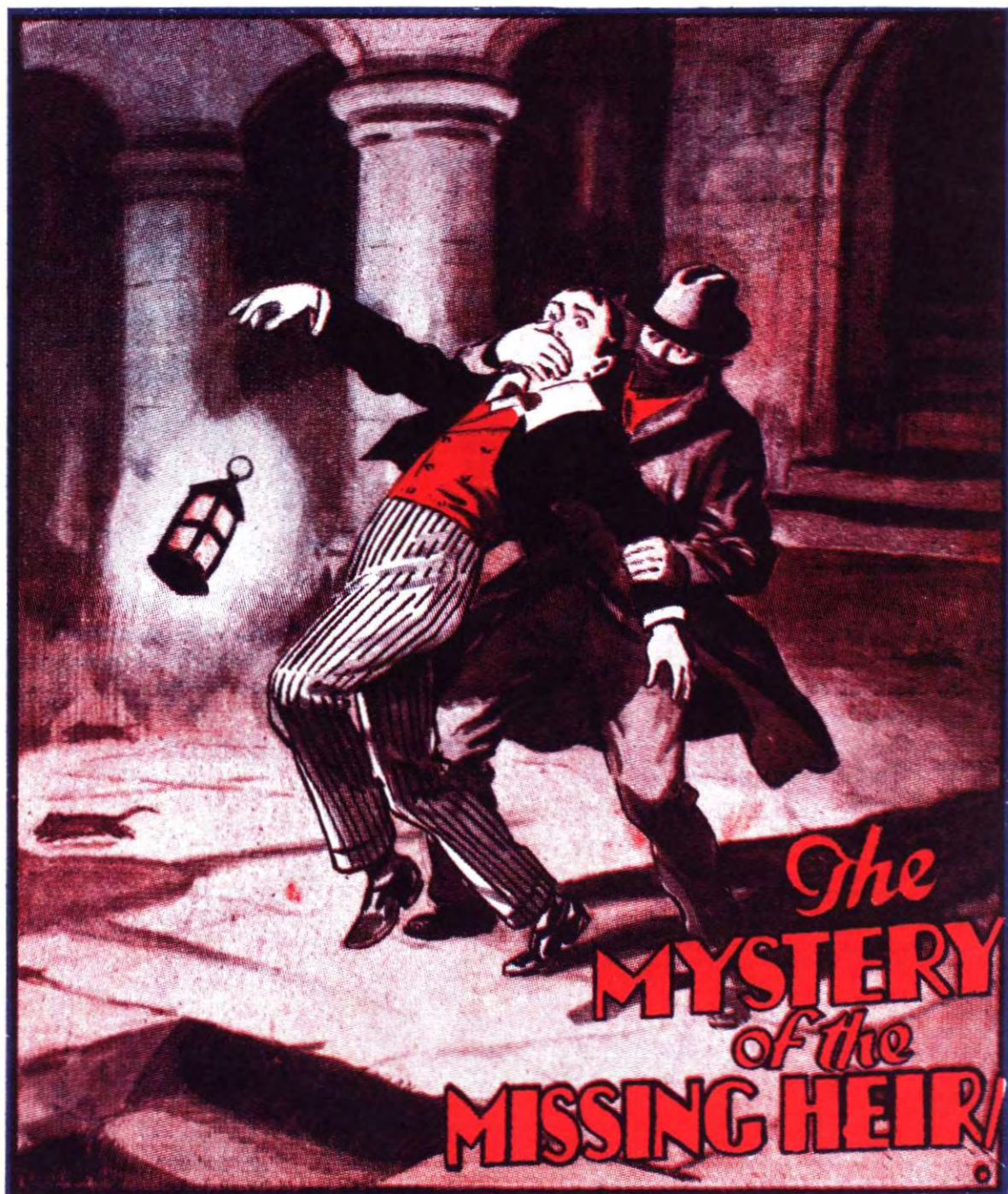


ALL-THRILLING LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL YARN INSIDE!

The GEM 2^D



The MYSTERY of the MISSING HEIR!

No. 1,273. Vol. XLII.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

July 9th, 1932.

Published by Howard Baker Press Ltd, 27a Arterberry Road, Wimbledon, London, S.W. 20.



The MYSTERY of



"This is the boy we want, Bunker. This is Tom Merry." "All right, Silas Shucks. But, quiet, we mustn't wake him!" . . . In the silence of the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's at midnight the two men bent over the sleeping boy. What did they want with him?

CHAPTER 1. A Strange Encounter.

"I GUESS that's him!"

Tom Merry gave a start as the words fell suddenly upon his ears.

It was a hot July afternoon, and Tom Merry, with a ruddy glow in his cheeks and his straw hat on the back of his head, was sauntering along the leafy lane from St. Jim's to the village of Rylcombe.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the chums of the Shell—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—had left the school to stroll down to the tuckshop in the village. Manners and Lowther had dropped behind to look at a bird's nest, so Tom Merry was for the moment alone.

