand themselves a cup of tea each—when they had finally gone into Wayland by themselves, very exasperated, in the faint hope of finding Arthur Augustus waiting at the cinema.

With nothing else to do, they had been lingering long over their meagre cups of tea, and had been discussing Arthur Augustus in a way that should have made that noble youth's aristocratic ears burn, wherever he was!

And now, evidently by the merest chance, the swell of St. Jim's had dropped into the same teashop, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that he had let his chums down.

"Well, ass!" snorted Herries.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Hewwies!"

"What about that cinema show, chump?" demanded Digby warmly. "Where have you been, idiot? What did you go and do the giddy vanishing trick for, burler?"

"Look heah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, going very pink. "I wefuse to sit heah and be addressed in this wude mannah! I considah—"

"But the cinema!" roared Blake.

"The—the cinemah?" echoed Arthur Augustus. "What cinemah?"

"You mean to say you've forgotten you'd promised to stand treat at the cinema?" gasped Herries.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus looked really dismayed. "I am afwaid it had uttably slipped my memow!"

"You—you—you—" Words failed Blake. He surveyed Arthur Augustus hopelessly.

"I am weally fwightfully sowwy, deah boys! The fact is, Cousin Ethel—"

"What's Cousin Ethel got to do with it?" demanded Digby impatiently.

"I had a telephone message fwom Ethel at dinnah-time," explained Arthur Augustus. "She asked me to buzz ovah to Spaldin' Hall to see her about somethin'—"

"And, of course, you clean forgot all about the cinema at once, you dummy!" groaned Herries. "You would!"

"Bai Jove! What do you mean, Hewwies?"

Arthur Augustus glared at George Herries, with a face that had gone suddenly scarlet.

Ethel Cleveland, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's cousin, who was a pupil at Spalding Hall, a school for girls near Wayland, was a great chum of many of the juniors at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus, in particular, had a very keen admiration for his pretty cousin—a fact about which his chums sometimes were inclined to pull his noble leg.

"You'd forget your own blessed funeral if Ethel rang you up, of course!" sniffed Herries.

"Look heah, Hewwies! If you are twyin' to imply—"

"I'm not trying to imply anything," grinned Herries. "Oh, well—if it was Ethel, I suppose it's no use grumbling. But you're an ass!"

"Always were, and always will be!" growled Blake.

"Wats!"

"Well, let's get out of here!" grunted Digby. "It's too late to go to the first house at the cinema, and we can't go to the second because of call-over, so we'd better shove back to the school, I suppose. Come on! Bring that idiot Gussy on a lead, someone."

Blake paid the bill, and the four chums of the Fourth emerged into the old-fashioned High Street, and turned in the direction of the road to St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus was looking quite apologetic.

"I am weally vewy sowwy to have let you fellows down about the cinemah—"

"Br-r-r!"

"I can undahstand that you are a twifle exaspewated—"

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not considah that an intelligent wemark, Blake!"

"Oh, gag him, somebody, do!" groaned Blake.

"As a mattah of fact, Ethel wanted to see me about wathah an important mattah," went on Arthur Augustus, with a sniff, ignoring Blake's remark. "It appears that there is a new gal comin' to Spaldin' Hall, deah boys—a gal named Mawie Douvah—"

"Marie Douvar?" echoed Digby. "That's the girl that

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Ethel told us about before, who was to have turned up a few weeks back, but was ill or something, isn't it?"

"That is the gal," nodded Arthur Augustus. "Well, she is awwivin' at last, to-morrow afternoon. As you know, she is a Wussian gal—at least, she was born in Wussia, but her parents were killed in the Wussian revolution, and she has been brought up in England evah since she was a baby. She is goin' into the Fifth Form—the same Form as Ethel and Dowis and Peggay—"

"Well, what about her, anyway?" growled Blake.

The leader of the Fourth, in his present exasperated mood, was not feeling inclined to display much interest in the arrival at Spalding Hall of Marie Douvar.

"Ethel & Co. have awwanged a little tea-party in their study," explained Arthur Augustus imperturbably, "to welcome her on her awwival. She wanted to ask if you fellows and Tom Mewwy & Co. would join the party to-morrow afternoon."

Blake brightened. Then his face fell. He shook his head. "Can't be did! There's a practice match on to-morrow afternoon, because of the match against the Grammar School on Saturday. We couldn't get over to Spalding Hall in time."

Arthur Augustus halted in dismay.

"Gwout Scott!"

"Don't mean to say you'd forgotten the practice match?" yelled Blake. "You didn't tell the girls we'd go?"

"As a mattah of fact, I had—and I did!" Arthur Augustus looked genuinely distressed. "This is wotten!"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Herries.

"No, it can't be helped," agreed Arthur Augustus, with a shake of his noble head. "But I shall be sowwy to miss the footah to-morrow—"

"What?" gasped Blake. "Miss the footer? You burbling dummy! You jolly well aren't going to miss the footer!"

"But how can I play footah if I am ovah at Spalding Hall, deah boy?" pointed out the swell of St. Jim's in reasonable tones.

Blake chuckled rather dryly.

"My dear old chump, you won't be over at Spalding Hall! You'll stay and play in the match, whether you like it or not. You'll have to write and explain to Ethel to-night. You needn't think we're going to have you letting the study down, Gussy! We're all in the game, and we're all going to play! Study No. 6 isn't going to have any blessed shirkers!"

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to be alluded to as a shirkah—"

"Besides," went on Blake, "you jolly well need all the footer practice you can get before the Grammar School match! See? We don't want any of your fluffly business on Saturday!"

"Bai Jove! If you considah my play fluffay—"

Arthur Augustus again came to a halt, surveying Blake with a wrathful eye.

"You're jolly well playing, anyhow!" said Blake vehemently.

"I considah that my dutay to the gals—"

"Rats! What about you duty to the giddy team?"

"I considah that my footah, if I may say so without appealin' to boast, is of a sufficiently high standard for me to miss a pwactice match!" said Arthur Augustus with a lofty sniff.

"Well, think again," grunted Herries. "Blake's right—you're not going to let the study down by shirking the game to-morrow!"

"Rather not!" put in Digby.

"Of course," said Blake thoughtfully. "I can understand Ethel and the girls being keen to show a funny thing like you to the new girl—bound to make her laugh. But—"

That was a little too much for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! He hit out with a noble fist, and four aristocratic knuckles landed forcefully on Blake's nose. Blake gave a yell.

"Yarooooogh! Oh, by hat! By doze—"

He hurled himself at the swell of St. Jim's. Clapsed in each other's arms, the pair seemed to be executing a Red Indian war-dance. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's gleaming

topper went flying into the road, and Blake's cap joined it there. They went sprawling into the dust together a few seconds later, and there was a gasp from Blake, who was underneath.

"Oh! Yow!"

"Have you had enough, Blake?" panted the swell of St. Jim's breathlessly. "I do not wish to quawwel with you, but if you do not apologise for your offensive wemarks, I shall considah it my dutay to administah a feahful thwashin'—"

Arthur Augustus got no farther. Blake, with a heave, had rolled him over sideways, and the next moment it was Blake who was on top, with the swell of St. Jim's underneath.

"Bai Jove! You wottah, you are wuinin' my jacket—"

"I'll teach you to punch me on the nose!" roared Blake, taking his noble chum's own nasal organ between finger and thumb and pulling hard.

"Oh! Gwoooooh! Leggo by doze, you uttah wottah—"

There was a sudden warning shout from Digby.

"Look out!"

Round the bend of the lane a big car had come swinging, travelling fast.

At sight of the two struggling figures in the road, the chauffeur swerved desperately to avoid them. The spinning front wheel on the near side of the car shot past within inches of Blake's startled face and there was a faint screeching sound as the big tyre flattened out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's topper.

Arthur Augustus, despite the narrow shave he and Blake had experienced, gave an anguished howl as he saw the ruination of his best hat. He scrambled up and rushed to where it lay, while the big car slowed down and stopped.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stood with the flattened topper in his hand, surveying it with feelings too deep for words.

From the window of the big limousine, the face of the man within appeared looking back angrily towards the juniors; a foreign-looking face, with a neat pointed beard and black, glittering eyes.

"Young fools!" snarled the man. "You deserve to have been killed—fooling in the road like this! Tehah!"

He gave a guttural exclamation, said something to his chauffeur, and the car went on.

"See who that was?" said Herries quickly. "It was that chap who lives at the Moat House—Dr. Brusiloff, his name is, Tom Merry told me. He's a giddy Russian."

"Blow him, anyway!" growled Blake, dusting down his clothes. "Come on! Gussy, you dummy—"

"I considah—"

But Blake, Herries, and Digby had no time to wait and listen to what Arthur Augustus considered about the ruination of his cherished topper! They marched off, and after a glare in their direction the dishevelled swell of St. Jim's flung his smashed tile into the hedge with a dismal groan, and went after them.

Of one thing, at any rate, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was quite determined!

What ever his chums might think, or say, Arthur Augustus meant to "cut" footer on the following afternoon, and be present at Spalding Hall to assist at the welcome there of the new girl, Marie Douvar!

CHAPTER 2.

The Fugitive Schoolboy!

IN a first-class carriage of the London express that steamed out of Wayland Junction Station only a few minutes after the wrecking of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's topper, Dr. Brusiloff sat smoking a cigarette with a satisfied smile at the corners of his lips.

Dr. Brusiloff, strangely enough, was also thinking just then about Spalding Hall and Marie Douvar!

His thoughts would certainly have astonished Arthur Augustus—or anyone else at St. Jim's, for that matter!

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Dr. Brusiloff and his confederates alone knew that the supposed Marie Douvar who was to arrive at Spalding Hall the following afternoon was a substitute for the real Marie Douvar—and that the real Marie was a prisoner at the Moat House!

There was an amazing secret behind that startling fact. Marie Douvar was the last of an aristocratic Russian family, which, with the exception of herself, had been wiped out in the Russian revolution. A faithful servant of the Douvars had succeeded after many years in tracing the whereabouts of the girl, who had been brought up in England; and this man Lazaroff had smuggled out of Russia at risk of his life a box containing the family jewels of the Douvars—a magnificent collection of some of the finest stones in the world, worth, all told, the best part of a million pounds!

Dr. Brusiloff, on behalf of the Russian Secret Service, had been entrusted with the task of intercepting those jewels and gaining possession of them.

A month ago he had kidnapped Marie while the girl had been on her way to Spalding Hall, believing that she could help him to get hold of the jewels that were being brought to her by Lazaroff.

Lazaroff, too, had been captured, and had died in a desperate attempt to escape from the Moat House. He had died without having revealed the secret of the whereabouts of the jewels—a secret which, with his death, no one in the world knew.

Brusiloff knew something, however! He knew, at any rate, that Lazaroff, while visiting Spalding Hall in search of Marie, had entered the school with the box of jewels—and had come out without it!

The jewels were, therefore, certainly hidden somewhere at Spalding Hall. But whereabouts he did not know. That was a thing which no one knew!

"But I shall find them! In the end I shall find them!" Brusiloff muttered the words with a smile of satisfaction on his thin lips as the express roared on towards London.

It was partly in order to find the hiding-place of the jewels that Brusiloff had arranged for a substitute to go to Spalding Hall in the name of Marie Douvar. Partly that, and partly the fact that if the girl failed to arrive at the school at all, investigations would be set afoot that might prove decidedly awkward for Dr. Brusiloff! He had averted suspicion for a few weeks by means of two bogus letters to Miss Finch, the little headmistress—forgeries that had seemed to come from the firm of solicitors who ran Marie's affairs. According to these letters, Marie had been ill, and unable to come to the school for the time being.

That Miss Finch would never dream for a moment that she was being deceived as to the identity of her new pupil, the scoundrelly Russian was convinced.

But the real identity of the supposed Marie Douvar who was to take the place at Spalding Hall of the prisoner of the Moat House, would have staggered the St. Jim's juniors even more than anything else, had they known the truth! Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, in particular, would have had the surprise of his life.

Dick Lang, a junior from Abbotsford—a school that was an old rival of St. Jim's on the footer field, had run away from Abbotsford three weeks before, after being accused of a theft which he had not committed.

With the police searching for him, Dick Lang had been on his way to London to find work, when, while in company with Tom Merry, who had befriended him in his

plight, Dr. Brusiloff and his wife had seen Dick, and been struck with the amazing likeness he bore to Marie Douvar.

Unknown to Tom Merry, the Brusiloffs had made an amazing proposal to Dick—that he should take the place of the girl he so strikingly resembled, and be sent under her name to Spalding Hall, there to search for the hidden jewels!

Dick, penniless and homeless, wanted by the police, had accepted the bargain offered. In return for his service to the Brusiloffs he was to be given a hundred pounds when the jewels were found—enough money to get him safely out of the country to start life afresh.

Never for a moment had the "wanted" schoolboy realised that the Brusiloffs were anything but the kind of



With grinning faces, the chums of the Shell watched the descent of Gussy in the arms of Blake & Co.!



people they had made themselves appear to be! He did not guess that Dr. Brusiloff was an utter scoundrel; but believed, on the other hand, that the jewels hidden at Spalding Hall were rightfully the Russian's property. And he certainly did not dream that the girl under whose name he was to live for a time was being kept a prisoner at the Moat House!

And Dr. Brusiloff was quite determined that Dick should never know!

The flickering smile lingered on Dr. Brusiloff's thin lips as he flung the end of his cigarette out of the window as the train thundered on. He glanced at his watch. Soon he would be in London, where he was to give Dick Lang his final instructions before the latter's arrival next day at Spalding Hall.

"I fancy those jewels are as good as in my hands!" His muttered words were followed by a soft laugh. "There is, fortunately, no hurry," he went on, in a tone of satisfaction. "I can afford to let the boy take his time in finding these jewels. So long as he does not suspect that there is anything in the affair to upset his precious ideas of honesty, everything is all right! And he need never suspect the truth!"

Again Dr. Brusiloff laughed his soft, sinister laugh.

For three weeks, since the Brusiloffs had found him a homeless outcast, Dick Lang had been living in London with Madam Brusiloff, to be trained for his part. Dr. Brusiloff was taking no risk of Dick by bad acting, causing suspicion at Spalding Hall that he was not really a girl at all—let alone Marie Douvar!

The Brusiloffs owned an expensive flat overlooking Hyde Park. The scoundrelly Russian drove straight to it in a taxi from the railway station, and was soon eagerly questioning his wife in a quiet room overlooking Park Lane.

"Everything is all right?"

"Yes," nodded Madam Brusiloff.

She was a tall, dark lady, beautifully dressed in evening clothes. She could make herself very charming—the charming side was the only side Dick Lang had been allowed to see! But at the moment there was something in her eyes to match the sinister gleam that shone in the eyes of her husband.

"He will pass as Marie Douvar?"

"Easily! There is no danger at all. I have worked wonders—you would not recognise him yourself! He takes it all as a joke, and has worked very hard to learn his part. He would pass anywhere!"

"Good!" There was, however, still a faint note of doubt in Brusiloff's voice. "Where is he now?"

"He will be here in a moment. We were just going to the theatre—I promised him a little treat to-night."

"That is good," nodded Brusiloff. "It is good to keep his mind off the little matter of those jewels! I do not wish him to ask too many awkward questions concerning them," he finished dryly.

"Here he is."

The door opened as Brusiloff turned, and Dick Lang stepped into the room.

The Russian gave a breathless exclamation. In a moment all trace of anxiety had vanished from his face.

It was true enough, as his wife had told him, that she had worked wonders.

Thanks to Madam Brusiloff's three weeks' careful tuition, the mud-stained fugitive whom the Brusiloffs had planned to use as their innocent tool, had been transformed, to all appearances, into a pretty girl! Of sixteen or so, who might easily have been a twin sister of the girl who was now a prisoner at the Moat House in Wayland!

He grinned across the room at Brusiloff very cheerfully.

Though he knew that he was doing the Russian a great service by agreeing to Brusiloff's bargain, he felt very grateful to the Russian for rescuing him from his desperate plight as an outcast and a fugitive, and showering upon him all the luxuries of wealth, even though he had to enjoy them in the role of a girl! It was, at any rate, better to live as a wealthy schoolgirl than as a penniless, half-starved waif who was wanted by the police!

"Hallo, Dr. Brusiloff!" grinned Dick, holding out his hand as he crossed towards his benefactor.

In his fashionable clothes, there was no doubt that Dick Lang made a surprisingly attractive girl!

He was not a tall fellow, and so even the feminine high heels did not make him seem unduly tall for the part he had to play. His hair had been allowed to grow during his three weeks in London, and, since it had been fairly long in the first place, with the addition of an artificial wave at a hairdresser's, he now had a "shingled" head that was as good as any girl's! The Brusiloffs had decided, at any rate, that a wig would have been too risky altogether. And they were taking no risks, with nearly a million pounds' worth of jewels in the balance!

Brusiloff's eyes gleamed.

"Wonderful!" he muttered.

"Will I do?" grinned Dick.

Madam Brusiloff laughed.

"I thought you would be satisfied," she said softly, with a glance at her husband.

"You have done well," said Dr. Brusiloff, an almost exultant note in his voice, with its queer foreign accent. "No one would guess! But, remember, my young friend," he went on incisively, "you are not being sent to Spalding Hall for a joke—a 'rag,' as you call it! You are going there to find for me those jewels that are hidden somewhere there!"

Dick nodded.

"Rather! Trust me, sir!"

"Remember that, my friend!" For a moment Brusiloff's voice was almost harsh, and his eyes glittered down into Dick's. But he quickly altered his tone to one of smiling geniality. "Perhaps I should rather call you my dear young lady—eh?"

He laughed, surveying the Abbotsford youngster approvingly. Dick was evidently a clever actor, and Brusiloff felt no anxiety now over his daring plan.

"I hear you are now going to the theatre," he said, in a benign tone. "Good! Enjoy yourself! For to-morrow you must go to school. Ha, ha! And when you return to-night I will tell you one or two further little things that, perhaps, you should know, about the real Marie Douvar—this poor girl who is ill, and so is leaving the way clear for you!"

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"Right-ho!" nodded Dick, with a grin.

There was a triumphant gleam in the eyes of the Russian as he watched from the window a few minutes later, while his wife and the disguised Dick Lang crossed the pavement to the waiting limousine, and drove away. He rubbed his hands together with evil glee.

But Dr. Brusiloff might have done well to remind himself that there is said to be many a slip 'twixt cup and lip!

Though his plans seemed to be working well, the Douvar jewels were not yet in his possession, despite his confidence that they soon would be.

There was still time for many a slip!

CHAPTER 3.

News from Abbotsford!

"I WEFUSE—"

"No good refusing, Gussy, old chap!"

"I uttahly decline—"

"No good utterly declining, either!"

"Look heah, Blake, you ass—"

"Oh, don't argue!" groaned Blake. "Come along to the changing-room, you dummy!"

"I wepeat," gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in breathless exasperation, "that I am not goin' to the changin'-woom! I am not goin' to play footah! I am goin' to Spaldin' Hall to be there to help the gals welcome Miss Douvah!"

And the swell of St. Jim's glared round Study No. 6 with grim determination in every line of his aristocratic countenance.

It was the following afternoon, after dinner. The practice match, which was being held for the benefit of the eleven that would be meeting Rylcombe Grammar School on the Saturday, to give them some practice, was due to begin in twenty minutes or so.

Blake, Herries, and Dig were determined that Arthur Augustus was going to play in the practice match. Arthur Augustus himself was equally determined that he was not. Hence the air of strife within the select precincts of Study No. 6.

