THE "WINGER" IS HERE! Read about this amazing gangster—inside!

The GEM

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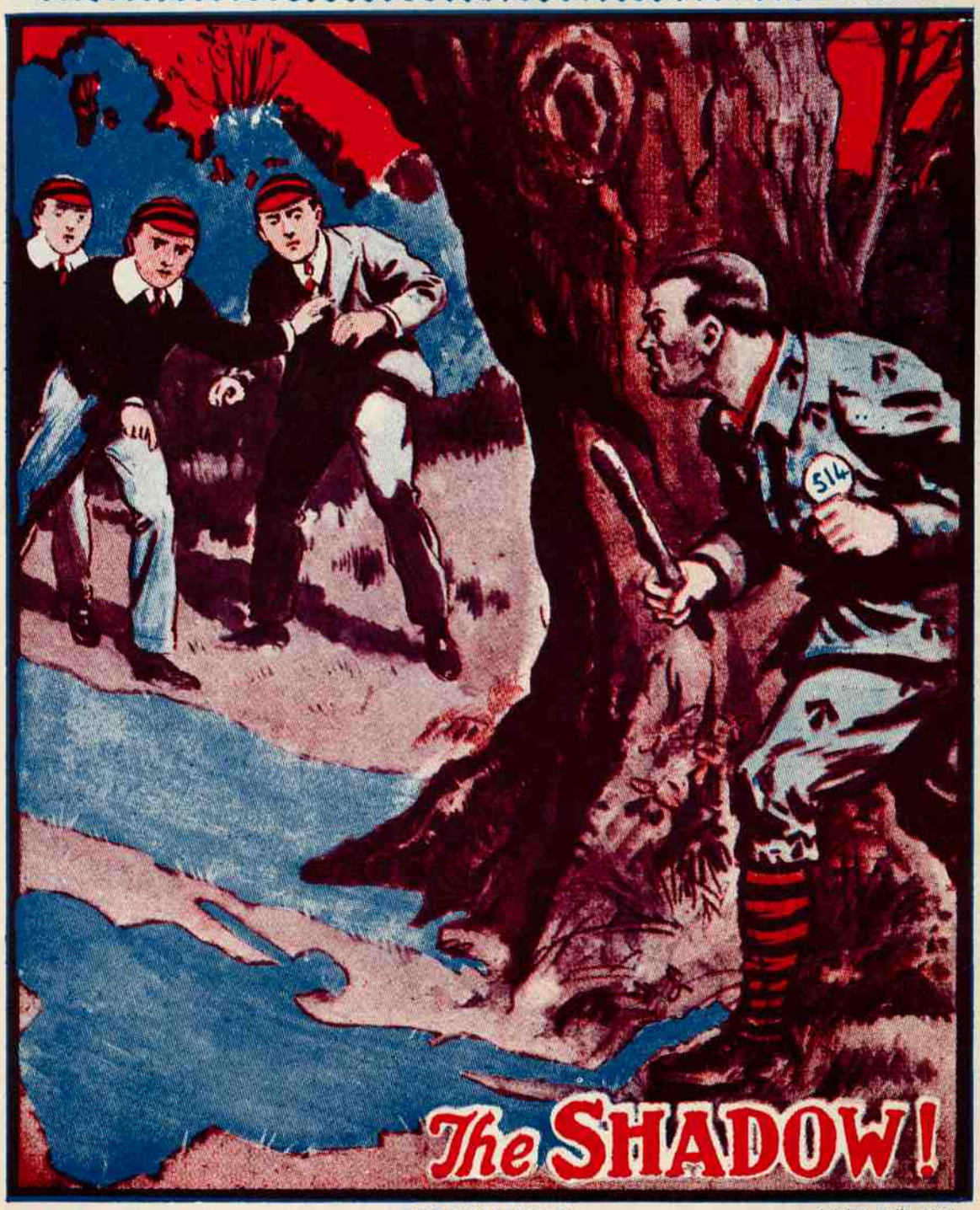

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THRILLS AND LAUGHTER ABOUND IN THIS SPLENDID COMPLETE

UNDER A CONVICT'S

CHAPTER 1.
A Startling Encounter.

BOOM!

Tom Merry gave a sudden start.

"Did you hear that, Manners?"

"I'm not exactly deaf," said Manners. "It was a gun from the prison."

Boo-oom!

It was the echo of the distant report dying away in the lonely depths of the wood.

The two chums of the School House at St. Jim's stopped and looked at one another, the light, cheery expression fading from their faces. They were following the footpath through the wood hard by the old school when the sinister sound struck upon their ears. Tom Merry gave a slight shiver.

"You know what that means, Manners?" he said, in a low voice.

Manners nodded.

"A convict escaped from the prison."

"Yes; some poor wretch made a bolt for it!"

"Hope he won't come this way," said Manners. "I expect the warders will soon lay him by the heels. I say, we're losing time!"

"Let's get on!"

The Terrible Two resumed their way through the wood, but Tom Merry's usually happy face was very thoughtful now. He could not help thinking of the hunted man, whose escape from the prison over the hill was proclaimed to the world at large by the boom of the distant gun.

"I say, I believe we've lost Figgins & Co.!" exclaimed Manners, after a few minutes. "I can't hear a sound of them, and they've vanished from sight. We shall have to give it up, Tom!"

Manners was staring round with an exasperated expression into the dark, thick wood on either side of the path.

"The bounders must have guessed we were tracking them," he went on. "We've lost them, Tom, and we may as well give it up."

"Rotten bad luck!" said Tom Merry.

There was certainly no sign of Figgins & Co. in the wood. A quarter of an hour before the Terrible Two had seen them enter the wood from Rylcombe Lane, Figgins carrying a picnic-basket. The bright idea had immediately entered Tom Merry's head of tracking them down in the wood and "lifting" that picnic-basket. Figgins & Co. were the leaders of the New House juniors at St. Jim's, and the feud between the two Houses of the good old school was as lively as ever. A recent raid by the New House faction remained still unavenged, and the Terrible Two were glad of a chance to go on the warpath. As Tom Merry said, revenge is sweet, and the jam-tarts Figgins certainly had in that basket were sweeter.

But Figgins & Co. must have smelt a rat, for they had completely vanished in the wood, and the School House juniors searched in vain.

"It's horrid!" said Tom Merry. "Those New House bounders are scoffing cakes and tarts somewhere here, perhaps only a dozen yards from us, and grinning at us into the bargain. I'd give a week's pocket-money to get on their track!"

There was a faint rustle in the thickets. Manners nudged Tom.

"You heard that?"

Tom's eyes were blazing with excitement. He had heard the sound, which showed that someone was cautiously retreating from the vicinity farther into the wood.

"Yes, rather, Manners. We're on their track, after all!"

"Let's follow them."

"Good! I wish there were more of us. Monty Lowther's still away, unfortunately. Pity we hadn't time to get Study No. 6 to join us. We're only two against three. Still, they're only New House bounders!" said Tom Merry. "We'll give them the kybosh, and scoff the picnic!"

"Cautious, now!" whispered Manners. "Not a sound!"

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors of St. Jim's stole from the footpath into the trees, in the direction of the rustle they had heard. They went on tiptoe, and at the same time listened intently for a repetition of the sound to guide them. It was repeated—the unmistakable sound of a retreating form brushing through the thick and clinging underwood. Close on the track went the Terrible Two.

"It sounds like only one of them, Tom," whispered Manners.

"Yes, I expect they've separated, so as to dodge us more easily."

"Ah, very likely!"

"We'll track this bounder to the giddy rendezvous and then make a rush for the picnic-basket," murmured Tom Merry. "I'll tackle Figgins, and you go for Kerr. Fatty Wynn doesn't count very much in a scrap. He's got plenty of pluck, but he's too fat to give us any trouble. I wish Lowther was with us."

From time to time the faint sound of the retreating form was heard, and the juniors, as stealthy as Indians tracking their prey, followed it through the wood. To the very heart of the deep and lonely wood the sounds led them. Suddenly it ceased. And the chums listened intently, but the sound was not repeated, and they came to the conclusion that the fugitive had stopped. They exchanged glances.

"He's heard us, of course," whispered Manners. "We've made as much noise as he has. I expect the three of them are waiting for us now."

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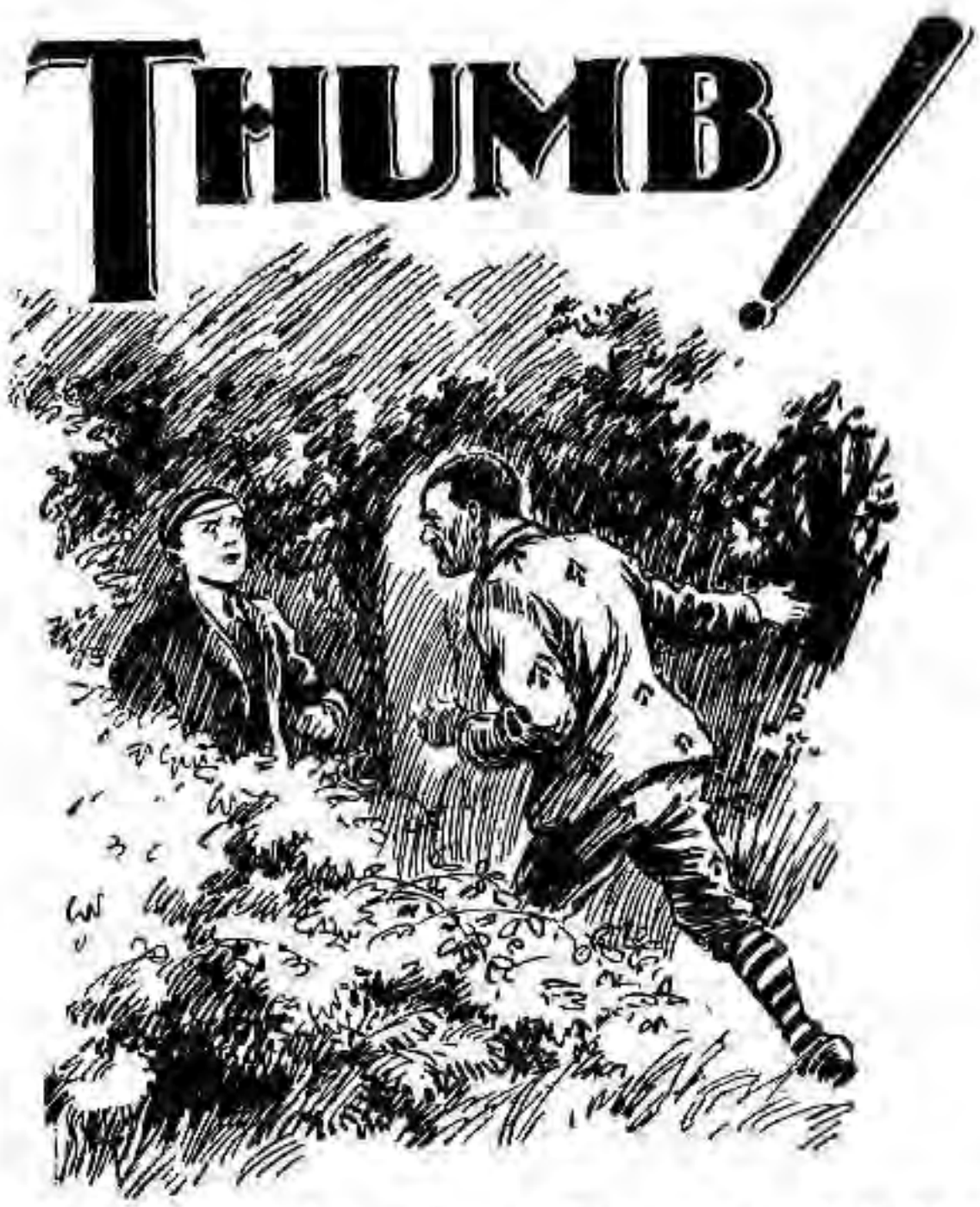
YARN OF THE ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S!



Tom Merry made a grimace. There was likely to be a tough tussle for the picnic-basket if Figgins & Co. were all there, and waiting for the onslaught. But neither of the Terrible Two were inclined to retreat.

It was School House against New House, and they did not care for the odds. Even if they got the worst of it, they were not afraid of a hard knock or two; but they meant to get the best of it somehow.

"I expect they're waiting for us," assented Tom Merry. "We're not going to give it up. We had better make a rush for it. Come on!"

"Right-ho!" said Manners.

And, abandoning all caution, the chums of the School House dashed on. Right through the thickets they went with a crash and a trample, and burst into a terrific war-whoop at the same time.

Tom Merry stumbled over a form crouching in the thickets, and the next moment he was down on the ground, with an iron grip on his throat. He gave a shriek of horror.

It was not Figgins; it was not one of the Co. into whose grip he had fallen. A man with a rough, savage face and glinting, wild eyes—a man with closely cropped hair and the hideous garb sprinkled with broad arrows that proclaimed the convict.

Tom Merry realised all in a moment. It was not one of the New House juniors whom they had tracked through the wood. It was the escaped convict! And Tom Merry, rushing on to the attack, had not come upon his rivals of the New House, but upon a hunted and desperate criminal!

"Help!" gasped Tom Merry.

He was on the ground, helpless under the ruffian's weight, and the grip on his throat cut short his voice after that one cry. A savage face was glaring down upon him in black and deadly rage.

But Tom's chum was at hand. Like Tom, Manners grasped the situation at once. He rushed on, and took a flying kick at the convict as he scrambled on Tom Merry, a good deal as if he were on the football field.

The man gave a gasp as Manners' boot came crashing upon his ribs, and rolled off Tom Merry, sprawling into the grass. Tom Merry was on his feet in a twinkling.

"Run—run!" he gasped.

Not for an instant did the juniors delay. The convict was scrambling up with fury in his eyes, and what he meant to do they did not know; but that the man was dangerous as a wild beast at that moment, was plain.

They tore off through the crashing thickets at top speed with a pace they had never shown on the cinder-path, though they were two of the best junior runners in the School House at St. Jim's.

There was a sound in the thickets behind them—whether of pursuit or not they did not know, nor did they pause to ascertain. Right on they tore, and in a couple of minutes came out into the footpath, and turned into it to race along towards Rylcombe Lane.

A figure started up in their path. It was that of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House at St. Jim's—a personage very much disliked by the juniors of the School House.

But at that moment the two youngsters were too wildly excited to recognise him, or even to look at him. Their only thought was that the convict had somehow got ahead of them, and they threw themselves frenziedly upon the supposed foe who had cut off their escape.

Monteith, utterly amazed and taken by surprise, went down heavily, with the two juniors scrambling and sprawling on top of him.

"Why, what the——"

"Hallo!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's Monteith!"

He jumped up as if the prefect had become suddenly red-hot. Manners scrambled off the fallen Sixth-Former as quickly as Tom Merry. Monteith staggered up, his thin, sour face black with rage.

"You young whelps——"

"I say, Monteith, we're sorry! We——"

The prefect grasped the juniors by their collars.

"I'll teach you to knock me down!" he spluttered. "You've been asking for a hiding ever since you came to St. Jim's, Tom Merry! You shall have it now!"

"Monteith, I tell you we couldn't help it! Do listen! There's an escaped convict after us, and——"

"Don't tell lies!" said the New House prefect sharply. "You can't take me in with a yarn like that!"

"It's the truth! He's after us! My hat! Look!"

Tom Merry's hand shot out and pointed to the ground. There, a few feet in front of them, a shadow was cast across the track. It was the shadow of a man with upraised cudgel; he was hiding behind a tree.

In a moment Tom had nipped round behind the tree and hurled himself upon the man, sending him spinning out on to the path.

It was the convict. He stopped, panting, at the sight of the prefect. The two juniors stood by, with their fists clenched, and the three of them would have made a very big handful for anyone to tackle, and the convict stood in doubt. Probably his purpose in chasing the juniors had not been very clear. He had been actuated more by rage than by clear intention. He stood panting, his eyes glinting, his breast heaving. The eyes of the convict and the prefect met. Then the former gave a sharp cry.

"You!"

Monteith started. He looked more closely at the evil face, and turned deadly pale. Tom Merry and Manners saw, with utter wonder and surprise, that he recognised the convict.

"Good heavens!" muttered Monteith.

A strange smile came over the face of the convict. Something of assurance came into his manner. He made a gesture which the prefect understood. Monteith turned to the juniors.

"Go back to the school!" he said in a husky voice.

"Aren't you coming, Monteith?"

"No, no!"

"You won't be safe——"

"Do as I tell you!"

Tom Merry looked into the prefect's face and saw how haggard it had become in a few moments; and, much as he disliked the bullying prefect of the New House, Tom Merry's heart was touched.

What was the cause of the terrible dismay and misery he saw in Monteith's face Tom Merry had not the faintest idea, but there was no mistaking it.

"Very well, Monteith," said Tom quietly.

And he made a sign to Manners, and the chums of the

Monteith met the escaped convict face to face—it was his cousin! "Help me to get away," said the convict, "or I will let all St. Jim's know that I am your cousin!" What could Monteith do? Read this grand yarn and see!

Shell walked away together. Monteith looked after them till a turn of the path hid them from sight, and then he fixed his gaze upon the convict again.

"Ralph!" he said, in a low, strained voice. "You!"

The convict grinned.

"Yes, my dear cousin. You're not glad to see me?"

Monteith shuddered.

"I heard the gun from the prison. But I never dreamed——"

"That it was I who had escaped from prison? I suppose not. I have been free for two hours, but they seem to have only just discovered it. I had thought of you, but I did not hope to get such a stroke of luck. You are a friend in need, James."

Monteith shivered again. Then, with a gesture of assent, he followed the convict from the path into the wood.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgins & Co. Make a Discovery.

FIGGINS & Co. were enjoying themselves. In the heart of the deep wood the three were sitting under the beeches, with the picnic-basket open between them—the long-limbed Figgins, chief of the New House juniors, Fatty Wynn, short and plump, and Kerr, the cautious, canny Scotsman.

Figgins leaned back against a thick bush, with a glass of lemonade in one hand and a jam-tart in the other, and an expression of seraphic happiness upon his face.

"This is jolly!" he remarked. "Did you see those School House bounders following us in the lane, kids? They had a sheep's-eye on this basket."

Kerr chuckled.

"Yes, I knew what Tom Merry's little game was, but we have done them this time."

"I think so," assented Figgins. "They're not likely to track us down in this little lair. We have been one too many for Tom Merry this time. Not that we're afraid of those School House kids. We are three to two, and we'd give 'em a warm time if they did find us. But we came out here to have a picnic under the trees, not to look for trouble."

Fatty Wynn looked up from the remnant of a rabbit-pie.

"That's so, Figgy. A scrap is all very well in its way, but we couldn't allow that sort of thing to interfere with a meal."

"I don't think you'd allow anything to interfere with a meal," said Figgins. "This is your tenth meal to-day, isn't it, Fatty."

"No, it's only the fourth," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "We get such small meals at St. Jim's; I have to eke it out somehow. Hallo! Did you hear that?"

Figgins held up his hand for silence. It was the sound of a footstep in the wood that had fallen upon the ears of the chums of the New House at St. Jim's. The sound had come from behind Figgins, on the other side of the thick, almost impenetrable bush he was leaning against. The chums looked at one another with deep-drawn breath.

"They're on the track!" whispered Figgins. "Not a sound! We can't have a scrap after a big feed, kids. And they may have Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy with them. They always chum up with Study No. 6 when it's a question of going for us."

Kerr and Wynn nodded. The New House trio awaited and listened with bated breath. Even Fatty Wynn left off eating.

There was a murmuring of voices on the other side of the bush. The speakers had stopped there, right in the heart of the wood, and little dreaming that three juniors were sitting round a picnic-basket on the other side of the thicket.

"Safe enough here!" said a harsh voice. "We can talk now. No chance of being discovered unless the warders are searching through the wood, and they're not likely to be here yet."

Figgins gave a jump. It was a strange voice to his ears, but the words told him who the speaker was. Figgins & Co. had heard the gun from the prison that announced the escape of a convict, and the mention of the word "warders" was enough to tell them that the man on the other side of the bush was the escaped prisoner.

The juniors exchanged looks of consternation. They had intended to lie low if the School House youngsters were on the track, but the necessity for keeping their presence a secret was greater than ever now. It would hardly be safe to fall in the way of a hunted and desperate criminal.

Figgins made a sign for silence, and the Co. remained motionless.

"I want you to help me," went on the voice. "You must help me. I broke in this direction because I thought there was a chance of getting a word to you."

There was a pause. The convict's companion, whoever he was, did not speak.

"I suppose you are willing to help me?" the man went on. "You are not thinking of deserting me and leaving me to the bloodhounds, James?"

"I shall be ruined!"

The reply was in a husky, sunken voice, but the juniors of the New House recognised it at once—the voice of James Monteith, the head prefect of their House! Monteith, of the New House, meeting a convict secretly in the wood! What could it possibly mean? Figgins & Co. stared at one another in silent wonder. The convict's voice replied crisply:

"Ruined or not, you must help me! I must have clothes, and food, and money, to escape. I tell you there are five years remaining for me in prison, and I will rather die than go back there! Die a thousand times! You must help me!"

"I—I can't! You should not have come here. You nearly disgraced me before. When you stole the Glyndon diamond, and sent it to me, and I never knew——"

"I had fixed it on Kildare's brother, and if you had taken care of that packet I sent you the truth would never have come out!" growled the convict.

"I did not know the diamond was in it—and if I had known——"

"You would have betrayed me?"

"I am not a thief!"

"Bah! But it is useless to discuss that now. The diamond was found, Kildare's brother was cleared, and I was sent to penal servitude."

"I wish you had remained there!" said Monteith bitterly. "If they had chosen to believe ill of me at St. Jim's, I should have been deemed your accomplice. As it is, many of the fellows know that I have a cousin a convict, and it has done me harm at the school. And it would be worse but for Kildare."

"Your enemy?"

