

SCHOOLMASTER ACCUSED OF THEFT! AMAZING SCHOOL STORY COMPLETE INSIDE!

The GEM

2^D



CHAPTER 1.

In Linton's Room!

"H^{II}" Baggy Trimble jumped almost a foot in the air as that sudden shout rang out along the passage.

He glanced hastily over his fat shoulder. "Oh lor'!" gasped Baggy.

It is said that conscience makes cowards of us all. If so, the conscience of Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, must have been in a particularly guilty condition that afternoon, judging from the scared look that had leapt into his pasty face at sound of that sudden shout from behind him.

Baggy was on his way to Mr. Linton's room, with a sheaf of foolscap under his podgy arm. Mr. Linton was the master of the Shell. It was a Wednesday afternoon, and a half-holiday, and Baggy had been spending most of the time since dinner in writing out lines for Linton—lines administered for making a noise in the quad under Mr. Linton's august window the previous evening. They were finished at last, and Baggy was rolling in the direction of the Shell master's study to deliver them, when that sudden "Hi!" from somewhere behind him had caused him to leap into the air as though an air-gun pellet had struck him in the seat of his fat trousers.

Baggy had recognised the shout to be in the voice of Gerald Cutts of the Fifth. His hasty glance back had shown him the figure of Gerald Cutts striding down the passage towards him. There was a grim look on Cutts' face.

For some reason, it seemed, Cutts of the Fifth wanted a word or two with Baggy.

But it was equally evident that Baggy wanted not a single word with Gerald Cutts!

"Oh lor'!"

Baggy broke into a scuttling run.

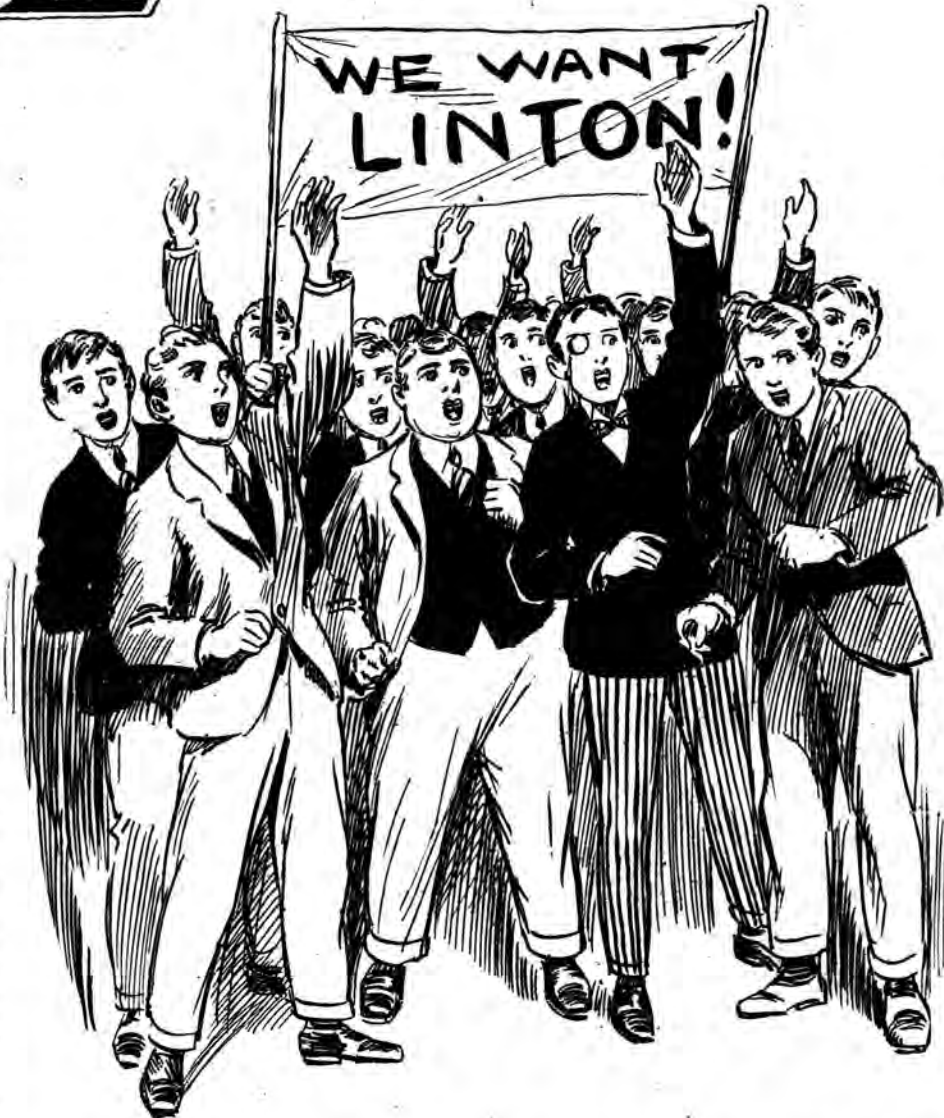
"Here, you fat porpoise—"
Cutts, too, broke into a run.

Baggy heard the Fifth-Former's footsteps coming after him rapidly, and he increased his own speed to a regular gallop. He fairly flew down the passage as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

Cutts, too, increased his speed.

"Stop, you fat little beast!" gasped Cutts, coming down
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LINTON IN



the passage with long strides. "You fat little rotter, I'm going to slaughter you!"

Baggy did not stop, however; in fact, he even succeeded in increasing his speed a fraction. He turned the corner of the passage on one wheel, so to speak, and tore on towards the door of Mr. Linton's room.

Behind came the rapid, overtaking footsteps of Gerald Cutts.

"Ow!" gasped Baggy. "Oh crumbs! Yow—"

If once he could reach Mr. Linton's room he would be safe enough for the time being, at any rate. Cutts would not dare to follow him into the Shell master's study.

Baggy knew well enough why Cutts was so interested in him just then. Cutts had purchased a very fine cake from Dame Taggles' little tuckshop, and had unwisely forgotten to lock the cupboard. Baggy, by that strange instinct that always led him to tuck—Monty Lowther, of the Shell, declared that Baggy's nose was so constructed by Nature that he could smell a cake three miles away—had discovered

—THE HEAD! TOM MERRY & CO. RALLY ROUND FORM MASTER!

REVOLT!

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Cutts' cake, with the result that a few crumbs and a raisin were all that Cutts had found when, like Mother Hubbard, he had gone to the cupboard. And there had been no need for Cutts to wonder who was responsible.

There was a look in Cutts' face, as he raced round the corner in hot pursuit of Baggy's flying figure, that boded ill for the Falstaff of the Fourth if Cutts succeeded in catching him.

But Baggy had had a pretty good start.

He glanced back breathlessly, his fat countenance green with fright. Cutts was overhauling him rapidly, but he was near the door of Mr. Linton's room now!

Baggy made a desperate spurt.

"Stop!" roared Cutts furiously.

But Baggy had no intention of stopping. He plunged at the door and knocked upon it wildly. There was no answer from within. But Baggy had no time to wait for an answer!

He swung the door open and fairly shot into Mr. Linton's study, with a breathless gasp.

He was safe!

So, at any rate, he imagined.

But though Baggy had vanished into Mr. Linton's room, Cutts had not halted, baffled, as might have been expected. Instead, he was still coming on, and there was a triumphant grin

on his decidedly unattractive face. For Cutts had happened to see Mr. Linton going downstairs only a minute or two before, and he knew perfectly well that the master of the Shell had not had time to return to his room yet.

Cutts chuckled breathlessly. He had Baggy in a trap!

In the study Baggy hastily closed the door behind him, with a thankful sigh. He blinked round.

"P-please, sir, I—I've brought you your lines, sir!" gasped Baggy breathlessly. "I— Oh!"

Baggy broke off. His fat little jaw fell as he suddenly realised that the room was empty.

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The next moment the door behind him had opened, and the grinning face of Cutts appeared. Baggy glanced round wildly as Cutts stepped into the room.

"Ow!" gasped Baggy.

He realised now that he was properly cornered, and his fat knees quivered like jellies under him as he gazed wide-eyed at the malicious grin on the face of Gerald Cutts.

"Got you, you fat little rotter!" snarled Cutts. "I'll teach you to scoff my cake, you fat pirate!"

"Oh lor!" panted Baggy wildly. "I—I don't understand you, Cutts! Wow! I didn't scoff your cake, really! I didn't even know it was your cake—I thought it was St. Leger's, of course. I didn't scoff it, either; I didn't know anything about it being in your cupboard. I never saw Toby take it in and give it you—"

Baggy broke off with a yelp as Cutts jumped towards him and grasped him by the collar, jerking him towards the door.

"Yow! Leggo, you beast! Whoops! Hands off, you beastly cad—"

"Come on out of here!" growled Cutts fiercely. "I'm going to skin you alive, you fat thief!"

"Yarooop!" gasped Baggy, as he was yanked across to the door by Cutts' powerful arm. "I tell you I don't know anything about your beastly cake! Yowch!"

Realising his fate only too well, Trimble brought his right foot into play.

Dancing painfully on one foot, Cutts instinctively released his hold of Baggy, to clasp his injured ankle. Baggy did not miss his chance. There was another breathless yell from Cutts as Baggy's bullet head butted him in the waistcoat, and the next moment the Fifth-Former had gone sprawling on his back.

Baggy Trimble shot for the door, and out into the passage like a streak of light. His scuttling footsteps died away down the passage.

Mr. Linton would have to wait for his lines to be delivered some other time.

In the Shell master's study Cutts sat up dazedly.

A small wastepaper-basket had been standing in the corner of the room into which Baggy had knocked him sprawling, and Cutts' head had become firmly wedged in it. As he sat up, blinking through the holes in the basketwork, with the basket jammed down over his face like some knightly helmet of old, Gerald Cutts was wondering vaguely whether he was on his head or his heels.

That butt in the waistcoat from Baggy's tough cranium had left the Fifth-Former dazed and winded.

"Oh gad!"

Cutts scrambled breathlessly to his feet, the basket still firmly wedged over his ears.

"The—fat little cad!" panted Cutts. "I'll slay him for this!"

He dragged the wastepaper-basket from his head, and a shower of wastepaper snowed around him. Cutts gave an exclamation of angry exasperation.

He dared not leave the waste-paper scattered over the carpet. It would reveal the fact, when Mr. Linton returned to his room, that someone had been there, and subsequent inquiries might prove awkward for Cutts. There would be trouble if the master of the Shell learnt that an unauthorised Fifth-Former had invaded his sanctum in pursuit of a junior delivering lines.

And with every moment of delay Cutts knew that his chances of catching Baggy Trimble were growing smaller and smaller.

But there was no help for it. Hastily he began to collect the scattered paper and cram it back into the basket. He finished at last, and turned scowlingly to the door.

"Oh gad!"

A gasp of dismay escaped Gerald Cutts.

The door was still standing ajar, as Baggy had left it. And through the opening Cutts could see two figures approaching the study down the passage. One was the cap-and-gowned figure of Mr. Linton himself.

The other was a middle-aged individual in a black coat, carrying a bowler hat and an attache-case. Who he was Cutts neither knew nor cared. His whole interest was centred in Mr. Linton!

If Mr. Linton, who was an irascible gentleman as a rule, discovered him in his study without excuse, there was going to be trouble for Cutts—lots of trouble.

"Oh gad!" gasped Cutts, with a fallen jaw.

It was too late to step out into the passage. Mr. Linton would see him; and to be seen emerging from the master's study would be just as bad as to be discovered in it, since he had no possible excuse for visiting the room at all! There was only one thing for it.

It was a desperate chance; but Cutts took it!

He crossed the room hastily and dived behind the sofa, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1210.

out of sight. Crouching between the sofa and the wall, scarcely breathing, Cutts told himself that when he caught Baggy Trimble, the Falstaff of the Fourth would wish he had never been born!

The next moment the footsteps paused outside the door. Apparently Mr. Linton did not notice the door being ajar, or thought he had left it so himself. Cutts heard the door pushed wide.

"After you, Mr. Linton," came a rasping voice.

"My dear sir—after you!" returned the voice of the master of the Shell.

The next moment Mr. Linton and his visitor had entered the study and closed the door behind them.

"Sit down, Mr.—er—Jackson," Cutts heard Mr. Linton say. "Now that we are alone, perhaps you will explain your business?" There was a pause, as if the master of the Shell glanced at his watch. "I should be grateful if you could make this interview as brief as possible, my dear sir."

"Certainly," came the reply, in the hard, rasping voice that Cutts had heard before. "If you wish, I will get straight to the point, sir, and tell you the purpose of my visit in a single sentence."

"Excellent!" murmured Mr. Linton in a puzzled tone. "But—"

"The fact is this," cut in the individual, whose name appeared to be Jackson. "I have been instructed by a client of mine, who wishes to remain nameless, to offer you the sum of one thousand pounds to resign your position as master of the Shell at St. Jim's!"

CHAPTER 2.

An Amazing Offer!

MR. LINTON stared at his visitor as though he believed the mysterious Mr. Jackson to have gone mad.

"You—you—" Mr. Linton seemed deprived of coherent speech for the moment, but he pulled himself together. "You would not mind repeating your observation, sir?" he gasped faintly. "I do not think I can have heard you aright!"

"I repeat, sir, that a client has authorised me to offer you the sum of one thousand pounds to resign your position as master of the Shell at St. Jim's."

Mr. Jackson's voice was cool and hard.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Linton.

He sat down at his desk, staring at the gentleman with the bowler hat dazedly.

"I—I really, my dear sir, I—I fail to grasp—"

"It is surely a plain proposition, Mr. Linton?" Mr. Jackson's voice held a trace of impatience. "My—er—nameless client makes this offer—a very handsome offer—for some reason which, though unknown, and perhaps we might even say mysterious, to us, is no doubt an excellent reason from his point of view."

"I am a lawyer, sir, as you are aware, and I am accustomed to people behaving sometimes in what appears, at first sight, a mysterious manner. But, nevertheless, the proposition is quite clear; the reasons for it need not concern either of us. My client, I repeat again, offers the sum of one thousand pounds, in cash, to you if you will leave St. Jim's at once!"

And, as if to bring home to Mr. Linton the truth of the statement, Mr. Jackson unlocked and opened his attache-case, producing from it stacks of Bank of England notes fastened in piles with rubber bands. He tossed them on to the table before Mr. Linton's flabbergasted eyes.

"I have brought the money with me, Mr. Linton; all in five-pound notes. You may count them yourself, and you will discover that the total amounts to one thousand pounds. It is yours, so my client has instructed me, if you will give me, here and now, your word of honour as a gentleman and a master of St. Jim's, to leave the school before the end of the week."

Mr. Linton took off his mortar-board to pass a hand dazedly over his brow.

He did not seem quite sure whether he was dreaming.

"One thousand pounds!" he repeated. "Bless my soul!"

"One thousand pounds, sir," nodded Mr. Jackson in a businesslike voice.

"But—but why should your client—"

"I am as ignorant of his purpose in making this offer as you are yourself, Mr. Linton."

"Then—then who—"

"I regret that I am not at liberty to disclose my client's identity," cut in Mr. Jackson raspingly.

Mr. Linton stared at the stacked money on the table in utter bewilderment.

Mr. Linton was not a rich man. As many fellows at St. Jim's were aware, recently the master of the Shell had lost a large amount of his comparatively small life savings owing to an unfortunate investment. Consequently,

the sum of one thousand pounds, stacked up before his eyes to tempt him, meant a great deal to Mr. Linton.

But there were plenty of things in life which Mr. Linton valued more than money.

One of them was his honoured position as a learned gentleman with a scholastic post at one of the most famous Public schools in England—St. Jim's!

"Well, sir?"

The harsh voice of the lawyer broke in on Mr. Linton's bewildered thoughts.

"I—I am flabbergasted, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. He fixed Mr. Jackson with a gleaming eye. "A thousand pounds is a great deal of money, I admit. But the mysterious nature of the offer makes it appear, sir, that there is undoubtedly something—er—to use a slang expression, if you will forgive me, something fishy, sir, about the proposal! Distinctly so, Mr. Jackson."

"No doubt your anonymous client has, as you say, a reason which is to him sufficient. But if it is an honest reason, why should he conceal his identity? I take it that he sends you with this sum of money in cash so that his name will not even have to appear on a cheque?"

"Very possibly," nodded Mr. Jackson dryly; who knew that, as a matter of fact, his mysterious client had taken the unusual course of offering the money in cash in the hope that so much actual, visible cash would be more tempting to Mr. Linton than a mere cheque.

"I do not like the appearance of the offer, sir," said Mr. Linton.

"Do you mean that you refuse it?"

"Precisely!"

"But, my dear sir, you have scarcely had time to consider it! As a business man—"

"It is useless to attempt to persuade me to alter my decision, sir!" Mr. Linton fixed the rather seedy-looking gentleman at the table with an unfriendly eye. "I value my position as a schoolmaster at St. Jim's very highly. I am not to be—ah!—bribed into relinquishing it for the sake of a—em!—paltry thousand pounds, sir! Decidedly not!"

"But, Mr. Linton—"

"Even if the offer had been made in an open, honest fashion, sir," went on Mr. Linton majestically, "I should have refused it. As it is, I take it as an insult, sir! I utterly fail to understand the purpose behind it, and I resent the whole suggestion very strongly, Mr. Jackson. In fact, I shall be very much obliged to you if you will take this money back to your nameless client, and tell him—er—to—"

Mr. Linton paused. Should he use the expression? He decided he would.

"And tell him—hem!—to 'go to the—er—Dickens!'" finished Mr. Linton, with a cough.

He rose to his feet and rustled across to the door and opened it.

"Good-afternoon, Mr.—er—Jackson!" he said coldly.

The lawyer's brow darkened.

"Listen to me, sir—"

"I have no wish to listen to you!" retorted the master of the Shell. "I have said my final word. I totally decline to consider your peculiar offer!"

"Very well," Mr. Jackson evidently saw that it was useless to argue. He rose, and rather bad-temperedly threw the wads of fivers back into his leather case. It was clear, from his expression, that the seedy-looking lawyer had lost a nice commission by having failed to persuade Mr. Linton to accept the mysterious proposal that he had placed

before him. "Very well, sir, if you are determined to miss this generous offer—"

"Good-afternoon, sir!" snapped Mr. Linton. "I— Ah, Merry!"

Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, had come into sight along the passage. He turned at hearing his name called.

"Kindly show this—er—gentleman to the quadrangle!" snapped Mr. Linton.

"Certainly, sir!" answered Tom.

Mr. Jackson picked up his case, after carefully locking it, seized his hat, and, with a growled "Good-afternoon!" brushed past the master of the Shell and out of the study.