In the opinion of his chums, the swell of St. Jim's would be "letting down" the study if he shirked the match in order to enjoy a tea-party with Ethel & Co. at Spalding Hall—even on the occasion of the arrival there of the new girl, Marie Douvar whom all the juniors were naturally feeling interested to see. In the opinion of Arthur Augustus, as a regular member of the Junior Eleven, he could well afford to absent himself.

And the resulting argument was in full swing!

"I tell you, you sillay footlahs—"

"Rats! You are coming!"

"I am not!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy is not playin'—"

"No, because he's injured his ankle a bit," said Dig, with a snort. "But your blessed ankles are all right—except that they've got on the silliest pair of spats I ever saw—"

"Bai Jove! My spats—"

"Blow your spats anyway! Come along to the changing-room!"

"Wats! Tom Mewwy is goin' to Spaldin' Hall this aftahnoon, and I pwomised to go with him! He said I needn't play footah if I don't want to—"

"Blow what Tom Merry said!"

"He's captain of footah—"

"Well, I'm captain of this study!" said Blake grimly. "And I tell you that Study No. 6 isn't going to have any shirkers! Collar the ass, you chaps!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy clenched his fists and hit out. Herries reeled back with a gasp before a thump on the jaw, and Dig gave a yell as Gussy's other fist landed in his eye. But numbers told! In a few moments, Arthur Augustus had been seized by his exasperated chums and swung into the air.

"Bring him along!" grinned Blake.

"You uttah wottahs! You are wuinin' my clobber!"

The swell of St. Jim's writhed and struggled and yelled as he was marched out of the study and borne along the passage and down the stairs. In the hall, Tom Merry was standing by the doorway with his three chums and study-mates—Monty Lowther, Harry Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock, the cheery American junior who hailed from New York City. Manners and Lowther were already changed into footer-kit, and were looking very fit and fresh. Tom, who was resting his ankle in anticipation of the Grammar School match, was not playing that afternoon, but was going over to Spalding Hall to the tea-party that Ethel & Co. were giving to welcome Marie

Douvar—or, at any rate, the supposed Marie Douvar—to Spalding Hall.

Cyrus K. Handcock, who did not play football, and had not at St. Jim's the chance to play baseball—much to his regret—was going with Tom.

The chums of the Shell watched the descent of Blake & Co. down the stairs, with grinning faces.

"Great Bohunkus!" ejaculated Cyrus K. Handcock.

"What's this dope?"

"We don't want Gussy to be tired for footer, so we're carrying him to Little Side," explained Blake gravely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But isn't he coming to Spalding Hall with me and Handcock?" exclaimed Tom in surprise.

"Yaas!" panted Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "You wottahs—let me go! Welease me at once, or I shall administah feahful thwashin's all wound!"

"Gussy's wrong!" grinned Herries. "He thinks he's going with you, but he isn't!"

he explained, as he drew out the enclosed sheet. "We drop each other a line now and then, you know. Wonder if he's any news about the team they're likely to put up against us in the next match?"

He scanned the letter, and gave a sudden exclamation.

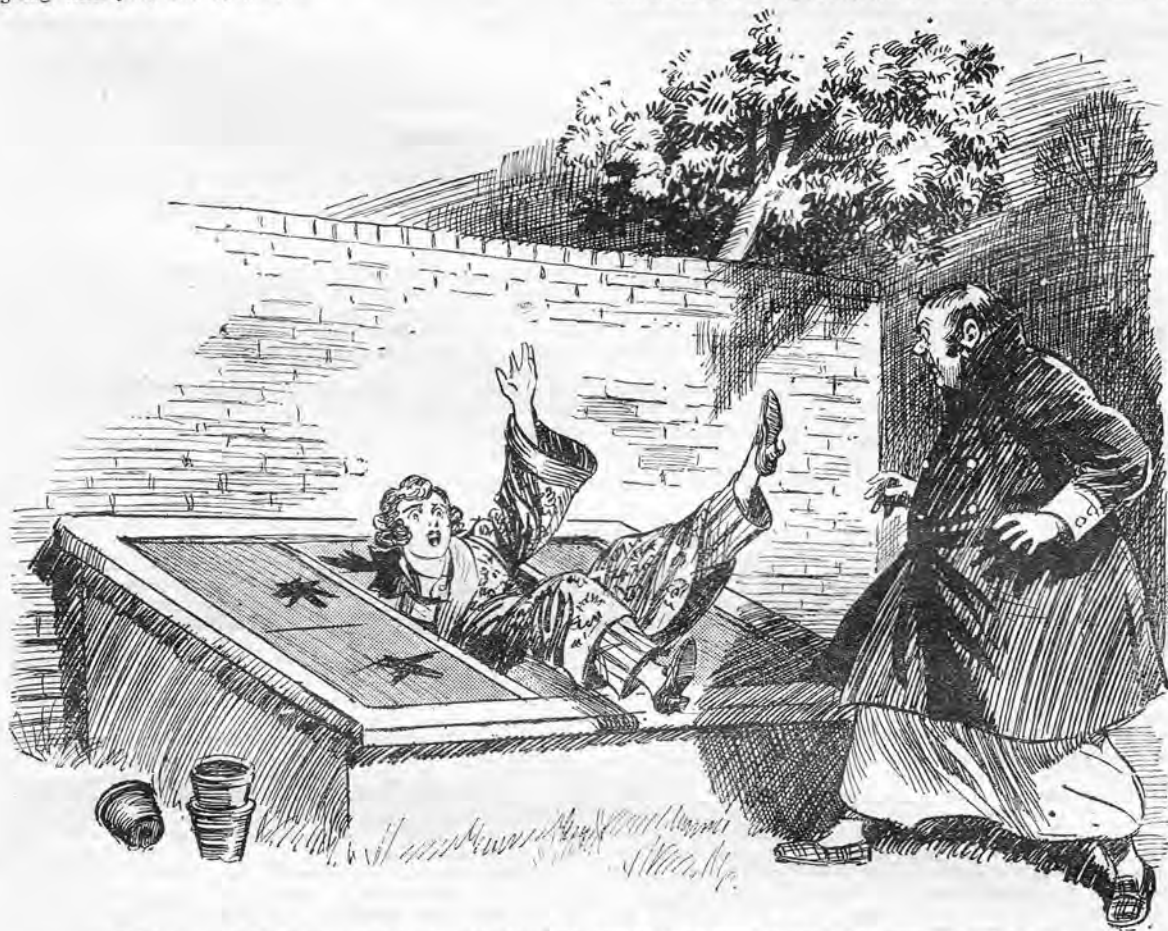
"Great Scott!"

"What's up?" asked Tom.

"Phow!" Monty Lowther glanced at his chums with rather a startled face. "Remember the last time they came over here, there was a chap playing inside-right who bagged a couple of goals, and saved 'em from getting licked?"

"What about him?" asked Manners. "You mean that chap Lang, don't you, whom we gave a lift into Wayland? I remember him."

"That's the chap," Monty Lowther nodded. "He's been expelled for theft! At least, he was going to be expelled, and stood a pretty good chance of getting sent to



With a crash Dick sprawled backwards through one of Miss Finch's cherished cucumber-frames!

"My hat!"

"Study No. 6 doesn't allow shirking," explained Dig. "Besides, we must have Gussy in the game, to keep it funny."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus, still protesting wildly, was borne past Tom Merry & Co. and away down the steps into the quad. Tom Merry chuckled.

"Looks as if Gussy won't be coming, after all!" he grinned. He glanced at his watch. "Time we got along, Handcock, old scout, if we're going to walk it. I understand Miss Douvar is driving down from London, and will be turning up soon after three."

"O.K!" nodded Handcock.

They turned towards the doorway. As they did so, a uniformed figure coming up the steps caused them to pause. It was the postman, bringing the midday post.

Among the letters there was one for Monty Lowther, with an Abbotsford postmark. He ripped open the envelope.

"It's from that chap Raleigh I know at Abbotsford,"

a reformatory! But he bolted rather than face the music."

"Great junipers!" muttered Handcock.

There was a queer look in Tom Merry's face as he stood silent.

Tom, true to his promise to Dick Lang, had never told even his chums of what Monty Lowther had now learnt from another source. Even now, he felt he could not admit that he had known for three weeks of Lang's bolt from Abbotsford—and the fact that he was convinced that the youngster had been innocent of the ugly charge made against him. So he said nothing, while Manners and Handcock and Lowther looked at one another with startled faces.

"My giddy aunt!" breathed Manners. "He seemed such a decent, cheery sort of chap, too!"

"It only shows you jolly well never can tell!" growled Lowther, with a glance at Tom. "What do you think?"

"I don't believe Lang was the sort of chap to do a thing like that," said Tom quietly. "I wouldn't mind swearing he was innocent."

Lowther shrugged, and put the letter back in his pocket. "Who knows?" he said. "It's rather rotten, anyway."

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Well, come along, Harry! Time we got along to Little Side."

He and Manners went their way, while Tom Merry and Handcock turned towards the gates, on their way to Spalding Hall.

There was a frown on Tom's usually cheery face as he and his American chum strode out into Rylcombe Lane. The reminder of Dick Lang's tragic affair had made him wonder, as he had so often wondered during the last three weeks, how Dick was getting on now, in his search for work in London.

That he had never been caught was evident enough from the letter Monty Lowther had received from Raleigh, of Abbotsford.

But of one thing Tom felt sure—he would never, he believed, be likely to see the "wanted" youngster again.

It would have been a staggering surprise for Tom Merry could he have known that the supposed Marie Douvar whom he was to meet that very afternoon was none other than Dick Lang himself—the half-starved, penniless fugitive from Abbotsford transformed into a wealthy schoolgirl!

And Dick Lang, for his part, had certainly never dreamed that although Spalding Hall was in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's, he need even meet Tom Merry, the only fellow at the school who was at all likely to recognise him, despite his disguise.

Had Dick known that, he might have felt a good deal less cheery at that moment, as he was being driven down from London by a uniformed chauffeur for what, with his irrepressible cheerful nature, he regarded as being the greatest "rag" of his life!

CHAPTER 4.

A Shock for "Marie"!

"HERE she is, I guess!" Cyrus K. Handcock made that drawing remark.

Together with Tom Merry, Handcock had been strolling in the quad at Spalding Hall, in company with Ethel Cleveland, Doris Levison, and Lady Peggy Brooke, the pretty red-headed tomboy of the Fifth.

The new girl was later than had been expected. But at last a big limousine had appeared in the road and turned in at the gates. It was at sight of it that Cyrus K. Handcock had given vent to his remark.

"Here's Miss Douvar, I guess!"

"Yes, this must be she!" nodded Ethel eagerly.

"Wonder what she's like?" murmured Lady Peggy. "I hope she's a decent sort!"

"I feel awfully sorry for her," said Doris softly. "It was terrible, her parents being killed in the revolution, when she was a baby! And she has been very ill, of course. Miss Finch was telling me that it has been arranged for her to have a bed-room of her own, so I suppose she isn't really quite fit even now. What a lovely car!"

The limousine was drawing to a standstill near the steps of the main entrance to the house. They turned towards it.

"I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry. "Let me buzz up to the study, Ethel, and brew the tea! Then it'll be all ready when you bring her along."

"That's a good wheeze," nodded Lady Peggy.

"Thank you so much!" exclaimed Ethel.

Tom hurried off, and vanished into the house by the school entrance as the chauffeur jumped out of the driving-seat and opened the door of the big car.

A slim figure in black, wearing a costly fur, stepped out into the quad.

Dick Lang had arrived at last for "the great rag!"—as he regarded it.

There was certainly nothing about his appearance, as he stood glancing round curiously, to arouse the faintest suspicion in the mind of anyone that he was not everything he appeared to be!

His naturally rather delicate complexion had needed very little aid on his part to render it as perfect as even the real Marie Douvar could have wished. Lang's closest friends at Abbotsford would have found it hard to believe that the figure that had stepped out of the car was that of the ex-inside-right of the Junior Eleven—the fellow who not so long ago had saved his school from defeat at the hands of Tom Merry's eleven by the scoring of two goals for Abbotsford.

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"I think she looks rather cheery!" murmured Lady Peggy.

"I guess so!" nodded Handcock.

The American junior politely paused a little distance from the car, and let Ethel & Co. go forward alone to greet their new schoolfellow. As yet, the supposed Marie Douvar had not noticed Handcock.

Dick Lang greeted Ethel, Doris, and Lady Peggy with a friendly grin.

"So you are Marie Douvar?" exclaimed Ethel smilingly, holding out her hand. "We are so glad you are better now, and have come at last. We are all in the Fifth—your Form. I hope we shall be great friends!"

"I hope so, too!" said Dick—and meant it.

He had wondered a good deal what the Spalding Hall girls would be like. It was going to be rather weird at first, being "one of the crowd" among a lot of schoolgirls! But if Ethel & Co. were typical of the rest, it did not look like being particularly unpleasant, he was telling himself!

The chauffeur, who had taken out the luggage and placed it by the steps, climbed back into the car, and the big limousine rolled away, and vanished out of the gates. Sammy Thrupp, the Spalding Hall porter, had appeared by now, and he touched his cap to Dick with a cheery grin of welcome.

"Afternoon, miss! I'll take the luggage up to your room, miss!"

"Let me introduce a friend of ours," said Ethel, beckoning to Handcock. The American junior came forward, removing his cap. "This is Handcock—a friend of ours from St. Jim's!"

St. Jim's!

Dick Lang felt his heart miss a beat. He turned quickly, drawing a startled breath, and found himself looking into the cheery face of Cyrus K. Handcock—the fellow who had driven him into Wayland after the last Abbotsford match at St. Jim's, less than a month ago!

"How—how do you do?" breathed Dick.

His pulse had quickened. It was a big shock to find that the Spalding Hall girls were acquainted with some of the juniors at St. Jim's—and that Handcock, one of the fellows he had met personally, was one of them!

He held out his hand mechanically, and Handcock took it. Dick's eyes were riveted on the American's face.

"I guess I'm glad to know you!" announced Handcock cordially.

Dick drew a deep breath of relief. It was quite evident that Handcock had utterly failed to recognise him. There

had not been the faintest look in the American's face of any sign of recognition.

After all, Handcock had only met him once—it was hardly likely that he would have recognised him, Dick realised now. He had nothing to fear from Handcock.

But if the Spalding Hall girls knew Handcock, they would be sure to know other St. Jim's fellows! And there was one junior at St. Jim's whom Dick did not want to meet at any cost—Tom Merry!

Tom had seen him more recently than the others, and had seen a good deal more of him, into the bargain. Suppose he did meet Tom Merry? And suppose Tom saw through his disguise?

It was a frightening thought for Dick. But he pulled himself together with an effort. After all, he told himself, he might never meet Tom Merry at all—it was no good worrying over what might never happen.

But the smile had died from his face as he turned and followed Ethel Cleveland into the building.

"You needn't go to see Miss Finch till you've had tea," said Ethel. "We want you to have tea with us in our study."

"That's awfully kind of you," said Dick.

It being a fine half-holiday, there were none of the other Spalding Hall girls about, as Ethel & Co. led their new schoolfellow, followed by Handcock, up the stairs to the Fifth Form studies. Most of the Spaldingites were out of doors.

Dick glanced about him curiously as he went. This was the place where the jewels were hidden—those jewels that he had to find on behalf of Dr. Brusiloff! The Russian had given him one or two hints as to likely places, so far as Brusiloff could judge. But Dick realised that the task ahead of him was not likely to prove a very easy one.

"Here we are!" said Ethel brightly, halting outside the door of one of the studies—No. 5. "This is our study."

Hey! Hang On A Moment!

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She opened the door, and led the way in. Dick followed her and stopped dead in the doorway.

In the study, staring at him in wide-eyed astonishment across the tea-table, was the one fellow he had dreaded meeting—Tom Merry, of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 5.

Baggy, the Lady-Killer!

ONLY just in time did Dick Lang stifle the breathless exclamation that leapt to his lips.

Tom Merry!

He felt his mouth go oddly dry, as he stood rooted to the spot, his eyes meeting Tom's in startled consternation.

It was evident enough that Tom was thoroughly amazed at the sight of him.

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Tom, staring at the supposed new girl as if fascinated.

That the game was up almost as soon as it had started, Dick felt convinced. He felt almost dazed with the shock of it. But somehow he pulled himself together, and walked into the study, with a steady glance at the astonished Tom. It was no good displaying panic.

The next moment, to his astonishment, he saw Tom go flaming red.

"I—I beg your pardon!" stammered the captain of the Shell. "I—I am afraid I was awfully rude, staring at you like that! I didn't mean to—"

Dick's heart leaped.

In a flash he realised that Tom Merry did not dream of the truth. And Tom had evidently supposed Dick's own queer look to be the result of annoyance at being stared at.

"The—the fact is," went on Tom, still crimson, "you are so awfully like a chap I know, Miss Douvar—you might be his sister. I'm sorry I was so beastly rude, staring; but it was pretty surprising for the moment," he finished lamely.

Dick drew a deep breath.

Even Tom Merry had failed to recognise him as the fugitive he had befriended on that night that Dick had first met Dr. Brusiloff.

But he was still feeling a little shaken as he forced a smile. He felt that he was on dangerous ground. But it would have looked queer not to have shown any interest in the fellow he was said to resemble.

"Oh, I see!" he said quietly. "I wondered why you were staring so." Tom's cheeks flamed again. "Whom am I like, then?"

"Oh, just a chap I met a couple of times!" said Tom hastily. "A fellow called Lang. He was at Abbotsford."

"Abbotsford?" repeated Dick, with a little puzzled frown.

"That's a school we play at footer," explained Tom. "Of course, you aren't likely to have heard of it, I suppose? You are really awfully like the chap—"

"Really?" queried Dick, with a smile. He was regaining his confidence now. He pulled off his hat, and tossed it on to a chair, revealing the wavy, "shingled" hair beneath—that, he knew, would prevent any possibility of suspicion entering Tom's mind more than anything else. It would be obvious to Tom that it was not a wig. "I wonder if you will put this somewhere for me?" he went on sweetly, taking the fur from his shoulders and deliberately holding it out to Tom.

"Oh—oh, yes, rather!"

Tom Merry, still looking rather flustered, took the fur and laid it on a chair. He glanced at Hancock, wondering if the American had noticed the resemblance between the new Spaldingite and Dick Lang, of Abbotsford.

"Isn't she jolly like him?" he muttered.

Hancock shook his head.

"Guess I can't remember," he said carelessly. "You mean the chap that bolted from Abbotsford after that theft?"

Tom nodded.

"Well, let's start tea," said Ethel brightly. "Will you sit there, Marie? And—"

There was a sudden tap at the door. In answer to an invitation from Lady Peggy it opened, and a fat face blinked into the cosy study.

It was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth—the fattest junior in the School House at St. Jim's—of all people! Tom gave an astonished exclamation, and glared at the Falstaff of the Fourth with anything but a welcoming look.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated.

Tom Merry certainly did not want Baggy to join what promised to be a very cheery little tea-party. He wondered, with an inward groan, what had brought Baggy to Spalding Hall that afternoon.

Baggy rolled into the study with a smirk.

Ethel & Co. surveyed him in surprise. Baggy grinned

at them breathlessly. It was evident that he had come in a hurry. And to Baggy it was just as evident that Tom Merry and Hancock, at any rate, were anything but pleased that he had come at all. Wherefore, he grinned at them rather maliciously, for he knew that he could rely on the good nature of Ethel Cleveland to ask him to stay to tea.

