

BOYS, THERE'S A 250-POINT BIG BONUS COUPON IN THIS ISSUE!

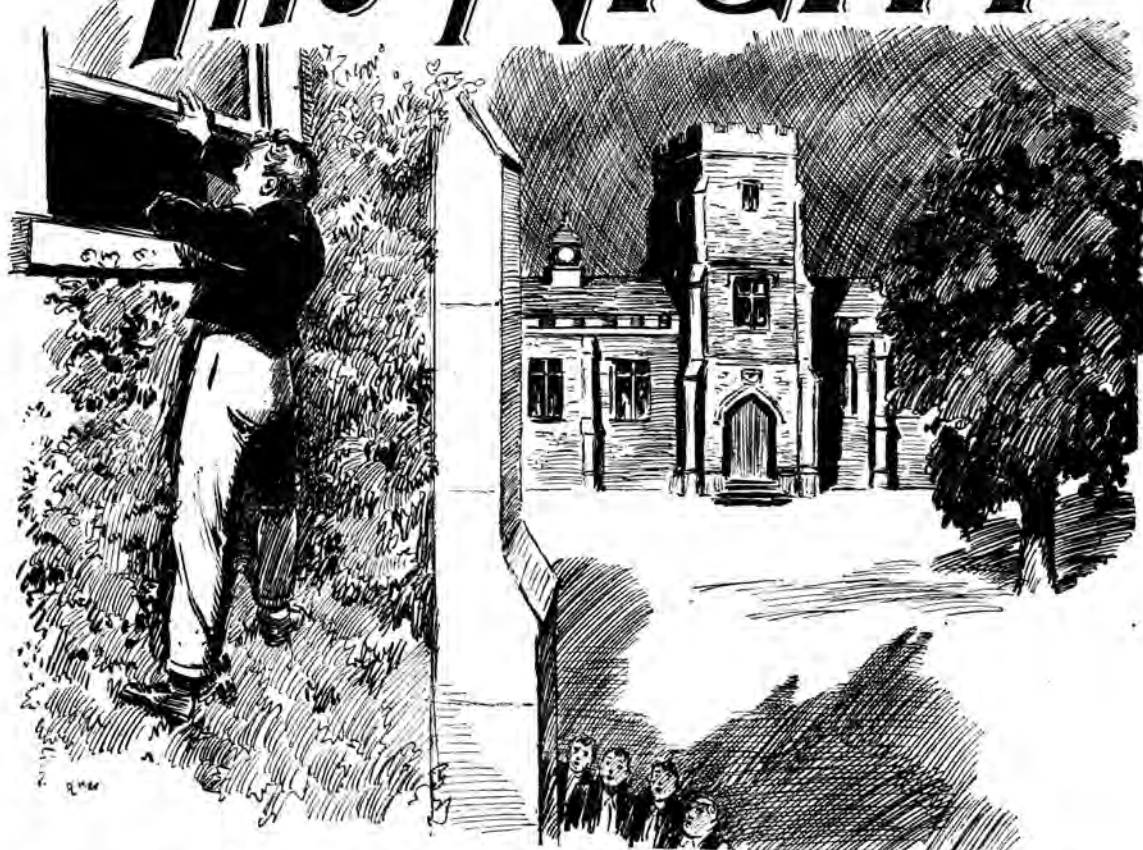
The GEM 2^D



READ THE *full of laughs* SCHOOL STORY INSIDE.

READ THIS RIPPING LONG YARN OF INTER-HOUSE RIVALRY—

The NIGHT



A great mystery surrounds a hamper which Blake receives from America. It takes three juniors to move it, and even Fatty Wynn can't get it open! What's in it?

CHAPTER 1. Figgins' Little Joke!

"OH!" "Oh!"
Tom Merry came sprinting along the upper corridor in the School House at St. Jim's just as Jack Blake came out of Study No. 6 in a great hurry. The two "Oh's!" sounded simultaneously as the juniors collided.

They met with a biff in the middle of the passage, and Tom Merry's impetus carried both of them along half a dozen paces before they rolled over on the hard linoleum.

"Oh!"
"Oh!"
Jack Blake sat up and glared at Tom Merry. Tom Merry sat up and glared at Blake.

"You utter ass!" ejaculated Blake. "What do you mean by buzzing along the passage when I was just coming out of my study?"

"You unutterable duffer!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What do you mean by coming out of your study when I was buzzing along the passage?"

"I was in a hurry—"
"I was in a hurry—"

Blake picked himself up and dusted down his trousers with his hands. Tom Merry rose to his feet and set his collar straight.

"You shrieking ass!" said Blake. "If I weren't in a hurry to get down to the gates to meet the carrier, I'd wipe up the passage with you!"

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"And if I weren't in a hurry to meet the carrier, too, I'd strew you in little pieces up and down the corridor!" said Tom Merry.

Blake burst into a laugh.

"Are you going down to meet the carrier, too, then?"

"Yes, rather! I'm expecting a hamper from home."

"And I'm expecting a hamper from my uncle abroad. He wrote in his last letter that he was sending me a present that would please me, and as he's a jolly sensible chap I suppose it will be a hamper with grub in it. Let's get along."

And the two juniors left the House together.

Afternoon school was over at St. Jim's, and the quadrangle was crowded in the sunny June weather. Tom Merry and Blake crossed to the porter's lodge, and Tom Merry put his head in at the open window.

"I say, Taggy!"

Taggles, the porter, looked up, with a grunt. He had had his rubs with Tom Merry, and he did not particularly relish being addressed as "Taggy." He gave the junior a freezing glare, and did not answer.

"I say, Taggy," said Tom Merry genially, "has the carrier been here, old son?"

"When the carrier comes at five o'clock, and it's now twenty minutes past," said Taggles sarcastically, "the inference is that he 'as been, Master Merry!"

Tom Merry looked at him with great admiration.

"Did you work that out in your head, Taggy, without the aid of a net?" he asked.

Taggles grunted.

"Well, has the carrier left anything for me?" asked Tom Merry.

RAIDERS!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"There's a hamper."
"Then why haven't you brought it to my study?" said Tom Merry severely. "I shall have to report you for neglect of duty, Taggy!"

"What price my hamper?" said Blake, looking in. "Has anything come for me, Taggles?"

"There's a parcel."
"A parcel? I was expecting something bigger than that."

Blake looked at the parcel rather disparagingly. It was addressed to J. Blake, at the School House, St. James' Collegiate School, and so there was no doubt that it was for him.

"Nothing else for me, Taggles?"

"No!" grunted Taggles.

"And that jolly big hamper for Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry looked at his hamper with great satisfaction. It was too big and heavy for him to carry, which was a great source of satisfaction, for the inference was that it contained something very good.

Tom Merry was expecting something from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess, and he had had a lingering doubt as to what it might turn out to be. Miss Fawcett sent him medicine and cod-liver oil more often than anything else. But this huge hamper could not be supposed to contain a consignment of patent medicines.

"I say, Taggy, get this up to my study, will you?" said Tom Merry. "I have the Head's permission to receive a parcel from home."

"Same here!" grunted Blake. "But I'm blessed if I know what there can be in a little packet like that to make it worth while sending from America."

"Perhaps it contains a tip," suggested Tom Merry encouragingly. "A parcel that size would hold a lot of banknotes."

Blake laughed.

"I don't suppose it's stuffed full of banknotes, though," he remarked. "Anyway, I suppose I may as well take it along."

And Blake picked up his parcel and departed.

Tom Merry produced a shilling from his waistcoat pocket, with the result that Taggles showed a great alacrity in carrying up his hamper.

Blake, however, was first in the School House with his package. He entered Study No. 6, where his chums were awaiting him. The tea-table was laid, but they had not commenced tea, leaving that important function till Blake came in, as his expected hamper might contain things acceptable on the festive board.

Digby, Herries, and D'Arcy looked at Blake with mute inquiry as he came in. Blake slammed down the little parcel on the table. There was the sound of a crack from within.

"Hallo! Something's broken!" said Herries.

"Is that all, Blake, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye and looking at the parcel.

"That's all, Gussy."

"But I thought you were expecting a hamper?"

"So did I."

"But hasn't it come?"

"It hasn't."

"Weally," said D'Arcy, looking round, "I wergard that as wathah inconsiderate of Blake's uncle. We were waitin' tea—"

"Well, let's see what the parcel contains, anyway," said Digby. "It seems to be fastened up pretty securely, with string and sealing-wax."

"There may be something valuable in it," said Herries. "Of course, grub was what we wanted. Still, I dare say your uncle couldn't very well send a hamper of grub across the Atlantic Ocean."

Blake cut the string and tore open the paper. A thick fluid ran out over the tablecloth.

"My word," said Digby, "what's that?"

"Somethin' broke when Blake slammed it down. It was weally wathah careless of Blake."

"Looks like oil of some sort," said Blake, puzzled. "Blessed if I know what's in the parcel!"

"Let's see!"

Curiosity was strong in Study No. 6. Blake finished unwrapping the parcel. Three bottles were exposed to view and a cardboard box. One of the bottles was broken, and a thick fluid was oozing from it.

There was a letter in the parcel, stained with the oozing oil. The chums of Study No. 6 looked at the bottles in blank amazement.

"Cod-liver oil," Digby read out from the label of the bottle that was broken.

"Tinted Tincture for Pining Patients," Herries read from the second bottle.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "Lovely Liniment for Little Limbs."

"Dr. Bones' Purple Pills for Pecky People," said Blake.

Then the chums of the Fourth looked at one another. Their feelings were too deep for words.

They had expected a consignment of selected catables, and they had received a collection of patent medicines and cod-liver oil.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, breaking the painful silence. "If this is your uncle's ideah of a joke, Blake, I cannot say that I should wank him vewy high as a humowist."

"My word!" said Digby. "I should write him a pretty strong letter, Blake, if he belonged to me."

"I'd disown him," said Herries darkly. "A chap who could work off a joke like that should be no uncle of mine."

Blake was looking puzzled.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I can't make it out a little bit. Let's have a look at the letter."

He opened the letter and glanced at it, and then uttered an ejaculation.

"My darling Tommy!" That was how the letter commenced, in an old-fashioned, feminine handwriting.

"My only hat!"

"That's Miss Fawcett's handwriting!"

"Tom Merry's governess!"

"The parcel is for Tom Merry."

Blake's face broke into a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha! That accounts for the giddy medicine. She's always sending him something of this sort. But—but how did the parcel come addressed to me?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Digby. "The labels must have got changed somehow. Better go down and see Taggles about it."

"Come on, then! If this parcel addressed to me is for Tom Merry, then that one addressed to Tom Merry may be for me."

"Yaas, wathah! Let's go and interview Taggles, deah boys."

The chums of Study No. 6 left the study, and hurried to the porter's lodge. Taggles had just returned there, after taking up the hamper to Tom Merry's study. Blake marched into the lodge with his followers at his heels and a wrathful frown upon his brow.

"Taggles, you villain—"

"Which I says, get outer my lodge!" said Taggles.

"What do you mean by playing tricks at your time of life?" said Blake severely. "I've often remonstrated with you on the subject of your intemperance, Taggles."

"Get outer my lodge, you cheeky young himp!"

"Where's my parcel?"

"You took it."

"That one was for Tom Merry. It was addressed to me, but it was for him. See? Some silly ass has been changing the labels. If this is your idea of a joke, Taggles, I think you are a—"

"I don't believe a—"

"Where's my parcel?"

"Yaas, wathah! Where is Blake's hampah, you wascal? Pwduce the hampah immediately. I insist upon the immediate pwduction of the hampah."

Taggles' face dawned into something like a grin.

"Then that's what Master Figgins was doing—"

"Figgins!" exclaimed Blake.

"He was in here just afore you came," said Taggles. "He was messing about with the parcels a lot, asking if there wasn't none for him, although I told him there wasn't."

Blake looked extremely wrathful.

"Oh, so it's a jape of that New House rotter! How many parcels came by the carrier, Taggy?"

"Only them two."

"Then Tom Merry must have mine. Come on, kids, we must get that hamper back before those School House rotters have scoffed the grub."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums hurried out of the lodge. A long-limbed, not to say lanky, junior looked at them with a grin as they passed him in the quadrangle. It was Figgins of the New House, and Kerr and Wynn, the other members of the famous Co. were with him.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Have you had your parcel yet, Blake?"

Blake glared at the humorous Figgins.

"Yes, you ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you've come here to look for trouble, Figgins—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House chums were inclined to rush upon their old enemies for a moment; but they were anxious about the hamper in Tom Merry's study. Although the School House boys generally united against the New House, there was a keen rivalry between Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three. If Tom Merry and his chums found provisions in the hamper, there was no telling whether Blake would ever see anything of them.

"I haven't time to knock your head off now, Figgins—"

"That's luck for somebody," said Figgins. "If you started, somebody might get hurt."

"We regard you with contempt," said D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass. "Wun away and play, you wotten New House boundahs!"

"Come on!" said Herries.

And the chums of Study No. 6 hurried on to the School House, followed by a mocking yell from Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 2.

The Hamper From Wyoming!

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell, stood round the hamper with beaming faces. Taggles had carried it up to the study, not without exertion, and had been duly rewarded with a shilling. The dimensions of the hamper pleased Manners and Lowther as much as Tom Merry.

"This is all right," Monty Lowther remarked. "I was afraid Miss Fawcett might be sending some bosh as she has done before."

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "There's still a bottle of cod-liver oil hanging about the study from the last parcel from Huckleberry Heath."

"Nothing of that sort this time," said Tom Merry, cutting the cord of the hamper with his pocket-knife. "A hamper this size can only contain a really ripping spread."

"I should think so!"

"It's done up pretty thoroughly," Manners remarked. "The hamper looks a bit knocked about, too. Get the lid up."

The hamper was opened.

Just inside the lid was an envelope, and upon the envelope was written: "To my nephew."

Tom Merry stared at it.

"I say, that's not Miss Fawcett's writing!" he exclaimed.

"And you're not her nephew, anyway," said Manners.

"There's some mistake somewhere."

"The hamper was addressed to me—"

"Better open the letter and see if there's any explanation inside," said Manners. "The wrong letter may have got shoved in. Has Miss Fawcett any nephews?"

"Yes, one in India, I believe."

"Then she may have written to him and shoved the wrong letter into the hamper."

"But it's not her writing."

"Somebody may have written it for her—Uncle Frank, perhaps."

"H'm! I suppose it's possible."

"Anyway, the hamper is for us," said Lowther. "For you, which means us. We're not going to part with it."

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"Certainly not!"

"Better look in the letter."

"I suppose it must be the wrong letter, that's all," said Tom Merry slowly. "Anyway, I can't tell till I look into it, so I had better do so."

"Yes, rather, and the sooner the quicker!"

Tom Merry slit open the letter.

He gazed in amazement at the heading of the letter inside the envelope. It was: "Spotted Coyote Ranch, Wyoming."

"My only hat!"

"What is it?"

"Look at that!"

"Spotted Coyote Ranch, Wyoming! Then the blessed thing comes from America."

"Apparently."

"I suppose you've got an uncle in America, and forgotten all about him," said Monty Lowther. "These things do slip one's memory at times."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I've got an uncle in India."

"You may have other uncles."

"No, I haven't," said Tom Merry, smiling. "I've only got one, and he's in India with his regiment."

"He may have gone to America without asking your permission."

"He's in India, I tell you."

"Then this is some other uncle you've forgotten," said Lowther obstinately. "The hamper is for us, and so it stands to reason that you must have an uncle in Wyoming."

"I haven't."

"Look at the letter," said Manners. "How does it begin?"

"My dear nephew Jack—"

"Jack!"

"That's what it says."

"Curious he should call you Jack when your name's Tom," said Monty Lowther. "But some uncles are queer old fellows, you know. Perhaps it was a pet name you had in your early days, you know."

"It wasn't."

"I knew a chap whose name was Herbert, and his people called him Johnny," said Monty Lowther. "So I don't see why your uncle shouldn't call you Jack, though your name is Tom."

"But I tell you—"

"Besides, isn't your name Thomas John Merry?"

"No, it is not."

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure, you ass!"

"Well, then, I don't quite know how he comes to call you Jack," said Lowther. "There's a lot of mystery about this hamper, anyway; but one thing seems to me pretty certain, and that is, that it's for us."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm afraid it isn't," said Lowther. "You have to take that as the fundamental fact that the argument starts from, you know. You always have to take something for granted in an argument. What does the letter say next?"

"It's not for me, so I can't read it."

"My dear kid, it is for you."

"It's to somebody named Jack."

"I don't see why your uncle shouldn't call you Jack if he chooses," said Lowther—"especially when he's sending you a whopping hamper like this. Anyway, see what he says in the first line. That may throw some light on the matter."

"Do you think—"

"Yes, I do. Go on."

"My dear nephew Jack,—As I promised you in my letter—"

"There you are," said Lowther. "Now you've only got to remember the letter he's referring to, and the whole thing's explained."

"But I can't remember any letter."

"Oh, try! A letter from an uncle—"

"I tell you I haven't any uncles, except General Merry in India."

"Oh, if you're going to be obstinate about it, I've nothing more to say. It seems to me that you're trying to raise difficulties."

"My dear ass—"

"As the hamper is evidently intended for this study, any little discrepancies can easily be explained if you put your mind to it."

"The hamper can't be for me."

"I should say not," said a voice at the door, as Jack Blake walked in. "That hamper is for me, you bounders."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If you've started on the grub, there will be ructions," said Digby.

Tom Merry turned round.
"There's some mistake here," he said. "The hamper was addressed to me, but this letter is for somebody whose front name is Jack."

"Well, my front name is Jack, isn't it?" said Blake, taking the letter. "This is my uncle's fist."

"Then how did the hamper come addressed to me?"

"I've just discovered that Figgins changed the labels."

"The rotter! But there is a parcel for me, then?"

Blake grinned.

"Oh, yes, that's the one addressed to me in my study, and you can have it as soon as you like! I opened it by mistake. It's from Miss Fawcett, and it contained three bottles of medicine and a box of pills."

of removing the hamper. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and regarded them with great interest.