"I guess that's him, Bunker!"

Tom Merry looked round quickly. Two men had suddenly appeared from the hedge, and the junior looked at them distrustfully. One—the man who had spoken—was a thin, tall, loose-jointed fellow, with a hooked nose and a short beard, evidently an American. The other, a short, thick-set individual, was more roughly dressed, and rougher in general appearance. Both were strangers to Tom Merry, and he did not like their looks. He had little doubt that he had fallen in with a couple of footpads, and he was on his guard at once.

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"Hallo!" he said coolly. "What do you want?"

"I guess we want you," drawled the tall man.

And the other chuckled.

"I guess we do, Silas Shucks."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You had better keep your distance," he remarked. "I am not alone, as you seem to think; so if you are thinking of robbery you had better give up the idea. I say, Monty, Manners, come here!"

"Collar him, Bunker!"

The two men ran straight at Tom Merry. At the same moment the voice of Monty Lowther was heard up the lane.

"What's wanted? We're busy."

"Come here!"

For a moment the two rascals hesitated. Then Silas Shucks muttered something in a fierce whisper to his companion, and they rushed at Tom Merry.

"Collar him!"

The next moment the hero of the Shell was struggling in their powerful grip and shouting at the top of his voice:

"Help! Help!"

Tom Merry struggled desperately. What could be the object of the ruffians he did not know. They did not seem to wish to rob him, but to drag him from the road into the wood.

"The chloroform! Quick, Bunker!"

Tom Merry heard the words, and they nerved him to a

—DISAPPEARED, AND OF THE ADVENTURES THAT BEFELL HIM!

the MISSING HEIR!

By Martin Clifford.

desperate effort. He broke loose from the grasp upon him, and started to run. But in a moment he was seized again and borne to the ground.

"Help!"

There was a thud of rapid footsteps in the lane. The ring in Tom Merry's voice told that he was not "rotting," as Monty Lowther had at first suspected, and the chums of the Shell were tearing to the rescue. They saw Tom Merry in the road with the two ruffians over him, and they did not wait to speak. They hurled themselves upon Tom's assailants without an instant's pause, and sent them flying across the lane.

Bunker and Silas Shucks rolled gasping in the grass under the trees, and Manners helped Tom Merry to his feet. Tom was panting for breath.

"What's the row?" asked Lowther, thumping him on the back to assist him in regaining his wind. "Were they going to rob you, Tom?"

"I don't know. They jumped on me all of a sudden. But—"

Silas Shucks sat up in the grass. He was looking rather dizzy, but there was an expression of astonishment on his narrow face.

"Tom!" he repeated. "Tom! What might your name be, young gentleman?"

"Mine? Tom Merry."

The two men looked at one another curiously. They rose slowly to their feet, but did not offer to renew the attack. The Terrible Three were shoulder to shoulder now, quite ready for them. But the two rascals had evidently had enough.

"I say," said Silas Shucks, "I reckon there has been a mistake here."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Yes. You tackled rather too large an order," he said. "Why don't you come on? You were full of fight a minute ago."

"If that young chap's name is Tom Merry—"

"What did you think it was?" said Tom Merry curiously.

"Have you taken me for somebody else?"

"That's it," said Silas Shucks, still evidently in doubt. "That's it. But if your name is Tom Merry— But where do you come from?"

Tom Merry made a gesture towards the tower of St. Jim's, rising in the distance over the trees.

"From the school?"

"Yes."

The two men exchanged glances again. They were evidently amazed, but at what the chums of the Shell could not quite see.

"You could tell that by the band on my hat if you looked at it," said Tom Merry. "What are you getting at, anyway? Did you really take me for somebody else, or is that gammon because you've got the worst of it?"

"That's more likely," said Monty Lowther. "Let's run them in. We three could easily handle a couple of weedy rotters like that."

"Right-ho!" said Manners. "Come on!"

"I guess it was a mistake."

"Rot! Collar them!"

The Terrible Three ran forward. As they were not assailed they became the assailants. But the two ruffians had had enough of it. They bolted through the hedge and disappeared among the trees before the chums of the Shell could get within reach of them. Monty Lowther was rushing after them through the gap in the hedge, but Tom Merry pulled him back.

"Hold on, Merry!"

"Better collar the rotters," said Lowther. "It will be fun, anyway, taking them to the station, and would mean a lot of eclat for us."

Tom Merry laughed.

"But it wouldn't be easy, Monty, and I don't see how

we are to run them down in the wood, anyhow. Let's get on to the village."

"Well, perhaps you're right."

"Of course I am, my son. It's too hot for fighting, anyway, and I feel rather out of breath. Come along."

