

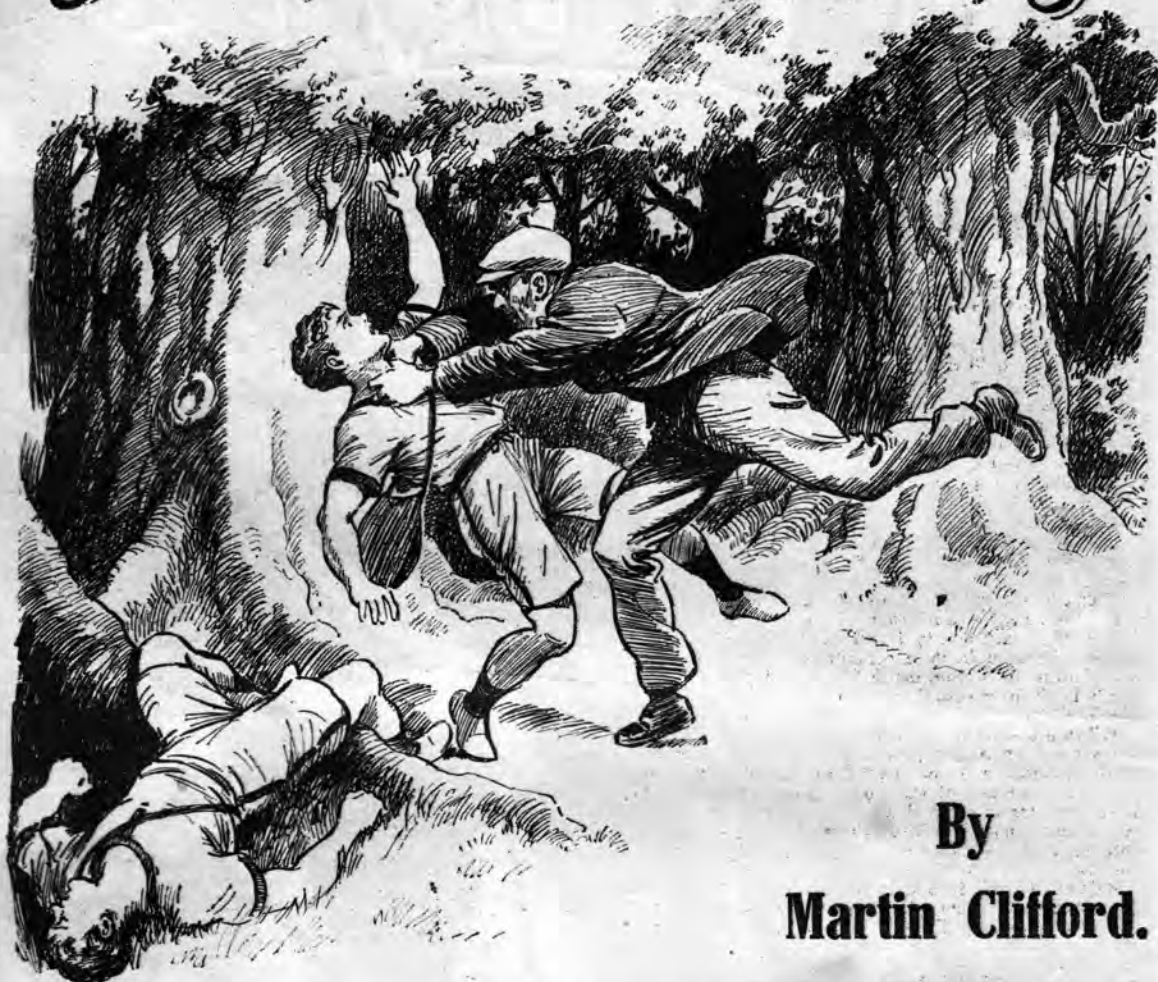
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SPECIAL DOUBLE-LENGTH YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO. INSIDE!

The GEM 2^d



The VENGEANCE of



By

Martin Clifford.

Tom Merry is chosen to run as a Hare for the Sixth Form Harriers! But he runs into danger—and has a hair's-breadth escape!

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry is Chosen!

"TOM MERRY?"

"Yes, Tom Merry!"

"Oh, rats!"

It was Sefton of the New House who said "Rats!" Kildare of the School House at St. Jim's, and captain of the school, looked at Sefton with a gleam in his quiet eyes.

"If you know more about it than I do, Sefton——"

"Oh, I don't say that! But Tom Merry——"

"I have said that Tom Merry has offered, and that I think he will do. If the committee are against it, I shall not insist; but, in my opinion, Merry is up to the work."

"He is a junior."

"Well, he is in the Shell, which is the top of the junior Forms; and he is certainly the fastest sprinter and the best stayer in the Lower School. You've all seen him run, and you all know that. As a matter of fact, there are very few fellows in the Fifth who could touch him on the cinder-path, and not many in the Sixth, either."

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Sefton shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, have your way!" he exclaimed. "You are always sugaring Tom Merry!"

"I like the lad," said Kildare. "He is one of the best. And when he gets into the Sixth he will bring more credit on the school than some of the fellows who are already there. But I leave it to the majority."

It was a meeting of the St. Jim's Harriers. It was Monday, and on Saturday afternoon the Sixth-Form paper-chase was to take place. The seniors had met in the captain's study to settle whom the hares were to be, and Kildare had surprised most of them by proposing Tom Merry, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, as one of them.

Kildare, as captain of St. Jim's, and the finest all-round sportsman in the school, was looked up to by the fellows of both Houses, rivals as they were in many respects.

Although his suggestion surprised the meeting, few were inclined to gainsay his judgment, and, in fact, Sefton was the only one who opposed. And Sefton of the New House opposed Kildare whenever he could, on any and every occasion, and so his opinion on the present matter did not carry much weight.

"It's all right," said Monteith, the head prefect of the

—IN THIS GRIPPING EXTRA-LONG YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO.!

“NOBBLER JIM”

New House. “No need to put it to the vote, Kildare. If you think that Tom Merry will do, we’ll put his name down, and that settles it.”

“Good!” said five or six voices.

Sefton gave his head prefect a bitter glance. Time had been when Monteith, too, was glad of any chance of heckling the captain of St. Jim’s, and when he would have backed up Sefton with all his heart. But that time was no longer. Monteith and Kildare were now the best of friends, and Sefton had no choice but to scowl and drop his opposition, finding himself in a minority of one.

“That’s settled, then?” said Kildare, looking round. “I may say that I shouldn’t have proposed Tom Merry if I hadn’t been certain that he was in good form. He’s a stickler, and he’ll do his best, especially as I shall be with him. Nothing more to be said, I suppose? I’ll go along to Tom Merry’s study and tell him he will be wanted in the paper-chase on Saturday.”

And the meeting broke up.

Kildare went along the passage towards the Shell studies. The light was gleaming out from the half-open door of Study No. 10, the apartment in the School House at St. Jim’s where dwelt the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. And as the captain came up to the open door he could hear the voices of the chums of the Shell.

“That’s all right!” said the cheery, pleasant voice of Tom Merry. “I think that will do, kids!”

“Good!” said Monty Lowther. “I say, Blake and his lot haven’t brought in their contributions yet.”

“Neither have Figgins & Co.,” said Manners. “If they don’t buck up we shall have to weed out the editorial staff, that’s all.”

Kildare smiled as he heard it. He knew that the juniors were busy upon the production of a new number of the junior magazine, known as “Tom Merry’s Weekly.”

The appearance of the Lower School magazine had been somewhat irregular hitherto, but whenever a new number was coming out Tom Merry’s study—turned for the nonce into an editorial office—was the scene of almost breathless industry.

Kildare looked into the room, and saw the three chums hard at work. Tom Merry was finishing the title-page of the magazine, and Kildare’s glance took it in as he looked in.

“TOM MERRY’S WEEKLY.”

A Journal Devoted to the Amusement of the Juniors and the Improvement of the Seniors at St. Jim’s.

Published by Tom Merry & Co., in the School House.

Price Nix.

Edited by T. Merry. Sub-Editors: Lowther, Manners, Blake, Herries, Digby, D’Arcy, Figgins, Wynan, Kerr, and Smythe.”

Kildare coughed and entered the study, and the chums of the Shell looked up. The captain of St. Jim’s nodded, with a smile.

“I see you’re very busy,” he remarked.

“Fearfully!” said Tom Merry, drawing his hand across his brow with a dramatic gesture, and leaving a smear there from an ink finger. “The labours of an editor who is really conscientious are infinite.”

“I suppose so.”

“To keep the journal up to the mark, and exclude all the piffle the contributors want to shove into it, would make a thirteenth job for Hercules, if he wanted one,” said Tom Merry. “What with Figgins’ serial and D’Arcy’s fashion columns it’s enough to turn a harmless and necessary editor’s hair grey.”

“Oh, ring off, Tom!” said Lowther. “If you wanted to resign the editorship, there are ten fellows ready to relieve you of the job.”

“I know there are; but what would become of the magazine?”

“That depends. If I had it—”

“If you had it, Lowther, old man, it would die a natural death. No; I am going to do my duty!” said Tom Merry heroically. “England expects every man to do his duty—”

“England expects a thundering lot, then,” said Lowther; “and I shouldn’t wonder if she were disappointed!”

“Cheese it!” said Manners. “Here’s Kildare waiting with his contribution in his pocket, and you haven’t even asked to see it!”

Tom Merry jumped up from the editorial chair.

“My dear Kildare—”

“Respected captain—” said Monty Lowther.

“Hand over the contribution—”

“Anything you write will go in whole.”

Kildare laughed.

“I haven’t come here with a contribution,” he said. “Manners is mistaken. I have not yet taken to writing for the papers.”

“I say, I wish you would!” said Tom Merry. “If you’d do us a football article it would go down rippingly, and the name of Kildare among the contributors would give the paper a tone.”

“I’m afraid it’s above my weight, Merry.”

“Or an article on the offside rule,” said Tom Merry persuasively.

Kildare shook his head.

“Or a poem,” went on the editor of “Tom Merry’s Weekly.” “As an Irishman you ought to be able to write poetry. Give us something in rhyme about Erin’s green isle.”

“I’m afraid your readers would not like my poetry, Merry,” said Kildare, laughing. “But I came here to speak to you about the paper-chase on Saturday.”

“Will you want me?”

“Yes.”

Tom Merry’s eyes danced; Lowther and Manners stared at their chum in amazement.

“What’s this?” exclaimed Lowther. “I didn’t know juniors were running in the Sixth Form paper-chase. Of course, we’re always willing to give the seniors a leg-up.”

“Merry is going to run as a hare with me,” said Kildare. “I don’t think we shall require assistance from the Lower Forms in any other way, Lowther.”

“Merry is going to run with you?”

“Yes; as a hare.”

“I’ll be ready, Kildare,” said Tom Merry; “and I’m jolly glad you think me good enough! You shan’t be sorry for choosing me, if I can help it.”

“I am sure of that.”

And, with a nod and a smile, the captain of St. Jim’s quitted the study. He left silence there as he closed the door. Manners and Lowther, without speaking a word, were staring at Tom Merry as though they wished to stare holes into him.

CHAPTER 2.

The Editorial Office of the “Weekly.”

TOM MERRY turned to the “Weekly” again, affecting not to notice the expressive stare fixed upon him. Manners and Lowther did not speak. They continued to stare steadily, and the sheer force of staring made Tom Merry look up at last from his work.

“Well?” said Tom Merry, meeting their eyes.

“Well?” said Manners.

“Well?” repeated Monty Lowther.

“What the dickens are you staring at me like a pair of silly owls for?” demanded Tom Merry. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Nothing!” said Lowther. “The question is, what’s the matter with you?”

“Nothing, ass!”

“Sure?” asked Lowther, with much solicitude.

“Confound you! Yes, of course I’m sure!”

“Not feeling at all weak in the head?”

“Look here—”

"I'm looking! At a duffer! If you're not weak in the head, or going off your silly rocker, what do you mean by it?"

"Yes; that's the question!" said Manners. "What do you mean by it, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry coloured a little.

"Mean by what?" he asked uneasily.

"Oh, you know very well!" said Lowther. "You've offered yourself, it seems, as hare in the Sixth Form paper-chase."

"Well, why shouldn't I?"

"There are lots of reasons, I think. Enough reasons to fill a sack. Do you think you can run against a Sixth-Former?"

"Yes; I know I can. I ran against Darrell the other day when I was turning the corner of the chapel wall."

"This is not time to be funny, Thomas Merry. Do you think you can run against the Sixth—fellows three or four years older than yourself?"

"Well, Kildare thinks I can!"

Monty Lowther scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"And, besides," went on Tom Merry, "can't you see what an honour it is for the Shell for a member of it to run in the Sixth Form harriers? A Shell boy to run as hare with Kildare, the captain of the school! Why, it will make the Fourth Form turn green from end to end."

"Yes; only if you get caught in the first half-mile, what then?" asked Manners.

"Oh, I know!" said Monty Lowther. "It will make the Shell turn pink with shame!"

"But I shan't get caught in the first half-mile. I hope I shan't be caught at all; but, in any case, I shall give them a good run for their money."

"You won't have much chance against runners like Darrell, Monteith, Baker—"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"Well, I do!" said Lowther emphatically. "The fact is, Tom, that you've bitten off more than you can chew this time!"

"But, I say—"

"Rats! You've taken on a job too heavy for you, and you will fail, my son, and the Fourth Form will cackle at the Shell like a lot of giddy geese."

"But—"

"And the New House fellows will cackle at us, too," said Manners. "I can imagine how Figgins & Co. will grin when Tom Merry is caught by Darrell and Monteith in the first hundred yards."

"Yes; we shall never hear the end of it!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "You're a pair of rotten croakers, that's what you are! You know I can run, and I don't see why I shouldn't make a good hare for the run on Saturday. I am going to practise and get into the best possible form."

"You won't be able to stick it out."

"I shall do my best, and if I give a good show, it will be one up for the Shell, and one up for the School House. If I get caught, that's the luck of the thing. Anyway, it's no good starting in the line of Job's comforter now. Shut up, and let's get on with the 'Weekly'!"

"Hallo, here comes Study No. 6!"

Four juniors presented themselves at the door of the editorial office. They looked very businesslike. Blake and Herries carried open manuscripts in their hands. D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, had an enormous roll under his arm. Digby's breast-pocket was bulging suspiciously.

"Oh, here you are!" said Tom Merry. "I've written down here that the 'Weekly' is published by Tom Merry & Co., but it seems to me that we shall have all the work, and the Co. don't do much."

"Well, we write the best contributions," said Blake. "I don't see that you can expect more than that!"

"The best—eh? Why—"

"That's all right, kid," said Blake, with a wave of his hand. "We've brought you along some stuff that will make your contributions look sick."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have a stow that will fill about half this nambah of the mag—"

The Terrible Three grinned at one another.

"Have you?" said Tom Merry. "Then you had better look out for a wastepaper merchant, and sell it cheap!"

The swell of St. Jim's screwed his monocle into his right eye, and stared at Tom Merry with a decidedly disdainful expression.

"If you mean to imply by that remark that I can't write, Tom Mewwy, I hurl the remark back in your throat!"

"My word, he's getting dangerous!" said Digby. "Shut up, Gussy, and let's get to work. Here come Figgins & Co. Hallo, Figgy, better late than never!"

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"Come in!" said Tom Merry.

And Figgins & Co., the famous quartet from the New House, came into the editorial office, with important looks on their faces, and bundles of foolscap under their arms.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry & Co. at Work.

F IGGINS & CO. had evidently come prepared for business, and the whole of the editorial staff being now in the office, they were soon at work.

The rivalry between the School House and New House at St. Jim's was always allowed tacitly to fall into abeyance when it was a question of producing a new number of "Tom Merry's Weekly," the production being the joint work of the juniors of both Houses.

Once or twice, indeed, Figgins & Co., outnumbered in the editorial office by the School House boys, had talked of starting an opposition paper in the New House, but it had never come to anything.

The "Weekly," which was now printed at the local paper office in Rylcombe, was really a production to be proud of, and proud of it the juniors accordingly were.

It could not be called a paying concern, as the copies were given away to the readers, and the cost of printing and publishing had to be borne by the staff, consisting of one editor and ten sub-editors.

But, as Monty Lowther remarked, any fellow who paid for a copy would immediately want to run the paper, and precious few would pay, anyway, and so there was no other possible system than the one adopted.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, with the latest addition to the Co., Marmaduke Smythe, set to work in good earnest, and the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 followed suit and ceased their mutual ragging. There was none too much room in Tom Merry's study for eleven juniors to sit and work, though it was the roomiest of all the studies allotted to the Shell. But the juniors were not disposed to grumble; they sat on chairs or boxes, or the window-sill, or the floor, contentedly, and gave all their attention to their work.

"I say," said Arthur Augustus, looking up from his seat on the coal-locker.

Nobody took any notice.

Ten pens were scratching away, and D'Arcy's remark was addressed to the desert air.

"I say," repeated D'Arcy, "who's going to do the beastly report for the debating society to-morrow?"

Tom Merry looked up from his work.

"I forgot that," he said. "Thank you for reminding me, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'd like to know how things would get done in this editowial office if I did not remind you boundahs sometimes."

"Lemme see," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I suppose I shall have to take the report. It's settled that it's going into this number, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly," said Blake, looking up. "The debating society is an important body, Tom Merry, and if its proceedings were left unreported there would be ructions."

"Well, I don't know about the importance—"

"Yaas, wathah! It's vewy important. You see, I belong to it—"

"Oh, of course—that makes all the difference. I suppose a full report had better go in," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "I had better be the reporter, as I know shorthand and can take it all down if the speakers are too quick for you fellows!"

"That's all right; but if you have a report in the mag. covering about two or three pages, you can't expect to shove in any of your poetry as well," said Figgins.

"I don't know."

"But I do. I appeal to the staff."

"Right-ho!" said the staff, with one voice.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "And I weally considah that a vote of thanks should be passed to the debating society, if they are the means of keeping some of Tom Mewwy's poetry out of the mag, dear boys."

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy's right!"

Tom Merry laughed good-naturedly.

"Have it your own way, kids," he replied. "My poems are too good for this sort of magazine, anyway, and they certainly do make Fourth Form poetry look rather rotten by comparison, and that's rough on the kids."

"On the what?" demanded eight voices, with singular unanimity.

"Pardon!" said Tom Merry gracefully. "I meant cads! Hallo! There's somebody knocking at the door. He can't come in now and bother us, whoever he is, so don't take any notice!"

And eleven pens scratched away. The knock was loudly repeated, and then a hand tried the door. But one of the staff had thoughtfully locked it, and it did not open.

"I say, in there!" shouted a voice in the passage.

"Who is it?" rapped Tom Merry impatiently.

"Gore. I want to speak to you."

"Go and eat coke!"

"But I want—"

"Run away and play!"

There was a loud kick on the door. Several blots dropped in the editorial office, and there were wrathful exclamations. Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"Get away, Gore!" he called out.

"Rats! Open the beastly door!"

"We're busy!"

"What are you up to? Smoking, I suppose! Ha, ha, ha! I've bowled you out, have I, Tom Merry? My word! Fancy smoking in—"

Tom Merry gave a growl.