"You lazy bounder! Lend a hand here!" grunted Blake.

"I'm afraid it would be too much exertion for me, dear boy!"

"Then you shan't taste a blessed morsel that's inside it, ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass!"

"Bring it along, kids," said Blake. "We'll get it to Study No. 6, and plump it down on top of Gussy's hat-box."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on!"

"If you were to destroy my hats in such a widdyulous



"Buck up, Grammar School!" "Rescue, St. Jim's!" The Grammarians piled upon the School House juniors. The odds against the Saints were too heavy. Dusty and dishevelled, with many signs of the fray about them, they were overcome.

There was a general groan from the Terrible Three.

"You'd better call for it," said Blake.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'll make you a present of it, Blake."

"Thank you for nothing! You're not going to leave the stuff in my study. You can just come and fetch it."

"Shan't!"

"Then we'll shove it out of the window."

"You can if you like, kid. I'm not particular."

"There's a letter with it."

"I'll call in for the letter."

"Lend a hand, my sons!" said Blake. "This hamper is heavy."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

Blake, Herries, and Digby bent themselves to the task

and wotten mannah, Blake, I should certainly refuse to regard you as a friend any longer."

"It's what I'm going to do, ass, if you don't help carry it," said Blake.

"Vewy well. Under the cires, I suppose I had better help you cawwy the beastly hamper, dear boys. But I regard you as vewy inconsiderate."

The chums of Study No. 6 exerted themselves, and dragged the heavy hamper through the doorway, and it went bumping along the passage.

The Terrible Three exchanged an expressive glance.

"Of all the rotten sells!" said Monty Lowther.

"And they haven't even asked us to the feed," said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, it is rather a sell. If you like, either of you chaps can have the cod-liver oil in Blake's study."

Lowther made a grimace.

"Oh, let's get along to the tuckshop and have a feed! It's too bad. Look here, Tom Merry, I should seriously advise you to swop your governess for Blake's uncle at the very first opportunity."

CHAPTER 3.

The Mysterious Hamper!

"THERE!" panted Blake.

The hamper was safely landed in Study No. 6 at last. The juniors stood round it with expectant looks. Blake unfolded the letter Tom Merry had handed in. He gave a whistle as he read the first few lines.

"What's in it?" asked Digby.

"Something rather unexpected," said Blake. "I'm afraid it can't be grub in the hamper, after all."

"Not grub?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Listen to what my uncle says!"

"Oh, read it out!"

And Blake proceeded to read out the letter.

"My dear nephew Jack,—As I promised you in my letter, I am sending you a present, which I think you will like. Before opening the contents of the hamper, however, I wish you to give the enclosed note to Dr. Holmes, and he will, if he chooses and thinks fit, give you permission to make use of what I have sent you. I hope he will do so. Your affectionate uncle.

"JAMES BLAKE."

Blake stared at the letter, and then at his chums.

"Well, what do you think of that?"

"Blessed if I know what to think!" said Digby. "It can't be anything to eat, or he wouldn't speak of it in that way."

"Then what can it be?"

"Goodness only knows!"

The chums looked into the hamper. The contents, whatever they were, were wrapped in canvas and closely packed. Blake felt them with his hand, and found that they yielded to his touch; but in places there was something that felt hard, like wood.

The chums were utterly astonished and puzzled. What Blake's American uncle could be sending him, which he would require the Head's permission to use, he could not possibly guess.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I wegard this as wathah a wefflection upon our judgment, deah boys! Your uncle weally seems to think that we wequiah advice from the Head on vewy twivial mattahs, Blake!"

"Must do as he says," said Blake. "I suppose I had better take this note to the Head? Rather rotten if he doesn't permit us to see what's in the hamper!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked into the study.

"I'll have my letter, Blake, please," said Tom Merry.

"It's on the table," said Blake.

Tom Merry took the letter from Miss Priscilla Fawcett from the table.

It was dripping with cod-liver oil.

"Well, this is a nice state to get a fellow's letter into!" he exclaimed.

"All your fault!" said Blake. "Look at the muck that stuff has made on our tablecloth! You ought to have brought your governess up better."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What are you chaps looking so glum about?" asked Tom, glancing at the serious faces of the Fourth-Formers. "Isn't there any grub in the hamper, after all?"

"I'm afraid not."

"What is it, then?"

"We can't tell till we've opened it, fathead!"

"Well, open it, then, ass!"

"Can't be did!"

"Why not?" asked Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Read that letter and you'll see."

Tom Merry read the letter from Uncle James. He gave an expressive whistle.

"Rather rotten!" he said.

"Yaas, it is wathah wotten," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "It seems to me to be wathah a wefflection upon—"

"Well, I'm going to the Head," said Blake. "Look after that hamper while I'm gone."

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"Certainly, deah boy!"

And Jack Blake, in a very puzzled frame of mind, made his way towards the study of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's.

A youth with a very large head and very thin legs met him in the passage.

"Blake—"

"Don't bother me now, Skimpole," said Blake. "I'm in a hurry."

Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, laid a bony hand on his shoulder and detained him.

"It's rather important, Blake—"

"Is it?" said Blake. "Buck up, then! No Determinism, mind you, or you'll get a thick ear before you know where you are!"

"I was really not going to talk Determinism on the present occasion, Blake. I am, it is true, carrying on propaganda work, but I hope to effect more by the publication of my forthcoming book than by—"

"Hurry up!"

"I was about to refer to the fact that you are expecting a hamper—at least, the fellows have told me so—"

"It's come."

"Oh, good! I had a suggestion to make."

"If you want to come to the feed—"

"I should have no objection to doing so, but that is not what I was going to suggest. My idea was that if you had a hamper containing a large quantity of provisions, it would be a grand opportunity for self-sacrifice."

"What?"

"And I was going to suggest that instead of standing a series of study feeds with the hamper, you should give a feed to all the needy persons you can find in the neighbourhood."

"Eh?"

"You would then have the satisfaction of—"

"Skimpole, old chap, you had better take a little run. You're in danger of having your napper banged on the wall," said Blake.

"But, really, Blake—"

"Oh, travel along! If you want to stand a feed to needy persons, I recommend you to sell your watch and bicycle, and you'd raise enough tin—"

"I require a watch and a bicycle, Blake. I am not the kind of fellow to carry opinions to the verge of absurdity. Your hamper—"

"I require my hamper, Skimmy, and I'm not the kind of fellow to be talked to death by an howling ass, so travel along!"

"But—"

But Blake pushed the freak of St. Jim's aside and walked on.

Skimpole shook his head solemnly as he gazed after him.

"It is uphill work, trying to eradicate the selfishness from the human breast," he murmured. "But as a sincere Determinist I am bound to continue my work. I think I may as well go for a spin on my bicycle now."

Blake tapped at the door of the Head's study. Dr. Holmes was there, and his deep voice bade the junior enter.

"What can I do for you, Blake?" asked the Head, looking at the junior over his gold-rimmed pince-nez with a kindly glance.

He liked Blake, as nearly everybody at St. Jim's did.

"If you please, sir," said Blake diffidently, "I've had a letter from my uncle in America, and he's sent me a present and he's enclosed this letter for you, sir."

"For me?" said the Head, somewhat surprised.

"Yes, sir."

Blake laid the letter on the Head's desk.

"He said I was not to unpack the hamper until you've read this letter and given me your permission, sir," said Blake.

The Head looked more surprised.

"Then I will read it at once," he said.

"Thank you, sir!"

Dr. Holmes took up the letter and opened it. His expression grew more surprised as he read it. Then he smiled. The smile gave place to a thoughtful frown.

Blake watched him anxiously.

"Can I open the hamper now, sir?" he asked, at length.

"Ahem!" said the Head slowly. "This is rather a peculiar matter, Blake."

"Yes, sir."

"I think you had better leave opening the hamper till I have consulted with your Housemaster."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"I will speak to Mr. Raiton as soon as possible. You may go now, Blake."

And Blake left the Head's study in an extremely puzzled frame of mind. He returned to Study No. 6, where he found his chums awaiting him. The Terrible Three were gone.

"Well?" said Herries and Digby, as Blake entered the room.

"Well, deah boy?" said D'Arcy.

Blake shook his head disconsolately.

"The Head's read the letter," he said. "He wants to consult with Mr. Railton before he gives us permission to unpack the hamper."

The chums of the Fourth Form looked astounded.

"My only hat!" said Herries. "What can the giddy thing possibly contain?"

"Blessed if I can guess!" said Blake. "I only hope that we shall get permission to unpack it in the long run, that's all!"

"It's vewy decent of the Head to leave it to us like this," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as vewy pwopah of him to twust to our honah."

"Yes, he's an old sport," agreed Blake. "We can't look into the hamper. I'm jolly curious. Let's go down to the school shop and have our tea there. The sight of that hamper will worry me if I can't look into it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 left the room, leaving the hamper where it lay, with the lid raised and the mysterious contents still closely packed inside.

CHAPTER 4.

The Terrible Three in Trouble!

PING—ping—ping!

It was the buzz of a bicycle bell, and three youths, who were strolling along Rylcombe Lane, in the middle of the road, looked lazily up. The three were Monk, Lane and Carboy, the heroes of the Grammar School.

"Hallo," said Monk, looking at the cyclist who was bearing down upon them, "that chap's wearing a St. Jim's band on his hat."

"He's a Saint," said Lane.

"And there's only one of him," grinned Carboy.

"And there's three of us, and more within call," laughed Monk. "It's some time since we paid our compliments to St. Jim's."

"Now is the chance, then."

"I was just thinking so."

Ping—ping—ping! Buz-zuz-zuz-zuz!

The cyclist came nearer. He was riding at a pretty good pace, and was evidently returning to St. Jim's after a spin along the country lanes. Frank Monk gazed at him as he came closer, and grinned. There was no mistaking the big head and extremely slender limbs of the brainy man of the Shell at St. Jim's.

"It's that chap Skimpole," said Monk. "You've heard of him. He goes in for 'isms' by the yard."

"I've heard of the ass—rather!" said Lane. "Don't you remember he started spouting to us once when we were at St. Jim's?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Have him off his bike!" grinned Carboy. "Here, Skimpole, get off that bike!"

The three Grammarians stood in the middle of the road, and evidently did not intend to get out of the way. Skimpole either had to stop, or to run into them. Skimpole was a peaceable fellow, and he wasn't looking for trouble just then. Besides, he might have knocked the Grammarians over, and he would certainly have gone over himself as well; so he put the brakes on, and stopped.

"Really, I wish you would get out of the way!" he exclaimed as he jumped off the bicycle. "It is very inconsiderate of you to stop me!"

"A sincere Determinist ought to be willing to put up with anything for the sake of his fellow-creatures," said Frank Monk. "I am surprised at you, Skimpole."

"Oh, if you would like me to explain to you any points in connection with Determinism, that's a different matter," said Skimpole. "I shall be most happy to do so. I wish I had my notebook with me, and I would read you some extracts from the two-hundred-and-twenty-seventh chapter of my forthcoming book—"

"I've been thinking about the subject awfully seriously," said Monk, with a wink to Lane and Carboy. "According to your principles, I believe, everybody is equally entitled to everything!"

"Well, that is putting it rather crudely," said the unsuspicious Skimpole. "But certainly every human being is entitled to the utmost that any other human being can do for him."

"So if I wanted a bicycle, I suppose it would be all right to ask you for yours?" suggested Monk.

"Well, not exactly. You don't understand."

"No, I suppose I don't. Will you give you me your bicycle?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I can only consider you as a humbug!"

"Not at all. I could read you an extract from the hundred-and-fifty-seventh chapter of my book, which would prove to you that—"

"Never mind; we can dispense with all that. You are a humbug! And, as a sincere anti-humbugist, I feel that it is my duty to punish you—"

"As a what?"

"A sincere anti-humbugist!" said Monk severely. "Take hold of him, kids!"

"Now, look here—"

"Tie him to his bicycle, and—"

"Look out!" exclaimed Carboy. "There's Tom Merry, and three other rotters are with him. 'Ware Saints!"

The Terrible Three and Reilly were strolling up the road from the direction of St. Jim's. They sighted the Grammarians at the same moment that Carboy spotted them.

Skimpole waved his hand.

"Rescue!" he shouted.

"Shut up, ass!"

"Rescue, St. Jim's! Help!"

Such a call was never heard in vain by the Terrible Three. They broke into a run immediately, and dashed towards the Grammarian trio.

"Buck up, Grammar School!" shouted Frank Monk.

And at the cry, two or three fellows in Grammar School caps came out of the trees beside the lane, and reached the spot just as the St. Jim's juniors came up. The odds were against them, but they could not leave a Saint in the hands of the enemy.

"Sock it to them!" said Tom Merry.

"What-ho!" said Manners and Lowther.

And the four rushed to the attack. So powerful was the charge of the juniors that Monk, Lane, and Carboy were rolled over in the lane by it. But as they went down they clung to their assailants, and dragged them down also.

"Buck up, Grammar School!"

The other Grammarians piled upon the School House juniors. Skimpole was dragged down, and a Grammarian sat upon his chest. Tom Merry, fighting desperately, was overcome by Lane and Carboy, and made a prisoner.

The odds against the Saints were too heavy. Dusty and dishevelled, with many signs of the fray about them, they were overcome, and the victorious Grammarians sat upon them hard to secure them.

"A regular bag, and no mistake!" chuckled Frank Monk.

"This reminds me of the time when we captured these rotters and sent them home with their heads through a kite."

"That was a good wheeze!" grinned Carboy.

"We made you sit up for it, though!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther. "We did you brown, and we'll do you brown again, you Grammar School rotters!"

"Yah!"

Frank Monk laughed.

"They had better walk that jigger back to their rotten old school!" he remarked. "We'll tie their hands to the handlebars, and they can walk it between them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We haven't any cord, though," Frank Monk remarked, feeling in his pockets. "Still, I suppose their neckties will answer the purpose."

"Let my necktie alone, you beast!"

"Can't; I want it. Their braces will do, if the neckties aren't sufficient! Fasten Merry and Lowther to the handlebars, one on each side, and Manners and Reilly to the saddle, and sit Skimmy on the bike."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

One at a time the struggling Saints were fastened to the bicycle. It was soon done. The odds were too great for effective resistance. Tom Merry and Lowther were tied first, their wrists secured to the handlebars with their own ties. Then Reilly and Manners were fastened on either side of the saddle. Finally Skimpole was sat on the bar with his legs on the handlebars.

The Saints stood round the bicycle, red and savage. The Grammarians howled with laughter as they looked at them.

"There, I think that's all right!" said Frank Monk.

"Off you go, you beauties!"

"Shan't!"

"Then stay there!" said Frank Monk. "Good-bye!"

"Untie us, you rotters!"

"Rats! Au revoir!"

And the Grammarians, yelling with laughter, disappeared up the road.

The St. Jim's juniors looked at one another.

"Nice, isn't it?" said Lowther.

"Oh, very nice," said Manners—"very nice indeed! Tom Merry is a nice sort of leader to lead us into this, I don't think!"

"It's all Skimpole's fault," said Tom Merry.

"Sure it is!" said Reilly.

"Yes, you're right there. It all comes of allowing that dangerous lunatic out alone!"

"Really, Lowther—"

"Oh, don't talk to me, ass! Nice set of fools we shall look, getting back to St. Jim's in this state! We haven't got over that kite affair yet. The fellows will chip us to death."

"Oh, blow the fellows!" said Tom Merry. "Come along!"

"Can't face the school in this state."

"We can't stay here all night."

"Well, think of some way out of it," growled Lowther.

"You call yourself a leader, Tom Merry, don't you?"

"I call you an ass, if that's got anything to do with it."

"Blessed if I don't take Blake for leader in future!" said Manners. "He claims to be leader of the School House juniors, and he couldn't make a bigger muck than this, I think."

"Oh, shut up, and come along!"

There was evidently nothing else to be done. Four juniors moved along the road, dragging the wobbling bicycle and Skimpole between them. They were not far from the gates of St. Jim's. It was getting near to calling-over, and many fellows were returning to the school, so the Terrible Three and Skimpole soon had an audience.

A crowd of juniors belonging to both Houses gathered round them and marched in with them, and not a hand was raised to release them. The joke perhaps seemed to them to be too good a one to spoil.

The School House juniors wobbled on across the quadrangle with crimson faces. Figgins & Co. met them en route, and roared with laughter. Blake & Co. were standing on the School House steps, and they simply shrieked.

"Bai Jove, I wogard this as wathah funnay!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Are you havin' a wippin' time, Tom Mewwy?"

"Cut us loose, ass!"

"I refuse to be chawactewised as an ass!"

"Can't you lend us a hand?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Blake. "We're always willing to help you young fellows out of trouble, you know."

"Rats!"

Blake opened his pocket-knife.

"I suppose I needn't ask you if it was the Grammarians who tied you up like this?" he remarked. "I suppose we can take it for granted that whenever you come in tied up to a kite or a bicycle, you have been upholding the honour of St. Jim's in the way you are distinguished for."

"Oh, cut the cackle, and get us loose before Railton comes out!"

"Certainly. What I say is—"

"Can't you untie that?" growled Monty Lowther. "That necktie cost me one-and-sixpence, and I don't see why you should slice it up with a beastly knife."

"You'd better keep still or I shall be slicing you yet."

"Ow!"

"There, I told you so! Never mind, it's only a slight cut, and you look so red that very likely a little blood-letting will save you from apoplexy."

"You villain! Ow!"

"There you are again! Now for you, Manners!"

Manners was careful to keep still, and then Reilly was untied. Skimpole was last to be released.

"You needn't trouble about setting him loose," growled Lowther, rubbing his wrists. "He ought to be kept tied up, or chained, or something."

"It's all his fault we got into this mess," grunted Manners.

"Oh, really," said Skimpole, in a tone of remonstrance, "it was really your own fault, you know. You did not put up a very good fight—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

He cut Skimpole loose, and the bicycle reeled away. The freak of the Shell rubbed his wrists ruefully. The fellows who had tied those knots had done their work well.