"I've brought you a note from Gussy, Miss Ethel," smirked Baggy, holding out a missive that had become exceedingly crumpled in transit. "He's had to play footer this afternoon—he, he, he!—and he's written to apologise for not turning up."

Baggy sniggered. He had been present on Little Side when Blake, Herries, and Dig had, by repeated bumpings of their noble chum in the mud, persuaded Arthur Augustus at long last that he was mistaken in thinking that he would be visiting Spalding Hall that afternoon.

As a matter of fact, Tom Merry had already informed the girls that the swell of St. Jim's would not be coming. He had realised that Blake & Co. would see to it that Arthur Augustus did not shirk footer in order to be present at the welcome to the supposed Marie Douvar. Ethel took her cousin's note with a smile, and glanced at the contents.

"Poor Arthur!" she laughed. "It seems that Blake and Herries and Digby wouldn't let him come, because of the football. Never mind."

"I guess Clarence will get over it," drawled Hancock.

"Now you can clear off, you fat porpoise!" growled Tom, under his breath, to Baggy.

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"Now you are here, you must stay to tea, Trimble," broke in the voice of Cousin Ethel.

"Thanks, Miss Ethel!" grinned Baggy, with a vindictive glance at Tom. "I'll be jolly pleased to, you know."

"Let me introduce Trimble of St. Jim's," went on Ethel, turning to Dick Lang. "This is Miss Douvar, Trimble."

"How do do?" said Baggy jauntily, as he took the hand that Dick held out. His eyes gleamed admiringly. Baggy, oddly enough, rather fancied himself as a "lady-killer," and the good-looking Abbotsford fellow, in his make-up as Marie Douvar, struck Baggy as being "rather a stunner." "Jolly glad to meet you! Gussy's missed something, if you ask me. He, he, he!"

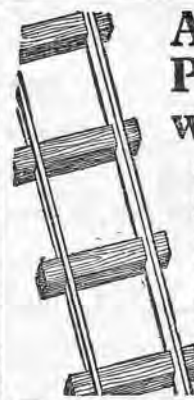
Dick surveyed Baggy anything but cordially. Baggy was evidently the sort of fellow to whom, at Abbotsford, he would no doubt have administered a good many thick ears. But Baggy did not seem to notice the look he had received. Uninvited, he plumped his fat frame down on the chair next to Dick's.

Tom and Hancock glared at Baggy. But it was impossible to eject him from Ethel & Co.'s study, since Ethel herself had invited him to stay. They took their seats at the table, and tea commenced.

It was quite evident from the first that Baggy was very "smitten" with the new Spaldingite.

Dick himself realised that fact, and would have been tremendously amused, had he not been still more exasperated at being ogled by the fat junior. He disliked Baggy as much as Baggy apparently admired him. Now

(Continued on next page.)



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that he had recovered completely from the shock of meeting Tom Merry, and realised that he was utterly safe from detection, even by the captain of the Shell. Dick was ready to get all the fun he could out of the situation. He greatly liked Tom Merry, and wanted the fun of pulling Tom's leg a bit. But he found it impossible to free himself from Baggy's attentions.

"I'm jolly glad I came along, you know," smirked Baggy. "Are you?" retorted Dick, rather grimly. "Rather!" Baggy lowered his voice confidentially. "You know, you are just my style."

He sniggered in an oily way, and reached out a greedy hand to help himself to another slice of cake.

"Will you try one of these tarts, Miss Douvar?" cut in Tom Merry, politely passing them towards Dick.

"That's all right; I'm looking after Miss Douvar," said Baggy loftily. He snatched the plate of tarts from Tom, and held them towards Dick himself. "Have one?"

Tom Merry glared at Baggy with a look that, if looks could kill, would have scratched the fat junior lifeless on the floor of the study! But Baggy, safe enough in the presence of the girls, did not worry.

He was out to make a hit with the new Spaldingite! Cousin Ethel and Doris were both frowning a little; Lady Peggy was surveying Baggy with frank disapproval. It was obvious to all three girls that Baggy was proving the fly in the ointment, so to speak, at what should have been a very pleasant party. And they could see that the supposed Marie Douvar was not exactly delighted at Baggy's ill-mannered attentions.

Dick, in his heart, was feeling that he would have liked to grasp Baggy by the scruff of his fat neck and jerk him from his chair, to plant a hefty kick in the seat of the fat St. Jim's junior's trousers. But, in the circumstances, that was not exactly open to him!

"Have a tart, Miss Marie?" repeated Baggy, with an ogling eye.

"Please!"

"I guess these macaroons are swell!" remarked Cyrus K. Handcock, helping himself to them after passing the plate to Lady Peggy. "How's it going, Baggy?"

"Oh, all right!" growled Baggy, gasping rather painfully on all fours over the jammy shoes. "I say, this suede is jolly difficult to get jam out of, you know—"

"Never mind; it's simply a matter of time, Trimble," said Dick calmly.

Tom Merry and Handcock chuckled. So did Lady Peggy.

They guessed well enough that the "accident" with the jam had been no accident at all, but a means of getting Baggy away from the table—which was certainly the next best thing to getting him out of the study! Ethel and Doris probably guessed that, too; if so, they did not appear to mind.

The only person who minded was Baggy Trimble!

To have the rest of the party cheerily enjoying the sumptuous repast at the table above, while he grovelled on the floor with a wet sponge, cleaning jam from the new Spaldingite's shoes, was a bitter blow to Baggy! His mouth was fairly watering as he heard the plates of cake and pastries being passed to and fro, and the merry rattle of tea-cups.

"I—I say, is that all right?" he gasped, at last.

Dick, who had been busily chatting with Tom Merry, glanced down. He surveyed the result of Baggy's efforts critically.

"Why, you haven't half finished!"

"It won't come off properly," mumbled Baggy.

"Oh, yes it will, if you try hard!" urged Dick. "Carry on! They're a lot better already!"

Baggy gasped, but he dared not refuse. He bent over the shoes once again, clumsily trying to free the suede of its present obstinate stickiness. He almost groaned as he heard

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Dick smiled. A sudden idea had come to him. He shook his head.

"No, thanks! I'll have some bread-and-butter and some jam!"

Baggy passed the bread-and-butter, and then handed the jam. Dick took the jam-dish, but the next moment it seemed to slip from his fingers. It fell to the floor, the contents dropping in a sticky mass on to his shoes.

He jumped up with an exclamation of apparent dismay. There was another exclamation from Ethel.

"Oh dear!" she cried. "All over your shoes!"

"My hat! Hard luck!" ejaculated Lady Peggy.

Tom Merry rose quickly to his feet.

"That's rotten luck, Miss Marie! Lemme find a rag, or something, to clean them!"

"I'm afraid I was careless," said Dick. "But don't you trouble. Trimble is looking after me so nicely, you know; I'm sure he'd like to do it!"

"Oh, rather!" mumbled Baggy, though not so enthusiastically as a polished lady-killer should have spoken. "I—I'll do that, Miss Marie!"

"I'm afraid they'll take rather a lot of cleaning," said Dick smoothly. "They're suede, unfortunately, and this jam is rather sticky stuff. But if you would be so kind—"

"I'll get you a sponge and some water from the bathroom, Trimble!" said Lady Peggy.

She left the study, to return a few moments later with a small bowl of water and a sponge.

Dick sat down again, and Baggy, with one or two breathless grunts, lowered his fat figure on to his knees to commence his task.

"You don't mind if I go on with my tea, do you?" said Dick, with a grin.

"Nunno!" gasped Baggy.

With the wet sponge he began his unwelcome task. The jam was raspberry, and very sticky indeed, and it looked like being a long job! Dick, with a cheery grin, sitting sideways in his chair to enable Baggy to get at his shoes, carried on with his tea serenely, as did the others.

"Have an éclair, Miss Marie?" chuckled Tom, who had now taken Baggy's vacant seat.

"Thanks!"

"More tea, Marie?" asked Ethel.

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the plates of good things being passed to and fro—no doubt almost empty now.

"Oh lor!" muttered Baggy drearily.

His back was aching as he laboured. The "accident" had occurred, too, when he had scarcely begun his tea, and he was feeling hungry and empty. It took a great deal more than a few tarts and a slice of cake to satisfy Baggy's insatiable craving for grub!

"You must come over and watch the match on Saturday against the Grammar School, Miss Marie," he heard Tom Merry saying cheerily. "Thanks, Handcock, old chap! I'll have another macaroon, since they're so jolly good! Yes, the Grammar School crowd generally give us a rattling good game, Miss Marie. You ought to come—"

"I will," nodded Dick decidedly.

Even though footer was "barred," so far as he was concerned now, he could, at any rate, enjoy watching a match, he was telling himself.

There was a plaintive squeak from near his feet.

"I—I say, Miss Marie, I think your shoes are all right now!"

Dick glanced down carelessly.

"Nearly," he said. "Carry on! They still look a bit sticky to me, you know!"

"Oh lor!" groaned Baggy disconsolately. "Hang it, she's never jolly well satisfied! That's the worst of girls!"

"Yes, we'll all come over on Saturday to watch the match!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel brightly. "I hope you beat Gordon Gay and his team!"

"So do I!" chuckled Tom. He glanced at his watch and across the table at Handcock. "Time we buzzed along, old chap!"

"I guess so," nodded the American.

The two juniors and the girls and Dick Lang rose to their feet. For the moment Dick had forgotten Baggy, and there was a yell from the Fatstaff of the Fourth as one of the shoes upon which he had been labouring trod on his fat hand.

"Ow! Yarooooop!"

"So sorry!" gasped Dick. "I say, those shoes look much better now! Thanks awfully! Don't bother about them any more, please!"

Baggy scrambled to his feet painfully.

He was agitated in every limb from his cramped position

while at work on the floor. His gaze turned to the tea-table, and his little eyes went dark with dismay.

One solitary chocolate biscuit was all that was left on the plates—that, and the crumbs on the plates of the Spaldingites and their guests.

"M-my hat!" gasped Baggy feebly.

"Oh, I am so sorry! We forgot to leave anything for Trimble!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel, in genuine distress. "I quite forgot you were down there, Trimble—"

"I guess it won't do Trimble any harm to miss his eats for once," drawled Handcock laconically.

Baggy glared at Cyrus K. Handcock, with feelings too deep for words. Tom Merry chuckled.

Baggy had brought his misfortunes upon himself, and Tom had no sympathy to waste upon the disgruntled Fourth-Former.

"Come on, Baggy!" he grinned, linking an arm in Trimble's. "Time we got along, old fat man!"

"But I've not had any tea!" panted Baggy.

"Never mind! You ate enough dinner to last you for two days, at least; I saw you myself," said Tom, with a chuckle. "Come on!"

"Afraid it was all my fault!" murmured Dick Lang.

Baggy swallowed his feelings with an effort as he met the dancing eyes of the supposed Marie Douvar.

"Oh, that's all right!" he mumbled, with a very bad grace. Then he remembered that he was out to make a hit with the new Spaldingite. He smirked. "Always jolly glad to oblige a lady, you know! I'm a dab at looking after the ladies!"

"Come on, you fat porpoise!" muttered Tom under his breath.

He forced Baggy towards the door.

Ethel & Co. and Dick accompanied the juniors downstairs to the entrance, where they said good-bye. There was rather a peculiar look in the eyes of the "new girl," as they watched Tom and Handcock and Baggy crossing towards the gates.

The meeting he had dreaded had happened—and he had not been detected! Tom Merry had noticed the likeness; but never for a moment, he knew, did Tom dream that Dick Lang of Abbotsford and Marie Douvar of Spalding Hall were one and the same person.

"Good egg!" muttered Dick to himself. "My hat—I'm going to have some fun out of this! Wonder how long it will take me to find those giddy jewels?"

"I think you ought to come and see Miss Finch now, Marie," said Ethel, and Dick nodded, and followed her in the direction of the headmistress' study.

On the road to St. Jim's, Baggy Trimble, rolling along by himself towards the school—Tom and Handcock's speed of walking did not appeal to Baggy and he had soon given up the attempt to keep up with them—smirked a satisfied smirk.

He had quite got over his experience in Study No. 5 at Spalding Hall! Never for a moment did the thick-skinned Baggy even dream that the affair of the jam had been a deliberate ruse to avoid his company at the tea-table. And even the tragedy of his lost tea could not oust from his thoughts the fact that he had made a hit with Miss Marie!

For that he really had made a hit, Baggy did not doubt.

How could it be otherwise? It was obvious—to Baggy—that such a charming and attractive fellow as himself must make a hit with any girl he met. That was a foregone conclusion—in the opinion, at any rate, of the modest Baggy.

"She's a stunner, too!" grinned Baggy to himself with a satisfied smirk on his fat countenance. "A bit inconsiderate about those blessed shoes—but, then, girls are a bit thoughtless sometimes, I suppose."

He gave vent to a greasy chuckle.

"He, he, he! I'll jolly well show the chaps! Won't they be sick when I cut 'em all out, and click with the new girl?"

CHAPTER 6. A Midnight Search!

BOOM!
The last stroke of midnight died away as the clock in the old tower at Spalding Hall finished striking the hour.

In his room at the end of the Fifth Form passage, Dick Lang sat up in bed listening.

There was scarcely a sound to be heard—only the faint murmur of the night wind in the trees of the playing-fields. Dick slipped out of bed, drew on a dressing-gown and slippers, and stole to the door. He opened it softly and looked out, once more pausing to listen.

"All clear!" he told himself.

Though Dick was enjoying his masquerade at Spalding Hall as a good "rag," he had never for a moment let himself forget that his first duty was to Dr. Brusiloff. And he was wasting no time in beginning his difficult task of unearthing the box of jewels which he had been told were the rightful property of the Russian at the Moat House.

He closed the door softly behind him, and stole along the passage, past the deserted studies of the Fifth-Formers, and down the stairs.

He had a pocket torch with him, and with its aid it was easy enough to find his way to a small side door. It was locked and bolted, but it was the work of a moment to unfasten and open it. The cool night wind blew on to his face as he stepped quickly out into the quad.

He had learnt from Dr. Brusiloff that wherever the jewels were hidden, they were fairly sure to be in some more or less superficial hiding-place, since the man who had concealed them on the premises at Spalding Hall had had very little time for his task.

One of the first places, therefore, in which Brusiloff had advised him to search was the big, thickly growing shrubbery that the Russian, in spying out the lie of the land from the school gates, had noticed against one of the long wings of the old Elizabethan building. Among the tall bushes there, the box, containing the Douvar jewels could have lain for months without even being discovered by the school gardeners.

Dick drew the door shut behind him—it was not fitted with a spring-lock, so he could return that way without any trouble. It was a dark night, the moon being hidden by thick drifting clouds, and at that hour the ex-Abbotsford fellow felt safe enough from detection.

He turned towards the shrubbery.

"Hallo—"

Dick paused suddenly, peering forward towards the corner of the wing. For a moment he had seemed to see a shadowy figure moving there—a man's figure, was the vague impression left upon his mind. But there was certainly no sign of anybody now.

"Only some blessed shadow," he told himself, impatient at his momentary alarm. The moon had appeared dimly for a few seconds just then, casting wavering shadows, and he felt sure that he had only imagined seeing a figure vanish round the end of the wing. "Hang it—I mustn't get jumpy!"

He hurried on and dived in among the big bushes of the shrubbery. The beam of the torch leapt out as he pressed the button over, lighting up the dry earth thick with leaves that lay under the shrubs. He peered round, creeping slowly along among the bushes.

It was a long task, searching the shrubbery from end to end. It proved to be a vain search, too. Dick emerged at last at the far end of the shrubbery without having found anything but a few rusty toffee-tins—evidently dropped from time to time into the concealment of the bushes from the dormitory of the Fourth Form, above! Sweets were forbidden in the dormitories at Spalding Hall, he knew.

"Nothing doing!" muttered Dick, as he stepped out of the bushes, snapping out his torch. "I wonder—"

His thoughts broke off and a startled cry escaped him.

A large hand had dropped on to his shoulder from behind him out of the darkness!

Dick swung round, white-faced. The figure of a man was standing beside him, a man who was clutching his shoulder in a vice-like grip.

Instinctively Dick hit out. His fist landed on the man's jaw and the shadowy figure reeled back, lost his balance, and went sprawling at Dick's feet with a startled grunt.

The next instant the youngster recognised him. It was Thrupp the ex-sailor, who was school porter at Spalding Hall.

Mr. Sammy Thrupp, unluckily for Dick, was suffering from toothache! Unable to sleep, the cheery ex-sailor had come out to walk his tooth up and down a bit, as he had expressed it to himself. It was Samuel whom Dick had seen and taken for a shadow! Wearing felt slippers as he was, the porter had made no sound in the quad—and hearing suspicious noises in the shrubbery, had come to investigate just as Dick had emerged from the bushes.

"Oh!" gasped Thrupp, sitting up rather dazedly and feeling his jaw. "Shiver me timbers—"

Dick did not wait, however, to hear Sammy Thrupp's view of the situation. He turned and ran.

And Mr. Thrupp, recovering from his shock, scrambled up with a gasp and raced after him.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Dick.

At all costs, he felt, he must avoid being recognised. It was no good making for the door by which he could

re-enter the house—he had first of all to shake off his pursuer. Accordingly, he turned in the other direction towards the opening into Miss Finch's orchard. Luckily for him, the moon was still obscured by clouds. So far, he knew, Thrupp could not have recognised him.

But the porter was coming after him at a surprising speed considering his plump figure and his usual sailorly roll. He was not gaining on Dick, but he was not losing any ground either!

"Hang these rotten shoes!" groaned Dick, as he raced along. "Of all the blessed silly things—"

It was a remark which would have horrified the little Frenchman who had sold them during one of Dick's shopping excursions in London with Madam Brusiloff! At the time, the dapper little Parisian had wondered vaguely at the odd smile on the face of the "young lady" trying them on—it would no doubt have been a shock to him from which he would never have recovered had he known that the reason of that odd smile was that the "young lady" in question was inwardly, and regretfully, comparing those elegant slippers with a certain favourite pair of footer-boots at Abbotsford School!

With their thin soles and dainty high heels they were undoubtedly more suitable for Marie Douvar than footer-boots—but Dick would have given a good deal to be able to effect the exchange just then!

Dick was a fast runner—he had not been one of the Abbotsford forwards for nothing—but his present footwear hampered him considerably.

He bolted across the orchard with Sammy Thrupp still hot on his heels, and through an open garden door into the kitchen garden beyond.

Crash!

Those high heels had betrayed him. They had never been made for sprinting purposes—and Dick had missed his footing. The crash that rang out in the dark garden was the death-knell, so to speak, of one of Miss Finch's cherished cucumber-frames, as Dick sprawled backwards into it.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

He tried to scramble out; but he was securely wedged in the woodwork of the broken frame, and despite his struggles he had to stay where he was! Sammy Thrupp came panting up, and halted in front of him, peering down at him with a triumphant, though unfriendly eye.

"Got ye, ye young limb!" panted Mr. Thrupp. "Got ye, have I? I—"

He broke off, and seemed to leap almost a foot into the air.

The moon had appeared from among the clouds, and by its light Mr. Sammy Thrupp had the shock of his life.

"Shiver me timbers!" he gurgled. "It's one o' the young ladies! It's—why, blessed if it isn't Miss Douvar!"

"All right," said Dick shortly. "Don't stand there staring like a— He was about to say "like a stuffed owl," but corrected himself hastily. "H'm—like—like that! Help me out!"