"We'd better open the door," he said, "or that rotter

"But is it true?" asked Gore.

"Yes, it's true."

"You're going to run on Saturday?"

"Yes; and you're going to run now, unless you want to study the weight of my boot!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Gore, retreating a little. "I always knew you were gassy enough, Tom Merry, but I never thought you would have the nerve to try to run with the Sixth! Nice sort of an ass you will look!"



Swift as lightning Tom Merry's left arm shot out, and his clenched fist caught the ruffian a terrific blow fairly between the eyes. With a grunt he dropped back into the road.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Mellish. "Why, it's to be a six-mile run, and you couldn't stay half the distance!"

"Are you going?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes, we're going! We're going to tell the House what an ass you're making of yourself," said Gore. "You'll make them cackle at the Shell, and I suppose that's your object—to bring the Form into ridicule. I think you ought to be stopped!"

"Oh, he will be stopped on Saturday before he's done a dozen yards!" said Mellish. "Of course, he's bitten off more than he can chew, and he will look an ass!"

Tom Merry picked up an inkpot from the study table. The look in his eyes was enough for Gore and Mellish. They went rather hurriedly down the passage. Tom Merry closed the door of the editorial office and took up his pen again. But most of the other pens were idle now, and their owners were staring at the hero of the Shell.

"So Goah was speakin' the twuth, Tom Mewwy?" said D'Arcy slowly.

"Yes, for once in his life," said Tom Merry. "Sort of accident, I suppose. You know, accidents will happen!"

"You are weally goin' to wun in the Sixth Form hawwiah?"

"Yes, I am, Gussy! What about it?"

"What about it?" said D'Arcy. "Why, I wegard you as an ass, that's all!"

will spread a yarn all over the School House that we're smoking in this study."

And he turned the key and threw open the door.

Gore of the Shell looked into the study. Mellish of the Fourth was with him.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Not smoking, hey? What are you so busy about—that rotten old magazine? I—"

"What do you want, Gore?"

"Only to ask you a question. I've just heard something about you—"

"That's it," said Mellish. "Walsh says—"

"That Lawson said—"

"That he heard Kildare say—"

"To Rushden—"

"That you were going to run as a hare in the paper-chase on Saturday."

"Got it all out?" asked Tom Merry politely. "My word! You two would make a good double turn in a variety show, and no mistake!"

"So do I," said Blake—"an arrant ass! I know you run very well for a junior—pretty nearly as well as I do, to be quite candid—but in a Sixth Form run—"

Tom Merry turned red.

"My aunt! Are you going to start now?" he exclaimed. "I've had it already from Manners and Lowther! Why shouldn't I run for the Sixth if I like? If they choose to have me I suppose it won't hurt anybody else?"

"Yaas, wathah! It will hurt the dig of the Lower School. You will bring widicule upon the juniahs by twyin' to win in such a wace," said D'Arcy. "You will be caught in the first lap, and then—"

"Then you School House bounders can sing small," said Figgins. "You fellows on this side are always going to do wonderful things, and never doing them! You are always biting off more than you can chew, and then singing small. It won't be any change for you. My hat, though! I'll make up a poem on the subject for this number of the 'Weekly.'"

The door opened, and a large head was introduced into the study. It was followed by a body, small in proportion to the head, supported upon legs small in proportion to the body. A good-natured, knobby face, with an enormous forehead and tufts of scraggy hair projecting over it, looked at the editorial staff.

"Hallo, Skimpole!" said Tom Merry resignedly. "What do you want?"

Skimpole was the brainy man of the Shell, and followed closely the works of Professor Balmcrumpet.

"I've just been speaking to Gore," he said.

"Well, there's no law against that, that I know of. And, as a matter of fact, we'd all be pleased if you'd go and continue your conversation with him," said Tom Merry. "Shut the door after you, there's a good fellow."

"But I've come here—"

"Yes, I can see you have. And now I want to see you go."

"I've got something to say—"

"Say it on the other side of the door, please, and in a low voice, so as not to disturb us. Now be an obliging fellow, Skimpy, and do as I say."

"I've got something to say, Merry," said Skimpole, unheeding. "I've just been speaking to Gore, and he tells me you are bringing out a new number of the 'Weekly.'"

"Wonders will never cease," said Tom Merry. "Gore has told the truth twice in the same day. Go on, if you must!"

"Well, I offered you an article for your last number, and you refused it with—I may say contumely."

"You may, if you like. You may go, too."

"I was driven to artifice for getting that article published."

"Yes. You sneaked it into the copy, and it was printed with the rest," said the editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly" wrathfully. "You came near having the hiding of your life."

"I have here another article."

"Take it away and bury it."

"I have endeavoured to make it as simple as possible, so that even your youthful intellects cannot fail to grasp the great truths I have expressed," said Skimpole, taking a manuscript from his pocket. "I have even stooped my genius so far as to write it in verse, as I know you like poetry for your magazine."

"You've taken a lot of trouble, old fellow. I'm sorry it was for nothing. Oh, I say, we're awfully busy!"

"I will read you the poem."

"How long is it?"

"Oh, not more than five hundred lines!"

The editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" jumped up as if they were all suddenly moved by the same spring.

"You're not going to read out five hundred lines here!" bawled Blake. "Get out!"

"Yaas, wathah! Twavel, deah boy!"

"Bunk!" shouted Figgins, seizing the poker. "By Jove, I can see us suspending the editorial labours to listen to a poem on the works of Professor Balmcrumpet!"

But Skimpole, with the determination of the slave of a fixed idea, faced the staff of the "Weekly" with perfect calmness.

"My dear brothers," he exclaimed, "pray be patient! I hope to open all your minds, and cause you to use your intelligence for the first time, and surely that is a boon you can appreciate."

"Get out!"

"This is how the poem begins," said Skimpole, opening the manuscript: "Toiling—"

"Bunk!"

But Skimpole went on obstinately:

"Toiling—"

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"Shut up!" roared eleven voices, in a formidable chorus.

"Shut up!"

"I shan't shut up! 'Toiling—'"

"Chuck him out!"

"I should resent your rude address," said Skimpole, "but as a follower of Professor Balmcrumpet, I am bound to forgive injuries. I know that your obstinacy is not your fault, but owing to your ill-training. Base and sordid surroundings in early youth account for that."

"What?"

"Training at the hands of vicious and self-indulgent parents causes children to grow up base and obstinate and stupid, and so I am far from condemning you."

"You—you giddy parrot! You get all that stuff out of books by the yard!"

"And chatter it off without knowing what it means."

"Yaas, wathah! If I did not regard Skimpole as a harmless ass, I should considah his remarks as a reflection upon my respected parents, and should weghard it as impewative to administrah to him a weally feahful thwashin'."

"My dear youth—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go for him, D'Arcy!" encouraged Figgins.

"Kick him out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As Professor Balmcrumpet himself would say, I am compelled to refrain from violence," said Skimpole, skipping out of the study. "Otherwise, I should certainly wipe up the floor with D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, I should weally like to see you twy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, looking decidedly warlike.

"Come on, you howwid boundah!"

But Skimpole was gone.

"Thank goodness he's gone!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You can sit down, Gussy. Skimpy's poem is postponed for a bit, and we can get on with our work."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the editorial staff recommenced, and now, fortunately, there were no more interruptions, and the work went ahead at a good speed.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry's Resolve.

KILDARE came out of the gymnasium and crossed towards the School House with his firm, stalwart step. It was dark in the quadrangle, save where shafts of light fell into the gloom from the study windows. A form clad in light running-garb loomed up and stopped at sight at Kildare in the dusk of the old elms.

"Hallo! Is that you, Kildare?"

"Yes, Merry," said the captain of St. Jim's, stopping.

"I see you're out for practise. Good lad!"

"I'm just out for a little sprint round the quad," said Tom Merry. "Can I speak to you for a minute, Kildare?"

"As many minutes as you like, so long as you don't stand still and catch cold," smiled the captain of St. Jim's.

"Trot along with me."

Tom Merry fell into place beside the stalwart Sixth-Former.

"Well, what is it?" asked Kildare, glancing at him in the dusk as the hero of the Shell did not speak.

Tom Merry's cheeks were rather red.

"It's about the run on Saturday," said Tom abruptly.

"Since you told me I should do for a hare in the run, I've been chipped to death by the Form. I say, Kildare, you—you really think that I am good enough to run with you?"

"Certainly! I should hardly choose you otherwise, Tom. I don't want the Sixth Form run to end in a fiasco."

"No, of course not. I needn't have asked the question. But the fellows think I have taken on more than I can accomplish, and they fancy that the Lower School will get laughed at on my account."

"I don't think that that's likely to happen, Tom," said the captain of St. Jim's quietly. "I have some judgment in the matter, and I think you are up to the mark. Mind, it depends a good deal on your getting into your very best form, and keeping fit and ready for Saturday."

"I shall do that," said Tom Merry. "You have decided to keep to the same course as usual, I believe?"

"Very little difference. The run will be roughly six miles, but the hares can make it longer by winding, if they choose. We cross the Rhyl by the bridge, go round the ruins of the old castle—or, rather, through them, leaving a trail of paper over the old place. That will be rather rough going for the hounds. Then we get off towards Wayland, and round by the chalk-pits and the pine-woods home."

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's a good run, Kildare. But I think I can do it. It was something you said about my running that made me make the offer; but if you think it was cheek on my part, I shouldn't mind you turning me out now."

Kildare laughed.

"My dear kid, I'm going to have you with me because I want you," he said. "I believe you are all right!"

"But as a junior—"

"I may be jolly glad you are a junior at the finish," said Kildare. "In the last run I had Darrell with me, and he hurt his foot, and I had to carry him on my shoulders the last quarter of a mile. If anything of that kind happens—well, you know the difference between your weight and Darrell's."

"Then you really want me?"

"Of course. Only keep yourself in good form, and you'll do!"

And Kildare, having by this time reached the door of the School House, passed in, and Tom Merry turned to resume his run round the shadowy quad. There was a determined expression upon the face of the hero of the Shell. Kildare's words had greatly encouraged him.

"If Kildare thinks I can do it. I can, and that's flat," he muttered. "But—but I shouldn't like to crack up and get Kildare ragged by the Sixth in consequence. That would be rotten. I'll go over the course first and see."

His brow wrinkled in thought as he ran lightly under the elms. To go over the course was easy to say, but it was a long task to do. There would be no opportunity except upon the only half-holiday before Saturday—Wednesday. And on Wednesday afternoon Tom was playing in a football match, and, as captain of St. Jim's juniors, he could not very well stand out.

But his eyes glimmered as a new idea struck him.

"By Jove! Why shouldn't I go at night—after lights out? I should have to go alone—none of the fellows could stick the distance. But I know the ground like a book, and there's nothing to be afraid of. I can get out easily enough, and— By Jove, I'll do it!"

He glanced up at the sky. The moon was peeping from behind the clock-tower of St. Jim's, and the sky was clear, of a steely-blue. There would be plenty of light for the run. A few feathery flakes of snow were falling, but the fall was not likely to be heavy before morning; and long before morning Tom Merry would be safe in the Shell dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry made up his mind.

He went into the School House and changed out of his running garb, and came into the Common-room with a glow of health in his cheeks.

A general exclamation from the School House juniors who were in the room greeted the appearance of the hero of the Shell.

"See the conquering hero comes!" sang out Gore.

And Blake struck up the well-known air from his mouth-organ.

Tom Merry laughed, but there was something like a gleam in his eyes. He was getting fed-up, so to speak, with the general chipping on this subject.

"I say, Merry," said Gore, "I've got a bet on with Mellish that you won't run more than twenty yards before you are caught on Saturday. Mellish thinks you'll be caught in the first ten—"

"Wrong!" said Walsh. "The hares have five minutes start, so Tom Merry won't be caught for something like six minutes from the start."

"Ha, ha, ha! Would you like me to pace you over the ground on Wednesday afternoon, Merry? You can cut the Grammar School match. It wouldn't take more than five or six hours, you know—"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"He's losing his ickle temper!" giggled Gore. "I say, Merry—"

Tom Merry walked out of the room. Monty Lowther and Manners had joined in the laughter, but they quickly followed their chum as he went out.

"I say, Tom, you don't mind a bit of chipping?" said Manners, laying his hand on Tom Merry's shoulder.

Tom Merry looked at him with a rather uncertain smile.

"Oh, no, of course not!" he replied. "But a fellow can get fed-up with it, you know. You don't think I shall pull it off on Saturday, either of you?"

It was a direct question.

"Well, perhaps not," said Lowther hesitatingly. "I know you'll give them a good run, though, and you may not be caught on the way out."

"You may get half-way home," said Manners. "I hope so."

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"Well, I'm going to make the run," he exclaimed, "and

I'm going to get into the school after it, with Kildare, without being caught, and that's flat! You know I'm not a boaster as a rule!"

"You've taken on too big a thing, Tom."

And Manners shook his head.

"It's not good enough."

"We'll see! I think I can do it, and Kildare thinks so, too, and that's good enough for me. We shall see!"

"Yes, we shall see, I suppose. You can't very well back out now, anyway. It would cause more chipping than the worst of failures, if you backed out."

"I've never thought of backing out. I'm going to run, and I'll show the School House that I can do it, too!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

And when Tom Merry spoke in that tone he usually meant what he said.

CHAPTER 5.

A Startling Encounter!

BOOM!

Sharp and clear the stroke from the clock-tower at St. Jim's rang through the frosty air. Ten more strokes followed it, slow and heavy. It was eleven o'clock!

In the Shell dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's quiet and slumber reigned. The moonlight glimmered in at the windows set high in the whitewashed walls. The shimmering light made the long, lofty room strangely weird and ghostly to the eyes of Tom Merry as he sat up in bed.

The night was bitterly cold. There was frost on the window-panes, and in the quadrangle there was a feathery sprinkling of snow. Tom Merry shivered as he threw back the bedclothes.

But he was not one to fail in any task he had undertaken. Without making a sound to awaken the boys of the Shell, he stepped quietly out of bed and donned his clothes—warm woollens, which he had placed ready overnight.

He had not told any of his chums of his intention. Lowther and Manners, in the first place, would have disapproved of the project. In the second place, finding him determined, they would have wanted to go with him.

And Tom Merry was not inclined to give up the idea, and he did not want to deprive his chums of their night's rest, and take them out for so hard and long a run in the cold February night.

He left the dormitory, closing the door silently behind him, and stole downstairs. By a window the juniors had used on more than one occasion before, Tom Merry left the school, and faced the bitter wintry wind in the quadrangle.

The ground was lightly powdered with a slight fall of snow, but no more was falling now. It looked little more than a sprinkling of flour on the ground. Tom Merry crossed the quadrangle swiftly.

From two or three windows lights still gleamed, but the greater part of the buildings were in darkness. Tom Merry stopped at the familiar spot on the school wall, and swung himself up the ivy.

It was wet and clammy, and a shower of tiny flakes scattered over him; but he did not care. Up he went, and sat astride of the wall, and looked over into Rylcombe Lane before he dropped.

It was well that he did so.

As he sat on the wall, hidden in the shadow of a big tree, and scanned the road, a dark figure loomed up out of the shadows of the night. It was wrapped in an overcoat, and a fur cap was pulled down about its ears; but there seemed to Tom Merry's eyes something familiar in the figure.

Where had he seen it before?

Had the stranger passed on his way, Tom Merry would have thought nothing of the matter, for the man might simply have been a late traveller on the road. But the figure stopped near the wall of the school, and stood there staring upward.

For a moment Tom Merry's heart beat high with the thought that he was seen, and that the mysterious stranger

(Continued on the next page.)



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was watching. But the man's manner did not show it. He was staring straight at Tom, but the black shadow of the tree hid the boy too completely for him to be seen.

The fact that the stranger, after staring up, advanced closer to the wall, showed that he had not seen Tom Merry.

The junior caught his breath sharply. He knew that the man was about to climb the wall, and the fact that he knew the wall was accessible at that spot showed that he was familiar with St. Jim's. There were certain irregularities in the stonework of the wall which gave a foothold, but these were hidden from view by stragglings of ivy. On the outside of the wall the ivy was not strong enough to bear a child, being merely straggling tendrils from within. Who was this who knew in what exact spot the school wall could be climbed? Only someone who was familiar with the school, and with some of the secrets of the juniors.

A grasp was laid on the rough stone, and the man began to climb. He came up swiftly, and Tom Merry had little time to think.

The man was evidently entering the school grounds for the purpose of robbery, or worse, and Tom knew what he had to do. He waited till the man came well up the wall, and then drew back his fist for a blow.

Had those powerful arms had a chance to close upon him, the boy knew that he would have no chance against the man. But his position, and the fact that he was unseen, gave the lad an advantage now irresistible.

He heard the man's panting breath as he climbed. Even in the dusk he caught a glimpse of a white, hard face, and knew the man.

"Bullivant!"

He muttered the name aloud in his amazement.

Back to his mind flashed the recollection of a strange adventure—of a man who had cunningly obtained a post at the school as a groundsman, with the intention of robbing St. Jim's of the historic school silver. Tom Merry had been the means of baffling him, and handing him over to Ferrers Locke, the detective. Bullivant—known among his criminal associates by another name—had been sent for trial, and Tom Merry had imagined him to be in prison by this time. His presence here showed that he had escaped from the hands of justice.

Tom Merry felt a tremor at his heart for a moment. The ruffian might be making another desperate attempt to obtain the school's silver plate; but it was more likely that he was actuated, at least partly, by motives of revenge upon the lad who had caused his arrest.

Startled by the recognition, the name passed Tom Merry's lips before he had time to think. He heard the hiss of a deep-drawn breath, and knew that the ruffian had heard him.

The upward climb ceased. For a moment the ruffian hung there, motionless, silent, with his hands on the coping, listening intently.

Tom Merry's teeth shut hard, and swift as a lightning flash his left arm shot out.

The hard-clenched fist struck the ruffian a terrific blow fairly between the eyes.

A low grunt escaped Bullivant. His hands slid from the wall, and he dropped heavily back into the road, and lay there for some moments, quite dazed.

It was on Tom Merry's lips to shout for help, and wake the school to secure the ruffian. But he restrained the impulse. Long before help could come the rascal would have made good his escape, and he would have betrayed himself for nothing.

He was glad the next minute that he had had the caution to remain silent, for it was only for a few moments that Bullivant lay on the frosty ground. Then he sprang up, and without even a glance at the wall from whence he had been hurled, he darted off. His heavy footsteps rang for a few moments in the darkness, and then died away faint and distant.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

The ruffian was gone! Silence settled down again upon the lane, save for the moan of the cold wind in the branches of the trees. The quarter chimed out from the clock-tower.

Tom Merry dropped lightly into the road. It was certain that, after such a surprise, the ruffian would abandon his attempt for that night, at least. There was little chance that Bullivant would return. As for the risk of meeting him in the lanes, that was slight, as he had torn off towards the village, and Tom's way lay through the wood.

The hero of the Shell looked about him, and then crossed the lane, and plunged through the trees into a field. A cut across the field brought him to the common where the paper-chase was to be started on the following Saturday afternoon.

A dark, silent expanse of grass dotted with bracken, The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,259,

lonely and weird in the glimmering moonlight! Tom Merry halted at the starting-point, and looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes past eleven.