"You'd better go in and get a wash," remarked Blake, surveying the dusty, red, and dishevelled chums of the Shell with a critical eye. "You'll be all the better for it. We'll go and give the Grammarians socks!"

"Good!" said Digby. "You remember that after that kite affair it was we who put the Grammar cads in their place. We can do the same again."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" said Herries. "We can't have them saying that they've licked anybody belonging to this school without

getting a set of thick ears for it. It's hard cheese that those fellows should give us so much work to do, but—"

"But as leaders of the House juniors, it's our duty," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Tom Merry crossly, as he entered the House.

And Monty Lowther, Manners, and Reilly followed him, with grim faces.

Jack Blake laughed.

"Come on, kids!" he said. "The Grammar rotters can't be far away, and we may find them and avenge the honour of St. Jim's!"

"Yaas, certainly, deah boy. We're goin' to avenge the beastlay honah of St. Jim's, or know the weason why, you know. Wait a minute till I get a silk hat."

"Ass, are you going out looking for a fight in a silk hat?"

"No; I should look for it in the lane. But I want to wear a silk hat, you know. We may be goin' to have a wuff encountah, but that's no weason why we shouldn't keep up a respectable appeawance, you know."

"Come as you are!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on, ass!"

Blake linked his arm in D'Arcy's, and the swell of the School House had to go, willy-nilly. The four chums walked out of the gates. Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Reilly went upstairs to get cleaned after that rough and dusty encounter. They were followed by the chuckles of the School House juniors.

CHAPTER 5.

The Raid of Figgins & Co.

"COME on!" said Figgins.

The Co. looked at him.

"Hallo!" said Kerr. "What's on now?"

"I'm afraid I can't come now," said Fatty Wynn. "I've promised Pratt to go with him to the tuckshop, and I couldn't possibly break a promise."

"I dare say Pratt will be just as pleased if you don't go!" growled Figgins.

"That's not the question. He's going to stand a feed."

"Come on!"

"And I'm hungry. I get awfully hungry in this June weather, you know. And I had a very light tea—only a few eggs and a couple of sausages with my bacon, and half a dozen jam tarts. And—"

"Come on!"

"But, really, Figgy—"

"Come on, I tell you! I'll explain as we go!"

"Is it a raid?" asked Kerr, as he followed his leader out of the New House, and Fatty Wynn reluctantly brought up the rear.

"Yes. And there's grub in it, I fancy."

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears.

"What's that, Figgy?" he asked quickly.

"You know Blake had a big hamper to-day."

"Well, yes, rather, as we changed the labels on it and sent it to Tom Merry instead," said Kerr, with a grin.

"Well, Blake will have got it before this. You know what that hamper's most likely to contain?"

"A spread," said Fatty Wynn, with glistening eyes; "and a jolly big one, I should judge, from the size of the hamper."

"Exactly!"

"But we can't get hold of it," said Kerr. "The hamper's too big for us to move, isn't it?"

"I don't know. There are three of us."

"But we couldn't get a thing that size out of the School House without being seen, and Blake will be in his study."

"Blake has gone out."

"Why, it's close on locking-up."

"I know it is, but Blake has just gone out. And Dig and Herries and Gussy have gone with him. That's why I thought of the raid."

"Good!"

"If we can't move the hamper we can raid the contents of it," said Figgins, with a grin. "It will make up for the times when the School House rotters have raided us. You remember the time they raided the fig pudding?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes! And a nice time they had of it after eating the thing," said Fatty Wynn. "And a nice time we had, too, for that matter."

"It was a jolly good pudding!"

"Yes; if you had left the cooking to me. You can't cook for toffee, Figgy. There are some things you can do, but cooking isn't one of them. You can play footer, and you can bowl, but you can't make puddings."

"I tell you that fig pudding—"

"And I tell you——"

"Oh, blow the fig pudding!" said Kerr. "Never mind that now! The question is about raiding Blake's study, and the sooner we do it the better, if we're going to do it at all. They can't stay out long."

"That's true, Kerr."

"Come on, then," said Figgins. "Still, I admit it gets my back up when Fatty says I can't cook a pudding. That fig pudding has never really been forgotten——"

"Because it made us all ill."

"Only because we shoved syrup of figs in it."

"You shoved in it, you mean!"

"Why, it was really your doing, you know."

"Why, I was against it all along. You must remember that, Figgv."

Figgins glanced at the hamper, and gave a whistle as he saw the padlock. He put his fingers under the lid and gave it a wrench. But the hamper was of the strongest possible construction, and Figgins' wrench had no effect upon it.

"Rotten!" said Kerr. "There's no opening the giddy thing without tools, at any rate. I suppose the kids here have had a feed on what's inside, and then padlocked it to prevent the stuff being raided."

It was a natural supposition, and Figgins nodded assent. Fatty Wynn was eyeing the hamper hungrily. The padlock seemed to him simply cruel. Like the Peri at the gates of Paradise, Fatty Wynn gazed upon the lock on the hamper.

"Rather a beastly trick of Blake's," said Figgins. "It shows a rotten suspicious nature to go about padlocking



"Come on!" exclaimed Figgins, and at a gasping run the juniors went along, dragging the hamper over the linoleum at a speed really remarkable considering the weight of it. Right up to the box-room door they dashed and bundled the hamper inside.

"I don't remember anything of the sort. I remember——"

"You'd better remember that it's close on locking-up time, and Blake won't be long," said Kerr.

"You're right. Come along."

The June dusk was thickening in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. The New House juniors dodged into the School House. They hurried upstairs to the Fourth Form corridor, meeting no one on the way.

"Come on," said Figgins, dragging his two chums into Study No. 6, and closing the door. "Where's that hamper?"

He turned up the gas, which Blake had left turned low after being last in the study. The hamper was easy enough to discover then. It stood near the table, and took up nearly as much room. The lid was closed now, however. Blake had not yet received the Head's permission to unpack it, but he was aware that the hamper might very probably be raided by hungry juniors on the scent of a feed. He had consequently worked in a chain to fasten it, and had secured the chain with a padlock, so that it was impossible to open the hamper now. The key was in Blake's pocket, so the contents of the hamper were safe enough, unless it was carried off bodily.

his things, as if he thought somebody wanted to pinch his grub!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, Kerr?"

"Nothing. We can't get that hamper open, and Blake may be back any minute. Hush! There's somebody coming along the passage now."

Figgins turned the gas down instantly.

The New House raiders listened intently.

CHAPTER 8.

Hiding the Plunder!

F IGGINS did not move until the footsteps died away. Then he latched the door and turned up the gas.

"That ass is gone, whoever he was," he remarked, with a grin. "We've got rid of him very well. But the difficulty is that Blake may be back any minute, and we can't possibly get that padlock off without tools."

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It would be rough to have to give up the idea of a raid after we've got so far."

"We can't give it up," said Fatty Wynn emphatically. "I've missed going to the tuckshop with Pratt to come here with you, Figgins. Something's got to be done, or we shan't get a feed at all. I'm hungry now."

"The beastly thing's too heavy to carry away," said Kerr, looking doubtfully at the great hamper. "We might lower it from the window if we had time, and get half a dozen fellows underneath to carry it away."

Figgins' eyes glistened.

"There's no time to do that here," he exclaimed, "but if we could get the hamper out of the room into some other part of the House—"

"By Jove, yes! Suppose we got it along to the box-room at the end of the passage," exclaimed Kerr excitedly.

"Blake wouldn't know what had become of it, and he wouldn't know where to look for it."

"My hat! That's the idea!" said Fatty Wynn. "Buck up, and let's get the hamper out of the study before those bounders come in!"

"Come on, then!"

There was no time to waste. Figgins & Co. seized the hamper and dragged it to the door. It was heavy, but they were strong, and they were in deadly earnest. The hamper was dragged along, and out of the door into the passage.

The passage was quite clear. There was a chance for the New House raiders to get the hamper to the box-room undetected if they lost no time.

"Come on!" exclaimed Figgins.

And at a gasping run the juniors went along, dragging the hamper over the linoleum at a speed really remarkable, considering the weight of it. Right up to the box-room door they dashed, and Figgins kicked it open, and they bundled the hamper inside. There was the sound of an opening door farther up the passage.

"Quick!" gasped Figgins.

He seized the door and slung it shut. A footstep sounded in the corridor, and then the voice of Tom Merry was heard.

"What's all that row about?"

The New House trio scarcely breathed. The Terrible Three had finished cleaning up after their adventure with the Grammarians, and were coming down when the noise of the hamper being dragged along the passage caught their ears.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came round the corner about three seconds after Figgins had closed the box-room door. They looked up and down the passage.

"What was all that row?" said Manners, looking puzzled. "There was a fearful din in the corridor just now."

"Blessed if I know!" said Lowther. "There's nobody here now."

"It sounded like something being dragged along," Tom Merry remarked. "Hallo, Gore! What was that row about?"

Gore of the Shell had just come upstairs. He grinned as he looked at the Terrible Three.

"I haven't heard any row," he replied. "I've heard something else, though."

"Have you? What do you mean?"

"I heard about four asses coming home to St. Jim's tied up round a bicycle," chuckled Gore. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry turned red. The Terrible Three had expected to get a torrent of chipping over the adventure with the Grammarians, and they were certain not to be disappointed.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Monty Lowther. "Stop that cackling, Gore! I don't see what you want to go off like a blessed alarm clock for!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore went down the passage laughing. The Terrible Three, looking pink and uncomfortable, went downstairs. Figgins turned to his comrades with a grin in the darkness of the box-room.

"That was a narrow shave," he murmured; "but a miss is as good as a mile. It would have been all up if Tom Merry had spotted us then."

"Shut the door!" said Kerr. "I'll light the gas."

"Don't turn it too high. It would be seen under the door."

"Right-ho!"

A glimmer of gas was sufficient to light the box-room. The New House trio looked about them. The room was pretty well filled with empty boxes and other lumber.

Figgins crossed to the window and looked out into the dusky quad.

"Taggles is locking up," he remarked. "Blake doesn't seem to be in yet. He's in for it, I expect."

"Never mind Blake now. How are we to get the hamper away?"

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"We shall want a jolly strong rope and half a dozen fellows up here to help us sling it out of the window," said Figgins. "Then it will be no joke to get it into the New House. It will be a big job, and one thing's pretty certain—we can't do it while the School House is awake."

Kerr gave a whistle.

"I suppose you're right, Figgy; but—"

"Anybody coming out into the quad could see it slinging from the window," said Figgins decidedly. "It's no good thinking of it now. If it's to be done at all, it will have to be done after lights out."

"Well, it will be fun, anyway."

"Very funny if we get spotted being out of the House after lights out," Fatty Wynn remarked. "It would mean a fearful row!"

"If you're getting funky, Fatty Wynn—"

"Oh, rats, Figgy! You know I'm game. It's a good idea, too. The School House rotters burgled our House on Kerr's birthday, and it will be tit for tat."

"That's the idea."

"But Blake will search for the hamper when he misses it from his room," said Kerr. "They might look in here."

"H'm!" said Figgins thoughtfully. "I don't think that's likely; but it's quite possible, and if they look in here and find the hamper we shall be done in. We shan't know, and should have all the trouble of burgling the School House for nothing. That would be rotten."

"I should say so."

"We shall have to conceal it somehow, that's all. I dare say we can shove it out of sight under some of these empty boxes. Here's a dozen or more piled on top of one another at this end of the room. Help me to get them down, and we'll shove in the hamper and pile them on it."

"Good!"

The New House Co. set to work at once. The empty boxes were not difficult to handle, and they soon had the space cleared. The hamper was dragged close to the wall, and the empty boxes stacked round and over it. The hamper from Wyoming was completely concealed from view.

Figgins chuckled.

"That's all right," he observed. "Now we've only got to get out of the House, without being seen, if possible. If we're not spotted, Blake won't even suspect that it's a New House raid."

"Skimpole has seen us—"

"Oh, he's too busy thinking about Determinism to attach any importance to a trifle like that! He's forgotten all about it."

"Very likely. Let's get out."

Figgins unfastened the catch of the box-room window. "We shall have to get in by the window," he remarked. "It will be easy enough to get up by the ivy, and easy enough to get in at the window now it's unfastened. If they look in here they'll never think of looking at the window."

The three juniors quitted the box-room. The passage was empty, but as they went down the broad staircase of the School House they could hardly fail to be seen. Figgins' hope of escaping undetected was soon dissolved. Mellish of the Fourth met them on the stairs and stared at them.

"Hallo, you New House rotters—"

It was a time for action, not for words. Figgins gave the astonished Mellish a push that made him sit down on the stairs in a hurry.

"Come on!" he cried.

The Co. dashed down three steps at a time. Mellish sat on the stairs and yelled.

"New House rotters! Look out!"

"Sure and it's Figgins!" exclaimed Reilly of the Fourth, backing into the way of the fleeing Co. with an Irishman's disregard for the odds. "Stop them!"

Three pairs of hands seized Reilly, and he went reeling against a study door, as Figgins & Co. dashed on out into the quadrangle. The alarm had spread, and juniors came running out of the Common-room.

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry.

"Figgins & Co.—"

"Where?"

"They've gone!"

"You're too late," said Mellish. "Just what's to be expected of you, too! You're no good for anything but to be tied up to kites and bicycles by the Grammar School cads."

"Sure and you're right!" exclaimed Reilly. "It's time Tom Merry resigned—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry; and he walked away.

Figgins & Co., expecting pursuit, ran across the quadrangle. But as they saw that the School House juniors only stared out into the dusk from the steps of the School House, they stopped.

(Continued at foot of next page.)



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"We're well out of that!" grinned Figgins. "Hallo! What's the row at the gate?"

There was a sound of knocking at the gates of St. Jim's, closed now for the night. A voice could be heard in the distance, apparently remonstrating with Taggles.

"It's those bounders come back!"

"Hallo! What are you doing out of your House at this hour?" exclaimed Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, coming by. "Go in at once!"

"We—"

"Go in at once, I tell you!"

There was no help for it. Figgins & Co. went into the New House under the eye of the prefect.

CHAPTER 7. Avenged!

IT is time we followed the chums of Study No. 6. Fully determined to avenge the insult to the dignity of St. Jim's, and incidentally prove that they were far more worthy than the Terrible Three to carry on the glorious traditions of the School House, the four chums sallied out of the gates in search of Frank Monk & Co. They guessed that the Grammarians were not far away, and they were right.

Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy were strolling easily in the direction of the Grammar School in the gathering dusk of the June evening. They had time to get in before the gates of the Grammar School were closed, and they strolled along at an easy pace, chuckling over the adventure with Skimpole and the Terrible Three.

They were in no hurry, and it did not occur to them that Nemesis was on their track. The other Grammarians had gone on ahead, and Monk and his friends were alone when the pursuers spotted them.

Blake had, of course, guessed in what direction to look for the Grammar School juniors. At that hour they could only be going home. D'Arcy, who had at late distinguished himself as an amateur detective, wanted to look for footprints in the dust of the lane: but Blake had no time to humour D'Arcy.

"What are you poking about there for, Gussy?" he demanded, as he saw the swell of the School House examining

the dusty road, his monocle screwed into his eye. "Have you lost anything?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, without looking up.

"What is it?"

"The twaces."

"The what?"

"The twaces of the Gwammah School cads. I am pickin' up their twack, you know, and I have just lost their twaces."

"You shrieking ass!"

"I uttably wefuse to be chawactewised as a shwiekin' ass! I am lookin' for their twaces in the dust. Sherlock Holmes always looks for the twack of the cwiminal."

"I suppose there are about a hundred tracks in that dust, fathead—"

"I wefuse to be addressed as a fathead!"

"And Sherlock Holmes couldn't have told one from another. Besides, it's getting dark."

"As soon as I have once found the twack, we can wun like anythin'."

"Rats! There's no need to look for tracks. We know the Grammar School cads must have gone towards the Grammar School, ass, and there's only one road they could have taken; so come on!"

"That is not the way Sherlock Holmes would weason it out."

"Come on!"

"I am sowwy to disagree with you, Blake, but I cannot come on until I have discovered the twacks of the Gwammah School cads!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "How do we know that they have not left the woad and gone through the wood, for instance?"

"Because they would be late for calling-over at the Grammar School if they went the long way round, duffer."

"I wefuse to be called a duffer! If you apply that extremely appwobvious expwession to me again, Blake, I shall be compelled to intewwupt the pwceedings by adm'nisterin' to you a weally feafhul thwashin'!"

"Oh, come on!" said Digby. "Let Gussy look for the tracks if he likes, and we'll go on! Leave him there!"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Herries.

"Good!" said Blake. "Put your beef into it, too! We
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don't want to get back to St. Jim's after locking-up, if we can help it."

"I say, deah boys—"

But the dear boys were springing on through the June dusk. D'Arcy gazed after them for a moment, and then gazed at the indistinguishable tracks in the dust of the lane. Finally, he decided to follow his comrades, and he, too, broke into a run, and the tracks were never looked for after that. The chums of Study No. 6 kept on a rapid run, D'Arcy holding his eyeglass in with one hand and his hat on with the other.

It was Digby who first sighted the enemy. He caught Blake's arm and stopped him, pointing ahead at three dim figures that loomed up in the dusk of the trees beside the lane.

"There they are!"

Blake halted, breathing heavily.

"Good! Get on the grass here, kids, and they won't see us, and we'll pounce on them suddenly."

"Good wheeze!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was a belt of grass under the trees beside the lane. The chums ran along the grass and made no sound. The Grammarians did not look round; nothing was farther from their minds than pursuit. The St. Jim's juniors were level with them before they had a suspicion of danger.

Then a gasping breath from D'Arcy caught Frank Monk's quick ear, and he turned round and shouted to his companions.

"Look out!"

But the warning came too late. The four juniors from St. Jim's hurled themselves upon the Grammarians, and had them down in the road before they could make a movement to defend themselves.

"Got you, you rotters!" roared Blake, as he pinned Monk down with a knee on his chest. "I think this is our turn—eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Monk. "Where did you spring from?"