"I was his enemy," said Monteith, "when I discovered his brother hiding in the old castle. I used the knowledge to dictate terms to him. And then—then his brother was proved to be innocent, and my cousin proved to be the thief. Yet Kildare was all kindness and consideration. He forgave what I could never have forgiven. We have been pulling together better lately. And now you must come to bring utter ruin on me. Don't you know that a fellow may be sent to prison for helping a convict to escape?"

"I know that you must help me! Will you send one of your own blood back to that hell upon earth?" said the convict hoarsely.

There was a long silence.

"No," said Monteith at last. "I suppose I must help you."

"Good! If you did not the disgrace you fear would not be escaped. I would see to that! How would you like me to come to the school?"

"Are you mad?"

"Not at all! But I swear that if I am arrested it shall be within the walls of St. Jim's, and if you could remain at your school after that——"

"You—you scoundrel!"

"Help me, then, to escape. I want but little, but I am desperate. They shall not recapture me if I can help it. You must save me."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Bring me a change of clothes, a razor, food, and money, and a disguise, if possible," said the convict. "Then I will shift for myself."

"But how—where?"

"Here! I was thinking of the old castle; but they are sure to search that first. This place is as secure as any I can think of; and I can hide in the branches of trees if the hunt comes close. Keep the mouths of those juniors who saw us shut—that's all."

"Tom Merry and Manners are not likely to chatter, I think. Still, I will speak to them."

"Make them keep the secret. Tell them you will flay them if they talk."

"Not much use using that method with Tom Merry. But I think he would hold his tongue if I asked him. You are going to remain here?"

"Yes! This big beech is hollow. Come here after dark, and put the things in it, and I shall find them. I may have to leave this spot. Come at night, or suspicion may be excited. They know I have a cousin at the school."

Monteith was silent.

"I suppose I must do it," he said. "When you have the clothes, what will you do?"

"Make a break for freedom as soon as it is safe to do so. In twenty-four hours I hope to be far away from here."

"I hope so," said Monteith, with a shiver. "It will be difficult for me to get away from the school——"

"I suppose you have broken bounds after dark before," said Ralph Monteith, with a sneer.

"Yes; but it will be more difficult now. Some of the St. Jim's fellows have been going down to a public-house in the village after dark, and the Head has told Kildare, our captain, to look into the matter. Kildare means business, and he is on the alert."

"That is unlucky; but it can't be helped. You must contrive to get out somehow."

"I shall manage it, I suppose. There's no more to be said?"

"No."

They parted without a word of farewell. Monteith strode away through the wood, the way he had come. Figgins & Co., on the other side of the bush, were still sitting silent, and staring at each other with wide eyes.

The convict hurled himself furiously upon Tom Merry and seized him round the throat. With a shout, Manners came dashing to the rescue.

Without making their presence known it was impossible for them to leave the spot, and so they had heard almost every word uttered by Monteith and the convict. They heard the prefect stride away, and then a rustle in the bushes told that the convict had also gone. Figgins rose silently to his feet.

"Let's clear!" he muttered briefly.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn, who were both rather pale, nodded assent. The remains of the picnic were silently hurried into the basket, and Figgins picked it up, and the three juniors stole away through the wood.

They went on tiptoe, fearful of making a sound for the convict to hear which might draw the desperado on their track. Not a word did they utter till they were out of the wood, in the open, sunny lane, leading to St. Jim's. Then Figgins broke the silence.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated the great Figgins.

"My giddy Aunt Selina!" said Fatty Wynn. "This is a go, and no mistake! You remember that affair of Kildare's brother, I suppose?"

"Rather! Don't you remember how we came on the poor old chap in the castle, when we were tracking Study No. 6?" said Figgins, with a chuckle at the recollection.

"Yes! It's the tables turned now, with a vengeance," remarked Kerr. "Monteith has got a bit of what Kildare had then, only there's this difference—that Micky Kildare was innocent, and our captain knew it while Ralph Monteith is guilty, and——"

"And our prefect knows that," said Figgins. "Monteith isn't a sweet individual, but one can't help feeling a bit sorry for him in the circumstances."

"He ought to let the rotter be arrested."

"Well, the chap's his own kin," said Figgins, with a shake of his head. "It's a lot to expect of Monteith to let him be taken back to the prison. Besides, you heard what he said—he'd show Monty up before all St. Jim's if he could."

"Nice, pleasant sort of a relation to have!"

"I'm sorry for Monteith, and I'm sorry we've learned anything about the matter," remarked Figgins. "Can't be helped, though, as Tom Merry always says. I've noticed an improvement in Monteith lately, too—he isn't half the rotter he was. The whole school used to call him Cad Monteith; but they've rather dropped that of late."

"We'll keep mum," said Kerr.

"That's the word."

And when they returned to St. Jim's, Figgins & Co. thought a great deal, but they said nothing. Monteith's miserable secret was safe with them.

CHAPTER 3.

The Great Idea of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

"HAVE you heard the news, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming into Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's.

Blake, who was greasing his football boots—and the carpet—looked up inquiringly. Herries grunted, and went on making toffee.

"What news?" said Blake. "Have you been and gone and bought a nice new fancy waistcoat?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Has your noble pa sent you a nice new topper for a birthday present?"

"Weally——"

"Has Tom Merry got a new idea, about up to the mark of his hobby club idea, and his triple alliance idea, or anything of that sort?"

"I haven't seen Tom Mewwy."

"Then what's the news, image? Why don't you tell me?"

"I'm twying to."

"You're so long-winded, Gussy."

"I'm twying——"

"Expound! Explain! Spout! Talk!"

"I'm twy——"

"Never saw a chap so long-winded," said Blake resignedly.

"If you wouldn't intewwupt," said D'Arcy, "I would tell you the stwange news. I think it may lead to an adventuah."

"Well, get it off your chest, fathead!"

"That is an extwemely wude expwession."

"Oh, go on!"

"Well, deah boys, it is a startling piece of news. I had it fwom Gore, who had it fwom Fwench, who had it fwom Taggles, who had it fwom——"

"Go on!" said Blake. "This sounds like the house that Jack built. Any more?"

"There is a despewate chawactah escaped fwom the pwison on the hill," said D'Arcy. "A wardah had been up to the school to speak to the Head, so that the boys mayn't fall in with the feahful wuffian. John, the footman, heard it all, and told Taggles, and Taggles told Fwench, who told Gore, who told——"

"House that Jack built again," growled Blake. "Can't you leave out all that and come to the point? There's a giddy convict escaped from prison?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And where is he?"

"He is supposed to be hidin' in the Castle Wood," said Arthur Augustus. "The wuins of the old castle have been searched alweady, but nothin' has been discovahed of the wuffian there. The wardahs and the police are goin' to hunt for the dweadful wuffian and wun him down."

"Let 'em!" said Jack Blake.

"I've been thinking——" said the swell of St. Jim's.

Blake jumped up and laid down his football boots.

"You've been doing what?"

"Thinkin'."

Blake stared at him in amazement.

"Have you really? Did it hurt?"

"Blake, I weally——"

"You shouldn't start these things suddenly. A complete change is best taken by degrees," said Blake warningly. "Do you want to wreck your constitution?"

"Upon my word——"

"When you start thinking you ought to do it on the instalment plan," said Blake solemnly. "Think of your noble governor, and don't bring his lordly whiskers down with sorrow to the cemetery. Take it gently, and you may survive it, but——"

"Blake, if you wish me to continue to wegard you as a fwiend, I must beg of you to wefwain fwom these wemarks," said Arthur Augustus. "It would go against my consh to quawwel with you if it could be avoided, but weally——"

"But really," said Blake, "you are a champion ass! And now get on with the washing. What have you been thinking about now you've started?"

"I was thinkin' that it would be a feathah in our cap," said D'Arcy, "if we were to captuah that extwemely despewate chawactah and delivah him to the wardahs."

Blake looked at Herries, and Herries looked at Blake.

"Well, my only pyjama hat!" said Blake. "Gussy is coming out! Fancy Gussy going on the war-path! My Aunt Maria Jane Jackson!"

"Good old Gussy!" said Herries. "I can see him tracking a giddy convict, armed with an eyeglass and a gold-headed cane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is extwemely wude of you to cackle when I have been thinking."

"Of course it is. It isn't as if such a thing happens often. But, I say, Gussy, what is your grudge against the convict chap?"

"I stand up for law and ordah," said Arthur Augustus. "The chap ought to be in pwison, and he may do some damage if he is fwee. He is an awful wottah!"

"Do you know who it is?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then why don't you tell us, you owl?"

"You haven't given me a chance. You keep on intewwuptin' me in an extwemely wude mannah. I weally nevah get a chance to speak in this study."

"It seems to me you have a long innings sometimes. But who's the chap? And how do you know, anyway?"

"I heard it fwom Gore, who had it fwom Fwench, who had it fwom Tag——"

"Bother all that! Who's the chap?"

"You wemembah the stwange case of Kildare's bwothah who was suspected of stealin' a diamond, or somethin', somehow, somewhere. Somebody suspected him of somethin', anyhow, and he dodged into the old wuined castle and hid there. He must have found it extwemely uncomfy, and what he did for a change of linen I cannot imagine."

"Perhaps he did without one. I remember that old yarn. It turned out to be Monteith's cousin who did the business, and he went to chokey," said Blake. "He was an awful beastly rotter, for he managed to throw the guilt on to Micky Kildare at first."

"Yaas, wathah! Well, this is the chap. Gore says that Fwench told him that Taggles said John, the footman, heard the wardah say to the Head that it was Convict No. 514 who had escaped, and that he had a welation in the school."

"Oh, I see! That's why they've sent here; they fancy that Ralph Monteith will try to get help from his cousin in the New House!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, that is vewy pwob."

"Monteith is not the sort to go out of his way to help anybody, I fancy," said Herries, with a shake of his head.

"You're right there; the warders needn't be afraid, I think. So Ralph Monteith is dodging in the Castle Wood, is he? Well, I could feel a little pity for most chaps who bolt from prison, but that scoundrel ought to be sent back, and no mistake! It would be a jolly good thing to collar him—and, by Jove, it would make the Terrible Two and Figgins & Co. green with envy!"

"That's what I thought," said D'Arcy. "I thought it was wathah a good ideah, deah boys, and I think it would be awfully jolly, you know, to lay the wascal by the heels."

"We're on!" said Blake. "On it like a bird! Hallo, Kildare! What do you want? Have you come to tea?"

Eric Kildare, the big, handsome captain of St. Jim's, looked into the study. He smiled at Blake's remark.

"No," he said in his cheery tone, "I haven't come to tea. I've come to tell you kids——"

"Us what?"

"You fellows," amended Kildare. "I've come to tell you that the juniors are restricted to the precincts of St. Jim's for the next few days."

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said. The bounds are drawn in, you see, and no one in the Lower School may go outside the limits until further orders."

The chums of the Fourth stared at the captain in dismay.

"My hat!" said Blake. "You're joking, of course."

"Must be!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am not joking. Those are the instructions from headquarters, and you are expected to observe them," said Kildare. "I thought I would speak to you specially, as you are the leaders of all the mischief in this House—except Tom Merry."

"You're joking, skipper! You know what nice quiet chaps we are. I'm afraid we shan't be able to oblige you in this matter, Kildare."

The captain shook his finger warningly at Blake.

"Mind what I've told you, you know!"

"But what's the reason?"

"Yaas," said D'Arcy, "what's the weason, Kildare?"

"There's an escaped convict lurking in the neighbourhood," explained the captain of St. Jim's. "The prohibition will last till he is captured—which may be a few hours or a few days."

"Why, I was just thinkin'——" began D'Arcy.

He got no further, for a Greek Lexicon, deftly aimed by Blake, caught him under the chin, and he sat down suddenly on the floor of the study. He jumped up again in a fury.

"You howwid boundah, what did you do that for?"

"Keep quiet!" said Blake.

"I wefuse to be quiet. I distinctly wefuse to be assaulted in such a mannah without inflictin' a feahful thwashin' upon the assaultah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Kildare grinned.

"Remember what I've told you," he said, going to the door.

"You see, Kildare——"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to shut up!"

"You silly ass, I——"

D'Arcy was hugging Blake round the neck, apparently bent upon vengeance, though by his actions he might really have been supposed to be in the act of demonstrating an

exuberant affection. Blake ran him against the wall and held him there.

"Are you going to be quiet?"

"Certainly not! No, wathah not! I wefuse to be quiet—I distinctly wefuse——"

"Shut the door, Herries!"

Herries slammed the door.

"Now, ass," said Blake severely, "I shied that book at you, fathead, because you were just going to give the game away, owl. Do you understand, cuckoo? If we let Kildare know that we were going to hunt the convict, lunatic, he would jolly soon stop us, idiot! See, dummy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, restored to peacefulness by the explanation.

"Time you did, owl!" said Blake, releasing him. "Now, kids, what do you think of this giddy prohibition? Are we going to remain quietly inside the walls of this ancient and honourable establishment?"

"We are not!"

"That's the idea. Not, not, not! Carried unanimously. Are we going to hunt the convict?"

"We are!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Now, I think as he's such a despewate chawactah, as D'Arcy puts it, we had better have Tom Merry in the thing, don't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go and ask him," said Herries.

"No good losing time," said Blake, nodding. "Come along."

In two minutes Study No. 6 presented themselves at the door of Tom Merry's study, and Blake announced his presence by a sounding kick.

"Come in, and don't kick the door down!" said a cheerful voice.

The three marched in. Tom Merry and Manners were having tea—in fact, had nearly had it—and they had made a good meal, having come in hungry from their run in the wood.

Blake took a disparaging view of the table, and as there was only some bread and a single sardine left he decided not to ask himself to tea.

"Hallo, you kids!" said Tom Merry. "What can we do for you?"

"You can addwess us with pwopah wespect," said D'Arcy. "I have on pwevious occasions stated my stwong objection to bein' weferred to as a kid, Tom Mewwy."

"Any objection to being referred to as an ass?" asked Tom Merry. "If so, I'd better not refer to you at all, because I was brought up to be truthful."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Shut up, Gussy, and listen to your Uncle Blake. Tom Merry, we've come here to propose——"

"Oh, this is so sudden!"

"Don't be an ass! We've come here to propose your joining us in a little excursion. It will be jolly fun——"

"Yaas, wathah! Awfully jollay, don't you know, deah boys."

The Terrible Two looked interested.

"Well, we're always ready to help anybody to fix up a little fun," said Tom Merry. "What's the game?"

"There may be a certain amount of risk in it," Blake remarked. "Would that make any difference to you, Merry?"

To which Tom Merry replied with a counter question as to whether Blake had come to that study in quest of a thick ear.

"Very well," said Blake, grinning. "Now, this is my idea——"

"Oh, wats!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It was my ideah! Blake, I wefuse to allow you to claim the honah of havin' owiginated this ideah!"

"Well, it was Gussy's idea," said Blake. "He naturally doesn't want to be robbed of it, as it is the only one he's ever had!"

"Blake, I must weally wemark——"

"Dry up! Now, this is the idea, Tom Merry. Have you heard that there's an escaped convict lurking—Kildare said lurking, didn't he?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Lurking," said Blake. "Or dodging, or hiding in the neighbourhood. It doesn't matter which he's doing, but it's got to be stopped."

The Terrible Two exchanged glances.

"I see you've heard about him," said Blake. "Now the Head, with that ridiculous idea of his that us juniors don't know how to take care of ourselves, has ordered us all to remain within school bounds till the bounder's caught. Isn't that a good reason for catching him as soon as possible?"

"Jolly good reason!"

"Then we have discovered that he is no other than that horrid rascal, Ralph Monteith, who tried to send Kildare's brother to 'chokey.'"

"That was before I came to St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, "but I've heard the story. The chap was a fearful rotter."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"For all these reasons, we are going to hunt him down and give him up," said Blake, with a look of importance. "We owe him a oner for old Kildare's sake, you see, and we've got to get that order about the bounds rescinded. Are you chaps willing to take a hand?"

"How are you going to hunt him down if you're kept to school bounds?"

Blake winked solemnly.

"I've heard," he said sagely, "that kids have been known to break bounds. I say I've heard it. Of course, I don't know anything about it myself."

"So you're going to break bounds and start hunting the convict?"

"Well, we couldn't do it by sticking in the school, could we?"

"I suppose not," agreed Tom Merry. "But suppose you got on his track——"

"Oh, we shall get on his track all right!"

"And suppose you track him to his lair——"

"We shall manage that."

"Then what are you going to do with him?"

"Capture him, of course."

"Supposing he won't be captured?"

"Oh, that's all rot! Of course we shall be able to capture him. If he won't go quietly, I shall punch his head!" said Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I wish you luck! Good-afternoon!"

"But, I say! Ain't you going to take a hand in the little game?"

"You must excuse us. Good little boys like us couldn't think of breaking bounds. It would lie too heavily on our little consciences."

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you're afraid——"

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"With or without gloves?" he asked, in a casual sort of way.

Blake grinned.

"Pax! I admit you're not afraid; but why don't you come into the game? You're not usually backward in coming forward when there's any fun going."

"We've got our reasons," said Tom. "Sorry, but you must excuse us. Go and ask Figgins & Co."

"So we will!" exclaimed Blake. "I'd rather have you two, for the credit of the School House, because it would make the New House chaps green with envy if we captured a convict."

"I wish we could take a hand," said Tom Merry regretfully; "but it can't be did. Better ask old Figgins."

Blake and his chums, considerably puzzled, quitted the Shell study. Tom Merry and Manners looked at each other mournfully.

"This," said Tom Merry, "is distinctly rotten! Blake will get lots of glory over this job. If they get the convict roped in, and the bounds are enlarged through Blake, he will be frightfully cocky. But we can't take a hand."

"We couldn't very well, after what Monteith asked us."

"Confound Monteith!" said Tom Merry. "He had no right to ask us anything of the kind. But a promise is a promise. We said we wouldn't say anything about having seen the convict, and it wouldn't be exactly the thing to help hunt him down after that. Yet he's an awful rascal, and ought to be in chokey. No mistake about that. And then, that question about the bounds. Why, they may take weeks before they find the convict, if Monteith helps him, as

(*Continued on the next page.*)

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I certainly expect he will. And we shall be gated all the time."

"Beastly!" said Manners.

"Well, it can't be helped!" said Tom Merry, with his usual optimism. "Finished your tea? Let's go down and kick a footer about."

CHAPTER 4.

No Takers!

FIGGINS & CO, and an empty picnic-basket came into the study in the New House where the famous trio lived and moved and had their being. Figgins plumped the basket down on a chair and then he snorted.

He had reason to snort.

For there, in the study sacred to the New House chums, were to be seen the forms of Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, the three School House juniors from Study No. 6 over the way.

Blake was sitting in the only armchair, with his feet on the only hassock, with his head resting on the only cushion, in an attitude of unaffected grace, as a novelist would say.

Herries was sitting on the table, absent-mindedly jabbing a penknife into Fatty Wynn's "Robinson Crusoe." Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood at the window, looking out at the pigeons, and bestowing a good deal of admiration upon a resplendent new pair of diamond sleeve-links.

"I say!" yawned Blake. "That long-legged freak is a long time coming! Hallo, Figgy!"

The long-legged freak glared at him wrathfully.

"What are you bounders doing here?"

"I'm sitting in the armchair," said Blake. "Herries is sitting on the table. What are you doing, Aubrey Adolphus?"

"I weally wish you'd not addwess me in that extwemely absurd mannah!"

"And D'Arcy is playing the giddy ox," concluded Blake. "Any more conundrums to ask, Figgy?"

"No," said Figgy. "Only one: Which way do you prefer to go out—the door or the window?"

"I prefer the door as a rule," said Blake, jumping up and looking warlike. "But on this occasion I prefer the window—if you can put me out!"

"I'll jolly soon do that!" said Figgins.

"Weally, deah boys, we did not come here to quawwel!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Blake, I weally wish you would keep your tempah bettah! Why don't you explain that we have come to make a pwoposal?"

"Pax, old Figgy!" said Blake, holding up his hand. "We came here on business."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

"Yes. You surely don't think we came to this measly hole for nothing? Now, then, don't get your wool off! I mean this palatial mansion of yours. Have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"About a giddy convict lurking—that's the word—lurking in the wood."

"Oh, yes, we know all about that! More than you can tell us, I expect."

"You know a lot, of course," said Blake. "What you know would fill a book, a very little one. We are going to hunt down the rascal."

"It was my ideah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I thought it would be awfully jollay, you know, to hunt the wascal down."

"Yes, sounds like one of your ideas," agreed Figgins. "Wants a microscope to see any sense in it. Do you know who that convict is, Blake?"

"Yes, a relation of your esteemed prefect."

"Yes, and Monteith mayn't like it if we start hunting down his relations," said Figgins.

"Oh, rats! The fellow nearly got Monteith into a fearful fix."

"Still, blood's thicker than water, you know."

"Yes; and some heads are thicker than wood!" growled Blake. "Stands to reason that Monteith would be glad to see the awful bounder safely shut up again. Besides, don't you know that the Lower School are confined to the school boundaries till the warders have succeeded in capturing the convict?"

"Oh, I say! Is that a fact?"

"Honour bright!"

Figgins & Co. looked at each other.

"It can't be did!" he said. "The chap's a beast, I know, but we can't start hunting down Monteith's family. Can't be did! Ask Tom Merry."

"Asked him, and the bounder suggested asking you."

"Well, we can't come into it. Better do it alone."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "After all, these New House wottahs pwobably wouldn't be of much use."

"Take that thing away, Blake," said Figgins, pointing to Arthur Augustus; "otherwise I shall probably kill it!"

"I have a stwong objection to being alluded to in that mannah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I came here with fwiendly intentions, but I am afwaid that Figgins' wemark leaves me no alternative but to thwash him!"

Figgins trembled so much that he had to hang on to the shoulder of Fatty Wynn for support. Blake caught the belligerent Gussy by the shoulder and yanked him to the door.

"Come on, Aubrey!"