"Well, now I'm off!" he murmured, as he replaced the watch in his pocket.

And he turned his face in the direction of the bridge over the Rhyl, and set off at an easy, swinging pace.

CHAPTER 6.

The Rescue of Ferrers Locke.

TOM MERRY kept up a steady pace, and, in spite of the cold of the night, he was soon in a pleasant warm glow from the exercise. The common, glimmering in the moon's rays, was behind him, and he cut through a straggling patch of wood, and came out upon the path leading up from Rylcombe Wood to the ruined castle.

Up the path he went at a slacker pace, as the ground rose more steeply before him, and came in sight of the ancient building which had been the scene of many a strange adventure.

The remains of the old stone gateway rose before him, and he passed through, and threaded his way among the ruins.

Here, with the ground cumbered with broken fragments of masonry, the going was hard, and here the hounds were likely to find their difficulties begin on Saturday. Tom Merry passed out of the old castle by a gap in the time-broken wall, and down the slope towards the Wayland High Road.

The High Road was hard and frosty, powdered with snow. With a steady pit-pat pit-pat the junior trotted on under the gleaming moon, now high in the heavens, and streaming down in silver light upon the countryside.

Some distance short of the town of Wayland, Tom Merry halted, and turned off to the left by the path leading through the chalk-pits. To one who did not know the ground this was a dangerous path to take at night, but Tom Merry knew every foot of the country round St. Jim's.

Many a wayfarer, it was said, had found his death in those old, disused pits, left open since the working of them had been stopped years before. Here and there on a dangerous verge ran a fence, but the fences were mostly weather-worn and broken.

In many places a single false step meant destruction; but so long as the path was followed, the wayfarer was safe enough.

Leaving the road, Tom faced the moor. Here, over the chalk-pits, the wind blew harder and colder, and, in spite of the warm exercise, Tom Merry felt the chill of it.

But for the moon, there was no light on this lonely path. Lonely, indeed, it was, with no habitation within miles, and at such an hour of the night there was not likely to be any pedestrian beside the adventurous junior from St. Jim's.

Deep, yawning gulfs of blackness on either hand told Tom Merry when he was near the chalk-pits. Suddenly the silence of the lonely moor was broken by a strange sound. Tom Merry halted, the blood pumping through his body.

What had he heard? It was not the cry of a wild bird; but what human voice could be calling in such a place at such an hour?

The boy bent his head and listened: The cry sounded away, distant, and faint, and if it shaped a word it was too far off for him to distinguish it.

Tom Merry hesitated. The sound came from the direction of the excavations at some distance from the path, and it was a dangerous spot to investigate. But it was not of the danger that Tom Merry thought; he was thinking of the run he was making, which he had intended to time from start to finish.

But the thought that a human being might be in distress in that lonely spot, far from aid, banished every other consideration.

"Halloo-o-ooo!"

The prolonged cry rang across the lonely waste, ringing far down the wind. Tom Merry listened intently for a reply.

It came—a distant cry. But this time the boy thought he could shape a word in the sound; he thought he heard the word "Help!" He hesitated no longer. Leaving the path, he hurried in the direction of the cry.

It was fortunate that he knew the ground well, for it was rugged and broken and yawned with cavities. Here and there his way took him along the unguarded verge of some abandoned pit a hundred feet deep; but Tom Merry's nerve was steady, and he ran on without a halt.

"Help!"

The cry rang again, quite clear this time. It was a man's voice that was calling for help, and the way it

sounded to his ears Tom Merry knew that it came from below the level of the ground.

There was no further doubt as to what had happened. Some unwary traveller, unacquainted with the lie of the land, had fallen into one of the disused pits.

Tom Merry was glad enough, as he realised it, that he had left St. Jim's for that solitary run in the moonlight. It was in all probability the means of saving a human life.

"Help!"

Tom Merry halted, and shouted back.

"Hallo! Hallo-o-o-o!"

A joyful cry answered him.

"Help! Thank Heaven, I have been heard at last! But take care, or you will follow me into the pit!"

The voice was quite near. Tom Merry made his way carefully towards the gulf of blackness which marked a deep pit from which the voice came weirdly.

the strangest meeting of his experience. Ferrers Locke, the famous London detective, whom he had helped in the case of the rascally Bullivant, was shut up in the chalk-pit at his feet!

Scarcely an hour after seeing Bullivant he had come upon the detective. But it at once occurred to his mind that Bullivant's presence in the neighbourhood was the cause of Ferrers Locke's coming there.

"How can I help you, sir?" called out Tom Merry. "I know this pit, and it is at least twenty feet deep. You cannot climb out."

There was a grim chuckle from below.

"I know that, Tom. I have tried for hours."

"But are you hurt, sir? A fall like that—"

"No; I rolled down the slope when I was pushed in, and that saved my bones, though I have a fine assortment of bruises all over my body," the detective replied with a grim humour. "The slope, unfortunately, is too steep for



Tom Merry braced his feet against a big stone that cropped out of the ground, and his hands grasped the rope. Setting his teeth he faced the terrific strain as the whole weight of the detective's body was thrown upon the rope.

He stopped on the verge. Stare down as he might, he could make nothing out. The moonlight glimmered at the upper part of the pit, but farther down it was in dense darkness. Somewhere down there, in impenetrable gloom, was the man who had cried for help.

"You are there?" shouted Tom.

"Yes," came back the voice of the unseen man. "I have been here since daylight!"

Tom Merry shivered. Shut up in that inaccessible pit for long hours, almost hopeless of rescue, he could imagine what the feelings of the unfortunate man had been.

"Thank Heaven you have come!" went on the voice. "I had almost given up hope!"

There was a curious expression upon Tom Merry's face.

"Will you tell me who you are?" he called out. "I am certain that I know your voice, and yet—"

"And yours seems familiar to me," came the reply. "Is it possible that I am speaking to Tom Merry of St. Jim's?"

"By Jove, then you are Ferrers Locke!"

"I am. You are Tom Merry?"

"Yes."

Tom Merry's face was full of excitement now. It was

me to climb out, and it is slippery. I have been shouting for help at intervals since sunset."

"You were pushed in?" exclaimed Tom Merry, horrified.

"Yes. I caught a Tartar, you see, and instead of arresting my man, here I am, while he has escaped. But you can help me out, Tom. I have a rope here. I brought it with me in case of accident when I came over the moor; but, unfortunately, I have not been able to use it in this case. If there had been a tree or a bush near the top of the pit I should have been all right; but there was nothing for the noose to catch on when I threw it up. But now—"

"Now I can catch it."

"Exactly."

"Throw the rope, sir. I'm looking out!"

"I will throw up the whole coil, and you can let it down to me," said Ferrers Locke.

There was a whiz in the air, and a coil of rope dropped a few feet from the waiting junior. Tom Merry picked it up and uncoiled it. There were thirty feet of strong rope, fully strong enough to bear the weight of a man. Tom Merry looked round for some projection to fasten the end to. But the sides of the pit were bare. Rough as the ground was, there was nothing to which the rope could be attached.

"Can you fasten it?"

"No, sir. There is nothing here; but I can hold it," said Tom Merry.

"My dear lad, my weight will pull you into the pit."

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"Not at all. I shall fasten it round my body, and then brace myself against a big stone there is here. I shall be safe enough."

"But—"

"I shall be all right, sir. If I go for help you will be left for hours in the pit, and you will be frozen to death."

"If you are sure, Tom—"

"I am quite sure, sir."

"Very well, then!"

Tom fastened the rope carefully round his shoulders. He threw the loose end into the chalk-pit, and he heard the detective groping for it in the darkness below.

"Got it, sir?" he called out.

"Yes, I have the rope. Tell me when you are ready!"

"Just a minute!"

Tom Merry braced his feet against a big stone that cropped up out of the ground near the verge of the pit. Then his hands grasped and firmly fixed upon the rope.

"Ready, sir?" he called out.

"Right!"

And a strain came upon the rope. Tom Merry set his teeth hard, bracing himself to bear the strain.

The rope seemed to bite into his shoulders, but he bore the pain of it with set teeth. A head loomed up from the darkness of the pit.

Ferrers Locke grasped the earth with his hands, and the strain was off the rope. Tom Merry, with a gasp of relief, rose to his feet. The detective stepped beside him, not needing the hand outstretched to aid.

"Tom, you have saved my life, lad!"

And Ferrers Locke grasped the hand of the hero of St. Jim's and gave it a grip which told how much he felt at that moment.

CHAPTER 7.

The Shadow of Danger!

TOM MERRY was breathing hard. The strain had been a telling one. Ferrers Locke coiled up the rope and looped it over his arm. He was looking curiously at the junior of St. Jim's.

"It seems an ungrateful question, Tom," he said slowly, "as you have just saved my life, in all probability, but

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what are you doing in such a place as this at this time of the night?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"I suppose you are surprised, sir. But I think you know me well enough to be assured that I should not break bounds at night for any ill purpose."

"I am sure of that, Tom."

"Of course, I should get into a row if it were known at St. Jim's," said Tom. "You will keep it dark, of course, if you come to the school?"

The detective nodded.

"Of course. Besides, it will suit my purpose very well for the scoundrel who pushed me into that pit to imagine that I am still there." The detective chuckled grimly. "He will learn in good time that Ferrers Locke is still alive."

"Was it Bullivant, sir?"

Locke gave a start.

"How did you guess, Tom?"

"Because I have seen him to-night."

"You have seen the man who was known at St. Jim's as Bullivant? You have seen him to-night?" ejaculated the detective.

"Yes, as I left the school."

"Was he near St. Jim's?"

"He was trying to enter."

"Then my suspicion was correct. I was right," exclaimed the detective. "But come, Tom, you will be frozen! Come along, and keep up a good pace, and we can talk as we go."

"Yes, by Jove, it is cold here!"

Tom Merry was glad to get into motion again. They turned towards the path, Ferrers Locke, who knew little of the place, trusting to Tom Merry's guidance.

Tom explained concisely how he had come to leave St. Jim's at that hour of the night, and how he had met Bullivant at the school wall. The detective laughed as he heard how the ruffian had been received on the wall.

"I don't suppose he'd try again to-night," Ferrers Locke remarked; "but he certainly will make another attempt ere long. Here is the path. Which way are you going, Tom?"

"I am going over the course of the paper-chase, sir—round by the chalk-pits, and home to the school through the pine-wood. It's three miles."

"I will come with you. A run will do me good after being frozen for hours. And, besides, I cannot let you go alone on such a route at such a time."

Tom Merry looked at him in surprise.

"But there is no danger, sir."

"There is, Tom, great and terrible danger, which you know nothing about, so far. But get into your pace; you will not find me lacking. I have spent enough time on the cinder-path to be equal to a little run like this. And, as I have said, it will do me good."

"Very well, sir."

And Tom Merry broke into a trot. The detective, in spite of his late terrible experience, seemed to be in good form. He kept pace beside the champion runner of the Lower Forms at St. Jim's.

"You remember the adventure with this man Bullivant, Tom?" said Ferrers Locke, breaking silence after some minutes. "You remember that he had a post at the school as groundsman or instructor on the football ground?"

"Yes, sir. And he played well—wonderfully well for such a rotter as he was."

"And you were the means, Tom, of bringing about his arrest, after his attempted robbery at the school?"

"I did all I could, certainly."

"The scoundrel was committed for trial, Tom, and would have had a long sentence, but he broke prison and escaped. While in custody, however, he had used such threats against you for the part you had taken in his arrest that I knew you would not be safe if he became free again."

Tom Merry's face became grave. He understood now.

"When he escaped," continued the detective, "I guessed that he would, as soon as he was able, make for the school, not in the hope of obtaining the loot he had formerly attempted to obtain, but for revenge upon the boy who had baffled him—upon you, Tom."

"I'm not afraid of him, sir."

"I know you are not. But you must know your danger in order to guard against it. The ruffian was trying to enter the school to-night. He may have had purposes of robbery in his mind. Doubtless he had, but one purpose he certainly had, and that was revenge."

Tom Merry was silent. He was brave, and his nerve had never failed him. But this was something new in his life—this glimpse of the terrible world of crime. The thought

of being the object of such a vendetta was disquieting enough.

"As soon as I knew that he had escaped, I knew you were in danger," said Ferrers Locke. "I came down here at once. I heard in Wayland of a man having been robbed by some ruffian on the moor, and from the description I guessed that it was probably the man I sought. In the hope of getting on the track of Bullivant, I went out on the moor this afternoon. I found him, but not as I had hoped. I should rather say that he found me. I was near the pit when he attacked me; recognising me, and knowing that I must be there in quest of him. I was taken at a disadvantage, and hurled into the chalk-pit. I should probably have perished there, but for you. It was only by constant motion that I saved myself from freezing. And if I had once allowed myself to sleep, I should never have awakened again. But that is over now—thanks to you! But you realise now, Tom, the danger you are in until Bullivant is arrested?"

"Yes, I realise it, Mr. Locke," Tom said quietly. "I was going to send you a warning, Tom. This meeting will serve the purpose. I shall send a message to Dr. Holmes on the subject. You will take care."

"Certainly, sir."

"No more of these lonely runs at night, Tom—at least, until after the ruffian is arrested, which I hope will be soon."

"I give you my word, sir."

"Thank you, Tom! I hope this state of affairs will not last long. The ruffian cannot evade me for many days—especially as he will deem me safely out of the way and himself secure."

They were passing through the pine-wood now, and later they came out into a lane, and, skirting Rylcombe, came in sight of St. Jim's.

The detective accompanied Tom Merry to the wall, and gave him a helping hand to the top. Then Tom Merry leaned down and shook hands with him cordially.

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, Tom, and remember!"

And Ferrers Locke disappeared into the night.

Tom Merry dropped down on the inner side of the wall, and crossed the dusky quad towards the School House. The moon was behind the trees, and the light was growing dimmer. Tom Merry's feet crumbled the powdery snow as he hurried to the window by which he had left the House, and he found it just as he had left it.

In a couple of minutes he was inside; the window was refastened, and he was hurrying silently upstairs to the Shell dormitory.

He entered and closed the door. The next moment he gave a jump as a pillow sailed through the air and smote him on the chest.

The shock was sudden, and with the thought of the ruffian Bullivant in his mind, Tom Merry could not help giving a sharp cry.

A chuckle from Lowther's bed answered him.

"When you've done with that pillow, Tom, you can let me have it back."

Tom Merry drew a deep, quick breath.

"What the dickens did you do that for, Monty?" he exclaimed, picking up the pillow. "You made me jump."

"Serve you right!" said Lowther.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"What do you mean by going out for hours in the middle of the night, without telling a chum where you were going?" demanded Lowther. "I think it's like your cheek."

"You see—"

"Bosh! Why didn't you wake me? I woke up and saw the moonlight on your bed, and saw it was empty, and when you didn't come back it made me quite nervous. I thought something must have happened to you. Of course," went on Monty reflectively, "if anything happened to you it wouldn't matter much, but—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I've been over the course for Saturday, Monty."

"Oh, that's the little game, is it?"

"Yes. Of course, I didn't put on the pace, but I've done it in good time, and I feel pretty fit after it."

"You'll find it different on Saturday, with twenty Sixth-Formers on your track," said Lowther. "Why didn't you take me with you? You had no business to go alone."

"I've had an adventure."

"You can tell me about it in the morning," yawned Lowther. "I'm going to sleep now. You can give me my pillow, please."

"Certainly; there it is!"

Tom Merry hurled the pillow, and it came back to Lowther with as much force behind it as when he had sent it

Monty gave a yelp.

"You ass! You made me jump."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"One good turn deserves another," he remarked. "An eye for an eye, and a jump for a jump, you know! Good-night, kid!"

"Good-night, fathead!"

And the chums of the Shell were soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER 8.

The Mysterious Footprints!

CLANG! Clang!

The rising-bell broke upon the slumbers of the Shell, and Manners sat up and yawned.

Clang! Clang!

Monty Lowther was the next to sit up.

"Ow! It's jolly cold!"

"Goo-gerroo-gerroo!" said Manners emphatically, as he shivered out of bed. "It's—it's beastly! Water frozen, as usual!"

One by one the Shell boys tumbled out of bed, but Tom Merry did not stir. Usually the first up in the dormitory, Tom Merry was showing an unusual sleepiness this morning. While the Shell performed their ablutions with many a shiver Tom Merry slept on quietly and serenely.

Manners glanced at him curiously.

"Tom's extra fatheaded this morning!" he remarked. "What's the matter with him? Yank the clothes off him, Monty!"

Lowther shook his head.

"Let him snooze a bit longer; he needs it."

"What the dickens for?"

"Oh, he was out on the tiles last night!" grinned Lowther. "Keep it dark, though. I woke up and found him gone, and pillowed him as he came in. If you didn't sleep like a rhinoceros, you would have heard us talking."

Gore came along the dormitory with a wet sponge in his hand.

"Hallo, here's Tom Merry oversleeping himself!" grinned the cad of the Shell. "We must not let Tom Merry get into a row for being late."

"Stop that, Gore!"

"Rats! I'm going to do Tom Merry a real service!"

Before Lowther could interfere the cold, wet sponge squelched down upon the face of the sleeping hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry gasped and shivered and awoke.

"Wh-wh-what!" he gasped.

Gore chuckled.

"Thought I'd wake you," he explained. "I was afraid you were oversleeping yourself, and would get into a row. Have some more?"

"No, you beast! Get away!"

Tom Merry scrambled out of bed. He was sleeping still, and his eyes were heavy. When it came to getting up in the morning early without having had sufficient sleep, the idea of a midnight run did not seem so good.

"Ya-aw!" yawned Tom Merry. "I'm sleepy! By Jove, it's late! I shall have to buck up!"

And he moved like lightning, and was down the last of the Shell, but not long behind the others. The boys poured out into the quadrangle for a run before breakfast, and Tom Merry espied Figgins & Co. standing near a window of the School House, discussing something in low tones and with grave faces.

"Hallo, there's something on!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Come along, kids!"

And the Terrible Three hastened towards Figgins & Co.

"Hallo, you bounders! What are you doing on our side?" demanded Tom Merry. "You know that the presence of a New House kid is an abomination—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "There's something been going on here during the night, you kids; and if there hasn't been a burglary, it's because the burglar saw some of your faces, I expect, and was frightened away."

Tom Merry started.

"What are you driving at, Figgy?"

"Look there!" said Figgins, waving his hand towards the ground under the window-sill. The thin sheet of snow from the previous evening was frozen there, and in it were plainly to be seen the prints of feet, going right up to the window. "It was Mrs. Mimms who spotted it," went on Figgins. "It seems that she found traces of snow in the room inside, and was alarmed, and she came out and found these footprints. She called us to look after them, and keep them from being obliterated by any of your clumsy hoofs till she fetched Mr. Railton."

"My word!" said Manners. "Somebody's been here in the night, that's clear! The snow didn't fall till after we were all in last night; and, besides, no fellow here would want to come up to that window."

"Of course not!" said Figgins. "Any ass could see that! I saw it at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What I mean to say is—"

"My dear Figgins, you've made it quite clear, so leave it where it is," said Tom Merry. "They are certainly footprints there, and it looks as if somebody must have made them. Perhaps it was Fatty Wynn, nosing about for a chance to get into the pantry."

Fatty Wynn turned red.