"We have twacked you down, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, as he sat upon Carboy's chest. "You may regard yourselves as pwisonahs of war!"

"Yes; we've got 'em!" said Blake, with great satisfaction. "Now, I fancy the proper caper is to roll them into the ditch."

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Frank Monk, in alarm. "There's four feet of water in that ditch, you ass!"

"Oh, that's all right! We'll hold your heads above the water!" said Blake. "We're not going to drown you."

"You'll spoil our clothes, you duffer!"

"H'm! Well, if you like to confess yourselves licked, we'll forgo the ducking," said Blake thoughtfully. "You are licked, out and out, you know, so you may as well own up."

"Rats!"

"What did you say?"

"Rats! Rats! Rats!"

"Well, of all the cheek! You'll go into the ditch now without the option of a fine! Roll 'em over, kids!"

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah! Woll the wottahs over, deah boys!"

Monk, Lane, and Carboy struggled desperately. The St. Jim's juniors were four to three, but it was a terrific tussle. D'Arcy dropped his eyeglass, and stopped to look

for it. For a minute the odds were even, and in that minute the Grammarians made a great effort and tore themselves loose.

They staggered to their feet, and would have fled, but they had no time.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were upon them again, and the fight raged furiously.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy threw himself into the fight again. The three Grammarians were driven right to the edge of the ditch under a shower of blows. Then they rallied and dodged, and went sprinting down the lane. D'Arcy was rushing in pursuit when Blake called him back.

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"Bettah wipe up the gground with the boundahs while we are about it, deah boy."

"Rats! 'Nuff's as good as a feast," said Blake, tenderly caressing a nose swollen to something like double its usual size. "We've got their caps here as trophies to show we've licked 'em."

There were three Grammar School caps lying in the dust. Monk, Lane, and Carboy had not had time to pick them up. Blake gathered them in, with a grin.

"We'll take these home to St. Jim's," he said. "We can send 'em on to Monk by post to-morrow. Meanwhile, they'll prove that we licked the Grammar School cads hollow; and if Tom Merry doesn't have to get off his perch over this job, you can use my head for a cricket ball!"

"Yaas, wathah! We've weally beaten the Gwammawians hollow, deah boys, and the Tewwible Thwee won't have a beastlay leg to stand on, you know."

The four juniors were in high feather now. They had won a victory, and they had the trophies to show. They also had a varied assortment of black eyes, swollen noses, and thick ears. But what of that? They were only the scars of honourable combat.

"Let's get back to St. Jim's," said Blake. "I'm afraid we shall be late for locking-up as it is. Come on!"

"Never mind. We've licked the Grammar School cads."

"Yaas, wathah! We have given the Gwammah School cads a feahful thwashin', deah boys, and they can't get away from that."

The chums of Study No. 6 lost no time in getting to the gates of St. Jim's. But the gates were locked. They were a good ten minutes late, and Taggles was always prompt in closing the gates to time.

There was nothing for it but to ring, and that Blake did. The form of Taggles, the porter, loomed up in the gloom.

"Hallo, Taggles, old fellow!" said Blake affably. "Sorry to disturb you like this, you know. You closed the gates rather early, didn't you?"

Taggles gave the chums of the Fourth a stony glare through the bars of the gate.

"I closed the gates at the right time, according to horders!" he said frigidly.

"You're going to let us in, aren't you, Taggy?"

"Yes, Master Blake; and report you to the 'Ead!"

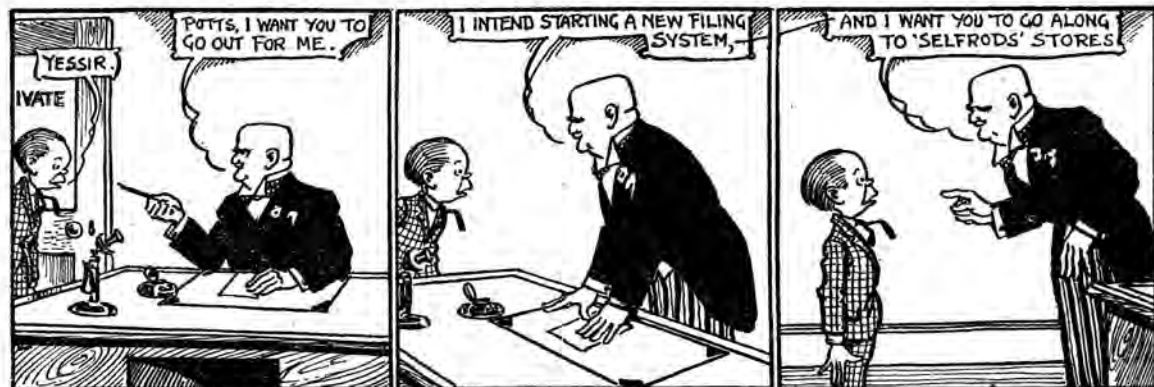
"Now, look here, Taggles, as an old sport—"

"Yaas, wathah, Taggles, deah boy! We appeal to you as an old sport, you know."

Taggles grinned crustily.

"When you're on the right side of the gate, Master Blake, I'm an old hunk and an old rascal, but now I'm an old sport!"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Of course, Taggles, you don't mind any little jokes we make," said Blake in a wheedling tone. "We all respect you very highly, Taggles."

"Yes, after looking up."

"Don't be sarcastic, Taggles. It doesn't suit your style of beauty, you know—it really doesn't. Let us in like a good chap."

"So I will, and report you to the 'Ead."

Blake felt in his pocket. He had a half-crown there that was not worth more than its weight as pewter, being a spurious coin that had been passed on Blake in an unguarded moment. A half-crown was a serious loss to a junior, and Blake had kept the counterfeit coin, not with the idea of passing it in his turn, of course, but in the hope of meeting the person who had passed it upon him. He had confided to his chums his intention of making that person eat it. But it now occurred to Blake that he might make a good use of that spoof coin.

"I say, Taggles—"

The porter caught a glimmer of metal between Blake's thumb and finger. Taggles was always, as Blake tersely expressed it, "on the make," and the sight of a half-crown roused his cupidity at once.

"What 'ave you to say, Master Blake?"

"Would you like me to make you a present of this?"

"Which I always does my dooty," said Taggles. "And if any young gentlemen felt inclined to make me a present of an 'arf-crown, I should not have anythin' to say against it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, Taggy, this is yours if you open the gate and say nothing about it."

"Weally, Blake, this amounts to bwibewy and cowwup-tion, and I cannot approve of it," said Arthur Augustus.

"That's all right, Gussy; you can stay outside."

"I should weseuse to do anythin' of the sort. But—"

"Oh, ring off! Taggles, you know, of course, that I wouldn't dream of offering you a bribe; that is only D'Arcy's coarse way of putting it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"What I mean is, that I have so great a respect for your character that I wish to make you a little present, and here it is. If you care to let us in, I shall take that as a favour from one gentleman to another, quite apart from any consideration of the half-crown."

"Bai Jove, that ahtahs the case, of course. Undah the circs, I don't see how Taggles can have any objection. He can wegard the half-crown in the light of a pwesentation, and lots of people accept pwesentations."

Taggles grinned.

He held out a hand between the bars, and Blake placed the half-crown in it. Then the gates swung open, and the juniors passed in.

"Good-night, Taggles!"

"Good-night, Master Blake!"

"I say, Blake, you know, that's wathah expensive, a half-crown to get in for callin'-over," said Arthur Augustus.

Blake grinned.

"Oh, half-crowns like that are cheap enough!" he said. "You can get 'em about a shilling a dozen."

"Bai Jove!"

"You see, it was a spoof one."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby.

"I should like to see Taggles' face when he discovers it!"

grinned Blake. "It's his own look-out, of course, for descending to the base level of bribery."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But upon the whole," said Blake thoughtfully, "I shall give him a real half-crown to-morrow in the place of it. It's a good joke, but if I let him keep it, it would amount to passing bad money."

"I am weally glad to heah you say so, Blake. It is bettah to lose half-a-crown than to have a stain on your beastlay honah, you know."

"Exactly. Lend me half-a-crown, will you?"

"Eh?"

"I haven't one. Thank you; I'll return this to you some time if I remember it, and I'm in funds. Let's get indoors."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, let's get in, kid!"

And the chums of Study No. 6, with the three Grammarian caps shoved under their jackets, entered the School House.

CHAPTER 8.

A Study Row!

"HALLO, Merry! Got over it, old chap?"

"Feeling pretty fit?"

"Better look out for the Grammar School kids."

Tom Merry turned crimson.

These remarks, and many more like them, greeted him when he made his first public appearance after the ridiculous return home.

The whole school was laughing over the joke, and his own House-fellows chipped the leader of the Terrible Three even more than the New House boys did.

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom crossly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore. "He's getting waxy!"

"I say, it's about time we had a new leader for the School House juniors," said Mellish. "Tom Merry is played out."

"Well, it does look like it," said Skimpole. "If you like to resign the leadership of the House into my hands for a time, Merry, I will do my best to—"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, there is no need to be rude about it," said Skimpole. "I could probably devise some method of putting the Grammarians in their place. As you know, I have taken up detective work lately, and, with my trained intellect, I could soon devise—"

"Rats!"

"Oh, very well, if you are going to take it like that—"

"When are you going to fly a kite again?" asked Mellish, with friendly interest. "I wish you'd tell us, Merry; we want to come along and see the fun."

Tom Merry put his hands in his pockets and walked away. He met Kildare of the Sixth in the quad. The captain of St. Jim's smiled.

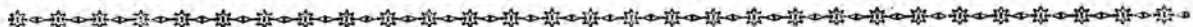
"You're looking a bit better now, Merry. You seem to have had the worst of it with the Grammarian youngsters."

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry. "Can't take the cake every time, you know."

Kildare laughed.

"No. It doesn't look like it."

Tom Merry reddened, and walked on. Whenever he



NOT SO SHARP!



appeared a torrent of chaff greeted him. Figgins & Co. at once greeted him with friendly remarks.

"It was reckless of you," said Kerr. "You see, it lowers the whole school for you to be licked like that by the Grammarians."

"That's how the case stands," said Fatty Wynn, with a nod. "The fact that those chaps are helpless duffers doesn't alter the case. It makes us all look asses."

"Nothing novel in that for you," said Tom Merry.

"My opinion is that Tom Merry has lowered the colours of the school in the most outrageous way," said Fatty Wynn. "The least he can do, in my opinion, is to stand a feed to make up for it."

"Oh, go and eat coconuts!" grunted Tom Merry; and he walked away.

"He's getting waxy," grinned Fatty Wynn. "But, I say, you chaps, I really think that's a good idea about the feed."

"Hallo! Here come those kids from Study No. 6! Blake is looking mighty pleased with himself," said Figgins.

"Hallo, Blake, what's the news?"

"Oh, we've just licked the Grammarians, that's all!" said Blake carelessly. "We thought they ought to be taken down a peg or two, after the way they treated Tom Merry. You know, somebody must uphold the honour of St. Jim's."

"Ha, ha, ha! Tell us what happened!"
Tom Merry had gone up to his study. He had had enough of chipping for a time, and he thought he would do some work. But he had scarcely got out his books when the door flew open, and Manners and Lowther came in.

"Have you heard the latest?" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. What is it?"

"Study No. 6 have had a row with the Grammarians in Rylcombe, and licked them hollow."

"Jolly glad to hear it."

"That's all very well," said Manners. "I'm glad the enemy are licked, as far as that goes. But what about us?"

"That's it," said Lowther, rather aggressively. "What price the Terrible Three?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Pretty cheap, I should say, Monty."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Lowther. "We've had a fearful come-down. The whole school is cackling over it."

"I know they are. I've heard them cackle."

"Now Blake and his gang have downed the Grammar School rotters—"

"And what I want to know is," said Manners, "where do we come in? The fellows will all be saying that Blake ought to be junior captain."

"Oh, one swallow doesn't make a summer, you know!"

"Perhaps not; but we've had a come-down—"

"Besides, Blake has always claimed to be leader of the House juniors, as far as that goes," said Tom Merry. "This doesn't make any difference."

"Yes, it does: we're nowhere now, and unless we get one in at the Grammar School jolly soon, Blake will be top dog in the School House, and keep there."

"Oh, we shall get our own back pretty soon!"

"How are we going to do it?"

"That will want thinking out."

There was a tap at the door, and it opened, and the chums of Study No. 6 walked in. They were looking very pleased with themselves.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry.

"We want to speak to you," said Blake. "We've been thinking—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And our idea is that as we've licked the Grammarians hollow, and you chaps haven't been able to do anything of the sort—"

"You ought to take a back seat—"

"And shut up—"

"And admit that we are the top dogs, deah boys!"

"Right-ho! That's how it stands!"

"What have you got to say, Tom Merry?"

"Nothing in particular," yawned Tom Merry, "excepting that I've got some work to do, so I'd be glad if you kids could go and do your chattering in your own study."

The chums of Study No. 6 glared.

"And take your faces away with you," said Monty Lowther plaintively. "They worry us!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Look here!" said Blake. "The Grammarians have licked you, and we've licked the Grammarians—ergo—that's Latin—"

"Ergo—therefore, deah boys, we weally considah—"

"Right-ho! That's how it stands—"

"You ought to be willing to take a back seat. My word! Why—"

"Now, Tom Merry—"

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Tom Merry pointed to the door.

"Outside, youngsters!"

"Youngsters!" roared Blake. "I'll youngsters you, you boulder! The Grammarians licked you, and we've licked the Grammarians, ergo—"

"Travel!"

"You ought to take a back seat, and acknowledge us leaders of the House juniors."

"Bunk!"

"You won't, then?"

"Buzz off!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, those wude wemarks are no argument. You must admit that you have made a feahful ass of yourself!"

"Do you kids prefer the door or the window as a mode of exit?" asked Tom Merry politely.



Blake and his chums saw the state of affairs at once. The lantern on the table. Right at the New House juniors they rushed, and the fight went on in

"Now, just look here, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, kick them out!" said Manners. "These youngsters in the Fourth Form want teaching a lesson. As their elders, we ought to do it."

"Elders!" shouted Blake. "Elders by about three weeks, I suppose—"

"Two months and seven days," said Tom Merry severely. "I'm really surprised at you, Blake, checking older fellows than yourself in this way."

"Are you going to take a back seat—"

"I'm very comfy where I am, thank you!"

"I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean. Outside!"

"Once for all—"

"We can't have children making a noise in this study," said Lowther. "I think we had better turn these youngsters out, Tom."

"Yes, I suppose we shall have to," said Tom Merry, rising. "Now, run along, little boys—"
It was too much. With one accord the four Fourth-Formers hurled themselves upon the Terrible Three. In a moment the study was the scene of a terrific struggle. The Terrible Three were only three against four, but they were the best fighting-men in the Shell. And as Arthur Augustus stopped suddenly to refasten his collar, which had burst from its stud, the odds were levelled.

The din was terrific. The table went with a crash into the fire-grate, and there was a smash of books and crockery on the floor, and a crash of fender and fire-irons. The juniors forgot everything in their excitement. Blake and Tom Merry were rolling on the floor in the midst of books and papers. Digby and Monty Lowther were close to the window, fighting like wildcats. Manners had Herries' head



on the floor and the hamper at the window with the ropes tied to it. t on in silence, Blake grappling furiously with the New House leader.

in chancery, and was punching away like a steam-hammer. Arthur Augustus was making frantic efforts to adjust his collar.

"Help!" gasped Herries. "Gussy, come on! He's busting my nose!"

"Wait a minute, deah boy; my collah's come unfastened!"

"You—you young villain! Rescue—"

"I shan't be a second, Hewwies."

"Ow! Come—Ow!"

"What is all this noise?"

It was a harsh, severe voice at the door. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, looked into the room over his glasses, a frown upon his brow.

The struggle in the study ceased as if by magic. Study rows were common enough at St. Jim's, especially in the Lower Forms, but they were not usually quite so fearfully noisy as on the present occasion. Mr. Linton had been

passing along the corridor, and the din had made him open the door and look in.

"Boys!"

Manners released Herries, and the latter stood rubbing his nose ruefully. Tom Merry and Blake scrambled up. Lowther and Digby separated. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the only one who seemed at all cool. He went on fastening his collar.

"How dare you make such a noise in your study!" said Mr. Linton. "I have had complaints about the noise here before, Merry, from Knox, whose study is below."

"We—we are sorry, sir—"

Mr. Linton smiled grimly.

"Sorry that I have caught you, I suppose you mean. I do not like to be harsh with juniors, and I can make allowance for exuberance of spirits; but it is necessary to draw a line. You will all take your books into the Shell class-room and remain there for an hour and write out Latin exercises."

And the master of the Shell wagged his head warningly at the dusty juniors and strode away. The late combatants looked at one another.

"Rotten!" said Blake. "All your fault, Tom Merry!"

"My fault! How do you make that out?"

"If you had taken a back seat when I told you—"

"If you kids hadn't come bothering in your elders' study—"

"If you asses hadn't let the Grammarians tie you up—"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard the Tewwible Thwee as being entially to blame for these unfortunate cives. I think Tom Merry should apologise."

"I say, are we going to the class-room?" said Manners.

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "Linton isn't to be griled with. He'll look into the Shell-room to see if we're there."

Blake grunted.

"Right-ho! He's just that sort of rotter. I suppose we had better go!"

And, with glum countenances, the seven juniors made their way to the class-room, and proceeded to write out Latin exercises with crawling pens.

CHAPTER 9.

Gone!

"**R**OTTEN!" growled Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked up from his exercise, and screwed his monocle into his eye.

"Yaas, it is wathah wotten!" he remarked.

"We have taken all the twouble to inflict a severe defeat upon the Gwammah School wottals, and have bwrought home twophies of our victowy, and now these Shell boundahs won't admit that we are the top dogs in the School House. I wegard it as mere obstmacy."