With a dazed expression on his countenance, Sammy Thrupp extended a hand and grasped Dick's. He heaved him out of the cucumber frame with a jerk, and there was a further rattle of broken glass.

"Shiver me timbers!" gasped Mr. Thrupp again. "Who'd ha' thought it? Miss Douvar! By the great horn spoon—"

Dick's brain was working swiftly. He would have to

put the best face on it that he could. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, it's me!" he nodded. "Well?"

Sammy Thrupp felt his jaw tenderly.

"My eye!" he said, half admiringly. "Who'd ha' thought a young lady could have a punch like that?"

Dick grinned.

"Awfully sorry! I didn't know it was you! I thought it must be some blessed burglar or something."

"I didn't see who it was, either," confessed Thrupp, surveying Dick curiously. "I thought it was some young scoundrel from the village up to something, though, when you socked me like that! Of course, if I'd seen who it was, I wouldn't have touched you, miss," he added hastily. "Afraid I must ha' scared you! But if I may ask—what's the idea?"

"I was looking for—a ring!" said Dick coolly.

It was true enough, for he knew that among the jewels he had been searching for there were many valuable rings, among other articles of jewellery.

"You were looking for a ring?" ejaculated Sammy Thrupp. "Excuse me, miss, but why at this hour?"

"It's a valuable one," said Dick. "I wanted to find it as soon as possible. I never thought I should be caught out there—"

"I see, miss." Sammy Thrupp shook his head disapprovingly. "There'd be trouble if Miss Finch knew. My eye, rather. You ought to ha' waited and looked to-morrow for this ring o' yours."

"Well, you won't tell her?" urged Dick. He put on a winning smile. "Will you?"

"H'm! I ought to, you know!" said Sammy Thrupp severely. But Sammy could never be very harsh with "his young ladies," as he termed the Spalding Hall pupils. "Well, I won't say anythin' this time, miss. And to-morrow, I'll have a look in the shrubbery for that ring you've lost, myself."

"You're awfully kind!" cooed Dick. "You're simply wonderful!"

"Oh, no, miss!" protested Sammy, almost blushing.

"But I say, what about this cucumber-frame? It's sure to be noticed—"

"Cats!" grinned Thrupp, with a significant wink. "I'll blame the cats for that! Now," he added, with a return of attempted severity, "you hurry in, miss! You'll be catchin' cold, you will, out at this hour in your dressing-gown! You get in quick, miss!"

"Right-ho!" nodded Dick. "Thanks awfully, Thrupp!"

And Sammy Thrupp shook his head as he watched Dick vanish through the orchard in the direction of the quad.

Either owing to the blow he had received, or the excitement, his toothache had gone completely. But his jaw still tingled.

"Shiver me timbers!" muttered Sammy, with a rueful grin. "Fancy a young lady havin' a punch like that! Who'd ha' thought it? And fancy comin' out at this hour to look for a blessed ring! She's a card, she is!"

And Sammy Thrupp shook his head as he went off towards his lodge.

Back in the house, Dick locked and bolted the door after him, and stole back to his room. There was a thoughtful frown on his face as he slipped into bed.

"Blow Thrupp!"

He had got away with it this time. But if he were

Potts, The Office Boy



found roaming round at night again—and apparently Thrupp kept dangerously late hours—suspicion would be aroused.

"This has put the lid on night work," he told himself grimly. "I can't take any risks! I'll have to look round in the daytime, whenever I get the chance, in future."

It had been rather an unlucky beginning for Marie Douvar at Spalding Hall.

CHAPTER 7.

Trimble Asks for It!

"THERE they are!" Baggy Trimble gave a smirk of satisfaction. It was the following Saturday afternoon, and the match between St. Jim's and the Grammar School had reached half-time, as Baggy came rolling on to Little Side.

As a rule Baggy failed to turn up to watch footer matches. He had spent the afternoon so far in the tuckshop, having succeeded in borrowing half-a-crown earlier in the day from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But as he had emerged from the tuckshop, the money all spent, he had met a couple of New House fellows, and a chance remark of theirs that he had overheard had reminded him of a fact which the excitement of having money to spend on tuck had caused him clean to forget! Namely, that the Spalding Hall girls had promised to come over and watch the match—and from what he had heard, he knew that they were already on Little Side.

He had wasted no time in getting there, and had soon spotted his quarry. He rolled in their direction.

Ethel, Doris, Lady Peggy, and Dick Lang were standing on the touchline, talking to Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. and one or two other admiring fellows, it being half-time. Dick, like Ethel & Co., was now, of course, wearing the brown coat and felt hat with the Spalding Hall ribbon that was the uniform of Miss Finch's establishment, and looked a perfectly usual Spaldingite.

It was more than amusing to Dick to be one of Ethel & Co., with whom he had already struck up a very warm friendship, and surrounded by respectful St. Jim's fellows. But he would have given a good deal just then to have changed places with one of the muddy footballers.

It had been a hard match up till now. So far, St. Jim's were leading, thanks to a goal scored by Tom Merry off a pass by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But Gordon Gay & Co. were far from beaten yet.

"That was a great goal of Tommy's, don't you think so, Miss Marie?" Baggy heard Monty Lowther saying cheerfully, as he approached.

"Rather!" nodded Dick. "I thought for a minute he was offside, mind you, but he wasn't by a yard."

"Why, you seem to know something about footer, Miss Marie!" exclaimed Tom, in surprise.

Dick jumped, and coloured a trifle. He had made a slip.

"Oh, yes, a little!" he said confusedly. "Not very much, of course."

"It's not often you discover a gal who knows anything at all about footah!" said Arthur Augustus, with an approving nod.

"Rats!" said Lady Peggy warmly. "We do, anyway!"

"Well, I fancy Miss Marie was the only one of you that

noticed I would have been offside in another yard, Peggy!" grinned Tom.

Dick broke in quickly. He felt he was on thin ice. "Anyway, for goodness' sake drop the 'miss'!" he exclaimed. "Marie will do, you know, without the handle."

Tom coloured, and laughed.

"Oh, thanks! Right-ho—Marie!"

Baggy came to a halt beside the visitors, and raised his cap with an oily smirk.

"Good-afternoon, girls!" he murmured ingratiatingly.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Lady Peggy. "Look what's blown along!"

"How-de-do, Miss Marie?" grinned Baggy, tacking himself on to the little group very complacently.

"Fine, thanks!" said Dick shortly. "What about you?"

"I'm pretty fit, thanks," smirked Baggy.

"Really? You look a bit on the untrained side to me!"

Baggy jumped, and turned crimson. The juniors chuckled.

"Oh, really, you know! I'm not a skinny chap, I know, but I dare say I could show some of the skinny ones a thing or two!" sniffed Baggy.

"In an eating race, I guess you mean?" queried Handcock.

"Oh, really, Handcock—"

The sound of the ref's whistle caused the footballers to return to their places on the field. The game started once more, with Baggy Trimble as well as Cyrus K. Handcock now in company with the Spaldingites.

That they did not want him was a fact that Baggy was far too obtuse to realise for a moment.

"I say, Miss Marie," said Baggy, in an oily undertone, "I don't suppose you want to watch this silly footer. Come along and lemme show you round the school! I—"

"No, thanks," said Dick, with a grin. Baggy was certainly rather amusing in his role of the gay Lothario!

"Oh, do!" urged Baggy. "I—ahem—I'd like to get to know you properly, you know! We'll be great pals, I expect!"

He slipped a fat arm through Dick's.

Smack!

Thoroughly exasperated, Dick Lang had forgotten for the moment his role as a member of the gentler sex. He had hit out, and his open hand connected with Baggy's podgy cheek with a report that could have been heard half across Little Side. Baggy gave a wild yell of pain and astonishment.

"Yarooooop!"

"Clear off!" said Dick fiercely.

"M-m-my hat! I—I—I—"

"Go away!"

Baggy gaped at the object of his admiration dumbly. Had Marie Douvar suddenly turned into a man-eating tiger, Baggy could scarcely have looked more astonished and dismayed.

Even Baggy was not so dull-witted that he did not realise he had "put his foot in it" somehow or other.

From the footer field there came a sudden shrill whistle. George Figgins of the New House, playing at inside-left, had crashed the ball into the Grammarians' goal with a deadly shot, giving St. Jim's a two-nil lead. Cousin Ethel, who was a great chum of Figgys, clapped her hands excitedly. There was an exclamation of admiration from Dick.

Stampede!



Baggy seemed to have been forgotten for the moment. He plucked at Dick's sleeve, with a sickly grin.

"I—I say, Miss Marie—"

Smack!

Once again Marie Douvar had administered a stinging palm to Baggy's fat cheek.

"Oh! Yarooooogh!"

"Marie!" gasped Ethel, rather horrified.

"I've told him to leave me alone, and he won't!" explained Dick grimly. "He'll get another if he doesn't go away!"

Baggy went!

Even the Falstaff of the Fourth realised that he was not wanted at long last! He rolled away, followed by the grinning stares of the other juniors who had seen his discomfiture, looking dazed.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Baggy. "She—she was waxy! Oh dear! I—I wonder why? Girls are so blessed funny!"

He rolled disconsolately into the quad.

Baggy was a thick-skinned individual if ever there was one. Though he had been "choked off" for the moment, he had by no means given up his intention of winning the regard of the new Spaldingite! He had apparently offended her somehow for the moment—but it was only a question of patience and persistence before she would come to see what a really delightful chap he was, of course; that was obvious enough—to Baggy.

"Wonder what I ought to do?" mumbled Baggy. "Girls like a lot of fuss made over 'em now." His little eyes gleamed suddenly. "My hat, yes! That's the wheeze!"

A brilliant idea had entered the mind of Baggy Trimble.

There was nothing a girl liked better than to be serenaded under her window, he believed, with a vague memory of cinema shows at the back of his fat mind. Very well, he would serenade Marie Douvar, and win her affections at one fell swoop!

Baggy rolled quickly across to the School House and scuttled up the steps. A minute later he was sneaking into Study No. 6 of the Fourth—Blake & Co.'s sanctum.

Herries of the Fourth was the proud possessor of a cornet, an instrument which brought down trouble on his head from the "unmusical" juniors, however, whenever he ventured to blow upon it in the House. It was kept on top of the cupboard in Study No. 6, in its box, as Baggy knew.

It did not take Baggy long to gain possession of Herries' instrument of torture—as his unfeeling chums called it. With the cornet under his coat, Baggy scuttled off to his own study.

"If Herries can play the blessed thing, I jolly well can, too!" muttered Baggy, as he hid it carefully away. "I'll give Marie a surprise to-night!"

It looked as though Baggy probably would; but whether it would be exactly a pleasant surprise was perhaps rather doubtful!

CHAPTER 8. The Jewels!

SCRAPE, scrape, scrape, scrape!

Four pens were scratching busily in Study No. 5 in the Fifth Form passage at Spalding Hall.

Seated round the table in the cosy little study were—apparently—four schoolgirls. At Ethel & Co.'s invitation, Marie Douvar had come along from the end room to do her prep in Study No. 5, on the return of the Spaldingites from St. Jim's, where they had enjoyed a cheery tea in Study No. 10, after seeing Tom Merry's eleven defeat the Grammar School in a two—one victory.

To his surprise—and rather to his dismay—Dick had discovered during the last three days that Miss Peters, the Fifth Form mistress, was something of a "dragon"—she made her pupils work. Consequently, Dick had found that he had to work just as hard at Spalding Hall as he had done at Abbotsford!

That discovery had been rather a shock. But he was reconciled to it more or less by now.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

The pens of the occupants of Study No. 5 carried on busily. It was dark outside now, and there was no other sound to be heard in the lighted study.

"Lemme see—what ever's the Latin for ship?" queried Lady Peggy.

"Navis," Dick told her. "But, I say, somebody, what's the—"

He did not finish his question.

From somewhere outside a weird and horrible sound had penetrated the open window—a sound rather like that of a dying donkey, or an expiring elephant.

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"Whooooorrah!"

The sound died away, then burst forth again.

"My hat!" ejaculated Doris. "What ever's that?"

"What the dickens—" breathed Dick.

The four girls jumped to their feet, staring at one another in astonishment. Ethel and Dick stepped quickly to the window, pulled back the curtain, and raised the sash hastily, staring out.

"Rararararah!" burst upon them from under the window.

"Look!" gasped Ethel. "Oh! It—it's Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble was standing beneath the window, his fat cheeks fairly distended as he blew lustily into Herries' cornet.

Baggy imagined that he was giving a lovely rendering of "Annie Laurie"—he felt that the sentiments contained in that ballad were very suitable. But it was doubtful if anyone else in the world but Baggy would have recognised as "Annie Laurie" the weird and wonderful noises that the Falstaff of the Fourth was producing from that cornet.



"Marie" hit out, and her open hand

"Rarararah! Whoooh! Wheeeeee!" went the cornet.

"My hat!" ejaculated Dick feebly.

Doris and Lady Peggy were at the window, too, now. From Lady Peggy there broke a gurgle of laughter.

"Great Scott! It's Baggy serenading!" She glanced at Dick with a cheery grin. "It must be you! You've made a hit with Baggy, you know!"

Whether it was merely luck on Baggy's part that had brought him to the right window, or whether he had guessed that the object of his admiration would most likely be doing prep in Ethel & Co.'s study, they did not know. But that Baggy's efforts were for Marie's benefit was obvious enough.

"Churrrrah!" from the cornet. "Yecceeeoh!"

Baggy was carrying on manfully.

He had caught sight of the four heads at the window above, and he imagined that they were listening enthralled to his strains. That the new Spaldingite was one of the four he had seen at once, and that fact caused him to redouble his efforts.

According to the St. Jim's juniors, George Herries could produce the most horrible and unearthly sounds they had ever heard from his cornet. But Herries' best—or worst—efforts were as nothing compared with the tortured notes that Baggy was producing from the unfortunate instrument.

His cheeks going in and out like clockwork, he pumped out music such as had probably never been heard in the world before.

From the windows of neighbouring studies the heads of other excited and hilarious Spaldingites were now protruding. But Baggy was oblivious to all but the one whom he considered himself to be serenading so charmingly.

Swish!

An ominous sound came suddenly to Baggy's ears from the window above. He glanced up, the cornet still to his lips, and the next moment a jug of very chilly water had sluiced over his face and over the cornet.



connected with Baggy's podgy cheek!

The cornet produced the weirdest note of all, then, as half a pint of water shot out of its trumpet with the sound of an emptying bath. And from Baggy Trimble there broke a breathless howl.

"Oh! Yarooosh!"

Swish!

Two more jugs of icy water descended upon Baggy. The occupants of Study No. 5 were wasting no time in letting Baggy know what they thought of his musical efforts! Their grinning heads protruding from the window, they saw Baggy, dripping and gasping, make a wild bolt for safety.

It was quite clear to Baggy that his serenade was not quite a success, after all!

But Baggy's troubles were not over yet.

Sammy Thrupp was the proud owner of a fair-sized quadruped that looked a general mixture of bulldog, terrier, pomeranian, and red setter. This animal had heard Baggy's serenade with strong disapproval. And it was the sight of it now, streaking across the dusky quad towards him, that put the lid on Baggy's discomfort.

With a wild yell he turned and fled.

Covering the ground at a speed astonishing considering his fat figure, Baggy dived for the opening into the orchard. He raced across it, with his snarling pursuer gaining every

second. With a final wild leap the Falstaff of the Fourth sprang for the open door of the kitchen garden, got through somehow, and slammed the door behind him.

"Yow!" gasped Baggy, beside himself with terror, as he heard Thrupp's peculiar-looking pet scratching energetically at the closed door. "Oh lor! Ow! Help!"

It was dark in the garden, which was rather fortunate for Trimble.

He could hear a shrill, indignant voice somewhere in the quadrangle, and recognised the voice of Miss Finch. Miss Finch, also brought on the scene by the sound of Baggy's efforts on the cornet, was calling grimly for Thrupp.

Baggy looked like getting caught if he was not very careful. And there would be trouble if he were found on the Spalding Hall premises at that time of the evening. Visitors were certainly not allowed at that hour.

He turned and scuttled across the kitchen garden, making for the farther wall, which shut the garden off from the road.

He hoped that he had just time to scramble over it, get to where he had left his bicycle under a hedge, and make himself thoroughly scarce before Samuel Thrupp took a hand in things.

But even as he was half-way towards the wall, the door behind him opened.

"Ow! Help!" moaned Baggy.

Luckily for Baggy, however, Mr. Thrupp had entered without his dog, which had apparently tired of the game already. In the gloom Baggy was not easily seen, and he dived for safety into a small gardener's hut without having been observed.

Quaking like a jelly with fright, Baggy huddled down in the dark interior of the hut and listened.

He heard Thrupp coming along the path looking for him, and his heart almost stopped as the ex-sailor halted outside the hut, peering in. A match spluttered, and Baggy kept still as a shadow. It died out after a few moments, and Thrupp went on, evidently having failed to notice him in the gloom.

Baggy almost wept with relief.

For some minutes he heard Thrupp searching round the dark garden. Then, clearly deciding that the marauder, whoever it had been, had got away over the wall, Mr. Thrupp left the kitchen garden, closing the door behind him.

Baggy rose cautiously to his feet.

The hut was chiefly used, it seemed, for storing firewood and pea-sticks. They were piled all over the place, and Baggy, fearful of falling over them and making a noise that would still be heard, took out a box of matches and struck one cautiously.

The tiny flame glimmered shakily in the gloom. Baggy gave a sudden exclamation of surprise.

Almost hidden among the pea-sticks piled near him was the end of a black, oblong box that looked as though it were made of ebony. It seemed a handsome article—a peculiar place to find it.

Baggy possessed an insatiable curiosity, and now that he was safe from Thrupp he did not feel that there was any hurry until his curiosity had been satisfied. He stooped down and pulled the box out from under the sticks.

There was something like a worn crest engraved on the lid.

"Funny to find it here," thought Baggy again. "Wonder what's in the blessed thing?"

He tried the lid, only to find that it was locked.

A little matter like that did not worry Baggy, however. In the dim light, to which his eyes were now becoming used, he had already noticed an old spade leaning against the wall. It seemed an ideal instrument for his purpose. He got to work, and it did not take long to prise open the lid, breaking the small lock.

He scarcely knew what he had expected to find inside that mysterious box. But what he did find brought a look of dumb amazement to his fat face.

Hastily he struck another match.

With trembling fingers he held the little flame above the opened box, staring down wide-eyed at the thousand dancing lights that gleamed from a mass of jewels within.

CHAPTER 9.

Findings Keepings I

"MY giddy aunt!" stammered Baggy dazedly.

Diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and sapphires—some set in rings and necklaces and brooches, some lying loose—met his astonished eyes.

In an almost frightened way he struck another match as the other went out, and took out a handful of sparkling

gems. He dropped them back, one by one, through his fat fingers.

That he had found a fortune, Baggy did not doubt. He knew very little about precious stones, but something told him that these were the real thing.

That Miss Finch had known nothing of the box of gems hidden in the shed in the kitchen garden was quite clear. No one else at Spalding Hall, presumably, knew of their existence, or they would scarcely have been left there long.

How, then, they came to be there was a mystery. But that they were there, Baggy had the proof of his own eyes.

"Must be some blessed burglar's giddy loot," he told himself excitedly. "Some crook must have hidden 'em here in escaping from the police, or something, and hasn't ever been able to get back for 'em. The police caught him, and he's in gaol, I dare say—"

Baggy broke off in his excited speculations to strike another match, and again feast his eyes on the mass of gleaming gems and jewellery.