"Very likely," said Lowther gravely. "Mrs. Mimms always has a good supply in the pantry, and Fatty Wynn meant to commit a jam burglary."

"Or a cake raid," said Manners.

"Oh, stop rotting!" said Fatty Wynn. "I wouldn't touch your measly School House grub with a barge-pole! I dare say it was one of you kids at the bottom of this, going out for something after hours."

"Quite likely," said Kerr. "Perhaps Knox, the prefect, going out to visit his select and refined friends at the Golden Pig, in Rylcombe."

"Nothing of that sort in our House," said Marmaduke. "We—"

"What about Sefton?" asked Lowther a bit warmly. "I admit that Knox is a bit thick, but your Sefton is a regular rotter, and as for going down to the Golden Pig—"

"He goes with Knox," said Tom Merry. "They're a pair. Hallo, here's Study No. 6! Let's bring Gussy's brain to bear on the subject."

The chums of Study No. 6 had scented something up, and were hurrying to the spot. They stared at the footprints and at the juniors collected there with equal interest.

"Hallo! Something wrong?" said Blake inquiringly.

"Looks like an attempted burglary," said Figgins. "We are keeping guard over the clue, so keep off the grass, you kids."

"What do you think is the meaning of that, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther, with an air of respectful deference which flattered the swell of the School House.

D'Arcy fixed his monocle carefully in his eye, and surveyed the footprints.

"Pway stand back, deah boys!" he said. "You must give me woom to see the pwints in the beastlay snow, you know."

"Good old Sherlock Holmes!" said Lowther. "I suppose those footprints couldn't have been left by the House cat, could they, Gussy?"

D'Arcy gave Lowther a withering look.

"I deduct," he said, with great emphasis, "that these tracks were made by a wuffian who had big, clumsy feet, and was lame on the left side, and—"

"You'd better tell Mr. Railton that, Gussy. He'll be able to put the police on the track of the lame rotter."

"It would be bettah for the case to be left in my hands," said D'Arcy. "Mr. Wailton is a vewy good Housemastah, but in a case of this kind we wequiah a fellow of judgment, and in this line I must say that I considah my bwain-power much supewiah to Mr. Wailton's."

"Thank you, D'Arcy!" said a quiet voice.

The juniors started. D'Arcy turned round like a top, and his eyeglass fell with a jerk to the end of its cord as he found himself looking at the Housemaster of the School House.

"Weally, Mr. Wailton—"

"I hope you have not disturbed the footprints," said the Housemaster. "No; I see you have not. This is very curious! Ah, I do not think these prints were made by a burglar!"

"Will you allow me to remark—"

"Certainly not!"

"But, weally—"

"That will do, D'Arcy! There is no need for alarm, my boys," went on the Housemaster. "These tracks were evidently left by a boy. The size of the footprints prove that. I should say that a junior of the School House left by a window last night, and came in again by the same way."

He glanced round at the group of juniors. Tom Merry seemed to be intensely studying the tracks, and so did not have to meet the eyes of the Housemaster. If he had met them, he knew that he would have coloured, and given himself away by so doing.

"I hope I shall find out which boy did this, and I shall give him a severe lesson," Mr. Railton remarked. And he walked away.

"You know, there's just one weak spot in your theory, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"Pway what is that?"

"Why, I left those tracks there myself last night, after going out for a sprint!" said Tom Merry calmly.

And he walked away, leaving D'Arcy staring after him, with his mouth wide open in astonishment.

A roar of laughter broke from the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good old Ferra's Locke!"

"I am afraid," said D'Arcy, looking round, "that Tom Mewwy is jokin', and has allowed himself to depart from the twuth for the sake of gettin' at me and pullin' my beastlay leg, you know!"

But it was no use. All the juniors knew that Tom Merry had stated the facts, because he would never have stated anything else, and D'Arcy could not save his beautiful theory. A yell of laughter drowned his attempts to explain further, and the swell of the School House walked away indignantly under a torrent of chaff.

CHAPTER 9.

The Debating Society Meets.

THE February dusk was deepening over St. Jim's when the Fourth Form came out of their class-room after last lesson. Blake, Herries, and Digby made for the door, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lingered in the passage.

"I say, aren't you coming out, Gussy?" asked Blake, stopping and looking back at the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Not just now, Blake. You youngstahs can go for a wun, and I will be in the study when you come in to tea."

"What are you going to do?"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Oh, nothin'; but I do not feel like takin' stwenuous exercise!"

"Coming out, Blake?" called Figgins. "Come and have a game of leap-frog before it's quite dark!"

"Right-ho!" shouted Blake. "Come on, kids!"

"Don't forget the meetin' of the debating society at seven!" said D'Arcy, as the chums of the Fourth Form rushed off.

And D'Arcy walked away, shaking his head doubtfully.

After tea there was a general movement of the Junior Debating Society towards the Common-room. In this room the meetings were held, none of the studies being large enough. There were twenty or more members in the debating society, some of them belonging to the New House, among the latter being Figgins & Co.

"Good meeting," said Tom Merry, as he came in with Manners and Lowther. "Who's chairman this evening?"

"Blake," said Lowther; "and I see the subject for discussion is already up."

"What are those Fourth Form bounders giggling about?" asked Manners. "There's Blake giggling, and Herries and Digby, and Figgins is as red as a peony."

"There's something up, I suppose, among those kids." "They're grinning at us," said Lowther. "See how the whole shoot started giggling as soon as we came in."

"I suppose Blake's got something on!" "Well, he'd hardly go about this weather without anything on!"

"Cheese it! Let's go and look at the subject up for debate."

The Terrible Three walked on with an apparent unconsciousness of the glances cast at them, and the giggles that broke irresistibly from the debating society.

Tom Merry looked at the paper, and turned red. The question marked for discussion was as follows:

"That, in the opinion of this society, Thomas Merry, Esquire, has made an ass of himself in offering to run in the Sixth Form paper-chase!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you?" asked Blake.

"This is not a proper subject for discussion!"

"What isn't?"

"What you have down on the paper."

"What's down on the paper?"

"Hang! You know as well as I do!"

"What I know is not evidence!" said Blake severely.

"I shall refuse to take any notice of your objection, unless you can specify something to which proper exception can be taken. I think I know the duties of a chairman."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins.

"Read out anything you don't like, Merry!"

"It's the whole question," exclaimed Tom Merry—"whether Tom Merry has made an ass of himself in offering to run in the Sixth Form paper-chase."

The debating society giggled joyously.

"Well, what's wrong with that?" demanded the chairman.

"You know the society was founded to discuss subjects of interest to the House and school generally. That's a question of interest to the House."

"I agree with Blake," said Kerr. "It's a question of interest to the school generally. In the New House we all

think that Tom Merry has bitten off more than he can masticate."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "In the New House you don't think at all. I say that isn't a proper question!"

"Do you mean to hint," demanded Blake majestically, "that it is an improper one?"

"Rats, I say! What I say is—"

"Stuff! It's not really necessary for you to say anything; you're only here as a reporter!"

"Do you think I'm going to report a debate on a subject like that, Blake?" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully.

"You've promised to," said Blake coolly.

"Why, you—you rotter—"

"It is against the rules of the society to call the chairman names when you are dissatisfied with his ruling. You are fined half the amount of your term's subscription, to be paid into the coffers of the society for the general benefit," said Blake, with great severity.

"I protest—"

"A reporter's protest does not count at a meeting of the debating society. Just sit down and take your notebook and pencil, and make a clear and comprehensive report, according to your voluntary undertaking."

Tom Merry sat down.

The debating society evidently meant to carry on the joke, and there was nothing for the hero of the Shell to do but to grin and bear it.

Even Manners and Lowther were chuckling.

Tom Merry's chums, as a matter of fact—and they had told him plainly enough themselves—were inclined to agree with the view that he had, as the juniors expressed it, bitten off more than he could chew, and they were rather inclined to enter into the joke.

Blake looked round him.

"Ahem!" he said, clearing his throat. "We are all here, even to the reporter, who is to take down the discussion for a full report in 'Tom Merry's Weekly.' I will now read out the question to be raised—whether, in the opinion of this society, Tom Merry, Esquire, has made an ass of himself in offering to run in the Sixth Form paper-chase? The opinions of the honourable members upon this important point are invited."

And Blake sat down.

A chuckle ran through the debating society, and Tom Merry, as red as a carnation, sat, pencil in hand, to take notes.

CHAPTER 10. The Resolution!

"PWAY, Mr. Chairman—"
"Sit down, D'Arcy!"
"I wefuse to sit down!"
"Shut up!"

"I distinctly decline to shut up! I have a wemark to make—"

Herries and Digby seized the swell of the School House by either arm, and jerked him back into his seat.

"Welease me—I insist upon bein' immediately welaesed!"

"Dry up!"

"Mr. Chairman, I claim the wight to make a wemark!"

"Oh, let him make it!" said Figgins. "We shan't get any peace till he does! Make your remark, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

SPEED-COPPED!



"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My word!" said Digby. "Job himself would have got fagged out if he had had to deal with Adolphus D'Arcy!"

"Sit down!"

"Get on, or else shut up!"

"Are you going to come to the point?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am comin' to it as fast as I can, but I am distinctly incommoded by these two boundahs dwaggin' on me, and I cannot help wealisin' that they are simply spoilin' the shape of my sleeves!"

"Get on! What's the remark?"

"Yaas, the remark—that's what I'm comin' to. I object to the form of the question on the paper this evening!"

"What's the matter with it?"

"You have waised the question as to whether Tom Mewwy is an ass."

"Well, what about it?" demanded Blake.

"I wegard that remark as distinctly wude. I object to the term on pwinciple. It has often been applied to me, and I have sometimes had to administrah a feahful thwashin' to the person. Undah the cires, I considah it not a pwopah expression to apply to Tom Mewwy!"

"Bravo, Gussy!" exclaimed Lowther and Manners.

"It would be much more appropwiate applied to eithah Lowthah or Mannahs—"

"Well, you ungrateful young villain!"

"But, even applied to them, I wegard it as a dispawagin' expression that should be barred. Tom Mewwy, to return to the subject undah discussion, certainly has many asinine qualities."

"Hear, hear!"

"He belongs to a Form composed mostly of asinine persons."

"Hear, hear!" yelled the Fourth-Formers.

"But, all the same, I wegard the expression as distinctly objectionable. Therefore, I move that it be expunged."

"Well, that's a jolly good word!" said Lowther.

"That it be immediately and pwomptly expunged fwom the papah!"

"Any seconds?" asked Blake.

"No!" said a dozen voices. "Shut up, D'Arcy!"

"I wefuse to shut up!"

"You've said your say, now ring off!"

"I have not finished yet. Pway be patient! I shall not detain you more than a quatah of an hour."

"Ha, ha, ha! Drag him down!"

Kerr and Marmaduke lent a hand to Herries and Digby, and the swell of the School House was crammed back into his chair.

"I pwotest!" he shouted. "I distinctly pwotest!"

"You'll distinctly go along the passage at the end of my boot if you don't shut up!" growled Blake. "Now, Figgins, old kid, we'll have your little bit!"

"Pway welease me, deah boys! You are thwottlin' me! And, besides, you are soilin' my collah with your distinctly unpleasant paws!"

"Will you keep quiet, then?"

"Yaas; but undah pwotest!"

"Under protest," said Blake, "or under the table, if you like. Anything for a quiet life. Now, Figgins."

Figgins proceeded to air his views.

"In my opinion," said the chief of the New House juniors, "the question on the paper should be answered in the affirmative."

"Hear, hear!"

"Having undertaken a job bigger than he can accomplish, Tom Merry has evidently acted like an ass! To act like an ass is equivalent to making an ass of himself. I therefore hold that Tom Merry has made an ass of himself, and that the question is answered in the affirmative."

"Good! Got that down, reporter?"

"Yes!" growled the reporter.

"Sure you've left nothing out?"

"Yes. Confound your cheek!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Lowther, are you going to give an opinion?"

"Certainly," said Lowther. "I take the opposite side."

"State your reasons."

"My reasons are that Tom Merry, belonging to the Shell at St. Jim's, is a member of the Form which possesses the most intellect—"

"Rats!"

"The most knowledge—"

"Cheese it!"

"And the most general superiority in school. Therefore, he is incapable of making an ass of himself!"

"Rotten!" said Blake.

"Yaas, I must say that I wegard Lowthah's remarks as wotten!"

"Shut up! Kerr—"

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"I take the same side as Lowther, but for a different reason," said Kerr. "I hold that Tom Merry has not made an ass of himself. That which is made cannot be made again. Nature made an ass of him!"

"Hear, hear!"

Many other members of the debating society having expressed various opinions, more or less complimentary to Tom Merry, Blake put the resolution to the meeting.

Lowther and Manners declined to vote, and with these exceptions the resolution was carried unanimously, and duly noted down by the reporter:

"That Tom Merry, in offering to run in the Sixth Form paper-chase, had not made an ass of himself, having been born one, and therefore being an ass already!"



Tom Merry, rolled over by a charge from Carboy, was on his back and beat Fatty Wynn all the way with a v

"Got it all down?" asked Blake.

"Yes, ass!"

"Mind it all goes verbatim into the 'Weekly.'"

The reporter growled and withdrew. And then the meeting of the debating society broke up, D'Arcy in vain trying to move an amendment that "duffer" should be substituted for "ass," the latter not being, in his opinion, a proper expression.

CHAPTER 11.

A Surprising Capture!

"NO more runs across country to-night, I suppose?" Monty Lowther remarked, as he and Tom Merry put away their chessmen to prepare for bed.

Tom Merry had told his two chums of the adventure of the previous night, but it was known to no

others. Some of the juniors knew that Tom had been out of bounds, but no more than that.

The hero of the Shell shook his head, with a smile.

"No," he replied. "I don't think much of the danger, as a matter of fact, but I have promised Ferrers Locke."

"Well, you're safer inside the walls than outside," Lowther remarked. "But suppose the scoundrel makes another attempt to get in? There may not be anybody on the wall this time to dot him on the proboscis!"

"Ferrers Locke has warned the Head, and I expect Dr.



his back on the grass, when Frank Monk sped down the field with a wonderful shot which equalised.

Holmes has taken his precautions," said Tom Merry lightly. "I don't suppose the rotter will be able to get in. I'm not going to worry about it, anyway. I think I shall have a spin round the quad before bed, just to keep it up."

"And I'll have a spin before the fire," yawned Manners; "and roast some chestnuts. You've got to be in the dormitory in a quarter of an hour, Tom."

"That's all right."

"I'll come with you," said Lowther; and the chums were soon ready for the spin, and sallied out of the School House into the dark quadrangle.

Dark and gloomy indeed was the quad, with the huge, heavy trees shadowing it and shutting off the moonlight. The chums of the Shell broke into a trot, making little or no sound in their running-shoes. As they went down the track inside the school wall at a good pace Lowther suddenly gave a start and halted. His grip on Tom Merry's arm brought his chum to a halt at the same moment.

"What's the matter?"

Tom Merry asked the question in a low, cautious voice, realising that something had alarmed Lowther, and that it was a time for caution.

"I heard a stone fall," whispered Lowther breathlessly. "There's somebody climbing the wall, Tom!"

Tom Merry felt a thrill. The chums had been passing the familiar spot he knew so well, where, on the previous night, he had crossed the school wall and surprised Bullivant in the act of attempting to enter the college grounds.

The chums of the Shell listened intently, standing quite still in the darkness under the looming elms. A distinct sound came to their ears—a scraping of a boot on the rough stone of the wall, and a rustling of the ivy growing there over the stone.

There was no further doubt upon the subject. Someone was climbing the school wall from Rylcombe Lane, and the fact of his climbing it proved that he knew all about the facilities that spot offered to a climber—that he was, in fact, quite familiar with St. Jim's.

"Bullivant!" muttered Tom Merry, with bated breath.

"He's come again," assented Lowther.

"But so early!"

"Very likely he means to get inside before the doors and windows are fastened," said Lowther sagely; "and hide himself in some corner till we've gone to bed, and then—"

Tom Merry shuddered.

It was only too probable, and the thought of what might have happened but for this accidental discovery was not pleasant.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "We'll make it warm for him this time! Don't make a sound; let the brute get in. He shan't get out again so easily."

"That's the idea! We'll lay him by the heels this time."

The chums of the Shell drew farther back from the wall. The shadow of the nearest elm fell so thickly there that they could see nothing; but the faint sounds in the darkness warned them that the climber had reached the top of the wall, and was coming over, clutching on the ivy.

"Don't touch him yet!" muttered Tom Merry in Lowther's ear. "We two are not enough. He may have a bludgeon or a revolver, and we want to make sure of him. We'll follow him to the School House, and wait till we're near help before we give the alarm."

"Right-ho!"

There was a patter of feet as the newcomer dropped down within the wall. The chums, almost holding their breath, heard a sound of deep breathing close at hand, and a dark figure almost brushed past them.

They caught only a glimpse of it—a figure in a thick overcoat, with a cap pulled down over the ears, a thick muffler round the neck.

The figure passed swiftly on, and fast on its track went the chums of the Shell. In the moonlight in the quad they caught sight of it again, and then Tom Merry grasped Lowther by the arm.

"He is not going to the School House, Monty; he is making for the New House."

Lowther nodded.

"He's going to hide there," he muttered. "All the better! You can see that Figgins' window is open, and he'll hear us call, and he'll be on the scene in a jiffy. I'll chuck something up through the window to attract their attention."

The overcoated figure had disappeared into the shadow of the New House. The chums followed, and then Lowther jerked up his hand, and his cap flew into the open window of Figgins' study.

The next moment the lighted window was crammed with four juniors, staring out in amazement into the dark quad.

"It's a School House cap," said the voice of Figgins. "There is some little joke, I suppose. Hallo, down there!"

There was a sharp exclamation in the gloom. The mysterious intruder, who was skirting along the New House, had heard Figgy's call, and evidently taken the alarm.

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry. "He'll get away!"

"Right-ho! Collar him at once!"

And the chums of the Shell dashed on. In the darkness they stumbled right against the intruder, and grasped him in a moment.

Taken quite by surprise, the man was dragged to the ground.

"Help!" yelled Lowther.

"Hallo, there!" came from Figgins' window.

"Help, Figgy! Burglars!"

"My hat! I'm coming!"

The juniors disappeared from the window. In a second Figgins & Co. were tearing down the stairs of the New House and out into the quad, regardless of looks of amazement that followed their excited rush. Mr. Ratcliff, the

Housemaster of the New House, was in the Hall, and he called to them angrily. But Figgins & Co. took no notice. They dashed out into the night.

Meanwhile, the mysterious stranger was struggling desperately in the grip of Tom Merry and Monty Lowther.

The two juniors had hurled him to the ground in the advantage of the surprise, and now their object was to keep him pinned there till help could come.

Tom Merry was sprawling over the fellow's chest, his whole weight on the man under him, and grasped both his wrists at the same time, so that he could not draw a weapon.

Lowther was clutching at his throat, and punching furiously at his head whenever he tried to raise it.

The stranger's efforts seemed to be solely directed towards getting away, and the two juniors had their work all cut out to hold him fast.

"Give in, you beast!" gasped Lowther. "You'll—you'll get hurt, you silly villain! I'll jam your head on the ground, if you don't keep still!"

"You infernal young scoundrels!"