Tom Merry, looking a little puzzled, conducted him away along the passage, and Mr. Linton closed the door.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "How—how very amazing! How very extraordinary! How—how very very mysterious!"

There was a brusque tap on the door. It opened, to reveal the countenance of Mr. Jackson.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Linton acidly.

"Haven't you gone yet, my dear sir?"

"I just came back to remind you that before this inter-



Cutts crouched beneath the sill, straining his ears to catch any sound from within the room!

view you gave me your word all that passed between us should be in strict confidence," murmured Mr. Jackson hurriedly.

"I—I remember. Very well."

Mr. Jackson vanished again, to follow Tom Merry. Mr. Linton, who had been thinking of going straight to the Head to tell his astonishing story, stood gazing in angry perplexity at his wastepaper-basket. A pity he had promised to say nothing! However, he could not help that now.

"Really, this is the most astonishing thing that has ever happened to me!" gasped Mr. Linton. He glanced at his watch. "Dear me! Four o'clock, and I promised to have tea with Mr. Lathom at four o'clock!"

Adjusting the angle of his mortar-board, the bewildered master of the Shell sailed from his study.

A minute later Gerald Cutts of the Fifth emerged cautiously from the same doorway. There was no one about. Cutts hurried away down the passage, and turned in the direction of the Fifth Form corridor.

"Good gad!" breathed Gerald Cutts. "Of all rum things! A thousand quid to old Linton if he'd chuck his job! Hang

it, it can only mean one thing—somebody else wants Linton out of the way, so that they can collar his job! But he must be thundering keen to get it, for some reason, if it's worth a thousand quid to him, whoever he is! What the dickens can it all mean?"

Cutts could not answer that bewildering question.

CHAPTER 3.

The Coming of Kent!

"WUTHAHFORD JUNCTION, deah boys!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, the swell of St. Jim's, who made that remark.

It was, perhaps, rather an unnecessary remark, seeing that the railway carriage in which the swell of St. Jim's and the rest of the junior footer eleven were crowded had come to a standstill immediately opposite a red-faced porter, who was bawling lustily:

"Rutherford Junction! Wayland train!"

The Junior Eleven had been to Abbotsford, playing their old rivals there that Saturday afternoon—the Saturday following the mysterious visit of the seedy lawyer to Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell.

It had been a great game, and had ended in a victory for St. Jim's of three goals to one—a handsome win, particularly considering that Abbotsford had produced one of the hottest teams the St. Jim's fellows could remember having met there.

The footballers were now on their way to Rylcombe, where they had arranged for a motor-coach to meet them to bear them to the school.

"Yaas, Wuthahford Junction, deah boys," repeated Arthur Augustus, adjusting his celebrated monocle to stare out of the window at the crowded platform. He nodded sagely. "We are at Wuthahford!"

"Go hon!" murmured Reginald Talbot of the Shell.

"Age you sure, old chap?" asked Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth, gravely.

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, I am suah!"

"Oh, good!" said Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, with an air of great relief. "If you hadn't told us, Gussy, we might have thought we were at Wigan on the Wig."

The footballers chuckled. Arthur Augustus surveyed Monty Lowther through his monocle suspiciously.

"Pway do not be absurd, Lowthah, deah boy! I was meahly wemarkin' that we are at Wuthahford Junction—"

"I know, and I think it's jolly kind of you," nodded Lowther solemnly. "If you hadn't told us we couldn't possibly have guessed it for ourselves, of course. Although there's a porter there yelling the name of the station fit to bust, and we can see the name of the station written up in letters about a yard high, we'd never have known!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the footballers, as Arthur Augustus, realising that Lowther was pulling his noble leg, despite the gravity of Monty's face, turned very pink, and glared at the humorist of the Shell wrathfully.

"Look heah, Lowthah—"

"May I?" asked Lowther humbly.

"Bai Jove! May you what?" inquired Arthur Augustus, puzzled and suspicious.

"May I really look at you, Gussy, old chap?" murmured Lowther, in grateful tones. "I mean, it's jolly kind of a handsome, beautifully-dressed chap like you to let ordinary fellows look at you. It's a great treat for us. We appreciate it. I propose, you chaps, that we offer a vote of thanks to Gussy for letting us look at him without any entertainment tax," finished Lowther solemnly, glancing round at the other occupants of the crowded carriage. "Anybody second that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the footballers.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble countenance went the colour of a tomato.

"Look heah, you cacklin' asses—"

"He's so generous with his invitations, too, isn't he?" cut in Lowther. "Always inviting us chaps to look at him in the most open-handed way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Maybe that's why Gussy bossed bagging a goal this afternoon," went on Lowther, as gravely as ever. "Whenever he had the ball he kindly stopped for the Abbotsford backs to have a good look at him, and each time they took the ball away from him. Ungrateful of them, wasn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footballers yelled. Arthur Augustus' countenance as he surveyed the humorous Monty through his gleaming monocle seemed to strike them as funny.

"Never mind, Gussy," grinned Tom Merry. "Although you didn't get a goal, you played a ripping game. So cheer up!"

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Tom Merry was junior footer captain, and he was looking very cheery and fit after the recent match. Tom had been personally responsible for two of the goals scored against Abbotsford. The other had been bagged by Figgins of the New House, from a clever pass by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus seemed to be about to retort hotly to Monty Lowther's humorous remarks, when there came a sudden interruption.

A tall fellow carrying a suitcase, who seemed a couple of years older, at least, than most of the St. Jim's juniors, had been passing the carriage. But on catching sight of their school caps, he had halted suddenly. After a moment or two of hesitation he opened the door of the compartment.

The compartment was full; Jack Blake, in fact, was standing. But the whole train was very full, and the newcomer had evidently been unable to find a seat.

Already the guard was blowing his whistle.

"Urry up, there!" yelled the red-faced porter.

The newcomer stepped into the crowded carriage, and swung his suitcase on to the rack. The porter slammed the door, and the train got into motion, gliding out of the station.

The footballers were surveying the intruder rather inhospitably. They had enjoyed having the compartment to themselves. A good deal of ragging was often the order of the day when St. Jim's juniors travelled by train, but the presence of a stranger in their midst rather precluded that. For the honour of St. Jim's they had to remember their manners in the presence of a member of the outside public, even when he was a fairly young fellow, as now.

The stranger, for his part, was glancing round the carriage with evident interest.

He was a fellow of slightly foreign appearance. His complexion was somewhat swarthy, his eyes almost black. But when he suddenly spoke, his voice was English enough.

"St. Jim's—eh?" he remarked smoothly.

Tom Merry met his eyes and nodded.

"Yes, we're St. Jim's chaps," he answered civilly, wondering at the stranger's interest.

Had the newcomer been a good deal older, one of the juniors would have offered him a seat. But they did not feel called upon to do so, since he appeared to be no older than the average senior at St. Jim's.

"I'm on my way there now," said the stranger coolly.

"You are?" echoed Figgins, in surprise. "You are going to St. Jim's?"

"Yes, I'm a new arrival there. I'm going into the Fifth Form. My name is Kent, by the way. I saw your caps, that's why I got in here."

His voice was friendly enough. But somehow none of the juniors felt particularly attracted to the new Fifth-Former, as he had told them that he was. They did not dislike him; they felt indifferent. But because he was a new fellow they were interested.

"I didn't know there was anyone new coming into the Fifth!" exclaimed Figgins.

A smile seemed to flicker for a moment in the black eyes of the new Fifth-Former.

"I don't suppose you did," he murmured. "My—er—guardian only decided to send me to St. Jim's at the last moment. In fact, I don't think it was actually settled until this morning, when he spoke on the phone to Dr. Holmes. It was all arranged very suddenly, you see," he finished vaguely.

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Look here, Kent, have my seat," he said civilly, wishing to appear friendly to a new St. Jim's fellow, even though he was going into the Fifth, a Form for which the juniors cared little.

The new senior accepted Tom's seat after a protest, and the train sped on towards Wayland—not very far away now.

"Come down from London?" asked Talbot.

Kent nodded.

"Yes, I had to change at Rutherford Junction."

Talk lagged for a while. Suddenly Kent spoke again. "By the way," he asked, in a casual tone, "isn't there a master at St. Jim's called Linton? Mr. Linton?"

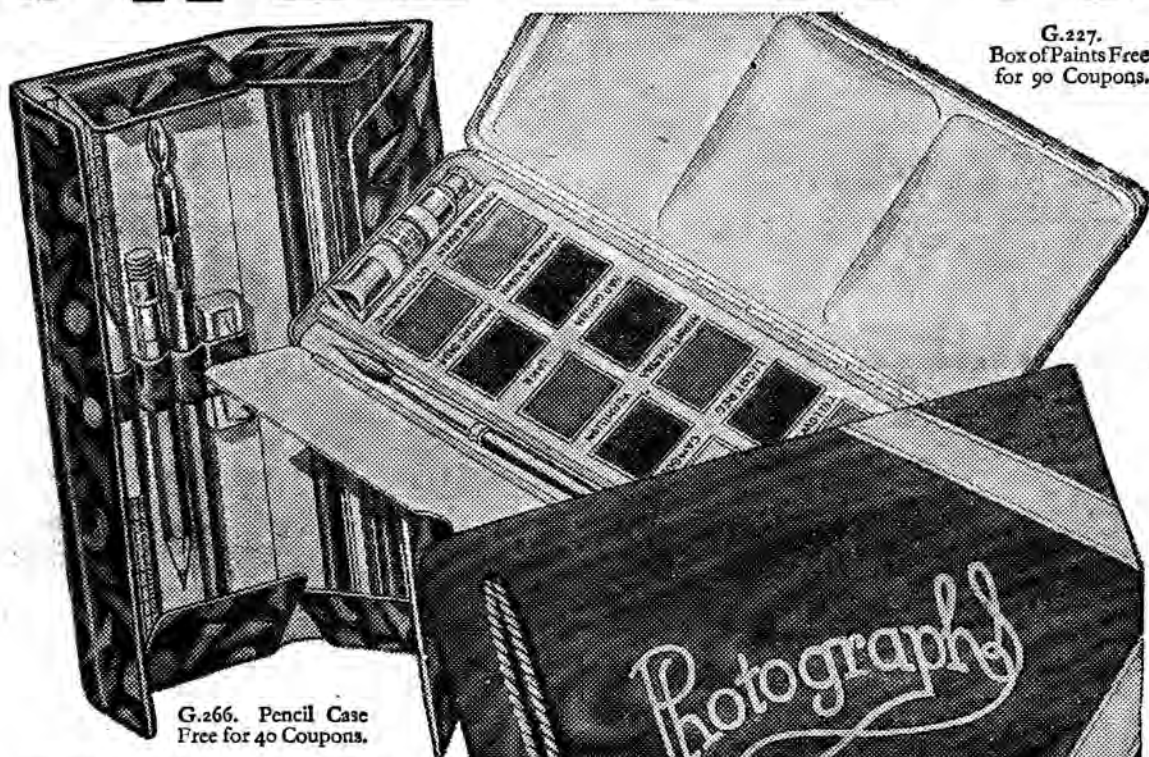
"That's right," nodded Blake. "He's the master of the Shell. But you'll be under old Ratty in the Fifth—Ratcliff. How did you know about Linton?" he added, as a sudden afterthought.

"Oh, I—er—met some St. Jim's fellows once, and I just happened to remember them speaking of a master of that name!" explained Kent smoothly.

His voice was so casual that it gave the juniors no reason

(Continued on page 8.)

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"LINTON IN REVOLT!"

(Continued from page 6.)

to imagine that the foreign-looking, new fellow had any interest in Mr. Linton of the Shell whatsoever.

They certainly never dreamed, as the train thundered on towards Rylcombe, that the arrival of the new Fifth-Former at St. Jim's held mysterious dangers for Mr. Linton—dangers and wild adventure in which some of the juniors themselves were to share.

"Well, here we are!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

The footballers had found their motor-coach waiting for them at Rylcombe Station, and Tom had offered Kent a lift in the vehicle, which the new Fifth-Former had accepted.

The coach was now rolling in at the big, old stone gateway into the ancient quad.

A number of juniors were gathered by the gates to cheer the return of their victorious footer team, since a telegram from Tom Merry, announcing their victory over Abbotsford, had been received at the school long before the arrival of the footballers themselves. Manners and Cyrus K. Handcock, the American junior, of the Shell, Herries and Digby, Kerruish and Dick Julian of the Fourth, and many others were there, and they gave the occupants of the motor-coach a lusty cheer as it came to a standstill inside the gates and the footer team piled out.

"Hurrah!" yelled Digby excitedly, as he thumped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his chum, on the back so heartily that the swell of St. Jim's gave a breathless yell himself. "Good old Gussy! Score any goals, you old ass?"

"Yow!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Dig, I have often told you I stwongly wesent bein' hit on the back in that howwible wuff mannah! No, I did not score any goals. I—hem!—I was wathah unluckay, pewwaps—"

"I say," cut in Herries, "who's that chap there?" Herries had just noticed Kent getting out of the motor-coach.

"A fellow we met comin' down on the twain," explained Arthur Augustus. "A new chap who's comin' into the Fifth. His name is Kent. Quite a decent sort, I should think, boys, though vewy quiet."

"Oh! Didn't know there was a new chap coming into the Fifth," said Dig. "Blow him and the Fifth, anyway! Who scored the goals, Gussy?"

"Tom Mewwy bagged two, and Figgins collahed another!"

And with Arthur Augustus busy going into details of the great match, he and Herries and Digby and Jack Blake, who all shared Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, moved off together towards the School House. Most of the other footballers were making for either the School House or the New House with friends. Tom Merry turned to the new Fifth-Former.

"If you like to come along, Kent, I'll take you to Mr. Railton. He's the Housemaster of the School House. You are going into the School House, aren't you?"

"Half a jiff—there is Railton!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Come on!"

The figure of Mr. Railton, the popular young Housemaster of the School House, had appeared from the doorway of the Head's house, crossing towards the School House steps in cap and gown. The Shell juniors, followed by Kent, intercepted him as he reached the steps of the House.

"Excuse me, sir!" said Tom Merry. "There is a new fellow here whom you might like to see."

Mr. Railton turned. His keen eyes lighted on the new Fifth-Former.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You must be Kent!"

"That is my name, sir," nodded the newcomer.

"Dr. Holmes has just been telling me about you," said the Housemaster. "Your coming was rather a sudden arrangement, I understand?"

"Yes," assented Kent. "It was, sir."

His black, inscrutable eyes were fastened on Mr. Railton enigmatically. Kent was a fellow whose inward thoughts would always be very difficult to read, Tom Merry was telling himself as he watched the new fellow's face with those unfathomable eyes. He decided inwardly that Kent would be an unpleasant person to quarrel with. There was an unscrupulous line about the rather thin lips.

There was a sudden faint exclamation from behind Tom Merry.

He turned his head. Gerald Cutts, of the Fifth, had emerged from the tuckshop, a little distance away, and was coming towards the School House steps. But he seemed to have halted suddenly, with the exclamation that had

caught Tom's ears. And Cutts was staring at the figure of the new Fifth-Former in a very peculiar way.

"Come with me, please," said Mr. Railton to the new senior. "I will see you in my study now."

"Very good, sir."

The Housemaster went up the steps and vanished into the School House, followed by the new Fifth-Former, leaving Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock at the foot of the steps.

"Well, what about rushing upstairs and brewing tea?" suggested Monty Lowther cheerfully.

"Good egg!" nodded Manners.

The four chums of Study No. 10 turned to follow Mr. Railton and the new Fifth Form fellow into the House. But Tom Merry had only taken two or three steps when he felt his arm seized.

He stopped, turning in surprise. The fellow who had grasped his arm, with a strangely intense grip, was Gerald Cutts.

"Who was that?" muttered Cutts breathlessly.

Tom stared at him.

"Eh? Who?"

"That chap talking to Railton," said Cutts. He seemed to be trying to conceal a certain amount of excitement in his tone.

"Oh, the new chap?" Tom stared at Cutts curiously. He remembered now that he had noticed Cutts staring at Kent in a peculiar way. "He's a new chap, coming into the Fifth. His name's Kent."

"Kent?" echoed Cutts. "His name's Kent?"

"Yes."

"You—you are sure his name is Kent?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't it be?" said Tom impatiently.

"What about him, anyway? You don't know him, do you?"

Cutts shook his head hastily.

"Oh, no! I—I was only wondering who he was."

And Cutts of the Fifth strode quickly up the steps and into the House.

"What the dickens was the matter with Cutts?" exclaimed Manners.

"Goodness knows!" Tom Merry shrugged. "He seemed interested in the new chap, didn't he?"

But the reason for Cutts' interest in Kent, the new Fifth-Former, was not likely to trouble the minds of the Terrible Three and their American chum. They were not particularly interested in either Cutts or Kent, as they made their way into the House and up the stairs to their study in the Shell passage.

But there was a very strange look on the face of Gerald Cutts as he went up to the Fifth Form passage and turned towards the study that he shared with St. Leger, the dandy and slacker of the Fifth.

For some reason the arrival of the new senior named Kent had affected Cutts of the Fifth strangely!

CHAPTER 4.

Under a False Name!

"S O here I am!"

It was Kent, the new Fifth-Former, who muttered the words.

Kent was standing by the window in the end study of the Fifth Form passage. Study No. 12 in the Fifth had been empty for a long time; but now it had been allotted to the newcomer upon his abrupt arrival at St. Jim's.

A smoky fire was burning in the grate, casting a faint light round the walls. But otherwise the room was in shadowed gloom, for Kent, apparently deep in his thoughts, had not turned on the electric light.

"So here I am!" he repeated softly.

There was a queer smile on his dark face.

He had had one visitor since his arrival in the study after his interview with Mr. Railton. Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, had looked in, in a friendly way, to see the new fellow. But Kent, though civil, had not seemed particularly keen on being visited, and Lefevre had soon left him alone in his study.

"A silent sort of chap," Lefevre had said to his two chums, Smith major and Lee. "Quite a decent sort, I expect. But I shouldn't want to try to pal up to him myself."

A low, rather odd laugh broke the silence of the end study, where Kent still stood motionless at the window, his dark eyes shadowed with thought.

"I wonder if my job here will be easy or difficult?" he muttered to himself.

So intent was he on his own thoughts, whatever they were, that he failed to hear a soft tap on the door behind him. But he did hear the door open silently and someone step into the room.

It was Gerald Cutts.

Cutts stood inside the door, staring across at the dark figure outlined against the window. He realised that the new Fifth-Former had not heard him enter.

Cutts closed the door softly.