"I insist upon an apology fwom Figgins befoah I go fwom——"

"Get moving!"

Blake shoved D'Arcy along to the staircase, and ran him down at full speed, with a grip on his collar. Arthur Augustus arrived at the bottom in a rather dazed condition, and not feeling fit to make any further objections.

Figgins & Co. grinned.

"Good wheeze this—hunting the convict!" said Figgins. "I'm sorry we can't take part in it. Blake will never capture him. What are you thinking about, Kerr? You're looking as solemn as a moulting owl!"

"I'm thinking that Blake will be disappointed if he doesn't catch the convict."

"I dare say he will, but——"

"So, like kind schoolmates, we ought to help him."

"What?"

"Not that same convict, of course," explained Kerr. "Any convict will do. It would be a rather good wheeze to let those clever kids discover a mare's nest."

Figgy caught on, and Figgy grinned.

"Good idea! We'll put our heads together and plot a plot."

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, in peaceful unconsciousness of the machinations of their deadly rivals—to borrow another expression from the novelists—sauntered away from the New House, feeling pretty well satisfied with themselves.

"Hallo, there's old Monteith!" said Blake. "I wonder if he knows?"

The head prefect of the New House had just come in at the gates. He was looking very worried, and decidedly bad-tempered.

The chums glanced at him without any intention of giving offence, for none of them would have dreamt of being guilty of meanness in twitting an enemy when he was down.

But Monteith was evidently in a bad temper.

"Get out of the way!" he snapped savagely, giving Blake a shove that sent him staggering against Herries and then to the ground.

"You rotten cad!" rapped out Blake.

Monteith swung round on him.

"What did you say?"

"I said you were a cad," said Blake defiantly, too angry to care for the fact that he was addressing a prefect, "and I say it again!"

Monteith gripped him by the ear.

"Leggo, you rotter!"

Monteith twisted his ear savagely. Blake struggled, but, of course, he was a child in the hands of the Sixth-Former. Herries and D'Arcy were rushing to the rescue, careless of the consequences, when Kildare's cheery voice broke in.

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Monteith.

Kildare's brow grew stern.

"This is my business," he said. "You have no right to touch a School House boy, Monteith, and you know it. Let Blake alone."

"I shall do as I like!"

The captain of St. Jim's stepped towards the prefect, a glint in his eyes.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Monteith, but you've got to let the juniors of the School House alone. You know that as well as I do."

Monteith returned him look for look, but only for a moment. Then, with a sullen scowl, he released Blake and sent him staggering away.

"Very well," he said savagely. "The brat was cheeky to me. You back the juniors up in that."

"I do nothing of the kind. Cut along, you youngsters! I'm sorry to have words with you now, Monteith."

The prefect's eyes gleamed.

"Why now more than at any other time?" he sneered. "You are alluding, of course, to the fact that my cousin is a convict."

Kildare was silent.

"It is like you to throw it in my teeth!" hissed Monteith.

The captain of St. Jim's flushed.

"I would never throw it in your teeth or any fellow's," he said quietly. "It is your misfortune, and I'm sorry for you, Monteith."

"So you say. Bah! I suppose you are glad enough of this disgrace that has fallen on me. I admit that I deserve nothing at your hands. You are right to make as much as you can of it," said Monteith bitterly. "I don't blame you."

"I'm sorry you should think such hard thoughts of me," said the captain of St. Jim's. "I am only sorry for you, and I wouldn't dream of saying a word about it. But I know it's only this trouble on your mind that makes you quarrelsome, and I don't want to quarrel with you."

And, unheeding the bitter words that leaped to the other's lips, Kildare turned and walked away.

"Well," said Blake, rubbing his reddened ear at a safe distance from the prefect, "Monteith is a pleasant sort of beast—I don't think! Never mind, we'll make him sing small when we run one of his family down, kids. His proper place is over yonder with his cousin, in prison, in my opinion.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And from that moment the chums of Study No. 6 were really on the warpath!

CHAPTER 5.
In the Dead of Night.

ONE!

The stroke boomed out from the clock tower at St. Jim's. Dark and gloomy was the old quadrangle, dark the shadowy elms, and not from a single window of the dark, old building gleamed a light.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, opened his door in the dead stillness that followed the boom of the hour. There was no sound in the House. All was dark and silent.

The prefect was very pale in the darkness, and his hand trembled as he stood at the open door, listening like a thief in the night. He was fully dressed. In his hand was a large bag, crammed full of the articles destined for the lurking convict in the Castle Wood.

Silently the prefect stepped from the room and closed the door behind him. He stole down the stairs, shivering at every creak of the wood under his stealthy steps. As head prefect Monteith had a key to the side door, and he let himself out into the quadrangle without difficulty. Under the shadows of the elms he stopped to listen again. The quadrangle was deserted. Where the shadows of the elms fell it was black, but away from the trees there was a glimmer of starlight.

Keeping in the shadows, Monteith stole away to the spot where the high, ivy-clad wall looked out upon Rylcombe Lane. In this spot many a lad from St. Jim's had broken bounds, climbing the wall by the aid of the ivy, and dropping into the lane outside.

It was now the prefect's turn to do what it was his duty to prevent others from doing. Monteith drew a deep breath as he stopped at the foot of the wall. He laid down the bag and fastened a cord to the handle, so that he could draw it up after him when he reached the top of the wall. Suddenly he gave a start and straightened up. A gasp of sudden terror escaped his lips.

"Who—what is that?"

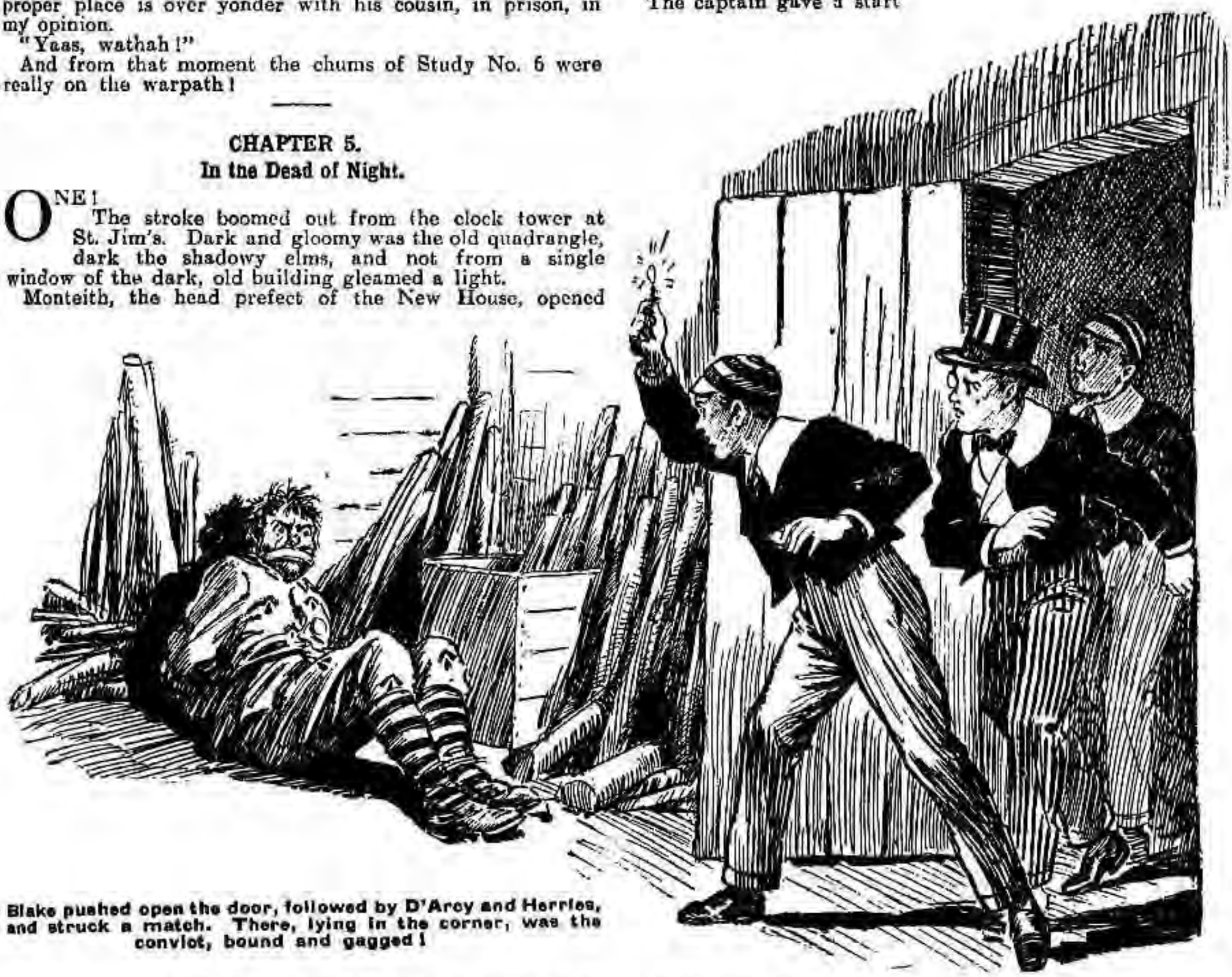
A dim figure loomed up in the darkness. It approached the prefect rapidly. Monteith's first thought was of flight; but he realised that he had been seen, and he stood his ground, his fists clenched hard, his heart beating tumultuously. Was it a master who had caught him in the act of breaking bounds like an irresponsible junior? He trembled

"You need not run," said a cold voice. "I have caught you!"

Monteith drew a gasping breath of relief. It was the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Kildare!"

The captain gave a start



Blake pushed open the door, followed by D'Arcy and Herries, and struck a match. There, lying in the corner, was the convict, bound and gagged!

"Monteith!"

"Yes."

They stood in silence for some moments, staring at each other in the darkness. Both faces were pale.

"So you have spied on me!" said the prefect at last, in a low tone of concentrated bitterness.

Kildare bit his lip.

"I have not spied upon you. I had not the faintest idea that I should find you here."

"Then what are you doing out of your bed at such an hour?" asked the prefect, with evident incredulity.

"You know what the Head's orders were," said Kildare quietly. "Some fellows of St. Jim's have been breaking bounds and going down to a public-house at Rylcombe. The Head gave us both instructions, as head prefects of our Houses, to look into the matter and see that it was stopped, without a scandal, if possible."

"I know all that."

"That is the reason why I am here. I know that this is the spot where the young rascals would leave the school, and I resolved to keep watch for some nights. This is the third night I have watched."

"How do you know that I did not make the same resolve?" said Monteith, with a sneer. "Perhaps I am doing sentry work myself."

"You were about to climb the wall."

"That is your opinion."

"You do not carry a bag with you on sentry work, as you call it, I suppose," said Kildare. "You were going to leave the school, Monteith, and I can only conclude——"

"What do you conclude?"

"That you are one of the fellows that the Head told me to look out for."

The prefect set his teeth.

"You think I am going down to the Green Man in Rylcombe, then?"

"What else can I think?"

"Well, you are wrong."

"I should be sorry to believe such a thing of you, Monteith. I would do anything to avoid a scandal—such a scandal as a head prefect being discovered breaking bounds at night. I should like to believe the best of you."

"Thank you!" said Monteith bitterly.

"If you will give me your word not to leave the school," said Kildare slowly, "I will let this pass, and say no more about it."

"You are very kind."

"Do you agree? I believe I am going farther than I have a right to go, as captain of the school, considering the trust the Head reposes in me."

Monteith was silent. Kildare waited a full minute for him to reply.

"Well, what do you say?" he asked. "Will you return to the New House and give your word not to quit it again to-night?"

"I cannot."

"Monteith! Think! An exposure can only ruin you—you will lose your prefectship, even if you are not expelled from St. Jim's."

"A thing you would be sorry for, no doubt."

"Extremely sorry," said the captain quietly. "I had hoped lately, Monteith, that we were getting on better terms, and that the old ill-feeling was dying away. If we are enemies, it shall not be my fault."

"Leave me alone then—leave me to myself."

"You know that I have my duty to do."

"I must leave the school."

"Do you mean that you have an appointment with someone at this hour?"

"Yes; but it is not as you suppose."

"I have my duty to do; I cannot betray the Head's trust in me. You cannot go, Monteith."

"Do you mean to say that you will prevent me?" demanded the prefect, his breath coming thick and fast.

"Yes."

Monteith gritted his teeth. He was no coward, but he knew that he was no match for the stalwart captain of St. Jim's. He had faced Kildare in strife before, and had been hopelessly worsted. Besides, a struggle at midnight, in the quadrangle, would cause a disturbance, and all would be lost. He reflected quickly.

The convict was waiting in the wood; he must go to him to-night. There was nothing for it but to tell Kildare the facts, and throw himself upon the captain's mercy. It was a strange step to take. For when Kildare had been under the shadow of a secret, when his brother under a wrongful suspicion had been hiding from the police, and Monteith had discovered the secret, he had used it cruelly and mercilessly.

The case was reversed now. And would Kildare prove more generous? Was it to be expected? It was Monteith's only chance.

"Kildare!" The prefect's voice was low and husky. "You don't understand. I must go. Listen to me! Do you remember the time when your brother was a fugitive from justice—when he was hiding from the police in the ruined castle, and you went there to help him?"

Kildare started.

"Yes, I am not likely to forget."

"You know that when his innocence was proved, my cousin Ralph went to prison for the crime. You know that Ralph has escaped from the prison?"

Again the captain of St. Jim's started.

"And what of that?"

"To-day," said Monteith huskily, "I met him in the wood."

"You met him?"

"Yes, and he asked me to help him."

"Good heavens!"

"You stood by your brother when all the world was against him. Can you blame me for standing by one of my own blood?"

Kildare was silent. He knew the cases were very different. Micky Kildare had been innocent, and Ralph Monteith was guilty. Yet, even if Micky had been guilty, would he have deserted him? It was a painful question.

"I'm going to meet him, to take him the things he needs to escape," said Monteith hurriedly. "I throw myself upon your mercy, Kildare. Yes, I know what use I made of your secret when I discovered it. I acted like a cad. I was a cad. I have no right to expect anything but retaliation from you. Yet——"

"I have no desire to retaliate," said Kildare quietly. "But have you reflected, Monteith—this man is a rascal, and nearly got you into a fearful fix, and he fully deserves his punishment, and it is a punishable offence to help a convict to escape?"

"You did not think of that?"

The captain of St. Jim's was silent again. His generous heart was full of compassion for the prefect, and he was far from harbouring any thought of revenge for a past injury.

"You know now," said the prefect, "why I am going out. It is not for the purpose that you supposed, and it is not your duty to stop me. Kildare, I make an appeal to you—as I never dreamed I should do. Let me go—keep silent, and let me go to help that wretch to escape. I cannot let him go back to prison. Help me in this, and I shall never forget it!"

"He does not deserve——"

"I have promised."

"You have promised to help him?"

"Yes."

"That alters the case. I consider you are rash; but I know how you feel about the matter. I will not stand in your way. I hope that I am not doing wrong. You can go."

"Thank you!" said the prefect huskily. "I shan't forget this, Kildare."

The captain nodded, and turning, disappeared into the darkness. A minute more and Monteith was over the wall and speeding along the dark lane towards the wood.

CHAPTER 6.

Plot and Counter-Plot.

TOM MERRY gave a soft whistle. It was morning at St. Jim's—a sunny morning—and school being over, the hero of the Shell was strolling in the quadrangle with his hands in his pockets.

Tom Merry was feeling very preoccupied. Blake and his chums were busy with planning their convict hunt, and Tom was extremely exasperated not to be able to join it. His promise to Monteith, given the day before, weighed on his mind. He felt that it would relieve him to have a row with the New House juniors, and so he had strolled over to the rival side.

Then he caught sight of Kerr. As a rule there was nothing remarkable in the appearance of the Scottish partner in the famous firm of Figgins & Co.; but just now Kerr's conduct was suspicious. He had a brown-paper parcel in his hand, and he was stealing quietly into the woodshed; and as he went in he gave a cautious glance round. He did not happen to see Tom, who was on the other side of a big elm, behind which he quickly dodged as he saw Kerr looking round. Then Kerr disappeared into the woodshed. Tom Merry grinned. That something was up was evident from Kerr's mysterious manner, and it did not take him long to decide that he was going to know what it was.

He remained in ambush behind the elm, keeping watch, and was not surprised to see Fatty Wynn coming quietly down to the shed. Fatty also glanced round before going in. Then he disappeared after Kerr. A minute or two later the great Figgins himself came out.

Figgins, like the Co., looked round before entering, and the last of the great firm being in the shed, Tom Merry judged that the meeting was complete. He left his ambush and stole quietly towards the shed. He knew that building well enough, and in a minute or two was behind it, concealed from casual observation, with his eye glued to a crack that gave him a full view of the interior.

Tom Merry looked in with considerable interest. Kerr was unfastening his brown-paper parcel, and Figgins and Wynn were watching him. Tom Merry watched, too, to see what would come of it.

"Got 'em all right?" asked Figgins.

"Yes, I think they are A1," remarked Kerr. "Look!"

Tom Merry started as he saw what Kerr extracted from the parcel and held up for general inspection. It was a suit of clothes, such as convicts wear, marked with the Government broad arrows, and not in a very cleanly condition.

"Jolly good!" said Figgins. "When Tom Merry is rigged out in that little lot the convict hunters from the School House will capture a prize!"

The Co. chuckled. Tom Merry was astounded for a moment. Then a broad grin overspread his features. He

understood the wheeze which Figgins & Co. had planned, and he looked on with interest to learn some details of it.

"I've got the cap, and the boots also," said Kerr. "The whole rig-out's complete. I've agreed to pay ten bob for the hire of things, and to return 'em undamaged. They're wanted for a fancy dress ball next week, old Phillips told me."

"They may get damaged a bit," said Figgins. "Never mind; ten bob's a good figure. But I don't grudge it for this wheeze."

"Rather not!"

"Have you got the make-up and all that? It's no good passing off Tom Merry as a giddy convict without disguising his mug a little."

"I've got it all here. We shall have to fix this gag in his mouth, so that he can't explain, and tie his hands behind his back. Then I'll make up his face and fix a false moustache on, and blue his chin to make him look as if he wants shaving. It will be pretty dusky here, and he'll pass all right."

"Good! Better get those things hidden here somewhere. We shall want them on the spot when we capture the School House bounder."

"I'm going to shove them under that pile of wood," said Kerr. "Everything's there—the make-up, the rope, and the gag; the clothes, boots, and cap, and some old clothes for padding him out to the size of the suit. It's a man's suit, you see, and will be a bit loose on him."

"I'm sure it will work," said Figgins, rubbing his hands, "if only the beastly convict isn't captured before we have time to work it. I hear that the police have drawn a cordon about the Castle Wood, and that the giddy convict can't possibly escape them now. It's only a question of time before he's caught."

"Well, if he's caught to-day we shan't get the news here," said Kerr. "Blake will make his capture to-day."

"But how are you going to fix it?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"That will want a bit of thinking out," said Figgins reflectively. "We've got to get Tom Merry alone, somehow, without that bounder Manners. When he's here we'll collar him, and the trick is done. Then we let out, accidentally, before Blake, that we've captured the convict and are going for the police. If I know anything about Blake, he'll raid the woodshed and carry off our prisoner for himself. That's the game. But how to get Tom Merry here—that's the question."

The Co. looked thoughtful.

"Ask him to come and look at a dog," said Kerr at last. "He'll come right enough, and we two will be hidden here, ready to jump on his neck."

"Good wheeze!" agreed Figgins. "You two can hide here some time beforehand, so that no suspicion can be raised, and I'll undertake to get Tom Merry on the spot. It seems to me that it will be all plain sailing. We'll work the wheeze after tea."

"That's settled then."

"Shove those things well out of sight, Kerr. We don't want 'em lifted by any chap who happens to come into the shed."

"That's all right."

"I'll tip Taggles a bob to see that we're not interrupted. He'll be jolly glad of a chance to help us take Tom Merry and Blake down a peg or two. That's settled, kids, so come on. We don't want to be found here."

Kerr's invaluable parcel having been carefully concealed, the three New House juniors quitted the woodshed, chuckling over their plot. Tom Merry was also chuckling, but silently. But for a stroke of luck he would certainly have been taken by surprise that evening by Figgins & Co., and would have figured in the most ridiculous scene imaginable, and the New House would have the laugh of both parties of the School House, the Terrible Two and Study No. 6 coming in for equal shares of the ridicule.

But it had already occurred to Tom Merry's brain that forewarned is forearmed, and that it would be possible to turn the tables on Figgins & Co. He waited till the New House trio were well off the scene, and then stole from

(*Continued on next page.*)

The heat of the game

SWOTTING is over, so now for it! Put a piece of Wrigley's in your mouth, it keeps you going, alert and ready. The pure cool flavour refreshes and steadies you, enabling you to put your best into the game.

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RL 23

his hiding-place and made a bee-line for the School House. Manners was in the study, and Tom Merry astounded him by rushing in like a whirlwind, seizing him round the neck, and executing an impromptu war-dance round the table with him.

"What's the row?" yelled Manners, struggling. "Gone off your rocker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme go!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo! Are you off your dot? Lemme go, fathead!"

Tom Merry let him go, so suddenly that he sat down on the carpet.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners picked himself up.

"Now, what's the matter, you howling lunatic?"

"The joke of the season! Ha, ha, ha! Listen, and I will a tale unfold, whose lightest word will harrow——"

"Dry up! Amateur theatricals are off!"

"Right-ho! Well, shut the door and your head, and listen. You know that Study No. 6 are going on a convict hunt? Good! Well, Figgins & Co. are going to capture a convict and leave him in the woodshed for Blake to sneak away from them. They've got a rig-out from the costumier's in Rylcombe, and they're going to capture a chap to stick into it. Who do you think?"

Manners looked keenly interested.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Me!" said Tom Merry. "Me! I! Ego! Moi!"

"You? How the dickens do you know?"