As they heard the gasping voice Lowther and Tom Merry nearly let go the stranger in their amazement.

"Sefton!"

They knew the voice. It was not Bullivant; it was Sefton, the "sporting" son of the New House!

"My only pyjama hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Great Columbus!" ejaculated Lowther.

As their grip relaxed the unfortunate prisoner staggered to his feet. But a great bar of light was falling into the quadrangle now from the open door of the New House, and Figgins & Co. were tearing up.

Figgins saw Tom Merry and Lowther receding, and the overcoated figure free. Figgins did not stop to ask questions

—he only thought that the burglar had got loose, and was escaping.

With a howl Figgins hurled himself upon the supposed ruffian, and Sefton went heavily to the ground again, sprawling there with the stalwart Figgins on his chest, and the next moment the Co. were piling over him.

CHAPTER 12.

A Little Mistake!

"GOT him!" roared Figgins.

Figgins & Co. had certainly "got him."

The marvel was that Sefton was not squashed and suffocated under the energetic Co. as they sprawled all over him and flattened him on the ground.

Faint gasps came from beneath Figgins & Co., and murmured words which, had they been audible, would perhaps not have been suitable for youthful ears to hear.

Tom Merry and Manners were yelling with laughter, rocking to and fro, too helpless to be able to interfere on behalf of the unfortunate Sefton.

It was all plain enough to Tom Merry now.

Sefton, the "sport" of the New House, had evidently been out of bounds after dark, to pay one of his visits to the Golden Pig, in Rylcombe, where he frequently met a set of rascally betting men, with whom he played cards and made bets on the races. He had been returning from this little excursion, and trying to get unseen into his quarters, when Tom Merry and Lowther pounced upon him.

Tom Merry's mistake had been natural enough. Nobody had any right to be entering St. Jim's at that hour in such a surreptitious manner, and the result was all Sefton's own fault.

The mistake, now that Tom Merry could see it, was ludicrous, but it was probable that the comical aspect of it was quite lost upon Sefton.

He was struggling and gasping beneath four stalwart juniors. Fatty Wynn was on his head, and Fatty Wynn's weight was something more than a joke. Tom Merry and Lowther laughed till they cried. But the alarm had been given now, and fellows were coming out of the New House, and the sour face of Mr. Ratcliff was staring from the lighted doorway into the dusky quad.

Tom Merry caught Figgins by the shoulder.

"Figgys—"

"It's all right!" panted Figgins. "He can't get away!"

"No; but—"

"Go and get a rope, and we'll tie him up! We've got him safe enough at present. Have you any idea who it is?"

"Ha, ha, ha! 'Yes! It's Sefton!'"

"What!"

"It's Sefton! He's been out of bounds, and we saw him coming in; and—it's all a mistake!"

"Well, you giddy ass! Sefton! My word!"

Figgins scrambled up.

"Let him go, kids! It's a mistake! It's Sefton!"

The Co. rather reluctantly scrambled off their prisoner.

"Sefton!" ejaculated three voices.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "It's a mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Co. chuckled gleefully. The mistake was, after all, not one to be sorry for. Sefton was a bully and a brute, and most of the juniors of the New House had a long score up against him.

Figgins & Co., among the rest, had a long account against Sefton, and they had quite unconsciously paid him something off it through Tom Merry's little mistake.

Sefton, released now, was too exhausted and breathless to make a move to rise. He lay wriggling and gasping, trying to get his breath back.

"What does all this mean?"

It was Mr. Ratcliff's sharp voice. The Housemaster of the New House was on the scene now, his gimlet eyes looking down angrily upon the gasping Sefton.

"If you please, sir—" began Tom Merry.

The New House master's eye turned coldly upon the hero of the Shell.

"I did not speak to you, Merry!"

Tom Merry coloured. It was not the first time he had felt the keen edge of the New House master's spiteful tongue. They had had skirmishes before.

"You will explain, Figgins."

"I really don't know what it means, sir," said Figgins, with half-veiled impertinence. "Tom Merry knows more about it than I do, sir."

The New House master bit his lip, and turned to Tom Merry again.

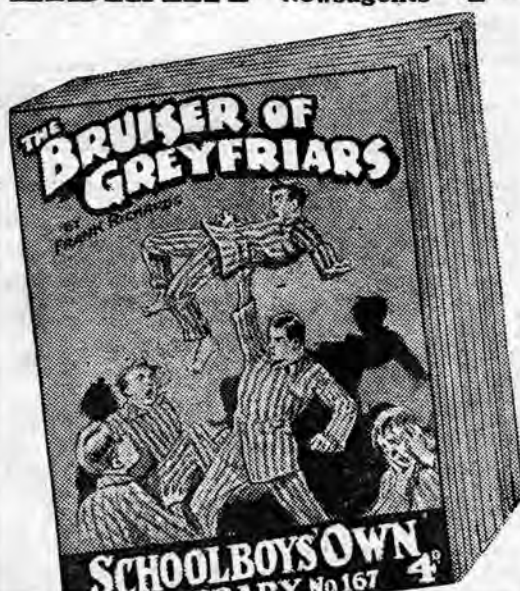
"If you know about this, Merry, explain, as Sefton does not seem to be in a condition to speak."

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Sefton was sitting up, gasping. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had come out with the Housemaster, and he gave the "sportsman" a helping hand to rise. "It was all a mistake, sir," said Tom Merry quietly. "We—we saw Sefton—"

He broke off abruptly. He could not say that he had seen Sefton entering the school over the wall after being out of bounds without getting the New House "sportsman" into a terrible difficulty. And much as Tom Merry despised the sporting instincts of the New House senior, he was not the one to betray him.

Mr. Ratcliff looked at Tom sharply.

"Go on, Merry!"

"That—that's all, sir," said Tom Merry awkwardly. "We—we saw Sefton in the dark, sir, and somehow took him for a burglar!"

"It's a lie!" hissed Sefton furiously. "It's a lie! You jumped on me on purpose, knowing perfectly well who I was."

Tom Merry set his lips hard.

"It was a singular mistake to make," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Do you seriously mean to tell me, Merry, that you saw Sefton walking in the quadrangle and took him for a burglar?"

Tom Merry was silent.

Put that way it looked absurd, and he could not explain how it was that the mistake had come about. He looked at Sefton, but the New House senior was too enraged to see that his interest lay in backing up Tom's explanation.

"It was nothing of the kind, sir!" he exclaimed. "They made the mistake on purpose. They knew very well that it was I!"

"Is that true, Merry?"

"No, sir; it is not true."

"Then what peculiar circumstance led you to take Sefton for a burglar? I suppose if you met me walking in the quadrangle in the evening you would not take me for a burglar?" said Mr. Ratcliff, with cold sarcasm.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then what should cause such a mistake on this occasion?"

Figgins nudged Sefton.

"You'd better own up!" he muttered.

The New House senior gave him a savage glance, and then he changed colour. It dawned upon him that Tom Merry must have seen him getting over the wall, and that hence the mistake had arisen. And if Tom chose to speak—

"If you please, sir—" he began.

The Housemaster's gimlet eyes fixed upon him.

"Well, Sefton, what have you to say?"

"Now I think about it, sir, I dare say Tom Merry did really make that mistake. You see, I was muffled up, and in the dark he couldn't tell—"

"You seem to have changed your opinion very suddenly, Sefton," said the New House master suspiciously.

Sefton turned red.

"Yes, sir; but, you see, I was excited—"

"Ahem! Well, if you have no complaint to make against Merry for your usage at his hands—" said Mr. Ratcliff slowly.

"None at all, sir!"

The Housemaster gave him a sharp, suspicious glance.

"There is more in this than you have explained," he said coldly. "I cannot help thinking that you are deceiving me, but I am not surprised at this from Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry's face flushed and his eyes sparkled. Deception was the very last fault of which he could be justly accused, but any weapon was good enough for Mr. Ratcliff to use against the boy he disliked.

"I am not deceiving you, sir!" Tom Merry broke out hotly.

"Silence, Merry!"

"It is not fair to accuse me of—"

"If you dare to say another word, Merry, I will report you to your Housemaster for insolence," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Go to your own House at once, and take care that you do not make any more mistakes like this. Go, I say!"

Hot words were on Tom Merry's lips, but Lowther grasped his arm and dragged him away. Tom's eyes were flashing as he half-reluctantly allowed his chum to draw him away towards the School House.

"The rotten cad!" he muttered.

"Quite right!" said Lowther.

"I don't see why I shouldn't speak out to him and tell him that he's a cad to accuse me of deception."

"I do!" said Lowther promptly. "Shut up, you ass, or he'll hear you!"

"I don't care if he does! He's a—"

"Of course he is, but a junior is rather at a disadvantage in rowing with a Housemaster!" grinned Lowther. "Come away, you ass!"

"Yes; but—"

"My dear fellow, come along; it's bed-time!"

"Oh, all right; but—"

"Blessed if you don't run on like a gramophone or Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! Come along, I say, and let's get to the dormitory!"

And they entered the School House.

CHAPTER 13.

D'Arcy is Wrong Again!

"OH dear—oh dear—oh dear!"

"Why, what's the matter, Mrs. Mimms?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The morning sun was glimmering on the wide quadrangle at St. Jim's, and on the wet leaves of the elms. There had been rain in the night, and the quad was wet, the trees still dripping, though the sun was shining brightly now. Tom Merry was just coming out of the School House when he heard the dismayed exclamations of the House dame.

"Oh dear—oh dear—oh dear!"

"But what—"

"We shall all be murdered in our beds, I know!"

"What is the—"

"And Mr. Railton would not send for the police!"

"But—"

"Oh dear—oh dear!"

Tom Merry, finding it impossible to obtain an explanation from the House dame, looked round for the reason of her evident agitation.

He was not long in finding it. On the white steps of the School House appeared the plain traces of wet boots distinctly marked on the stone under the shelter of the porch.

The muddy traces were unmistakable, and Tom Merry started as he saw them. Who had been prowling round the School House in the night?

"Oh—oh dear! We shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"Hullo! What's the row?" exclaimed Blake, coming out. "More footprints! Here you are, D'Arcy, bring your mighty brain to bear again. Tell us whether the kid who made those hoofmarks was lame in the left ear or blind in the right leg?"

"Pway don't be fivivolous, Blake, when you see that Mrs. Mimms is in a state of gweat alarm!" said D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass. "Ah, I see that these twaces of boots were made by the same person as those the night before last!"

Tom Merry grinned. Mrs. Mimms hurried into the House to find Mr. Railton, and the chums gathered round the footprints and stared at them with great interest.

"Upon reflection, I believe your statement that you made those footprints the othah night, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy. "I was doubtful at first, as it seemed impos for my theory to be wong; but as a gentleman I cannot bring myself to doubt anothah gentleman's word, and so I admit that it was the twuth. Of course, it is quite easy for one who has studied the methods of gweat detectives to see that these twaces were made by the same feet."

"I'd like to know how you make that out."

"You see that the pwint of the left foot is lightah than the pwint of the wight foot, deah boy."

"I don't see at all."

"Well, take my word for it, then, if your sight is not quite so good as mine," said D'Arcy. "The pwints are a twifle largah, but a change of boots would account for that. Afiah your expwience the othah night, Mewwy, I weally think it was weekless of you to leave such plain twaces of havin' been out."

"Well, rather!" said Blake. "You ought to have been more careful, Merry. Mrs. Mimms will bother Railton about this till he makes an inquiry and worms out the whole business."

Tom Merry laughed.

"In spite of Gussy's wonderful detective instinct, I didn't make those footprints there."

"Now, Mewwy, pway don't wot—"

"It's a fact, Gussy! I had a run out with Lowther just before bed-time, but that was before it rained. I went up to the dormitory at the usual time, and never left it again till this morning."

D'Arcy looked rather crestfallen.

He knew that Tom Merry was telling the truth, and he had made his second "bloomer" as an amateur detective. It was discouraging.

(Continued on page 19.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,259.

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HALLO, chums! I've got another first-class, rip-snorting extra long school story all ready for you next week showing Tom Merry & Co. in the field of sport. Sporting stories featuring the popular chums of St. Jim's are always well received, so I have no hesitation in recommending next Wednesday's yarn. In

"SPORTSMEN OF ST. JIM'S!"

Martin Clifford reaches high-water mark. Thrills there are in plenty in this extra-long story, and your favourite author has not forgotten the laughs as well. This yarn, together with the next chapters of our grand serial story,

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By David Goodwin,

Potts the Office Boy, and another batch of news pars will offer as fine a collection of reading matter as it is possible to obtain anywhere for the modest price of twopenny. The GEM is the top of its class; its popularity is gaining every week—your appreciative letters tell me so, in addition to the circulation figures—but the regular reader, the real enthusiast, is the fellow who gives his newsagent a regular order. He makes absolutely certain of his copy of the GEM by doing that and so avoids the disappointment some of my other readers unfortunately experience when the newsagent greets them with "sold out." Start that "regular order" habit to-day! It pays in the long run! Do it NOW!

A SNAKE'S GLASS EYE!

The keepers at the London Zoo were alarmed. Something was radically wrong with one of Peter's eyes—Peter being a popular boa-constrictor six feet long! Along came an expert optician who decreed that the eye would have to be removed. Well, it was removed in due course, and in its place was put a glass bead exactly the same size. The wound was bandaged up, and Peter thought so little of the whole operating business that he ate his usual ration of four pigeons that day. But here's the snag—when the bandages are removed the glass eye may fall out, as a snake has no eyelids! So now in your notebook you will be able to add to the stories of the dog with false teeth, the cat with a wooden leg, and the cows with spectacles, the history of the snake with the glass eye!

"BOYS, YOU MAY SMOKE!"

If you were a member of a certain school in Illinois, U.S.A., you wouldn't be surprised to hear your Form-master give you that order—for an order it is. Boys of fifteen

years of age—and over—are served out with pipes by the school authorities, and for two periods of a quarter of an hour each per day they are allowed to smoke to their heart's content. The big idea behind this unusual "lesson" in the day's work is paradoxically enough to cure you of smoking. The experts reckon that as a boy who has learned Latin and Greek at school generally forgets it all with great ease the moment he leaves school, so a boy who has had to smoke in his school days as part of his lessons will never want to practise it when he leaves lessons behind him and takes his place in the world. The theory sounds all right, but it would be interesting to meet some of the Illinois school-boys say, in five years' time—especially if they all turned up at their old school with pipes going strong.

A FORTUNE IN A BOTTLE!

Forty years ago a boy's father brought home from South Africa a bottle which appeared to contain some rather uninteresting-looking crystals. And it was not until quite recently that the boy—now grown up—took the bottle of crystals along with him when he went to sell some gold and asked the dealer if he could tell him what the crystals were. The owner of the bottle had one of the greatest surprises of his life when he was told that the crystals were actually diamonds; and when he walked out of the shop he had exchanged the bottle and its contents for the extremely useful sum of one thousand one hundred and fifty pounds! One wonders how many times that apparently useless looking bottle came near to being thrown into the family dustbin during the forty years it had been in England.

THE FIGHTING EAGLE!

Bang! The young fellow with the gun wondered whether his eyes had played him false. Yes, that was an eagle—flying across the woods at Whitfield, near Dover. And he knew that his hastily fired bullet had gone very near the mark. It had indeed, for round came the grey eagle, its lashing wings covering a span of seven feet, and swooping with amazing speed attacked the young sportsman with great ferocity. The grey eagle's ugly talons were doing damage when the struggling sportsman managed to free himself and had the presence of mind to fire the second barrel of his gun. This time his shot went home and the great bird fell dead. When the youngster inspected his

prize he found a rabbit clenched tightly in the eagle's beak, and now he can boast that he has fought and conquered a real eagle weighing more than twelve pounds!

CATCH HIM WITH THIS!

When you bump into that walking encyclopedia of a fellow, who seems to know everything, and likes to let everyone know that he does, try this simple looking question on him: "How many legs has a billiards-table got?" It's more than likely your walking know-all will reply: "Six legs." That's where you choke, for a billiards-table has eight legs. Try it on father, or your big brother first.

THE CAT BURGLAR-HUNTER!

It is an ordinary-looking family cat—just like the one you have, perhaps, or similar to the one next door, but it has done something out of the ordinary. The owner, of course, is quite proud of it. He was taking supper with his invalid daughter in her bed-room one day, and the cat was there, too, doubtless waiting for his scraps. During the wait the cat kept glancing underneath the bed. The daughter noticed the cat's uneasiness so she looked under the bed. What she saw made her scream. Then father had a look. What he saw made him roar—for he found a burglar!

TO PARIS BY MOTOR-BOAT!

That now popular term "O.K." was the major portion of a telegraphic message twenty-one-year old Mr. R. C. Cole sent to London recently when he completed his five hundred and fifty mile journey in an outboard motor-racing boat from Westminster Bridge to Paris! When Cole reached Dover on his memorable trip he found heavy seas awaiting him, but his fourteen feet craft experienced much worse "going" when he was but two miles from the French coast, and was nearly swamped. Still, he made the journey as he said he would, which is distinctly a triumph, and which shows that enthusiasm, courage, and judgment can surmount most obstacles. O.K., Cole!

SAFETY FLYING!

Ever seen the aeroplane that an absolute novice can handle without fear of breaking his neck? Yes, it has an engine, can zoom, dive, bank and do practically everything that any aeroplane you've seen in the sky can do. It's named the Whiting Hoverplane, and it's a faithful copy of a small single-seater aeroplane with this difference—it is anchored! Up on the roof of a large London store the Hoverplane is a centre of great attraction. Anyone who pays a small fee can try his hand at flying, whilst close at hand an instructor tells you what to do. At a touch of a switch the engine roars into motion, you open the throttle and prepare to taxi off; next you pull back on the control stick and—hey presto!—you are flying—in a manner of speaking! You get all the thrill of the various movements, anyway, without the danger, and when you've stepped out of the small cockpit at the end of your lesson you know well enough whether flying as a pastime appeals to you, and whether you have the nerve for it.

YOUR EDITOR

THE VENGEANCE OF "NOBBLER JIM"!

(Continued from page 17.)

"I suppose it is so, if you say so, Mewwy," he remarked. "But the similarity of the twaces is remarkable."

"I admit that I don't see it, as the feet are about twice as big as mine. Here's Mr. Railton."

The Housemaster of the School House, looking very worried, came out into the porch with Mrs. Mimms; but he started, and looked very alert as he saw the footprints on the stone.

He knew at once that they must have been left there by a man, and one who had approached the door of the School House at a very late hour in the night.

"There, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Mimms triumphantly.

"Ahem! You are right this time, Mrs. Mimms. Someone has evidently been prowling round the House in the night," said Mr. Railton. "I will certainly see that the proper steps are taken."

The juniors looked at one another. If Mr. Railton took this serious view of the matter, it was evidently serious enough. Undoubtedly a burglar had paid a visit to the House the previous night; but the question was—why had he not entered? The door doubtless baffled him, but he might have found a window to yield.

"Oh dear!" murmured Mrs. Mimms, encouraged in her alarm by the grave expression of the Housemaster's face. "We shall all be murdered in our beds!"

"Nonsense, Mrs. Mimms! As a matter of fact, we had received warning that a rascally character was in the neighbourhood, and proper precautions were taken last night. Ah, here is Taggles! Taggles!"