"My word!" said Digby. "Of all the obstinate asses—"

"And to get us detained in this beastly old class-room for an hour," said Herries, "all because they couldn't see reason when we explained to them—"

Blake grunted.

"I'm not thinking of that."

"Then what are you thinkin' of, deah boy?"

"That hamper in our study."

"Yaas, bai Jove! I had almost forgotten that, you know! We haven't had time to look at it since we came in."

"Too busy crowing over your giddy victory," remarked Lowther.

"I wefuse to admt that I have cwowed," said D'Arcy.

"We came to your study to explain to you that we had licked the Gwammawians and avenged the honah of the coll, and then you cut up wuff!"

"Cheeky young asses!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, don't rag now!" said Blake. "We shall have Linton looking in. Besides, nothing alters the fact that we have licked the Grammarians after the Grammarians licked Tom Merry, and therefore we are top dogs in the School House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm thinking about that giddy hamper, though—"

"Haven't you looked into it yet?" asked Tom Merry, glancing up from his desk.

"No; we had to get the Head's permission, as you know, and he wanted to consult with Mr. Railton first. I was going to Mr. Railton's study to ask him, only—"

"Only it was more important to do some bragging first," remarked Monty Lowther.

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Lowther—"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Linton may come along any moment."

"Let that silly cuckoo keep quiet, then. We just stopped

to speak to Figgins & Co., to tell them about it, and we told some of the fellows—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Besides, why shouldn't we crow if we want to?" said Digby. "We've licked the Grammar School cads after the cads licked you three, and we've got their giddy caps to show—"

"When will that confounded hour be up?" growled Blake, looking at the clock. "What is bothering me is that some fellow may go along to our study and look into the hamper on his own. Figgins & Co. might."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Figgins & Co. have been in the House since you went out, as a matter of fact," he remarked.

Blake looked alarmed.

"What were they doing here, Merry?"

"I don't know. I heard Reilly shout that they were here, but they were gone by the time I came up."

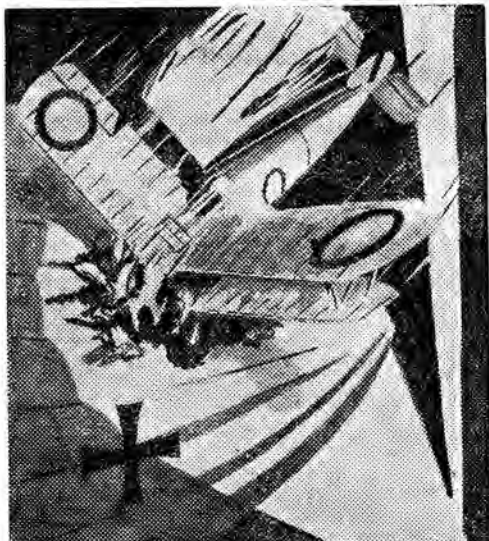
The chums of Study No. 6 looked at one another uneasily. The visit of Figgins & Co. to the School House might mean nothing, but it might mean mischief. The mysterious hamper was as yet unpacked. Blake & Co. were waiting for permission, but if Figgins chanced upon it he would know nothing about that. If he had half a chance he was as likely to raid it as not.

The master or the Shell looked in the class-room. The seven juniors were working away industriously.

Mr. Linton coughed, and they looked up.

"You may go now, my boys!" said the master of the Shell, glancing at the clock. "I hope this lesson will keep you from creating such disturbances in the study again."

"I hope so, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.



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"Yaas, wathah!"

"You may go."

And the juniors gladly went. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy hurried out first.

"I'll cut along to Mr. Railton's room and ask him about the hamper," said Blake. "I'll join you in the study. You can go up."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

Blake tapped at the door of Mr. Railton's room, and the Housemaster's voice bade him enter. Blake went in. Mr. Railton glanced curiously at his cut lip and battered nose—very visible signs of his encounter with the Grammarians—but he made no remark.

"If you please, sir, can I know about the hamper now?" said Blake.

The Housemaster smiled.

"Yes, certainly, Blake. I expected to see you before this!"

Blake coloured.

"I was out until locking-up, sir."

"H'm! You seem to have met with some disaster."

"I—I knocked my nose against something, sir," stammered Blake. He did not think it necessary to explain that it was Frank Monk's list he had knocked against.

Mr. Railton smiled again.

"Well, about the hamper," he said. "The Head has shown me your uncle's letter, and upon the whole he has decided that the hamper may be unpacked, Blake, and that you may make use of the contents."

"Yes, sir," said Blake, wondering what the contents of the mysterious hamper might be. "I am very glad of that, sir."

"The Head trusts—and I trust—that you will be discreet, that is all, Blake," said Mr. Railton, in a slightly emphatic tone.

"Certainly, sir!"

"Your uncle's idea is really good, but if carried to excess the matter might become generally troublesome. The Head is willing to leave it to your good sense."

"Thank you, sir."

And Blake quitted the study in a puzzled and amazed frame of mind. What the hamper could possibly contain was a staggering mystery. The junior hurried up the stairs and overtook the chums as they reached the door of the study.

"Is it all right?" asked Digby, looking round.

"Right as rain!"

"We can open the hamper?"

"Yes, we can unpack it and use the contents, and the Head trusts to our discretion. What on earth the hamper contains beats me. It can't be grub."

"Bai Jove! It's a beastly mystewy, and no mistake!"

"We'll jolly soon solve it now," said Herries. "It won't take a minute to get the hamper open now that we've got permission."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors hurried into the study. Blake turned up the gas, and the next moment he let out a terrific yell.

"Where's the hamper?"

"Bai Jove!"

"My word!"

The space where the hamper had stood was empty. The hamper was gone! Blake glared at the spot as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Gone!"

"Gone, bai Jove!"

There was no doubt about it. The hamper was gone, and the mystery of its contents remained still unsolved.

CHAPTER 10.

The Hamper Hunters!

BLAKE stared at the place where the hamper once had been for several moments in blank silence. D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eyes and stared again, as if he hoped by the assistance of the glass to discover some sign of the missing hamper. But sign there was none. The hamper was gone. There was no place in the study where so bulky an article could be concealed. It was evidently not in the room.

"My only hat!" said Blake at last. "It's been raided!"

"Yes, while we were out on the track of the Grammarians!" growled Herries.

"Or else while we were in the class-room."

"Oh, no! Tom Merry saw Figgins, or somebody saw him, while we were out—"

"But look here, Figgins & Co. couldn't get that hamper away. Taggles could hardly carry it upstairs. Figgins & Co. couldn't have got it downstairs without alarming the whole House," exclaimed Digby.

Blake wrinkled his brow in thought.

"Something in that, Dig."

"It wasn't Figgins & Co., then. It must have been some School House rotter."

"Tom Merry!" exclaimed Blake, with conviction. "That's why he mentioned that Figgins had been here, just to throw us off the scent."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake, turning to the door. "We're going to have that giddy hamper back, or know the reason why!"

"But I say, deah boy—"

"Come on!"

"But weally, Blake, the hampah was not in Tom Mewwy's studay when we went there, and he has been undah our eye evah since."

"Oh, they wouldn't put it into their study, of course! They've stowed it away somewhere till they can get the padlock off."

"That's the wheeze."

"Yaas. I nevah thought of that. But if we go and wow in Tom Mewwy's study again, Mr. Linton will be down upon us like anythin'."

"I don't care! I'm going to have that hamper back!"

"Yaas, wathah. But—"

"Oh, come along, and don't jaw! They may be getting the padlock off at this very moment, and then we shall be too late."

"Quite twee. Buck up, deah boys!"

The chums of Study No. 6 ran swiftly along the passage to Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three had just returned there, after being released from detention. They stared at the four excited chums as they burst into the room.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you looking for more trouble, Blake?"

"I'm looking for my hamper."

"Your what?"

"My hamper."

"I thought it was in your study."

"So it was, till you rotters shifted it. Where is it?"

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"I don't know anything about it, Blake. Is it gone?"

"Yes."

"Well, we haven't looked into your study even. Honour bright!"

Tom Merry's word was always to be relied upon. Jack Blake knew that, and he calmed down a little.

"Well, if you say so, Merry—"

"I do. I don't know anything about it. And Manners and Lowther don't, either."

"Not a word," said Manners.

"Not a syllable," said Lowther.

"We accept your assurance on that point, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We would not dream of doubtin' a gentleman's word. But the important question is—what has become of the beastly hampah?"

"That's it," said Blake.

"Figgins & Co. were here."

"But they couldn't possibly get that hamper out of the House," said Blake. "It was so heavy that Taggles could hardly carry it upstairs."

"That's so. I don't see how Figgins could have handled it," assented Tom Merry thoughtfully. "If it wasn't Figgins, it was somebody in the School House."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Lowther.

Blake glared at him.

"You've got my hamper?"

"No," said Lowther, laughing. "I haven't got your hamper, but I believe I know who has. It's Skimpole, of course."

"Skimpole!"

"Look at it yourself. As a Determinist, he would think nothing of confiscating the hamper and distributing the contents among all who wanted some."

"My only hat!" yelled Blake. "I remember now that he suggested something of the sort to me when the hamper first came."

"Then there's no doubt about it," grinned Lowther. "You'd better collar it before he has time to dispose of it."

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

And the four hamper-hunters rushed out of Tom Merry's study and into the next one, which was tenanted by Gore and Skimpole. Gore and Skimpole were both there, as it happened, and a hot argument was in progress. Gore was objecting to some pies belonging to him being handed to a tramp at the gates of St. Jim's. It had happened before, and now it had happened again, and Gore had had enough of it. The argument was growing very heated when the chums of Study No. 6 burst in.

Blake & Co. did not stand upon ceremony. They rushed

straight at Skimpole, and bumped him down on the hearth-rug.

"Where's my hamper?" roared Blake.

Skimpole gasped.

"Eh—what?"

"Where's my hamper?"

"Your hamper! Really, Blake, I do not understand you. Is not your hamper in your study? If it is not, I really cannot enlighten you as to its whereabouts, since I am quite ignorant upon the point."

Blake bumped his head upon the rug.

"Where's my hamper?"

"Really, I—I— Help, Gore!"

Gore roared with laughter.

"Not much," he said. "If you've been boning Blake's grub as well as mine, serve him jolly well right, and serve you right if you get a licking!"

"Yaas, wathah! Unless Skimpole immediately informs us what he has done with the hampah, we shall certainly administrah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Where's my hamper?"

"Really, Blake—"

"You horrid bandit, what have you done with my hamper?"

"I—I swear I haven't touched it, Blake!" gasped Skimpole. "After you refused so rudely to allow the contents to be distributed among the poor and needy of Rylconibe, I gave up the idea entirely."

"The hamper's gone!"

"I do not know anything about it. I assure you of that, Blake. If it had occurred to me, I might, in the interests of the toiling millions, have taken away your hamper and distributed the contents, but I did not. I really do not know what has become of your hamper, Blake."

"Now, look here, Skimpole—"

"I do not know what has become of your hamper. It is impossible for a sincere Determinist to prevaricate. If I had taken your hamper, I should tell you so at once."

"Well, there's something in that," growled Blake, getting off Skimpole's chest. "I made sure that you, had had it."

"I really have not had it."

"Then who has?" demanded Blake.

"I really do not know."

"Have you taken the hamper, Gore?" demanded Blake, turning upon the ead of the Shell so suddenly that he jumped.

"I? No, of course not."

"Well, somebody's had it," growled Blake. "I'm going to have that hamper back, if I have to slog everybody in the School House. Come on, chaps! I suppose this tame lunatic is telling the truth."

"I assure you I am incapable of speaking anything but the truth, Blake. A sincere Determinist is bound to the cause of truth by his principles. If you have a quarter of an hour to spare, I will read you an extract on that subject from the hundred-and-fifty-fourth chapter in my book."

The door slammed behind the chums of Study No. 6. In the passage they paused to consider their next step.

"It's getting towards bed-time," grunted Blake. "We shall have to go to bed soon, and we have got to find the hamper before then. Of course, it's a jape of one of the fellows, and we've got to keep the thing to ourselves, and keep it dark. But we're going to have that hamper back or bust something!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's some School House boulder that had it, and it wasn't Tom Merry or Skimpole. By Jove, I think I can see light!"

"What's the idea?" asked Digby.

"You remember Tom Merry said he hadn't actually seen Figgins in the House. He heard Reilly say that Figgins was there. Suppose it was Reilly raided the hamper, and said that just to raise a false scent?"

"Ba, Jove, I think that's extremely pwob! Weilly has nevah tweated me with pwopah respect."

"It's likely enough," said Digby. "But—"

"It's pretty certain," said Blake, with conviction.

"Reilly has been up against us ever since we started the St. Jim's Junior Parliament. Reilly is the boulder—"

"Yaas, wathah! He is quite capable of this piece of feahful cheek! He busted in a silk hat of mine once with a ewicket bat, and a fellow who would do that would do anythin'."

"Come along, and we'll see."

And the hamper-hunters hurried off to Reilly's study. Reilly was member for Belfast in the St. Jim's Junior Parliament, and, as it happened, he was entertaining some of his constituents to a topping feed in the study.

(Continued on page 19.)

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JOTTINGS FROM—



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

“WHAT cheer, chums! Aren't you mighty glad you got this week's copy of the GEM? Three hundred points in one week! Isn't that just a fine number to add to your coupon collection? And there is the usual tip-top programme that I always give you in the GEM. Some value, eh, chums? And now a word or two about next week. The long St. Jim's yarn is a sequel to the one you have just read—and it's a corker.

Now that Blake & Co. have found what was in the hamper you may be sure there will be some fun at St. Jim's when they try out their costumes. There is, believe me, and Martin Clifford describes it in one of his most brilliant yarns:

“REDSKINS OF ST. JIM'S!”

Out next Wednesday, so don't miss it!

Then there will be further adventures of those two cheery young middies, Ned Hardy and Victor Jinks, in our ripping sea story, “Chums of the Fighting Fleet!” In addition Potts will give you another laugh, and I shall “turn” another page of my notebook! Order your GEM early.

SWIFT WINGERS.

Which can fly faster—a racing pigeon or a racing aeroplane? There was such a heated discussion about this a short while ago that some owners of racing pigeons decided to put it to the test. They selected their twelve swiftest birds and started them off on an eighty miles race against a plane, which left the starting post fifteen minutes after the birds. Like winged arrows the birds sped through the skies, determined to eat up that eighty miles like you would eat up a cornet. But the plane got there first—twenty-three minutes before the first of the racing pigeons dropped down out of the sky at the finishing post. That is the first race of its kind ever held in England, and it is likely we shall see some more. Won't the first pilot to be whacked by pigeons feel ratty!

TERRIBLE TIMBUCTOO.

At the other end of the earth—that's a vague sort of spot on the map. But people often talk about it, like they talk about Timbuctoo. Do you know where Timbuctoo is, or what it is? A British Consul in Senegal, Africa, went there the other day, and he didn't take a tram, either! He had 1,200 miles to cover, and his way led him through jungle and desert such as a fellow might dream about in a specially hot nightmare. But he got there in time for his purpose. And that was to be present at the unveiling of a

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memorial tablet in honour of the very first European ever to tread the soil of terrible Timbuctoo—a Major Laing. A hundred years have passed since that brave major faced the unknown terrors of that outlandish territory. Having travelled for hundreds of miles across the Sahara Desert, a native sheikh offered to guide the major to Timbuctoo, nine miles north of the Niger River. But the guide died on the way, and so did the major's other companions. But, like that British Consul who, a hundred years later, managed to get there, the major entered Timbuctoo at last—only to be ordered to leave again at once. On the way home, he was slain by a treacherous sheikh. Twenty years ago his body was found, and was buried at Timbuctoo—where the tablet to his memory, as a brave explorer, has just been unveiled. About all that Timbuctoo does now is to export ostrich feathers, and its houses are mostly circular huts made of straw and earth.

A TORTOISE NURSERY.

That fat fellow you know, and whom you poke fun at as being as slow in his movements as a tortoise, could really give the world's swiftest tortoise a jolly good licking in any race—and do it on his head. A man who knows all there is to be known about Brer Tortoise says that they are as slow in hatching as they are in everything else. He watched a tortoise make its nursery and lay eggs, a foot below the ground. Then he watched. He watched for a whole year, then another month, and six days. Then the tortoises began to hatch out. They must have been entered by Mother Tortoise in a slow-speed contest, for the average time taken for tortoise eggs to hatch out is a mere eight months.

WARRIOR KING'S TREASURE.

In a vault made of solid gold and pure silver there lies somewhere in Austria the remains of a warrior king named Attila, who died hundreds of years ago, leaving behind him a reputation as having been a real terror of a scrapper. They buried him in gold and silver, and surrounded him with treasure chests packed full. And now someone believes he has found the lucky spot. They have started digging for that treasure, in the courtyard of a big castle. They have found odds and ends that lead them to hope the golden vault is beneath their spades. And they're going on digging until they know their luck—one way or the other.

FILMS UNDER THE SEA.

For the very first time in all history the makers of a cinema picture have gone down into Davy Jones' domain for their “shots”—sixty feet under the sea,

dressed in regulation diving costumes. They turned the handles of their cameras like billy-ho, to get a most amazing picture of a city that has been sunken for something like seventeen hundred years! This Greek city, lately discovered by an expedition sent to look for it by the Russian Government, started to slip into the sea bit by bit all those centuries ago, and the people who lived there deserted it gradually as their homes sunk inch by inch. Now the sea washes sixty feet above the tops of the submerged walls and broken towers, and after forty-five trips to the sea-bottom the intrepid cameramen have “got” one of the most astonishing pictures ever thrown on to a cinema screen!

WHAT A TAIL!