"I heard 'em plotting the plot, planning the plan, and scheming the scheme. I am to be made up as the convict, bound and gagged, and left till called for, so to speak."

"Jolly good wheeze! But as you've got wind of it, it won't work."

"Yes, it will. It will work like a charm."

"You don't mean to say you're going——"

"Peace, child, and listen. Figgins is going to lure me to the woodshed with the tale of a dog——"

"The tail of a dog? What on earth has the tail of a dog got to do with it?"

"Fathead! T-a-l-e of a dog. A dog he wants me to see."

"See? Yes, I see—see."

"Kerr and Fatty Wynn are going to be ambushed there, and they'll seize me, and the wheeze is worked. But I have thought of an improvement on the plan."

"Ha, ha! I think I can guess what it is."

"We are going to turn the tables on old Figgy. Blake will capture the convict, but it will turn out to be a long-legged specimen from the New House instead of yours truly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, there! What's all this cackling about?"

Blake looked into the study and asked the question. He eyed the chums of the Shell in amazement.

"Nothing," said Tom Merry. "We were discussing your convict-hunt, that's all."

"Oh, were you?" said Blake, reddening. "Nothing to cackle about in that, that I can see."

"That's all you know. Have you caught any convicts yet?"

"Not yet."

"But you're going to, of course?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Yes; we're going to, you see."

"You'll have to keep an eye on Figgins, then?"

Blake stared.

"Figgins refused to join in the game," he said.

"That's because he's going in for convict-capturing himself."

"Is he?" said Blake, looking warlike. "If he starts capturing any of my convicts there will be ructions."

"Well, I've given you the tip. Suppose he captures this bounder——"

"Then he'll get a thick ear, that's all. I'm not going to have my good ideas boned in this way by a New House outsider!" said Blake wrathfully.

"My ideah, you mean, Blake, weally!" came a voice from the passage.

"Oh, dry up, Aubrey!"

"I wefuse to dwy up when I heah any person claimin' my ideahs as his own!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is bettah to stick to the twuth!"

"Oh, travel along!" said Blake. "I'll remember what you've told me, Tom Merry. Let Figgins try to capture my convict, that's all!"

And Blake departed, looking extremely fierce. The Terrible Two roared with laughter.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "This looks like being the wheeze of the season, and no mistake. Blake means business, and he is certain to capture somebody or other. I only hope that he will be pleased with his capture."

CHAPTER 7.

The Trapper Trapped.

DUSK was falling on the old school when Figgins & Co. came cautiously towards the woodshed and slipped inside. There was no one near at hand to see them, but Figgins was always cautious.

The New House trio looked keenly round the little building, the interior of which was shadowy. All was silent and still. At that hour no one was likely to come there but Taggles, and Taggles had been bribed by Figgins to keep away.

"All serene!" said Figgins. "Now get out of sight, you two kids, while I go and lure the high-mightiness Tom Merry into the giddy trap."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr. "Mind you don't bring Manners along with you. Those two fellows are always sticking together."

"Oh, that's all right! I heard Manners say that he was going into the gym, so Tom Merry is pretty certain to be alone in his study."

"Good luck!"

"Buck up, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn. "We shall be anxious."

"I may be a little time; I can't let Tom Merry smell a rat by hurrying," said Figgins. "He may not be in the study, either, or he may be doing an impot. Just you wait here till I come back, and be ready to jump on his neck."

And the great Figgins quitted the woodshed. Kerr and Wynn lost no time in selecting their ambush. In a recess behind a great heap of faggots they drew into the darkness and waited. They did not see two heads emerge from behind a pile of wood, and did not guess that two keen pairs of eyes were watching them.

They were watching the door, waiting for Figgins' return, and never dreaming of peril behind them. But peril undreamt of was very close at hand.

Suddenly, without a sound to warn them, two forms

Potts, the Office-Boy.

leaped upon them, and they were borne to the ground in a twinkling. Kerr gave a startled yell, which was choked by his face flattening into the ground. Fatty Wynn could only gasp.

"Got them!" said a well-known voice.

Kerr wriggled with rage.

"Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Caught!" said Manners, who was pinning down Fatty Wynn. "Caught!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Yes, so I will, presently."

Kerr struggled desperately. He realised that the "wheeze" must have become known to the Terrible Two, and that they had preceded their foes in the woodshed, and waited in ambush for the arrival of Figgins & Co. But Kerr struggled in vain. Tom Merry held him down with a grip of iron, and Kerr, lying face downwards, was at too great a disadvantage, with Tom sitting on his back, to put up much of a struggle. He was desperate, but he was helpless.

"Let me go, you rotter!"

"Rats!" said Tom cheerfully.

"Figgins will be back in a minute, and——"

"No, he won't! Figgy is gone to speak to me in my study, and he won't come back till he's found me," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

Kerr gasped.

"What are you going to do?"

"Make you prisoners. Now, if you struggle you will very likely get hurt. I want your hands, please, to tie up."

Kerr opened his mouth to yell, in the faint hope that one of his comrades in the New House might hear him; but Tom promptly pressed the back of his head, and the yell was choked off against the floor.

"Better keep quiet," said Tom Merry, with the tone of one giving friendly advice. "That can't be improving your nose, you know."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Is that a new language you talk in the New House?"

"Woooroo-g-g-g-r-r-r!"

"Blessed if I know what you're talking about! Anyway, I want your hands."

Tom Merry had drawn a looped cord from his pocket. He drew Kerr's hands up behind the helpless New House junior, and fastened the wrists together firmly. Then he turned round, and, still sitting on Kerr, bound his legs together with a liberal allowance of rope.

"Now for the gag!"

He rolled Kerr over on his back.

"Don't you dare to—— Gr-r-r-r!"

Kerr's protests died away as the handkerchief was thrust into his mouth, and Tom Merry proceeded to fasten it there with a cord round the back of his head.

"I dare say this is a little bit uncomfy," Tom remarked, "but you can't really grumble, kids, as you intended the same thing for me."

"He can't grumble with that gag in his mouth, anyway," said Manners.

"Ha, ha, no! Now let's fasten up Falstaff!"

Manners had held Fatty Wynn pinned down while Kerr was being disposed of. Between them the Terrible Two soon had Fatty served the same as his fellow-member of the Co.

"Good!" said Tom Merry, surveying his prisoners with satisfaction. "It is really lucky that Figgins sported a bob in keeping Taggles away. Now we shan't be interrupted."

Manners chuckled gleefully.

"Let's get along with 'em!"

Adjoining the woodshed, with a brick-wall between, was a shed where Taggles kept spades and other tools used in his gardening work. It did not take long for the Terrible Two to drag their prisoners into that building, and they were laid upon the floor. To make assurance doubly sure, Tom fastened them both with cord to a wheelbarrow. Then the Terrible Two locked the door on them, and returned to the wood-shed. Tom Merry chuckled hugely.

"Now we've got rid of the Co.," he remarked, "it's time to deal with old Figgins. Get into the ambush, Manners, old son! When I come in here with Figgy, instead of the Co. jumping on my neck, as he expects, you'll jump on Figgy's. That's the programme. It will probably be a bit of a surprise for Figgy; but life is full of surprises."

And Tom Merry quitted the woodshed, leaving Manners in ambush. He strolled into the gym, and then went to the School House and ascended to his study. The light was on, and Figgins was sitting on his table, waiting impatiently. He looked at Tom as he came in, and Tom looked at him.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry.

"Glad you've come!" growled Figgins. "Where have you been?"

"I've just come from the gym," said Tom, with perfect truth.

"Oh! Well, I want to speak to you."

"Speak away, Figgy! I'm listening."

"Would you like to see a dog—such a funny little critter?" said Figgins. Figgins, like Tom, was a stickler for the truth, and he was careful not to say that he had a dog to show. He simply asked Tom Merry if he would like to see one, which, of course, was quite a different matter.

But he found the hero of the Shell in a singularly unsuspicious mood.

"That I would!" said Tom.

"Will you come down to the woodshed with me?"

"Rather!"

Figgins grinned to himself as he slid off the table. He was in luck; he had not expected Tom Merry to fall into the trap so easily as this.

"Come on, then," he said briskly.

"Right you are!"

And the two juniors went downstairs together, and out into the quadrangle.

"Race you to the woodshed?" said Figgins.

"Right-ho!"

Again Figgins grinned. This was a cute move to get out of any awkward questions about the dog on the way, and again Tom Merry had fallen blindly into the trap. They raced to the woodshed. Tom was there first. He stepped inside and uttered an exclamation.

"It's all dark in here, Figgy!"

Figgins followed him in.

"So it is; but we'll have a light soon."

"Where's the dog?"

"There isn't any dog, kid. I never said there was. There's a donkey, though, and his name is Tom Merry! Come on, chaps!"

Ang Figgins gripped hold of Tom Merry.

Tom returned grip for grip, and they struggled. Tom

Grand Slam!

was fully a match even for the great Figgins, and the result of that tussle would have been very doubtful had no one been at hand to interfere. But there was a footstep in the darkness, and Figgins had no doubt that the loyal Co. were there to back him up.

"Come on!" he gasped. "The beast's as strong as a horse!"

The unseen individual came on and laid a strong grasp on Figgins. The chief of the famous firm of Figgins & Co. gave a yell.

"You've got hold of me, ass! Collar Tom Merry!"

"Not this time," said the voice of Manners.

Figgins jumped.

"Manners! Where's the Co.? I say, Kerr! Wynn! Rescue!"

But there was no rescue at hand for the trapped Figgins. Down he went to the floor, with Tom Merry on top of him and Manners clutching him, and in a minute he was a helpless prisoner, under the grasp of the Terrible Two.

"Quick, Manners! The rope!"

Figgins tried to yell.

But Tom Merry's hand was over his mouth in a twinkling.

He gurgled and gasped and struggled, but he was powerless, and in a few minutes Manners had tied his hands and feet.

Then the gag was placed in his mouth and neatly tied there.

"Feel all right, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Very well! As you don't answer, I suppose you're all serene. Get a glim, Manners!"

"Here you are!"

Manners lighted a bicycle lamp. The door of the shed was carefully closed to keep the light hidden. There was a shutter over the window, so hardly a gleam could escape that way. The light glimmered on Figgins' furious face. He was watching the Terrible Two with a painful interest, and his eyes nearly bulged from his head when he saw Tom Merry drag Kerr's precious parcel from its place of concealment.

A foreboding of what was to come struck him now.

Tom opened the parcel and pulled out the prison clothes. He grinned as he sorted them out.

"Now, Figgy, are you ready?"

Figgins made no reply, for an excellent reason.

"We happen to have tumbled to your little game, Figgy," Tom Merry condescended to explain. "We're going to rig you up as a convict for Blake to capture."

Figgins wriggled convulsively.

"The Co. are tied up in the gardener's shed, and they can't rescue you. We've got you in a cleft stick. It's what you planned for me, so you've got nothing to complain about—have you?"

Figgins glared.

"Now, we're going to dress you, and you may get hurt if you struggle. That's a warning! If you are quiet, we'll treat you like the apple of our eye. His legs first, Manners!"

Figgins' legs were untied. He began to kick violently, but each of the School House juniors clung to a leg, and he was helpless. His boots were taken off, and then the convict's knickers were slipped on him over his trousers, which were rolled up over his knees. The knickers secured, the barred stockings were placed on him and padded out to look fatter, Figgins' calves being of the slimmest. The boots provided by Kerr were next placed on his feet, and then his ankles were firmly tied together again.

Figgins looked as if he would explode with wrath, but he was perforce silent. He could only summon what philosophy he could muster and be as patient as possible.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "The lower half of you, Figgy, looks a fearful ruffian! Untie his arms, Manners, old man!"

Figgins prepared for a desperate struggle.

But the Terrible Two were too many for him. His arms were unfastened, but he hadn't much chance to hit out. The hideous convict's garb was forced upon him and secured, and then his arms were fastened again down to his sides.

Tom Merry began to prepare the make-up. During a period of amateur theatricals at St. Jim's Tom had learned a great deal of the art of making up, and now he did his work almost as artistically as Kerr could have done it.

Figgins squirmed in vain.

His complexion was turned to a deep red, and a blue, unshaven appearance was imparted to his cheeks and chin.

His nose was reddened, his eyebrows darkened, and a thick false moustache gummed securely to his upper lip.

Tom Merry was startled himself by the change these artistic touches wrought in the aspect of the great Figgins.

Figgy was transformed into a fearful-looking ruffian, whom any peaceful person would have avoided in a lonely place.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Manners. "Is that really Figgy, or is it Bill Sykes? Figgy, is it really you, old man?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Jam that gag a little tighter!"

"Gr-r-r——"

"Now I think that will do!" said Tom Merry. "Douse the glim! Now for the capture! Good-bye, Bluebell! You won't have to remain there long, Blake and Study No. 6 are coming to deliver you to justice, you hardened ruffian."

And the Terrible Two quitted the woodshed.

As Herries gave the policeman a shove, Blake whipped up Taggles' pony and the trap went rattling down the road at a great pace.

Figgins heard a chuckle die away, a door close.

He was alone!

Alone, to wait for the coming of his old rivals—Study No. 6! He wriggled and squirmed in the gloom, but he could not wriggle or squirm himself loose. Figgins was fairly caught in his own trap this time!

CHAPTER 8.

A Brilliant Capture.

"REALLY, Blake, I think we ought to be doin' somethin' or othah, don't you know!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who made that sage remark.

The chums were in the school tuckshop, and Blake had expended the sum of ninepence in tarts, which the three had just finished consuming.

It was then that Arthur Augustus delivered himself of the opinion stated above.

Blake looked at him.

"What do you want to do, Gussy?"

Blake was leaning against the doorpost. The door was half open, and he could hear a murmur of voices in the passage, but he was not paying any attention to it.

"Well, we ought to be huntin' that convict, you know! What's the good of formin' a plan and then doin' nothin' to carry it out, deah boy?"

"Not much good, certainly. What's your idea?"

"Suppose we bweak bounds to-night and go and hunt the boundah!"

"No good," said Herries. "Don't you know the police have drawn a cordon right round the wood, where he's supposed to be, from the old castle to Rylcombe Lane? We couldn't even get into the wood without being stopped."

"He may not be in the wood at all."

"Where do you think he might be?"

"Anywheah!" said D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy and Mannahs will have the laugh of us if we don't hunt that despewate chawactah, aftah all! Yaas, wathah!"

Blake nodded.

"I've been trying to think out a plan," he said. "I——"

He stopped suddenly.

His chums stared at him in surprise.

"Well——" began Herries.

Blake made a sign to be silent.

Herries and D'Arcy were amazed, but they were obedient. They watched Blake, and Blake's eyes were blazing with sudden excitement.

For, as he stood there, leaning against the doorpost, through the crack of the door had come the clear words from the passage, distinctly audible:

"Figgins has done Study No. 6 this time!"

And Blake jumped.

It was the voice of Tom Merry!

"You're sure, Tom?" said the familiar voice of Manners.

"Rather! I went down to the woodshed with Figgy. Blake saw us go, but he never guessed what was in the wind!"

"Ha, ha!"

"The question is: Ought we to tell Blake?"

"No; we have no right to give Figgy away!"

"Well, you see, it was Study No. 6's idea to capture the convict, and the prisoner in the woodshed really belongs to them by rights."

"Yes, but if Figgins & Co. had the trouble of capturing him, they ought to have the glory. Blake shouldn't be so slow!"

"Well, that's right! He is slow, and no mistake! Fancy him not guessing that the convict would come here for Monteith to hide him!"

"Figgins must have guessed it."

"Of course! Figgy is sharp! He will crow over Blake! Quite right, too! Study No. 6 are out of it this time, and no mistake!"

"I suppose we ought to keep it dark. It wouldn't be fair for Figgins & Co. to find their prisoner gone when they come back to take him away to the police station."

"Certainly not! We won't say a word. Besides, Figgy relies upon us."

"Then mum's the word!"

The voices moved on. The Terrible Two passed on up the passage. Blake was quivering from head to foot with excitement.

His chums had heard Tom Merry's voice but not his words. They stared at Blake in amazement and inquiry.

"Do you catch on?" breathed Blake. "Figgins & Co. have caught the convict. He came here for Monteith to hide him, and they have caught him and fastened him in the woodshed, while they've gone to Rylcombe to fetch a conveyance to take him to the police station."

"Great Scott!"

"They won't find him when they get back," said Blake determinedly. "We're not going to be robbed of our glory by those barefaced bounders."

"We'll collah the beastly convict!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"You bet."

"I suppose there's no hoax about it, Blake?"

"We'll soon see by looking in the woodshed."

"Good! That's easy enough!"

"Come along! We're not going to let the grass grow under our feet. Who'd ever have dreamed that the fellow would have the awful nerve to come here to hide? Figgins & Co. ought to have told us! They have no right to collar our convict!"

"I should wathah think not!"

"He's ours! We had the idea first!"

"Excuse me, Blake, but weally it was my ideah!"

"Dry up. It was our idea, and in the innocence of our hearts we told Figgins. Now he's boned the idea and collared our convict. It's mean!"

"It's not playing the game," said Herries.

"No; that it isn't! Figgy won't find any convict there when he gets back, that's all. That convict is ours."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll just look into the woodshed to make sure that all is serene, and then we'll collar the prisoner and walk him off!"

"What shall we do with him?"

"Take him to Rylcombe and give him to the police, of course! It will make a bit of a sensation."

"How shall we get the boundah to go to Rylcombe?"

"By Jove! I've got a good idea! We'll have Taggles' trap. We'll tell him what it's for, so he's certain to lend it us. You see, we can't risk losing the convict, or there's all our glory gone. If we tried to walk him to Rylcombe some silly bobby would see him and take him away from us, and make out he captured him. If we gave him up here at St. Jim's, the masters would take charge of the whole matter, and we should be left right out in the cold. You may be sure of that!"

"Yaas, wathah! They wouldn't give us the pwoper cwedit."

"Besides, Figgins & Co. would claim him as their own prisoner."

"They've got cheek enough for anythin', those boundahs."

"So we'll make all secure by taking him to Rylcombe ourselves. We shall have to square Taggles with a few bob. Gussy can stand that, as he's rolling in wealth, and it's his idea. Gussy can square Taggles."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then!"

The chums of Study No. 6 speedily reached the woodshed. Blake cautiously opened the door and peeped within. He heard a faint sound as of a body wriggling on the ground. He struck a match. Then he gave quite a jump, and his chums behind him jumped, too.

The flare of the match revealed that the affair was no hoax. There, on the floor, bound hand and foot, lay a fearful-looking ruffian, in the garb of a convict. The match went out. Blake withdrew from the woodshed and closed the door. He was shaking with excitement.

"You saw, kids?"

"I saw him," said Herries, with a shiver. "What a horrible-looking brute!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He doesn't look like a prize beauty, I know," assented Blake. "They've fastened him up for safety, and they seemed to have gagged him. They were afraid that if he made a noise we should be on the track. It's all plain sailing now, kids. Gussy, go and negotiate with Taggles. It doesn't matter how much you have to give him—we must have the trap!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Give him all you've got, and promise him your next week's pocket-money—anything you like," said Blake generously. "Only get the trap, and make him keep the gates open till we've gone. Cut off, and be quick!"

"I will wun all the way!"

And the swell of the School House cut off. Blake and Herries remained near the woodshed. They were on guard, fully determined that if Figgins & Co. appeared there

should be a desperate fight for the possession of the convict. Two forms loomed up in the gloom.

"Hallo, Blake! Hallo, Herries!"

"Hallo, Tom Merry!"

"What are you hanging about here for?"

"Mind your own business!" said Blake. "Don't ask any questions, and we won't tell you any fibs! Get moving!"

"But——"

"Oh, travel! Your face worries me!"

"Where's Adolphus?"

"I dare say he's attending to his own business somewhere."

"Look here——"

"Shan't! Rats! Are you looking for trouble? If you're not, you'd better get along before you find some."

"Keep your wool on, Blake," said Tom Merry. "How touchy you are this evening!"

"Are you going along?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then do so!"

The Terrible Two strolled on. They passed behind the side of a building, and then they stopped and leaned against a wall and gasped with silent laughter.

"It works—it works!" murmured Tom Merry. "Blake and Herries are on sentry duty over the woodshed. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder where Gussy is?"

"Perhaps they're waiting for him before they bring the prisoner out. Oh, my hat! There is some fun in store!"

And the Terrible Two, with shaking sides, strolled onward. Blake was looking after them in the gloom.

"I believe those bounders suspect something!" he growled. "They'd better not try to get our convict away, that's all!"

"Hallo, here's Gussy!"

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The swell of St. Jim's returned breathless.

"It's all wight!" he gasped. "Taggles has agweed. He began to laugh when I asked him for the twap to take the convict to Wylcombe—I don't know why."

"Perhaps it was your face!" suggested Blake politely. "Go on!"

"That is an extwemely wude wemark——"

"Oh, go on!"

"I wefuse to go on till you have apologised for that wude wemark!

"Ass! Fathead! Minutes are precious!"

"If minutes were as pwecious as gold, Blake, I should wefuse to be addwessed in that mannah! Unless you apologise I will take no furthah part in the mattah!"

"Idiot! Imbecile! Owl!"

"I am waiting for your apology, deah boy! I wefuse to weconsidah my decision."

"Ass! Lunatic!"

"You are gwoin' wudah and wudah, and unless you immediately withdwaw those expwessions I shall have no alternative but to leave you, and cease to wegard you as a fwiend!"

"Gussy!" said Blake, breathing hard. "If you're found suddenly dead some time you'll know the reason—I mean, your relations will know the reason."

"I have not yet weceived my apology.

"Don't argue, Blake! He'll keep that up all night," said Herries. "There's no time to lose. Figgins & Co. may be here at any minute."

"Look here, Aubrey——"

"I wefuse to do anything of the sort till I have my apology."

"I withdraw all those expressions, and trust that you will allow our friendship to resume its former footing," said Blake solemnly.