There was a queer expression on his face as he took a few quiet steps across the carpet towards the figure by the window.

"Hallo—Visser!" said Cutts in level tones.

At sound of that sudden voice out of the gloom, the Fifth-Former, whom Cutts had addressed by the name of Visser, gave a breathless, choking gasp. He swung round, his face set in startled lines, his eyes wide and staring.

For some moments he stood gazing at Gerald Cutts as though he had seen a ghost.

He was breathing fast; his fists were clenched. Kent—or, as Cutts had called him, Visser—seemed incredibly, strangely startled. Far more so than could be explained by the mere fact of Cutts' unexpected entry.

Cutts gave a dry laugh.

"Well, Visser?" he said coolly. "Not seen you for a long time!"

Cutts was grinning rather maliciously as he held out his hand. He was enjoying the evident consternation he had caused the new Fifth-Former.

But it did not take the new fellow long to recover his composure. He took Cutts' hand coolly enough a moment later.

"Hallo, Cutts!" he said steadily. "Do you know, I'd quite forgotten you were at St. Jim's?"

"Really?" grinned Cutts. "Bit of a shock, eh, to find someone here who knows that your name isn't Kent at all?"

For a moment the new fellow's dark eyes glittered. He shot a swift glance at the door.

"Not so loud!" he snarled.

"Oh, don't worry," grinned Cutts; "no one will hear us in here!"

He crossed to the switch and snapped on the light. The two of them stood surveying one another silently. There was intense curiosity in the eyes of Gerald Cutts.

"Well, how are you, Visser?" he said easily. "And, if you'll excuse me asking," he went on ironically, "what are you doing at St. Jim's under an assumed name?"

The other did not answer. His eyes were burning queerly.

"When I last met you—the only time I did meet you before, in fact," grinned Cutts—"your name was Visser. Now it seems to be Kent! What's the idea?" He laughed softly. "A bit of a shock, I suppose, to find me here—a chap who knows your real name! You'd reckoned without that when you came here under a false name, eh?"

He seemed to be keenly enjoying the shock he had given to the newcomer—a shock from which the latter seemed to be recovering quickly enough.

"Exactly," said Kent—alias Visser—softly. "Let's see; we met in the holidays once. We were both staying at the same hotel, I remember, and we got pally; went around together quite a bit. That's more than a year ago."

"Yes," nodded Cutts, "we went to the races at Mansfield together several times. We both lost a good deal on the gee-gees there!"

Cutts laughed boastfully. He was one of those dingy individuals, who were fortunately very few and far between at St. Jim's, who took a pride in being what he called a "blade" and a "gay dog." He had the typical pasty face of the "fast-goer" in consequence.

"Yes, we did drop a bit on the Mansfield races," agreed Visser calmly. "I say, sit down."

He seemed to be thinking rapidly behind his dark, unreadable eyes. He had apparently quite recovered from the shock of being recognised and challenged with his real name. But inwardly, perhaps, he was not so indifferent as he appeared at the fact of his being bowled out within a few hours of arriving at the school, to which, for some mysterious reason, he had come under an assumed name.

His eyes were fastened on Cutts, glittering as the black sheep of the Fifth sat down.

Cutts was still grinning, very pleased with himself at having, as he felt, a certain amount of power over his shady acquaintance—thanks to his knowledge of the newcomer's true identity. But he was considerably puzzled to know the reason of Visser's arrival at the school under an alias.

That there was something shady behind it Cutts did not doubt. But what?



Flack seized Cutts by the shoulder, and with a powerful swing, hurled him through the doorway into the dark cellar!

He grinned across from his chair to the mysterious new arrival, as Visser paced the carpet near him restlessly.

"Well?" demanded Cutts. "What's the idea?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean, old chap!" grinned Cutts sardonically. "A chap doesn't come to a school under another name for the fun of it! Your name's no more Kent than mine is—"

"Not so loud, hang you!" snapped Visser, with a swift, uneasy glance at the door.

He halted, his eyes blazing down into those of Cutts in a way that revealed the bitter chagrin that was inwardly consuming him, despite his cool exterior. Visser was not so calmly unconcerned about Cutts' recognition of him as he had appeared a moment or two before.

Cutts chuckled.

"Don't worry," he said blandly; "I don't propose to give the game away. At least, I don't think I shall."

He grinned up at Visser. Cutts was enjoying his position keenly.

"What's the idea?" repeated Cutts. "I think I've a right to know that if I'm going to keep your little secret for you."

Visser stared down at Cutts searchingly. He could see that it was useless to try to persuade Cutts that there was nothing shady behind the fact of his alias.

"I'm sorry," he said grimly; "I'm not telling you!"

Cutts glared at him.

He was keenly curious to know the truth. And, with the hold that his knowledge gave him, he had imagined that he could force Visser to tell him easily enough. It was quite clear, however, from the look on Visser's face that the latter did not intend to tell Cutts a thing!

"Look here," said Cutts truculently, "I'm going to know—see? I'm keeping your secret for you, since we're old friends, and in return you're jolly well going to tell me what's brought you to St. Jim's under a false name! If you don't—"

"Well?" snapped Visser as Cutts paused. "If I don't?"

"Perhaps I might let it leak out that you're a blessed impostor," sneered Cutts.

Visser laughed.

His laugh was a shock to Cutts, who had imagined that his threat would scare the new Fifth-Former. But from the derisive note of Visser's laugh it was clear that he was not scared.

"I don't think you will," purred Visser softly.

"What do you mean?" muttered Cutts.

His voice was uneasy. Something in Visser's eyes, as they glittered down into his, rather frightened him.

Visser laughed again, harshly.

"Do you remember that little snapshot camera I had when we went to Mansfield races?"

Cutts started, and Visser smiled.

"Remember I took a good many photos at the races?" he went on smoothly. "I got some good ones. I remember there's one I took of you in the paddock looking at the gee-gees. Others, too. I snapped one of the five-bob enclosure, with you handing money to a bookie. You happened to be handing him the bundle, to be put on a gee-gee, of course, just as I took the photo. It was a thundering good photo, too! You're right in front of the picture, Cutts—you and the bookie."

Cutts had gone quite white. He licked his lips, which seemed to have gone suddenly dry.

"You—you haven't still got those photos, Visser?"

"Oh, yes, I have!" grinned Visser malevolently.

"They're all in my album with my holiday photographs. I haven't looked at them for a year or so, but they're still there right enough. As a matter of fact, I've got 'em in my trunk, now I come to think of it. I always take my photograph album with me."

He turned to a trunk that was standing against the wall, where Taggles, the school porter, had placed it, on its arrival an hour ago from the station. Visser unlocked it, and, after rummaging in it for a moment or two, produced a small album. Cutts watched him, with pale lips.

"Yes, here are the photos I took that time at Mansfield races," continued the new Fifth-Former calmly. "Good, aren't they? I wonder what the Head would say if he saw 'em?"

He held out the open album towards Cutts, with a sardonic smile.

Cutts gave a gasp as he saw those year-old photographs, with himself figuring prominently in several of them, with racehorses and bookmakers. He put out a quivering hand as if to take the album. But Visser withdrew it, tossing it back into his trunk and locking it.

"Yes, those are good photos," he repeated. "I've got the negatives at home, too. Even if these were destroyed by any chance, I can still print more. Of course, since I took them, I'm not in any of the photos myself. I could show them to the Head if I liked, without telling him I had taken them. But anyone who was in them, if he were a St. Jim's chap, would get expelled, of course, like a shot. The Head wouldn't approve of a St. Jim's chap going to horse races, even in the holidays, would he?"

Cutts smiled in a sickly way.

"Look here, Visser—"

"My name is Kent at St. Jim's," purred Visser.

"I—I mean Kent," nodded Cutts, biting his lip. "Look here, I was only joking when I said I might show you up. I wouldn't, of course."

"That's sensible of you, unless you want those photographs to be sent to the Head," said Visser harshly. He smiled very unpleasantly. "And I hope that your curiosity regarding my affairs will cease. Understand?"

"Yes," muttered Cutts. "I—I've no wish to know anything about your affairs Visser. But one good turn

(Continued on next page.)

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deserves another. I want you to destroy those photographs, and the negatives."

"Sorry to disappoint you," grinned Visser. "I'm not destroying them. Oh, no!"

Cutts stared at Visser with helpless, baffled rage.

He was badly scared.

He knew that if Visser cared to show those photographs to the Head, or to Mr. Railton, it would mean expulsion for him.

"Look here, Visser—" he began thickly.

"Don't let me have to remind you again that my name is Kent," said Visser, in an ugly tone. He glanced at his watch. "Perhaps you won't mind going now. I'm busy."

Cutts had risen to his feet. He stood facing Visser, trembling with helpless rage.

"You bound!" he burst out.

He had come to the study, filled with excited curiosity, believing that he had power over the newcomer to force his secret from him. Instead, he now found himself in Visser's power. The tables were turned.

Cutts would have given his ears to have known the reason of Visser's presence at St. Jim's under a false name. But it looked as though he would not learn the truth, after all.

Visser refused to speak. And if Cutts dared to breathe a word to a soul regarding the fact that Kent was not his real name, Cutts would have to pay dearly.

There was a hard laugh from the new Fifth-Former.

"Don't worry, Cutts," he sneered. "I shan't show those photos to anyone, so long as you mind your own business regarding my affairs. But if once you start poking your nose into my business, if you breathe so much as a single word about my name not being Kent—"

He broke off, with glittering eyes. The unspoken threat was enough—no need for him to put it into words.

"Good-bye, Cutts!" grinned Visser derisively. "Thanks for looking in!"

Cutts swung on his heel without a word, and left the study. A soft laugh from the mysterious new Fifth-Former followed him.

Cutts turned towards his own study. His face was pale.

He was badly scared.

He realised that at present Visser had no reason to show those incriminating photographs to anyone. But he knew that he was in Visser's power, thanks to those snapshots—in the power of an unscrupulous scoundrel, who for some unknown, mysterious reason, had come to St. Jim's under an assumed name. And the knowledge frightened him.

And why was Visser at St. Jim's? What dark secret lay behind the sudden arrival at the school of Visser—alias Kent?

CHAPTER 5.

Cutts Finds Out!

"HALLO, Cutts, old boss! Why the troubled brow?"

It was the cheery voice of Monty Lowther who asked that question. It was after tea, two days later, on the Monday evening, and the Terrible Three of the Shell had strolled up the steps of the School House, to find Gerald Cutts standing in the doorway, apparently deep in thought.

It was the brooding frown on Cutts' face that had brought forth Lowther's grinning query.

Cutts scowled at Tom Merry & Co. without answering. The Terrible Three passed by him into the House, leaving him brooding at the top of the steps.

The object of his thoughts was the mysterious occupant of the end study in the Fifth Form passage—the fellow who had come to St. Jim's under the name of Kent.

What had brought Visser to St. Jim's under that false name?

The question had been tormenting Cutts for two days.

That there was something shady behind his presence at the school, Cutts did not doubt for a moment.

But what? It was a baffling mystery!

A step in the hall behind him a few moments later caused Cutts to glance round. He started.

Visser himself was crossing towards the big doorway, wearing a coat and cap, evidently going out.

Visser nodded to Cutts in an apparently friendly way. But Cutts saw the faintly derisive gleam in the other's eyes.

"Nice evening!" remarked Visser coolly, and passed on down the steps, turning towards the gates.

Cutts watched him crossing the darkening quad with a queer look in his eyes.

"I wonder!" he breathed

The arrival of "Kent" at the school had probably caused less interest at St. Jim's than the arrival of any new fellow had done for a long while. When not in the class-room

he had kept almost entirely to his study, so that the vast majority of the fellows—except for the Fifth—had not even set eyes on him yet. It was quite possible that there were still fellows at St. Jim's who did not even know of his arrival at the school. But to Gerald Cutts, knowing what he did, Visser's every movement was of interest.

"I wonder where he's off to now?" he muttered, his eyes on the dark figure crossing towards the gates through the deepening gloom.

A sudden gleam came into Cutts' eyes.

Perhaps it had been a look in Visser's face, perhaps it was simply guesswork on Cutts' part. But something seemed to tell him that if he followed Visser he might learn something.

The next moment Cutts had hurried down the steps, and was crossing towards the gates in pursuit of the figure that had just vanished into the road.

Cutts was wearing a cap—there was no time to bother about getting a coat. Cutts did not mean to let Visser far out of his sight.

He hurried out of the gates in time to catch sight of Visser's dim figure disappearing down the shadowy darkness of Rylcombe Lane.

Cutts followed.

He had little fear of detection. It was dusk already, and growing rapidly darker, with just enough light to enable him not to lose his quarry, but scarcely enough for Visser to be likely to notice him even if he glanced back.

Keeping to the grass at the edge of the road, to deaden his footsteps, Cutts stole on down the lane in pursuit of the mysterious newcomer to St. Jim's.

For half a mile or so Visser kept to Rylcombe Lane. Then he turned aside down a narrow road that led towards Wayland Moor, with Cutts keeping a hundred yards behind him, careful that his footsteps made no sound.

From the steady pace which Visser was keeping up it seemed certain that he was going somewhere definite. But the road he had taken was not the usual road to Wayland. It seemed to lead nowhere in particular, except the moor.

"Where the dickens—" muttered Cutts, as Visser suddenly turned down another narrow road.

He was not left long in doubt as to Visser's destination, however. A few hundred yards down the road the dim, shadowy figure ahead seemed to vanish into a high wall on the right of the road, and Cutts, coming up to the spot cautiously, half a minute later, realised at last with excited surprise for where Visser had been making.

"Scranton Manor," breathed Cutts, peering through the old gateway into which Visser had vanished. "What on earth has he come here for?"

Scranton Manor was an ancient house, desolate and lonely, set far back from this almost unused road among dark trees. Its gardens backed on to the moor, tangled and overgrown—the old manor had long stood empty.

Cutts' curiosity was now at fever-pitch.

What could have brought Visser to this lonely, untenanted house on the edge of the moor?

"I'm thundering well going to find out!" he muttered, with a determined twist to his thin lips.

Noisless as a cat, Cutts stole in through the big, rusty gates and down the winding drive.

His heart was beating a trifle fast. He realised that he was doing just what Visser had threatened him with expulsion for daring to try to do—interfering with the mysterious affairs of the newcomer to the Fifth! But his curiosity was such that it could not be denied.

And Cutts soon discovered one thing—that Scranton Manor was no longer the deserted, untenanted house it had so long been. Though the drive was still choked with weeds, and the great tangled trees were as overgrown and uncared-for as ever, someone seemed to be living there now. At any rate, lighted windows met his eyes half a minute later as he crept towards the house down the long drive.

There was no sign of Visser now as Cutts crouched by some bushes opposite the big front entrance, peering eagerly at the forbidding old pile of the lonely manor house. His quarry had evidently disappeared already into the building.

There were lights in some of the upper rooms. As he watched another room became lighted up on the ground floor, next to the front door. Cutts saw a man's figure come to the window and pull the curtains across.

A few moments later Cutts was stealing like a shadow across the grass in front of the house towards that lighted window.

He crept over the gravel drive and reached the flower-bed under the window. A dim yellow light was shining out through the dim curtains as he crouched beneath the sill, straining his ears to catch any sound from within the room.

"Well," a hard voice was saying—a man's voice—"have

you been able to find out anything that's going to be useful to us?"

"Yes."

Cutts stiffened. The answer was in the voice of Visser—alias Kent.

Another voice cut in, deep and growling. Cutts could not make out what it said. But after a moment Visser began to speak again.

"I had a bit of luck. I saw him go to the Head's house last night, from the window of my study. It was dark. I went down into the quad and listened to them talking, under the Head's window—"

Despite his excitement, Cutts had time to grin to himself. How little Visser dreamed that his own methods were being used against him at that very moment!

"The Head is unwell," went on Visser's cool tones. "It seems that some money—some school funds—have to be taken to London, to a bank there, on Wednesday. The Head asked him to take the money for him. He's going to—"

"Well," cut in a harsh voice, "how does that affect us?"

"A lot!" retorted the triumphant voice of Visser. "I've got a scheme. We'll rob him of that money while he's on his way to the station. He'll go in a hired car—well, one of us will be driving that car! It'll be easy enough to work—"

"And then?" asked the unknown man eagerly.

"I can get a copy of his handwriting," continued Visser in cool tones. "We'll forge a letter, apparently written by him, asking for his share of the swag. I'll see that the Head sees that letter. It'll seem as clear as daylight that the whole thing was a put-up job, and that he was in it all along, and is sharing in the stolen funds. Of course, he'll be sacked at once—"

"By thunder!" Cutts heard a fist crash down on a table. "That's a great idea, young 'un!"

"I thought you'd like it," agreed Visser's cool voice, with a harsh laugh.

The growling voice of the third occupant broke in. Cutts could not make out what was said, but already he was trembling with wild, breathless excitement.

He knew something, at last!

Visser was a member of a gang of crooks who, for some mysterious reason, wanted some particular person sacked from St. Jim's. Visser had been sent to the school to find out the best way of bringing that about—a task in which he had evidently wasted no time.

But who was the person whom they wanted sacked—and why?

"Who on earth—" breathed Cutts.

He was racking his brains to think who it could possibly be whom the Head had asked to take what was clearly a large sum of money to London, and whom Visser and his friends were planning to "frame up" with a robbery, with the deliberate purpose of getting him out of St. Jim's. But he could not imagine who it could be.

He strained his ears, where he crouched beneath that lighted window, scarcely breathing.

He had not long to wait to learn what he wished to know. "Yes, that ought to fix this man Linton all right," came the merciless tones of the unknown man within the room. "Linton!"

Cutts echoed the name dazedly in his brain.

It was Mr. Linton, the elderly master of the Shell, whom the crooks of Scranton Manor wanted sacked from St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 6.

Held Prisoner!

CUTTS felt utterly dazed. He had never been so astonished in his life before.

Why these crooks should want Mr. Linton, who was surely a harmless enough gentleman to anyone, sacked from St. Jim's, was a staggering mystery.

And they evidently not only wanted it, but were prepared to go to any lengths to bring it about!

Cutts turned his attention again to the voices within the room as he heard Visser interrupt the words of the unknown man who had just mentioned Linton's name.

"What's the news from Carnaby?" asked Visser. "I suppose there is plenty of time?"

"Enough, anyway," came the answer. "Carnaby wired this morning. He says the doctors think old Denman will live another month, with luck."

"Well, that ought to be enough time for us to get Linton kicked out of his job, and for you to take his place as master of the Shell," returned Visser coolly.

"Yes," answered the other. "As long as I get the job of master of the Shell at St. Jim's before old Denman dies—"

Cutts, listening with every nerve, was growing more and more bewildered by what he heard. He knew now the crooks' purpose, but he was more mystified than ever by the reason for it!