The school porter was coming up to the School House. He had something in his hand which looked like a fragment of cloth. A savage-looking bulldog was at his heels.

"You see, Mrs. Mimms, there was nothing to be alarmed about! Taggles' bulldog was turned loose in the quadrangle at ten o'clock last night, and this precaution served its purpose. Were you alarmed in the night, Taggles?"

"No, sir. I 'eard Grip a-growlin', sir, but I didn't get up," said Taggles. "But I found this 'ere on my doorstep this mornin', sir."

He held out the fragment of cloth to the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton took it, and examined it curiously, the juniors looking on with great interest. It was a fragment of a coarse, dirty cloth, and it bore the marks of the bulldog's teeth in it still. A smile broke over the Housemaster's face.

"Ah, this belongs to the burglar, I suppose!"

Taggles nodded and grinned.

"Yes, sir! You see, there's red on it! Grip must have found him tryin' to get in, and got a good bite. He brought this 'ere to my door to show what 'e 'ad done, sir! Good dog!" said Taggles, patting the head of his savage-looking favourite.

"My word!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I don't envy that burglar bolting for the wall with Grip after him. He must have had a high old time."

"We will send this to the police. It may furnish a clue to the rascal," said Mr. Railton. "I have no doubt he will be arrested soon. You see, Mrs. Mimms, there is no real cause for alarm."

But the House dame only shook her head. She knew what she knew, as she would have expressed it, and the prospect of being murdered in her bed seemed to be rather fascinating, for she alluded to it again and again whenever she could find a listener.

Tom Merry walked away with Lowther and Manners, and the faces of the chums of the Shell were very grave indeed. "It was Bullivant, of course!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I suppose so."

"And he came here for—"

Tom shivered a little.

"To rob the School House, of course; and perhaps—"

He did not finish, but the colour wavered in his cheek for a moment as he thought of what might have been.

"The scoundrel!" muttered Manners. "I shan't sleep easy again until Ferrers Locke has him safe under lock and key."

"It's—it's rotten!" muttered Tom Merry. Then a smile broke over his face. "But, by Jove, he must have had a rough run last night! Grip must have got his teeth fairly into him. Taggles took jolly good care not to get up, or we might have laid the ruffian by the heels. Never mind!

He's had his lesson, and so long as Grip is turned loose of a night, I don't think he'll ever get into the School House." "Probably not," agreed Manners. "By Jove, if he has had Grip's teeth in him, I should think he would keep on the other side of the school wall in future. Let's go and have a look at the spot where he must have got in."

"We shall find traces of him there, I expect."

The chums of the Shell made their way to the wall bordering on Rylcombe Lane. It was easy to see the traces left by the burglar. It was in the same spot that Sefton had climbed over the previous evening. But Sefton had done no more than shake the ivy. Now tendrils of it were torn out, whole masses displaced, testifying to the frantic haste with which the intruder had scrambled up the wall, escaping from the teeth of the bulldog. Bullivant—if it had been he—must have had a hard run to escape the teeth of Grip; and had evidently clambered up the wall with the bulldog hanging to him.

Tom Merry laughed lightly.

"I don't think he'll come over that wall again," he remarked.

"I should say not. But if he's determined to get his own back, Tom, he'll look out for you when you're outside the walls of St. Jim's."

"Well, I shall look out for him, too," said Tom Merry carelessly.

"Yes, but you shan't go out again after dark till he's safe under lock and key," said Lowther. "Not alone, at any rate. We're not going to have you knocked on the head."

"Exactly," said Manners. "For the general comfort of Study No. 10, Tom must be taken care of. I say, you'll be having a long run on Saturday, Tom—"

"Keep an eye open for him!" said Lowther. "That would be just his chance if he spotted you in the castle ruins, or among the chalk-pits, or in some lonely place like that."

"Kildare will be with me—"

"A blow from behind isn't easy to guard against," said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "I'm beginning to think you're a bigger ass than ever for taking on that run with the Sixth Form, Tom!"

"Just so," said Manners. "The verdict of the debating society was absolutely correct. I didn't vote, but I agreed with 'em."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom. "Can't you let that rest? Let's get into breakfast."

The chums of Study No. 6 met them as they came in. Blake tapped Merry on the shoulder and stopped him.

"Have you got that report written out?" he asked.

"No!" growled Tom Merry.

"Now, don't you neglect it, kid," said Blake, wagging a forefinger at the hero of the Shell. "Mind, we're not going to have a reporter that doesn't know his business. That report has got to go verbatim in the 'Weekly.'"

"I'll have it ready," said Tom Merry. "Never fear! I didn't have time to do it last night."

"If you like, Tom Mewwy, I will knock it into shape for you," said D'Arcy. "As a most important article, it ought to be written in the best possible style, and a weport is nothin' if it isn't turned out well."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Blake. "The joke of the thing is in Tom Merry writing it out himself. But you never have a sense of humour, Gussy, or you wouldn't go out with that face of yours."

"I wegard that we remark as—"

But Blake did not stop to hear how D'Arcy regarded the remark. He followed the chums of the Shell in to breakfast, and left the swell of the School House to continue his observations with no audience but the pigeons in the quadrangle.

CHAPTER 14.

Ferrers Locke on the Track!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

It was the afternoon, and it being Wednesday, school was over for the day at St. Jim's. On the junior football ground St. Jim's juniors were meeting their old foes of the Grammar School. The ground was pretty well crowded. Many seniors, curious to note Tom Merry's form in view of the paper-chase to come off on Saturday, were standing round the ground, looking on with great interest.

The Lower Forms of St. Jim's had, of course, turned up to a man—or, rather, a boy. They shouted themselves hoarse at every bit of good play, whether upon the home or the Grammarian side.

D'Arcy, with his monocle in his eye, stood looking on.

He usually played with the St. Jim's juniors, but on the present occasion he was standing out, and French, a Shell boy belonging to the New House, was playing in his place. D'Arcy watched the game with great interest, and cheered as loudly as any.

The first half had ended honours even, both sides having found the net once, and now St. Jim's were facing the wind, which was blowing keenly from the moors. But in the teeth of the wind Tom Merry had made a fine run down the field, resulting in a goal for St. Jim's, in spite of the Grammarian opposition and the great efforts of Lane in goal.

Hence the ringing cheers, coupled with the name of Tom Merry.

"Lot of silly fuss to make over that chap," Mellish growled to Gore. "Anybody could do as much, given a chance."

"Of course they could," said Gore.

D'Arcy turned round and gazed at the two with great scorn. His very eyeglass seemed to gleam with indignation.

"Dwy up!" he exclaimed. "I wegard you as a pair of uthah wottahs! Tom Mewwy has just kicked a splendid goal."

"Oh, rats to you!" growled Gore.

"I despise you feathily," said D'Arcy witheringly. "If I were not so intewested in the beastlay match, I should certainly wegard it as impewative to administrah a feathly thwashin' to the pair of you on the spot!"

And the swell of St. Jim's turned to the game again with a sniff of indignant scorn.

"Quite right, D'Arcy," broke in Kildare, whom Gore had not perceived standing near them. "When you can play football as well as Tom Merry, Gore, it will be time for you to criticise. Until then you had better shut up!"

Gore scowled and was silent. It would have taken a bolder junior than George Gore to answer back to the captain of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy was pleased to give Kildare a glance of approval. "Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" he said. "I wegard your wemarak most sensible, Kildare."

"Thank you!" said Kildare dryly.

"Oh, I mean it, deah boy! I have a great respect for your judgment!"

Kildare walked on. D'Arcy looked after him in some surprise.

"Weally, it almost seems as if Kildare was bored with my wemaraks," he murmured. "But, of course, that's imposs. Ah, there goes Fwank Monk!"

The Grammar School skipper was away with the ball. Tom Merry, rolled over by a charge from Carboy, was on his back on the grass, and Frank Monk was speeding down the wing with the ball at his feet. A roar greeted a splendid shot which beat Fatty Wynn all the way, and scored the equalising goal.

"Bwavo!" shouted D'Arcy, waving his eyeglass. "Bwavo, Fwank Monk! I wegard that as a vewy cweditable kick."

The whistle went a few minutes later, and the footballers, tired, but cheerful, came off the field after a rather hard game.

The score was level, and, as a matter of fact, that was as it should have been, for the two junior teams were very much on a par. D'Arcy slapped Frank Monk on the back. The Grammarian captain gave the swell of St. Jim's a good-humoured grin.

"Hallo, D'Arcy! Been in love lately?"

D'Arcy turned crimson.

"I was about to congwatulate you on that weally cweditable performance," he said stiffly.

"Oh, that's all right! Go ahead! I'm open to receive any congratulations—especially in the graceful way you know how to give 'em," said Monk solemnly.

Arthur Augustus beamed at once.

"Well, that is a vewy gwaceful wemarak, Fwank Monk, and shows judgment on your part," he said. "I was goin' to say that you Gwammah cads—I mean Gwammah fellows—played up weally well, considewin', and that you deserve gwreat cwedit."

"Go hon!" said Frank. "Of course, it would have been different if you had been in the team, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! If I had been playin', I weally don't think you would have managed to equalise, you know, deah boy."

"Oh, I don't mean it that way! I was thinking that if you had been playing for St. Jim's your side would have been licked to a frazzle."

"Weally, Fwank Monk—"

But Frank Monk, grinning, passed on with the rest into the pavilion. The match was over, amid good feeling on

both sides, and the Grammarians stayed to tea. And when they went home the Terrible Three accompanied them in their charabanc to the gates of the Grammar School.

At the Grammar School the rivals parted with many expressions of mutual good will, and the chums of the Shell walked back towards St. Jim's in the gathering dusk of the February evening.

It was dark as they drew near St. Jim's again, and the thought of Bullivant naturally came into their minds, and the chums kept a wary eye open on either side as they tramped along the solitary lane. A sound in the grass beside the road as they drew near the school made them start, and they stopped and drew together in the middle of the lane as a dark figure appeared from the shadow of the trees.

"Tom Merry!"

The hero of the Shell started at hearing his name called in a husky voice that was not familiar to his ear. He stepped forward.

"I am Tom Merry."

The dark, ill-clad, rough-looking figure came nearer. "Keep your distance!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Wait till we know who you are."

There was a slight laugh in the dusk.

"I think you know me, my lads."

It was a very different voice now. Tom Merry uttered an exclamation:

"Ferrers Locke!"

"Yes, Ferrers Locke!" said the detective, coming nearer. The amazed juniors looked more closely at him. His disguise was perfect. Not one of them but would have taken him for a tramp, with his ill-fitting, dirty clothing and his rough, unkempt beard and the inflamed hue of his nose and cheeks.

"I should never have known you, sir," said Tom Merry, in wonder.

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"I should be a poor hand at a disguise, if you did!" he remarked. "I want to speak to you, Tom. Step into the shadow here."

"We'll walk on," said Manners, moving.

The detective made a gesture.

"Not at all, remain. I have no objection to Tom Merry's chums knowing as much of this affair as himself. I saw you playing in the football match, Tom, and I saw you go in the Grammar School charabanc. I want to know exactly what happened at St. Jim's last night. As you know, I sent Dr. Holmes a warning, and to-day I have had a letter from him, referring to the matter of the footprints. I do not want to come up to the school, and thus attract attention, and I have been looking for an opportunity of speaking to you outside the walls. When I saw you pass in the charabanc I guessed that you would walk home, and so waited here for you."

"I did not know your voice at first—"

The detective laughed again.

"I could not be quite sure of you in the dusk," he said; "therefore I disguised my voice until I was sure it was you. Now, give me a full account of that affair of the footprints."

Tom Merry explained all he knew. The detective listened carefully, evidently making mental notes of what he had heard.

"There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that it was Bullivant," he said; "and, in my opinion, he visited the school more for revenge than for robbery, though undoubtedly he would have robbed the doctor if he had gained an entry. I know you have courage, Tom, and so I do not hesitate to tell you that you are in serious danger until that rascal is safe under lock and key."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"I am not afraid, sir."

"I know you are not, Tom. I almost wish you were, and then you would keep safe indoors until you could go abroad without danger."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"You would not ask me to skulk in a corner, sir, for fear of that despicable scoundrel?" he exclaimed. "I couldn't do that, sir."

"I know you couldn't, Tom, so I won't ask it. But I will ask you to take care. Listen! I am certain now that I am upon the track of that scoundrel. I am almost sure that he has a hiding-place in the pine-wood we passed through the other night."

Tom Merry started.

"The pine-wood!" said Monty Lowther in a low voice. "You will have to pass through it on Saturday afternoon, Tom."

"Kildare will be with me," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, but—"

"I don't like it," said Manners.

"Neither do I," said Ferrers Locke. "Of course, I may be mistaken; but I have found traces in the pine-wood which lead me to believe that the villain is in some den there, or else near it. As the wood is very extensive, it is, of course, impossible to run him down there by open search. I depend upon strategy. In a few days I am almost certain that he will be my prisoner. But if he is not captured before Saturday, Tom—"

Ferrers Locke paused. Tom Merry waited for him to finish.

"If he is not captured before Saturday, Tom, would it be too much to ask if I asked you to give up running in this paper-chase?"

"I couldn't, sir. You don't understand; but it would be impossible. Manners and Lowther could tell you so."

"But surely a paper-chase—"

"It's not an ordinary run, Mr. Locke. It's the Sixth-

the pine-wood on Saturday afternoon. Take this whistle, Tom. If you should by chance see the scoundrel, a single blast will reach my ears, and I shall know that you want help."

"Thank you, Mr. Locke!"

Tom slipped the whistle into his pocket.

"But surely the man won't dare to show himself with a fellow like Kildare along with me?"

"There is no telling what he may do; and even a fine lad like Kildare could not do much against a bludgeon wielded in a desperate hand."

"I had better warn Kildare—"

"Certainly; but warn him at the same time to keep the secret. If the attack should be made in the pine-wood I shall be there." The detective broke off, and held out his hand. "Well, good-bye, Tom! I must go!"

And they parted.

Tom Merry's brow was very thoughtful as he walked on



WOOSH! Before Lowther could interfere Gore squelched the wet sponge down upon the face of the sleeping hero of the Shell. With a gasp and a shiver Tom Merry awoke!

Form run, and I offered Kildare to run as a hare with him, and he seemed to think me good enough. Ever since then I've been chipped to death by all the Shell and the Fourth, and other fellows as well. They're all saying that I can't do it, and some of them say that I shall find an excuse at the last moment for getting out of it. You see how the case stands, sir."

Ferrers Locke's brow wrinkled slightly. That a paper-chase was a matter of small importance in comparison with danger to Tom Merry's life was certain; but the detective had a sympathetic remembrance of his own boyhood, and he knew exactly how the case appeared to Tom Merry. Danger or no danger, Tom Merry would have risked his life a dozen times rather than have appeared an empty boaster in the eyes of his schoolfellows.

"Then you won't give it up, Tom?"

"I couldn't, sir."

"Very well; I won't attempt to persuade you. But if Bullivant has not been arrested before then, I shall be in

to St. Jim's with his chums. They found the gates still open, and they were soon in the School House.

"Hand over that whistle," said Monty Lowther, as they entered their study.

Tom Merry looked at him.

"What do you want it for?"

"To practise," said Lowther. "Manners and I want to know exactly what it sounds like, you see."

And Monty blew a blast upon the whistle that rang through the School House.

"But what for?" demanded Tom.

"So that we shall know it again. You see, we shall be in the pine-wood on Saturday afternoon, as well as Ferrers Locke!" said Monty Lowther coolly.

"Good idea!" said Manners.

And Monty Lowther performed ear-splitting variations on the whistle till an enraged prefect came tearing up the stairs and put a stop to it.

CHAPTER 15.

The Start!

TOM MERRY was the object of much curiosity among the juniors of St. Jim's during the next few days. That he was up to the form required for the Saturday's run few of the juniors believed, and even Lowther and Manners had their doubts. That he would keep his word and run his best they knew; but what they feared was that he would fail, and become an object of the ridicule of the Lower Forms.

Gore and Mellish and their set openly declared that they did not believe that Tom Merry would run as a hare in the paper-chase at all.

"He'll have some jolly good reason for not running," Gore confided to his cronies. "A sprain in practise, or a twist on the footer field, or something."

"That's the idea," said Mellish. "Anyway, you mark my words, he won't run; and if there's any excuse given, depend upon it that it will be a fib."

Mellish and Gore may or may not have believed what they said, but a good many of the juniors were inclined to do so, and there was great curiosity in the Lower Forms as to whether Tom Merry would run or not.

Had Tom ever thought of giving up the run, as Ferrers Locke wished, this would have decided him against such a step.

Whatever his reasons may have been, it would certainly not have been believed by the majority of the juniors of St. Jim's, and the hero of the Shell would have been set down, in plain words, as a "funk."

Tom Merry's cheeks reddened at the mere idea. The thought of staying behind, then, did not dwell in his mind for a moment. If he had known for certain that Bullivant was in the wood with bludgeon waiting for a savage assault, it would have made no difference to him. Unless he was physically incapacitated he would run.

And there was no likelihood of that. Never had Tom Merry been in such fine form as he now was, and even his detractors admitted that if any junior in the school was fit to make the run, Tom Merry was the fellow.

On Saturday morning curiosity in the junior Forms was at its height, and Tom Merry was asked plain questions by youths thirsting for information. He returned answers curt enough to all inquirers.

"You are weally wunnin' this aftahnoon, then?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, meeting Tom as the Shell came out of their class-room after morning school that historic day.

"Yes, ass," said Tom Merry politely.

"Pway modewate your expwessions, my deah boy! I object to bein' called an ass!"

"Well, then, the best thing you can do is to stop being asinine," said Tom Merry walking on, and leaving D'Arcy addressing space.

"I say, you're really going?" asked Digby, meeting Tom before he had taken a dozen steps from the indignant D'Arcy.

"Of course I am, fathead!"

"If you call me a fathead—"

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry passed out of the School House, and Blake and Herries, who were standing on the steps, at once turned towards him.

"Given up the idea of running this afternoon?" asked Blake.

"No, duffer!" said Tom Merry, going down the steps.

"If you call me a duffer—"

But Tom Merry was gone.

A minute later Mellish and Gore stopped him in the quadrangle, each with an ill-natured grin on his face.

"I hear you're not running, after all," said Mellish. "I thought you'd drop it, you know."

"I don't know how you could have heard anything of the sort," said Tom Merry. "I'm afraid you're departing from the truth, Mellish."

"Are you going to run with the Sixth, then?"

"I have said so."

"Yes; but I said all along it was only gas. Hands off! Ow!"

Mellish sat down suddenly as Tom Merry's knuckles biffed upon his nose.

"What did you do that for?" he howled.

"There's some more for you, if you're not careful of your words," said Tom Merry disdainfully. "You'd better hunt up a little pluck from somewhere before you start ragging me again, Mellish."

And he walked away, leaving Mellish rubbing his nose ruefully.

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"Why didn't you go for him?" exclaimed Gore. "My word! I never saw such a neat dot on the boko in my life! You went down like a ninepin. Why didn't you go for him?"

"Why didn't you?" snarled Mellish.

"He never touched me."

"He would fast enough if you had said what I said, only you hadn't the pluck," said Mellish savagely. "The fact is you're a cur! Ow!"