"I am satisfied, Blake, and I wegard you as a fwiend," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, to wesume what I was telling you—Taggles has agweed. He is puttin' the pony in the twap for a considewation of a pound, which I have given him."

"The horrid old extortioner!"

"He says he may get into a wow with the Head."

"I hope he will, the horrid Shylock!"

"It is all wight. I had a fivah fwom my governah yesterday, and I am wolling in tin," said D'Arcy. "It is all wight. The twap should be weady in a few minutes, Taggles said, and we've only to get the pwisonah in it."

"Taggles might come and lend us a hand."

"No, he won't! I asked him, and he said he wouldn't have a hand in it at all. He's afwaid of the wuffian, I suppose."

"Well, we can do without his help! Hallo, there's the trap ready outside his lodge. I can see the lights. Let's get the convict!"

The trap was waiting. Blake was a good driver, and had frequently driven Taggles' trap, so the old fellow was not afraid to trust him with the pony. And the loan of the trap for an hour was a very easy way of earning a sovereign.

The three juniors re-entered the woodshed. They came out again with their prisoner in their midst. Between the three of them he was easily carried, specially as his weight was nothing like what one would have expected from his size.

He struggled a little, but they took no notice of that. No one was about, and in a few minutes he was plumped into the trap and a cloth thrown over him, and Blake unhitched the pony and led it out into the road. Then he mounted into the trap and gathered up the reins. Herries and D'Arcy sat close to the prisoner, holding him in case of any attempt on the convict's part to throw himself out of the trap.

Blake cracked the whip, and the trap went bowling along the lane, bound for the police station at Ryleombe.

CHAPTER 9.
After the Capture.

"MY hat!"

Tom Merry uttered the exclamation suddenly.

"What's the matter?" asked Manners.

"Did you see the trap go out? I believe—— My only pyjama hat!"

Tom Merry did not stop to finish, but ran quickly down to the gates. Taggles was looking out of his window, and he gave a gasp at the sight of Tom Merry.

"I say, Taggles!"

"Master Merry!"

"Do you think I'm a ghost, fathead? What's the matter with you?"

"Master Merry!"

"You ass! Who's gone off in that trap?"

"I thought it was—was you the young rascals had there!" gasped Taggles. "I—I——"

"Ha, ha! Do you mean Blake's prisoner? So you know all about the little game?"

"I—I—no——"

"Don't prevaricate, Taggles! I see you knew that game from start to finish, and you let those kids from Study No. 6 carry out the wicked plot because you thought it was up against me!" exclaimed Tom Merry severely.

"I—I——"

"I'm ashamed of you, Taggles! If you go on like this I shan't remember you in my will, and then what will you do for your old age?" demanded Tom Merry.

Taggles recovered himself.

"But I wonder——"

"You needn't wonder any more. It's Figgins they've got in the trap."

"Figgins?" gasped Taggles.

"Yes. We found out the wheeze, you see, and turned the tables on Figgins. But I never thought those kids would take him out of the school. My hat! I thought they'd give him up to the Housemaster to be sent away, and then the joke would come out."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. "Fancy old Figgins being given up at the police station as a desperate ruffian!"

"I say, we must stop them!" gasped Tom. "Go and get our bikes out, Manners, while I let the Co. loose."

"Right-ho!"

Manners shot off, while Tom Merry proceeded with equal speed to the gardening-shed, where the unhappy Co. languished in durance vile. Tom soon released them by the light of a match.

"Pax, kids!" he exclaimed. "We've got to rescue old Figgy!"

The Co. were looking extremely inclined to go for the School House junior, but Tom Merry's words made them refrain.

"What's the matter with Figgins?"

Tom explained. The Co. gasped in amazement.

"And has that ass Blake really carried him off from the school?" exclaimed Kerr.

"Yes; in Taggles' trap."

"Poor old Figgy!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose that's what they would have done if the wheeze had worked as you intended and I had been the giddy prisoner."

"You made him up as a convict?"

"Yes; and he looks a frightful character."

"Ha, ha! Poor old Figgy! It's up against him this time, and no mistake!" gurgled Fatty Wynn. "Well, he can't grumble. It's his own wheeze, only it's worked a little wrongly."

"I'm going to have a try to save him," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you coming?"

"Yes. But we can't get out. It's locking-up time."

"If Taggles dares to close the gates, we'll snatch him bald-headed. But he won't. He would get into a row with the Head if we gave him away."

"That's so, I suppose."

Manners' whistle was heard.

"Hallo! There's Manners, with our bikes. You'd better get your machines and follow on."

"Rather!"

"I say, what's all this row about?"

It was Monteith's voice. A few moments later, Taggles stared at the head prefect of the New House. He was about to blurt out the facts when he remembered the tale he had to tell to save himself from blame. If he had not believed the prisoner to be the real convict, he certainly had no right to let Blake have the trap, and he pitched his tale accordingly.

"It's that convict," he explained. "The young gentlemen have captured him, and they're taking him away to the pleece station."

"The convict? What convict?"

"That there convict who escaped from prison yesterday. They found him lurking about the school——"

"Oh, the fool—the madman——"

"They've captured him and taken him to Rylcombe," said the veracious Taggles.

"Heavens!"

"I say——"

But Monteith, too, apparently, had no time to listen to what Taggles had to say. He bolted down the lane like one possessed. Taggles scratched his head in amazement. It seemed to him that all St. Jim's was going insane that evening. Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, touched him on the shoulder.

"What's all this noise about, Taggles?"

"It's them youngsters captured the convict, Master Kildare. And Master Monteith, he's—he's bolted——"

Taggles stopped short. Kildare had bolted, too! For it had immediately occurred to the captain of St. Jim's that Monteith, hearing of his cousin's capture, might do something rash, and he wanted to be by Monteith's side at that moment.

Taggles stared after him, and then went into his lodge and slammed the door.

"The whole blessed lot is off their silly onions!" said Taggles to himself. "That's wot's the matter; they're right off their silly onions!"

CHAPTER 10.

A Startling Revelation.

BLAKE drove the trap along the dusky lane at a good speed. He was extremely anxious to get his prisoner to Rylcombe and delivered up in a duly impressive manner before any untoward accident could occur.

Half the distance to the village had been covered when a rough voice called the trap to a halt and a lantern flashed on the startled pony.

"Can't stop!" called out Blake. "We're in a hurry."

"You've got to stop!"

"What's the matter?"

"Sorry, but we're ordered to search every vehicle that passes to-night," said the constable politely.

Blake snapped his teeth.

"Shan't delay you for a minute," said the policeman, flashing his light into the trap.

Blake gripped the rein and made a sign of the head to Herries. Herries understood. The constable jerked up the cloth and gave a cry of amazement as he saw the form in the broad-arrow garb underneath. For an instant he was simply petrified. Then he gave a shout:

"Here he is!"

Herries reached out and gave the constable a sudden push, and he staggered back. Blake whipped up the pony and the trap dashed on.

"Done 'em!" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

But the constable was not quite done. He had caught a glimpse of the convict, and in that hasty glimpse had not noticed that he was tied up. He could only conclude that the man was hidden under the cloth in a bold attempt to escape.

His whistle rang out piercingly—the signal arranged upon if the convict were sighted. Fresh whistles and shouts answered from various directions. In a few minutes a dozen policemen were tearing on the track of the trap, and mounted men came out of the wood to join the chase.

But Blake had a good lead, and he kept it. Right on dashed the trap, right on into Rylcombe, and up the old High Street to the lighted front of the police station. Then Blake clattered to a halt, and in a twinkling the three had the tailboard down and the prisoner out, and were rushing him up the steps into the station.

A minute later the pursuers were on the scene. Inspector Skeat was in the station, and he jumped up and stared at the boys.

"Why—what—who—how——"

Blake touched his cap respectfully.

"If you please, sir, we've captured the convict, and we've brought him here to deliver him up the law."

"Thought we'd save you the trouble, sir," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The inspector gasped.

"Bless my soul! Impossible! You boys—— Yet here he is! Why, what does this mean? This is not the man!"

"Not the man?"

"No. Number Twenty hadn't any moustache. I suppose he's disguised himself, though."

The pursuers were bursting into the station now. Blake turned to them. He was as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

"You're too late," he said calmly. "We've done it. We captured the convict. We brought him here."

The policemen looked at one another and grinned. They had jumped to the conclusion that the boys were helping the convict to escape, but Blake's action in bringing him to the station altered that.

"He's in disguise," went on the inspector. "Hallo! What's he gagged for?"

He took the gag from the prisoner's mouth.

"Got you again, Number 514!"

The convicts reply was peculiar:

"You silly owl!"

The inspector jumped.

"Why, you—you——"

"I'm not a convict!" roared the prisoner. "I'm Figgins!"

(Continued on page 23.)

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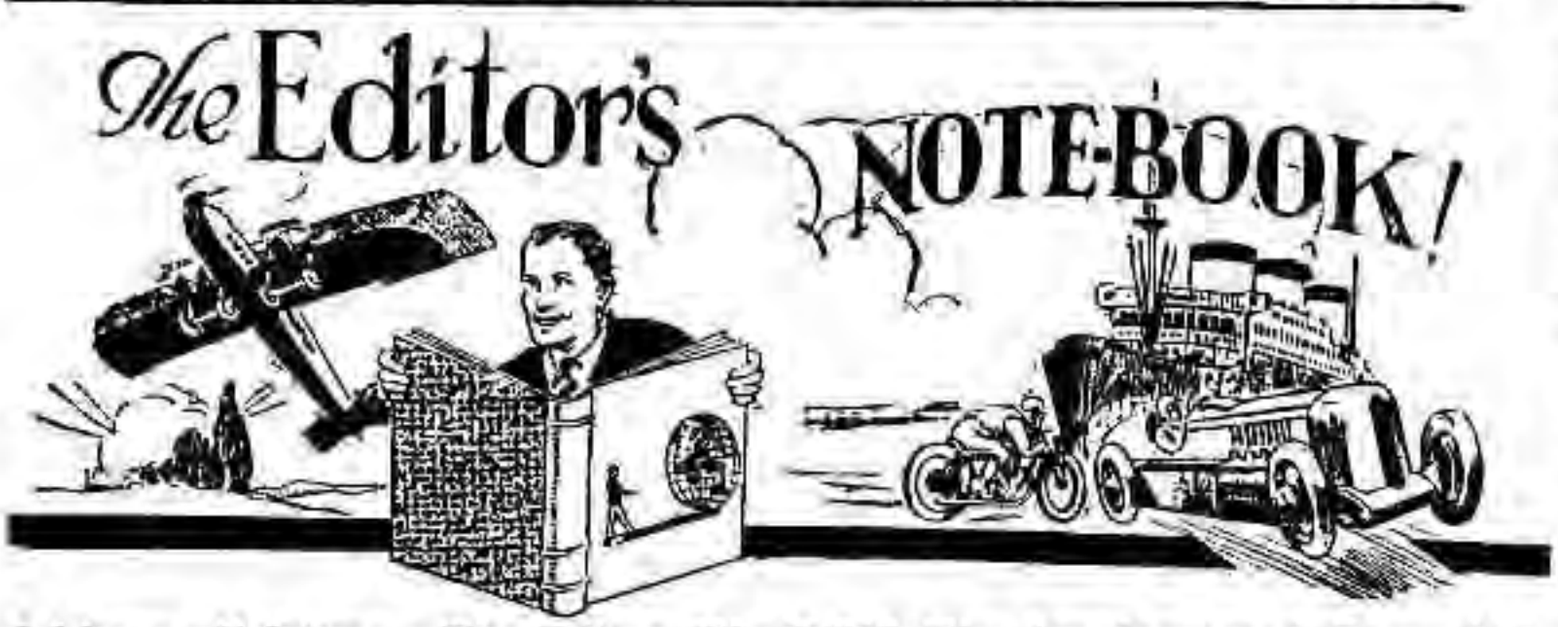


Address all letters : The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

HERE we are again, chums, with the usual first-class, tip-top, A 1 programme of yarns. Yes, the good old GEM has the hall-mark of quality, and it doesn't stint its readers on the score of quantity either. Once a GEM reader, always a GEM reader is a phrase that occurs with happy frequency in my large mail every day.

Now let's have a look at the bumper issue for next week. In the first place there's a dramatic long complete yarn, featuring Tom Merry & Co., which is entitled

"GAY DOGS OF ST. JIM'S!"

By Martin Clifford.

The title alone promises something extra thrilling, and by jingo, this yarn is indeed all that. Miss your tea, if you must, but don't on any account miss reading this masterpiece. The same applies to

"TUBBY'S STARTLING STUNT!"

By Owen Conquest.

"O. C." is bang in form, and his delightful story of the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood will be remembered for many a long day. Then young Snap Fane has another cut at the master crook known the world over as

"THE WINGER!"

In this next episode, which is one long, continuous thrill, you'll read how near Snap Fane comes to achieving his ambition. By way of light relief you will find Potts the Office-boy in one of his usual laughter-making gags, whilst in this "specially reserved" page you will be able to dig up some more unusual news and facts.

THE FIRST MAN TO FLY!

As far back as the year 1709 the people of Lisbon foregathered in the palace grounds to see the man who claimed to have the power "to navigate through the air" make his experiments before the King and Queen of Portugal. Until then no man had ever braved the elements aloft, and this intrepid pioneer, by name Bartholemeu de Cusmao, must have felt a twinge or two before his weird-looking flying machine, which resembled a bird and possessed a large, balloon-like body, left the ground. The gaping sightseers marvelled when Cusmao's machine climbed nearly as high as the walls of the palace, cruised about gently and then made a "perfect landing." Then they had their big thrill, for in making a second flight, Cusmao's plane suddenly caught fire and crashed. The plucky pilot was injured, but he was not cured of his obsession that men indeed "could fly like the birds of the skies." Straightway he started to draw up plans for another plane, but King John of Portugal couldn't overcome his fear at the unnatural sight in those days of a human being riding the heavens, so he put a ban on Cusmao's ambitions and experiments. When Cusmao died his marvellous work had been forgotten, but now, centuries after, the Brazilian Government has decided to erect a monument to the memory of this gallant pioneer who, it transpires, was actually born in Brazil and afterwards emigrated to Portugal. Such is fame!

A GOOD START!

The spectators who were shouting encouragement to the Raglan School footer eleven must have been on tenterhooks till the final whistle blew when the Raglan side were playing their first match this season. Only one goal had been scored, and that was to the credit of Raglan School. Would they win the match? Would they last out the ninety minutes? Pheep! The "long" whistle shrilled and the questions were answered: Raglan School (Enfield) had won. They deserve a special cheer, for theirs has been an unhappy Soccer record. Two years ago they finished up the season with the alarming total of 269 goals scored against them and only 6 goals for them. Indeed, at one period in those dark days they had seen 126 goals netted against them whilst they hadn't scored a solitary goal. But these football-loving youngsters were severely handicapped. They were unaccustomed to Soccer, they had no ground of their own, and they were continually bumping up against experienced teams whose players were much older than themselves. This season they are going all out to do big things. With the experience they have gained, plus the advantage that they now have their own ground and are practising hard, the tide of success looks like turning in their favour. The result of their first match augurs well for the future, and we wish these young sportsmen luck.

THE HAT TRICK!

The Great Western Railway engineers, drivers, firemen porters—everyone, in fact, connected with this great railway concern—must feel mighty bucked these days. To their company goes the World's Train Speed Record as a result of the amazing performance of the "Cheltenham Flyer." The track upon which this record was set up lies between Paddington and Swindon—77¼ miles. And the "Flyer" sped over the metals on her first record-making trip in 59½ minutes, thus averaging 77.9 miles an hour. The next day she did the journey in 90 seconds less time, averaging 80.4 miles an hour. Then, just to show that that wasn't the limit, the third day's run was made in 57½ minutes, which produced an average speed of 81.2 miles an hour. The name of the engine which drew the Flyer is the Launceston Castle, a locomotive of the 4—6—0 type, belonging to the Castle class, which was built in 1923.

BEAUTY TREATMENT FOR THE SPHINX!

Very special beauty specialists are plying their trade in Egypt these days, for the Egyptian Department of Archæology have made the alarming discovery that the age-old monument known to the world as the Sphinx is cracking. Around the head and the neck of the Sphinx are ominous cracks and wrinkles that require urgent attention. So the Sphinx, still as inscrutable as ever, still as cynical as when it first gazed on the world 4,000 years ago, is to undergo a course of "beauty treatment." The wrinkles will be "lifted" the cracks filled up, and when the beauty specialists lay down their tools it is estimated that the Sphinx will be "young" again and safe enough to sit still through a few more centuries.

THE BOOK OF THE YEAR!

"Tommy! Put that light out!" exclaimed father. "It's high time you were asleep." "Righto, father," came a very reluctant reply. But the light was not put out and Tommy didn't go to sleep. Father began to get cross. He looked round for a cane and mounted the stairs to his son's bed-room, intent on teaching Tommy a lesson in obedience. "Ah! Reading in bed!" snapped father. "And what book, my boy, is so mighty good that you can afford to lose your sleep over it." "It's the 'Holiday Annual,' father," ventured Tommy. "And it's better than ever this year." Father took one look at the "Holiday Annual," let fall his cane in the sudden interest that overcame him, and started to read one of the St. Jim's stories. "By Jove, this is a good book," he remarked to himself. Then aloud: "Very well, I'll have a look at it downstairs. Now you get to sleep, my boy." Father crept out and found a snug chair in the drawing-room. He was still reading the 1932 "Holiday Annual" two hours later, and but for the fact that he had to go to work in the morning he would have sat up all night reading it. "The stories," he said to himself, "take me back to my youth. They're absolutely tip-top. No wonder that young rascal Tommy didn't want to put the book down. I could almost give up my night's sleep to read this." All the same for that, father would not have been able to read through the "Holiday Annual" in one night, for he had overlooked the fact that there are two hundred and eighty full pages of stories and pictures as well as the gorgeous colour plates. But he was right in saying that the "Holiday Annual" is tip-top; it's a book of healthy school and adventure yarns which every boy ought to read. For six shillings this handsome volume is remarkably good value. Ask your nearest newsagent to let you see a copy.

COMPLETE YARN OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. AT ROOKWOOD.

ROUGH ON TUBBY MUFFIN!

By

OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER 1.
Nothing Doing!

"I SAY, you chaps——"

"Buzz off, Tubby!"

Thus Tubby Muffin and the Fistical Four respectively.

The fat junior had just sidled up to Jimmy Silver and his chums as they were crossing the old quad at Rookwood. His little eyes were gleaming rather excitedly.

"I say, you fellows, this is important," he said, ignoring the Fistical Four's somewhat discouraging greeting. "Hold on a minute, Jimmy Silver—don't run a fellow off his feet! I want——"

"Five bob till your next remittance turns up!" finished Jimmy Silver, anticipating Tubby's requirements. "Well, that's just what we should like ourselves!"

"But we can't get it," said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"So you can't, either," added Newcome.

"And the only thing left for you to do is to buzz off!" finished Raby. "Buzz! Scat! Run! Bunk! Vamoose! Savvy?"

"Oh, really, you fellows! I want——"

"Now, to resume what I was saying——" said Jimmy Silver.

"I want to invite you all to a feed!" hooted Tubby Muffin, determined to say his say. "Hear me, Jimmy Silver! I want to invite you all to a feed!"

"Eh?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. abruptly ceased their discussion and stared at Tubby.

"You—you want——" stuttered the leader of the Fistical Four.

"To invite you all to a feed!" nodded the fat junior. "That's plain English, ain't it? Coming?"

"Well, my hat!"

The Fistical Four blinked. To say that they were surprised would be to put it mildly—they were dumbfounded. They thought they knew their Tubby. They were aware that he wanted a great many things, but they would never in a month of Sundays have guessed that he wanted to invite them to a feed.

"To a feed?" asked Lovell, almost dazedly. "To a feed, did you say, Tubby?"

"You heard me, I suppose," grinned the fat junior. "A real, genuine, first-rate, slap up feed! With French pastries, and meringues, and fruit cake, and Scotch gingerbread! Coming?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at each other, and smiled. When Tubby broke in on them they had been discussing the subject of how to rake up enough hard cash for a respectable feed. Tubby's offer, surprising as it was, came to them like manna from heaven.

"We'll come," said Lovell promptly. "I can answer for these men."

"Oh, rather!"

"But what's the catch in it?" asked Jimmy Silver.

Tubby Muffin frowned.

"I hope you're not going to be suspicious, Jimmy Silver. I've asked you——"

"All serene, old fat man! And we've accepted," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Where's the feed? Up in your study?"

Tubby Muffin appeared to ponder over that question.

"Well, it will be," he said, after a pause. "But I'll be quite frank with you. At the moment, it's not."

"Oh!"

"At the moment, as a matter of fact," said Tubby Muffin, "it's nowhere near to my study. To tell you the truth, it's in the Head's room!"

"What?"

"Why, you silly fat cuckoo——"

"All ready for the tea the Head's giving this afternoon," explained the fat junior cheerfully. "The Head's standing a tea to Bulkeley of the Sixth and one or two of the prefects this afternoon, you see. Now, I happen to know that the grub's in his study, all ready for the start."

"You—you——"

"My idea, you see, is this," said Tubby Muffin cheerfully—"if you chaps'll just dodge in and raid the tuck, I can stand on the School House steps and see that the Head doesn't come back while you're on the job. See?"

"Great pip!"

"There's absolutely no danger," rattled on the fat junior not observing the startling change that had taken place in the expressions of the faces of the Fistical Four. "Bulkeley and the rest are at footer, and the Head's taking his constitutional round the Cloisters. You'll be as safe as houses, you know! Well, now, if you're ready——"

"You silly ass!" roared Jimmy Silver, finding his voice. "So that's the feed you're inviting us to, then—the feed the Head's laid in for the prefects?"

Tubby nodded.

Said Peele, "Let's pinch the Doctor's cakes,
And when we've finished stuffin',
We'll take some evidence with us,
And frame up Tubby Muffin!"