But the next words he heard explained that amazing mystery!

"How much do you say old Denman's worth?" It was Visser speaking.

"More than half a million," came the reply. There was greedy covetousness in the tone in which the words were spoken. "More than half a million, and every penny of it left to whoever is master of the Shell at his death! If Linton knew about it—"

"Well, he doesn't—luckily for us!" broke in Visser, with a harsh laugh. "Nobody does, you say, except ourselves and old Denman's solicitors?"

"No one!" came the exultant answer. "Old Denman's will is still secret. I shouldn't have known about it myself, of course, if I hadn't been his private secretary—before I was sacked!"

Gerald Cutts, crouching under the sill outside the lighted window, drew a hissing breath between his teeth.

So that was the secret! For some reason, an old man who was now dying had left his great fortune to whoever was master of the Shell at his death! And these scoundrels were determined to have one of their number filling that position at the school when "old Denman" died, so that they would come into possession of his vast wealth.

"Good gad!" breathed Cutts hoarsely.

He remembered in a flash that mysterious offer he had overheard being made to Mr. Linton—the offer of a thousand pounds if the master of the Shell would resign his post! Now Cutts knew why it had been made. These were the men who had made that mysterious offer, through a lawyer—the offer which Mr. Linton had refused.

Cutts had not mentioned anything about what he had overheard that day in Mr. Linton's room to a soul. He had been frightened that, had he done so, it might have come round to Mr. Linton in some way, and revealed the fact that he had been in the Shell master's room, eavesdropping. He realised how strange it was that he, who had overheard that strange offer made, should now be the fellow to learn the amazing secret behind it!

"Good gad!" he repeated dazedly.

Would You Believe It?

Jonas Hanway was the first man to carry an umbrella in London, 1750, but an umbrella was carried over the



King of Assyria
700 B.C.



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Born when Charles II was King!



Li Ching-Yung of Kailshien, Southern Szechuan Province, China, born 253 years ago and still alive.

Cutts had no particular friendly feeling towards Mr. Linton. The master of the Shell was a gentleman whom Cutts came across but seldom, and when he did it was usually to find the master of the Shell a decidedly acid and irascible individual. But at this plot to rob him of more than half a million, even Cutts felt a wave of indignation. "The bounds!" he breathed.

He felt an overwhelming curiosity to see Visser's companions.

Cutts had learnt all he wanted to know, otherwise. But he felt that he could not leave Scranton Manor, to fly back to St. Jim's and tell his amazing story, without having some idea of what kind of men the crooks who had taken up their headquarters in the old manor appeared to be.

There was a crack of light shining out at one side of the window, where the curtain did not quite cover it. Cutts realised that he could probably see in there without any risk of detection.

Still crouching, he took a furtive step towards the farther side of the window.

The movement was fatal! Despite his caution, he made a faint sound. From within the room there came a sudden exclamation and the sound of someone leaping to the window.

Cutts felt his heart go cold.

He wanted to turn and run, but he felt numb—rooted to the spot.

The next instant the curtains had been dragged back, and a face was staring out at him. His eyes met those of the man within the room.

For a moment the man stared out through the glass. Then, with a choking exclamation, the crook dragged up the window. Cutts found himself gazing dumbly into the sinister circle of a levelled automatic.

"Don't try to run!" snarled the man.

Cutts could not have run, even had he dared. He was frozen where he stood, his face as white as paper. Slowly he raised his arms above his head.

He heard a startled cry from Visser, within the room, as the scoundrelly newcomer to St. Jim's recognised his face in the light that streamed out through the open window. Cutts glanced past the man with the automatic, and his eyes met those of Visser—glittering and malevolent, ugly with fury.

"You!" snarled Visser.

The man with the automatic moved to the side of the window, still keeping Cutts covered.

"Get in!" he snapped. "And sharp's the word!"

Cutts got control of his trembling limbs with difficulty. He dared not disobey. With unsteady hands he grasped the sill and dragged himself over it into the room.

The man with the automatic shut the window behind him, and dragged the curtains across. Cutts stared round helplessly, his eyes wide with terror.

That he was in the hands of utterly unscrupulous scoundrels, he knew only too well!

His eyes met Visser's.

"You!" repeated Visser. "So you've been spying on me!"

"Who is he?" asked the man with the automatic harshly.

The third occupant of the room—a muscular man with a broken nose, who looked like an ex-prize-fighter of the shady sort—was glaring at Cutts with silent ferocity.

"His name's Cutts," snarled Visser. "He's the fellow I told you about, who knew me!"

"Is he, by thunder?" The man with the automatic put away his weapon, and took a menacing step towards the

black sheep of the Fifth. "How much have you heard—eh?"

"I—I've heard nothing!" stammered Cutts.

"He's lying!" growled the man with the broken nose. "He must have heard everything!"

Three pairs of glittering eyes burnt into those of Gerald Cutts, as he glanced round, panic-stricken. He moistened his lips with his tongue; they had gone dry.

"I—I—" he stammered, cowering. "I—I heard nothing, I swear! I don't know what you mean! I don't understand—"

"Chuck that!" snarled the man nearest him. He was a tall, lean man of thirty or so, with a thin face and dark hair—not a bad-looking man, in a way, had it not been for the cruel unscrupulousness of his thin lips. His voice, unlike that of the man with the broken nose, was the voice of a well-educated man. "You've heard every word we've said!"

Cutts shrank back from the gleaming menace in the man's eyes.

Something like a whisper of terror broke from his quivering lips.

He knew how useless it was to deny further that he had overheard. In an agony of fear he cowered against the wall, covering his face with his hands.

"Let me go!" moaned Cutts. "I—I won't tell! I swear it!"

"Let you go?" growled the man with the broken nose, fiercely. "Knowing what you do? Not likely!"

"I warned you not to spy on me!" snapped Visser, his face livid with rage. "You fool!"

He glanced at the thin-faced man.

"What shall we do with him, Hyde?"

"We can't let him leave here, knowing what he does!" snarled the man, addressed as Hyde. "We'll have to keep him here till we're through with this business at St. Jim's. Flack, take him down to the cellars! Lock him up!"

Flack, the man with the broken nose, growled assent. He strode forward and grasped Cutts by the shoulder with a grip of steel, shaking him like a rat.

"Come on, hang you!"

Even had Cutts had the pluck to put up a fight for it, he would have been as helpless as a child in Flack's muscular grasp. He was jerked towards the door, which Visser flung open, and along the shadowy passage outside. Down some stairs he was dragged into a dark passage below. In the gloom Flack groped for the handle of a door, and kicked it open with his foot. Utter blackness met Cutts' terrified eyes.

"Inside!" growled Flack.

"No!" screamed Cutts. "Not in there—in the dark! Let me go! I'll go mad if you shut me up in the dark! I—I won't tell a soul, if you'll let me go! I swear—"

His words choked in his throat as Flack seized him by the shoulder, and with a powerful swing of his arm hurled him through the black doorway. Cutts collapsed on a cold, stone floor, whimpering breathlessly.

He heard the heavy door crash shut—heard a rusty bolt slide home.

A wild scream broke from his ice-cold lips.

He scrambled to his feet, groping for the door, and beat upon the massive woodwork with his fists in the utter darkness that hemmed him in.

"Let me out! Let me out!"

No sound from the other side of the bolted door;

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Not a hat, but a swarm of bees!



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only his own cries echoing mockingly round the cold walls of the cellar behind him.

Flack had gone.

Alone in the dark, the prisoner of Scranton Manor beat his bruised fists upon that bolted door that shut him off, as in a tomb, from the outside world, and from St. Jim's, which he could never reach now to tell his amazing story, and warn of his danger the innocently unsuspecting master of the Shell.

CHAPTER 7. The Hold-Up!

"COME in!"

Dr. Holmes, the handsome old headmaster of St. Jim's, was seated at his desk in his big study, writing. It was early after dinner on the Wednesday following the strange disappearance from St. Jim's of Cutts of the Fifth.

The Head glanced towards the door as it opened, in response to his invitation.

"Ah, Mr. Linton!"

Mr. Linton was wearing a coat and carrying his hat, evidently ready to go out. He stepped into the study, shutting the door carefully behind him.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" murmured the master of the Shell. "I am ready to go. I intend to catch the two-fifteen train at Rylcombe. I have a car waiting for me now in the quadrangle."

"Excellent, Mr. Linton!"

The Head rose, taking a key from his pocket, and crossed the study to the safe that stood in one corner of the room. He opened it, and took out a small leather case.

"Here is the money, Mr. Linton. I am exceedingly obliged to you for taking it to London for me. I need scarcely point out that it is most important that it is delivered safely at the bank in Lombard Street."

"You can trust me to exercise the utmost care, Dr. Holmes."

"Thank you, Mr. Linton! The case is locked. Here is the key."

Mr. Linton took the key and put it in his pocket very carefully.

"By the way, Dr. Holmes, has there been any news concerning that boy Cutts, who failed to return to the school two nights ago?"

A worried, anxious frown appeared on the usually genial face of the old Head.

"None at all. It is most extraordinary, and very distressing. The police, of course, have the matter in hand. But so far they have utterly failed to trace his movements since Monday evening. Taggles, as perhaps you know, has declared that he saw Cutts go out of gates early in the evening, but no one has reported seeing him since. Where he went is a mystery."

"Most bewildering," murmured Mr. Linton, with a grave shake of his head. "And, as you say, sir, most distressing. No doubt he will be traced before long, I suppose, but—"

His eyes fell on the clock on the chimneypiece.

"Dear me! It is time I left, Dr. Holmes, if I am to be sure of catching the two-fifteen."

"Good-bye, Mr. Linton, and many thanks!"

The master of the Shell left the study, and made his way downstairs to the quad. A red car was waiting, drawn up near the School House steps. The driver, a heavily-built man with a cloth cap drawn rather low over his face, jumped down and opened the door for Mr. Linton, who climbed in and deposited the valuable case on the seat beside him.

"Rylcombe Station!" commanded Mr. Linton, somewhat pompously.

He was feeling rather important at finding himself in charge of a large sum of money belonging to the school funds, to take to London. It was certainly an important task, even, perhaps, a dangerous one, he was telling himself, with a thrill. Mr. Linton was remembering very vividly all the newspaper stories he had read of robberies and desperate criminals.

"Fortunately, I understand that these—ah!—bandits usually are to be found at work in America," murmured Mr. Linton, rather relieved at the thought.

The taxicab-driver started the engine, and a few moments later the red taxi was turning towards the gates.

From an upper window of the School House a face watched intently as the taxicab vanished into the road.

It was the face of a fellow staring down from the end study of the Fifth Form passage—the face of Visser.

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And on the dark features of the Fifth-Former there played a flickering smile.

Mr. Linton glanced at his watch.

"Plenty of time," he murmured, with satisfaction.

The red car was speeding down Rylcombe Lane at a smart pace, already half-way to the station. At this rate, Mr. Linton told himself, he would have five minutes to spare.

He watched the hedges flashing past, and hummed a gay tune. It was not often that Mr. Linton hummed a tune, let alone a gay one, but at the moment he was feeling in particularly high spirits. There was spring in the air. It had already occurred to Mr. Linton that after he had delivered the money at the bank, there was no reason why he should not go to a theatre.



In the hand of each of the masked men gleamed a snub-nosed automatic, trained threateningly on the master of the Shell!

"Yes," murmured Mr. Linton cheerfully. "No reason at all why I should not—ahem!—drop in and—er—see a show!"

He felt a very gay dog indeed as he used that expression. "Something bright and—ah—cheerful," continued Mr. Linton to himself. "Dear me, I have not seen a—er—a show for years! Something bright, I feel, though, of course, decorous. I—hem!—I wonder if the musical performance which I saw advertised in the London paper this morning, entitled 'Popsy-Wopsy,' is sufficiently decorous? Possibly not. I should be better advised, perhaps, to purchase a ticket for 'Hamlet,' if that excellent play is being performed."

The car sped on.

"'Popsy-Wopsy,'" mused Mr. Linton thoughtfully. "A

curious appellation for a theatrical performance. I wonder what is its exact significance? Really, I feel somewhat inclined to take the—ah—risk. The advertisement, I remember, displayed a charming young lady, singing what appeared to be a gay tune in a very spirited manner. I wonder, now—"

Mr. Linton awoke from his reverie over the possible merits of "Popsy-Wopsy," to discover that the car had come to a standstill.

To his surprise, Mr. Linton found that the car had not arrived in the station yard, as he had presumed for the moment. Instead, it had drawn up by the side of the road, in a wooded lane.

Mr. Linton peered round in astonishment.

He had failed to notice, in his abstraction, that the car had left the road to Rylcombe. But he saw now that it must have turned aside a little while before; the lane in



which it had come to a standstill was not on the usual route to the railway station at all.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mr. Linton.

The driver was climbing out of his seat. He turned to the door of the car and swung it open.

"My good man!" exclaimed Mr. Linton irascibly. "What ever is the matter? This is not the way to the railway station!"

And then suddenly his jaw dropped and his eyes seemed almost to pop from their sockets.

Owing to the dark shadow of the trees under which the car was standing, he had failed to notice that the man's face was concealed by a cloth tied over it, below the eyes. But he saw it now! And Mr. Linton's heart almost stood still.

He sat and goggled at the masked man staring in at him through the door as though he had been a ghost.

At the same moment a second figure appeared swiftly from the trees and ran across towards the car. Another masked man!

"B-b-b-bless my s-s-soul!" stammered Mr. Linton faintly.

All thoughts of "Popsy-Wopsy" had fled from his mind in a moment. He realised in a flash what was happening: He was the victim of a "hold-up" such as he had read of in the newspapers! They were after the school funds in the leather case on the seat beside him.

Instinctively his hand shot out to grasp it. Mr. Linton was no coward; he would have defended the money valiantly had he had half a chance.

But already the other door had been dragged open, and the second masked man was glaring in at him over the cloth tied round his face beneath his cap. And in the hand of each of the masked bandits there now gleamed dully a snub-nosed automatic.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Linton. "Oh! Ruffians! Scoundrels! I—I—I—"

"Hop out!" growled a sinister voice. "Look slippery, guv'nor!"

"I refuse!" panted Mr. Linton. "I—I utterly decline to be robbed! I shall have you both arrested and dealt with most severely by the full rigour of the law! You understand?"

"Hop out!" repeated the sinister voice fiercely. "Unless you want your fat head blown off!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Linton. "I—I—I— Very well!"

He climbed out of the car and stood breathless on the roadside, pale and helpless. His scholarly brow was damp with perspiration.

"This is monstrous!" panted the unhappy master of the Shell. "You shall—er—suffer for this, my men!"

He glanced round wildly. The lane seemed utterly deserted.

"Leave that case alone, sir!" gasped Mr. Linton fiercely, as the driver reached into the cab and snatched the leather case. "Do you realise that theft is punishable by law? Prison is the penalty, and I am informed that life in prison is anything but pleasant. Therefore reflect—"

"Dry up!" snarled the driver.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Linton. "Oh! Oh, very well! But—"

The driver had jumped back into the driving seat, the case beside him. The second man darted into the seat behind and slammed the door. With a grinding of gears, the red car leapt forward, leaving Mr. Linton at the roadside.

"Stop!" shrieked Mr. Linton, fairly dancing with excitement. "Stop, I say!"

The car did not stop. It was rapidly gathering speed. But the next moment a breathless cry—a cry of hope—broke from Mr. Linton's lips.

Coming up the lane towards the fleeing car were eight familiar figures that had just come into view round the bend for which the car was speeding. Mr. Linton, with a joyful gasp, recognised Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell, and Blake & Co. of the Fourth.

"Stop it!" he shrieked wildly. "Stop that cab!"

The group of juniors had halted in astonishment at sight of Mr. Linton dancing in the middle of the road, his silk hat tilted over one ear. But they grasped the situation in a flash.

Why Linton wanted the car stopped was a mystery to the juniors. But if he wanted it stopped, they meant to stop it!

The car, travelling fast, was close upon them now.

"Look out, you chaps!" yelled Tom Merry. "Stop it—quick!"

CHAPTER 8.

St. Jim's to the Rescue!

"MY hat! What the dickens—"

"Look out—"

"B-bai Jove!"

Despite their breathless astonishment, the juniors were swiftly closing in, in a solid group, in the path of the oncoming car.

By the side of the masked figure at the wheel sat another masked man, with an automatic in his hand. There was grim determination now to stop the red car at any cost.

The man at the wheel was accelerating fast. He saw that the juniors were out to stop him getting through, and he was relying on speed to smash through their ranks and get clear.

"Oh, gweat Scott! Yawwooop—"

Arthur Augustus, a little in front of the others, gave a wild yell as the man beside the driver fired. The bullet lifted D'Arcy's hat from his head. Gussy missed his footing and collapsed in the road, a struggling heap.

"Holy smokes!" panted Cyrus K. Handcock, the junior from New York City. "Look out—"

The juniors scattered desperately as the car came roaring upon them. They were not lacking in pluck; but there was no sense in letting themselves be run down, possibly killed, by the scoundrels in the car.

Tom Merry's face had set in desperate lines as he realised how vain their hope had been of stopping the flying vehicle by barring its path.

As the car swept by him Tom poised himself lightly, and leapt!

It was a desperately risky thing to do, but Tom landed safely. For a moment, as his feet found the running-board, he all but reeled backwards and fell off. But his clutching hand caught hold of the side of the driver's seat, and he hung on grimly as the car swept on down the lane.

He found himself staring into a pair of flaming, evil eyes, between the masking cloth and the low-pulled cap of the man at the wheel.

"Stop!" he panted.

For answer a clenched fist came driving at his face from the other man. It caught Tom Merry on the chin, jerking back his head with sickening concussion. But somehow, by a miracle, he elung on still.

The next moment his own fist had smashed home on the driver's jaw.

The car lurched wildly as its driver fell sideways from the wheel, dazed for the moment. Tom reached out a hand and grasped the wheel himself, twisting it fiercely. The speeding vehicle swung round towards the ditch, and skidded wildly as it struck the grass verge at the roadside. Tom leapt off, falling in a heap on the grass, breathless and unhurt. There was a heavy crash.

Tom scrambled up.

The car was lying at an angle in the ditch—an utter wreck.

"Good old Tommy!" yelled the voice of Monty Lowther. Tom glanced round. The rest of the juniors were racing down the lane towards the ditched motor-car. In the

distance, the excited figure of Mr. Linton could be seen panting towards the scene.

Already the two masked men were scrambling free from the car. Tom Merry raced across the grass towards them.