“Waggle away, George!” says the cheerful landlubber, taking a boating trip at the seaside, to his pal who is steering by “wagging” the rudder ropes. And they begin to believe they're sailors. The little rudder waggles, and the boat waggles in answer. Put that boat and that rudder beside the tail of the great liner Berengaria and George's craft would look like a flea-bite. The Berengaria had to have its rudder repaired a few weeks ago. They took it by lorry from the dock at Southampton to the makers at Darlington. It was a week doing the 316 miles, and the largest lorry in all the world had had quite enough of its burden by the time they got there. For that rudder weighs 55 tons, is 41 feet long, and 17 feet across! The liner which wears it is 553 feet long and 98 feet broad, and its tonnage is 52,226. So it doesn't seem such a very big tail after all. But what a smack it would catch a mackerel, or cod, say, that didn't swim fast enough out of reach when the man at the Berengaria's wheel waggled it!

BOOBY TRAPS FOR JUMBOS.

For hundreds of years they have been digging deep pits in India specially for wild elephants to tumble into. The natives have many uses for a live elephant, and that is the regulation way of catching them. But they haven't much use for a dead one—except to eat. It's a toss-up whether the Jumbo that tumbles into an eighteen-foot deep hole in the jungle breaks its neck or merely raises a bump on its hind regions. So someone has had a brain-wave, the new idea being to “pad” the bottom of the pit with several foot of grass, to break the monster's fall. When the victim has tumbled in—having carelessly walked on to the frail bamboos which, covered with leaves, have been spread over the top of the trap—the next thing is to haul him out. A whole gang of men get together around the pit, with two trained elephants, and hitch ropes from the tame elephants to the captive down the hole—it being the job of someone first to slip the rope around the captive's neck and a second one around its leg, by lassoing it. If the elephant down the hole doesn't first succeed in catching the man with the lasso and dragging him down and trampling him flat, the two tame elephants get the command to “Gee-up!” and they keep “going-up” until they have hauled the savage captive on to firm land. The fun isn't ended then. It's only just starting, really! You see the wild elephant is not so keen on being taken prisoner, so he puts up a real good scrap and often knocks out two or three of his opponents before he gives in!

YOUR EDITOR.

THE NIGHT RAIDERS!

(Continued from page 17.)

Blake kicked open the door, and the chums of Study No. 6 marched in, with war-like looks, to find five or six Irish juniors ready to receive them.

Reilly rose to his feet.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Do they all come into a room without knocking in the slum you were brought up in, Blake?"

"Where's my hamper?"

"Eh?"

"Where's my hamper?"

"Your what?"

"Hamper."

"Off your rocker?" asked Reilly pleasantly.

"My hamper's gone out of my study."

"Has it? Then you'd better go and look for it! We're discussing some important political questions here, and we can't have kids interrupting us!"

"Where's my hamper?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Where's my hamper?" roared Blake. "You've had it, and I'm not going out of this study till you produce it!"

"Sure, and I haven't even seen the hamper!" grinned Reilly. "But as for going out of this study, I fancy there are enough of us here to shift you!"

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Faith, Gussy, cheese it!"

"I wefuse to cheese it! I was about to wemark—"

Reilly pointed to the door.

"Outside!"

"Look here," said Blake, "do you give me your word, as a member of St. Jim's Parliament, that you haven't had the hamper?"

"I give you my word as member for Belfast!"

"The honahouwable membah's word must be taken by any othah honahouwable membah," said D'Arcy. "I am quite satisfied."

"Well, I suppose he's telling the truth," said Blake. "But where's the hamper?"

"Yaas, bai Jove, where's the hampah? That's the beastlay question."

"Sure, and I don't know!" said Reilly. "But there's one thing I do know, and that is that you're interrupting a political meeting!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Sure, and if ye—"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "We'd clean up the study with these chaps, only there isn't time. We've got to find the hamper before we go to bed."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of the Fourth quitted the study. They made their way slowly back to their own quarters in thoughtful silence. Where was the hamper? To the mystery of its contents was now added the mystery of its whereabouts.

"Blessed if I know where to look next!" said Blake, as they went into Study No. 6. "If Tom Merry and Skimpole and Reilly haven't had it, I don't know what to think."

"Some of the other fellows may have raided it."

"Yes; but which? We can't go round to a hundred chaps and ask them in turn if they have raided our hamper. Mellish might have done it; but he would lie if we asked him, so that would be no good. And where can it be? It's too big to put out of sight in any of the studies."

"That's so."

"Yaas, wathah! Whoever has waided that hampah has hidden it away in some cornah till he gets the chance to open it," said Arthur Augustus, with a nod.

"That's it. The padlock wouldn't be got off very easily," said Blake. "My idea is that the raider has shoved it away somewhere, and very likely means to unpack it after lights out to-night."

"Very likely."

"There are plenty of recesses in this rambling old place where it could be shoved," Blake remarked thoughtfully. "We could easily spot it if it were in one of the studies; but if it's shoved away into some corner, we might as well look for a needle in a haystack!"

"Quite wight."

"We'll have a look round till bed-time," said Blake, "but I don't suppose we shall see it. If we don't, I've got an idea."

"What's the idea, chappie?"

"We won't go to sleep to-night," said Blake. "It's pretty certain that somebody in either the Fourth or Shell has taken it. The kids in the Third would never dare, and, of course, it wasn't a senior."

"Yaas, wathah! The guilty party is in the Fourth Form or the Shell; but there are quite a numbah of School House fellahs in the Fourth Form and the Shell, deah boys."

"But they have only two dormitories," said Blake. "We'll all remain awake to-night, and two of us can watch in our dormitory for anybody who stirs, while the other two get out into the corridor and keep an eye on the Shell dormitory."

"Good wheeze!"

"Then if anybody in either Form gets up to look for the hamper, we shall only have to follow the rotter and spot him and recover the hamper."

"Good!"

"Bai Jove, I am wathah cuwious to look into that hampah!" D'Arcy remarked. "The mystery is weally quite fascinatin'."

"I could ask Mr. Railton what was in it," Blake remarked. "He must know, as he has read my uncle's letter to the Head. But he would want to know immediately why I didn't look myself, and then it would be all out."

"We can't give the rotter away, and bring the masters into it," said Herries, with a decided shake of the head. "But when we find the giddy raider, we'll give him beans!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Beans isn't the word for it!" said Blake. "I'm burning with curiosity to know what's in the hamper."

"We shall have to contain our cuwiosity until the hampah is discovahed, deah boys. Hallo, there is Skimpole! Pway don't come in, deah boy! We are wathah wowwied, and we can't be bothered with any of your bosh just now!"

But Skimpole came into the study, all the same.

CHAPTER 11.

On the Watch!

BLAKE'S right hand rose to point to the door.

"Outside!" he said, with Spartan brevity.

"Really, Blake, I have come to do you a service," said Skimpole. "You told me that you had lost a hamper—"

"Yes. And we haven't found it, so—"

"Oh, if you don't want to find it—"

"Do you mean to say that you know about it?" said Blake, changing his tone somewhat. "In that case, of course—"

"I have no doubt that I can give you some information on the subject."

"Go ahead, then!"

"I do not know anything about the hamper—"

"Then what are you driving at, ass?"

"What I mean is that, with my splendid ability as an amateur detective, I may be able to pick up a clue which will lead to the recovery of the missing heir—I mean, the missing hamper," explained Skimpole.

Blake gave an expressive grunt.

"Skimpole, I weward you as an ass!" said D'Arcy.

"I have not the slightest doubt that I can find a clue," said Skimpole, taking out a bulky notebook. "If you will give me the details—"

"Oh, travel along!"

"If you decline my services—"

"Well, we do," said Blake. "We've no time to bother."

"I am willing to take up the case without fee or reward."

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said Skimpole. "Simply out of regard for you, and to show you that you are mistaken in your estimate of my ability. I understand that you were sent to the class-room, and detained there for an hour by Mr. Linton!"

"Nearly an hour."

"H'm! That looks suspicious."

Blake stared at him.

"What looks suspicious?"

"The fact that Mr. Linton sent you to the class-room. It is an unusual hour in the evening for juniors to be detained in a class-room."

"He found us fighting with the Terrible Three in their study and kicking up a fearful row," explained Digby.

"That is all very well; but still, it was an unusual proceeding. I am compelled to ask myself, as a detective, whether Mr. Linton may not have had some secret motive

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for this proceeding," said Skimpole, jotting down notes in his book. "I regard him somewhat in the light of an old offender."

"A what?" yelled Blake.

"An old offender," said Skimpole. "You may remember that a few days ago he picked up my notebook in the passage, and refused to restore it to me until he had shown it to the Head."

"What about that?"

"His pretext was that the Deterministic doctrines in my book were not suitable matter for a junior to be thinking about," said Skimpole. "That, of course, was nonsense. A brain like mine is capable of dealing with any matter. You do not often see a brain like mine."

"I've never seen yours yet, and I'm not going to take your word for it that you've got one, either," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! If Skimpole possessed a bwin, there would be some indication of it in his conduct, and I have nevah noticed anythin' of the sort."

"Pray allow me to go on," said Skimpole. "Mr. Linton's pretext was absurd, in my opinion, and was evidently meant to disguise the fact that he wanted to remain in possession of my notebook for a time, so that he could copy from it, and use my valuable ideas."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may laugh as much as you like, Blake, but that book will make me famous when it is published, and St. Jim's will go down to posterity as the school where Herbert Skimpole was educated."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I therefore regard Mr. Linton somewhat in the light of an old offender," said Skimpole. "Suspicion rests upon him!"

"My only hat!"

"I shall pursue the case on that clue," said Skimpole. "If I find Mr. Linton in possession of your hamper, you will admit, I suppose, that I am right?"

"Yaas, wathah! But if Mr. Linton finds you on his track—"

"You will get a record licking," said Blake, "and serve you right. Of all the unutterable asses, you are about the unutterablest. D'Arcy is a genius to you."

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"You will see," said Skimpole, with a wise shake of the head; and he shut up his pocket-book with a snap, and quitted the study.

Half-past nine rang out from the clock-tower.

Blake sniffed.

"Bed-time!" he exclaimed. "Come along. That ass has wasted our time, and we shan't be able to look round for the hamper."

Half-past nine was bed-time at St. Jim's for the Fourth Form and the Shell. The juniors went upstairs to their dormitories.

Tom Merry spoke to Blake as he passed him in the upper corridor.

"Found that hamper yet?"

Blake shook his head.

"That's rough. It must have been Figgins."

"We shall see," was Blake's diplomatic reply.

And the School House juniors went to bed. There was a long interval of chatter in the Fourth Form dormitory before the boys went to sleep. The adventure with the Grammarians had caused a great deal of excitement, and Blake's triumph over the rival school led many of his Form-fellows to back him up in his ambition to be the recognised leader of the House juniors.

The chums of Study No. 6 were called upon to relate their adventure over again, which they did willingly enough.

At last the buzz of talk died away, and when ten rang out from the clock-tower, most of the Fourth Form were in the arms of Morpheus.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy remained resolutely awake. Blake's idea of keeping watch that night had seemed an excellent one when he proposed it in the study. As the desire for sleep grew upon them, it seemed less and less excellent, but they would not give in.

The quarter-past ten rang out, and only the quartet were awake now in the long, shadowy dormitory.

And by this time Herries, the sleepest of the three, had decided in his own mind that Blake's idea, so far from being excellent, was absolutely rotten, and not worth carrying out. And Herries went to sleep.

Digby was arguing the matter out in his own mind, and the matter was growing dimmer every moment; and then Dig dropped off, too. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed to keep himself awake, and fell fast asleep with his head against the bedpost. But Jack Blake was made of sterner stuff.

As soon as he found his ideas growing confused, he knew that he was in danger of falling asleep, and he threw off the bedclothes, and sat on the side of his bed, and dabbed his face every now and then with his sponge. This effectually kept him awake, and he was quite wide awake when half-past ten rang out.

It was time now to be on the watch. The Upper Forms were in bed, too, by this time, excepting some of the Sixth. Now was the time that the raider would be abroad, if Blake's theory on the subject was the correct one.

Blake rose, and slipped on his trousers, and a pair of rubber shoes he had placed in readiness. Then he crossed to D'Arcy and shook him.

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured D'Arcy dazedly.

Blake grinned, and shook him again.

"I wefuse," murmured the drowsy swell of the School House. "I wish it to be distinctly undahstood, deah boys, that I uttably wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

Blake shook him again.

"Hallo! What's the mattah?" asked D'Arcy, waking up.

"Quiet, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"Quiet! It's time to be on the watch," whispered Blake.

"Do you understand?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quiet, you ass!"

Blake shook up Digby and Herries, and at the same time whispered caution to them. In a few minutes the four juniors were partly dressed. There was no sound from any of the other beds. If the raider belonged to the Fourth, he was evidently not yet prepared to go out and unpack the hidden hamper.

"I'll go and watch the Shell dormitory," whispered Blake. "Gussy can come with me. You chaps can stay here and keep watch!"

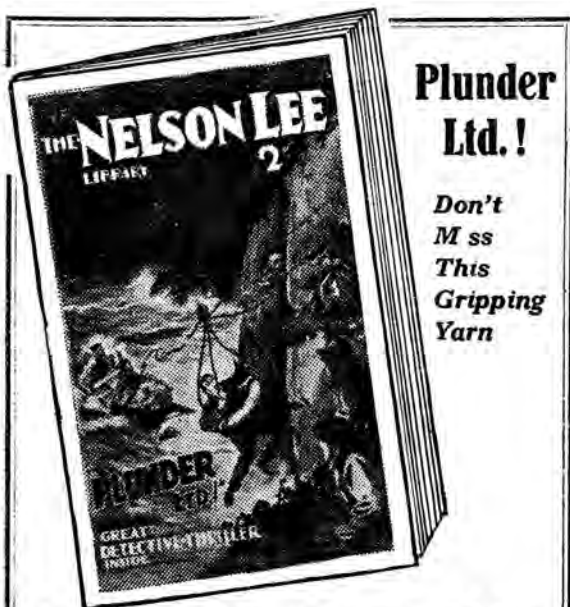
"Bai Jove, they'll go to sleep if they do! Pewwaps I had better stay here, Blake."

"H'm! Better come out into the passage, all of you, and keep watch outside the door," said Blake. "You're not likely to go to sleep on the linoleum."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Don't shout, fathead! Come on!"

"I wasn't shouting!"



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"Look out!" yelled Frank Monk in alarm. But the warning came too late. The four juniors of St. Jim's hurled themselves upon the Grammarians and had them down in the road in a twinkling. "Got you, you rotters!" roared Blake, as he pinned Monk down with a knee on his chest.

"Oh, don't argue at this time of the night! Come on!" The chums of the Fourth quietly left the dormitory. So far as they could ascertain, they were the only watchful ones there. They went out into the passage and silently closed the door behind them.

"Dig, you and Herries stop here while I go along to the door of the Shell room," said Blake. "If we're careful nobody can get out without our knowing it."

"Right you are!"

"Mind you don't go to sleep!"

"That's all right!"

"I don't know," said Blake doubtfully. "You are a pair of heavy-headed owls at this time of the night. Blessed if I can trust you!"

Digby chuckled.

"Then you'd better stop here and watch us while we watch the door, old chap."

"Look here, I shall come back every now and then to see if you're asleep, and if you are I shall stick this pin into you."

"You're more likely to fall asleep yourself, in my opinion."

"Oh, bosh!"

"Come on, Blake! I am waitin' for you, deah boy!"

"Here I am!"

Blake and D'Arcy went along the passage. They took up their position outside the door of the Shell dormitory, in which Tom Merry and his Form-fellows were sleeping the sleep of the just.

Arthur Augustus sat down on a seat in an alcove in the passage, and was soon nodding off. Blake shook him, and he started.

"Anythin' the mattah, Blake?"

"No," grunted Blake; "only you were going off to sleep, ass!"

"Was I weally? I am afwaid I am wathah sleepay. Nevah mind, I will talk, and that will keep me awake."

"Oh, don't! I'd rather you went to sleep. I don't want to know anything about fancy waistcoats, or the latest thing in silk hats."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, you can snooze if you like! I shall remain awake," said Blake good-naturedly. "Might as well have left you in bed, though."

"I wefuse to go to sleep," said Arthur Augustus. "I distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I am heah to share your watch, deah boy, and I should wegard it as beneath my dig to yield to this tired feelin' I am expewincin' at the pwesent moment."

His head fell forward on his breast.

"I am certainly wathah sleepay," D'Arcy went on, in a drowsy tone. "But it would be infwa dig for me to sleep on the watch, you know. I must distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I shall wemain awake and watch with you, deah boy!"

Blake grinned. D'Arcy's voice was growing fainter and sleepier with each word.

"Yaas, wathah! I distinctly-wefuse-to-go-to-sleep." And with the last word D'Arcy dropped into a profound slumber.

Silence reigned in the passage, save for the steady breathing of the swell of the School House.

Blake stretched himself, yawned, and exerted all his power to keep himself awake. Eleven rang out from the tower. Then he tiptoed along the passage to the spot where he had left Herries and Digby.

Herries was sitting with his back against the wall, fast asleep. Digby blinked drowsily at Blake.

"Awake?"

"Yes."

"Keep it up!"

And Blake returned to his post. D'Arcy was still sleeping soundly. Blake thought of his comfortable bed, and listened for the clock to strike again. The half-hour chimed out.

"Half-past eleven!"

Blake went quietly along to the door of the Fourth Form dormitory, and peered at the two dim figures in the shadows there.

"Are you awake, Dig?"

A snore was the only response. Blake grinned and stooped to wake the sleeper. Then he paused. A faint sound came through the silence of the night, and Blake started and listened.

CHAPTER 12.

Caught in the Act!

"ARE you ready, you chaps?"

"Quite ready, Figgins."

"Got the ropes all right?"

"Yes; here they are!"

"Don't make a row, then!"

"I'm not making a row," said Pratt. "Don't make a row yourself, Figg!"

"Shut up and come on!"

"We're coming!"

The whispers sounded faintly in the gloom of the New House. Figgins & Co. were on the warpath. Besides the Co. six other fellows belonging to the Fourth Form and the Shell were up and doing. They were Pratt, Mason, and Newton of the Fourth, and French, Jimson, and Davis of the Shell. Figgins had picked them out for the night's expedition, and they were prepared for the midnight raid.