"That's it, old chap! Well, we've no time to waste, gassing. If you're ready——"

"We are—ready to bump a silly, fat idiot!" said Jimmy Silver. "Gimme a hand, you fellows!"

"What-ho!"

"Here, wharrer you doing?" yelled Tubby, in alarm, as the Fistical Four closed round him. "Is this the gratitude I get for—— Yarooooh!"

Tubby Muffin's remarks tailed off into an unintelligible series of exclamations and whoops. He felt himself lifted and violently lowered to the ground level—once, twice, and thrice. After which the Fistical Four abandoned him, their tea problem still unsettled.

Tubby, after reposing on the ground, roaring for half a minute, rose and rolled off in the direction of the House.

Peele and Lattrey and Gower, the gay dogs of the Fourth, were lounging on the steps as he went in. Tubby paused for a minute.

"I say, you fellows, would you like a feed?" he asked, using more direct tactics this time. "A really good feed, I mean?"

Peele eyed the tips of his patent shoes with a reflective eye.

"I'd like to kick a fat porker, an' I'm just wonderin' whether it's worth expending the energy Perhaps it is!"

"Whooop! Keep away, you beast!" gasped Tubby. "Look here, I'm not in the habit of palling with dingy rotters like you chaps, but I'll sink my pride for once and let you in on a really good thing. There's a really ripping feed in the Head's study——"

"Why, you fat fool——"

"Just there for the asking," said Tubby persuasively. "I'll stay here and see that the Head doesn't come back, while you go and snaffle it, and then we'll go fifty-fifty. How's that?"

"Fine!" grinned Peele. "Now how's this?"

"Yaroooooop!"

"This" was a hard kick on the rear portion of Muffin's anatomy. Apparently the fat junior didn't find it a bit pleasing. He rolled hurriedly into the House, roaring, while Peele & Co. roared on another note—with laughter!

Inside the House Tubby Muffin went disconsolately along towards the Head's study. The feed which he knew to be reposing there held a magnetic attraction for him. In the ordinary way Tubby steered very clear of Dr. Chisholm's room. But the Head's study with a feed in it was a very different proposition from the Head's study he had knowledge of.

With a quaking heart Tubby paused outside the study and looked up and down the passage. There being nobody in sight, he plucked up courage to open the door and look in.

Tubby's mouth fairly watered at the sight that met his eyes. The Head occasionally entertained fellows belonging to the higher Forms to tea, and when he did he did them well. He had done so on this occasion.

In his preoccupation the fat junior didn't hear a soft footstep behind him. So the first intimation he received that Lonsdale of the Sixth was passing was when a thumb and forefinger closed over one of his fat ears.

"On the prowl, as usual, you fat burglar?" said Lonsdale sternly. "Lucky I brought my ashplant along with me! Bend over!"

Tubby Muffin emitted a mournful howl.

"Ow! I say, Lonsdale, I hope you don't think I was looking at that tuck. Matter of fact, I came to see the Head on—on the subject of my progress in Latin!"

Lonsdale smiled.

"Well, if you'd rather I took you to the Head——"

"Beast! I—I mean, I don't want to trouble the Head! I'll bend over!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

He bent over, and Lonsdale administered "six" to the accompaniment of a chorus of fiendish yelling.

After that Lonsdale went his way, still smiling, and Tubby Muffin, with many a moan and many a groan, rolled upstairs to his study to rest. He had come to the conclusion that, so far as the Head's feed was concerned, there was definitely nothing doing!

CHAPTER 2.

Peele's Little Plan!

"MUFFIN'S a fool!"

"Oh, absolutely!"

"But what he's just been yappin' about gives me an idea," said Peele of the Fourth, his somewhat shifty eyes roving through the doorway of the School House to see that there were no unauthorised listeners. "You heard what Muffin said?"

"Why trouble to talk about the fat fool?" asked Gower, with a yawn. "Let's trot up to the study for a little game."

"That can wait," said Peele. "I'm thinkin' about that tea up in the beak's study. Muffin'll never raid it. He'll never dare! But why shouldn't we?"

"Oh gad!"

"Well, why not?" asked Peele coolly. "It's a dashed good feed, that's a cert. The Head's pretty lavish when it comes to standin' Sam. That feed's not to be sneezed at. Why shouldn't we have it?"

"Good gad! I can think of several tip-top reasons!" gasped Gower. "One is that we might be found out and get a Head's floggin'!"

Peele grinned.

"Have another think, Gower! The very reason I'm considerin' it is that I think it can be done with scarcely any risk. Who's the unlucky old sportsman who'll get all the blame if the feed vanishes?"

Lattrey and Gower looked at each other.

"Well, Muffin, I suppose, in the absence of any evidence," said Gower, frowning. "Mean to say, then, that you're thinkin'——"

"Thinkin' of makin' Muffin stand the racket? Never let it be said!" responded Peele, with a rather unpleasant-sounding chuckle. "But it's rather comfortin' to know, if we do do it, that no one in the world will suspect us, while everyone will immediately think of Muffin."

"Oh gad!"

"If that's what does happen, then it'll be unlucky for Muffin. But, then, the fat bounder shouldn't have such an unsavoury reputation, should he?" argued Peele, with a grin. "Only thing is, can we get away with the loot? I think we can."

"You always were an optimist, Peele!" sneered Lattrey. "What makes you think we're likely to get away with a complete feed from the Head's study, anyway?"

"Simply an' solely the fact that there's nobody indoors just now," was Peele's ready reply. "The beak's takin' his afternoon mike round the Cloisters, an' the Sixth are all down at footer, bar Lonsdale, who's bound to go out soon. It should be dead easy. Two of us can mount guard, and the third crack the merry crib."

"What about Muffin?" objected Lattrey.

"Well, if he turns up he's easy. Any yarn'll do for the fat idiot."

Lattrey and Gower looked at each other again.

"Not altogether keen, I must say!" remarked Gower. "But you seem to think it'll be all right, Peele."

"Easy as rolling off a log!" declared Peele cheerfully. "Let's get in an' do a bit o' scoutin', anyway."

The three young rascals lounged into the House.

Entering the Hall, Peele made a sign to his two colleagues, and all three took cover in a recess.

"Lonsdale—just goin' out!" Peele whispered. "Just as well he shouldn't see us."

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Gower and Lattrey, with considerable warmth. Certainly, in view of their nefarious plans, they had no wish whatever to be seen by Lonsdale of the Sixth.

Lonsdale passed by without noticing them, and they saw him saunter out of the House in the direction of the playing fields.

"Safe as anythin' now," said Peele, leading the way through the Hall. "If you chaps'll stand one at each end of the beak's passage, I'll trot into the merry old torture chamber an' see what's what. Game?"

"Oh, quite!"

And when they arrived at the passage where the Head's study was situated Gower and Lattrey mounted guard—a job they much preferred to the more risky one which Peele had undertaken.

Peele vanished into the study.

He was out again in a matter of seconds. The blade of the Fourth was grinning.

"Easy as winkin'!" he informed his henchmen. "All we want is a bag. I'll run up an' get one."

Gower and Lattrey remained rather uneasily at their posts while Peele slipped upstairs to procure a bag.

He was soon back again, carrying a suitcase.

"Don't be long, old chap!" begged Lattrey, as Peele sailed boldly along to the Head's study again. "We don't mind doin' this, of course, but——"

"Half a minute'll do it," said Peele. "Keep your eyes skinned for outsiders, an' mind you give me warnin' if anyone comes along!"

With that Peele slipped into the Head's study again.

Gower and Lattrey watched out in a state of great trepidation. But it was a half-holiday, and at this hour of the afternoon the House was well-nigh deserted. Nobody came near.

Peele reappeared after what seemed to his waiting colleagues an eternity. Actually, it was no more than a minute.

Peele was grinning.

"O.K!" he chirruped. "Now to get it up to the dugout. Sharp's the word!"

All three hurried off, anxious now to get the proceeds of the raid into the comparative security of their study.

Luck favoured them to the last. They encountered nobody en route.

"Done!" grinned Peele, as the door closed behind them. "Now we'll lock it up out of sight till later on in the afternoon, an' get downstairs an' show ourselves. An alibi may be useful!"

"What about plantin' a cake or somethin' on Muffin?" suggested Lattrey. "We can bung it somewhere in his study. If they search an' find it, they won't look any farther."

"Oh gad! Good for you!" gasped Peele. "We'll see what we can do with this!"

And as soon as they had finished putting away the tuck the three blades of the Fourth went out with the amiable intention of "planting" on Tubby Muffin the cake which Peele had selected for that purpose.

Tubby Muffin was asleep when they looked into his study.

The Head ordered Tubby Muffin to remove the books from the bookcase, and finally something came to light. Hidden at the back was a small cake!

Next to eating Tubby liked sleeping, and as he had been denied the possibility of the former, the fat junior had not unnaturally fallen back on the latter. He was deep in the arms of Morpheus.

Lattrey tiptoed across the room, raked out some dusty old books from the bookshelf, placed the cake in the cavity behind, then carefully replaced the books.

Tubby Muffin did not stir.

Peele & Co. departed in triumph.

"Now to mix up with the crowd!" said Peele, as they went downstairs again. "Sooner we're seen round the footer pitch or somewhere away from the House, the better it'll be for us."

And the blades of the Fourth went out with all speed.

CHAPTER 3.
Not a Success!

"GOOD-AFTERNOON, sir!"

Bulkeley, Dickinson, and Jones major stopped on the steps of the School House and "capped" the Head respectfully as he appeared from the direction of the Cloisters. They, with Lonsdale, were the fellows whom the Head had honoured with an invitation to tea.

Dr. Chisholm smiled and nodded as he joined them.

"Good-afternoon, my boys! You are quite ready? Where is Lonsdale?"

"Adsum, sir!" said Lonsdale, as he joined the group. "Hope I'm not late!"

"Not at all, Lonsdale. If you are all ready, then we will go in. I have left directions for tea to be laid."

And the Head led the way in.

A surprise was awaiting him when he opened the door of his study.

Dr. Chisholm always went to some pains to make sure that little functions of this kind were a success, and it was an understood thing that the House dame should procure for the occasion certain little delicacies which were not usually obtainable at the school shop.

That had been done on this occasion, and the Head returned in the full anticipation that those little delicacies would be all set out on the table. He had, in fact, actually seen Tupper, the pageboy, carrying a trayload along when he left the House.

But of those tea-time delicacies there was not a sign. Plates and cups and saucers and knives and spoons were there in abundance, but no tuck.

The Head looked in and blinked.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "A little surprising that tea should not be ready; I certainly gave explicit instructions on the point. Pray come in, my boys! I will send for the House Dame."

He pressed the bell-push on his desk, and soon after Bulkeley and the other Sixth-Formers had made themselves comfortable round the room, Tupper looked in.

Dr. Chisholm regarded Tupper a little suspiciously.

"Tupper! Did I not see you bringing to this study a tray containing comestibles an hour or more ago?"

Tupper blinked at the table.

"Yessir! Which I certainly left everything on the table."

"It is not there now, Tupper. You know of no reason why it should have been taken away?"

Tupper shook his head.

"Not me, sir. P'r'aps I'd better call the 'Ouse Dame."

"Do so immediately, Tupper."

Tupper departed, and shortly afterwards Mrs. Maloney, the buxom House Dame of the Classical House, came on the scene. She regarded the empty table with wide-open eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Maloney! Can you tell me why the comestibles which were placed in this room for tea should have been taken away?" asked the Head mildly. "If, for some reason, you have removed them, I shall be glad if——"

"But I haven't, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Maloney. "Yet—dear me!—everything's gone! The special pastries I had sent from London, and the Scotch shortbread Mrs. Chisholm brought from Edinburgh, and——"

"Yes, yes; I am aware of the nature of the edibles," interrupted the Head, a little impatiently. "What I am anxious to know is if there is any explanation of their disappearance."

"As far as I'm concerned, sir, none whatever. It looks to me, sir," said the House Dame seriously, "as though some young rascal has had a picking!"

The Head frowned.

"Surely, no boy can have the temerity——"

There was a sudden exclamation from Lonsdale.

"Muffin!"

"What about Muffin?" asked Bulkeley curiously. "You mean Muffin of the Fourth?"

"The fat young beggar!" nodded Lonsdale. "I shouldn't have mentioned it in the ordinary way, sir. But this reminds me that I had occasion this afternoon to punish him for looking into this room during your absence."

"Bless my soul!" The Head looked quite shocked. "Muffin is, I am aware, a rather greedy boy, and has been known more than once to take edibles belonging to other boys; but surely——"

"Surely not even Muffin would dare make a raid on your study, sir," said Bulkeley, finishing the Head's sentence. "It seems incredible."

"Nevertheless, I found him looking in the door," said Lonsdale. "But for my intervention, I feel sure he would have attempted it then."

"Goodness gracious!"

There was rather a strained silence for a few seconds. Dr. Chisholm had turned quite pink. The indignity of having his study raided for tuck was something new in his experience, and he felt the reverse of pleased about it.

"Shall I go and find the young rascal, sir?" asked Bulkeley, breaking the awkward pause.

"No, Bulkeley; we will have tea. I will attend to Muffin myself, afterwards. Mrs. Maloney! Will you please have tea served without delay?"

"Certainly, sir. I'm afraid, sir, I haven't any more of those special pastries and shortbread——"

"I am sure I can leave the matter of the menu in your hands with confidence!" said the Head, with a somewhat forced smile. "Boys! Please make yourselves at home, and forget this unpleasant episode."

Bulkeley and his colleagues smiled and tried to do so. But it was more easily said than done. About the tea itself, the Head's guests did not care two straws. Tea was not an important matter in the Sixth Form scheme of things, though perhaps in their heart of hearts they enjoyed "special" pastries almost as much as the fags. What did matter was that their dignity and the dignity of their host had been affronted. Bulkeley & Co. felt that very keenly, more especially as the Head, despite his efforts to disguise the fact, was feeling very annoyed indeed about it.

It was not surprising, in the circumstances, that their endeavours to turn the affair into a felicitous social occasion fell a trifle flat.

Bulkeley & Co., to please the Head, talked about the forthcoming mid-term examinations. The Head, to please his guests, talked about the First Eleven's forthcoming footer fixtures. And all the time both parties' thoughts were fixed on Tubby Muffin, who, they thought, had had the unheard-of temerity to raid the study of the Head himself for tuck!

Tea in the Head's study, for once in a way, proved a distinct "frost," and both host and guests breathed a sigh of relief when the ordeal was over.

CHAPTER 4.

For It!

"TUBBY!"

"Tubby Muffin!"

"Wake up, old fat man!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. opened the door of Tubby Muffin's study and fairly yelled at the fat occupant who was snoring in the armchair.

Tubby woke up with a start.

"Beasts! 'Tain't rising-bell, is it? Oh, hallo, you fellows!" The fat junior came to earth again. "I say, Jimmy Silver, what about tea? I'm hungry!"

Jimmy Silver did not smile. For once in a way, the leader of the Fistical Four wore a look of deep seriousness on his youthful face.

"Never mind about tea, Tubby!" he said. "Strikes me you've had as much tea to-day as you'll want! You're wanted—in the Head's study!"

Tubby Muffin's jaw dropped.

"Me? Oh crikey! I say, you chaps, I really didn't take that pie of the House Dame's last week; you'll back me up, won't you?"

"You're wanted about something more serious than that, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "Why on earth did you do it, you crass ass?"

"Do what?" asked Tubby Muffin, with a stare.

Jimmy Silver shrugged.

"Don't be an ass! You know jolly well you're wanted for taking that feed from the Head's room. Why deny it to us, anyway?"

Tubby Muffin's mouth opened in a gasp.

"Me? Wanted for pinching the Head's tuck! Why, I swear——"

"Don't!" said Jimmy Silver. "And don't wait about here, either. Buzz along to the Head's study unless you want him to come here for you. He's waxy!"

"But I didn't do it!" hooted Tubby Muffin, his little eyes almost bolting out of their sockets with the indignation he felt. "I haven't touched a crumb of it, I tell you! I haven't——"

"Well, run along and tell the Head, then!" grinned Lovell.

"I jolly well will!" declared Tubby Muffin.

And he did.

Tubby had not often visited the Head's study with a clear conscience. But he did so this time.

He could hardly stop to knock on the door of the study before rolling in.

Dr. Chisholm was seated at his desk. His eyes gleamed as he looked up and recognised the porker of the Fourth.

"Ah! Muffin!" he exclaimed. "So you have come——"

But he had not time to finish his sentence before Tubby Muffin had burst out with:

"I didn't, sir! It wasn't me! I've been asleep in my study all the afternoon. If someone told you I took that tuck——"

"Silence, Muffin!" broke in Dr. Chisholm sternly. "Briefly to acquaint you with the facts as I know them, certain articles of an edible nature have been taken from my study this afternoon. Lonsdale informs me that early this afternoon he found you looking into the study. Rather naturally, suspicion falls on you."

"But—but I went straight up to my study after Lonsdale left me, sir!" gasped the fat junior. "I've been asleep there ever since. I dunno more than Adam what's become of the tuck!"

"That is what you say. But I regret to have to remark, Muffin, that I have not always found you to be truthful," said the Head sternly. "Can you bring anybody to prove your statement?"

Tubby Muffin groaned.

"I could if the beasts would only back me up, but I know they won't. Can't you take my word, sir? I'm awfully truthful, as a matter of fact; anybody'll tell you I'm the soul of honour."

"Please do not talk utter nonsense, Muffin!" snapped the Head. "You deny, then, that you are the guilty party?"

"Of course I deny it, sir!" gasped the hapless fat junior. "I—I say, sir, I wonder if it was Bulkeley?"

The Head jumped.

"Bulkeley?"

"I dare say that's who it was, when I come to think of it, sir!" said Tubby Muffin eagerly. "Probably he felt peckish and thought he'd look in for a snack while you weren't here. As he was going to tea with you, in any case, he might think you wouldn't suspect him and——"

"Muffin! Incredibly foolish youth! How dare you make such a preposterous accusation against Bulkeley in order to save your own skin?" roared the Head. "Not another word, Muffin! You will come with me."

"Wh-where are you going, sir?"

"I am going to your study to see for myself whether any evidence can be obtained of your guilt this afternoon."

Tubby Muffin's brow cleared a little.

"Oh, good! I mean, come, with pleasure, sir! I'll show you the way!"

And Tubby rolled upstairs with the Head without any misgivings. If there was one thing he felt certain of it was

that no evidence existed in his apartment of a crime he knew he had not committed.

A shock—a dreadful, overwhelming shock—was in store for Tubby Muffin.

Tubby led the way in and the Head followed after, while a small crowd of juniors collected in the passage outside to see what they could see.

Among that crowd were Peele, Lattrey, and Gower. The blades of the Fourth were grinning.

They soon had cause to grin still more. Under the Head's direction, Tubby opened cupboards, desk, and locker, and spread out the contents for inspection. Nothing remotely connected with the prefects' tea caught the Head's eye. Still not satisfied, Dr. Chisholm made the fat junior turn out the "junk" corner, only to draw another blank.

Then he ordered Tubby to take down some of the books from his bookshelf, and something came to light at last in the shape of a small iced cake, untouched and still in its paper wrapping.

There was an exclamation from the Head.

"As I thought, Muffin! You may cease your search now. I have seen enough!"

Poor Tubby Muffin stared at the cake in blank and almost incredulous amazement.

"Wh-where did that come from?" he stuttered. "I—I never knew——"

"Enough, Muffin!" said the Head, in a deep, deep voice. "I have seen that cake before, when it was being taken into my study. I forbid you to add to your offence by telling me more untruths!"

"But—but I've never seen it before in my life, sir—honest Injun!" babbled Tubby Muffin. "Someone's put it here so that I shall get the blame—perhaps Bulkeley——"

"Utterly ridiculous!" hooted Dr. Chisholm. "I do not intend to bandy words with you in this matter, Muffin. You are guilty; of that there can be no doubt. I shall not punish you now——"

"Oh lor'! Thank you, sir!"

"Your offence is too serious for an ordinary caning!" boomed the Head. "Instead, Muffin, I shall punish you next Saturday morning, after prayers, by flogging you before the entire school!"

"F-f-flogging!" stammered Tubby, almost deprived of the power of speech by the dreadful thought of a flogging in public.

"That is all!" snapped Dr. Chisholm.

When he had gone there was pandemonium. For once, Tubby Muffin was the centre of attraction. The crowd swarmed round him, commiserating with him, chaffing him, asking him a hundred-and-one questions.

Tubby Muffin merely continued to stand there as if stupefied. When at last he did find his voice again, he was almost on the point of tears.

"Silver—Lovell—all you chaps! I didn't do it! Honest I didn't!" he groaned. "The Head's made a mistake—it's all wrong——"

"Chuck it, Tubby!"

"Draw it mild, old fat bean! You're the giddy culprit, right enough!"

"But I didn't——"

"Think yourself lucky the Head forgot to confiscate that cake!" grinned Raby. "I should get on with it before he comes back, if I were you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin looked at the cake with a start, then put Raby's suggestion into effect.

When he had finished, the realisation of his awful plight came to him with full force. He, Tubby Muffin, who had "got away" with a hundred-and-one tuck-raiding expeditions, was to be publicly flogged for the one raid in which he had taken no part! Never had such an appalling prospect faced the porker of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver and one or two of the kindlier spirits of the Fourth tried to cheer him up. But Tuffy Muffin was beyond cheering up. He just mourned and kept on mourning, and refused to be comforted.

THE END.

(Will Tubby be able to prove his innocence? He has a good shot at it in next week's top-hole Rookwood yarn, "TUBBY'S STARTLING STUNT!")

"Under A Convict's Thumb!"

(Continued from page 17.)

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy turned quite pale. There was a buzz of bicycle bells outside. Tom Merry and Manners rushed into the station with the Co. at their heels. They had seen the trap outside, and knew that Blake had succeeded in getting his hapless captive here.

"It's Figgins!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's a joke! It's old Figgins!"