And the Terrible Three sauntered on down the lane. Tom Merry had little expectation of ever seeing the two ruffians again, and he little dreamed how soon they were to meet and what strange results would follow.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy Investigates.

"BAI Jove, deah boys, you look wathah dusty! Have you been havin' a wov with the Gwammawians?"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's, who asked the question as the Terrible Three came in at the gates.

"No," said Tom Merry. "I haven't seen the Gram-marians to-day."

The swell of the School House adjusted his eyeglass and looked him over.

"You look as if you had been in a wov," he remarked.

"So I have," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But it was with a couple of footpads. If you had been there, Gussy, you—"

"You could have scared them away," remarked Lowther. "With your face, you know."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I feel a bit dusty," remarked Tom Merry. "I think I'll go and get cleaned. Well, what is it, Gussy?"

"You have been attacked by a couple of footpads?" said D'Arcy, producing a little silver pencil and a gilt-edged notebook from his pocket.

"Yes; at least, I suppose they were footpads."

"Vewy good! I should be glad to have the details."

"The what?"

"The details," said Arthur Augustus. "As you know, I have made it a hobby to take up amateur detective work, and I think this will be a wathah good opportunity of twyin' my skill. I didn't have a chance before, as I was bothahed by that howlin' ass Skimpole."

"My dear kid, you can't hunt for these two rotters!"

"That is quite a mistake, Tom Mewwy. If you gave me any clue to them I have not the slightest doubt that I shall be able to bring them to justice in a wemarkably short space of time."

"But they'd eat you up, Gussy!"

"I am quite willin' to wun the wisks of a detective."

"They'd knock you on the head," said Lowther. "We should lose our one and only Gus."

"I should uttably wufuse to be knocked on the head. I have not the slightest doubt of my ability to twack down the wottabs and have them awwested. Pway give me their descwipt."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, all right, Gussy! You can have their description, if you like. There were two of them—one a tall, thin chap, with a thick American accent—got that down?"

"Wait a moment, I've broken the point of my pencil."

"Oh, rats! I can't wait all the—"

"Lend me a beastlay pencil, then, Tom Mewwy. Thank you. Now I am quite weady. Now, one was a tall, thick chap, with a thin American accent—"

"No," said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "One was a tall, thin chap—"

"Tall, thin chap; yaas."

"With a thick American accent, a hooky nose, and a beard."

"Hooky nose, and beard; yaas?"

"The other was a shorter fellow, something like a walrus in build."

"Walrus in build; yaas?"

"Also spoke with an American accent."

"Amewican accent; yaas?"

"They collared me, and nearly yanked me into the wood, because Lowther was a silly ass and thought I was only rotting when I called for help."

"Lowther was a silly ass! Yaas?"

"Look here!" began Monty Lowther warmly.

"Don't interrupt," said Tom Merry. "Gussy's taking down the notes of the case, and he must have all the facts."

"The facts! Why, you—"

"Then Manners and Lowther came up, and their features frightened the rascals away."

"Frightened the wascals away; yaas?"

"And that's all. They pretended they had mistaken me for somebody else, to get out of the row; but that was rot, of course."

"Wot, of course; yaas?"

"That's all."

"There's one thing more," said Lowther. "It's only a detail, but it might have a bearing on the case."

"Pway tell me what it is, Lowthah. Any detail seemingly unimportant to an inexperienced mind may have a great importance to the twained intellect of a detective."

"Hark at him!"

"Pway go on, Lowthah, and don't be iwwelevant."

"Well, after we had gone to the tuckshop we came back here."

"Came back here; yaas?" said D'Arcy, busily making notes.

"And at the gates of St. Jim's we met a curious object—"

"Cuwious object; yaas?"

"It had a silk hat on, and an eyeglass—"

"Eyeglass; yaas?"

"And looked something like a human being, but more like a tailor's dummy, and—"

"Lowthah, you wotten ass—"

"And it had a notebook and pencil, and—"

"You uttah ass!" said D'Arcy, turning pink, and commencing to erase the notes in his book dealing with the curious object Lowther was describing. "I ought to have guessed that you were wottin', you uttah ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can you tell me any further details, Tom Mewwy?"

"No; only that we had ices and marmalade tarts and ginger-pop at Mother Murphy's."

"That is iwwelevant. Did these wottahs leave any foot-pwints in the lane?"

"No," said Lowther. "They took them all away with them—"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah. The question of foot-pwints is an important one. But I cannot expect you fellows to notice anythin' weally important. Well, Tom Mewwy, I will do my best with this case, and will weport latah."

And the swell of the School House put away his notebook and pencil, and walked off. The Terrible Three grinned, and went on their way to the School House.

A quarter of an hour later, after a refreshing wash in cool water, the chums of the Shell came down to their study. The door was wide open, and a youth, with a large, bumpy forehead and a pair of spectacles, was sitting on the table, swinging his thin legs.