"What a find!" he gasped.

That he had a perfect right to the box of treasure, the Falstaff of the Fourth did not question for a moment. In Baggy's rather threadbare code of honour—if he had such a thing at all—findings were keepings. Of course, if he lost something and somebody else found it, that rule didn't apply. But it applied to his own findings every time.

"It would be impossible to find out who they belonged to, anyway," he told himself, as an uneasy twinge of conscience rose within him—soon suppressed. "And since the chap they used to belong to couldn't be found, I don't suppose—well, I've found 'em, and I've as much right to 'em as anybody else!"

With which amazing statement Baggy hastily shut the box, tucked it under his arm—it was amazingly heavy, he found—and stole cautiously out into the dark kitchen garden.

Baggy was not an athlete; but he managed somehow or other to get over the wall into the road with his prize, and Herries' "borrowed" cornet. He found his bike still

where he had left it, and a few minutes later was pedalling for St. Jim's, the cornet under his coat, and the precious box strapped to the carrier, wrapped up in an old newspaper he had found blowing about in the road.

Old Taggles was just closing the gates as he rode into the quad, perspiring freely from his haste.

"Which I says is, you're werry late, Master Trimble," sniffed Taggles. "Which I says is—"

"Oh, go and boil your head!" said Baggy rudely.

"My heye! Which I says is—"

"Br-r-r!"

Baggy wheeled his machine to the cycle-shed, and scuttled into the School House with the box under his arm, hidden in the newspaper. The juniors were trooping in to call-over as he raced upstairs. He had only time to hide his wonderful, staggering find in Study No. 2, and replace Herries' cornet in Study No. 6, and squeeze into call-over just as Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was calling out his name a second time.

"Adsum!" gasped Baggy.

"Cut it pretty fine, didn't you?" grinned Mellish, sotto voce.

Baggy grinned.

He certainly had cut it fine. But even had he been late for call-over that night, and received a licking from Kildare in consequence, it would have been worth it.

A dazzling vision of vast wealth was swimming before his eyes.

That his find was worth hundreds, perhaps thousands, even, he was convinced. Of course, he could say nothing about it to anybody. He would have to change the jewels into money gradually and secretly. Because, although Baggy had managed to persuade himself that he had a right to keep the jewels he had found, in his heart he knew that he had not the faintest right to do so.

Baggy Trimble walked on air as he went up to the Fourth-Form dormitory that night.

His serenading of the new Spaldingite had been a miserable failure—not that Baggy had given up hope by any means of winning Marie's regard. That he would do so sooner or later he was quite determined, for he was very "smitten" indeed! But although his serenade had been a failure, his visit that evening to Spalding Hall had been anything but a failure!

"Hundreds of quids—p'raps thousands!" Baggy told himself again and again, as he undressed and got into bed.

"What's the matter with you, Baggy?" said Kerruish of the Fourth suddenly. "You look as if you're pretty pleased with yourself about something!"

"Not been robbing a bank?" queried Wildrake.

"Oh, really, Wildrake—"

"I shouldn't have thought you'd have been feeling very pleased with yourself after Miss Douvar smacked your silly face a couple of times this afternoon!" chuckled Roylance. "Ha, ha, ha! Served you right, I'll bet!"

The juniors chuckled. Baggy's discomfiture was common knowledge. The Falstaff of the Fourth went flaming red, and glared at the grinning juniors.

"Oh, rats!" he growled, and rolled over in bed, pulling the blankets up over his fat little ears.

Darrell of the Sixth looked in a moment or two later and put out the light. In the darkness Baggy lay with his eyes gleaming excitedly at the ceiling.

"Hundreds—thousands of blessed quids!"

But even Baggy would have been astonished—flabbergasted—to know that the contents of the black box that he had found at Spalding Hall were worth more even than that; that the Douvar jewels—though he did not know them by that name—were worth, more or less, a million pounds! The finest jewels in the world, some of them, reposing now in Study No. 2 of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's!

Baggy Trimble, by sheerest chance, had stumbled upon the prize that all Dr. Brusiloff's efforts had so far failed to find!

CHAPTER 10.

Rough on Baggy!

"THAT'S that!"

It was two days later, early after tea on Monday, that Baggy Trimble gave that satisfied exclamation.

Baggy had taken a long time to decide on the best and safest hiding-place for his hoard of treasure. Obviously he could not keep them safely in Study No. 2 for very long. He had finally decided upon one of the little islands that were situated here and there along the Rhyl—Mayfly Island was the particular one he had chosen as the ideal hiding-place. It was not far from the school, which was an advantage, and it was so thickly grown with bushes that

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it was never used for bathing purposes—not that many of the St. Jim's fellows went bathing at that time of year, in any case.

Accordingly, Baggy had arrived there by boat with his box carefully hidden in a newspaper, and with a spade. He had dug a fair-size hole in the middle of the bushes on the little island, dropped the box inside, and covered it over with earth.

His treasure was safe enough now! It could lie on Mayfly Island for weeks—months, if necessary—without any danger of its being discovered, while he found the best means of turning the jewels into hard cash.

It was tantalising for Baggy to feel that he possessed such terrific wealth, and yet could not at present have a single penny of it to spend! But even Baggy was not fool enough to let his greed and impatience lead him into some rash move that would give the whole thing away to the rest of the world and rob him of his prize altogether!

But Baggy had not been able to resist extracting one diamond ring from his hoard! It reposed in his pocket now as he dumped the earthy spade in the boat and climbed in to row back to St. Jim's.

A quarter of an hour later Baggy was back at the school, rolling towards the School House with thoughts of prep.

But at the foot of the steps he paused, his eyes on the doorway of Mrs. Taggles' little tuckshop under the elms.

Baggy was feeling hungry—very hungry, in fact. And he had not a farthing on him in cash.

He had in his pocket, it was true, a diamond ring worth several hundred pounds! Baggy grunted disconsolately. He did not realise for a moment that the ring was worth all that, of course; he imagined that ten pounds or so would have been a good price for it. But even a ten-pound ring was a tantalising thing to have in his pocket when he wanted hard tin.

"Blessed if I don't see if Mrs. Taggles'll gimme something for it!" muttered Baggy, his greediness suddenly overcoming his discretion. "No harm in that. Nobody'll guess!"

He rolled across to the tuckshop, and in through the doorway.

The little shop was empty, he was glad to find. Mrs. Taggles, setting out her stock at the counter, surveyed Baggy with anything but a favourable eye, however.

"No, Master Trimble!" she said decidedly. "I cannot allow you a penny more credit. You already owe me three shillings and fivepence!"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Taggles—"

"Not a penny more, Master Trimble, till you have paid!"

"All right!" said Baggy loftily. "As a matter of fact, I've come to settle up that measly three-and-five!"

Mrs. Taggles looked very taken aback. The frown died from her face, to be replaced by a beaming smile.

"In that case, Master Trimble—"

"I—I've not exactly got the cash—" began Baggy.

"Oh!" The smile vanished. "Really, Master Trimble, I—"

Baggy hastily lugged the ring from his pocket and placed it on the counter with an impressive air. Mrs. Taggles surveyed it, with pursed lips.

"That's worth ten quid, at least," said Baggy eagerly. "It's a legacy. An old aunt of mine died and left it me. I was her favourite nephew, you see. I was the apple of her eye—"

Mrs. Taggles surveyed Baggy very grimly indeed.

"I do not believe your story for a moment, Master Trimble!" she said with asperity. "How dare you try to pass over this on me? I have a good mind to inform your Housemaster! I have no doubt at all that this is a ring from the sixpenny stores in Wayland!"

It was natural enough that Mrs. Taggles did not for a moment believe that the ring was really the diamond ring it appeared to be. But it was a shock to Baggy to find what she thought. He glared indignantly.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Taggles—"

"Please leave my shop, Master Trimble!"

"I jolly well won't!" roared Baggy, forgetting in his chagrin that he was addressing a member of the fair sex.

"I tell you that's a jolly good ring, and if you'd got any sense you'd see it's a bargain at ten quid! I—"

"Kindly leave my shop, Master Trimble!"

"I tell you—"

"Hallo! What's all this?"

Tom Merry had entered the tuckshop, accompanied by Manners and Lowther and Cyrus K. Handcock. Baggy jumped.

"Oh, n-nothing!" he said hastily, reaching out for his ring. "I—I—"

Before his hand could close on the ring, however, Mrs. Taggles picked it up.

"Master Trimble was trying to pass off a cheap ring on me to pay his account, Master Merry!" said the old lady indignantly. Never for a moment did Mrs. Taggles dream

that she was for once misjudging Baggy, and that as a matter of fact Baggy had ludicrously under-estimated the value of the article in question. Mrs. Taggles knew even less than the Falstaff of the Fourth about jewellery, and the fact that the ring was in Baggy's possession was enough to convince her that it was quite worthless. "I think it is disgraceful!"

"My hat, yes!" said Tom grimly.

He took the ring from Mrs. Taggles' hand. It certainly looked a good one. But, like Mrs. Taggles, Tom did not dream of believing that a supposed diamond ring in Baggy's possession could be a real one and not a cheap imitation.

He surveyed Baggy with a frown. Baggy gave a squeal of alarm.

"Gimme my ring!" he gasped.

Tom tossed him the ring, and Baggy caught it and stuffed it into his pocket, with an uneasy blink at Tom Merry & Co.

"You fat rotter!" said Manners contemptuously.

"I guess that's the outside edge—trying to palm off a phoney ring!" snapped Handcock.

"Bring him outside!" growled Monty Lowther.

Baggy, trying to edge out past the four Shell fellows, gave a squeal as he felt his arms seized. Tom glanced at Mrs. Taggles, while Baggy wriggled to escape.

"We'll see to Trimble, Mrs. Taggles!" he said grimly.

"Don't you bother Mr. Railton!"

"Oh, very well, Master Merry!" said the old lady, with an equally grim smile.

"Now, you fat worm," said Tom quietly, as Baggy was led outside, "you need a jolly good lesson!"

"I—I tell you I wasn't trying to swindle her!" groaned Baggy. "It's a real diamond ring, you asses! I swear it is—"

"Aw, hire a hall!" said Handcock impatiently.

"I tell you—"

"If it's a real diamond ring, Baggy, how did you get hold of it, then?" demanded Tom sternly.

Baggy went rather a sickly hue. That was a question he could not truthfully answer!

"A-an aunt of mine left it me!" he croaked. "It came this morning by the post—"

"That's a fib, anyway!" said Manners. "I was downstairs when the post was there, and I know there was nothing for you!"

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "We-were you?"

"You admit you were fibbing, then?" snapped Tom.

"Oh dear! Yes!" groaned Baggy, seeing that further protest was useless. "But it really is a diamond ring."

Tom, still holding Baggy's arm, surveyed him curiously.

"How can you have an expensive ring in your possession, Baggy?" he demanded again. "If it's really a valuable one—"

"Oh lor!"

Baggy saw that he was between the devil and the deep sea. It would not do, he suddenly realised, to insist that it was really a valuable ring, or very awkward questions would naturally follow—questions he could not answer. The other alternative—to pretend to admit that it was a fake—meant that he had been trying to swindle Mrs. Taggles, however! It was a ticklish situation, and Baggy chose what seemed the wisest course.

"I—I admit it!" he gasped nervously. "It's only a blessed spoof ring. I—I tried to pass it at the tuckshop for a joke! It was only a joke," he repeated feebly.

"Well, it's not the sort of 'joke' we're going to let you play off on Mrs. Taggles!" said Monty Lowther.

"Bump the fat cad, you chaps!"

"I guess so!"

"Yarooop! Leggo! Hands off, you beasts— Oh! My hat! Whoooooops! Yarooough!"

Baggy gave a wild howl as he was swung into the air by arms and legs, and bumped heartily. Again and again he was swung up, and bumped down again, till he felt that his teeth were loose and his bones were more or less entirely broken. Not till he was too utterly breathless to squeal, even, did Tom Merry & Co. release him, dumping him down in a groaning, moaning heap.

"P'raps that'll be a lesson to you to cut out sharp practice in future, Baggy!" said Tom sternly.

"Grooooooh! Ow! I'm dying! My back's broken in three places, I think—"

"Good!" said Lowther cheerfully.

"Oh, really, Lowther, you heartless beast—"

Tom Merry & Co. strolled away, arm-in-arm, feeling that they had given Baggy his deserts for once. Not till they had vanished into the School House did Baggy limp to his feet.

"Oh, the beasts!" he groaned. "Yow!"

It was hard luck, perhaps, to have been bumped for trying to change a worthless ring into cash, when actually he knew the ring to be worth a good deal of money. But even Baggy had realised that he must not let Tom

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Merry & Co. know the ring's true worth! And though he had been bumped for a deed of which he had been innocent, he certainly deserved bumping for so many other things, that there was no harm done; though that was not a view of the case with which Baggy was likely to have agreed!

He limped away, the diamond ring clutched in his fat fingers in his pocket, still groaning. But at the foot of the steps he suddenly halted, with gleaming eyes.

"My hat, yes!"

An idea had come to him. Though it was evidently impossible to change even that single ring into hard cash at St. Jim's, he could find good use for it.

He would give it to Miss Marie!

His serenading might have been a dismal failure; but a diamond ring would surely soften any girl's heart!

Baggy was not a generous fellow, and to give away anything of value, even to a girl he admired, was contrary to his nature. But, seeing that the ring was a fleabite out of his vast hoard, even Baggy felt he could afford to be generous for once.

"I'll do it!" he muttered. "She's bound to think I'm a wealthy chap then, and that'll make all the difference! Dash it, I jolly well am a wealthy chap, too, now!" he added, with a grin. "It's only a matter of finding out where I can sell those giddy jewels safely! I'll be a giddy Rockefeller then! He, he, he! Marie'll fall for me properly when I give her this!"

And Baggy rolled into the House with quite a cheerful countenance, despite his aches and pains!

CHAPTER 11.

A Staggering Problem!

"OH, my hat! It's that ass!"

Dick Lang gave a disgusted grunt.

It was the following evening, and Dick was cycling along over Wayland Moor after tea, from the direction of Spalding Hall, on a machine he had borrowed from Doris Levison. He was on his way to the Moat House.

He wanted to see Dr. Brusiloff, to tell him that, so far, he had failed to find the jewels that the Russian wanted, despite several hard searches in and around Spalding Hall. Not that Dick felt in any way beaten in the matter. The school was a rambling place, in extensive grounds, and it was scarcely surprising, he felt, that so far he had not unearthed the precious box.

The sight of Baggy Trimble rolling along the road, apparently bound for Spalding Hall, had met his eyes as he cycled round a bend in the road.

"Blow!" said Dick.

His visit to the Moat House was a secret one, and he wanted to get it over. He was not supposed to know the occupants of the old moated mansion—a fact which he had never quite been able to understand—and so the fewer people who saw him in the neighbourhood of the place the better.

But there was no escaping Baggy Trimble!

Baggy had already caught sight of him, and halted in the middle of the road, with an eager grin. For a moment Dick thought of riding past him; but he decided he had better see what Baggy wanted. He slowed down.

"I say, I'm jolly glad I met you, Miss Marie!" exclaimed Baggy eagerly, raising his cap, as Dick dismounted. "I—I was coming over to see you, you know!"

"To apologise for that ghastly row you made under my window the other night?" inquired Dick, with a grin.

Though Baggy exasperated him badly at times, he found Baggy's evident devotion decidedly comic.

"Nunno!" gasped Baggy, going crimson. "At least—y-yes! I—I thought you'd like it!" he explained sheepishly.

"Sorry; I didn't!" laughed Dick. "Well, what did you want to see me about, Trimble?"

Baggy's crimson countenance deepened even further in colour. He shuffled his feet and coughed nervously before plunging a hand into his pocket and pulling out a small cardboard box.

"I—I wanted to give you this!" gulped Baggy.

Dick took the box curiously, and opened it. To his utter astonishment, what looked like a valuable diamond ring lay inside.

He gave an exclamation. Baggy grinned eagerly.

"That's for you, you know, Miss Marie! A—ahem!—a little present, you know!"

Dick looked at him queerly. He couldn't be exasperated. But that the ring was really a valuable one he, naturally, did not realise, any more than Mrs. Taggles or Tom Merry & Co. had done. A few shillings at most was the price Dick imagined it to have cost. He scarcely knew what to do.

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"That's awfully kind of you!" he said, thoroughly taken aback. "But I can't accept it, you know, old—". He was about to say "old chap," but checked himself in time. "I can't, really!"

"I wish you would!" said Baggy, with an oily smirk. He was recovering his confidence now. "I—hem!—I bought it specially for you, Miss Marie! I thought you'd like it!"

"But—"

Dick broke off in his protest. After all, it was only worth a few shillings, of course. There was no real harm in taking it, just to get rid of Baggy, so that he could ride on to the Moat House without further waste of time.

"All right," he said. "Thanks awfully!"

He took the ring out of the box. It certainly looked a good one, although he felt it could not possibly be anything but an imitation.

"Won't you put it on?" smirked Baggy.

Dick laughed, and slipped the ring on to his finger.

"You're jolly kind!" he said shortly. "But I'm in rather a hurry, Trimble. Good-bye!"

"Oh, I say—"

Baggy gave an ejaculation of consternation as Dick jumped on to his bike again. He had hoped, on the strength of the ring, to spend the rest of the evening with the new Spaldingite.

But already Marie Douvar was pedalling away along the road. The figure on the cycle vanished round the next bend, and Baggy gave a disgusted ejaculation.

"Blow!" said Baggy, gazing blankly down the empty road.

"Blow!"

Oddly enough, at almost the same moment, Dick Lang was echoing Baggy's ejaculation.

He had stopped a few hundred yards farther on, once he was safely out of sight of Baggy, to remove the ring from his finger. But, to his annoyance, he had discovered that it fitted too tightly. It would not come off.

He tugged, but it remained where it was.

"Bless the thing, anyway!" growled Dick, and gave up the attempt.

It was no good wasting time over Baggy's ring. He mounted the cycle again and went on.

Before long the gates of the Moat House came into sight. Dick glanced round. The road was empty—no one would see him entering the place, and that was a point on which Dr. Brusiloff had insisted he should make sure, when he came to visit the Moat House to report.

He turned quickly in at the gates, cycled along the dark, neglected drive, and came out opposite the bridge that spanned the moat.

"It's a pretty eerie-looking place, anyway," he told himself, as he glanced at the forbidding-looking old building. He had never seen it in daylight before. "Hope he's in!"

He crossed the bridge to the main entrance, and rang the bell, leaving the cycle at the foot of the steps. A manservant opened the door. Dick stepped into the hall.

"I want to see Dr. Brusiloff."

"Very good," answered the man, in a foreign voice. "Your name, please?"

"Miss Douvar," answered Dick, without hesitation.

He saw a peculiar look come into the man's face, and wondered why. He would have been astonished to know the reason—that the servant knew the real Miss Douvar to be a prisoner in that very house at that moment!

But the next instant there was a step on the stairs, and Dick, glancing round, saw the tall figure of the Russian hurrying towards him.

"Ah!" murmured Brusiloff smoothly. "Come this way, if you please!"

Dick followed him into a small, firelit room overlooking the moat. Dusk was falling, and the Russian turned on the light.

"I just looked in—" began Dick.

He broke off in surprise. There had come a startled exclamation from Dr. Brusiloff. The Russian's eyes were riveted, glittering, upon the ring on Dick's finger, as the light caught the diamonds and caused them to dance and gleam.