In the general amazement Tom Merry knelt down and cut Figgins loose with his penknife. The New House junior staggered to his feet. He looked very wrathful.

"My word!" gasped Inspector Skeat. "So this is—is a joke, is it? You young rascals! You have conspired to defeat the law!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It was a joke! And how were we to know that Blake would bring him here? We didn't think of that."

"Oh!" murmured Blake. "What giddy asses we've made of ourselves! We shall never hear the end of this!"

"The whole school will have the grin of us!" groaned Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"D'Arcy, you ass, this is what comes of acting on your ideas!"

"Now, weally, Blake, I pwotest——"

"Oh, dry up!"

"I wefuse——"

"Come along! No good sticking here."

The general attention was fixed upon Figgins. It was easy for the unhappy convict-hunters to steal quietly away, get into the trap, and drive off to St. Jim's.

"I'll make somebody sit up for this!" said Figgins, glaring round. "I—— Hallo, Monteith!"

Monteith had dashed into the station. His face was pale as death.

"Is he captured?" he gasped. "Is he——"

His eyes fell upon Figgins, and he broke off.

"Figgins, what is the meaning of this?"

"Yes, by Jove!" said Kildare, who had followed the prefect in. "What game are you playing, Figgins?"

"Somebody seems to have made Figgins up as a convict," said Tom Merry demurely. "Blake mistook him for the escaped convict in the Castle Wood, and captured him, and brought him here to give him up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith drew a tremulous breath of relief.

"Here, get out of this station!" said Inspector Skeat, frowning round upon the laughing constables. "By Jupiter! While you've been chasing this fool of a boy, you've left the wood unguarded; the convict may——"

The words recalled the police to a sense of the situation. They poured out of the station to tear back to their unguarded posts.

"Come on, old Figgy!" said Tom Merry. "We'll help you off with that rig. No malice, old chap!"

And Figgy grinned.

"Well, it was a jolly good wheeze, though it worked out the wrong way!" he exclaimed. "No grudge, of course; though I've had a rough old time. Come along!"

The juniors left the station in a group. The two seniors followed them more slowly.

"I am glad of this, Monteith, for your sake," said Kildare, in a low voice. "I followed because I thought I might be needed. Did you hear what the inspector said?"

Monteith looked at him. The prefect was trembling.

"That the wood has been left unguarded," said Kildare. "If your cousin is on the alert he will not lose that opportunity. He has a change of clothes and money; this may mean that he is saved. For your sake I hope so."

Monteith pressed his hand.

"Thank you, Kildare! You are a trump! You have been better to me than I deserve; but if I ever have a chance I'll show I can be grateful!"

And the captain and prefect walked back to St. Jim's on better terms than they had ever been before.

* * * * * * *

Kildare was right; Ralph Monteith had not lost his opportunity. He had seized upon the chance and escaped from the wood; nor was he ever seen in the place again. Day by day Monteith watched the papers, but his arrest was never reported. He had escaped from England, and he never returned.

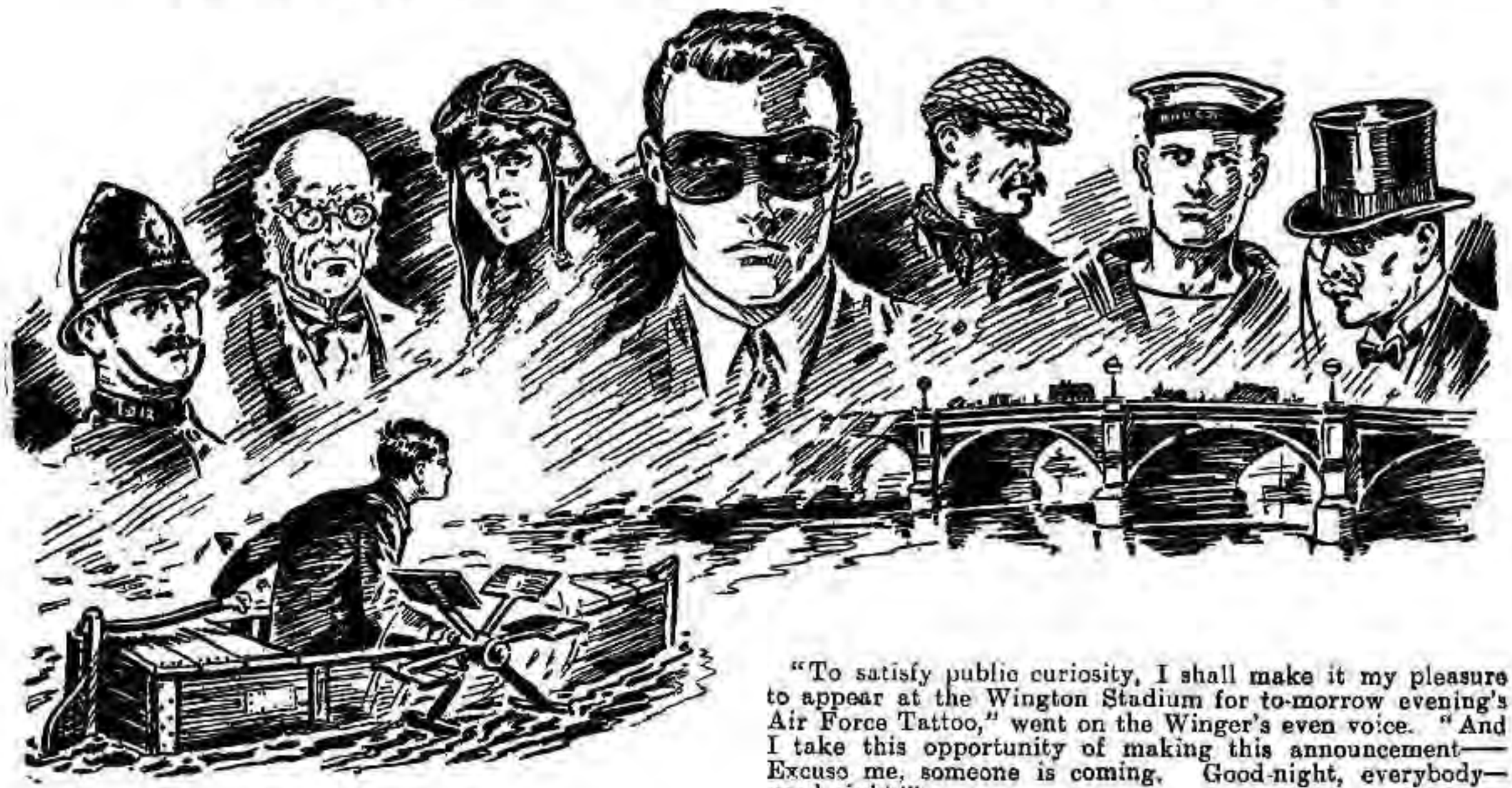
The excitement of the convict hunt died away; but it was long before the juniors of St. Jim's allowed Study No. 6 to forget their brilliant capture, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was made to wish that his dazzling idea of capturing the convict had never entered his head.

THE END.

(Despite Tom Merry's great score over Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co., they join up with him next week to smash the "smart set," in "GAY DOGS OF ST. JIM'S!")

COMPLETE ADVENTURE YARN OF THE MAN WITH A HUNDRED DISGUISES!

THE WINGER!



THE WINGER ON WINGS!
He flies away with three thousand pounds—and Snap hanging on to the undercarriage of his plane!

CPAPTER 1.
The Winger Calls London!

A COUPLE of million Londoners suddenly jerked erect and alert. Books fell from hands. Newspapers fluttered to the floors. Men stopped speaking, and women ceased their knitting from Epping to Richmond, Hendon to Croydon.

One might say that London had suddenly turned to stone.

"Lummee, 'ear that?" rasped a coster in Mile End.

"My doah, how vewy extwaordinawy!" burbled Lord Cecil in Jermyn Street.

"Mother—dad, come and listen!" shouted a sturdy schoolboy in a basement flat in Putney.

Two million people petrified. Four million eyes staring at their wireless loudspeakers. And at the British Broadcasting headquarters officials' jaws dropped, entertainers ceased to rattle proof sheets, and operators uttered sounds which indicated strangling.

"I take this opportunity of making myself public," a smooth, refined voice called through the ether. "Ladies and gentlemen of London. The Winger has the great pleasure to make a short announcement, which he feels sure will be of even greater interest than the next item on the programme of that excellent institution, the British Broadcasting Company."

Snap Fane, floating on the black bosom of Father Thames in his home-made cockleshell boat, suddenly uttered a squeak.

"Jiminy! What's he up to now?" he asked a glittering star which showed between two clouds far above his nose.

Sergeant Hull, in his riverside police station at Limehouse Reach, said something unparliamentary. Detective-Inspector Thomas, at Scotland Yard, so far forgot himself as to swear in the presence of a superior officer and his wife.

The suave voice of the Winger continued:

"Owing to the futile efforts of Scotland Yard to effect my apprehension, I feel that I have acquired a notoriety which was far from my seeking. Therefore, like most celebrities, I feel it is my duty to appease the very natural curiosity of my public."

Inspector Thomas looked like an exploding strawberry:

"To satisfy public curiosity, I shall make it my pleasure to appear at the Wington Stadium for to-morrow evening's Air Force Tattoo," went on the Winger's even voice. "And I take this opportunity of making this announcement—Excuse me, someone is coming. Good-night, everybody—good-night!"

"Quick, he's in the operating-room!" shouted a B.B.C. official.

A rush and a jamb in the corridors. The loud slamming of a door, and minutes wasted in getting it open. A mocking laugh—the purr of a powerful motor-car, and all the policemen outside saw was the red light scooting away down the road.

And on a sheet of paper in the B.B.C. broadcasting-room they found a sketch of a young man with wings either side of his shoulder blades.

How London rocked with laughter! Millions tried to be the first to tell the joke. But everybody knew it. The Winger, that mysterious young aristocrat who had eclipsed even the famous Raffles, had actually stolen into the operating-room of the B.B.C., and utilised an interval to transmit his impudent announcement.

Moreover, he had got clean away. Nobody knew how he got in, and all anyone saw of him was the red stern light of his limousine, which the policeman who saw it averred winked mockingly at him.

The Winger would be at Wington! How would he be there? He had said he would show himself to the London public!

Orders buzzed over telephone wires, for the police had learned not to use their broadcasting radios when scattering instructions for the frustrating of the young crook's plans. Wington had already heard, so had most branch police stations. London had heard—Paris—Madrid—Berlin—and even ships south of the Equator buzzed with the news.

The Winger was coming into the public eye—at last. His simplicity in crime, his clean methods of carrying them out, his care never to spill human blood—except harmlessly to wing a police officer in the arm—had appealed to the sporting public mind.

All the Winger wanted was money, which, after all, is a common failing. That he was all wrong in his methods of getting it, was beside the question.

Most people worked honestly for it. Why the Winger got it by crime the London public neither knew nor really cared. There were no complicated plans made by the Winger. He did everything in the most obvious manner, and thus got away with it.

Simplicity was his motto. Publicity, so far as carrying

through his work was concerned, his routine. No sneaking around dark corners with a rubber stick for the Winger. If he wanted money from a safe, he just went there and very likely got the owner to hand it to him.

The police had failed in every instance to stop him. Only one person in London had hampered the activities of this aristocratic crook whom no one really knew.

That person was Snap Fane, the East End London boy without parents or a home, except a patch of mud in Barking Creek, and a home-made paddle-boat.

"Gee, the idiot'll get bagged!" Snap commented to himself. "Ha, ha, ha! The cheek of the blighter, sneaking into the B.B.C. and broadcasting!"

Not only Snap was laughing. All London echoed his amusement—that is, all except Scotland Yard—and some of the officials there grinned behind their hands—and the B.B.C., who felt very sore.

Snap paddled furiously to Limehouse riverside police station:

"What's the Yard doing about it, Mr. Hull?" he asked, with a wide grin.

"Stop that infernal chuckle!" growled Sergeant Hull. "The fool's done it this time. The cheek—the utter impudence of the——"

"Shall I send along a dictionary for you to chose more definitive words, Sergeant Hull?" purred a voice from the radio set.

What Sergeant Hull said as he switched off is unprintable. He made a kick at Snap, and, missing, sat heavily down on the bare boards, narrowly missing the cat.

Snap fled and pushed off again, drifting with the tide. He would go to the station, too. All London would be there. Thousands would be turned away.

"Jingo, I wish I knew what his game is!" he mused to himself. "I know, I'll ask him."

He tuned in on the portable radio set and sent out the Winger's call-sign.

The Winger, lolling in an easy-chair in a flat not two hundred yards from the Ritz Hotel, suddenly lowered his evening paper, which had glaring headlines of his latest escapade.

"Yes, the Winger speaking," he purred into the transmitter of the tiny radio set standing on the polished table. "Oh, hallo, Snap! How are you?" he asked politely.

"Busting to know what your fatheaded game is, Winger," came Snap's sharp little voice from the receiver. "You're not really going to the Stadium, are you?"

"Of course I am!" smiled the Winger. "I always keep my word—a gentleman never breaks that, whatever else he breaks, Snap. Will you be there also?"

"Not 'arf, Winger!"

"Then I hope to see you to-morrow evening. Good-night!"

He switched off and sipped a glass of wine thoughtfully. His usually careless eyes carried the merest trace of anxiety.

"That kid is the only person likely to down me," he muttered to himself. "He's sharp as a needle—seems to guess exactly what I am going to do next."

He rose and walked like a panther across the thick, pile carpet. Then he laughed, and taking an opera cloak and hat, threw it over his immaculate evening dress.

"May as well go to the opera," he mused half aloud.

And while the Winger sat in the stalls, elbow to elbow with fashionable people of the West End, Snap Fane was drifting down on the ebb tide to Barking Creek.

Snap still lay looking up at the tall chimneys in the creek when the Winger drove his fast sports model deep into the heart of Essex.

Snap was thinking—wondering what the Winger was going to do on the following night.

The Winger was wondering exactly what Snap's cute brain would instruct him to do.

Wit against wit. A lad from London's underworld against a polished crook of the West End. A duel of duels, and in the past the honours had been slightly in favour of Snap Fane.

The Stadium would be packed to capacity to-morrow evening. Never before would the gate money be so large——

Snap bit on that thought. The gate money!

"Gosh!" he muttered, lifting his head on his hands as he lay flat along the bottom of his boat in Barking Creek. "How the blazes could the Winger lay hands on the gate money, though?"

But the idea stuck. What else could the Winger be after?

"Crimes, he might not be after anything—just up to a lark," he mused. "He's a dark 'oss is the Winger."

Snap gave it up and went to sleep. If the Winger was after anything it could only be the gate money, for not even he could hope to hold up the crammed Stadium and ransom the thousands of people there.

And if he was after nothing except a little amusement, well, Snap would be there, too.

Snap's last waking thought that night was—that if this daring young crook was not out to rob anybody, then he sincerely hoped he would not get caught.

Yet, to take such a risk for no gain seemed foolish.

Late into that night the Winger sat in council with every member of his gang present. It was still dark when the isolated country house emptied and shadowy men streaked away in high-powered motor-cars.

Only two remained. The Winger and Blake, his first lieutenant.

"See any flaws in my plans, Blake?" the Winger asked lazily, stifling a yawn.

"One big flaw, chief!" growled the burly first lieutenant. "The whole scheme is mad—suicidal; and if you fail, you'll be arrested by three-quarters of London's available police."

The Winger chuckled and yawned again.

"I'm not afraid of Inspector Thomas, Hull, or the whole sheebang, Blake," he drawled smoothly. "But I'm certainly going to keep my weather eye lifting for that decent young imp, Snap Fane!"

He took his radio set from his pocket and tuned in to the Yard.

"Hallo, Thomas," he said suavely. "Think you could reserve the Royal Box for me to-morrow evening? No! Well, never mind, I shall be in a box, anyway. Until we meet—if we do—good-night!"

Blake gasped as the Winger cut out.

"You're the limit, chief," he said admiringly.

"The limit's the sky," was the Winger's enigmatical remark. "And so to bed. Good-night, Blake! We'll be richer by this time to-morrow—a little."

CHAPTER 2.
Wington!

MOTOR-CARS, motor-bikes, buses, charabancs, trains, and tramcars, push-bikes, women with perambulators. Everyone in London seemed to be going to the Stadium.

The streets were black with people. Those who had

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missed the Winger's impudent announcement the evening before, had read all about it in the morning papers.

"He'll be arrested!"

"They'll cop him!"

"I hope he's nice-looking!"

"I only brought my gate-money with me in case!"

Those were a sample of the remarks heard among the multitude streaming for the entrance gates. The tattoo was forgotten. This young, aristocratic crook, whose daring and simplicity had first shocked, then astounded London, was drawing the crowd.

The tattoo officials chuckled and rubbed their hands. The Stadium would be packed black. The gate-money would be colossal.

Snap Fane was first at the gates, his pocket radio set tuned in for any signals the Winger might send to anyone. Snap knew the Winger's whimsical wit—his daring in baiting Detective-Inspector Thomas, or anyone else who tried to capture him.

Owing to the crush, the gates were opened earlier than announced.

Turnstiles clicked like machine-guns to the merry tinkle of silver.

Snap paid his one-and-sixpence, which was the price for admission to the cheapest seats, and rushed for a front row place.

"Seen the Winger, guv'nor?" he asked the man at the pay office.

"No, and not likely to," answered the box-office man.

Snap wriggled into place and hung on like grim death while people surged around trying to dislodge him.

"That kid's in the grounds, chief!"

The voice came from Snap's pocket radio set.

"Whajjew say?" demanded a burly Cockney standing beside him.

"Nothing, mister," grinned Snap, his heart missing a beat.

That sentence. It was a warning to the Winger from one of his band. Someone connected with the Winger had seen Snap enter the Stadium and had warned him.

"Hallo, Snap! Hallo, laddie!" came the suave voice of the Winger himself from Snap's pocket.

The Cockney eyed Snap suspiciously.

"Got a blinkin' parrit in yer pocket, mate?" he demanded suspiciously.

Snap grinned and shuffled. The last thing he wished to do was to attract attention to himself. Yet he hated the idea of shutting off his radio set.

Then he got a bright idea and snatched out a huge red spotted handkerchief in which the radio set was wrapped.

"Ever heard them blokes wot can chuck their voices, mister?" he asked, with an elfish grin.

"Blimey, you a vent—vent—one of them chaps?" The Cockney stared at him in admiration.

"You bet I'm here," Snap answered into the radio transmitter, then pushed the set back into his pocket swiftly.

"Splendid!" came the Winger's voice. "Well, keep your eyes skinned, Snap, for everybody in the Stadium will see the Winger to-night."

The Cockney roared with laughter. Those immediately surrounding Snap craned their necks and stared at the uncomfortable lad.

"Do something more, kid," urged a man farther back. "I didn't hear that."

Snap shook his head.

"Show's over, boss," he retorted. "Later on, perhaps!"

The stands were filling rapidly. Around the passages moved an unbroken line of people, and the sole topic of conversation was the "Winger."

Snap lapsed into deep thought. The voice which had warned the Winger that Snap was in the Stadium had sounded very loud and close. But the Winger's voice came from farther away.

"He ain't here yet," Snap told himself.

It grew dark. The place was crowded out. Not a single seat remained vacant. A solid black mass of humanity waited with eager eyes the coming of London's coolest, most impudent crook.

"Every box surrounded?" demanded Inspector Thomas. "He said he would be in a box."

"The whole Stadium is surrounded, chief," answered the plain clothes man. "I've got the reports here of thirty-nine officers who have certain young gents under observation as looking like the Winger."

"How do you know what he looks like?" barked Thomas. "That's our trouble. He's a past master at disguises, and nobody's ever seen him in his natural self yet."

The tattoo started. A march past of the Royal Air Force arrested the attention of the audience, fitfully at first, then more firmly.

Then came a parade of airplanes. Large planes, small ones, bombers and scouts, defenders and attackers.

They lined up in formation on the ground. At a given signal, every engine zoomed into whizzing life. Daring pilots clambered into their seats. The squadron took the air, flashing searchlights casting their shadows on the low-lying clouds above.

The Stadium was drowned in darkness, broken only by the upward slanting of searchlight beams, gripping the soaring air fleet in their relentless, revealing fingers.

The audience had mostly forgotten the Winger's manifesto of the night before, watching the evolutions up there under the sky ceiling.

One squadron suddenly shot up through the cloud blanket and went from sight, leaving the air empty.

Crash! Zoomph! Bang! Bombs began to drop from nowhere on the city of wood and canvas which had been erected.

Out rushed a fleet of fighters, taking the air like birds rising from the earth. The attacking fleet appeared. Machine-guns spat red stabs of flame down at the defending fleet rising to meet them.

Even Snap forgot the Winger. The two fleets would crash! They were rushing at each other at over a hundred miles an hour, spitting imaginary death like tiger cats.

Three bombers side-slipped and appeared to crash—out of action. Two fighters suddenly took tail skids, and zoomped into a reverse loop to avoid a formation of attackers—then cleverly got on their tails and shot them down.