"Hallo, Skimpole! You've got into the wrong cage," said Monty Lowther. "This isn't the lunatic asylum, you know."

Skimpole blinked at the Terrible Three.

"I came here to speak to Tom Merry—"

"Speak away, my son," said Tom Merry, "and cut it short."

"I've just seen D'Arcy—"

"Nothing remarkable in that. We've just seen him, too."

"Please don't interrupt me, Lowther. I hear that you have been robbed by a gang of ruffians in the lane."

"Ha, ha, ha! This is the first we've heard of it."

"Well, D'Arcy dropped a hint about it, and I heard the rest from Mellish. I thought I'd drop in here for further details. As you know, I am a demon at amateur detective work, and I thought I might as well recover the stolen property from the thieves for you."

Tom Merry laughed.

Skimpole was D'Arcy's rival in the amateur detective line, and it was difficult to tell which was the funnier of the two.

"But there isn't any stolen property," said Tom Merry.

"Dear me, this is rather unfortunate! Are you quite sure that they did not succeed in taking your watch?"

"It's in my pocket."

"Or your purse?"

"I haven't one."

"Or your money?"

"I haven't any."

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"Well, really, Merry, this is rather discouraging. Still, the thieves—"

"But there aren't any thieves."

"Eh? But—"

"I don't know what they were. But they didn't steal anything, and didn't try to. There were two of them, and they might have been footpads, or they might have been off their rockers. Now you know as much about the matter as I do. If you'll kindly find somewhere else to sit, we'll have tea on that table."

"I should like to have their descriptions."

"D'Arcy's got the descriptions. Ask him for a copy from his giddy notebook."

"He may refuse."

"Then punch his head. I can't keep on talking all day. The loaf's in the box. Lowther, and the butter's under the jar. I thought it would be cooler there."

"I should like a description from you—"

"I think there's a little jam left."

"No, there isn't. I put the last in D'Arcy's hatbox."

"Well, trot out the marmalade, then. Better light some sticks to boil the kettle. We can't have a coal fire this broiling weather. Hallo, are you still there, Skimpy?"

"Yes, Tom Merry. I want the details of the case—"

"Oh, scat! Why didn't you remain a Determinist instead of taking up this amateur detective rot?" demanded Tom Merry in an aggrieved tone.

"I have rather dropped Determinism of late, as I have been busy with the details of my new flying machine."

"Well, go and get on with the flying machine."

"I am at a momentary standstill in that, too," said the brainy man of the Shell. "I have the whole invention mapped out, with the exception of one detail—the means of raising the machine into the air. When I have solved that the thing will be completed; but I am at a temporary standstill in the matter."

"Ha, ha, ha! You had better go and think it out," said Manners, gently taking the youthful inventor by the arm and leading him to the door. "If D'Arcy won't give you that description, punch his head, or go back to Determinism, or go and build your airship, or go and eat coke. Good-bye!"

Skimpole found himself in the passage, and the study door was shut. The amateur detective blinked at the door, and then opened it and looked in.

"I say, Tom Merry— Ooooooch!"

A sardine, deftly aimed by Monty Lowther, caught Skimpole in his open mouth. He gasped and jumped back, and the door slammed again; and this time it was not reopened, and the chums of the Shell were left to have their tea in peace.

CHAPTER 3.

The Luck of Arthur Augustus.

"BLAKE!"

"Adsum!"

"Herries!"

"Adsum!"

"Digby!"

"Adsum!"

"D'Arcy!"

No reply.

"D'Arcy!"

Still silence. Mr. Railton, who was taking the roll call, looked up with a severe brow. Nobody was allowed to be late for evening call-over at St. Jim's, but the swell of the School House was evidently absent from the ranks of the Fourth.

"Young ass!" muttered Jack Blake. "Where can he have got to?"

"He went out after tea," said Digby. "He was mighty mysterious about it. But I was just going to cricket practice, so I didn't notice much."

"He had something on his chest, I know," Herries observed. "I asked him if he'd like to come and see me feed my bulldog, and he answered quite shortly."

"D'Arcy!" repeated Mr. Railton for the third time.

"Yaas, sir—I mean, adsum!"

It was a breathless voice at the door, and the eyes of the whole crowd in the hall were turned upon the newcomer.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But the School House swell was in a sorry plight.

His attire, usually the most elegant at St. Jim's, was mudd-spattered from head to foot, his collar was loose, and his tie hanging by one end, and his silk hat was a wreck. He was breathless and panting, and had evidently been running hard.

He came quickly to his place in the Fourth Form, and the other fellows drew back from contact with his muddy garments.

"My only hat!" muttered Blake. "Where have you been?"

"Looking for mud, I should say," remarked Digby.

"And finding it!" grinned Herries.

"Pway don't wot, deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy. "I have had a feahful time!"