"You have found them!"

Brusiloff's voice was almost choking with triumph. Dick shook his head.

"I'm afraid I haven't yet. You see, I don't get many chances of looking—"

"But that ring!" panted Brusiloff. "It is one of the jewels from that box! I know it! It is of an unusual design, and I cannot be mistaken!"

Dick glanced down at the glittering ring on his finger in utter bewilderment.

"But—but this is only a cheap, imitation ring!" he said.

incredulously. "It was given me only a short while ago by a St. Jim's fellow! It can't be worth anything—"

Dr. Brusiloff seized hold of his hand, examining the ring with startled eyes. His eyes burnt into Dick's.

"You say this ring was given you by a St. Jim's boy?" he breathed.

Dick nodded.

"Yes. It won't come off, or I dare say I'd have chucked it away!"

There was a queer, thick exclamation from Brusiloff. He let Dick's hand fall, and surveyed him searchingly. He realised from the look in Dick's face that the disguised youngster was telling the truth. There could be no doubt of that.

"Then—good heavens! What does this mean?" panted Brusiloff. "For this ring is part of the contents of that box of jewels that I know to have been hidden at Spalding Hall!"

Dick caught his breath.

He could no longer doubt that Brusiloff knew what he was talking about. The ring Baggy had given him had been no cheap imitation, but a valuable piece of jewellery. He knew now.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Then how on earth did the fat ass get hold of it?"

Both to Dick and to Brusiloff it was a staggering problem.

The Russian swung round on the youngster with gleaming eyes.

"Who is he, this boy who gave you that ring? What is his name?"

"A fellow called Trimble, in the Fourth!"

"Trimble?" The Russian echoed the name, frowning thoughtfully, his thin lips pressed together in a white line.

"So! Why did he give you the ring?"

Dick grinned rather sheepishly.

"H'm! The ass is a bit keen on me—doesn't know what a chump he's making of himself, of course. I've tried to choke him off." He shrugged. "He's an awful fool."

Dr. Brusiloff smiled sardonically. He lit a cigarette, deep in thought.

"So!" he said softly. "I know this boy Trimble. He is 'keen' on you? You should be flattered!" He faced Dick with queerly gleaming eyes. "Listen! You must not try to 'choke him off,' as you call it. You must show much friendliness to him. You must discover from him where he obtained that ring. He is a fool. It should not be hard for you, if you make yourself nice to him, to get him to tell you everything!"

"Oh!" Dick did not look very pleased with the idea. "I—I see."

"It is possible," went on Brusiloff, "that in some way this ring has come out of the box, and that while the rest of the treasure is still hidden at Spalding Hall, this one ring came to be found somewhere about here by this boy Trimble, and that he knows nothing of the other jewels. On the other hand, it is possible that he knows a lot. Does he visit Spalding Hall?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Ah!" The Russian's eyes glittered fiercely. "Then what if he has happened to find this box, and has kept it, saying nothing?" He took two or three excited strides over the carpet. "Well, that is for you to find out. You must—what is the word?—you must 'vamp' him, my young friend! That would be a good joke."

He laughed sardonically.

Dick gave rather a wry smile. The idea of "vamping" Baggy did not appeal to him at all! But he felt that he had to do his best for Dr. Brusiloff, and if Baggy really had got possession of the vanished jewels in some mysterious way, any means were justifiable to get them back from him, since the Falstaff of the Fourth had no shadow of right to them.

"I'll see if I can get him to tell me," he nodded.

"There is no 'if' about it, my young friend!" snapped Brusiloff. "It is a case of 'must'!"

"All right."

"Good! He is a fool—I have met him. Then so charming and clever a young lady as yourself—ha, ha!—should have no difficulty. I trust to you!"

Five minutes later the bogus Marie Douvar was cycling quickly back through the dusk towards Spalding Hall. As he turned in at the gates, Sammy Thrupp, who was standing outside his lodge, touched his cap with a grin.

"Evenin', miss! Sorry I couldn't find that ring you lost in the shrubbery that time—"

"It's all right," grinned Dick. He held out his hand, where Baggy's gift still glittered. "See?"

"Ah! So you found it yourself, miss! Good-night!"

"Good-night, Thrupp!"

There was a thoughtful frown on Dick's face as he went

into the house and up to his room at the end of the Fifth Form passage.

"It's all jolly queer!" he muttered. "How the dickens did Baggy get this giddy thing? Well, I suppose it's up to me to find out!"

Scowling darkly, Trimble eventually reached St. Jim's.

"That jolly well finishes it, anyway!" he was telling himself disgustedly, as he mounted the steps with a fat waddle. "Give a girl a ripping ring, and she hardly says thank you! Just buzzes off right away! She might have let me talk to her a bit. Well, I've finished with her! Blow her, that's what I say!"

And, with a dejected gait, the Falstaff of the Fourth rolled upstairs to Study No. 2.

"Anyway," he muttered, suddenly brightening, as he turned into the Fourth Form passage, "I've got those giddy jewels! Pots o' money they're worth! I'm a giddy Rockefeller, I am! He, he, he! Blow Miss Marie!"

But, even though Baggy professed to have finished with the new Spaldingite, had he only known it, the new Spaldingite had by no means finished with him; but was, on the other hand, beginning to take a very keen interest in Baggy Trimble!

Baggy did not know that, by his gift to "his girl," he had put himself in deadly danger from the mysterious Russian at the Moat House—the scoundrel who was using Dick Lang as his innocent tool for his nefarious schemes while on the trail of a million!

THE END.

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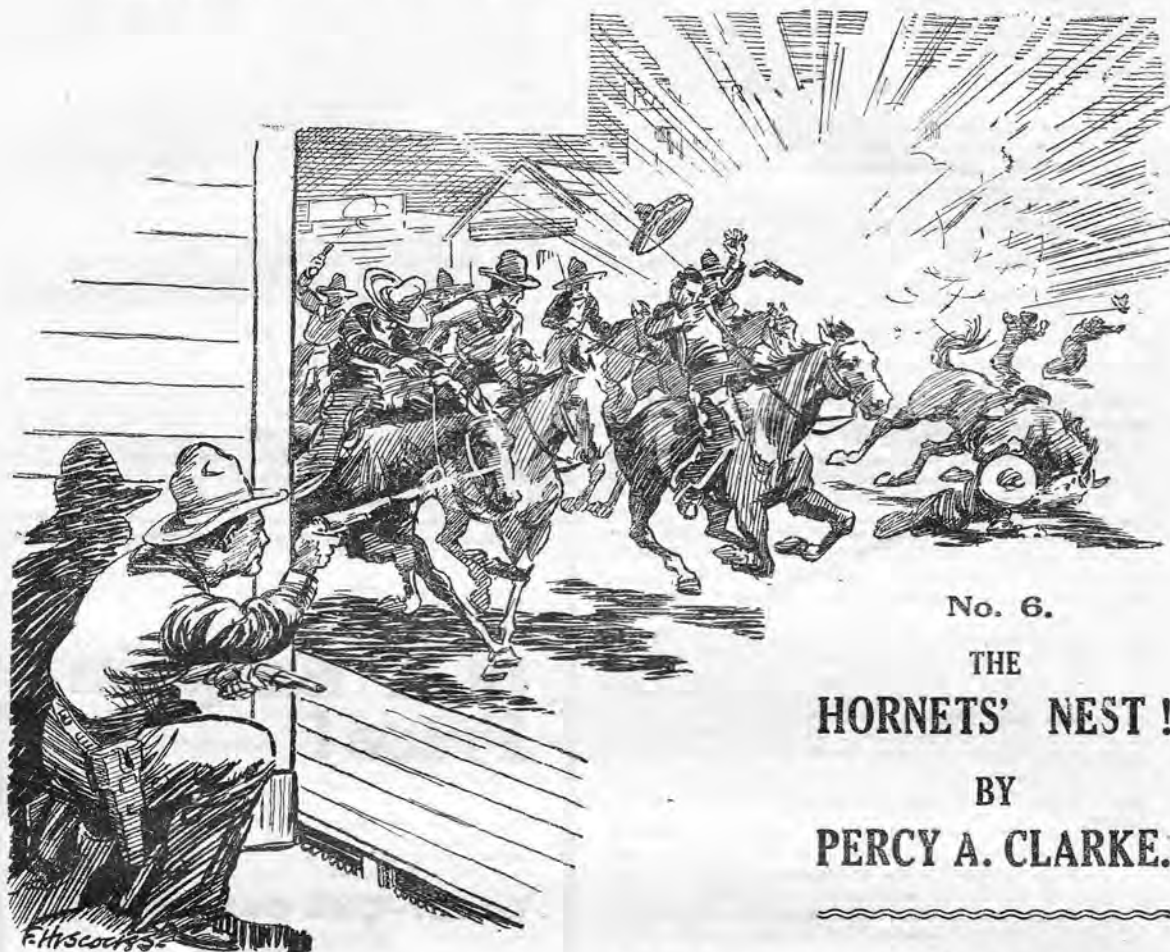
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CHAPTER 1.

Busted—A Bank!

THE sheriff from Pecos City rode up to the Broken K outfit, south of the Snake Springs, and Colonel Worth, the ranch owner, met him by the corral rail.

"Waal, and what's the best news?" he asked.

"Thar ain't no best news, colonel," said the sheriff. "It's all plumb bad. I been writing letters to the Mexican authorities, and they won't have nothing to do with Laredo. They won't support him and they won't arrest him."

"Then we'll have to stop the skunk ourselves," snapped the colonel. "Thar ain't no sense a setting down and doing nothing a-tall while Laredo gits an army o' greaser bandits an' renegade cowpunchers to clean us up. No, sir. We've got to git busy, pronto."

"Sure," said the sheriff. "Tell me how, though."

The colonel scratched his head at that. It was easy enough to say a thing should be done, but it was another to say exactly how it should be done. Then he had an idea. He put back his head and shouted at the top of his voice.

"Hey! Buck!"

"Coming, boss!"

Buck Moran, the Broken K foreman, came leisurely

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**Greasers! 'Tcha! Buck can't stand
the sight of them! . . . And as for
Smoke! O Gee! He likes 'em for
his breakfast!**

from the bunkhouse, rolling in his walk, his jaws moving thoughtfully, his Stetson pushed back on his head until it looked as if it must drop down on the ground behind him.

"Buck," said the colonel, "the sheriff reports the Mex Government no sabe Laredo and his gang, and don't want to be bothered no ways. What d'you know about that?"

"Guess we'll have to clean out thet hornets' nest, boss," said Buck. "It sure is a job that's got to be done, and won't get easier for being left till some other time."

"Yeah, we know all that," said the sheriff. "The point is, how do we do her?"

"I know what I'd do ef I was you, sheriff," said Buck.

"I'd send out half a dozen picked men, riding different ways to the Border, to keep their eyes skinned till they gets some hint where Laredo's hide-out kin be found, and I'd have a posse waiting to do the cleaning up as soon as maybe, and ef it happens to be over the Border I wouldn't worry none. Laredo is a danger to society, and he's got to be bumped off or put in the hoosegow. No less!"

"Gee, Buck, that's a mouthful," cried the sheriff. "Tell you what! You be the first special rider, and head for the Border what way you likes. How's that, colonel?"

"Okay with me, Jim. I kin release Buck. Guess I'll have to till Laredo is in the pen. Snap into it, Buck, and I wish you all the best."

"Then listen," said Buck. "I got a hunch Laredo comes

out round by way of Johnsbury. We shook things up for him, you'll remember, over the Border at Puerto Bambino, so he won't be that a-way. Howsomever, I'll hit the trail of Johnsbury, and don't you forget to have a posse trailing me, and as soon as I get a peep at any of Laredo's gang I'll sure send you word."

They shook hands, and Buck ambled off to the corral for his long-legged mustang, Smoke. There had been a time when the cow-waddies of the Broken K had laughed at Buck's weird-looking horse, but they had learnt better. Buck had made a reputation for himself as a fast man with a six-shooter gun and a cleaner up of crooks and rustlers, and that same reputation had stuck a goodish bit to his horse. Smoke had speed and endurance above the average for any horse in those parts. But, above all, he had intelligence, and had got Buck out of a tight fix more than once.

Buck saddled his cayuse, forked the saddle, and rode out of the Broken K outfit, idly rolling a cigarette. He was in no hurry. He had no definite place to go, and weeks to get there. But as he rode he studied the country with keen eyes, searching for signs of the big gang of Mexican bandits which threatened to come swooping over the Border to slay and loot that particular county.

Laredo had long been a scourge in those parts, but never so terrible but what the cow-punchers could keep him within limits. But the Mexican was growing ambitious, and several renegade Texas cow-punchers spurred him on to greater things. He had got together almost an army of lawless men, and planned to sweep over the Border, killing and rustling and robbing, and get away with a fortune in one great coup.

Jed Hunter had brought the news to the Broken K outfit, despite the fact that Jim Brewster, Laredo's right-hand man, tried to stop him talking. Buck Moran was convinced that there was no bluff in it. Laredo was making his plans, and unless he was found and stopped for good there was a nasty time ahead.

Buck rode for two days until he came to Johnsbury, and saw nothing suspicious. He called on the local sheriff, who knew nothing, yawned, and went to sleep. So Buck entered the saloon. He made out he was on a little holiday from the Broken K, and should he find a better ranch and a better boss he might consider a change of job.

That was his artfulness. He was hoping that something would be suggested by the local gentry, but he was treated all the time with suspicion. Buck half guessed that Laredo was massing over the Border opposite Johnsbury, having found it desirable to camp farther from Snake Springs and the Broken K territory.

Yet, despite his artful talk, Buck found nothing, saw nothing, and heard nothing to suspect Laredo or anyone belonging to him, when with a crash and a bang the peace of Johnsbury was shattered into fragments.

Buck whipped out his six-shooter and darted from the saloon to the main street. He saw a crowd of men galloping up the street, and nine out of ten of them wore sugar-cone hats.

The sheriff came from his office, guns in hand, his fat body weaving. He was plucky enough, but he was met with a hail of lead and dropped before he had crossed the broad sidewalk.

Buck started into action. His guns spat fire viciously as he darted round the corner of the saloon for cover. Crouching low, he emptied three saddles, then across the road came the roar and sudden glare of a terrific explosion. The force knocked Buck over, dazed and reeling.

When he got to his feet again, he realised that the Ranchers Bank had no front to it. He saw a cow-waddy come running out of the dust and debris carrying cash bags. Buck let him have it, guns blazing; but a big Mexican turned his horse and levelled his gun, snarling with rage as he did so. Buck hurled himself sideways and doubtlessly saved his life; but a bullet scared his forehead like a red-hot iron, and the Broken K foreman threw up his arms and slumped unconscious in the alleyway.

But he was not senseless for long. Buck Moran was made of tough stuff. He fought the red mist that blurred his vision and scrambled to his feet. For a few moments he stood there, reeling, until he had a good grip on himself, then he looked round for his guns and picked them up.

There was little to be done in the way of fighting, however, for the raiders were already raising the dust on the skyline, heading for the Border.

Buck surveyed the scene of destruction they had left behind them.

"Shucks!" he told himself. "I've got the hang o' this fandango right now. Laredo wants money f'r his bunch o' cut-throats so he's blown up the bank. Yeah, I'll allow it's that a-way. Let's take a look-see!"

He walked across the street to the ruined and wrecked bank. A cowpuncher lay there groaning, some of Buck's bullets in his body. Buck stooped over him.

"Waal, ef it ain't Caleb Carn," he exclaimed. "Howdye, Caleb? Ain't you plumb sorry you done come to do Laredo's dirty work for him?"

The man opened his eyes and scowled up at the Broken K waddy.

"You got me, Buck! And them yeller greasers bolted and left me here to go to the pen. Waal, I ain't moaning! I'm whacked. But mind this, Buck, Laredo has sworn to get you and here's one as hopes he'll do it."

"I don't doubt it," said Buck. "Not f'r a minute, I don't. Guess I'll call on Laredo mighty soon, though, to make sure."

"You—you'll go to Laredo," faltered Carn. "Yeah," asserted Buck. "Mebbe you'll tell me where to find the coyote."

"Nix on that," snapped Caleb. "You done want 'em, you find 'em."

"So I will," agreed Buck. "I'll set out right now. I'll send two three guys to put you to bed and tend your hurts, then I'll leave this burg and go call on Laredo. Seems like there'll be fireworks mighty soon round these parts. So long, Caleb."

Caleb Carn said nothing, contenting himself with scowling, while Buck dived into what had been the telegraph office, only to find the operator bound and gagged in a corner and the instrument-board smashed.

Buck looked fierce and rushed out again and along to the saloon. Now that all danger had gone the male inhabitants had come out of hiding and jabbered away saying what they'd do to Laredo and his greasers if only they could get hold of them.

"Say, you hombes," cried Buck. "What for you hang about here? Ef you're that determined, grab yore hosses and set out after 'em."

"We've got our ord'nary work to do, stranger," said the owner of the saloon.

"Suro," agreed Buck. "But I did think you'd do summat. Your sheriff is gunned and your bank busted no end. Waal, listen, boys. The Pecos sheriff is heading this way right now. When he comes tell him I'm going after Laredo and I'll blaze the trail. Tell him I headed due south from this burg."

"Yeah, we'll tell him. But who are you, anyways?"



Buck brought the Mexican cowboy up sharp with an uppercut to his unshaven chin!

"I'm Buck Moran. He'll know. So long, boys, and I'll tell Laredo next time he comes this a-way not to make too much noise to frighten you saps and yellow cooties."

The men growled, but Buck vaulted into the saddle of the waiting Smoke and galloped from Johnsbury, disgusted with the easy way in which the bandits had got away with their booty.

CHAPTER 2. A Bold Move!

ONE thing was certain. Laredo was getting the Border folk terrified. As soon as his greasers swooped down on a district the menfolk went into hiding rather than face him. It was high time that Laredo was put out of action, to say the least.

It was easy enough to follow the bandits. Twenty or thirty men could not travel over that country without leaving some trace, and to Buck's trained eyes, following the trail over the wild mesa was as easy as galloping along a high road. It led him due south, as he had expected, and straight to the Border, which was marked in those parts by a river, swollen by recent rains.

Buck did not hesitate. He put Smoke at the river and the horse swam over gamely to the opposite bank. There were plenty of signs to show which way the bandits had gone, and Buck set out after them, not forgetting to leave signs by means of which the Sheriff of Pecos could follow on.

Buck slashed trees, left his neckerchief hanging on a cactus, dismounted and drew the sign of an arrow in the dust of the trail. He did all he knew to keep the following posse travelling after him in the right direction.

But he came to where the ground rose over a ridge of rocky mountain spur, and the hoofs of the bandits' horses left no mark whatever. It was checkmate and Buck reined Smoke to a standstill to think things out. He dismounted and cast about for a fresh trail, but it was hopeless from the first. On the ridge there was no soil at all, only bare rock.

Then he saw below in the valley the clustered adobe huts of a Mexican village and Buck decided on a bold move. He scraped an arrow head on a boulder beside the trail to indicate to the sheriff where he had gone, then, mounting Smoke, carelessly rode down to the village.

There were few people about and they did not interfere with the gringo rider. From the board over the ramshackle headquarters of the Mexican Government Buck learnt that the village was Santa Maria de Vera Cruz.

But the bandit gang seemed to have disappeared entirely. The scene was perfectly peaceful in every respect, and Buck did not see so much as a scowl on the few swarthy faces that stared at him.