But he was alone for the moment; the others were still too far off to lend a hand. And, despite his athletic strength and all the pluck in the world, the captain of the Shell was no match for two strongly built men.

An iron fist met him as he hurled himself desperately at one of the pair. It lifted Tom Merry off his feet, dropping him, dazed and bruised, at the scoundrel's feet. And before the others could come up, the two ruffians had leapt through a hole in the hedge beyond the ditch, and vanished into the woods beyond.

"Oh, gweat Scott!" gasped Arthur Augustus, panting up. "They have got away, bai Jove!"

Monty Lowther and Manners were stooping anxiously over Tom Merry, helping him to his feet. There was an ugly mark on Tom's cheek where the man's fist had struck.

"Hard luck, Tommy!" muttered Manners sympathetically.

"They—they've got away?" mumbled Tom.

"Fraid so!" nodded Monty Lowther. "We can't hope to catch 'em now, in the woods."

"But what the dickens is it all about?" cried Blake excitedly. "Masked men—my hat!"

"Here comes Linton!" cut in Herries. "He'll tell us!"

Mr. Linton came tearing up.

"The funds!" panted the master of the Shell. "The funds! Where are they?"

"Funds, sir? What funds?" asked Digby, in perplexity.

Mr. Linton hurried across to the wrecked car. He gave an exclamation at sight of the empty seat.

"Gone!" he breathed. "It has gone! They have taken the money!"

He turned a haggard face to the juniors.

"They have taken the money!" he repeated—"money I was taking to London for Dr. Holmes—school funds! It was in a leather case—"

"Holy smokes!" broke in Handcock excitedly. "One of the guys was carrying a leather case when he broke for it!"

Mr. Linton groaned.

"Come on!" gasped Blake. "Follow 'em!"

Now that the juniors realised that the two scoundrels had got away with a large sum of money they all felt eager to try to pursue the fugitives, hopeless though such an attempt must actually have been. With the exception of Tom Merry, who was still too dazed, they plunged across the ditch and through the hedge into the trees beyond.

"How did it all happen, sir?" muttered Tom.

Mr. Linton explained in breathless sentences.

"Funny you never noticed that the chap wasn't taking the right road to the station, sir," cut in Tom suddenly.

"I—I can't account for it myself," said Mr. Linton in an unhappy tone. "Dear me—this is terrible—terrible! What ever will Dr. Holmes say? I fear that he will consider I have been most careless. Had I noticed the man leave the route to the station, my suspicions would at once have been aroused, no doubt, and I might have been able to act before the other scoundrel came on the scene. The other was evidently in waiting at this spot—the whole thing must have been prearranged—"

"Obviously, sir," nodded Tom. "It's rotten!"

After a few minutes Blake & Co., Monty Lowther, Manners and Handcock returned glumly to the lane. As Tom had known must be the case, their attempt to trace the fugitives had been altogether in vain.

"I suppose you could identify the driver, anyway, sir?" said Monty Lowther hopefully to Mr. Linton. "Although he put on a mask later, he can't have been masked when he came to the school for you!"

"I—I fear I quite failed to notice his face at all," said Mr. Linton. "Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Lucky we came along, sir, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We all of us might be able to recognise the wuffians by their build, sir, if ever we are called upon to identify the wottans."

"Perhaps," nodded Mr. Linton, brightening a trifle.

Arthur Augustus gazed mournfully at his battered topper. "Oh dear!" he murmured worriedly. "My toppah is wuined!"

For the moment, at any rate, the swell of St. Jim's seemed far more worried by the damage done to his cherished "tile" than by the escape of the masked bandits with the school funds.

The juniors had been on their way to Spalding Hall, the school for girls near Wayland, where their girl chums, Ethel Cleveland & Co., were pupils. In consequence, Arthur Augustus had been wearing his best topper. It certainly did not look like a best topper now, however; it looked far more like a second-hand concertina with a hole in it.

"Oh, blow your rotten topper!" grunted Blake. "That



Meet Horace Coker, a most amusing and amazing schoolboy character, in this week's fine school yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars. When brains were handed out, Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars was at the wrong end of the queue, for he's the biggest duffer that ever walked on two legs. Despite this handicap, Coker, the prize ass, has got the pluck of a lion and fears nothing . . . not even burglars! Where the great Horace is, there's bound to be fun. You'll laugh loud and long over his latest stunt in the grand school story appearing in this week's issue of

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doesn't matter! Look here, sir!" he went on, turning to Mr. Linton and ignoring his noble chum's wrathful glare. "Hadh't some of us better hurry into Wayland and tell the police? And I expect you would like the rest of us to go back to the school with you, to tell what we know. This is a frightfully important matter, of course—"

Mr. Linton nodded. His not unkindly old face was lined and haggard. The whole affair had been a great shock to the old gentleman.

"I—I think that would be best, Blake! Thank you!" He turned rather dazedly to set off down the lane. "Look here!" muttered Monty Lowther hurriedly. "You Fourth Form bouncers go off to the police, and then look in at Spalding Hall to explain to the girls! We Shell chaps'll stick with old Linton!"

Blake & Co. nodded, and turned away in the opposite direction as Tom Merry & Co. hurried after Mr. Linton.

"Poor old Linton!" muttered Manners. "This is terrible for him. He was responsible for that money."

"I guess it's pretty tough," nodded Handcock sympathetically.

Tom Merry, rubbing his bruised cheek grimly, also nodded. And Monty Lowther muttered that "tough" was certainly the right word.

But the chums of the Shell little dreamed, as they caught up with the master of the Shell, that this was but the first in a series of events that were to be still more "tough" for the unfortunate Mr. Linton.

CHAPTER 9.

Burkett's Discovery!

THE story of the hold-up, of which Mr. Linton had been a victim, caused such a sensation at St. Jim's that the other recent sensation, the mysterious disappearance of Gerald Cutts, was for a while almost forgotten.

During the next few days the results of the police efforts to trace the identity of the two masked bandits were awaited with keen excitement by all the fellows, from the lordly Sixth down to the inky-fingered fags of the Third.

But it soon became clear that the local police were up against a well-nigh impossible task.

Though they discovered that the red car was one which had been stolen from a Wayland garage on the day before the hold-up, and fitted with false number plates, the identity of the men who had stolen it, and used it in their nefarious schemes, remained an unsolved problem.

One curious fact came to light, however. When Taggles, the school porter, was asked whom he had telephoned to when ordering Mr. Linton's car, he declared stoutly that he had telephoned to a well-known garage in the town. But the company in question denied ever having received such a call. And when the telephone directory in Taggles' lodge was examined, it was found that the page bearing that company's name was missing.

Taggles declared positively that it had been in the book when he had telephoned, since he had looked up the number specially to order the car. But how it came to be missing now was certainly very puzzling, until it was found that other pages in the book were missing, and Ephraim Taggles confessed that at times he used the pages that he did not expect ever to want for spills when lighting his pipe. He still stoutly denied having torn out the sheet in question, however. But no one credited his assertion then, and the matter was dropped.

The Shell had an easy time during those next few days. Mr. Linton seemed weighed down utterly by his experience, and his Form could have behaved as badly as they had liked without his punishing them, or even noticing it. But only a few fellows, such as Frederick Burkett, the bully of the Shell, took advantage of that. The majority of the Shell felt too sorry for Linton.

"Blessed if the old boy doesn't seem all broken up over it," said Talbot, in the junior Common-room on Friday evening. "I suppose he can't help worrying. But nobody blames him, hang it! I hear the Head was most decent about it."

"Poor old Linton!" said Kangaroo, the Australian junior. "Wonder if they'll ever get the money back?"

"Shouldn't think so," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. Tom's face still bore the mark inflicted by that smashing blow from one of the masked bandits. "All the cash was in notes, apparently, and the numbers are known, of course. But even so, I shouldn't think they'll find it."

There was a chuckle from Burkett, who was lounging near the fireplace.

"Funny if the whole thing was a put-up job," grinned Burkett. "I mean, if Linton was in it, and is taking his share of the profits. You hear of such things."

"Ass!" said Manners contemptuously.

"Rats!" grinned the bully of the Shell. "You never know. We all know Linton's lost a good deal of money lately. Perhaps he's taken this way of getting some of it back."

The Shell fellows glared at Burkett.

"What about chucking Burkett out?" suggested Kangaroo.

"Hear, hear!" snorted Grundy.

"I say, hands off!" gasped Burkett, in sudden alarm.

Hefty though the bully was, and more than a match, single-handed, for any other junior at St. Jim's, with the sole exception of Tom Merry, even Burkett could not stand up against half a dozen. And there were at least half a dozen present who did not intend to let Burkett talk as he had been doing about the unlucky Mr. Linton.

"Collar him, you chaps!"

"What-ho!"

There was a rush, and Burkett, realising that discretion was the better part of valour, made a bolt for the door. But he was too late. He was seized by a dozen hands, and swung, struggling fiercely, into the air.

"Open the door, someone!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Anything to oblige," grinned Roylance, swinging the door wide.

"I say, pax!" panted Burkett desperately. "I—I didn't mean that about Linton, of course. I—I— Oh crumbs!"

The juniors rushed Burkett to the doorway, and, with a hefty swing, sent his big figure flying out into the passage. Burkett struck the linoleum with a crashing concussion, and he gave a wild yell.

"Yow! Yarroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Burkett scrambled up, red and furious. He was hurt. But already the door of the Common-room had slammed, and even Burkett, after a moment's reflection, decided it would be better for his health not to enter. Snorting and growling, he stamped off along the passage.

A solitary figure was standing in the Hall. Burkett saw that it was Kent, as he believed Visser's name to be.

The new senior was reading the notices posted on the green baize board in a careless way. He glanced round at sound of Burkett's approach from the direction of the junior Common-room, and nodded.

"Good-evening!" said the new Fifth-Former, his dark, inscrutable eyes fixed on the bully of the Shell.

Burkett felt flattered. Not that he cared two straws about Kent, personally—he had only seen him once before—but because Kent's civility seemed to indicate that the latter mistook Burkett for a fellow Fifth-Former, owing to his size. And Frederick Burkett was inordinately proud of his colossal size, though his massive-shouldered, hulking figure was as ungainly as an ox.

"Evening!" said Burkett briefly, in his growling voice.

"Hallo! I think you've dropped something," added Kent quietly.

Burkett glanced round, following the direction of the new senior's eyes. A half-folded sheet of notepaper, with writing upon it, was lying against the wall near him.

"I didn't drop it," grunted Burkett. He stooped and picked the letter up, glancing at it. "Somebody else's."

"Oh!" said Kent—alias Visser. "I thought you must have dropped it."

He turned and sauntered towards the letter-rack, and paused, glancing over the letters waiting there to be claimed.

Burkett glanced down at the sheet of notepaper in his hand.

"Hallo!" he said to himself, though without much interest. "Old Linton's fist!"

There was no mistaking Mr. Linton's neat handwriting. All the Shell fellows knew it well.

Already Burkett had noticed that the letter contained on the sheet of notepaper—notepaper, incidentally, which he recognised now as being of the kind which the master of the Shell always used—was addressed simply to "Dear K." He wondered who on earth "Dear K" could be. Glancing at the foot of the letter, he saw that it was signed with the single letter "L."

"Dear K." "Yours L." There was something oddly mysterious about the use of those initials, it seemed to Burkett. And, not being too scrupulous, the bully of the Shell proceeded to satisfy his curiosity by reading the opening sentence of the letter, after a quick glance at Kent, to make sure that the Fifth-Former was not seeing him do it.

The next moment a startled exclamation had broken from Burkett's lips.

He did not finish with the opening sentence; he read

every sentence. And as he read his eyes grew wider and wider.

"Dear K,—I am writing to say that I shall be exceedingly obliged if you can see your way to letting me have my share of the proceeds as soon as possible. As you are aware, I am in financial difficulties. I should never have consented to your scheme at all had it not been so utterly necessary for me to obtain money at once. With regard to the remark in your letter regarding the junior boys, who so nearly upset all our plans, I am astonished that you do not seem to understand how necessary it was for me to call upon them to attempt to prevent J. and C. from 'escaping.' Of course, I never dreamed that they would be so nearly successful in their efforts. And, since they unfortunately appeared on the scene of the supposed 'hold-up,' which we had staged in case of unseen witnesses, had I not called upon the boys for aid, in my apparent wish to regain the money, suspicions would obviously have been aroused. I can understand that J. and C. were annoyed, but the fault was not mine. I merely acted my part fully, in order to avert any possibility of suspicion. Yours, 'L.'"

Burkett gazed dazedly down at the letter in his hand as he finished reading its amazing contents.

He felt that he must be dreaming. Yet there it was, in black-and-white—in Mr. Linton's own handwriting!

How the master of the Shell had come to drop the letter before posting it, and how it came to be without its envelope, were questions which Burkett did not ask. They did not matter. The all-important, staggering fact was that the letter showed, beyond any shadow of doubt to Burkett's mind, that Mr. Linton, the dignified, respectable master of the Shell, had not really been the victim of bandits at all! The loss of the school funds, which had caused such a terrific sensation at St. Jim's, had been a "put up" job! Linton had been in it—Linton was to share in the "swag."



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In the Common-room a few minutes before Burkett had suggested that very thing, without remotely dreaming that it could be even possible.

Now that he was faced with apparent proof that it was not only possible, but was an actual fact, Burkett felt utterly stupefied.

"Crumbs!" he breathed. "Linton, of all people! My—my giddy aunt!"

Even Burkett felt appalled by his discovery.

He looked up with excited eyes. But he was alone in the Hall—Kent had vanished.

Burkett glanced round almost wildly. He had to tell somebody? Should he go straight to the Head—or what?

Burkett stood quivering with excitement, too staggered to collect his wits and decide what to do. But at that moment there was a step on the stairs. The tall figure of Knox of the Sixth appeared.

Knox glanced at Burkett and halted, staring.

"What the dickens is the matter with you, kid?" asked Knox—the most unpopular prefect at St. Jim's.

"Knox!" gasped Burkett. "Look at this! Read this!"

With quivering fingers, he thrust the letter into the prefect's hand.

Knox glanced down at the letter with a curious glance.

But his curiosity changed abruptly to gleaming-eyed excitement. He read the letter through and drew a sharp, hissing breath between his teeth.

That he was as staggered as Burkett himself had been was clear enough.

"Good gad!" breathed Knox wonderingly. He grasped the bully of the Shell by the arm. "This is Linton's writing, isn't it?"

"Yes!"

"Good lord!" Knox's eyes were gleaming queerly. There was a light, twisted smile on his thin lips. He did not like Mr. Linton; the master of the Shell had been known on several occasions to interfere on behalf of members of his Form when they had been suffering at the hands of the tyrant of the Sixth. "Where did you find this?"

"Lying here in a corner of the Hall!" gasped Burkett. "Linton must have dropped it! I—I say, it's as clear as blessed daylight! Linton wasn't robbed at all, really—it was all a put-up job—"

"Yes, that's clear!" sneered Knox. His face was pale with excitement, though outwardly he was now cool enough.

"Good gad! Linton a thief!"

"It—it's a bit thick!" muttered Burkett. "But what ought we to do about it, Knox?"

Gerald Knox smiled grimly. His eyes glittered like pin-points.

"Come with me to the Head at once, Burkett."

"Oh!" gasped the bully of the Shell.

Knox seized him by the shoulder as he stood gaping at the Sixth-Former and almost pushed him towards the stairs. Together they hurried up to the first landing and turned in the direction of the Head's study, Knox carrying the letter, his face set in a pale, twisted smile. Burkett's face was still dazed almost stupefied.

"Come in!"

The deep tones of Dr. Holmes replied to Knox's sharp knock on the door of the Head's study. The prefect opened the door and strode in, Burkett lumbering behind him.

"Well? What is the matter, Knox?"

The Head was sitting in a deep chair by the fire, a book of Greek verse in his hand.

"Burkett has just found this, sir," said Knox, struggling to keep his voice cool. "He found it downstairs in the Hall a few minutes ago, where it had evidently been dropped. He showed it to me, and I have brought it at once to you, sir."

He held out the letter and the Head took it, laying down his book on the small table beside him. There was a puzzled frown on his handsome old face as he glanced at the letter.

"Dear me! This is Mr. Linton's writing!"

"Exactly, sir," nodded Knox smoothly.

The Head frowned.

"Surely you realise, Knox—and you, Burkett—that neither of you had any right to read a letter dropped by one of the masters? It should have been returned to Mr. Linton unread."

"I think you will agree with me, sir, that it was a very fortunate thing that in this instance Burkett did not return it to Mr. Linton unread!" retorted Knox dryly.

"Just happened to see a word or two—and that made me read the rest, sir," mumbled Burkett.

"I feel that Burkett was quite satisfied, sir," nodded Knox. "If you will read it for yourself—"

"Really, Knox, I feel utterly unauthorised to read Mr. Linton's private correspondence—and I feel that you—"

"I can assure you, sir, that it is your duty to St. Jim's

to read that letter!" broke in Knox, his voice quivering with excitement.

"My—my duty to St. Jim's?" ejaculated the Head. He stared at Knox searchingly. "In that case, Knox, I will read this letter, relying upon your solemn assurance. But if I find after having read it that I do not consider you had any right to give me that assurance—"

"I am ready to take the consequences, sir!" Knox was almost dancing with impatience now, though he appeared cool enough. "Read it, sir, and see for yourself!"

The Head adjusted his glasses, frowning, and began to read.

Burkett had expected a startled exclamation to escape from the Head's lips. But Dr. Holmes read the letter through without a sound. But two pairs of watching eyes saw his face grow pale, and paler still, as he read.

When he finished reading, and lay the letter down, the Head was so deathly white that Burkett felt thoroughly alarmed. He glanced anxiously at Knox. Knox was smiling grimly.

The Head sat staring straight in front of him. His hand, resting on the arm of his chair, was trembling violently.

With a start, he seemed suddenly to realise the presence of Knox and Burkett.

"You may go, both of you!"

Gerald Knox and the bully of the Shell turned silently to the door, and passed out into the passage, closing the door behind them.

"My giddy aunt!"

"It can't be true!"

"It is true, though—Knox says so!"

"Well, he's innocent, anyway!"

An excited discussion was in progress in Study No. 10 of the Shell.

Had the Head thought of it, he would no doubt have made Knox and Frederick Burkett promise strict silence with regard to their amazing knowledge. But he had not thought of it—and Burkett, among the juniors, had wasted not a moment in spreading the staggering story far and wide!

"It—it's awful!" breathed Clifton Dane.

"Bai Jove, wathah!"

"I hate to think it, but it looks as if he must be guilty, doesn't it?" said Blake, rather hoarsely.