"D'Arcy!" said Mr. Railton's stern voice.

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, yaas, sir."

"What do you mean by being late for calling-over and appearing here in that disgraceful state?"

"If you please, sir, I've had a feahful time——"

"Go and clean yourself instantly, and take fifty lines for being late."

"Weally, sir——"

"Go!"

And D'Arcy went. A suppressed cackle from the juniors followed him. The roll-call went on, and there were no

borrow from him preparatory to tracking down the villains. I asked him for it before he left St. Jim's, and he refused to give it to me, and refused to accept my co-operation."

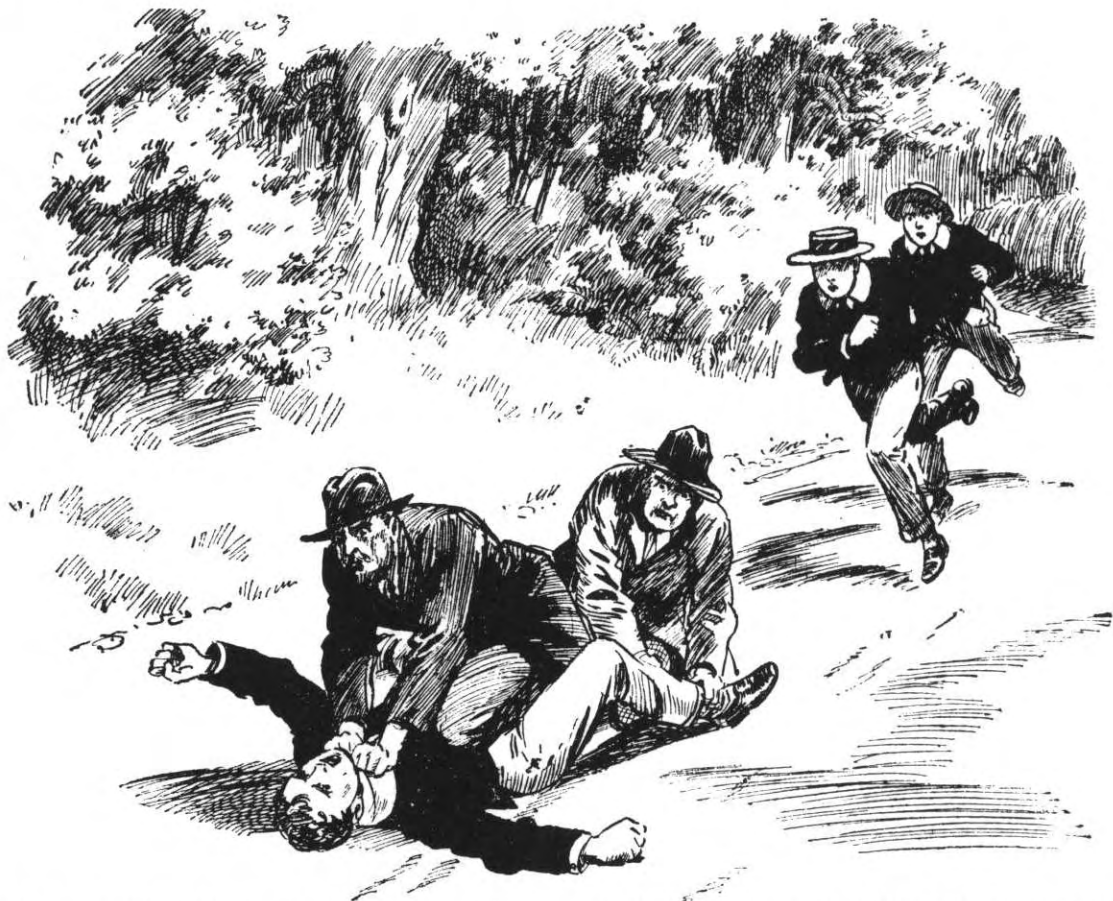
"No wonder," grinned Tom Merry, "considering the kind of a muck-up you made last time you started as an amateur detective."

"That was really not my fault. You see, I was incommoded by D'Arcy all the time, and one could hardly expect to make much progress, bothered by an ass like that! If you like to give me the description now, Tom Merry——"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I can't very well place the same case in the hands of two detectives," he replied gravely. "You must get Gussy to let you into it."

"H'm! Perhaps it's as well to observe professional etiquette," assented Skimpole. "I suppose I had better see D'Arcy."



In a moment Tom Merry was seized and borne to the ground by the two ruffians. "Help!" There was a thud of rapid footsteps in the lane, and Manners and Lowther came tearing to the rescue.

others absent. The school was dismissed, and Tom Merry joined the chums of Study No. 6 in the passage.

"What on earth has happened to Gussy?" he asked.

Blake laughed.