He knew enough, however, about the Mexican Border not to judge everything by outward appearances. Alert and cautious, he dismounted outside the cantina and entered, not troubling to hitch Smoke to the rail. He had a purpose in that. Even cutting a rope with a clasp-knife takes time!

Inside the cantina was peace. Half a dozen Mexican peons sat in the bar, dozing. They glanced up as Buck entered, then drooped their heads in apparent slumber again. Buck turned his back on them and, going to the counter, called for a drink. They only sold tequila and it was poison. Buck did not actually drink. He toyed with his glass, leaning heavily on the bar as if tired out. He was smothered with dust from head to foot. He sagged as if falling asleep standing up.

But men were entering the cantina, and he knew it. He expected to feel a knife in his ribs at any moment. Listlessly he turned to survey the newcomers. They were three vaqueros, or Mexican cowboys, and they, too, looked as if they had spent many weary hours in the saddle only recently.

They glared at Buck as they walked to the bar. They whispered together, then broke into loud and raucous laughter. What ever the joke was their merriment was certainly very boisterous, doubling them up. They guffawed and rolled about, sliding nearer and nearer to Buck until the nearest man seemed to slip and came hurtling along the bar.

But Buck was waiting for the movement. He moved with the rapidity of lightning, and instead of crashing into him, the vaquero fell heavily to the floor, and there was a gleaming knife in his hand.

Buck stamped on that hand and the nerveless fingers released the weapon. The fallen man yelped with pain. One of his pals leapt at Buck, only to be brought up sharp with a vicious uppercut to the unshaven chin. The third vaquero ducked as Buck whipped out a gun and let fly, then dived through the doorway out of the cantina, leapt

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to the saddle of his waiting horse and galloped out of town, heading northwards.

Buck guessed that the greaser had gone to warn Laredo, who was in town, and if he hoped to find Laredo's hide-out he couldn't do better than follow that fellow. But the peons had awakened from their slumber and were on their feet, every dirty hand gripping a knife.

Buck was in a tight fix, but his guns blazed furiously as he backed to the door. The vaqueros came to their feet, but Buck's six-shooters had everybody covered as he stood there, body weaving, keen eyes missing not the slightest movement.

"Stand still, senors!" he cried. "I'm a dead shot, and I'm in a bad temper. Reach for it, senors, muy pronto!"

They obeyed, scowling darkly at him.

"Oh, ver' clever, Senor Gringo!" snarled one of the vaqueros. "But Laredo wait for you. Si, he wait and he—"

Bang! Crash! Buck's guns spoke venomously. Twice they spat fire and every Mexican in the cantina ducked to avoid the bullets that whistled over their heads. And before the smoke cleared from before their eyes Buck had turned and fled out through the doorway. With one bound he leapt to the saddle of Smoke, and was away and heading for the Border again like a lightning streak.

It looked as if he were badly scared and anxious only to escape with a sound skin, but in actual fact he was deliberately following the man who had gone to warn Laredo that Buck Moran of the Broken K had crossed the Border.

Buck saw the man a mile ahead of him, and raced in hot pursuit, while behind him the vaqueros tumbled out of the cantina and chased him. He was between the quarry and the pursuers. He, himself, was both hunter and hunted, and it looked as if his number would be up, whatever happened.

At first the man headed due north back the way Buck had come, but just before he reached the rocky ridge where Buck had lost the trail of the bandit gang from Johnsbury, he turned off to the west. Buck took off his Stetson, with no thought for the heat of the sun, and tossed it down beside a boulder, hoping that when the Sheriff of Pecos came that way with his posse he would understand what the sign meant. It was all chance work, anyway, but as he topped the spur Buck thought he saw a cloud of dust far to the north.

But there was no time for thinking, with one man speeding away ahead of him and two more coming up behind him as fast as their horses could travel. Smoke was the best horse of the lot. More than once Buck could have caught the man he was following, but he deliberately kept Smoke under a tight rein, reducing his speed. He wanted to find out where Laredo hid with his army of cut-throats. He wanted to lead the sheriff there, too.

Strictly speaking, no gringo cowpuncher and no gringo sheriff had any right to be on that side of the Border, but the Mexican Government in those parts was so lax and corrupt that the only way for the ranchers of Texas to protect themselves was to wink at Borders and smoke Laredo out of his nest, like they would destroy a hornet's nest.

Buck knew he was running grave risks, but he didn't think too much about it. He held on his way, keeping Smoke well in hand. He began to realise that Laredo had found a safe hide-out. The trail developed into a rocky defile with the cliffs rising sheer on either hand.

The chance of surprise that way was nil. The possibilities of ambush were favourable to the bandits. In that narrow gulch half a dozen men could withstand an army.

The vaquero ahead did not reduce his speed nor raise any sort of warning, although he must have known that Buck was close behind. Naturally Buck reckoned that there was no one about just there, and held on his way. He was thinking hard and to some purpose. If he could corral the man ahead there might be a chance of visiting Laredo's lair without being announced.

"Hit her up, you ole critter!" said Buck to Smoke, and the horse, freed from the tight rein, forged ahead with amazing speed. Frantically the vaquero tried to get more out of his own horse, but the animal had long since shot its bolt. Buck came up to him hand over fist, loosing the lariat at his saddle-bow. The rope swung in the air over his head, then shot out like a striking snake. The noose settled over the vaquero's shoulders. Smoke came to a standstill, all four feet braced for the shock, and the man came out of his saddle with a bump.

In a flash Buck was beside him and down on the ground. "Sorry to worry you, senor," he said, "but I guess I'll tell Laredo meself I've come. He'd like it better that a-way, I'm thinking, and I sure know I should."

The vaquero was moaning, although he wasn't really hurt, only dazed by his fall. Buck trussed him hurriedly with the lariat, rolled him to the side of the trail, then leapt to the saddle again.

CHAPTER 3.

The Last of Laredo!

SMOKE needed no urging. He galloped up the rocky trail, sure-footed and speedy, round the sharp corners, up the hilly steeps, the shingle flying from under his hoofs.

"Gee whikers, you're a pal, Smoke!" breathed Buck. "But we're running right now into the maddest stunt I ever done thought about, and that's saying a mouthful."

Smoke high-tailed along the trail in a way that gave a good idea how he got the name of Smoke.

The animal fairly smoked on his way. But the pace of that ride couldn't last for ever and Buck knew it. The gully was getting wider, and at the sides great boulders were strewn in profusion, offering the most amazing chances of ambush that Buck had ever seen in his life.

And it happened. He came slithering round a corner disturbing a peaceful scene. There were Mexican bandits swarming all over the trail as if preparing for an ambush. Buck had come on them slightly too soon, and they were not ready. They scuttled out of the way of Smoke's flashing hoofs. They fired their guns, but the bullets went wide. Buck crouched low over Smoke's tossing mane and rode smack through the whole crowd of them. He made no attempt to get at his own guns, but once through the unshaven mob he put his hands in the air over his head, and, with his knees, he turned Smoke, and the animal came to a standstill.

The greasers were puzzled. It was not like Buck Moran to surrender so easily, but then Buck knew that round the corner there must be hundreds more of Laredo's gang. Having once been discovered in that mountain fastness, how could he hope to escape with his life? And there was nothing to be gained by riding on to be shot down.

They clustered round him, revolvers levelled at him.

"Waal," drawled Buck. "You got me cold, senors. Yet I never sent a bullet at you. No, senors, I done come just to call on Laredo, neighbourly like."

One big fellow glared at Buck.

"You ride so slow," he snarled. "You keep hand up or you die, muy pronto."

"Sure!" said Buck, with a grin. "Anything to oblige."

Hands over his head he rode at a walk along the trail, round the corner by a large rock, to a wide open space like the bottom of a great basin, the sides being the towering cliffs all round. Buck saw above huts in plenty, but no other way in or out of that basin except by the way he had come.

There were at least a hundred bandits in that natural basin. There was grass on the ground providing pasturage in plenty for their horses and cattle. There was a brook trickling down from the rocks and across the valley to provide water. Laredo would have had to go miles to have found a better hide-out.

Buck was forced to ride at the point of twenty guns across the grassy floor of the basin to the largest hut, outside which Laredo waited for him. Beside Laredo was another man—a gringo. Buck scowled darkly at the sight of him.

"Sid Rawlins, huh?" he cried. "Shucks, I sure had a hunch that this business was too big for the brains of a greaser cut-throat!"

"Yellow dog!" snarled Laredo. "Talk civil!"

"And it's not your concern, Buck Moran, who's here and who isn't!" rasped Rawlins. "You weren't invited that I knows of, and we wants to know why you came."

Buck thought that out. A Mexican relieved him of his guns, so he dropped his hands and chafed the blood back to them. Sid Rawlins had at one time been the manager of the Broken K, but he was a rogue and a murderer. It had been Buck who had caught him red-handed. Rawlins

had gone to prison for life. Presumably he must have escaped and joined hands with Laredo over the Border.

It explained much. Buck had foiled Laredo many times all along the Pecos country and round the Broken K territory. Laredo had no love for him, but because of the losses he had sustained, the Mexican bandit had been glad to leave Buck's district severely alone until Jed Hunter had arrived all shot up, with the news of the bandits massing to attack every ranch on the Pecos. Men wondered why and how Laredo had the nerve to think of such a thing, but the presence of Sid Rawlins, who knew the lie of the land like the palm of his hand, supplied the answer.

Buck was in the hands of two men who had every reason to hate him, but he grinned at them good-humouredly.

"Waal, Sid," he said casually, "ain't you glad to see an old pal o' yours?"

"Nix on that!" snarled Rawlins. "You never was a pal o' mine, and you know it! What brought you here?"

"Aw, I don't know," said Buck. "I jest thought you

Smoke came to a standstill, all four feet braced for the shock, and Buck's quarry came out of his saddle!



ought to know you left Caleb Carn all shot about in the street at Johnsburg."

Laredo gasped and Rawlins paled.

"You," hissed the Mexican. "You was at Johnsburg?"

"Sure," grinned Buck. "I was there! And I had an idea of I followed yore trail I'd hit up against something. And, believe me, folk, I have. Thet trail was as easy to follow as the Pecos River."

"But you came up from Santa Maria. We saw you riding up the mountain, and Pedro was coming on ahead of you," said Rawlins. "No lying, now, Buck Moran, or I shoot you where you stand! You came up from Santa Maria, chasing Pedro."

"We found Pedro tied up beside the trail," said a vaquero, in Spanish.

"Yeah, I'm 'not surprised," said Buck. "It was this a-way, gents. Thet trail from Johnsburg was plumb easy to follow till I got me up on the rocks. Then I lost her, and had to go down to Santa Maria to git the dust outter me tonsils. I might still ha' bin lookin' for you, only three vaqueros blew in. Two started in monkeying with yours truly, and Pedro left there in a hurry to let you know I'd arove. You got me? So I jest indulged in a little gun-play, then left there and followed Pedro. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"There's a trick in this somewhere!" snapped Rawlins. "Get down off that hoss. You're going to tell more'n that afore I've done with you. Why did you rush up here? You must ha' known you was doing a durned silly thing. We're going to kill you stone dead, Buck Moran, for coming here. But first you're going to say why you came. Are you leading anybody else up here?"

Buck grinned and tried his hardest to look as if he didn't care about a thing. He slid from Smoke's saddle and stood before Rawlins, his keen brain working overtime. He was wondering how near the Pecos sheriff was, and how big the posse. He wondered many things, and he saw many things, the swartly, scowling faces, the adobe huts, the stunted trees, the grass, and a hornets' nest dangling from the branch of a tree that hung over the hut behind Laredo and Rawlins.

"Waal," he drawled, "ef you was to ax me was I guiding anybody here, I says no, I ain't. But ef you was to ax me could anybody follow where I done come, then I says yep. And here's hoping they comes a-runnin'."

"Who?" cried Rawlins, one hand on his gun.

Buck's eyes glittered with defiance.

"The sheriff o' Pecos wid a posse!" he snapped. "And all the Broken K waddies and the Twin Arrow waddies—high-tailing it this a-way to clean out a hornets' nest, I guess."

There was a blur before Buck's eyes. He guided Smoke to the end of the rocky trail and away they went, helter-skelter, speeding back the way they had come, with the bandits following in a panic pursued by thousands of hornets.

How far he travelled thus Buck never knew. He heard guns cracking, and bullets seared like red-hot irons in his arms, his legs. Once Smoke leapt as a bullet struck his flank. Then there were men on the trail ahead, and the flash of guns seemed almost in their faces. A hoarse voice bellowed above the din.

"Hold, boys! It's Buck—hold!"

And then Buck forgot. He slipped senseless from the saddle, and did not wake up until he was over the Border again, and found himself lying in a litter between two horses.

"How come?" he asked feebly.

"Sure!" said the sheriff, riding over to him. "You lay quiet, Buck. You bin all shot up by them greasers, but you'll pull through."

"But what happened?" Buck wanted to know.

"We'd never have found Laredo's hide-out ef it hadn't bin for the trail you left," said the sheriff. "But we got there jest in time to coop 'em up; and what our bullets didn't get, them hornets did. Gee, they was two hornets' nests, I guess, went smash round about them! And that bandit army don't exist right now. Laredo was killed, and we've got Sid Rawlins. We're toting him back to gaol, and the authorities won't ax no awkward question about where we done found him. So that's okay, Buck!"

"Yeah!" put in Colonel Worth. "There'll be peace and safety all along the Pecos after this, and we've got to thank you for it, Buck."

"Don't forgit Smoke," said Buck. "Is the ole critter safe?"

"He sure is," said the colonel. "And when you're fit to fork him again he'll be carrying the manager of the Broken K. Got that?"

Buck grinned rather feebly, and broke into faltering song.

"With me foot in the stirrup and me hand on the horn,

I'm the best durned cowboy as ever was born."

"Nix on that!" snapped the sheriff. "You got to stay quiet till we gits you home. Doc Williams said that."

"Right-ho!" said Buck. "I sure feels like I could do wid a rest."

And he was asleep almost as soon as they put him in his bed.

Buck Moran was made of tough stuff, and he soon recovered from his wounds. He had made a name for himself in those parts, and his reputation scared all Mexican bandits along that part of the Border, so that the Broken K outfit prospered in peace under his managership.

THE END.

(Be sure to make the acquaintance of Dick Yates and his American pal, Danny Malone. They make their bow in the first of a series of thrilling adventure yarns under the title of "THE DOLLAR HUNTERS!" starting in next week's GEM.

NEW SERIES OF THRILLING ADVENTURE YARNS— STARTS NEXT WEEK!

"Curse!" howled Rawlins. "You die for this, you skunk! You—"

He whipped out his gun, but Buck collapsed in a heap where he stood, and the bullet whined over his head. Then in a flash he came up like a wire spring, and hurtled himself full at Rawlins. His fists crashed in the snarling face, and the erstwhile manager of the Broken K went down as if poleaxed.

Laredo had his gun out. He let fly, and Buck felt the sting of it in his shoulder as he spun round. But Laredo felt the weight of a fist, and Buck's left hand snatched a gun from his belt as he dropped.

It was madness. Buck—one man—amidst a hundred Mexican bandits thirsting for his blood. They howled and they charged, half afraid to fire in case they hit either Laredo or Rawlins. But Buck had his plans. He raised Laredo's gun and fired three times up at the trees over the adobe hut, straight at the hanging hornets' nest.

Zooming and buzzing, the insects swarmed out angrily, and the greasers, their arms threshing the air like flails, fled from the winged avengers. Horses stampeded, men were in a panic, and Buck was running along behind the huts looking for his horse.

In the thick of the dust he saw Smoke, but a vaquero was on his back. Buck whistled as he ran, and, although the vaquero tugged at the reins, Smoke turned towards his master. Smoke's head was pulled round by the Mexican in the saddle; but the horse was walking, fighting against the cruel tug of the bridle, in the opposite direction to that in which the vaquero wanted to go.

Buck ran from rock to rock, heedless of the angry hornets that buzzed round his head. At the crucial moment he sprang up at the greaser. His right crashed home on the man's ear and knocked him from the saddle; then Buck, conscious that blood was trickling down his left arm from the wound in his shoulder, managed to climb to the vacant saddle, and Smoke broke into a furious gallop.

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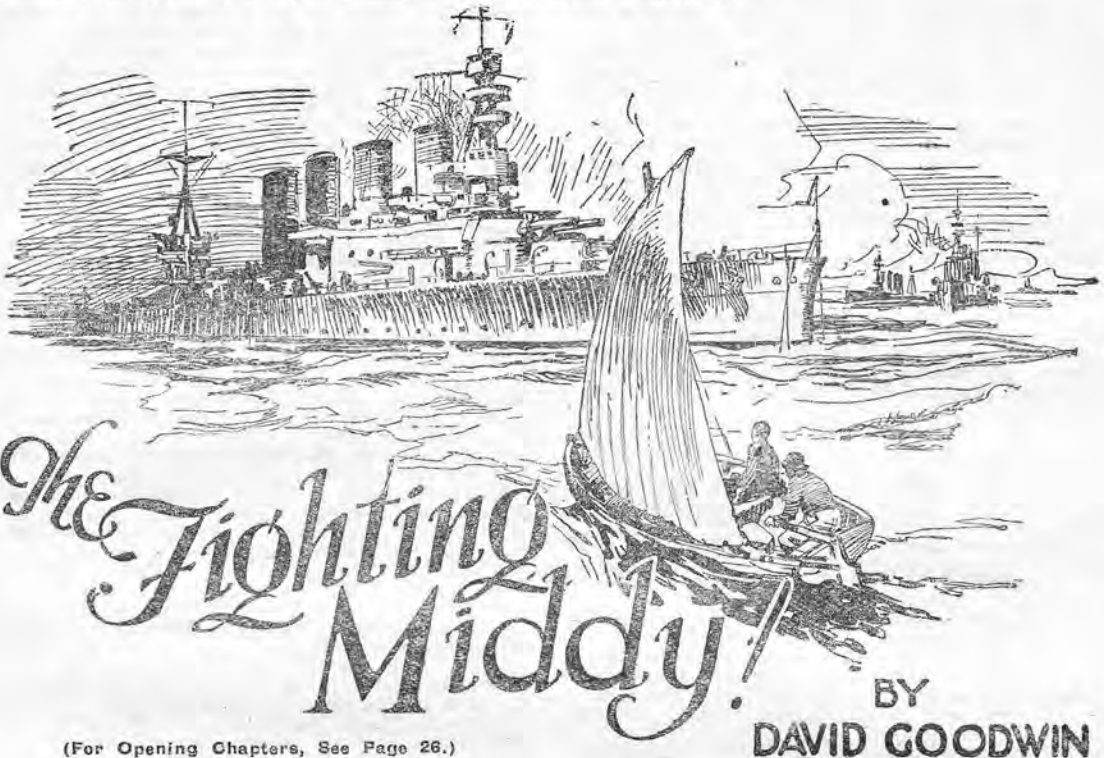
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Don't miss this great new series, which starts in the GEM next week. Both Dick and Danny are great guys, believe me, boys! You'll like 'em!

CONTINUATION OF OUR RED-HOT SERIAL STORY!



(For Opening Chapters, See Page 26.)

The Hero of the Mess!

IN less than a minute Sergeant-Major Rink, a heavily-built, well-set-up man of forty, with a plum-coloured face, entered the cabin, and saluted.

"Sergeant-Major, who is this man?" said the captain briefly, indicating the sentry.

"Private Beckett, sir," said Rink.

"Are you sure?" asked the captain. "Look at him, and make certain."