The Fourth Form fellows, naturally, were not so grimly determined to refuse to believe in Mr. Linton's guilt as were the Shell.

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther fiercely. "It's all a mistake! It must be!"

"But that letter, written in Linton's own fist—"

"I can't believe it," muttered Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Poor old Linton! Of course, with that letter in his writing, how can the Head believe him innocent? But I do! I can't explain it, but there must be some mistake. Linton wrote it in a trance, or something. People do rum things in trances—when they have a fit, sometimes. Linton may have had a fit, through worry over that robbery, and his own financial troubles."

"That's the worst of it," put in Herries quietly. "Old Linton, having had financial worries, as is well known, makes it look all the blacker against him."

A troubled silence fell in Study No. 10.

Tom Merry & Co.'s was not the only study at St. Jim's whose occupants were discussing the amazing development with regard to the supposed hold-up in which Mr. Linton had lost—or till then was imagined to have lost—the school funds that had been entrusted to him.

Kildare, the captain of the school, was discussing it gravely with Darrell, his chum, in the Sixth Form passage. Fourth Form fellows were discussing it in Fourth Form studies. Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, was in his room talking about the same subject to Smith major and Lee. Fags were discussing it, and in the New House fellows were discussing it, too.

In fact, it was quite possible that there was only one fellow at St. Jim's who was not at that moment talking about Mr. Linton, and his supposed guilt.

Alone in the end study of the Fifth Form passage, Kent—alias Visser—the new senior, was sitting by the fire, staring into the flames.

On his dark, foreign face there was a thin smile.

CHAPTER 10.

Linton's Bombshell!

"MR. LINTON, there is nothing more to be said." Dr. Holmes spoke in quietly determined tones.

His face was rather pale. His long interview with Mr. Linton had been a great trial to the old Head. He was determined to end it now.

"Dr. Holmes—"

Mr. Linton's pleading voice broke off. He stared at the Head like a man in a dream.

"I repeat, Mr. Linton, there is nothing more to be said. You must leave the school, as I say, immediately. Tomorrow morning. I will myself instruct Taggles to order a vehicle to convey you and your luggage to the station."

Mr. Linton, standing in the centre of the big room, his face ashen grey, glanced helplessly from the Head to Mr. Railton. Mr. Railton's own face was strained and pale. There was deep sympathy in his eyes; but it was clear enough from his expression that his sorrow was for Mr. Linton's guilt. He no more could bring himself to believe in the master of the Shell's innocence than could the Head himself.

A little groan broke from Mr. Linton. He tottered to a chair and sank into it, as though his legs had given way under him. He seemed to fight for breath.

"I am innocent!" he gasped.

The Head surveyed him with haggard eyes.

"Mr. Linton, your protests are useless—surely you realise? You admit that this letter is written in your own handwriting, upon your own notepaper! That alone is sufficient proof. Your admitted financial troubles, and the fact that you allowed yourself to be driven to a lonely spot to be robbed—"

"I did not permit it!" panted Mr. Linton. "I failed to notice where I was being driven!"

"Impossible!"

"Dr. Holmes, I swear it! As for that letter, though it appears to be in my writing, I swear I never penned it!"

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"This is vain talk, Mr. Linton. You cannot convince me! You will leave the school to-morrow morning. Now, I beg of you, let us end this inexpressibly painful interview!"

Mr. Linton rose unsteadily to his feet.

"For the honour of the school no charge will be made against you in a court of law," went on the Head sadly. "I have made that clear, have I not? But it is obviously impossible for you to remain at St. Jim's."

Mr. Linton did not answer him. He turned blindly to the door, and crossed towards it with unsteady steps. His fingers groped for the handle.

The Head and Mr. Railton watched him with shadowed eyes.

Mr. Linton's fingers found the handle. He paused, glancing back at them.

"Very well," he said brokenly—"very well! I—I—"

He opened the door and took a stumbling step from the room. Then he halted, staring into the passage.

The passage was crowded!

In a solid body Mr. Linton's Form were gathered in the passage. Shell fellows from School House and New House were crowded there, waiting for his appearance, and over their heads they held a banner, with the words,

"WE WANT LINTON!"

As he stepped into sight, ashen-faced and trembling, a sudden cheer rang out from the assembled Shell.

"Three cheers for Linton!" Tom Merry's voice had been almost fierce as he had called for them. "Hip, pip—"

And the cheers echoed out with the same fierce note.

Mr. Linton stared dazedly at the excited juniors. A faint, quivering smile trembled on his lips as he closed the door.

He understood in a flash that the school knew already. But he understood, too, that the Shell, at any rate, believed in his innocence!

Tears came to Mr. Linton's eyes, dimming them. He brushed them away.

He seemed to be trying to speak, but the words would not come. A moment later the Shell were surging round him. Tom Merry grasped his hand.

"You're innocent, sir!" cried Tom hoarsely. "Of course you are! We know that in the Shell!"

"Thank you!" said Mr. Linton huskily. "Your faith means a great deal to me—more than I can tell you!"

"You—you aren't going away, sir?" breathed Talbot.

"Yes," Mr. Linton nodded. He was very white. "I—I am going. I go to-morrow. Not from my choice, for I am innocent of the charge made against me. But I—I am being sent away."

"Don't go!" panted Tom Merry fiercely. "Don't let them send you away, sir! You are innocent! So why should you go, knowing yourself innocent? Don't go!"

Mr. Linton stared into Tom's fiercely determined face helplessly. Tom's meaning seemed to penetrate his brain only gradually.

But already he looked a different man! The discovery

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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Here We Answer Readers' Questions.



The Oracle knows everything, so if you want to know something—ask him!

YOUNG Adolphus turned up this morning with a pair of very loud socks showing at the bottom of his new spring suit. When the Ed. saw the socks he broke into loud guffaws, but the office-boy's socks were so loud that we couldn't even hear the Editor laughing.

"Well," said the Editor, after he had recovered his breath, "I've often had to tell you to pull your socks up, my lad, but I'm afraid this time I shall have to ask you to take them off!" Young Adolphus didn't like that a bit. He said that an aunt of his had given him those socks as a birthday present, and if he didn't wear them he'd get socks when he got home.

"Anyway," said the Ed., "you must hide somewhere, and let me and Whiskers get on with our work." Thereupon he picked up some letters and began firing questions at me with the rapidity of a supercharged six-cylinder peashooter. "First of all, my whiskery one," said he, "can you tell a Battersea reader how long it took Miss Amy Johnson to fly to Australia?"

"Miss Amy flew to Australia in nineteen days," I told him.

"And talking of Australia, here's a question from another reader, about kangaroos. He wants to know how big kangaroos are in Australia?"

"The largest living kangaroos, Ed.,

stand about eight feet high. Their head is about the size of a sheep's. There used to be a larger kangaroo, which is now extinct, that stood over ten feet, and had a head the size of a Shetland pony's. What are called wallabies in Australia are a species of kangaroo. The nail-tailed wallaby is one of the most graceful-looking of these, and gets its name from the hard growth at the end of its tail that looks like a nail."

"Can you tell me what a lateen is?" was the Ed.'s next question.

"A lateen is the name given to a certain kind of sail. This sail is triangular in shape, and a vessel that carries one of these is called a lateener."

"The same reader wants to know what a felucca is?"

"A felucca is a small vessel used in the Mediterranean, and is propelled by means of oars and these lateen sails."

"Bob Tring asks whether a kettledrum always plays the same note?"

"No," said I. "The kettledrum is the only drum that has a definite musical pitch, and the pitch can be altered by tightening or loosening the vellum by means of screws. In a band you will always see three or more kettledrums, and each drummer has his drum tuned to make a different note."

"Who invented kettledrums?"

"That's something nobody knows for certain, Ed.," said I. "The old Greeks and Romans used to use them, and people before their time even."

"Charles Radford, a Stoke Newington reader, would like you to tell him what a Jinn is?"

"I expect Charles has been reading some Arabian yarns. Jinns are a kind of genii that are supposed to come out of the fire, and live in a mountain called Kaf. They are also supposed to

be able to make themselves invisible if they wish. Naturally all that has to be taken with a pinch of salt," I told the Ed.

"Fred Bridger wants us to tell him whether it's true that jujubes grow on trees. He's been told they do, and he's afraid someone's pulling his leg."

"You can tell Fred," said I, "that jujubes do grow on trees, but not the lozenges that are sold in the sweet-stuff shops under that name. Those jujubes are made of gum-arabic and gelatine, with some flavouring added. The jujube fruits that grow on the jujuba tree are greatly valued as dessert among the Chinese, and are sometimes sent to this country. They are about the size of a small filbert, with a reddish-brown, shining and rather wrinkled outside. Inside they have a yellowish pulp and a long stone."

"And what's the jujuba tree like, old lad?"

"A tree about forty feet in height, found in China, India, and tropical Africa. It's also cultivated to some extent in California."

"What's a lamprey?" fired the Ed., picking up another letter.

"A lamprey, sir," I replied, "is a fish that has one nostril on the top of its head, no jaws, but a circular sucker with which it is able to pull away the flesh from other fish when it captures them. Small lampreys can be found in creeks, and a bigger kind is called the spotted sea-lamprey."

"They can be eaten, can't they?"

"Yes, lampreys are supposed to be good eating, though very hard to digest."

"How are they caught?"

"In baskets with bait inside. Lampreys themselves make good bait for catching cod and turbot."

"Well," said the Ed., "I can't catch you, anyway. You'll draw your money in full this week; you're a smart lad and no mistake." I bowed, and my whiskers swept the carpet. At that moment the office-boy came back, with one of his socks on inside out. When we pointed this out to him he told us that he had turned the sock inside out because there was a hole in it, which just shows you how daft that lad can be when he likes.

"LINTON IN REVOLT!"

(Continued from previous page.)

that his Form believed in him had been like a magic tonic to the master of the Shell.

In a flash his face cleared.

"Don't go, sir!" repeated Tom Merry.

Mr. Linton's eyes were gleaming strangely. The sudden change in his expression, in his whole figure, was amazing. He drew himself to his full height, and seemed to nod to himself.

He turned abruptly, and knocked with a firm hand on the Head's door. The door opened, and the Head came out, closing the door behind him.

"Mr. Linton!" ejaculated the Head. "What ever—"

"Dr. Holmes, I have made my decision!" said Mr. Linton, in a voice that was quiet and grim. "I shall not leave St. Jim's to-morrow."

The Head gave a breathless exclamation:

"You must go—at once!" And he pointed to the stairs.

"I refuse to go," went on Mr. Linton fiercely. "Unless you prove me guilty in a court of law, I shall refuse to leave the school!"

Dr. Holmes stared at Mr. Linton as though he could not believe his ears.

Never for a moment had the possibility of Mr. Linton's refusing to go occurred to the old Head!

"Nonsense, Mr. Linton! To-night I am taking the first step towards engaging a new master to replace you as master of the Shell. If you persist in your foolish idea it will avail you nothing, since in a few days the new master of the Shell will be arriving at St. Jim's!"

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Mr. Linton's eyes sparkled with a light equally grim.

"Engage another master if you choose, Dr. Holmes—engage ten, if you prefer! But I repeat that until you bring me before a court of law, I shall not leave St. Jim's! And while I remain here I remain as master of the Shell!"

He glared wrathfully at the dumbly astonished Head, then swung on his heel and walked away.

The Head rustled into the study, shutting the door behind him with a determined click.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton stared at one another dazedly. From the passage they heard a faint, excited cheer.

"Bless my soul!" gasped the Head. "What ever is to happen now?"

Mr. Linton's bombshell had quite stupefied him.

"You cannot have Mr. Linton arrested, sir—the honour of the school forbids it!" exclaimed Mr. Railton helplessly.

"But unless I do, he refuses to go!" said the Head, in a dazed tone.

"Perhaps Mr. Linton will think better of it, sir, when you engage a new master, and the new master arrives to take the Shell," suggested Mr. Railton dryly. "I should engage the new master at once, Dr. Holmes."

"I will!" The Head's eyes were sparkling grimly once again. "I will write to-night, making full arrangements. When the new master arrives—"

But even the headmaster of St. Jim's did not dare prophesy just what would happen when the new master of the Shell arrived!

(What will happen when the new master arrives? Will Linton still refuse to leave St. Jim's? Don't miss "THE FIGHTING FORM MASTER!" next week!)

SPLENDID NEW COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN!

TUBBY MUFFIN'S WINDFALL!

BY
OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1.

A Find for Tubby!

"W HOOOOP!"

Tubby Muffin gave a startled roar.

Never had Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin, of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood School, been so startled, surprised, and indignant.

Really, it was enough to startle any fellow.

It was morning "quarter" at Rookwood, and the quad was crowded with fellows who had swarmed out of the Form-rooms. Leapfrog was going on under the old beeches; but that strenuous pastime did not appeal to the fat Tubby. Tubby was loafing along by the school wall, where it bordered the Coombe road, with his hands in his pockets, and a thoughtful frown on his podgy brow. Tubby was thinking of a tempting display of jam-tarts in Sergeant Kettle's little shop, and of the deplorable distrustfulness of Mr. Kettle, who refused to let a fellow have even one of them on "tick." As he loafed along the wall, Tubby's attention was attracted by the sound of rapid footsteps in the road on the other side of the wall.

Someone unseen by Tubby was running hard down the road. Tubby heard not only the rapid beat of running feet, but the hoarse gasping of a breathless man. Fainter footsteps were audible from a distance from which Tubby, without being a Sherlock Holmes, was able to deduce that the unseen man was running from pursuers. The fat Tubby wondered idly what was up, and, but for his constitutional laziness, would have clambered up the wall to look over.

That he did not think of doing. But he stood staring at the wall, listening to the sounds from the other side. And then the unexpected happened.

Something flew suddenly over the wall—so suddenly that Tubby Muffin did not see it, and did not know that it was coming till it hit him on his fat little nose.

Then Tubby knew. He knew only too well. The object, whatever it was, fairly crashed on his nose, and Tubby gave a startled roar, and clasped his nose with both hands in anguish.

The missile dropped at his feet. It dropped unheeded

by Tubby. All Tubby's attention was concentrated on his nose.

There was a severe pain in his nose. It brought a rush of water to Tubby's eyes. He clasped his nose and roared.

The running footsteps raced on. The man, whoever he was, was gone. A tramp of pursuing feet followed, and died away in the distance. Pursued and pursuer vanished into silence.

But Tubby was not heeding them. He squeezed his little fat nose. He pressed it tenderly. He caressed it with anxious affection. For some moments he was not sure that it was still there. It felt as if it wasn't.

But it was still there, as large as life, indeed larger, for the impact of the sudden missile had raised a swelling. Tubby's nose, like Marian's in the ballad, was red and raw.

"The rotter!" gasped Tubby, in indignant wrath. "Chuckling stones over the wall, the beast! Oh, my nose! Ow!"

But the agony had abated, as the youthful Macaulay would have expressed it. And then Tubby's eyes fell on the missile that had smitten him, and fallen to his feet.

It was not a stone. Tubby had supposed, for the moment, that the running man had thrown a stone in passing. But it was quite a different object that lay at his feet, glimmering in the sunshine.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tubby, in amazement.

He stooped quickly and picked up the strange missile. It had a yellow glimmer like gold in the sunlight. But it was polished brass, as Tubby saw at the second glance. It was shaped like a lizard, curiously graven, and, though it was not more than six inches in length, it was heavy. Part of it, at least, was solid brass, though whether it had a hollow interior Reginald Muffin could not discover.

That it was an article of some value as a curio was clear to Tubby. It must have been worth a few shillings, at least.

Tubby Muffin's frowning brow cleared, and he forgot the lingering pain in his nose. He grinned.

Some person unknown had flung the brass lizard over the school wall. Why he had thrown away an article that evidently had some commercial value Tubby did not know or care. It had fallen into Tubby's hands—after falling on his nose—and was now Tubby's. Findings were keepings—at least, from Tubby Muffin's point of view. The jam-tarts in Sergeant Kettle's shop were nearer to Tubby now.

Tubby gave his injured nose a last rub, slipped the brass lizard into his pocket, and rolled away.

He looked for Jimmy Silver. But Jimmy Silver and his chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, were not to be seen in the quad. Mornington of the Fourth was lounging under the beeches at a little distance, and Tubby Muffin bore down on Mornay.

"I say, Mornay, old chap

—" began Tubby. Mornay looked at him.

"Cut it out!" he said.

"Eh—cut what out?" asked Tubby.

"The 'old chap'!" said Mornington.

"Oh, don't be a cheeky ass!" said Tubby. "Look here, I've got something to show you. Look at this! It's jolly valuable; but I only want half-a-crown for it, old fellow."

He drew the brass lizard from his pocket, and held it up. Mornington glanced at it, and then gave it a second glance, with some interest.

"Where did you get that?" he asked.

Tubby's mouth opened and closed again. The brass lizard was his. Tubby had no doubt about that. But he was not sure that Mornington might not have a doubt about it. Possession was nine points of the law; but Mornay might bother about the tenth point. On

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MUFFIN MAKES MONEY!

Valuable ornament sold for sixpence—Muffin sold again!



The remark seemed to infuriate Mr. Isaacs. He seized his umbrella and rushed at the young man in the hedge!

the whole, Reginald Muffin sagely decided that it was wiser not to explain exactly how that curious object had come into his hands. Fortunately, Tubby was not trammelled by any undue regard for veracity. He paused only a moment.

"Oh, I've had it for ages!" he explained. "It—it's used as a paperweight, you know. Jolly useful thing to have in the study. I thought you'd like it, Morny. What about half-a-crown?"

"It's worth more than that," answered Mornington.

"Well, what about five bob?" asked Tubby.

"It's worth more than that."

"I say, Morny, old chap, what do you think it's worth?" asked Tubby Muffin eagerly.

"About a pound."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tubby. "Do you really think I could get a pound for it, Morny?"

"No fear! I think you might get three months."

Tubby Muffin jumped.

"Look here, Morny, you silly ass! What will you give me for it!" demanded Tubby.

"Nothin', old bean! But I'll give you a tip. Take it back to the owner," grinned Mornington. And he walked away.

That tip, however, it was impossible for Tubby Muffin to act upon, even if he had wanted to; and certainly he did not want to. He gave a snort and rolled away in search of another purchaser, anxious to dispose of that curious curio before the bell rang for third school—after which the tarts in the tuckshop would be gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

CHAPTER 2.

Stop Thief!

JIMMY SILVER stared.

"That merchant's in a jolly hurry!" he remarked.

Jimmy was leaning on the stile in Coombe Lane. His chums, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, sat in a row on the stile.