"Blessed if I know. He went out after tea with a mysterious look, and I thought he had something up his sleeve. Perhaps he's been attaching himself to the lady at the bunshop and got that in return."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"More likely something in the amateur detective line," chuckled Monty Lowther. "He may have been tracking down those footpads!"

"What footpads?" asked Jack Blake.

Tom explained.

Blake chuckled at the idea, and at that moment Skimpole of the Shell came along the passage and stopped.

"I wanted to speak to you chaps. Do you know where D'Arcy is?"

"In the bath-room at the present moment, I believe," said Blake. "What do you want him for?"

"He has a description of some footpads that I want to

And he hurried upstairs, and a moment later the juniors heard him knocking at the door of a bath-room.

Blake chuckled.

"Come up!" he said. "There will be some fun here."

Thump! Thump! Thump!

Skimpole was pounding on the door of the bath-room, inside which he could hear the swell of St. Jim's splashing away.

The voice of D'Arcy came from within.

"Who is there?"

"It's I, Skimpole."

"Then go away, you ass!"

"I want that description——"

"Wats! Go away!"

"But I want that description——"

"I uttally wufuse to let you have the descwipt! I wufuse to have the case bungled by a silly ass! Now go away. If I have to come out to you, I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Really, D'Arcy, I must insist——"

The door of the bath-room suddenly opened.

"Ah, thank you, D'Arcy! I—I—ow! Wooch!"

A shower of water shot from the open door, and Skimpole staggered back, drenched. The door of the bath-room slammed again, and a chuckle was heard.

Skimpole hurled himself forward at the door, but it was fastened within.

"Now pewwaps you will go away and stop wowwyin' me, you wottah!"

"You—you—I am quite wet."

"Then go and dry yourself."

And Skimpole apparently thought this advice good enough to be taken, for he drifted along the passage and disappeared. Five minutes later D'Arcy came out of the bath-room, grinning.

Blake slapped him on the shoulder.

"Where have you been, you ass?"

"Pway don't be so beastlay wuff, Blake!"

"Where have you been to get into that state?"

"Bai Jove, deah boys, I've had a feahful time! I left the coll to twack down the footpads who twied to wob Tom Mewwy, and—"

"And caught them?"

"Oh, no—"

"They caught you, then?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Not at all, deah boy. I had the howwid misfortune to wun into a lot of fellows fwom the Gwammah School."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah. They wushed at me, and I wan. There were a lot of them, you know; and, besides, I was too busy twackin' the wascally footpads to have time to thwash them. I wan ovah a wooden bwidge ovah a ditch, and slipped, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wogard this mewwiment as extwemely untimely. I had a most feahful expewience. They dwagged me out of the ditch, laughin' like a lot of wotten hyenas, and I felt too exhausted to thwack them. So I came back."

"Looking like a drowned rat," said Blake.

"Wcally, Blake—"

"You'd better give up amateur detective work!" grinned Tom Merry. "You ought to set up as a funny merchant, Gussy; that's nearer your mark."

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. I have had a momentary webuff, that is all, and I feel certain that I shall soon causo the awwest of those wuffians!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away with his nose in the air, leaving the juniors chuckling.

CHAPTER 4.

A Thief in the Night!

"Q U I E T!"

"I guess so, Silas Shucks."

"I'll have the pesky window open in a jiffy!"

It was night at St. Jim's—a hot, sultry, July night. Darkness lay upon the school; the hour of midnight had tolled from the tower, and all was again silent. Two dim forms had flitted through the darkness of the quadrangle, and stopped at the porch of the School House.

One was tall and the other short and thick-set. Both had caps pulled down over their brows. They seemed to breathe more freely when they were out of the open quadrangle in the dusk of the deep porch.

The taller of the two closely examined the fastening of the hall window that glimmered beside the stone pillars of the porch. He gave a chuckle.

"It's easy enough, Bunker. Only the old-fashioned catch, and the window opens on a hinge. It's dead easy."

"Good luck, Silas!"

"I'll have it open in a jiffy!"

There was a faint click in the gloom. Then a creak of the wooden window-frame.

Bunker drew a quick, deep breath.

"It's open?"

"I guess so."

"Mind, it's your idea, Silas, not mine. That's understood."

"Oh, stow your croaking!" growled Silas Shucks impatiently. "Of course it's my idea—it was my idea from the first, wasn't it, to make a fortune out of the little lord?"

"I know it; but this is a new development."

"It will make everything safe."

"Well, you're boss, and I follow your lead. Only, mind, it was your idea from start to finish. That's understood."

"Yes, that's understood. And now stow your cackle!" said Silas Shucks roughly.

The window swung back into the Hall. Silas Shucks put one leg over the sill, and peered intently into the dense

darkness before him. Slowly and dimly he made out the form of the objects there."

"All serene, Silas?"

"I guess so. Stow your cackle."