Mellish sat down again, with Gore's fist on his nose this time. Gore might be afraid of Tom Merry, but he was not afraid of Mellish—an important fact which the cad of the Fourth had overlooked.

Gore walked away, laughing, and Mellish sat rubbing his nose and staring after him. D'Arcy had seen his mishap, and generously came to give him a hand up.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "That was a postman's knock, and no mistake! Which hurt you most of the two, Mellish—Tom Mewry or Goah?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Mellish.

"Bai Jove! That's beastlay ungwateful, you know, when I've just come to help you!" said D'Arcy. "I knew you were always a wottah, but weally—"

"Oh, shut up!"

And Mellish walked away.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had met Kildare, whose greeting was very different from the previous ones he had received. The captain of St. Jim's clapped him heartily upon the shoulder.

"Feeling fit, Merry?"

Tom Merry looked up brightly.

"Fit as a fiddle, Kildare."

"That's right. You look first-rate. Mind you keep close to me in the run, and if we should come upon that rascal you told me about the other night, I think he'd hesitate to bother the two of us," said Kildare. "If you like, of course, you can stand out of the run even now."

"I don't want anything of the sort!" exclaimed Tom Merry hastily.

The captain laughed.

"Very well. Don't forget to be at the starting-place with your bag of 'scent' at two sharp."

"I shall be there."

And for the time appointed for the start Tom Merry was early on the ground. Kildare arrived a few minutes later. The two hares were in their running clothes, and muffled in coats till the moment came to start.

Mr. Railton, the School House master, was to time the start, and he was ready. Half St. Jim's had gathered to see the chase off. The hounds were twenty in number, nearly all the Sixth Form Harriers being in. Sefton wore a sneer upon his face as he looked at Tom Merry, and the junior, catching it, felt his inward determination strengthened. He resolved that Sefton, at least, should never catch him, if the winning of the run were to cost him his life.

"Three minutes to the start yet," Lowther remarked, looking at his watch. "Give us one more blow on the whistle, Tom, in case of accidents."

"Oh, what rot!" said Tom.

"Do as you're told, kid," said Lowther. "Little boys should obey orders, and not argue with their superiors." He lowered his voice. "Lend me the whistle a tick."

"But—"

"Lend me the whistle, ass!"

Tom Merry handed it over. Lowther turned with a grin towards Arthur Augustus, who was there to see the start, and was laying down the law on the subject of paper-chases to Blake, Herries, and Digby. Lowther was behind him, and he quietly stepped close to the swell of the School House, and put the whistle to his lips to blow.

"You see, deah boys—" D'Arcy was saying, when a sudden, terrific blast on the whistle just behind his ear made him jump clear off the ground.

"Wh—wh—what!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

D'Arcy turned upon Monty Lowther, and gave him a glance of the most withering indignation.

"Lowthah, I wegard that as a weally beastlay twick!"

"Ready, Merry?" said Kildare.

"Quite! Give me the whistle, Lowther!"

Tom Merry took the whistle. Blake glanced at him curiously, and looked at Lowther.

"What the dickens is that for?" he asked. "Monteith has got a bugle for calling on the hounds. But what does Tom Merry want with a whistle?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't tell you," said Lowther, after a moment's hesitation. "You see, I can't explain

all without giving away a secret. But Tom Merry may be in danger to-day—you needn't stare, it's a dead certain fact—and we're going to be in the pine-wood, on the home stretch, and if he wants us he's going to blow that whistle. You kids can come along if you like."

"Who are you calling kids?"

"Ready!" said Mr. Railton, looking at his watch.

"Hallo! They're starting!"

The hares, with their bags of torn paper slung over their shoulders, set off at a swinging trot across the common.

As they were to be allowed five minutes' start the hounds still stood in a cluster round Mr. Railton, waiting for the word to be given.

The hares disappeared behind a clump of bracken, Tom Merry running well by the side of the captain of St. Jim's.

Figgins emphatically declared his intention of being in the pine-wood with the Co. by the time Tom Merry entered it on the homeward run.

"We'll scatter up and down the footpath," said Figgins. "It runs about a mile through the pine-wood, and we'll be at different points, so that at least one or two of us will be near Tom Merry if anything should happen."

"Good!" said Lowther heartily.

"They're off!" exclaimed Kerr.

The word had been given, and the hounds were streaming away over the common, lighting up the expanse of green with a blaze of scarlet shirts. Mr. Railton put away his watch and walked back to the school, and the crowd dispersed. But there were ten juniors of St. Jim's who did not join in the usual occupations of a fine half-holiday.

The Terrible Two, Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. had



Tom Merry was sprawling over the fellow's chest and grasping his wrists at the same time, while Lowther clutched furiously at his throat.

But when Kildare put on speed later, then it was a question how the hero of the Shell would keep up with him.

"I say, Lowther, is that a fact, or were you only rotting?" asked Blake, turning again to Tom Merry's chum.

"Fact, kid!"

"Then we'll come along with you," said Blake emphatically. "You needn't tell me any of the particulars, I don't want to know 'em; but if anything is going to happen to Tom Merry we're going to be on the spot!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's get Figgins & Co. along, too," suggested Digby. "There's Figgins yonder, Herries. Buzz off and tell him to come here, old fellow!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

Figgins came up. He looked a little incredulous at first, evidently expecting a School House "plant," but they soon convinced him that they were not romancing. And then

more serious business in hand, as the solemn expression on their faces would have shown, had anyone been particularly observing them.

But no one was, as it happened, and there was no remark made when, at a certain appointed time in the afternoon, the juniors left St. Jim's and made their way towards the pine wood through which the home run of the hares lay.

CHAPTER 16.

In Deadly Peril!

OVER the bridge of the Rhyl went the two hares, and a ringing note of a bugle from the bracken behind showed that they had been sighted by the hounds.

Kildare quickened his pace, and glanced at his companion. Tom Merry was running well and freely. He

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kept pace with Kildare apparently without an effort, and the captain's eyes glistened with approval.

"You'll do, youngster!"

They passed the bridge and ran on along the woodland path to the ruined castle. The trail of torn paper fluttered behind, white on the green grass.

Up the steep hill-path till the ruins rose before them, in at the broken gateway, and then winding among the shattered masonry went the hares at a rapid pace.

The bugle-note rang on the hill, and then was silent. Leaving the ruins behind, the hares left the trail of paper down the declivity and came out into the Wayland Road. There Kildare stopped to jump upon a fence and look back.

Tom Merry stood in the road, breathing hard.

A third of the distance had been run, at a good pace, and the junior was feeling the strain of it, but he had not felt any symptoms of weakening.

His whole body was glowing with the exercise, and his heart was inspired by an elated confidence that he was equal to the task he had undertaken.

Kildare's eyes swept the hill behind, and the scarlet shirts of the hounds came into view on the slope, bursting from the ruins of the grey old castle.

Monteith was in the lead, and after him came Darrell, Rushden, Drake, Baker, with others farther back, and the last to appear from the ruins was Sefton. The New House "sportsman" was the worst runner in the pack.

Kildare jumped down into the road.

"How are you feeling, youngster?"

"Fit as a fiddle!"

"Good! We'll stop for a breather at the chalk-pits; that is the turning-point. It will be easier going from here to there."

"By Jove, we've beaten the hounds so far!" Kildare remarked, stopping and sweeping the back track with his glance. "I can't see a spot of red anywhere!"

Tom Merry followed his glance.

"There's Monteith!"

The slim, athletic figure of the New House prefect was breaking from the bushes at a great distance. Kildare looked again, and nodded.

"You've got good eyes, youngster! We may as well be moving, but we'll take it easy at first."

Away among the chalk-pits they went at an easy, swinging pace. A bugle note rang out over the moor. It showed that Monteith had sighted the quarry again.

"Put in on, Merry!"

"Right-ho!"

Kildare quickened his pace. It was now that Tom Merry was put to the real test. Some distance behind Monteith, Darrell, and Baker were in the lead, and were putting on a spurt of magnificent speed. Several of the hounds had dropped out of the run, which was too fast and hard for them; the first to fail being Sefton.

Three Sixth-Formers were coming on gallantly, decreasing the distance between them and the hares, whom they could easily see every now and again.

It was time for an effort, and Kildare's glance was anxious for a moment as he turned it upon his companion. It was not only the loss of the race, but his judgment would be held at fault if Tom Merry failed him now.

But Tom Merry did not look like failing!

Like a racer at the flick of the whip he responded nobly to Kildare's call. Away went the hares, Tom Merry not an inch behind.

"Can you do more than that, Merry?"

"I think so."

"Make the pace, then," said Kildare.

Tom Merry shot ahead. Kildare quickened and kept pace, and the hares flew on at a speed that would have roused loud cheers on the cinder-path.

The pine-wood was looming up before the hares now. In the excitement and exertion of the race Tom Merry had completely forgotten all about the ruffian whom Ferrers Locke believed to be lurking in the recesses of the pine-wood. He had forgotten Ferrers Locke himself. He remembered nothing, he thought of nothing, save his determination to be in at the gates of St. Jim's before he could be overtaken by the hounds.

Kildare looked back, and gave a shout of triumph.

"They're winded!"

Tom Merry followed his glance. Monteith had put on a splendid burst, but it was over now. The New House

prefect had dropped into a trot, and was falling yards behind at every minute. Darrell and Baker were already so far behind as to be out of sight.

Tom Merry laughed breathlessly.

"We've done them, Kildare!"

"By Jove, yes! We've only got to keep up a moderate pace to the school and we're the winners! Monteith ran well, but he hasn't another spurt like that left in him. I fancy we're all right now—and you've run like a hare, Merry!"

As they entered the trees Monteith disappeared from sight. Before the hares lay the winding path through the heart of the pine-wood—dim even in the sun of noonday, doubly dim now that the afternoon was growing old.

Something in the dim and sombre silence of the pine-wood struck upon Tom Merry with a strange chill. Back to his mind came the thought of Bullivant—of the ruffian who might be lurking among the thick tree-trunks, who might see him and attempt to execute the savage purpose which had brought him to the neighbourhood of St. Jim's.

And the danger, though he knew it not, was terribly near.

A sudden whiz sounded in the stillness of the wood, and an object flew from the trees, and Kildare suddenly stopped and pitched headlong to the ground.

Tom Merry halted, with a cry of dismay.

It was a bludgeon that had hurtled from the shadows of the pines, and it had struck the captain of St. Jim's upon the head and felled him like a log.

Kildare lay where he had fallen, without motion.

For a moment wild horror and fear tugged at the heart of Tom Merry. He knew that the danger had come, that it was upon him, and that his only comrade had been struck down ere he was attacked in order that he should have no aid.

But it was only for one moment that that sudden feeling of terror thrilled through the veins of the brave lad. He remembered the whistle, and in a flash it was in his hand, placed to his lips, and he blew a blast upon it that rang and echoed far through the sombre wood. He had no time for another.

A savage grip was laid upon him ere that shrill blast had died away, echoing among the trees, and he was dragged to the ground.

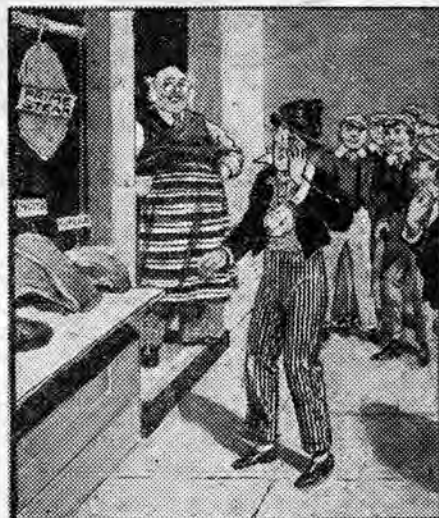
Strong as Tom Merry was he was but a child in the hands of the powerful ruffian, who had sprung down upon him like a tiger from the wood. Down he went, crushed to earth under the weight of Bullivant, and the savage face he well remembered glared down into his.

Here is next week's cover!

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The hands of the ruffian were on the boy's throat, his knee on the heaving chest, and in his eyes was a blaze of hate and revenge.

"I've got you now!"

Tom Merry could not speak. He could only gaze upwards with dilated eyes at the savage face of the ruffian, and pray silently that his whistle might have been heard, and that help might be at hand ere death claimed him—for there was no mistaking the purpose of the savage ruffian.

He grinned down hideously at the white face of the boy. Kildare, like a log in the grass, neither spoke nor stirred.

"So I have you at last! I swore that I would! I have waited for this! I heard someone running in the wood. I didn't dream it was you till I saw you. Then—" He broke off, with a chuckle. "You know what to expect. By all the—"

His grip was like a vice on the boy's throat. As he spat out a brutal oath his grasp tightened, and the boy's senses began to swim.

There was a crash in the thicket.

"Bai Jove, I thought so! It's Tom Mewwy!"

A gloved fist smote the ruffian under the ear. He reeled aside, and his grip upon Tom Merry's throat relaxed. The junior gulped in a deep breath of air.

"You howwid wuffian!" exclaimed D'Arcy—for it was the swell of St. Jim's who had appeared first on the scene in answer to the whistle. "Bai Jove—"

He had no time for more. Bullivant sprang at him and sent him flying with a furious blow. The swell of St. Jim's went, with a bump and a gasp, to the ground, and the brute would have been trampling savagely over him the next moment, but Lowther and Manners came tearing up and leaped upon him like hounds upon a stag, and, like a stag with the teeth of the hounds in him, the ruffian went down beneath their weight.

From different quarters the other juniors came tearing up now. Figgins and Blake arrived together and flung themselves upon the ruffian. He had just shaken loose the chums of the Shell, but the fresh attack pinned him to the ground again. Before he could deal with Blake and Figgins, Wynn and Kerr dashed up and joined in the fray. Marmaduke was only a moment behind, and then came Herries and Digby.

The whole crowd of juniors were now swarming over the ruffian like ants upon a beetle. They did not spare him, either, but hit hard as he struggled, and a shower of blows kept him down when he seemed likely to shake off their weight. Grasp on every limb by one or more pairs of strong hands, with Fatty Wynn sitting on his chest and Marmaduke on his head, even the powerful ruffian was overcome.

Tom Merry ran to Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's was sitting up in the grass, looking dazed, and rubbing the side of his head, where a huge bump had formed.

"Kildare, I feared—"

The captain of St. Jim's understood. He smiled faintly as he staggered to his feet.

"I'm all right, Merry!"

"Thank heaven for that!"

"That knock must have stunned me. Great Scott! How my head aches! Hold that brute fast, youngsters!"

"We've got him, Kildare!" chuckled Figgins. "He can't get away without carrying ten of us with him!"

"Yaas, wathah! The howwid beast had the feahful cheek to stwike me, you know, and I shall certainly not allow him to escape, deah boy!"

"I will take care of him!"

It was a quiet voice as a man stepped from the trees. In spite of his disguise, still as a tramp, Tom Merry knew him.

"Mr. Locke!"

"Ferrers Locke!" exclaimed Kildare, in amazement.

The detective nodded.

"Yes; I happened to be far away when I heard the whistle, and so I am the last to arrive. I will take charge of that scoundrel, lads, and thank you for capturing him."

The handcuffs clicked upon the wrists of Bullivant.

"My prisoner!" said Ferrers Locke, looking down at him. There was a cowering fear in the face of the ruffian.

"I—I thought you—you—"

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"You thought me déad, and it is no fault of yours that

I am not. But I am not dead, you see. I am alive to deliver you up to justice." The detective turned towards Tom Merry. "You are safe now, Tom. I shall see that this rascal has no opportunity of escaping again. And the authorities will take care of him for the next seven years, at least. Meanwhile, the pack are coming on, and if you are to win in the paper-chase, you will have to buck up."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed D'Arcy excitedly. "Wun, Tom Mewwy! Buck up, old boy, and wun like anythin'!"

Tom Merry looked anxiously at Kildare.

"You are not fit—"

"I shall finish the run," said Kildare quietly. "I have to get to the school, anyway. Come on, Tom! We'll stick this out together."

And the hares ran on. Kildare's strength was returning, and his pace was good, though not what it had been. Tom Merry was the more fit of the two, and it was he who had to accommodate his pace to the slower stride of the captain.

The juniors gave them a cheer as they disappeared along the winding path, Tom Merry scattering the trail behind. A minute later Monteith came panting up. Behind him Darrell and Baker were coming on.

Monteith looked round in amazement, but did not stop to ask questions. He knew that he was close behind his quarry now. The hares had reached the border of the pine-wood now, and were clear of the trees. Up Rylcombe Lane they went at a spanking pace.

As they passed the familiar stile Tom Merry glanced back. Monteith was in full sight, and away behind him was Darrell. Baker could not be seen. And even as Tom looked back Darrell gave it up, and slackened down from the killing pace.

"Only Monteith left!" gasped Tom Merry.

Kildare's teeth were hard set. His head was aching and swimming, and lights danced before his eyes. But he set his teeth and ran on. His hand was on Tom Merry's arm now. Without that guidance he could not have run.

High before them rose the gateway of St. Jim's, and in it were a crowd of fellows waiting to greet the homecoming hares.

A loud cheer welcomed them, and the fellows made room for them to pass.

A dozen yards from the gate Kildare reeled.

"One spurt more!" cried Tom Merry, gripping him hard by the arm.

And Kildare made the spurt.

Monteith's outstretched hand was only a foot behind the captain of St. Jim's as, with Tom Merry still grasping his arm, he staggered through the gateway of St. Jim's, and fell there in a dead faint.

Monteith had missed his quarry by a hairbreadth; but a miss was as good as a mile. Loud cheers rang out as Kildare was picked up and carried into the House. Tom Merry was seized by a crowd of Lower Form fellows, and carried shoulder-high after him. Even Gore and Mellish were silenced now. Tom Merry had made the run, and by winning in the paper-chase he had proved that he could do it, and even his detractors had to admit that he came out of the test on top.

A few hours' rest was enough for Kildare, and Tom Merry was relieved to see him about again, looking a little pale, but otherwise no worse. Blake, Figgins, and the rest of the juniors came in, full of importance from the adventure in the pine-wood, with the news that Bullivant was safe under lock and key. Tom Merry was the hero of the Lower Forms, and at a feed given in the School House that evening, in honour of the occasion, Figgins, in a neat speech, declared that Tom Merry had deserved well of St. Jim's, that he had proved himself as good as his words, and that the affair ended with Tom Merry, as D'Arcy put it, "King of the Castle"—a pronouncement which was heartily endorsed by every gentleman present.

THE END.

(There's another great extra-long yarn in next week's GEM! It's called "Sportsmen of St. Jim's!" It's a new one, don't miss it!)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,259.

ALL-THRILLING NAVAL ADVENTURE YARN!