In morning "quarter" fellows were not really supposed to go out of gates. But at Rookwood, as elsewhere, fellows sometimes did that which they were not supposed to do. The Fistical Four had enjoyed a little stroll along the sunny, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,210.

leafy lane, and stopped at the stile to chat for a few minutes before strolling back to the school.

Arthur Edward Lovell was doing most of the chatting, his friends listening with more or less attention. Lovell was telling them how they could improve their cricket; which was rather kind, especially as Lovell was by no means the best cricketer of the four. Jimmy's attention, which was not very firmly fixed on Lovell and his remarks, wandered away to a man who came running up the lane from the direction of the school.

Jimmy stared at him. The man was running hard. His face streamed with perspiration. He puffed and blew as he ran. His mouth was open, revealing the fact that two upper front teeth were missing. Even at a distance Jimmy could hear his hoarse, stertorous gasping as he came pelting breathlessly up the lane.

"I was saying—" remarked Lovell.

"I wonder if there's a bull loose?" said Raby, following Jimmy's glance.

"I was saying—"

"Somebody's after that merchant!" said Newcome.

"If you fellows would listen to a fellow—" said Lovell warmly.

"My Aunt Sempronia!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "There's a bobby after him."

Round a bend in the lane, a little distance behind the running man, came a figure in uniform, running as hard as the fugitive.

Both pursued and pursuer were running as hard as they could; but neither was making much speed. Both were crimson, panting, and covered with dust, and looked as if the chase had been a long one. The constable seemed to be gaining, the man with the missing teeth almost at the end of his tether.

"Stop thief!"

It was a breathless shout from the constable as he sighted the juniors ahead in the lane.

Jimmy Silver jumped into the middle of the road. Lovell and Raby and Newcome slid from the stile and jumped after him. As law-abiding citizens, the Rookwood chums were bound to lend assistance to an officer of the law when called upon.

They lined up across the lane, quite prepared to collar the fugitive and hold him till the constable came up.

The panting man slowed down, a pair of little piggy

eyes gleaming from his crimson face at the schoolboys. Without stopping, he swerved to the right and plunged into the hedge that bordered the lane.

"After him!" shouted Lovell.

Jimmy Silver was after the man like a shot. Head and shoulders of the fugitive were through the hedge when Jimmy grasped his legs.

"Lend a hand, you men!" yelled Jimmy, holding on to the kicking, thrashing legs.

His three chums rushed to his aid. Grasping hands fastened on the thrashing legs, and the man was jerked out of the hedge like a cork from a bottle.

"Got him!" gasped Lovell.

The captured man bumped down in the dust, panting and gasping. Jimmy Silver & Co. held on firmly to his legs, and the prisoner wriggled and struggled in vain.

The constable came panting up.

"Hold him!" he gasped. "Thank you, young gentlemen! Hold him while I get my breath!"

"We've got him, officer," said Jimmy.

"Let a bloke go!" panted the man with the missing teeth. "I ain't done nothing! Let a bloke go!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. allowed their prisoner to rise, keeping a tight grip on his arms and collar. He did not struggle now. He stood among the juniors, panting for breath. The constable mopped his streaming brow, pushing back his helmet. He was winded by a long run.

"What's he been up to?" asked Lovell.

"Robbery at Latcham!" panted the constable. "Robbery at Mr. Isaacs' shop in the Market Place!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Have you chased him all the way from Latcham?"

"Every blessed step!" gasped the constable. "And a nice dance he's led me across the fields! But I never lost sight of him; and half a dozen times I nearly had my hand on his shoulder, but he dodged like an eel. I've got him now!"

And having recovered his breath a little, the Latcham constable dropped a heavy hand on the shoulder of the prisoner.

"What did he bag from old Isaacs?" asked Lovell.

The juniors knew Mr. Isaacs, of Latcham. Mr. Isaacs was a jeweller, a pawnbroker, and a second-hand merchant. He dealt in almost everything, from foreign stamps to superannuated bicycles, and from precious stones to rolled-gold watches. They could guess that it was the jewellery department that the man with the missing teeth had favoured with his attention.

"A string of pearls," said the Latcham constable. "At least, that was the charge."

The prisoner, to the surprise of the juniors, grinned.

"You'll find that you've made a mistake, constable," he said. "Mr. Isaacs will find that he's made a mistake. I don't know anything about his pearls!"

"And you was running just for exercise, on a 'ot day?" said the Latcham constable sarcastically.

"I lost my 'ead!" said the young man with the missing teeth. "Isaacs says, 'Take him in charge and search him

at the station.' I own up I lost my 'ead and hooked it. But there ain't any law in this country against a man losing his 'ead. I'm sorry I've given you a lot of trouble, and I'm ready to go back to Latcham as soon as you like."

The juniors looked at him curiously. He was quite cool now, and seemed almost unconcerned. He was grinning and there was a mocking glimmer in his little, sly, piggy eyes.

The constable gave him a grim look.

"That means that you've chucked the pearls away somewhere in the fields!" he remarked.

"I ain't never seen Isaacs' pearls, and don't believe he ever had any, excepting sham pearls at ten bob the bushel," answered the young man with the missing teeth coolly, "and I'll make him pay for charging me when I've seen my solicitor."

"That's enough from you!" remarked the Latcham constable. And, having thanked the juniors again for their assistance, he walked his prisoner away.

From the direction of the school came the sound of a bell.

"My hat! That's third school!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

In their interest in the capture they had made, the Fistical Four had rather forgotten the Form-room and Mr. Dalton. The jingle of the school bell reminded them; and they started at a run for Rookwood. They dodged in by the way they had left and ran for the House.

But the bell had ceased to ring, and the Fourth Form were all in, and the chums of the end study were a full two minutes late in reaching their Form-room. Mr. Dalton gave them a grim glance as they came breathlessly in.

"You are late!" rapped the Fourth Form master.

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy Silver meekly.



Tubby Muffin spun round and ran for the house. Bright made a desperate leap for the wall and clambered over!

Assistance rendered to the law would have been a good excuse had it not involved confession of being out of gates during morning break. The latter consideration did not occur to Lovell.

"We helped a bobby, sir—" began Arthur Edward.

Mr. Dalton stared.

"A what?" he ejaculated.

"I—I mean a peeler, sir—" stammered Lovell.

"Do you mean a policeman?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! We stopped a man he was after. That's what made us late, sir," said Lovell.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Dalton. "Then I presume that you have been out of gates during quarter?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes! You—you see—"

"You will take fifty lines each," said Mr. Dalton. "Go to your places."

"Oh!" gasped Lovell. "But, sir—"

"Silence!"

The Fistical Four went to their places.

CHAPTER 3.

A Visitor for Jimmy Silver!

"LOST the ticket, Jimmy?"

"Eh?"

"Can't you get your watch out?"

"What?"

"Or have you been buying a tiepin on easy terms, and got behind with the payments?" asked Mornington.

Jimmy Silver blinked at the dandy of the Fourth. That series of questions from Valentine Mornington simply amazed him.

After classes that day, Jimmy Silver & Co. were walking down to the tuckshop for supplies for tea in the study. Morny met them on the way, with a grin on his face.

"What the thump are you driving at, Morny?" demanded the captain of the Fourth, a little testily. "If you're just talking out of your hat—"

"Then you weren't expectin' a visitor?" grinned Morny.

"No, ass! What visitor?"

"Jolly old Isaacs, from Latcham."

Jimmy Silver almost jumped.

"You silly ass! What the thump do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"I mean that old Isaacs has come over to see you!" chuckled Mornington. "Old Mack doesn't want to let him in. You'd better go down to the gates and pass your friend in, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver frowned. If the pawnbroker, moneylender, and secondhand merchant of Latcham had called at Rookwood to see him, it was a surprise to Jimmy. He certainly could not imagine what Mr. Isaacs wanted.

Quite a number of fellows seemed to be interested in the matter. Mr. Isaacs had, apparently, attracted considerable attention at the school gates. Jimmy's chums looked at him rather curiously.

"Better see the man and shoo him off!" said Lovell.

"Bit fatheaded to let him come and see you here, Jimmy."

"I don't know anything about him, ass!" hooted Jimmy Silver.

"What I mean is, it may get you into a row," said Lovell. "Old Isaacs is a blessed moneylender, among other things, and the beaks might think—"

"You silly ass, I tell you—"

"Well, I'm only advising you for your own good," said Lovell. "Dalton might spot the man, and then—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snorted Jimmy; and he changed his direction and started for the gates.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome went with him; Lovell with his eyebrows lifted expressively. Quite an army of juniors followed on. The visit of Mr. Isaacs, of Latcham, was causing widespread interest.

"Silver!" Bulkeley of the Sixth called out to Jimmy. "There's a man at the gates asking for you—old Isaacs, of Latcham. What does this mean?"

"I haven't the foggiest."

"If you've been to a pawnbroker—"

"I haven't!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

He tramped to the gates, leaving Bulkeley looking after him dubiously. In the old gateway of Rookwood stood a gentleman with a shiny complexion, a shiny silk hat of ancient design, and a shiny beaky nose. He was waving two shiny hands, adorned with shiny rings, as he talked to old Mack, the porter.

Old Mack seemed very doubtful about admitting Mr. Isaacs to the precincts of Rookwood. Mr. Isaacs was not a gentleman of high reputation; and assuredly it was most unusual for a pawnbroker to call at the school and ask to see a member of the Fourth Form.

"There's your friend, Jimmy!" chorled Townsend.

"You silly ass!" snorted Jimmy.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,210.

"I wish to see that young gentleman Silver!" Mr. Isaacs was saying to old Mack, for the tenth time. "Young Mister Silver—"

"Well, you'll have to ask the 'Ead fust," said old Mack; "and I ain't letting you in without orders from the 'Ead!"

"A few words with that young gentleman Silver—"

"Here's your pal Silver, Isaacs!" shouted Townsend; and the juniors laughed.

"Oh, my hat! Here comes Dalton!" exclaimed Raby.

The crowd gathering at the gates had attracted the attention of Mr. Dalton. He came striding on the scene.

"What does this mean, Mack?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Who is this man?"

Mr. Isaacs turned to him before the porter could reply.

"Name of Isaacs, sir!" he answered. "Isaacs & Co., Market Place, Latcham, sir."

"I think I know who you are, Mr. Isaacs. But why are you here?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"I call to see a young gentleman named Silver—"

"What—what? Silver!" Mr. Dalton stared round at Jimmy Silver's crimson face. "Silver! What dealings have you had with this—this gentleman?"

"None, sir!" answered Jimmy. "I've bought things at his secondhand shop in Latcham, that's all."

"There is no harm in that, certainly," said Mr. Dalton. "But—" He turned to the peculiar visitor again. "Mr. Isaacs, why do you desire to see this boy in my Form? I presume that he does not owe you money?"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mr. Isaacs. "Certainly not!"

"Then why—"

"It is this way," explained Mr. Isaacs. "I have been robbed—"

"Robbed!" ejaculated Mr. Dalton.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Isaacs. "Robbed by a young man named Ephraim Bright—a very wicked young man. I miss a string of pearls. I call in one policeman to take Bright into custody, to search him at the station, and he run away. He take with him the pearls."

Mr. Dalton stared blankly at the merchant from Latcham.

"I fail to see why this should have brought you here, Mr. Isaacs!" he said. "Kindly explain, and be brief."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Isaacs. "That young man Bright was in my employ, and I sack him. He is a very bad young man. He bolt with my pearls, and the policeman run after him. He catch him near this school, with the help of young Mister Silver."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy.

He began to understand now.

"The officer take him back to Latcham, and he is searched at the police station," continued Mr. Isaacs. "But those pearls are not found. That wicked young man say there never was any pearls. The police cannot detain him without some evidence, and there is no evidence. The policeman say some Rookwood schoolboys seize that man and stop him, and I think he throw away them pearls when he is stopped. I wish young Mister Silver to show me the place where he stop him, and I search for those pearls."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Is that all?"

"That is all, sir!" said Mr. Isaacs. "If that young gentleman would kindly come and point out the place—"

"You may do so, Silver," said Mr. Dalton.

"Very well, sir!" said Jimmy.

Evidently it was not as a moneylender or as a pawnbroker that Mr. Isaacs had called to see Jimmy Silver that afternoon! It was as a jeweller, in search of his missing pearls.

The Fistical Four walked down the lane towards the stile with Mr. Isaacs.

"Here's the place, Mr. Isaacs!" said Jimmy, halting at the stile. He pointed out the broken hedge where the man with the missing teeth had attempted to plunge through. "We got him by the legs here, and dragged him out."

"Ten to one that was when he chucked away the pearls," said Lovell. "They'd be in the field back of the hedge, in that case."

"If he had them!" said Raby. "If the police haven't detained him, it looks as if they don't feel sure he had them at all."

"He robbed me," said Mr. Isaacs—"he robbed me of pearls worth four hundred pounds. He throw them away. I give five pounds to any young gentleman that find the pearls!"

"Oh, blow your five pounds!" said Jimmy Silver gruffly. "We'll find them for you if we can!"

Every tuft of grass, every crevice and cranny, was explored. The hedge itself was beaten and shaken and examined. Mr. Isaacs, with his black eyes gleaming through his gold-rimmed pince-nez, moved about bent double, the tail of his old morning-coat sticking out like the tail of a parrot.

But nothing was discovered. For an hour they rooted about, and as it was now an hour past tea-time, Jimmy Silver & Co. decided to chuck it.

"Better chuck it," said Lovell. "Very likely the man never had them at all. Anyhow, we're late for tea."

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "Here comes the merchant himself."

The young man with the missing teeth appeared in Coombe Lane, and put his head through the gap in the hedge. He grinned at the sight of Mr. Isaacs, bent double, crimson, and gasping for breath, as he rooted about among grasses and ferns and brambles.

Mr. Isaacs straightened up, and glared at Bright. His black eyes gleamed at his "sacked" assistant.

"Where are those pearls, you thief?" he shrieked.

"Chuck it, Isaacs!" said Bright. "There never was any pearls. And I tell you straight, I'm going to bring an action for defamation of character."

That remark seemed to have an infuriating effect on Mr. Isaacs. He had a stout umbrella under his arm. He grasped it, and rushed at the young man in the hedge.

Swipe! Ephraim Bright ceased to grin suddenly as the umbrella landed on his cowler hat with a terrific concussion. He rolled back into the lane, yelling.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Well hit!"

Mr. Isaacs, apparently wanting more, plunged through the hedge after his former assistant. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed, grinning. Bright, sprawling in the lane, yelled and wriggled and squirmed as Mr. Isaacs rained swipes on him with the umbrella.

Mr. Isaacs was a stout gentleman, and he puffed and blew with exertion as he swiped. But he put a tremendous amount of beef into it. There was a crash as the umbrella broke into halves on Mr. Bright's head. The young man with the missing teeth scrambled up, and fled down the lane, yelling. After him charged Mr. Isaacs, brandishing the remnant of the umbrella.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver & Co.

CHAPTER 4. For Sale!

"JIMMY, old chap—" "B-r-r-r-r-r!" Tea was rather late in the end study that afternoon. Over tea, Jimmy Silver & Co. were discussing the strange affair of Mr. Isaacs and his pearls, when the door opened, and the fat face of Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin was inserted into the study.

"Buzz off!" grunted Lovell.

"I've had tea!" said Tubby Muffin, with dignity. "I haven't come here for tea. I've got something for you, Jimmy."

"Good!" said Jimmy Silver. "If it's one of the half-crowns you owe me, fatty, it will come in useful. Hand it over."

"It isn't that," explained Tubby—quite an unnecessary explanation! In the matter of half-crowns, it was Tubby's fixed belief that it was less blessed to give than to receive. "Look here!"

The chums of the end study "looked there," as Tubby placed a rather peculiar object on the table. It was the brass lizard which had smitten Tubby on his fat little nose that morning, and which had remained in his possession since. Tubby had offered it for sale in several quarters; but fellows seemed to share Valentine Mornington's doubts on the subject.

"What is it—a paperweight?" asked Jimmy. "Looks a nice thing. Where did you get it, Tubby?"

"The fact is, I got it among some—some articles to sell," said Tubby. "You know the idea—you get a dozen articles and sell them among your friends."

"I know!" assented Jimmy Silver. "Trot them all out, and get it over."

"The—the fact is, that's the only one I've got left," said

Tubby. "The—the others went like hot cakes. The actual fact is, Jimmy, that I've saved that for you, because I thought you would like it."

"Now tell me an easier one!" suggested Jimmy.

"Morny thinks it's worth a pound," said Tubby. "He was rather keen to buy it; but I told him I was keeping it specially for you. I'm letting you have it for ten shillings, Jimmy."

"Your mistake, old bean—you're not."

"To an old pal like you, Jimmy, I'll let it go for five shillings," said Tubby. "Dash it all, what's money between friends?"

Jimmy rose to his feet.

"I don't know where you got that thing, Muffin," he said. "But it's not yours. Take it back where it belongs, and take this with you."

"This" was a kick that elicited a wild howl from Reginald Muffin. The fat Classical jumped out of the study.

"Yaroooh!" roared Tubby.

And he faded away down the Fourth-Form passage, with the brass lizard still in his possession. Jimmy Silver & Co. went on with their tea and the discussion of Mr. Isaacs and his pearls; what time Reginald Muffin rolled out of the House, seeking another purchaser for his windfall.

He wandered disconsolately under the beeches, the prize still in his pocket. He came in sight of Rawson of the Fourth, leaning on the school wall, with a book in his hands. Tubby rolled up to him.

Over the wall, almost directly above Rawson's head, as he leaned there, a face rose into view. Someone had clambered up the wall from the road, so quietly that neither of the juniors had heard him. Tubby gave a start, and stared in surprise at a bony face with little piggy eyes and two missing teeth as it rose over the wall.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

Mr. Bright did not see Rawson for the moment. Leaning over the wall, he shot a quick glance round. The beeches screened the spot from the quad and the school buildings. As Tubby stood dumb with astonishment the young man named Bright swung himself swiftly over the wall, and dropped. He made a jump at Tubby Muffin with hand outstretched.

"Give it to me!" he snarled. "Quick, before I wring your neck!"

"Ow! Help!" yelled Tubby, leaping back.

Bright sprang at him. Rawson's book dropped from his hand, and he ran forward just as Bright's grasp closed

on the yelling and terrified Tubby.

Crash!

Rawson's clenched fist caught Bright behind the ear just as he was grasping Tubby.

There was a spluttering yell from Mr. Isaacs' late assistant, and he crashed over on the ground. Tubby bolted for the House. Bright sat up, gasping. Rawson gave a shout. Half a dozen Rookwood fellows came running up. Bright scrambled to his feet, made a desperate leap at the wall, caught the top, and clambered over. The next moment he dropped into the road, and a swift patter of running feet was heard.