The long-limbed, loose-jointed rascal drew himself into the opening and disappeared into the darkness of the Hall. Bunker slowly followed. Then Silas Shucks' thin, wiry hand closed the window noiselessly, without fastening it.

"Come on!"

Silently, in rubber-soled shoes, the two ruffians stole up the stairs. Up to the second floor, till Silas Shucks opened a door, and the sound of regular breathing falling upon their ears warned them that it was a dormitory.

"Here we are, Bunker."

"Sure it's the right room?"

"No; but we shall soon see."

"But—"

"Stow your cackle."

Silas Shucks stepped into the room. He glanced towards the high windows, where there was a faint glimmer of starlight, and then at the row of white beds. He moved slowly and silently towards the beds, and now there was the glimmer of a tiny electric lamp in the palm of his hand.

He moved from bed to bed, allowing the light to fall for a moment upon the face of each sleeper, while he carefully scanned the features.

It was the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House that the ruffians had entered. The end bed was occupied by Jack Blake, and the next ones by his chums.

Silas Shucks glanced at Blake, and then at Herries, and then at Digby. He shook his head each time. Then he paused for a moment at the bed of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of the School House was sleeping soundly. His experiences as an amateur detective had doubtless exhausted him. He lay with his head on one side, and his aristocratic profile showing in the glow of the electric lamp. His lips moved, and he was murmuring something in his sleep.

Silas Shucks bent his head to listen.

"I wefuse to shut up!"

That was what Arthur Augustus was unconsciously murmuring, and the rascal bending over him grinned.

"I guess he's not the chap. He would do, but the other would do better—the pesky young rip who calls himself Tom Merry."

The next bed was occupied by Walsh, and the next by Mellish. Over the latter Silas Shucks gave an expressive sniff, as if of contempt, which would not have been flattering to Mellish if he could have heard it. Then he passed on till he had reached the end of the dormitory and scanned the face of every sleeper. Bunker was waiting, with repressed nervousness, at the door.

Silas Shucks finally shut off the electric glow, and joined him.

"Have you found him?"

"No."

"Then he's not here."

"Let's get out. One of them might wake, I guess."

They left the dormitory, and closed the door.

Bunker tapped his companion's arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"Find Tom Merry."

"He's not there."

"There must be more than one dormitory in a House this size. I know he is in this building, and I'm going to find him."

"How do you know?"

"There are two Houses—the School House and the New House—and Merry is a School House boy. I learned that much in Rylcombe from Mrs. Murphy. I suppose the Forms have separate dormitories, and Merry belongs to another Form. Come on."

"Well, it's your idea, not mine."

"Stow the cackle!"

A couple of minutes later Silas Shucks was opening the door of the Shell dormitory. It was an apartment similar to the Fourth Form room, only barely as large. The long-limbed ruffian entered, and again proceeded from bed to bed, allowing the glimmer of light to rest for a moment upon the face of each youthful sleeper.

He scanned the faces of Gore and Skimpole and Lowther and Manners. Then he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as his glance rested upon the face of Tom Merry.

Bunker stepped quickly to his side.

"Is that him?"

"I guess so."

They scanned the face of Tom Merry. Very handsome and frank that face looked, with the fine, healthy pink cheeks.

"He's wonderfully like," said Bunker, in a whisper.

"Didn't we mistake him for the other to-day?"

"I guess so; but if we saw them together—"

"That would show up a difference, of course; but they won't be seen together. This is your quarry at present."

"Well, it's your idea."

"Stow your cackle! Have you got the chloroform-pad?"

"Here it is."

"Hold the light, then."

Bunker held the torch, and Silas Shucks bent over the sleeping boy with the pad drenched in chloroform in his hand. The pad was slowly approached to the face of Tom Merry, and he breathed in the fumes unconsciously, and his sleep took on a sounder, deeper heaviness. Then the pad was pressed gently on his face. One start he gave, and that was all. Unconsciously he glided from sleep to insensibility.

Bunker drew a deep breath of relief. Silas Shucks grinned.

"I guess it was easy."

"We haven't got him away yet."

"That won't take long."

"What about his clothes?"

"We don't want his clothes. We've got clothes for him, haven't we?"

Bunker chuckled silently.

"I guess you're right, Silas."

"He can come as he is. It won't hurt him to be carried out in his pyjamas on a hot July night, I suppose? If we took his clothes we shouldn't be able to get rid of them without trouble."

"I reckon so."

"Lend me a hand with him."

The bedclothes were rolled back, and Tom Merry was lifted from the bed. The hero of the Shell was quite unconscious, and he did not make a single movement. He lay as limp as a dead body in the grasp of the kidnappers.

He was lifted into Silas Shucks' powerful arms, and carried silently away. The ruffians emerged from the dormitory, and Bunker closed the door. Then they stole down the stairs, Tom Merry's weight apparently being very little to the big American.

They halted at the unfastened window.

"Get out first, Bunker."