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CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET

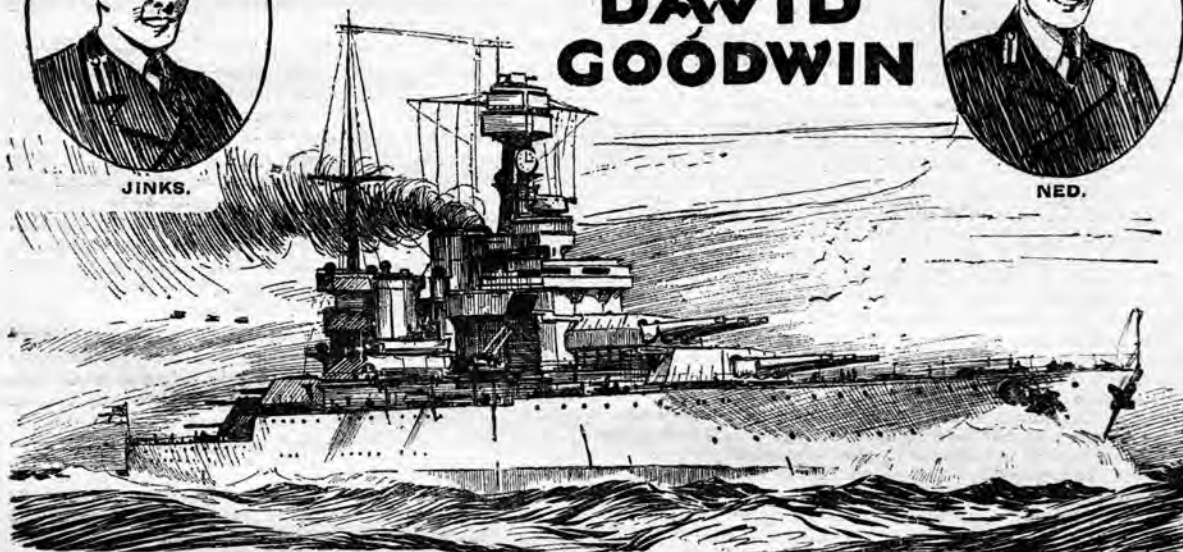


JINKS.



NED.

by
**DAVID
GOODWIN**



MEET NED HARDY—the only middy in the Navy who has won the D.S.C., and his chief “raggy,” JINKS!

CHAPTER 1.

Ned Hardy Speaks His Mind!

MIDSHPMAN JINKS gave a hoot of delight as he picked up the “Times” and the announcement caught his eye.

“Good old Raggy!” he exclaimed.

“Raggy?” said his chum, Ned Hardy. “What’s the Rag-bird been up to now? Best chap in the fleet, bar none!”

“Except me!” said Jinks. “Listen! Our late skipper gets the kick-up. And think, my son, what it means to us!”

He read out from the paper.

“Captain Howard Raglan, C.B., of H.M.S. Victorious, is gazetted rear-admiral.”

And below it was another paragraph:

“Rear-Admiral Raglan will hoist his flag in H.M.S. Victorious to-morrow, at eight bells, and will command the Second Battle-cruiser Squadron.”

“Gosh! That’s a lift for you and me!” cried Ned. “Flag-ship! Middies of the flagship—what! Good old Rags!”

“Always liked Rags,” said Jinks patronisingly. “Though he’s a mighty tough nut. Neddy, this is big stuff! Shan’t be sorry to get back aboard, after all.”

“Sorry!” said Ned. “No giddy fear! Home’s home, and special leave is special leave. But give me the Victorious lifting along through a head sea.” He looked through the window at the quiet sunny meadows surrounding his father’s home of Briar’s Hall, where he and his gun-room mate were spending their leave from the fleet, and thought how tame it all was. “This time, Jinky, we lead the line!”

“If we have as hot a cruise as we did last time we’ll do,” chuckled Jinks. “Considering you’ve been only three months with us, I don’t wonder you’ve the itch to get back aboard. A middy with the Distinguished Service Cross, by gum!”

He smote his chum on the back, and looked at him admiringly.

“But don’t you get the big-head over it, my buck!” he added. “We’ll dashed soon knock the side out of you if you start putting on dog!”

“Don’t be a chump!” said Ned. “All I had was luck.”

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He sighed. “My luck has been as good as poor old Ralph’s was rotten. I’d chuck my D.S.C. into the ditch if he could get his job back.”

Ned Hardy’s career, though a short one, had been perhaps the most remarkable in the fleet.

He had joined his ship, H.M.S. Victorious, a superb battle-cruiser, just three months before. And he had joined her under a cloud. For his elder brother, Lieutenant-Commander Ralph Hardy, had been court-martialled in the same ship, and dismissed from the Navy, only a little while before.

There had been a sensational robbery from the safe-room of the Victorious—£5,000 in banknotes had been stolen! Ralph Hardy had been held responsible, and though they could not prove that he had an actual hand in the robbery, he was found guilty of neglect of duty, and was cashiered.

To this same ship, by a blunder of the Admiralty, Ned Hardy was appointed. He started his career in a vessel where his very name was dishonoured; the little midshipman found himself cold-shouldered on all hands. Yet so plucky was he, and so winning was his personality, that Ned Hardy quickly proved his courage and skill when put to the test, and made everybody forget the dishonour attached to his name. Midshipman Jinks was Ned’s chum and helper from the first.

Ned’s chance of proving his grit came within a few weeks of joining. A foreign spy had tried to unravel the secrets of the Victorious, and Ned had been warned against this man by his unfortunate brother Ralph. Through Ned’s sharpness and courage the spy was detected and captured, and so brilliant was the boy’s share in running down and securing him that Ned was awarded by the Admiralty an honour seldom ever accorded to a midshipman. He was given the Distinguished Service Cross. So his third month found him no longer an outcast but the most popular lad in the whole ship—perhaps in the entire fleet. And, having secured a fortnight’s leave, he had come home to spend it with Jinks at his father’s house. The leave was up at last, and to-morrow he was to rejoin his vessel.

There was only one flaw in Ned’s happiness, and that was his brother Ralph’s disgrace. Ralph, eight years older,

and a full lieutenant, had been Ned's hero—and was still.

Their father, a straightforward and stern old sailor, who had long retired from the Navy, had felt Ralph's dismissal to be the bitterest blow of his life. He had disowned his elder son, forbidding Ralph ever again to darken his doors. It had nearly broken the young officer's heart, to be dismissed both by the Navy and by his father.

The old man, where his honour was concerned, was pitiless. He now considered Ned as his only son. Ned, for his part, obstinately and loyally refused to believe his brother guilty.

"I really believe," said Jinks to Ned, as the breakfast-gong sounded, "that your governor'll be sorry to see us go, Ned—though I reckon we've been a giddy nuisance to him. He doesn't say much—"

"He never does," answered Ned. "The fact is, he's never got over—Steady, here he is!"

Captain Hardy, a fine old man of seventy, straight as a dart, with white hair and a stern, handsome face, entered the room. The boys jumped up, saluted—he always insisted on that—and then shook hands with him.

"Well, youngsters," said Captain Hardy heartily, "the old place'll be pretty quiet after you're gone, and, though I like quiet, I shall miss you. But here's the breakfast."

It came in, piping hot, in the big silver dishes engraved with the Hardy arms, and the three of them fell to. The two middies chattered busily; Captain Hardy was preoccupied, and said little. Towards the end of the meal the butler brought in the letters from the nine o'clock post, and gave them to their owners.

"Three from three of my best girls," said Jinks complacently. "Any news, Ned?"

Ned did not answer. His face had flushed suddenly, and his eyes sparkled as he saw the envelope handed him. It was in the writing of his brother Ralph. Never before had the ex-officer written to him at his father's house since his dismissal. Ned tore open the envelope with eager fingers.

The note was brief:

"My dear Ned,—To-morrow, I hear, you go back to the Victorious. You return with your honours upon you, old boy, and I wish you luck. I would give the eyes in my head if I could do the same. But I'm still an outcast."

"You have cleared your name, but not mine. Take care, Ned, for there are men still at liberty—friends of the spy you helped to capture—who will trip you up yet. Your honour—even your life—will be in danger. Always keep your weather-eye lifting. They will never forgive you for doing them down."

"Though I am no longer in the Service, you'll find me a useful ally. You will hear from me very soon after you join your vessel. Till then, au revoir."

"Your affectionate brother,
"RALPH HARDY."

Ned devoured the letter eagerly, his heart beating faster. It was like a trumpet call to him.

"Ned," said his father sharply, "what have you there?" There was the quarter-deck ring of command in his tone. Across the table he had recognised the handwriting of his son.

Ned changed colour; he knew better than to hesitate.

"It's a letter from Ralph, dad."

"From Ralph?" said Captain Hardy, frowning. "He writes—to my house—and to you?"

"Yes, he writes to me. Surely—"

"Have I not told you," said the old man sternly, "that your brother's name is not to be mentioned in this house, nor any message received from him? He knows better than to write to me!"

Ned rose, his blood tingling.

"Father," he said, "you believe Ralph guilty! I don't—and I never will!"

"Stop!" said Captain Hardy sternly.

"Let me finish, dad!" appealed Ned. "Haven't I the right, now, to speak up for my own brother?"

The old man paused. Unbending though he was, he could scarcely deny that Ned had earned that right.

"Very well," he replied grimly. "This once, then. Say what you have to say, and then no more of it for ever!"

"I know his disgrace was a terrible one, and I know the Court found him guilty. And I know I haven't got a jot of proof, and neither has he; but I believe it was a plot laid by spies, and the cleverest plot on record, to slip the blame on to Ralph and get rid of him! Father, because there were no such spies as those during your service, you won't believe it. But I've been up against one of them myself."

"That was altogether a different business—"

"Why different, father? What they did in Ralph's case, or how they did it, I don't know. But I'll find some way to

clear his name, and they shall take him back into the Service—and you, father, shall own that you have wronged him!"

"Ned," said the old man quietly, "you are as simple and innocent as a baby! You will see no wrong where you believe there was none, and you see all sorts of villainy where there isn't any. Do you think a court martial of experienced flag-captains could be deceived? Do you suppose it was not the bitterest day of my life when I disowned my own son?" Captain Hardy paused, and his voice became gentler. "But no more of this, Ned. I am willing to believe Ralph innocent on the day that his guilt is disproved. But you are following a lost cause. It is impossible!"

"I'll do it or go under. I pledge my word to it!" said Ned.

His father shrugged his shoulders and left the room. Ned turned to Jinks, who had been listening, startled and distressed at the scene.

"Old boy," said Ned, putting a hand on his shoulder, "you know the shadow that hangs over our name. I'm going to clear it up. Will you help?"

"Help?" exclaimed Jinks. "You can count on me to the last ounce! Ralph Hardy was the biggest brick that ever boarded the Victorious, and though I can see no earthly chance of throwing over a flagship court martial, I'm with you! But you'll never do it!"

"We shall see!" said Ned Hardy; and he shut his teeth with a snap.

CHAPTER 2.

The Spy's Lost Memory!

"HERE she lies, Ned! Doesn't she look great! Hurrah for the old sardine-box! It's good to see her again!"

The two middies gave a simultaneous cheer as the car which had brought them from Briers Hall came over the crest of the hill behind Gosport, and the blue waters of Portsmouth Harbour gleamed below, with five huge steel ships of the Second Battle-cruiser Squadron looming up among the crowd of light cruisers and torpedo vessels. First of the line was the Victorious herself, with the black booms along her grey sides, her mighty guns stretching out from the low turrets, and the admiral's flag flying proudly from her main truck.

Glad as they had been to get their leave, Ned and Jinks were gladder still to be back with the fleet. In ten minutes' time they were speeding off across the full rush of the tide-way in a picket-boat, their kits piled in the stern, and the petty officer and stoker in charge were as pleased as anyone in the harbour that day to see the two midshipmen again.

The boat was quickly alongside the fore-gangway, and the corporal of the gangway quickly had the kitbags of the two middies taken in charge. The master-at-arms was at the head of the rail, and, saluting Ned and Jinks, passed them along to the officer of the day. This was Lieutenant Buckley, a keen-looking young officer, who had the air of having swallowed a poker. The middies went straight up to him and saluted.

"Come aboard, sir!" they said together.

Lieutenant Buckley acknowledged the report with a salute.

"Report yourselves to your senior in the gun-room," he said; adding quietly: "Glad to see you back."

The middies turned off towards the boat-deck stairs.

"That's your giddy fame, Ned," said Jinks, grinning.

"It's a bit of a novelty for the officer of the day to welcome a mere scottie back to the ship with honeyed words. Great crumbs! He said he was glad to see you back. He little knows! Look out!" Jinks added under his breath. "Here's the chief!"

Rear-Admiral Raglan himself, the chief and autocrat of the squadron, on his way to the bridge, came upon the middies suddenly, and they stopped dead to let him pass, and saluted like clockwork figures. But the great man, responding to the salute, stopped, too. He held out his hand to Ned, who nearly fell down.

"Welcome back to your duties, Mr. Hardy," said the admiral, a kindly gleam in his usually stern eyes, as he gave the midshipman's hand a brief shake. "Hard work now, eh, and no more midnight chases? You will be wanted this afternoon, however, so be ready when I send for you."

He shook Jinks' hand as well, and passed rapidly on.

"Wonders will never cease!" said Jinks. "The admiral will be kissing us on the brow next, and asking after our sisters! I thought we should get the frozen face this time, after all the fuss last cruise."

(Why does the Admiral want Ned? Look out for thrilling developments next week.)

EASTWOOD SHIELD LEAGUE.

BAGSHOT'S GALLANT DISPLAY!
BUT SAINTS TOO GOOD FOR THEM!

By "OLD BOY."

St. Jim's, Wed.

CECIL PANKLEY, the Bagshot captain, seemed rather unlike his usual self on arrival at St. Jim's. I asked him what he thought of his team's chances and was surprised to find him modest, even reticent. This, from Pankley, famed for brag and bounce, was a little remarkable! "Wait and see," was Pankley's only answer, and more than one St. Jim's man beside myself began to suspect that there was something in the wind. At all events, Pankley, remembering how the Saints mopped up Bagshot to the tune of 9-0 earlier in the season, had wisely determined to say nothing beforehand.

St. Jim's were still without Kangaroo, but Sidney Clive had proved himself a worthy deputy at St. Jude's, and kept his place. Cardew stood down to make way for Talbot, now fit again.

The ball was placed on the white spot. Pankley won the toss, and the game started.

It was not long before the reason for Pankley's reticence became evident. A St. Jim's advance on the left was neatly held up, and the ball came in to Pankley. The Bagshot skipper went away like a flash, and swung the leather out to his right winger. Bagshot descended on the Saints' goal, and there was an audible gasp as the ball was centred right at Pankley's feet. Pankley shot without hesitation, and Fatty Wynn grabbed a fraction of a second too late.

Bagshot were one up!

But the Saints were set on the equaliser, and it came at length from Blake's foot—a terrific drive close in.

They had lost their lead, but Bagshot played as though they were winning easily. Gone was that panicky nervousness which had betrayed them before; instead, they made up for lack of skill with a deadly determination which soon bore fruit. An advance on the left saw Kerr left standing, and Fatty Wynn was caught in two minds with a swift cross shot that just slid under the bar. Two to one!

St. Jim's redoubled their efforts, and

Tom Merry's head was instrumental in deflecting a centre from Gussy past the Bagshot goalkeeper, levelling the scores.

Still Bagshot were undismayed, and Pankley took the ball clean through in a great solo run to slam it past Fatty Wynn as the Falstaff galloped desperately out

of goal to meet him. Once again Bagshot were in the lead, and half-time found them still there!

St. Jim's have won more than one match through sheer imperturbability, and they began the second half with a quick, deft short-passing movement that had Pankley & Co. all at sea. Levison drew the goalkeeper, and passed. Quick as lightning Tom Merry pounced on the ball and drove it well home—three all.

The game continued at a smart pace, neither side flagging, and St. Jim's being unable to turn a territorial advantage to any definite account. Tom Merry was hurt in a collision and had to go off for repairs. And, curiously enough, with time fleeting and their centre-forward off the field, the Saints thought that fillip which they needed.

A miskick close in gave Levison a chance, and he shot. The goalkeeper got his fist to the ball, and tipped it over the bar. D'Arcy took the corner-kick and landed it just a little too far over—or so it appeared. But Talbot was dashing in from the opposite wing, and as the ball touched the ground he let fly. Like a pip from an orange it flew—through a heap of players and into the net!

The last straw broke the camel's back, and Talbot's goal seemed to break the morale of Pankley's reorganised team. Talbot came into the picture again with a brilliant run, which he crowned by crashing the sphere home like a cannon ball. Five to three!

Tom Merry returned to the field, and Bagshot were well on the run during those last few minutes. Nevertheless there was nothing fluky about the way Talbot completed his hat-trick with an unexpected drive from outside the penalty area which caught the Bagshot goalkeeper napping. A goalkeeper's job is to look out for unexpected things, and in the closing moments of a match he is quite likely to be tested with a difficult shot. As the ball dropped in the net Pankley let forth a hollow groan, and Tom Merry grinned.

We heard with excitement that Greyfriars had beaten Gordon Gay & Co., at Rylcombe, by 3-2 in a needle game, and that Abbotsford, by dint of great efforts, had forced a draw against Frank Courtenay and his men of Highcliffe.

RESULTS.

Matches Played Wednesday.

ST. JIM'S .. 6	BAGSHOT .. 3
Blake, Merry (2), Talbot (3).	Pankley (2), Poole.

Teams: ST. JIM'S—Wynn; Figgins, Kerr; Redfern, Clive, Lowther; Talbot, Levison, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy. BAGSHOT—Terence; Lee, Craddock; Trezay, Rockingham, Troop; Fleet, Poole, Pankley, Putter, Sinbad.

ABBOTSFORD .. 2	HIGHCLIFFE .. 2
Fane, Williams.	Courtenay (2).

BANNINGTON G.S. 1	ST. JUDE'S .. 1
Blid.	Lance.

CLAREMONT .. 1	ST. FRANK'S .. 6
Weston.	Nipper (2), Pitt, Grey, Christine, De Valerie.

RYLCOMBE G. S. 2	GREYFRIARS .. 3
Gay, Monk.	Wharton, Harro, Singh, Cherry.

ROOKWOOD .. 3	REDCLIFFE .. 0
Mornington (2), Grace.	

Matches Played Saturday.

BAGSHOT .. 8	BANNINGTON .. 1
Pankley (3), Putter (2), Poole (2), Sinbad.	Dexter

GREYFRIARS .. 0	ST. FRANK'S .. 0
HIGHCLIFFE .. 4	RYLCOMBE G. S. 4
Courtenay (4).	Gay, Monk, Wootton min., Wootton maj.

REDCLIFFE .. 7	ABBOTSFORD .. 0
Judd, Stoker (2), Mills (2), Forshaw (2).	

ST. JUDE'S .. 5	CLAREMONT .. 2
Raleigh (3), Lane, Mallory.	Merrivale, Baxter.

LEAGUE TABLE TO DATE.

	P.	W.	D.	L.	F.	A.	Pts.
Greyfriars ..	17	12	3	2	59	19	27
St. Jim's ..	17	12	3	2	66	22	27
Rookwood ..	17	12	2	3	53	32	26
St. Frank's ..	17	11	3	4	52	23	24
Rylcombe ..	18	10	3	5	55	30	23
Highcliffe ..	17	9	4	4	43	27	22
Redcliffe ..	17	6	2	9	31	33	14
Bagshot ..	17	5	3	9	30	45	13
St. Jude's ..	17	2	7	8	22	43	11
Abbotsford ..	18	1	7	10	25	72	9
Claremont ..	18	1	5	12	23	55	7
Bannington ..	18	1	3	14	12	66	5

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