Tubby Muffin, with a howl of alarm, spun round and ran. Tubby did not cease running till he reached the House. Who the man with the missing teeth was, and why he had attempted to rob him of the brass lizard, Tubby Muffin did not know, and did not begin to understand. But Reginald Muffin was fed-up with his windfall by this time. He rolled away in search of Leggett of the Modern Fourth, and accepted that business-like youth's offer of sixpence for the windfall. That small sum was immediately invested in jam-tarts at the school shop, and Tubby Muffin, at least, was done with the mysterious brass lizard.

THE END.

(Why did Bright attack Tubby? Is he after the brass lizard? See next week's splendid Rookwood yarn!)

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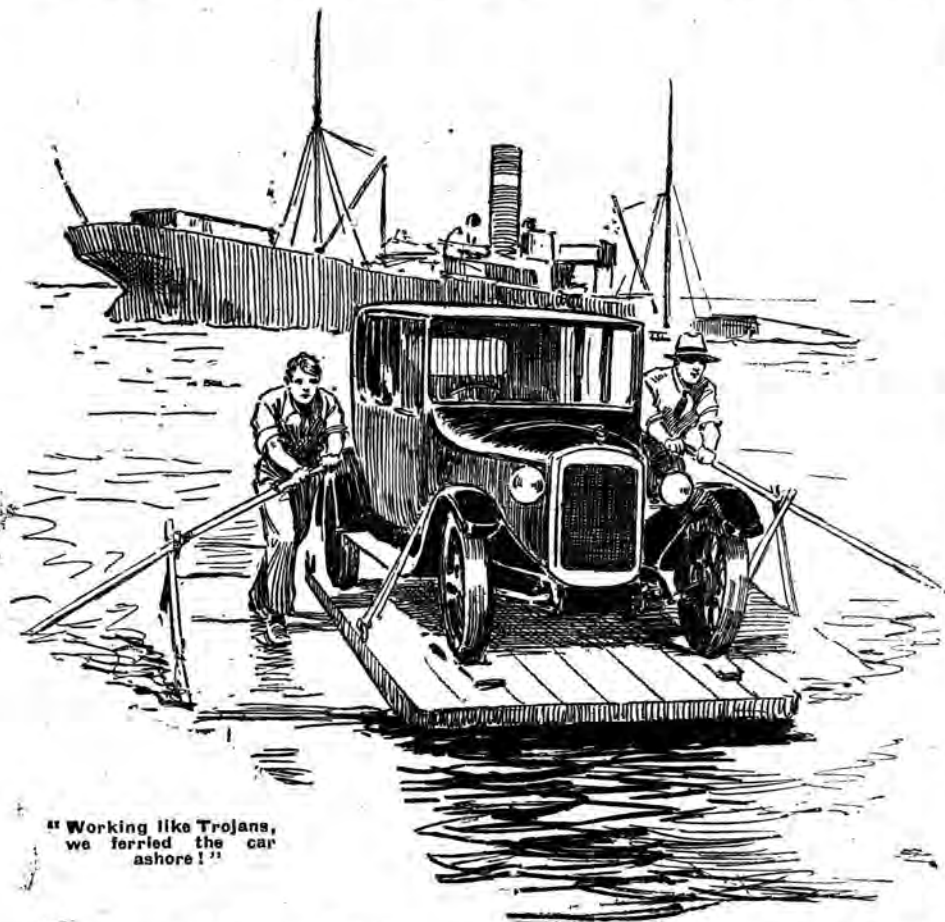
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"Working like Trojans,
we ferried the car
ashore!"

An Important Decision!

I COULD have kicked myself for having allowed myself to be so scared, and I heard Jill, in the tent, laughing. "I've got one!" she called. "Buck up, you boys! I can't hold the brute much longer!"

Crack!
Dad's rifle spat out again. I heard him shouting to the dog to head off the animals.

"This way, Dudley!" he shouted. "Meat and milk! Secure them alive!"

I knocked the big goat on the head, and he collapsed on to the sand. Then, properly awake now, and my eyes becoming used to the semi-darkness, I streaked for the tent.

Jill, in pyjamas, was struggling with a young nanny goat; mother was sitting up at the end of her mattress, the bedclothes drawn round her, trying to avoid getting involved in the struggle.

"Really, dear," she said in mild reproof, "I think this sort of thing ought to be stopped; it gave us an awful fright!"

I tapped the goat on the head with the butt of my revolver, and she fell across Jill's bed. I wasn't going to tell them of the scare I had received from my sportsman, but I cheered mother up. I told her that it was very unlikely the goats would roll up again, as their visit would not leave pleasant memories in the minds of those who got away, and that, anyway, we'd soon be putting up huts. Then I dragged the goat out on to the sand, and told them to get to sleep.

"There'll be fresh milk in the morning, Jill, but you'll have to be milkmaid."

"Right-ho!" said Jill quite casually; but mother looked a little horrified.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,210.

Outside I saw the herd of goats in full retreat, that ass Nigger barking at their heels and risking a nasty kick. Dad and the Dud were coming back. Dad had shot a couple of male goats, and had captured a couple of males and four females, and, until we could fence them in, we hobbled them with short lengths of rope.

I liked the idea of fresh goat's milk as a nice change from the condensed, and I thought it quite likely that roast goat wouldn't be a bad meal, but I knew jolly well that I'd never make a successful butcher.

We threw some wood on the fire. Dawn was coming up in the east in a riot of colour that would have driven an artist almost mad with delight, but was rather lost upon us.

"The visit of those goats is really most encouraging," said dad, as he sprawled himself out on the sand. "It not only means fresh milk and meat, but it means there is fresh water somewhere close here—and the water supply was rather a worry."

"But with the tanks on board the Maglo we ought to have enough water for weeks," said Dud.

"Look here, dad," I burst out, "you seem to be making preparations as though, in the words of the old song, our stay here may be for years, and may be for ever."

"We have to face facts, boys. Of course, there is always the chance of us being picked up, but we're clearly right off the trade routes, and whilst we must hope for the best, we must be prepared for the worst. After all, we have a pleasant little kingdom of our own, and if we can get everything useful off the ship before she becomes a total wreck and goes to pieces, we ought to be able to manage very well."

Dad spoke quite cheerfully, and Dud and I grinned at each other rather feebly. Dad was clearly bucked at being sort of King of Necessity Island, but we were not so bucked.

I dropped off to sleep with the perfume of heavily scented flowers in my nostrils, and I must have slept for hours. The sun was hot on my face when I opened my eyes, and sniffed at a very different and far more tantalising odour which, for a moment, made me think that the island was a dream, and that I was back in civilisation.

Coffee and bacon and eggs!

The chattering and screeching of parakeets in the jungle and the swish of the surf on the sand, brought me back to realities, and I sat up, rubbing my eyes.

Dad and my brother were still sleeping. By the fire stood mother, in what had been a rather swagger afternoon frock, but which looked crumpled now. Her sleeves were rolled up, and her feet were bare; her white hair was tumbled and wispy. She was standing over the fire on the sand, turning over slices of sizzling bacon.

"Buck up, Barry!" called Jill from behind me. "Breakfast's nearly ready, so you'd better wake the other two. We thought we'd let you sleep as long as possible."

I looked round, then gave a yell, and woke the others.

"Breakfast!" I shouted. "A real breakfast! Look over there!"

Young Jill had certainly risen to the occasion. A tablecloth was spread in the shade of some fleecy palms, in the centre of which was a bowl filled with gorgeous scarlet and yellow flowers and a dish of bananas. Cutlery and silver were laid, and on the silver tray were coffee and milk, and good china cups and saucers from the wreck. It was like coming down to breakfast at a posh hotel.

"Bravo, Jill!" I cried. "I won't be a tick, but I must just have a dip in our private swimming-bath!"

I made a dash for the lagoon, and dad and Dud followed me, mother calling to us not to be late.

"Just like home!" said Dud, with a grin, and lit a cigarette, just as he used to do when we went off for an early dip before breakfast at the seaside.

"And I've milked the goats!" yelled Jill triumphantly after us.

It certainly seemed Jill's morning. Dad looked quite bucked as we made for the lagoon, and Dud and I looked at each other. Our kid sister was coming on!

Gaining the lagoon, I flung off shirt and shorts, and plunged into the deliciously cool blue water, and the other two swiftly followed. It was rather weird swimming in the deep, clear water. Below, one could see scores of wonderfully coloured fish, silver, blue-and-gold, darting about, and one felt rather like being in some huge aquarium with a white-sanded floor. But with that breakfast in the offing I was mighty soon out, and as I pulled on my shirt I happened to glance at the wreck, which was partly hidden round the bend, and saw a black mass of birds swarming round it.

Dad followed my glance.

"Vultures!" he said shortly. "That dead shark. I've heard that they will fly for miles, and fight like fury for putrid flesh."

"Don't spoil the jolly old breakfast," said Dud hastily, and we hurried back to our encampment.

It certainly was a breakfast, and the first good meal we had had since the old Maglo had run into the fury of the gale three days ago. I could have lingered over it; but dad, once his hunger was satisfied, was all on the fidget. The barometer he had brought from the wreck was falling a little, and there was still so much we wanted.

I was beastly stiff after the exertions of the day before and could cheerfully have settled down to try to get the wireless working, but I saw we'd got to put our backs into the job on hand.

Jill accompanied us on the raft, leaving mother to straighten up things ashore. We were cutting out a midday meal after such a good breakfast; but hoped, with luck, to have a decent feed in the comparative cool of the evening.

We tried to drive off the vultures that swarmed round the big hole in the side of the vessel; but they seemed absolutely fearless, and kept coming back. They were horrible-looking birds, a shabby black, with thin necks, hideous heads, and cruel-looking beaks stained with blood, fighting like fury over the putrid carcass of the dead shark in the saloon.

"Better let them carry on," said Dud. "The quicker they clear the shark the better. There's no other means of getting rid of the creature, so we may as well let them do the job."

Jill said she did not want to go near it. She held a little, lace-edged handkerchief to her small nose, and looked extraordinarily dainty in her white tennis frock. She was more like a seaside girl going out to the courts than a cast-away on a remote Pacific island; but she set to work with a will, and we loaded the raft until it was nearly awash, and then safely landed a valuable cargo.

But all the time I was thinking about that twelve volt battery on the demonstration car Dud had been taking out to New Zealand. If that was still standing up, I should be safe for the low tension for the wireless, if I could get it going, and I was relying on that wireless. It was the big thing in which we scored over Robinson Crusoe or the Swiss Family Robinson.

Our island probably had not changed since the year dot,

but a modern invention like wireless ought to make all the difference in the world to anyone stranded upon it, and the mere hope of being able to get into touch with some vessel would be worth an awful lot.

So, leaving dad and Jill to collect stuff from the stores, I persuaded Dud to accompany me to the hold where the car had been slung. It was hard work getting off the tarpaulin and heavy boards with the sun glaring down upon us, and we must have looked a pair of sketches in shirts, shorts, and linen hats.

When we'd removed the covering I went down the iron ladder, and the reek of paraffin rose from the dark well which seemed to stretch so far below, and I yelled to Dud to put out his cigarette. Then he joined me on what I supposed they called the upper floor of a hold, which went down two or three storeys, and we saw the Moonbeam saloon, securely fastened to the floor, and covered with dust-sheets.

"It won't take many ticks to take the battery off," I said.

And then old Dud had me gasping.

"Battery!" he said, and there was an excited gleam in his eyes as he looked at me. "Barry, old lad, we're going to take the car!"

Jill the Tracker!

I COULD tell by Dud's voice and the expression on his face that he was not joking; but the thing seemed an absolute impossibility. Short of dismantling the bus, which, with the tools at our disposal, would probably take days, even if we could manage it at all, it seemed impossible, and I pointed out to him that dad would not allow us to attempt the task until everything of greater value was out of the ship.

"Greater value, kid! Why, hang it, man, your one hope is the wireless, and with the car ashore I'd be able to keep the battery charged up whilst we take week-end runs into the country, and discover something of the geography of the island!"

He grinned as we walked towards the car; but, though the remark was made as a joke, it set me tingling, for I was longing to explore our island home, and speeding along the shore over those firm white sands would certainly be a pleasant way of doing it. But then I saw a snag that I wondered he had overlooked.

"I suppose you're banking on finding a filling station on the island?" I said sarcastically.

Dud was pulling a dust sheet from the car.

"We'll have our own filling station. They emptied the tank when the bus was put aboard but they overlooked the spare tin I'd had filled on the off chance of it coming in useful when the car was unloaded. Two gallons will go a long way when its only used for getting a start and I feel certain that once she's started I can tune the carburettor to run on paraffin in a tropical climate like this. From the smell it's clear that a cask or two has been broached but it will be tough luck if we can't land several casks!"

He leant into the car, and the next moment a raucous din caused me to jump violently, and Dud laughed.

"It's a good electric hooter, and a bit overwhelming down here, but it shows the battery's all right, Barry. Now let's unfasten the clamps and wheel her into position."

The saloon car was in the cradle with castor wheels on which she had been slung aboard, and it was easy enough to unlash the cradle and push it under the opening, but I did not see how we were to get a big saloon car, weighing fully a ton and a half, up on to the deck and down on to our big raft, even if the raft would stand the weight.

But old Dud had thought it out. We could not use the donkey engine which ordinarily worked the crane, but there was a geared windlass, with a steel wire hawser, on the deck. It had a long double handle and ratchet, and he thought that if the four of us put our backs into it we should just about manage the job. Dad wasn't a bit enthusiastic about it, but he appreciated the point about the battery, and when I pointed out that the body could easily be converted into a sleeping-place for we three men until we'd time to build something better, he agreed to what he considered a great waste of time.

Jill was wildly elated.

"Speeding on a desert island! Oh, Dad, it will be great!"

We didn't tell her of the tinkering that would be
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1210.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Young BARRY MAYNE is on his way to New Zealand aboard the Maglo, with his father and mother. DUDLEY, his elder brother, and JILL, his younger sister, are also with them. During a terrific storm in the Pacific the crew mutiny and desert the boat, after killing all the officers. With an ear-splitting crash the Maglo strikes a coral reef of an island. Barry manages to get ashore with a line. A hawser follows, and by means of a bucket and a pulley they all reach the island, which they christen—NECESSITY ISLAND. The next morning Barry and Dud go aboard the Maglo to salvage what they can. To their horror they are trapped in a half-submerged cabin with a shark. Their father arrives in time and shoots it. The next night Barry is suddenly attacked while asleep. Thinking it to be a native, he yells for help—and discovers that the camp has been invaded by wild goats!

(Now continue the story, as told by Barry.)

required before the bus would run on paraffin, and the job we'd have to get the casks out of a hold that was awash below the deck where the car was, but we got to work.

One year when we'd stayed at Folkestone I'd watched them loading and unloading cars from the Channel boats just as easily as they slung the luggage; but our job didn't work like that, not a bit like it!

The car came up slowly, and once nearly went back with a rush that would have put paid to it, and I know every muscle in my body ached by the time we'd got the bus clear of the hold and above the bulwarks. Then Dud pulled the yardarm round, and the cradle with the car in it hovered over the raft.

"Now we've got a little job of work!" said Dud, with that lack of tact which had brought about the loss of many jobs in the days which now somehow seemed to belong to another century, and dad bit on it.

He said if Dud considered that the work up till now had been a pleasant pastime for a tropical afternoon, he desired to say that he totally disagreed with him, and for a tick I thought he was going to leave the bus slung over the side, but Jill soothed him.

Dud disappeared over the side to stand on the raft and guide the car into position, and while dad sought some shade, and had a pipe to soothe his feelings, I found an oil-can and eased the ratchet, which had a tendency to stick at a critical time.

With the ratchet working properly, lowering the cradle to the raft was going to be pretty easy. The problem was would the raft stand the weight? It would be pretty sickening if raft and car disappeared under the water, and I was worried about my battery, on which the wireless depended.

Click, click, click!

We were slowly lowering the car. Mother had come to the water's edge, with Nigger at her heels, and was watching, with wonder and alarm, calling out to Dud to be careful.

"Whoa!" I yelled, as a sudden idea occurred to me. "I'd better go down on the raft. Dud's no swimmer, and if the car should sweep him off or sink the raft, he'll be for it!"

They all saw the sense of that, so, with the car about a couple of feet above the raft, I took Dud's place, and he went to the windlass.

Down came the car, inch by inch, the cradle swinging on the wire hawser. We had made our raft roughly about

fifteen feet square, so, as the cradle must have gone about eighteen feet, there was a good deal of overlap to be arranged for; but, on the other hand, providing I placed the bus properly, there would be a good space on either side.

I felt water coming round my ankles as I guided the cradle into position. Then I saw the taut hawser slacken. The water was awash up to my knees, but she still floated, and a yell of delight came from the Maglo, and Dud came swarming down to me with the oars under his arm. Working like Trojans, we ferried the Moonbeam across, and the end of the cradle buried itself in the sand.

Then landing the bus and leaving it to be pushed into position later on, we lifted the cradle ashore and went off in the raft to bring back the things dad and Jill had been collecting on deck.

"Dad's a bit worried," said Jill as we came alongside. "He's discovered that the big water-tank is leaking badly, and he's drawing off all he can. It's made him keen on finding water on the island, and I've suggested that you and I go prospecting, Barry."

"The mighty trackers of the jungle!" said Dud, with a grin. "You go water-seeking, by all means. I want to get up a cask of paraffin. It's no use having the bus ashore and no juice to run her on, so I want to make sure of a cask whilst the going's good."

"I'm not sure that old Dud's job isn't easier than ours," I said to Jill as we made for shore. "From what I've read of jungles the sign-posting is rotten."

"You forget I was in the Girl Guides at school," said Jill, "and know a lot about tracking. Dad says the goats had been for water, and all we've got to do is to follow the tracks of the goats as they came to our camp."

"Oh, is that all!" I said sarcastically. "That's simple! There are only the marks of the goats coming together with our footprints and Nigger's! I thought it was going to be something difficult!"

"Ass!" said Jill, as we grounded and leapt ashore. "Do you think I can't tell a goat's track from Dud's or the dog's, or whether the track is coming or going? Oh, Barry, it will be a thrill tracking in the jungle, never knowing what we are going to find."

(Jill's words are going to prove only too true—there's heaps of thrills awaiting them in the jungle! Don't miss next week's gripping instalment, chums, whatever you do!)

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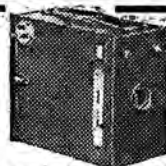
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