Jimson carried a big coil of rope over his arm, and Pratt a dark lantern. Kerr had another coil of rope, and Fatty Wynn had something in his hand, which, upon closer examination, would have turned out to be a packet of sandwiches. There was no telling how long the raiders might be over the raid, and Fatty Wynn knew that he might get hungry.

Figgins led the way down to the Hall of the New House, and one by one the raiders passed through the window into the dim quadrangle. There was a glimmer of moon through the clouds, just enough to show the New House juniors their way.

Straight towards the School House Figgins led the way, and the raiders followed him, and they halted under the window of the box-room where the Co. had hidden the mysterious hamper.

The box-room was on the third story, but masses of clinging ivy on the ancient wall rendered an ascent practicable to a skilful and cool-headed climber, and Figgins had nerve enough for anything.

He looked up at the thick ivy, glimmering in the moon, and then laid hold of it. Up he went, the other fellows watching him from below.

"Careful, Figg!" said Kerr anxiously. "I'll go up first, if you like."

Figgins replied only with a grunt.

Up he went, and in a short time he was on a level with the narrow sill of the box-room window.

As he had, while in the box-room, taken the precaution of unfastening the window on the inside, his entrance was not difficult. He pushed up the sash and disappeared into the darkness within.

"Done it!" murmured Kerr.

Pratt sniffed.

"Yes, and he's gone up without the rope."

"By Jove, so he has!"

"Ass!" said Kerr laconically.

"That's all very well," said Pratt. "But how are you going to lower the hamper down without a rope? That's what I want to know!"

"You'll see."

"That's all very well—"

Figgins' head was projected from the window above. His hand appeared, and he unwound and let out a ball of twine. Kerr took the end of it as it came within reach, and fastened it to the end of a coil of rope.

He gave a jerk on the twine as a signal to Figgins to pull, and the chief of the New House juniors drew in the twine, and the rope after it.

Kerr grinned triumphantly at Pratt.

"That's better than trying to climb with a big coil of rope over your arm—eh?"

"Oh, I could have done it!" said Pratt.

Kerr made no reply. It was no time for argument, or for punching obstinate heads. The twine was soon pulled in above, and Figgins took the end of the rope. The rope was knotted in places to render ascent easy. Kerr felt, and

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found that it was taut. Figgins had fastened the end in the box-room, and now he waved his hand from the window.

"Good!" murmured Kerr.

And the Scottish partner in the Co. climbed the rope. It was not a difficult task, the knots offering support for the hands. Kerr disappeared into the window of the box-room; Fatty Wynn took hold of the rope. Pratt nudged him.

"Better let me go, Fatty. You'll never get that weight up."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Fatty.

"Shall I mind your packet for you?" asked Jimson.

"Thank you, you might!"

Fatty Wynn handed over the packet, and then began to climb.

Jimson grinned and unwrapped the paper round the sandwiches.

"Anybody peckish?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" grinned Davis.

"Here you are, then. Take some."

With low chuckles the New House juniors devoured the sandwiches. Fatty Wynn, all unconscious of their little joke, climbed the rope slowly but steadily, and arrived at the box-room window. It was possible that a slimmer climber would have been better for the task, but Figgins wasn't going to have one of the Co. left out of it.

Figgins' long arm came out of the box-room window and grasped Fatty, and helped him into the room.

"Good!" said Figgins. "Here we are!"

"Yes," gasped Fatty, "that was quite a climb. My hat, what's that?"

He stumbled against a box as he stepped down from the window and reeled, and sat down with a bump.

Figgins grinned.

"You ass! What are you making all that row for?"

"How could I help it?" remonstrated Fatty Wynn.

"You don't think I bumped down like that on purpose, do you, Figgins?"

"Well, you ought to have more sense. You might wake the house, plumping down a ton weight like that."

"I only weigh eleven stone."

"Oh, blow your weight! Let's get that giddy hamper out!"

"Come on!" said Kerr.

The mysterious hamper was well hidden under the boxes. Figgins had piled them upon it earlier in the evening. Moving cautiously in the dimness of the box-room, the New House juniors began to remove the boxes. But the gloom of the box-room was too much for them. A box slipped from Kerr's grasp, and crashed against another.

Figgins muttered something under his breath.

"Couldn't help it," muttered Kerr apologetically. "I can't see in the dark."

"Better have the lantern, I suppose."

"Well, I don't see that it would do any harm. The whole House is asleep at this time. And, anyway, nobody ever passes the door of this room at night."

"True."

There was a scratch of a match, and Figgins lighted the lantern. The rays glimmered out, and revealed the breathless Co. and the pile of boxes. The work was much easier in the light, and the New House juniors set to it with a will.

The empty boxes were removed, and the mysterious hamper was brought to light again.

Figgins & Co. dragged it to the window.

"By Jove, it's heavy!" said Figgins, gasping from his exertions. "We shall have to be jolly careful in getting it out of the window."

"Think the three of us can manage it?"

"Better have Pratt and French up," said Fatty Wynn. "We want the other coil of rope, too. It would be rotten if we let the thing drop into the quad."

Kerr chuckled.

"It would be rough on those kids underneath if it dropped on them."

"We can manage it," said Figgins. "We've only got to let it out slowly, that's all. I'll take a turn of the rope round the bar of the grate here to keep it from buzzing out too suddenly."

"Yes, that's all right."

The second rope was pulled up into the box-room, and then both were fastened to the hamper—one at each end. The juniors below had finished the sandwiches, and they were waiting anxiously.

Figgins waved his hand from the window as a warning to them to be ready.

"Now, then, kids!"

The Co. laid hold of the hamper. There was ample room for it to pass through the window. One effort, and it would



"Well," said French in measured accents, "if this is what you call a raid, Figgins, all I have to say is—Ow! Wow!" French had not meant to say "Ow! Wow!" but Figgins' fist clumped upon his nose, and he sat down in the quad with a suddenness that jarred all the bones in his body!

be on the sill, and the rest would be easy—merely a matter of paying out the ropes.

"Go it! Hold on!"

Figgins suddenly let go the hamper and straightened up. "Look out!"

CHAPTER 13.

The Return of the Raiders!

BLAKE stood in the darkness of the passage above, listening. He could hear nothing but the more or less musical snores of Digby and Herries, asleep at his feet. Whatever was the sound he had heard below in the silence of the night, it had died away. But Blake was on the alert now. He stooped and shook Digby by the shoulder. The junior awoke.

"Hullo!"

"Wake up!" said Blake. "Wake up, fathead!"

Digby shook himself and came out of the land of dreams. He rose rather unsteadily and rubbed his eyes.

"I believe I've been asleep," he remarked.

"Yes, I do believe you have," said Blake sarcastically. "I believe Herries has, too, and Gussy. Nice sort of chaps you are to keep watch."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be anything to watch for, does there?" said Digby. "I suppose you haven't seen anything or anybody?"

"I've heard something."

"What was it?" asked Digby, alert at once.

Blake was shaking Herries. Herries was slower to awake, but he was brought to a consciousness of his surroundings at last.

"Wharrer marrer?" he murmured.

"There's something up," whispered Blake. "I shouldn't wonder if it was Figgins raided the hamper after all. I just heard a row on the next floor down, and I believe it came from the box-room."

"The box-room," muttered Digby.

"Yes. It flashed into my mind at once."

"What did—the box-room?"

"Ass! It flashed into my mind at once when I heard it, that Figgins might have shoved the hamper there. He couldn't get it out of the School House while the House was awake. He may have put it there to take it away later."

"He didn't know we shouldn't look there."

"Well, he may have hidden it. There was room enough there to hide a dozen, and he had to risk it, anyway."

"Well, it's quite possible. But are you sure you heard something?" asked Digby, straining his ears without detecting a sound in the stillness of the night.

"Quite certain."

"Then let's go and look," said Herries. "If the bounders are there, we want to catch them before they walk the hamper off."

"Yes, rather," said Digby.

"Wait a minute. I'll call Gussy."

"Is he asleep?"

"Yes; as sound as you were," grinned Blake.

And he tiptoed along the passage and shook the slumbering swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder.

D'Arcy started out of the land of dreams.

"Pink stripes, I think," he murmured, "and blue spots, with yellow flowers, deah boy. Not double-bweasted. Oh,

no! The single-breasted waistcoat is more fashionable now. As for the pockets—"

Blake grinned. D'Arcy was evidently dreaming that he was negotiating with his tailor about a new fancy waistcoat.

Blake shook him again, and he came to himself.

"Bai Jove, I've droppod off, I do believe!" said D'Arcy, rubbing his eyes. "Where's my beastlay eyeglass?"

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Wight you are, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus did not know what was wanted, but he was too sleepy to inquire, and he followed Blake with unusual docility. They joined Digby and Herries, and the quartet descended the stairs and passed quietly along the passage to the box-room.

Blake gave a start and gripped Digby's arm as the light, gleaming under the door, caught his eye.

"Look there!"

"Bai Jove, it's burglahs!" murmured D'Arcy.

Blake chuckled.

"New House burglars, I expect," he remarked. "Anyway, whoever they are, we are going to collar them."

They crept quietly to the door. There they paused for a moment to listen. From within came faintly the sound of a voice—the voice of the chief of the New House juniors.

"Now, then, kids!"

"Figgins!" chuckled Blake. "What do you think now, my pippins?"

"You're right, Blake!"

"Always am, my dear chap!"

"Oh, don't crow! Let's collar these rotters!"

"Come on, then!"

Blake opened the door as quietly as he could. But there was a sound, and it was that which alarmed Figgins. It was then that Figgy cried: "Look out!" And the School House juniors rushed to the attack.

Blake and his chums saw the state of affairs at a glance—the lantern gleaming on the floor, the hamper at the window with the ropes tied to it, and the New House Co. in the very act of lifting it to the window-sill.

They were evidently none too soon upon the scene. Right at the New House juniors they rushed and fought in silence. Figgins faced Blake gallantly, and they went at it hammer and tongs, but the Co., taken more by surprise, were bowled over in a moment, and Digby and Herries sat on them on the floor.

Figgins and Blake struggled desperately, with no sound but gasping breaths. But Arthur Augustus came to Blake's aid, and Figgins was tripped up and plumped on the floor, and Blake sat astride on his chest.

"Shut the door, Gussy!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus shut the door. Figgins wriggled under the weight of Jack Blake, but it was useless—there was no escape for him.

"Now look out of the window, Gussy, and see if there are any more of them."

"Certainly, deah boy!"

D'Arcy looked out of the window. The group of juniors below, waiting for the hamper to be lowered to them, were dimly visible in the moonlight.

"Yaas, wathah, Blake! There are half a dozen of the wottahs, waitin' to cawwy our hampah acwoss to the New House, I suppose!"

"They'll have to wait a long time!" grinned Blake. "I'm afraid the game's up, Figgy. Keep at the window, Gussy, and if anybody tries to climb up, knock him down."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you rotten rotters!" gasped Figgins. "How did you know? Have you been waiting for us, you beasts?"

"Oh, you couldn't expect to pull the wool over our eyes!" said Blake loftily. "We're up to all your little games, you know!"

"Get off my chest!"

"Rats! It's rather bony, considered as a seat, but it's the safest place at present. Gussy, are any of the others climbing up?"

"No, deah boy. They don't seem to have heard anything."

"Of course, they wouldn't!" chuckled Blake. "They wouldn't know anything's gone wrong till they got back their giddy leaders, returned with thanks! Untie that rope off the hamper, Gussy, and bring it here and tie it round Figgins!"

"Bai Jove! What are you goin' to do with the wottah, deah boy?"

"I think it's a good idea to send him down to those chaps out there," chuckled Blake. "It seems rotten that they should have to wait for nothing. We can't have this rubbish lying about here, either."

"I'll give you rubbish!" gasped Figgins.

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"Tie his wrists first—I'll hold 'em—you can use his belt for that. Then fasten the rope under his arms!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard the ideah as wathah funnay!" Figgins was soon secured. Then Blake left D'Arcy sitting on him while he secured the remaining two of the Co. in the same way.

The New House juniors resisted, but in vain. They were soon bound, and then the School House quartet were free to deal with them as they chose. Blake grasped Figgins by the shoulders.

"Take his feet, some of you—or take one each, as they're so jolly big—then sling him out of the window!"

D'Arcy and Digby stooped to pick up Figgins. D'Arcy staggered back with an exclamation.

"Why don't you get hold of him, Gussy?"

"The howwid wottah has thrust his hoof against my twousahs, and I am certain that he has soiled them."

"Never mind your trousers now, ass! Take hold of him, I tell you!"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. He has wubbed his howwid hoo, on my twousahs, and I feel certain—"

"Take hold of the beast, Herries!"

"Right-ho!"

"I don't see why Hewwies couldn't have taken hold of him in the first place, and saved my twousahs from bein'—"

"Now, then, all together!"

Figgins was slung upon the window-sill. He said not a word. The affair had gone against him, and Figgins was not the fellow to complain.

The New House juniors, staring impatiently up at the box-room window, saw a strange object roll off the sill and descend swinging a the end of a rope.

"My hat!" said French. "That's not the hamper!"

"Hampers don't have legs that length," said Pratt.

"That's Figgins!"

"Figgins!"

"What on earth are Kerr and Wynn lowering Figgins down like that for?"

"My only hat!"

The strange object swung lower. It was certainly Figgins. He was swinging wildly at the end of the rope, and bumping on the ground finally at the feet of the astonished juniors.

Blake looked out of the window. The moonlight glimmered on his face for a moment, and the New House juniors understood.

"Jack Blake!"

They released Figgins. A second object came floating down from the box-room window. It was Kerr, on the end of the second rope. He was landed beside Figgins. Then a plump figure appeared on the window-sill.

"I say," called out Blake cautiously, "let us have one of those ropes up again or we shall have to drop this prize porpoise on your nappers!"

Kerr cast loose a rope, and Blake pulled it in. Then Fatty Wynn swung down at the end of it.

He landed, gasping for breath, on the ground.

"Well, of all the howling asses—" began Pratt. "Ow! What's that?"

"That" was the ropes from above, which clumped round his shoulders as Blake threw them down from the box-room window. Pratt gave a yelp.

Blake waved his hand from the window.

"Rubbish returned with thanks!" he called out softly.

"Good-night!"

The window closed. The New House juniors looked at one another, and looked at Figgins & Co. The Co. were strangely silent.

"Well," said French, in measured accents—"well, if this is what you call a raid, Figgins, all I have to say is—Ow! Wow!"

French had not meant to say "Ow! Wow!" He said that suddenly because Figgins' fist had clumped upon his nose, and he sat down in the quad with a suddenness that jarred all the bones in his body.

"Anybody else got anything to say?" said Figgins casually.

Nobody had. The New House party returned in silence to their House. They re-entered the New House, and in the upper passage Fatty Wynn tapped Pratt on the arm.

"Give me my sandwiches."

"Haven't got them," said Pratt, with a chuckle.

"You—you haven't left them out there?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then where are they?"

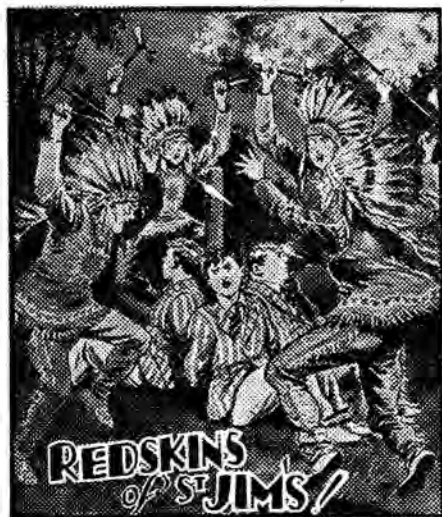
Pratt tapped himself just below the chest.

"You—you beast!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm fearfully hungry. You—you absolute rotter!"

And he went disconsolately to bed.

"Well, it has been a frost!" said Figgins, as he got into

"REDSKINS of St. JIM'S!"



Ever seen a Redskin with an eyeglass? If not, now's your chance! Take a look at the small reproduction of next week's GEM cover alongside. Boys, there's a real smasher of a yarn, packed with fun, thrills and adventure in store for you next Wednesday. When Blake and Co. become the Blackfoot Braves of Rylcombe Woods, things begin to move! People in Sussex just don't expect to see Red Indians on the Warpath! Spend Twopence on the GEM next Wednesday, and read the best yarn of the week!

bed. "But it was a risky business, anyway, and we nearly brought it off. But, by Jove, I'd like to know what really is in that hamper!"

CHAPTER 14. At Last!

"**B**AI Jove, deah boys, we have fwustwated their knavish twicks, and no mistake!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Blake closed the box-room window. "It's extremely fortunate that I happened to be on the watch to-night."

"Yes, you were a fat lot of good!" grunted Blake. "You'd be sleeping in the passage now if I hadn't wakened you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, let's see what's in the hamper, anyway," said Digby, "now that we've got it back."

"Unlock the padlock, Blake!" exclaimed Herries. "You've got the key."

"Right-ho!"

Blake felt in his pockets for the key. He felt in one pocket, and then in the other, but both were drawn blank, and Blake looked blank, too.

"Well, why don't you unlock it, deah boy?"

"I can't find the key."

"You had it."

"I know I had it, but I haven't it now."

"Pewwaps it's in one of your othah pockets."

"No; I distinctly remember putting it in my trousers pocket."

"Are you weawin' the same twousahs now?"

"Yes, ass. I don't keep a trunk full of trousers and change them every five minutes, as you do," grunted Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I suppose the key fell out of my pocket when we were scrapping with the Grammarians in the lane," said Blake. "It's gone."

"Then we can't unfasten the padlock," said Herries.

"Unless you can do it with your teeth," said Blake sarcastically.

"I think you are an ass."

"Well, I don't think you're one; I know you are. We can't open the beastly thing to-night, that's all. Let's get it back to the study and lock it up there, for safety, and then get back to bed."

"I want to know what's in the hamper."

"So do I, but it can't be did," said Blake impatiently. "Let's get it away, and don't make a row. And don't talk; you make me tired."