The sergeant-major looked surprised.

"Yes, sir. It's Private Beckett, regimental No. 7979 of B Company."

"Have you any reason, sergeant-major, to suppose that this man is not Private Beckett, but somebody else impersonating him?"

The sergeant-major was taken aback. He looked at Captain Raglan, and then stared hard at the sentry. The latter had quite got over the excitement and nervousness caused by Ned's sudden attack, and stood erect, meeting Rink's gaze with slightly injured, but well-disciplined surprise.

The harder he stared, the more puzzled did Rink become—and he did not seem to know what to say. A dim suspicion grew upon his heavy face.

"Well?" said the captain.

"Well, sir, I—er—I—er—"

"Come, sergeant-major, surely you know the men of your own company?" said Captain Raglan. "Do you see anything about him that is remarkable?"

"In a way, sir, I do," said the puzzled sergeant-major, who was wondering if he were going to be hauled over the coals.

"What is it?" said the captain sharply.

"It isn't much, sir, but he hadn't that bit of a scar under the left eye when he first joined. He must ha' got it when he was on leave a week ago."

"How long was he on leave?"

"Ten days, sir."

Captain Raglan came a step nearer, and scanned the sentry's face attentively.

"The scar is an old one, and was certainly not made within a year," he said. "Now, sergeant-major, have you noticed any other difference in Private Beckett?"

"Well, sir, I have. He used to be one of the hardest

drinkers on the ship, an' always giving trouble, an' now he don't drink at all."

"Ah, that's a change for the better, one would think!" said the captain dryly. "And so he's turned from a drunkard to nearly a teetotaler, all in ten days—eh? Why this sudden rise to grace, Private Beckett? Did you sign the pledge when you were ashore?"

"Yes, sir," said the sentry.

Commander Langford smiled again. He was watching Beckett's face.

"He has returned after ten days with a scar a year old, and temperate habits, then?" said the captain. "Anything else?"

"I—I can't call to mind anything, sir," stammered Rink, who felt there was thunder in the air, "an' yet—"

"And yet you're beginning to think he may not be Private Beckett, after all—eh?"

"I can't say that, sir. There's lots o' things about him. But still, such a thing ain't possible. I don't see how it could be. If it isn't himself,

I suppose it's his twin brother, or else— But then his mates all know him, though he never was popular, an' didn't make pals more than he could help with them. But such a thing never entered my mind as—"

"Quite so," said Captain Raglan, cutting the puzzled, sergeant-major short. "Have

you no suspicion that this man, who has been in your company over a week, may be a spy?"

"Spy!" gasped Rink, staring at the sentry. "In my company! A spy on board the Victorious!"

"That is the charge brought against him by Mr. Hardy."

The sergeant-major was dumb.

"May I ask the sergeant-major a question, sir?" said Ned.

"You may, Mr. Hardy. There is more in this than meets the eye."

"Is there any single thing," said Ned to the sergeant-major, "by which you could absolutely swear he's Private Beckett—the real Private Beckett?"

A light broke in on Sergeant-Major Rink.

"Yes, there is, sir. He's got a crimson mark—a birth-mark—as big as your fist on the left shoulder. I've noticed it when the company was told off to bathe—so have the men. They call him 'Strawberry' in the corps."

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"MR. HARDY—'SHUN!

Get ready to answer the Cap'n's questions."

The sentry's face turned ever so slight a shade paler. "Ah!" said the captain keenly. "Have you seen that mark on Private Beckett since his return, Rink?"

"Well, no, sir," said the sergeant-major, after a moment's hesitation, "now I call it to mind. He's been excused bathing by the surgeon-lieutenant, as he'd got a chill an' rheumatics."

"Hand your rifle to the sergeant-major," said Captain Raglan to the sentry. "Lay bare your left shoulder."

The Marine obeyed. There was tense silence in the cabin as he removed his tunic, and slipped his left arm out of his shirt. There was the mark, sure enough—a typical birthmark, like a patch of crimson upon the skin, such as not a few men have.

"There is the proof positive," said the captain dryly, "for anybody to see. You were right, sergeant-major. The man is certainly Private Beckett."

Ned had taken four steps nearer the sentry, and was using his eyes keenly.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said quietly, "this isn't a birthmark. It's tattooing done in crimson to imitate it. I've learned a good bit about tattooing, and know it when I see it."

The captain smothered a surprised exclamation, and stepped rapidly forward to examine the man's shoulder. Commander Langford did the same.

"It looks like a natural mark to me," said Captain Raglan decisively, "though I know very little of tattooing."

"Nor I," said the commander. "And yet—" "Pass the word there for the staff-surgeon," said the captain.

The sentry waited in dead silence, as rigid as a rock, till the surgeon appeared.

"Mr. Vaughan," said Captain Raglan to him, "will you tell me what the mark is on that Marine's shoulder?"

The staff-surgeon, who was a man wrapped up in his work, and caring for little else, made a careful examination.

"It is a tattoo mark, sir," he said briefly, "and made a couple of weeks ago at the earliest. It has scarcely healed."

Ned gave a gasp of relief, but the Marine turned deadly pale.

"Thank you, Mr. Vaughan; that will do!" The captain raised his voice. "Corporal!"

The file of Marines entered instantly.

"Arrest that man, and place him in the guard-room!" said the captain sternly.

The spy, for such had Ned's acuteness proved him beyond all doubt to be, clutched the edge of the table, and glanced to either side of him desperately. To attempt to escape was useless. The two privates were on either side of him instantly; the sergeant-major gave a sharp order, and the sheathed bayonet was unbuckled from his belt, and taken from him in token of his arrest.

"Sir," gasped the man hoarsely, "this is a mistake—" "You will make your defence in the proper place!" said the captain grimly.

"Sergeant-major, you will post the sentries at the guard-room door, and see that no person on the ship holds any communication whatever with the prisoner except by my express orders."

Sergeant-Major Rink saluted, and, with a face as grim as the captain's own, gave the order, and marched the spy away between the rifles of the two privates. And vile though the part had been that the man played, at that moment Ned felt a touch of pity for him. The middy had had a taste of the guard-room himself.

"Mr. Hardy," said Captain Raglan, as the footfalls of the corporal's file died away, "extraordinary as this affair has been—and it is not cleared up yet—you have done the ship a great service. So far, it is to your credit. I congratulate you!"

Ned was so overjoyed at the relief of finding himself cleared, that he could have danced round the cabin.

"I—I'm awfully sorry I went for the sentry like that, sir!"

"An officer must never lay hands on his subordinates, of course! But we'll overlook that in this case," said the captain, laughing. Immediately he became grave again. "Now, Hardy, let us clear up this business. I see you are completely innocent of the charge brought against you. But why did you refuse to explain to me this morning?"

"I'm very sorry, sir. I only wish I had," said Ned penitently. "And I can see what an ass I've been—I mean, sir, I perceive that I have—er—er—acted unwisely. The fact is, I—the sentry—those notes—I don't know quite how to put it," he said desperately, as the commander masked a grin with his handkerchief. A card was handed in to the captain, who glanced at it.

"Yes, show him in at once!"

Ned was trying to pull his wits together and start his explanations, when, to his astonishment, Mr. Elking himself was escorted into the cabin, and greeted by the captain.

"Good-evening, Captain Raglan!" said the visitor.

"Hallo!" he added, catching sight of Ned. "You here?"

"Mr. Elking," exclaimed Ned, with a gasp of relief, "this is the best bit of luck I've had. I never hoped to see you again!" He turned excitedly to the captain.

"This gentleman can explain everything a lot better than I can, sir; he's the very man to do it. He knows why I refused to speak."

"Eh? Do you know Mr. Elking?" said Captain Raglan, in complete surprise. There were not many people who knew what Mr. Elking's real business was, or that he was a star of the Secret Service, but the captain of the *Victorious* was one of them.

"Yes, I have the pleasure of Mr. Hardy's acquaintance," said the visitor, with a smile, "and if you have found him as smart as I have, captain, he must be a fairly efficient middy. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Mr. Hardy has been under arrest all day, and has just been released," said the captain.

The visitor made a slight sign, and Captain Raglan, who was evidently on terms of understanding with him, asked the commander to retire, cleared the cabin, and gave orders for the sentry outside to take station at the far end of the alleyway.

"Now," said Mr. Elking, "I expect I can clear this matter up, captain. I have an inkling of what the trouble is, and if you will allow this young gentleman to speak—" "Certainly," said the captain. "I wish it."

"You need keep nothing back, Hardy," said Mr. Elking. "Let us have it from the beginning."

Only too glad to do so, Ned related all that had happened with regard to the two ruffians who had attacked him, from the time when he first saw them, down to the arrest of the sham sentry. Mr. Elking gave a low whistle.

"You've got him, then? Good business! That is the man, right enough," he said, "and we can thank Hardy that he's in custody. Your last new middy, Captain Raglan, has been as sharp over this business as he was over the other. Hardy, my lad, I'm an old hand, but I don't think my eyes are sharper than yours."

Ned thought of his brother's letter in his pocket, and was silent.

"This is a very extraordinary story!" mused Captain Raglan.

"I can vouch for the truth of every word of it," returned Mr. Elking. "The papers for me were entrusted to Hardy by Mr. Mytton. Hardy knew they were of great importance and sewed them into his coat, thereby baffling the two rascals who tried to rob him of them—they failed to find them."

"This man you have sent to the guard-room is one of the pair. His real name is Dimitri, and he is a spy in the service of Moscow. He belongs to a great Russian secret society of espionage agents, and you will learn more about him very shortly."

"A spy aboard the *Victorious*!" muttered the captain.

"He is not the first, as you know," said Mr. Elking significantly. "Thanks to Hardy, he has been dropped on before he can have done much harm."

"But the notes?" said Captain Raglan. "The banknotes that they put in Hardy's pocket-book? You have shown me that that is true, but why did they do it? Those notes were stolen from our safes."

"They had a hand in that robbery," said Mr. Elking, "and being unable to get rid of the remainder of the notes, they took their chance to put these two on Hardy's person when they were searching him for Mytton's message. They did it to discredit the youngster, whose name had already been mixed up in the affair through his brother, and thus

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 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. Whilst in the guard-room Ned receives a letter from his brother warning him that a Russian plot is afoot to wreck the British Navy and that a paid agent is aboard the *Victorious* successfully impersonating a Marine private named Beckett. Recognising the man as having attacked him in the train the day he joined the ship, Ned accuses him, in front of the captain, of being a spy. Convinced that there must be some truth in the lad's statement, the captain sends for the sergeant-major of Marines.

(Now read on.)

throw the authorities still further off the scent. For I may tell you that the real culprits who committed that robbery are still at large."

"Mr. Hardy," said the captain, holding out his hand, "I congratulate you heartily on coming out of this affair with colours flying. You have been made the scapegoat of a very ugly plot, and have not only escaped it, but brought your enemy to book."

Ned flushed with pleasure as he took the captain's hand rather shyly.

"Only the next time, speak out when you are commanded," said Mr. Elking, smiling. "You held your tongue out of loyalty to me, Hardy, and I thank you. But I never meant you to do that. Obey your captain, who is responsible to your King, before any other man alive—even if the whole Admiralty and Foreign Office tell you not to!"

The captain nodded.

"The rest of this affair, Mr. Elking, I think we had better discuss between ourselves," he said.

"Certainly," said Mr. Elking, and the captain rose. He passed the word for the commander.

"Mr. Langford," he said, "will you do me the favour to accompany Mr. Hardy to the gun-room and announce to his brother-officers that not the slightest foundation exists for any accusation that has been brought against him; that, on the contrary, he has performed a service of much merit, and has shown himself zealous and intelligent! You will make this announcement publicly, as his arrest was known to the whole ship."

The commander took Ned outside.

"I am as pleased over this as you can be yourself, Hardy," he said, shaking the boy's hand. "I backed you to come out of it all right. Now, come along, and we'll set you straight with the mess."

The officers of the gun-room stared in blank surprise as the commander appeared in the doorway with Ned at his side, and halted. Grimshaw, alone, standing at the back, gave a quick scowl.

"Gentlemen," said the commander, "it is known to you that Mr. Hardy was this morning put under arrest upon a most serious charge. The captain bids me tell you that Mr. Hardy has not only completely established his innocence, but has come out of the affair with great credit, and has done a meritorious service to the ship!"

The middies swung off their caps with a cheer that made the beams ring, and Ned came back into his own. They gave him three times three, no one daring to check them, and bore him off in triumph.

The Middies' Compact!

THEY gave Ned such a welcome as the gun-room of the *Victorious* had never seen. The excitement had reached a red-hot pitch when it was known that one of their number was under arrest, and the commander's speech had put a finishing touch to it. They crowded round Ned, clamouring for news. Wexton alone sulked in the background, and finally left in disgust at finding his rival the hero of the mess.

"It's a record!" said Acland. "You're absolutely the first snottie in the squadron that's ever been shoved in the guard-room! We ought to have a memorial tablet stuck up."

"Fancy old Bagpipes coming down himself to restore our giddy confidence in our comrade!" said Mayne.

"Bagpipes" was the title by which the commander was known among the middies.

"Were they going to hang you at the yard-arm, or what?"

"What's goin' to happen next?"

"Shut up, you fellows!" said Keppell, the senior midshipman commandingly. "Let him alone. You aren't supposed to talk about it, are you, Hardy? Owner's orders, eh?"

"I'm sorry," said Ned. "I'd tell you fellows if I could, but it won't do. I expect you'll know all about it later; but I don't want to get into hot water again for letting my tongue wag."

"How did you get out of the hole? Bagpipes said it was jolly creditable."

"It wasn't anything," returned Ned. "I had uncommon good luck, that's all. Things turned out well for me, or I might have got it hot."



"You need keep nothing back, Hardy," said Mr. Elking. "Let us have it from the beginning."

"Was it Grimshaw who got you into the soup?" persisted Mayne. "He seemed to know all about it."

"Grimshaw?" said Ned, rather surprised. "No, I can't see how he could have done it."

"I'll bet he had a hand in it, all the same," said Jinks—"the beast! He was going about looking as pleased as a monkey with a pot of blue paint all the morning."

"I think it's beastly hard we're not to know all about it," said Acland. "We're the most efficient an' enlightened mess on the ship, and nothing ought to be kept from us, if you ask me. Of course, it wouldn't do for a lot of rotters like the sub-lieutenants to know, but a discreet an' tactful body of officers like ourselves ought to be kept informed—"

The shrill whistle of the pipes as the watch was changed interrupted Acland's impassioned speech, and those who were due for duty made a rush for the deck. Ned belonged to the same watch, and as he had had no contrary orders since his arrest, he darted out with the others, Jinks being next to him.

The midshipman felt somehow that all eyes gave him a welcoming glance as he took his station.

Ned's head was still spinning with all he had gone through, and he found it difficult to settle down to the ordinary watch-keeping routine. He wondered what was happening in the cabin, and wished he could have known what was the upshot of the captain's conversation with his visitor. He was soon reminded of it by Mr. Elking's appearance on deck.

"Pinnacle to the gangway!" was called sharply, and the first lieutenant came to the rail of the upper deck. "Mr. Hardy, you will take charge of the pinnacle, and land the captain's guest at Gosport."

"Yes, sir," answered Ned, and darted away to execute the order. He had not had charge of the steam-pinnacle before, but he guessed there was a reason for it, and that Mr. Elking intended to have a word with him.

The pinnacle was lying at the boom, and she came alongside at once. Ned had had plenty of practice with pinnaces and pirket-boats—which take less handling than cutters—as a sea-going cadet. Mr. Elking nodded to him as he stepped in and took his seat in the stern beside the midshipman.

Away went the pinnacle, puffing swiftly towards Portsmouth; and Ned, as soon as they were clear of the line of the Fleet, found a pretext to send his coxswain into the bows. The pinnacle engines were well forward, so that the leading stoker in charge of them was not close enough to overhear ordinary conversation in the stern.

"That's right," said Mr. Elking, in a low voice. "I wanted a word with you, Hardy. I've got to thank you for all you've done; it has been a considerable help to me. That's by the way. We shall need you again shortly, and you must be in readiness."

"Yes, sir. For what?" asked Ned.

"You must communicate with me at once if you are molested at all by anybody who might be connected with the spy we have in custody. Keep your eyes open still."

"All right, sir. Though I'm not sure that I'm very keen on this detective job," said Ned, feeling a little too much like a spy himself under these orders to suit his taste. "It seems apt to get a fellow into hot water with the skipper, and I thought I joined the Victorious as a midshipman."

"I don't want you to do much detective work," said Mr. Elking, smiling, "but only to report anything that actually happens to you. You needn't go out of your way to seek it."

"Very good, sir; I'll do that, of course. You've been very decent to me, and put me right with the captain; I'll oblige all I can."

"You see, Hardy, you've happened to get mixed up in a very important affair, which may threaten a danger both to the well-being of your ship, and also, incidentally, to your brother."

"You know about that, then?" said Ned. "Where is he, and what's going to happen?"

"I can't give you any information about that; it's a subject you and I ought not to discuss. Perhaps you'll learn it from your brother himself."

"Well, I've promised to do all I can, sir. Anything for excitement."

"You haven't been exactly dull so far, have you? But

the next thing is, Hardy, you will be wanted for this spy trial."

"On the ship, sir?"

"He will have to be sent ashore first, at any rate; though I think it is a pity he cannot be kept on the ship, and Captain Haglan agrees with me. But we may not be able to help ourselves. It's a great thing to have him in custody, and we owe it chiefly to you. He's one of the most slippery rascals alive. That's all I've got to say about it at present, Hardy."

"Have I got to keep it all dark, sir?"

"Well, we don't want any more unnecessary secrets—you've suffered through that already—and it'll probably all come out at the trial. One can't keep these things dark once there's been an arrest. I expect your Marines know a good deal about it already. Don't go chattering about it all over the ship, that's all—though I know you wouldn't do that, Hardy. For not going to bind you to secrecy again. You're a King's officer. I wish there were a few more middies like you—my work would be easier."

Ned wondered what Mr. Elking's work exactly was, and whether he had to guard the Fleet's battle-cruisers from spies. But he saw it would not do to ask questions of that sort, and he called the coxswain at again. During the rest of the passage shorewards Mr. Elking proved himself a charming companion. Ned landed him at the town quay at Gosport.

"I've combined business and pleasure to-day," said Mr. Elking, with a smile, as he shook hands and stepped ashore. "Au revoir, Hardy! We haven't seen the last of each other."

The pinnacle dashed away again down the harbour and out across the Solent, and Ned congratulated himself on having had a brisk spin over the water instead of the monotony of an anchor-watch. He saw the pinnacle slung in and cleaned down, and then went below.

Sub-Lieutenant Grimshaw looked so gloomy during dinner, and was in such a bad temper generally, that Ned wondered if there could be anything in Jink's belief that he was responsible for Ned's arrest.

"I don't suppose he's any too pleased that I'm all square again," thought Ned. "It's just on the cards that he might have been there when the notes were spotted, and got the news from the skipper. Or is it anything deeper than that?"

"It's queer he should take so much trouble over a junior middy; but, of course, I have stirred him up a bit—and, then, he used to hate Ralph so. Well, I shan't bother about the beast. I wish he'd get his step, though, and move into the ward-room, then we'd have Hart as the senior here."

(Well, Ned's established his innocence and proved himself a worthy officer of the British Navy. But he's far from being in a bed of roses, as you'll discover when you read next week's instalment of this gripping serial of the Royal Navy.)

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