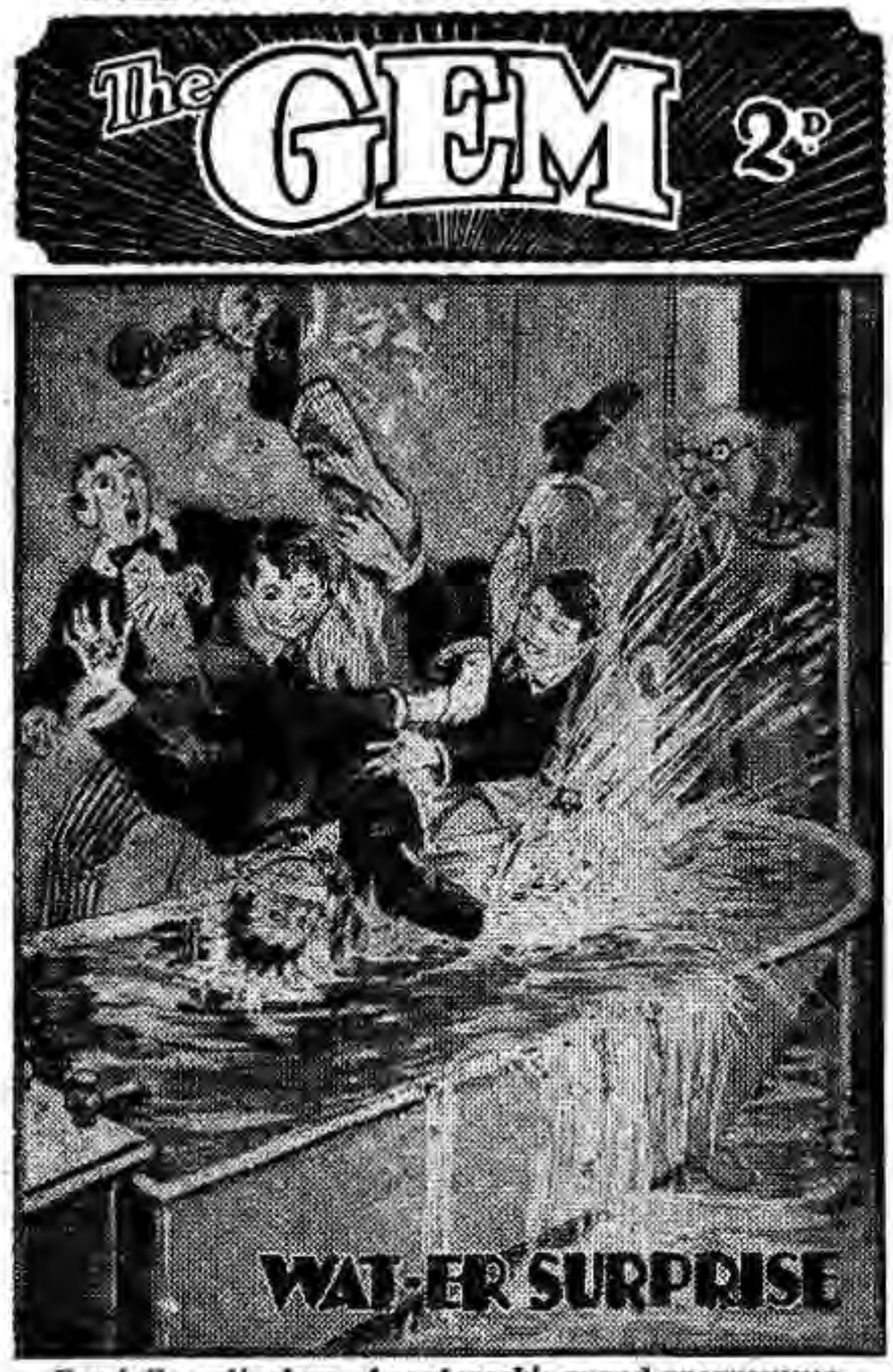
A hush fell over the cheering audience as the fighters turned and fled for the clouds, closely followed, hotly pursued by the gallant little Bristol midgets.

They went from sight, diving clean into the white-grey blanket of cloud, yellow spotted by the wavering searchlight beams.

Snap, leaning against the railing right at the top of his stand, craned his neck upwards until it ached.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have the great pleasure to keep my promise!"

NEXT WEEK'S COVER



For full particulars of next week's grand programme, see page 18.

ORDER YOUR "GEM" EARLY, BOYS!

As the flaming aeroplane came down among the rapidly scattering ambulance men, the pilot stood up and bowed ironically!

The audience uttered a gasp which sounded like the surge of a wave over shingle. The loud-speakers hurled the words like thunder around the almost deserted arena.

Snap shivered and came back to earth.

"The Winger will appear within thirty seconds, ladies and gentlemen, and he will remain in sight exactly fifteen seconds with a full spotlight on him!" roared the loud-speakers.

The gasp died away at the first intonation of that mysterious voice. Police-officers and detectives stiffened and stood tense and ready.

The white-faced audience looked this way and that, sideways and up. Where was the announcer—where the Winger?

Snap shuddered and looked down over the rear of the topmost railings, down to the gravel outside the Stadium. Beneath him was an entrance turnstile and pay-box.

Rows and rows of gleaming cars were parked beyond.

He looked aloft! The angry snarl of airplane engines came from above the cloud curtain.

Then the audience, Snap, policemen, and all uttered a scream of terror, for cutting out of the cloud ceiling came a small fighter plane.

A trail of fire streaked out behind the machine. She was falling—falling in flames.

A searchlight picked the machine in its grip, revealing to the horrified crowds a white-faced pilot frantically trying to disengage the body strap which held him to his seat.

Shadowy figures rushed from the far end of the Stadium, bearing stretchers.

"He'll be killed!" screamed a woman, a solitary voice announcing the coming tragedy.

Snap focussed his binoculars on the frantically struggling pilot in the flaming fuselage, his hands shaking with excitement.

Another hundred feet and the airplane would crash!

"Lummee, what the——" Snap choked the words in a startled gasp.

Something had happened in the airplane. The uprush of wind had torn the pilot's hair off. With it went what looked like the skin of the face.

A second later Snap went hurtling down through the crowds in front of him, his heart thumping fit to suffocate him.

"Gosh, the Winger!" he howled frantically.

"Look—he's got control!" rolled a roar of relief around the vast Stadium.

The flaming airplane levelled out when within fifty feet of the ground. The ambulance men and firemen who had dashed out to be ready scattered either side as the blazing machine taxied down between them.

Somehow—Snap never knew how—he reached the front rails and vaulted into the arena.

"Good-evening, ladies and gentlemen!" boomed the microphones. "I have pleasure in announcing that the Winger has arrived!"

The pilot in the flaming plane stood up and bowed ironically slowly around the audience, which stood still, silent, spellbound.

"Every performer takes his fees, ladies and gentlemen, also Inspector Thomas!" roared the microphone. "Thank you!"

Two stretcher men suddenly seized some bags which had been covered on their stretcher and made to pass them to the smiling Winger.

"Quick—he's the Winger!" shouted Snap, his voice ringing through the silence.

The Winger swung round—saw Snap's lithe figure sprinting the length of the arena towards him. Illuminated by what the crowd now saw was only a red flare, the Winger's slim figure stood still and rigid, a clear picture for all eyes.

Then he waved to Snap, rapped out an order to the two stretcher men, and made contact.

The two men sprang into the rear cockpit. With a screeching zoom the still apparently flaming plane taxied at increasing speed towards Snap Fane and half a dozen belated policemen who had rushed into the arena.

Snap could see the Winger's white face staring at him. The machine was heading straight at him.

The wheels left the grass—the machine rose a couple of feet and passed low over Snap's head.

He grabbed upwards. His fingers got a grip. A terrific jerk on his arms, and he was swung off his feet, gripping the under-side of the wheels axle.

Shouts and screams rent the air, ringing even above the roar of the airplane's engine. Snap was being carried aloft. He must let go—he would fall and be killed.

High above the clouds the two air fleets were still fighting their sham battles, ignorant of the counter show beneath the sky ceiling.

CHAPTER 3.
A Narrow Thing!

THE Winger's airplane swept low over the heads of the horrified people, cleared the grandstand with Snap's feet only a dozen feet from the roof.

"That confounded kid is hanging on to the axle, chief!" shouted one of the stretcher-bearers.

"What!"

Instantly the Winger levelled out, zoomed low over the car parks, and headed for the fields beyond.

Snap gritted his teeth and held fast, the rushing wind streaming his legs and body out until they lay at an acute angle with the under-carriage of the airplane.

Could he hold on? Not for long! Already the sockets of his arms were being wrenched apart—his fingers slipping.

Yet it had all happened so swiftly that he had not had time to feel frightened. He even saw the two aerial fleets come gliding down from their fight above the clouds, serenely ignorant of the other drama which had been staged by the Winger.

Suddenly a searchlight shot out from the Winger's machine, flooding a flat field ahead. The machine nosed gently downwards. In a flash Snap guessed the Winger knew he was hanging from the axle.

The speed eased down. He crumpled his legs up lest they should smash against the ground when the airplane landed, as it was going to do.

The wheels bumped—the machine jumped, then struck and taxied across a jolty field. Snap got a horrid jerk. His fingers were dragged from their hold, and he rolled over and over down into a gully.

Face up to the clouds, half stunned by the sudden contact, he just lay there, dreamily wondering how many bones were broken. Dimly to his bewildered wits came the roar of the airplane. It was coming back to him. It stopped, and a man sprang out and bent over him.

"Snap, you're an ass!" snapped the Winger. "How do you feel?"

"Corks! Winger, I'm out!" whispered Snap. "You win!"

Deftly the Winger ran his fingers over Snap's limbs.

"No bones broken, Snap, you gritty lad," he said, with a smile. "But I don't win. You made me leave behind two bags full of Treasury notes which my men brought out in the stretcher. I got only one bag aboard—about three thousand pounds."

Snap sat up and blinked. The Winger sprang away from him, whipped out a little automatic, and covered him.

"Just to give you a legitimate excuse for not bagging me, Snap," he purred, backing hastily. "Good-bye, you brave little rat."

He sprang aboard the airplane, and by the time Snap was dizzily on his feet, was in the air, streaking east. Snap watched him go, ruefully biting his lip to stifle the pain of his skinned fingers and hands.

"Lumme, he's a oner!" he muttered grimly, as he realised what the Winger had done. "He's stolen a machine from an aerodrome, bagged the gate money somehow, and landed in the arena to pick it up and two of his gang!"

As he staggered to the nearest road he wondered how the Winger had managed to get the gate money from the pay-boxes at the turnstiles.

There were many of them, with an official in each of them, also uniformed attendants at the turnstiles.

He begged a lift in a passing car and got back to Scotland Yard in the small hours of the morning.

"My hat, I thought you were killed or captured by that crook, Snap!" shouted Detective-Inspector Thomas, as Snap staggered into his office.

Snap waggled his head and eyed his hands which he had bandaged with his handkerchief. Then he told his tale.

"Did you get the other bags of money I stopped him shoving into the airplane, Mr. Thomas?" he asked. "Jingo, if the wind hadn't ripped off his skin mask he'd have got clean away with the lot! But how the dickens did he get the pay-box money?"

"Easy enough, the blighter!" growled Thomas. "He sent his gang out to kidnap every pay-box official and turnstile attendant. His men took their places. What could be easier?"

"Where'd he put the kidnapped blokes?" grinned Snap, very amused at the Winger's perfectly simple methods.

"They were found in an old barn at Finchley, dressed only in their underclothes!" snarled Inspector Thomas.

Thomas glared at Snap, and Snap grinned and edged to the door.

"Get out!" roared the detective.

Snap got, and fled to his boat, gently paddling back to Barking Creek.

The Winger had made a fair haul, after all. Three thousand pounds in notes, and kept his promise to London to show up at the Stadium.

In his Essex country house the Winger sat at the table with his gang assembled around him.

"Did you have any trouble getting away with the silver, No. 6?" he asked a man wearing a skin mask over his face.

"No, chief, nobody suspected us, and we got away with it quite easily during the air fight," answered No. 6. "Nine hundred and forty-one pounds, seventy bad shillings, and a dozen or so dud sixpences."

The Winger smiled.

"Send the duds back to Scotland Yard," he ordered.

(There's a thousand pounds reward out for the Winger next week, and somebody tries to earn it! Don't miss this big thrill, whatever you do!)

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was fully a match even for the great Figgins, and the result of that tussle would have been very doubtful had no one been at hand to interfere. But there was a footstep in the darkness, and Figgins had no doubt that the loyal Co. were there to back him up.

"Come on!" he gasped. "The beast's as strong as a horse!"

The unseen individual came on and laid a strong grasp on Figgins. The chief of the famous firm of Figgins & Co. gave a yell.

"You've got hold of me, ass! Collar Tom Merry!"

"Not this time," said the voice of Manners.

Figgins jumped.

"Manners! Where's the Co.? I say, Kerr! Wynn! Rescue!"

But there was no rescue at hand for the trapped Figgins. Down he went to the floor, with Tom Merry on top of him and Manners clutching him, and in a minute he was a helpless prisoner, under the grasp of the Terrible Two.

"Quick, Manners! The rope!"

Figgins tried to yell.

But Tom Merry's hand was over his mouth in a twinkling.

He gurgled and gasped and struggled, but he was powerless, and in a few minutes Manners had tied his hands and feet.

Then the gag was placed in his mouth and neatly tied there.

"Feel all right, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Very well! As you don't answer, I suppose you're all serene. Get a glim, Manners!"

"Here you are!"

Manners lighted a bicycle lamp. The door of the shed was carefully closed to keep the light hidden. There was a shutter over the window, so hardly a gleam could escape that way. The light glimmered on Figgins' furious face. He was watching the Terrible Two with a painful interest, and his eyes nearly bulged from his head when he saw Tom Merry drag Kerr's precious parcel from its place of concealment.

A foreboding of what was to come struck him now.

Tom opened the parcel and pulled out the prison clothes. He grinned as he sorted them out.

"Now, Figgy, are you ready?"

Figgins made no reply, for an excellent reason.

"We happen to have tumbled to your little game, Figgy," Tom Merry condescended to explain. "We're going to rig you up as a convict for Blake to capture."

Figgins wriggled convulsively.

"The Co. are tied up in the gardener's shed, and they can't rescue you. We've got you in a cleft stick. It's what you planned for me, so you've got nothing to complain about—have you?"

Figgins glared.

"Now, we're going to dress you, and you may get hurt if you struggle. That's a warning! If you are quiet, we'll treat you like the apple of our eye. His legs first, Manners!"

Figgins' legs were untied. He began to kick violently, but each of the School House juniors clung to a leg, and he was helpless. His boots were taken off, and then the convict's knickers were slipped on him over his trousers, which were rolled up over his knees. The knickers secured, the barred stockings were placed on him and padded out to look fatter, Figgins' calves being of the slimmest. The boots provided by Kerr were next placed on his feet, and then his ankles were firmly tied together again.

Figgins looked as if he would explode with wrath, but he was perforce silent. He could only summon what philosophy he could muster and be as patient as possible.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "The lower half of you, Figgy, looks a fearful ruffian! Untie his arms, Manners, old man!"

Figgins prepared for a desperate struggle.

But the Terrible Two were too many for him. His arms were unfastened, but he hadn't much chance to hit out. The hideous convict's garb was forced upon him and secured, and then his arms were fastened again down to his sides.

Tom Merry began to prepare the make-up. During a period of amateur theatricals at St. Jim's Tom had learned a great deal of the art of making up, and now he did his work almost as artistically as Kerr could have done it.

Figgins squirmed in vain.

His complexion was turned to a deep red, and a blue, unshaven appearance was imparted to his cheeks and chin.

His nose was reddened, his eyebrows darkened, and a thick false moustache gummed securely to his upper lip.

Tom Merry was startled himself by the change these artistic touches wrought in the aspect of the great Figgins.

Figgy was transformed into a fearful-looking ruffian, whom any peaceful person would have avoided in a lonely place.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Manners. "Is that really Figgy, or is it Bill Sykes? Figgy, is it really you, old man?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Jam that gag a little tighter!"

"Gr-r-r——"

"Now I think that will do!" said Tom Merry. "Douse the glim! Now for the capture! Good-bye, Bluebell! You won't have to remain there long, Blake and Study No. 6 are coming to deliver you to justice, you hardened ruffian."

And the Terrible Two quitted the woodshed.

As Herries gave the policeman a shove, Blake whipped up Taggles' pony and the trap went rattling down the road at a great pace.

Figgins heard a chuckle die away, a door close.

He was alone!

Alone, to wait for the coming of his old rivals—Study No. 6! He wriggled and squirmed in the gloom, but he could not wriggle or squirm himself loose. Figgins was fairly caught in his own trap this time!

CHAPTER 8.

A Brilliant Capture.

"REALLY, Blake, I think we ought to be doin' somethin' or othah, don't you know!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who made that sage remark.

The chums were in the school tuckshop, and Blake had expended the sum of ninepence in tarts, which the three had just finished consuming.

It was then that Arthur Augustus delivered himself of the opinion stated above.

Blake looked at him.

"What do you want to do, Gussy?"

Blake was leaning against the doorpost. The door was half open, and he could hear a murmur of voices in the passage, but he was not paying any attention to it.

"Well, we ought to be huntin' that convict, you know! What's the good of formin' a plan and then doin' nothin' to carry it out, deah boy?"

"Not much good, certainly. What's your idea?"

"Suppose we bweak bounds to-night and go and hunt the boundah!"

"No good," said Herries. "Don't you know the police have drawn a cordon right round the wood, where he's supposed to be, from the old castle to Rylcombe Lane? We couldn't even get into the wood without being stopped."

"He may not be in the wood at all."

"Where do you think he might be?"

"Anywheah!" said D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy and Mannahs will have the laugh of us if we don't hunt that despewate chawactah, aftah all! Yaas, wathah!"

Blake nodded.

"I've been trying to think out a plan," he said. "I——"

He stopped suddenly.

His chums stared at him in surprise.

"Well——" began Herries.

Blake made a sign to be silent.

Herries and D'Arcy were amazed, but they were obedient. They watched Blake, and Blake's eyes were blazing with sudden excitement.

For, as he stood there, leaning against the doorpost, through the crack of the door had come the clear words from the passage, distinctly audible:

"Figgins has done Study No. 6 this time!"

And Blake jumped.

It was the voice of Tom Merry!

"You're sure, Tom?" said the familiar voice of Manners.

"Rather! I went down to the woodshed with Figgy. Blake saw us go, but he never guessed what was in the wind!"

"Ha, ha!"

"The question is: Ought we to tell Blake?"

"No; we have no right to give Figgy away!"

"Well, you see, it was Study No. 6's idea to capture the convict, and the prisoner in the woodshed really belongs to them by rights."

"Yes, but if Figgins & Co. had the trouble of capturing him, they ought to have the glory. Blake shouldn't be so slow!"

"Well, that's right! He is slow, and no mistake! Fancy him not guessing that the convict would come here for Monteith to hide him!"

"Figgins must have guessed it."

"Of course! Figgy is sharp! He will crow over Blake! Quite right, too! Study No. 6 are out of it this time, and no mistake!"

"I suppose we ought to keep it dark. It wouldn't be fair for Figgins & Co. to find their prisoner gone when they come back to take him away to the police station."

"Certainly not! We won't say a word. Besides, Figgy relies upon us."

"Then mum's the word!"

The voices moved on. The Terrible Two passed on up the passage. Blake was quivering from head to foot with excitement.

His chums had heard Tom Merry's voice but not his words. They stared at Blake in amazement and inquiry.

"Do you catch on?" breathed Blake. "Figgins & Co. have caught the convict. He came here for Monteith to hide him, and they have caught him and fastened him in the woodshed, while they've gone to Rylcombe to fetch a conveyance to take him to the police station."

"Great Scott!"

"They won't find him when they get back," said Blake determinedly. "We're not going to be robbed of our glory by those barefaced bounders."

"We'll collah the beastly convict!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"You bet."

"I suppose there's no hoax about it, Blake?"

"We'll soon see by looking in the woodshed."

"Good! That's easy enough!"

"Come along! We're not going to let the grass grow under our feet. Who'd ever have dreamed that the fellow would have the awful nerve to come here to hide? Figgins & Co. ought to have told us! They have no right to collar our convict!"

"I should wathah think not!"

"He's ours! We had the idea first!"

"Excuse me, Blake, but weally it was my ideah!"

"Dry up. It was our idea, and in the innocence of our hearts we told Figgins. Now he's boned the idea and collared our convict. It's mean!"

"It's not playing the game," said Herries.

"No; that it isn't! Figgy won't find any convict there when he gets back, that's all. That convict is ours."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll just look into the woodshed to make sure that all is serene, and then we'll collar the prisoner and walk him off!"

"What shall we do with him?"

"Take him to Rylcombe and give him to the police, of course! It will make a bit of a sensation."

"How shall we get the boundah to go to Rylcombe?"

"By Jove! I've got a good idea! We'll have Taggles' trap. We'll tell him what it's for, so he's certain to lend it us. You see, we can't risk losing the convict, or there's all our glory gone. If we tried to walk him to Rylcombe some silly bobby would see him and take him away from us, and make out he captured him. If we gave him up here at St. Jim's, the masters would take charge of the whole matter, and we should be left right out in the cold. You may be sure of that!"

"Yaas, wathah! They wouldn't give us the pwoper cwedit."

"Besides, Figgins & Co. would claim him as their own prisoner."

"They've got cheek enough for anythin', those boundahs."

"So we'll make all secure by taking him to Rylcombe ourselves. We shall have to square Taggles with a few bob. Gussy can stand that, as he's rolling in wealth, and it's his idea. Gussy can square Taggles."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then!"

The chums of Study No. 6 speedily reached the woodshed. Blake cautiously opened the door and peeped within. He heard a faint sound as of a body wriggling on the ground. He struck a match. Then he gave quite a jump, and his chums behind him jumped, too.

The flare of the match revealed that the affair was no hoax. There, on the floor, bound hand and foot, lay a fearful-looking ruffian, in the garb of a convict. The match went out. Blake withdrew from the woodshed and closed the door. He was shaking with excitement.

"You saw, kids?"

"I saw him," said Herries, with a shiver. "What a horrible-looking brute!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He doesn't look like a prize beauty, I know," assented Blake. "They've fastened him up for safety, and they seemed to have gagged him. They were afraid that if he made a noise we should be on the track. It's all plain sailing now, kids. Gussy, go and negotiate with Taggles. It doesn't matter how much you have to give him—we must have the trap!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Give him all you've got, and promise him your next week's pocket-money—anything you like," said Blake generously. "Only get the trap, and make him keep the gates open till we've gone. Cut off, and be quick!"

"I will wun all the way!"

And the swell of the School House cut off. Blake and Herries remained near the woodshed. They were on guard, fully determined that if Figgins & Co. appeared there