The hamper was dragged out of the box-room, and the

lantern extinguished. As quietly as they could the chums dragged it back to Study No. 6, and locked it up there. Then they returned to the Fourth Form dormitory. Curious as they were concerning the contents of the hamper—and their curiosity had now reached boiling point—they were sleepy, too, and they were soon in the land of dreams.

But all things, they say, come to him who waits; and the opening of the mysterious hamper came at last. In the morning a coke-hammer solved the difficulty of the padlock, and the lid of the mysterious hamper was raised once more.

With bated breath the chums of Study No. 6 gathered round it. Blake had locked the study door to prevent interruptions or espial. The lid was raised, and the mysterious contents unpacked.

And then exclamations of amazement and delight burst from the juniors, for the present from Blake's American uncle was one that was calculated to delight the heart of a lad with a love of adventure in his heart.

It was a complete outfit of Redskin apparel—wampum and coloured serapes, moccasins and feathers for head-dress, tomahawks and bows and arrows, and spears in sections for packing. And there was a letter inside the wrapping.

Blake glanced over it with dancing eyes.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "I remember now my uncle speaking of something of this sort when he was in England. The idea, you know, is to get up as Red Indians, and camp in the woods, and learn to rough it and look out for yourself. That's why we had to have the Head's permission to unpack these things. And the Head's given his permission, so there won't be any difficulty about that."

"Bai Jove, it's a weally wippin' ideah, deah boys! Do you know, I wathah fancy myself as a Wedskin chief."

"Ripping!" exclaimed Digby. "By Jove, this will give us a leg-up over those bounders in the Shell! We'll keep it dark!"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "For the present, at least. They can go on guessing what was in the mysterious hamper. We'll try the camping-out idea next half-holiday, and we may get the Head's permission to make a week of it. That would be ripping, if you like."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 kept the secret. A shower of questions descended upon them as soon as they came out of the study, but no answers were forthcoming. And curiosity in the School House became absolutely burning on the subject of the mysterious hamper.

THE END.

(Blake and Co. make good use of their Redskin outfits in next week's ripping yarn "REDSKINS OF ST. JIM'S." It's a Wow!)

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IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO START ON OUR THRILLING NAVAL ADVENTURE YARN.

CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET



Ned Hardy, the youngest middy on the *Victorious*, is determined to clear the name of his brother Ralph, who was dismissed the Service after a robbery aboard his ship. Ned believes that spies "framed" his brother. On ten days' leave with his pal Jinks, Ned arranges to go hunting "coupers," who sell illegal drinks to fishermen on the Dogger Bank, with Lieutenant Watson on board the *Merlin*. Ned sets out to join the *Merlin* in a small pinnace, and runs into heavy weather.

The Black Witch!

WILD, broken waves bore down on the pinnace as she forged ahead, and buffeted her till she streamed like a half-tide rock. She wallowed and pitched and plunged on her way westward, and sometimes seemed nearly to stand on her head. It was no weather for a small pinnace.

"Keep her going, Simmons!" said Ned, his face lashed and stung by the spray as he sat at the helm. "Give her more power. She's hardly making way against it!"

"Ay, ay!" said Simmons, stoking up the fire and tinkering with the engines. He looked as if he did not like the trip at all, and muttered to himself as he thrust the lever hard over. "Engine ain't workin' at all sweet, sir! I hope the craft don't pitch any more, or I can't answer for her! Gosh!" he gasped, as a fresh blast of wind swept the pinnace sideways. "I wish I was back at Hull!"

Ned glanced at him keenly. He had not much confidence in Simmons. He lacked nerve, which is a rare fault in the Service.

"Go ahead, and do your best, man!" sang out Ned cheerily. "Keep her running, and we'll soon be in shelter!"

The words were whirled from his lips by a shrieking black squall that came along the water like a blow from a fist. The pinnace battled with it manfully. They were out of sight of anything but water now, for the distant shores were hidden, and the choppy tidal seas came over the bows every now and then.

The squall drove off, but on its heels came another, still fiercer, and the little craft plunged violently, her screw racing as it rose clear of the water when she pitched. Suddenly the throb of her engines ceased, there was a grinding jerk, and she fell away into the trough of the sea, and drove helplessly to leeward.

"She's broke down, sir!" cried Simmons helplessly.

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His nerve seemed altogether gone. The midshipman faced the situation coolly.

"Get her under way again somehow as quickly as you can!" he said, as a sea broke aboard and nearly swamped the fire. "I'll attend to the rest!"

Simmons fumbled with the engines frantically. The pinnace was driving away down-river with the gale and tide at a furious rate. Grimsby was already abeam, and soon was passed—there was no means of reaching it unless the engine could be made to go. Soon it was passed beyond reach altogether, the little vessel was tossing like a cork.

"We'll have to try to anchor," cried Ned, "though it's only a dog's chance! But it may check her long enough to give us time. If she's driven out to sea we're done!"

It was only the most forlorn of hopes that the anchor would hold the pinnace at all—certainly it would not do so for more than a minute or two. Ned stoked it and threw it over, however, praying that it might give Simmons time to master the engines.

The pinnace lurched and brought up with a heavy jerk, flinging a great cloud of spray over herself as the chain tightened and the anchor bit into the sand far below. She rolled and pitched frightfully, but she held on for the moment, and Ned dashed aft to give the artificer what assistance he could. The bar was not forty yards away, and if they failed to stop her now, nothing could save them.

"She may do it yet!" panted Simmons, stoking away at the fire. "I've cleared the cylinder at last, an' there's pressure in the boiler. If we've only one minute clear—"

"I'll try to put a buffer on the chain," said Ned; for it was giving terrific jerks that threatened every moment to snap the links as the vessel pitched over the seas.

He darted forward and set to work, but a wave-top came smashing aboard over the quarter, and put the fires out for

good and all. With it came a mighty lurch, the anchor-chain snapped like a thread, and this time the pinnace was in among the roaring surf of the bar with a vengeance.

"We've done all we could!" said Ned, setting his teeth. "Seems to me it's Davy Jones for us now, and no mistake!"

He did his utmost at the tiller to keep the craft's head straight, and yelled to Simmons to get out one of the long sweep-oars. But the pinnace was like a mere chip tossed about in that raging sea, and soon she was full of water nearly to the thwarts.

It was a marvel that she lived through it all. Sometimes she seemed to be standing on her head and heels at the same time; her seaworthiness was marvellous and unlooked-for.

More than once in rearing over a wave she flung out of herself the water she had taken in from the last; Ned and Simmons, with a bucket apiece, baled frantically to keep her afloat.

"Great Caesar, I believe she'll clear the bar!" cried Ned. "I'd have bet a hundred to one against it! If she does, we might keep her afloat in the open!"

The wild plunging and tossing ceased, and no more water came aboard. The seas grew bigger, longer, and more regular. The pinnace, though a little more water would have swamped her, laboured less violently.

"Bale away! Get her dry!" shouted Ned breathlessly.

They toiled furiously with the buckets; presently the gratings reappeared. The pinnace was now driving smoothly over great mountains of water, and rolling over the dark hills and valleys with comparative steadiness.

"Where have we driven to?" muttered Ned.

The shroud of rain lifted, and showed him the great white eye of the Spurn Lighthouse rapidly being left behind, and the dark line of the coast north and south of it fading from view. The case was only too plain.

"We've driven clean out to sea, sir!" gasped Simmons, shivering.

"We have!" said Ned cheerfully. "And where we'll end up," he added to himself, "unless it's on the coast of Norway in three weeks' time, blow me if I know!"

The Humber and its bar were left far behind. It was the broken water of the latter that had so nearly swamped them; the more regular rollers of the North Sea were less dangerous.

The situation was dismal enough, at the best. The two sailors were in a crippled craft that could neither sail nor steam, a fresh gale blowing them farther out to sea every minute, with no hope of getting back to the land, and scarcely any provisions. The storm was increasing in force; the broken wave-tops began to dash aboard again as soon as the crew stopped baling.

"We must make some sort of a drogue for her, and keep her head to the sea, or she'll swamp yet!" he said. "Bring those spars aft!"

Between them, by Ned's directions, they made a sea-anchor out of two boathooks, and a spar lashed into a triangle. Over this they stretched the canvas cover that belonged to the pinnace's engines, and thus made a sort of kite, weighted at one end to make it float upright.

This was put overboard, and the pinnace rode to it by a long rope. It offered some resistance to the water, and so kept her head to the sea, and prevented her from falling into the trough of the waves and swamping, and she was now riding fairly easily. It did not stop her from drifting, of course, and she still drove pretty rapidly to the north-east.

"What'll happen to us?" moaned Simmons, whose teeth were chattering with the cold. "We've no chance—we're done!"

"Oh, rats!" said Ned, trying to speak cheerfully. "Don't pull such a long face over it! We're bound to get picked up!"

"Who's to see us in the dark, sir?"

"We must wait for morning, that's all! We ought to be able to keep this hulk afloat till the day breaks, if the gale doesn't get any worse. Come, buck up, man! I don't intend to get drowned, for one! Have some grub, and perhaps that'll put a little life into you!"

Luckily Ned had stowed the sandwiches away in a watertight locker before they started, and there were plenty of them, so the two did not want for food. A beaker of fresh water was lashed under the seats of the well also, and there were emergency rations in another locker—for Lieutenant Watson kept all his boats equipped in this manner. Ned and the artificer blessed him for it.

Several times during the night they saw the lights of steamers and sailing vessels passing over the waters, but none of them came anything like near enough for a hail to reach them. The castaways shouted at one or two just for the comfort of hearing their own voices in the loneliness around.

Later on they saw no lights at all for several hours, and when at last the dawn broke, they looked out over a cold,

grey, tossing sea, with no sign of a sail anywhere round the horizon. The gale had eased to a fresh breeze, but the sea was still running high.

"Jupiter! What a sight you look, Simmons!" said Ned, grinning feebly at his companion.

There was not much to choose between the two as far as looks went. Dead white, weary, soaked to the skin, with eyes lashed red by the wind-driven spray; the salt flaking white on their foreheads and eyebrows, the two castaways had a very worn appearance.

"Wonder 'ow far we are off land?" said Simmons despondently.

Ned, reckoning up the time and the rate at which the gale must have driven them, calculated it might be anything between fifty and a hundred miles, but he said nothing.

Instead, he served out a good whack of sandwiches and more of the cold coffee, which put new life into them both.

The wind began to freshen with the coming of the day, and soon it was blowing hard again. Then a disaster happened—the ready-made drogue would stand the hard strain no longer, and it suddenly broke up and melted to pieces, leaving only one of the boathooks attached to the rope.

The pinnace began to drive faster than ever, and it was a very heavy task to keep her straight at all. It became impossible to do this and bale her as well. A sea came aboard, and then another, and Simmons found himself nearly to his knees in water. Even the ever-hopeful Ned began to fear they were really done for at last.

Suddenly Simmons gave a shout.

"Sail—ho!" he yelled hoarsely. "Sail—ho!"

Ned peered to windward, and gave a whoop of delight. The craft that Simmons had sighted was no great distance away, but they had been too occupied with the swamping pinnace to see her. Ned waved to the vessel, and she bore down towards them—a big, powerful, but unkempt-looking ketch, with a glistening black hull and dark red sails.

"Dogger Bank trawler!" said Ned. "English hull, but rigged abroad, I should say. But, by gum, she's only just in time!"

The smack, which was fully eighty tons in measurement, came within fifty yards. Ned thought he had never seen such a rough-looking crew. Six or seven smacksmen, in jerseys and sea-boots, stood on deck, and a tall, savage-faced fellow well over six feet, with a ragged moustache, and sheath-knife at the back of his belt, was at the wheel.

Down she swooped towards the pinnace, her crew staring but giving no sign. Suddenly the smack hauled her wind again and stood away on the other tack, turning her tail on the helpless craft, making no attempt at a rescue.

"What are they up to?" cried Ned aghast. "They can't mean to leave us in the lurch."

He shouted to the smack at the top of his voice, and Simmons bellowed piteously, waving his arms.

The fishermen took no notice. The pinnace was still drifting away, when one of the men on deck, striding to the bulwarks, levelled a pair of glasses at her, and seemed to be reading the name on her stern, which was in gilt letters, and now became visible to the smack for the first time as she swung round. Ned heard him say something excitedly to the skipper at the wheel; the smack whipped round again and came within hail.

"Pinnace, ahoy!" roared the man at the wheel, in a thick, husky voice that was somehow familiar to Ned. "Are ye off the gunboat Merlin?"

"Ay, ay!" shouted Ned. "Can't you see? Why don't you pick us up?"

"Ay, we'll pick yer up!"

The smack, skilfully handled, ran close to windward of the pinnace, and in another minute Ned and Simmons were on the deck of the ketch, stiff, cold, and cramped, but devoutly grateful.

"It's more than I can do to thank you properly now!" said Ned, barely able to get the words out. "We owe you our lives, both of us. We were nearly done!"

"Bring the kid here!" ordered the skipper.

Ned was led aft by a grip on his shoulder, and brought face to face with the captain of the smack, who left the wheel to one of his men and strode to meet him.

Ned not only felt that he remembered that husky voice, but something in the man's face seemed vaguely familiar to him.

The skipper had a pair of fishy, filmy eyes that awoke in Ned a suspicion that the man was the worse for liquor, which might have accounted for his passing the pinnace by.

"Officer on the Merlin, are yer?" said the skipper slowly.

"I'm a naval officer, but only a passenger on the Merlin," said Ned; "that's her pinnace, and if you'll hitch a rope to it, you'll be able to claim salvage. But I want to thank you—"

The skipper cut him short with a grim laugh.

"I see you was Navy bred, an' you might ha' drifted on to drown an' feed the crabs for all I cared; but when my mate saw the Merlin's name on that pinnace's counter, I turned her round and came back for you!"

"I don't know what you've got against the Navy," said Ned quickly; "we're generally on good terms with the North Sea trawlers, and decent fellows they are. But if the Merlin ever did you a good turn—"

"Good turn!" roared the mate, breaking in ferociously. "Ay, a year in the stone jug—that's what I got from the Merlin! Nabbed at sea for followin' a free copper's trade, an' my vessel confiscated—that's why I'm sailin' as mate under another man. The Merlin owes me a year out of my life that I spent in gaol!"

A light broke in upon Ned.

"What vessel's this?" he cried.

"The Black Witch!"

The Vengeance of Long Dennis!

IN a moment the truth came home to Ned. The captain of the smack—the man before him—was Dennis Clegg! Now, at last, he remembered where he had seen the wolf-like face and those red-rimmed, fishy eyes. This was the man who had been deck-hand on the black steam-yacht the night Dimitri was captured. Clegg, the cooper—the spy of Voroff & Co.

"Then this 'ere's Long Dennis' vessel!" gasped Simmons.

"Yes, you dog!" said Clegg. "Long Dennis—that's me!"

He swung round upon Ned, and suddenly checked him self. His face changed, and his filmy eyes stared closely into the midshipman's face.

"It's young Hardy himself!" he shouted, striking the rail with his fist. "Gosh! But my eyes must be nigh gone! I thought I knew 'im! It's that kid we copped on the night Dimitri was shot—Ralph Hardy's brother!"

The rest of the crew did not seem to understand, save one—a stout, red-faced Russian, who stepped quickly to Clegg's side.

"You was sure it is he?"

"I tell you it's the snuffie I was told to make sure of!"

"I know—I know!" whispered the Russian hurriedly. "No need to tell de crew about dat! It is enough for dem that he comes from de Merlin!"

"Leave it to me; I'm in charge o' this!" growled Clegg.

He turned to the crew, who were clamouring to know who Ned and the artificer were.

"They're from the Merlin—both of 'em!" he said. "We've got 'em, an' we'll pay 'em! There's sence one o' you ain't suffered by the patrol boats; four o' you ha' bin in quod through the Gamet gettin' caught two years back.

They nabbed Vandervell's craft only two days ago, and now they're after us. What d'ye say, mates?"

"Tie 'em back to back, and shove 'em overboard with a sinker to their ankles!" chorused the crew.

They crowded round, and the oaths flew thick—most of them foreign—as they realised that two of their enemies were absolutely at their mercy. There is no hatred on the sea like the hatred of the illicit drink seller for the naval patrol.

Long Dennis stared at the middy and the artificer without replying. He seemed to positively gloat over them, and by the slight swaying of his head it was plain that he was well forward in liquor.

"Time enough for that," he said thickly—"time enough for that! We've got 'em safe as cooped barrels. I'm going to make use of 'em first, fore they come to it. I'm going to have that spunged officer cub wait on me, an' hand the liquor to me an' my customers, an' fetch an' carry, an' do the dirtiest work on the ship!"

He glared at Ned.

"An' that orliver white-faced swab, too! These are the buggers that haul us to quod whenever they can. We'll have some sport out o' them. We'll need a potman," he added, "when we heave-to for the night."

"Better drop 'em overside now, Dennis, if you mean gettin' rid of 'em," said the man with sea glasses, glancing at Clegg. "Safe, ain't it? What's the use o' making a show?"

"You betray your jaw!" said Dennis, turning a flushed face and a watery eye on him. "Am I skipper 'ere, or are you?"

He turned to Ned.

"P'raps you'll step below, Mr. Midshipman Hardy, o' the flagship," he said. "I makes you welcome to my vessel, an' I shall be able to do you the honours presently."

Ned looked him in the face, but gave no sign. The order was repeated, with an oath. Two of the men strode up to him to carry it out by force. Ned saw that resistance to an armed crowd of a dozen was worse than useless; he would gain nothing by getting manhandled by a drunken crew.

He turned abruptly, and walked to the hatch with as much an air of command as if he were on the quarter-deck of the Victorious. Ned allowed himself to be ushered below. One of the hands followed him, and pointed out a cabin—or, rather, a cupboard with a sleeping-berth in it—next the hold, in which, with a Russian oath, he told Ned he might stay until he was called for.

(In the grip of Dennis Clegg! Ned's in a pretty tight corner now! Watch for amazing developments in next week's great instalment.)

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