"I guess so, Silas Shucks."

"And don't jaw."

Bunker climbed through the window, and received the insensible junior into his arms. Then Silas Shucks followed, and the window was closed. The two ruffians quickly crossed the quadrangle, and Bunker climbed the wall, and drew Tom Merry up after him.

Shucks followed. In a couple of minutes the kidnappers stood in the lane. Still Tom Merry had not shown a sign of returning consciousness.

Silas Shucks bent over him and peered into his face, upon which a ray of starlight fell. It was deathly white, and the eyes were closed.

"He's all right for hours."

"I hope he's not—not—" Bunker stammered.

Silas Shucks interrupted him savagely.

"Do you think I am a fool? Stow the cackle, and bring him along."

In the black shadow of thick trees, at the first corner of the road, a small car was waiting. Tom Merry was lifted into it, and Silas Shucks started the engine.

Zip, zip!

The car whizzed away through the stillness of the night. And Tom Merry lay, white and quiet, deep in insensibility, while the rapidly revolving wheels bore him farther and farther away from St. Jim's.

And the school slept on.

CHAPTER 5.

The Disappearance of Tom Merry!

MONTY LOWTHER sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes, as the clang of the rising-bell rang upon the morning air. Then he yawned portentously.

"Hei-i-i-i-i-ho! I wish Taggles would get drowned some morning before he had a chance at that bell! I say, Manners, you lazy waster, wake up!"

"Gerooooogh!"

"Wake up! Tom Merry, wake up!" said Lowther, slipping out of bed and yawning again. "Get up, Lazybones! What do you mean by idling in bed when your uncle is up and doing? Get up—Why—what—how—"

Monty Lowther broke off, staring in amazement at Tom Merry's untenanted bed.

Manners sat up sleepily, and yawned.

"Is that the rising-bell? You up, Monty?"

"Yes. I say, do you know when Tom Merry got up?"

"No. Is he up?" asked Manners, looking round.

"His bed's empty, anyway."

"Well, that's presumptive evidence that he's up, at all

events," yawned Manners. "I suppose he's gone out for a spin in the early morning—ugh!"

"Then he's gone out without his clothes," said Lowther, pointing to Tom Merry's garments, neatly folded up beside his bed, as usual.

Manners stared.

"My hat! Yes. Perhaps he brought his cycling things into the dormitory last night, and put them on when he got up."

"He wouldn't dress without his underclothing, I suppose?"

"No, I suppose he wouldn't."

"He's gone off in his pyjamas," said Lowther. "Has our friend Thomas taken to sleepwalking, or has he gone for an early-morning dip in the Rhyl?"

Manners laughed.

"An early morning dip, I expect," he replied.

"Like his cheek to go without waking us up, then!"

growled Lowther. "I should have liked a dip in the river this morning, if I had thought of it. I'll punch his head when he comes in."

The chums of the Shell dressed, expecting every moment to see Tom Merry enter the dormitory, glowing from a morning swim. But the hero of the Shell did not come in. His absence troubled the chums. They went downstairs, and near the door of the dining-hall they encountered the chums of Study No. 6, who were looking in to see if breakfast was ready.

"Have you seen Tom Merry?" asked Lowther.

"I saw him last evenin', deah boy."

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Lowthah. I—"

"Have you seen Tom Merry this morning, any of you? He came down before any of us, and the curious thing is that he came down in his pyjamas," said Lowther. "I suppose he had a bathing-cloak round him to cross the quad in. But if he's gone for a morning dip he ought to be in by now."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps he is drowned," suggested Arthur Augustus.

Lowther gave the swell of the School House a dig in the ribs that sent him staggering against the wall. He brought up against the wall, and then slid down into a sitting position close to the wainscot. There he sat for some moments, staring in amazed bewilderment at Monty Lowther.

"What did you do that for?" he gasped at last.

"That's in acknowledgment of your cheerful suggestion," explained Monty Lowther.

"You uttah wottah!"

"Tom Merry's not the sort to get drowned," said Jack Blake. "It's rather curious his not coming in, though. Are you sure he went to the river?"

"Where else could he have gone in his pyjamas?"

"True."

"Lowthah, you have tweeked me with gwoss diswesspect!"

"Oh, ring off, ass!"

"I wefuse to wing off. I absolutely wefuse to be called an ass. You have tweeked me with such gwoss diswesspect that I have no alternative but to administah to you a feafthl thwashin'!"

"I can't make out where Tom is—"

"Put up your beastlay fists, Lowthah. I am goin' to thwash you!"

"Oh, get off, Gussy! I haven't any time for rotting now!"

"I am not wottin', Lowthah. You have tweeked me with gwoss diswesspect, and I am goin' to chastise you severely. Pway put up your wotten fists, you wottah!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I—"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "Something may have happened to Tom Merry, and, if so, this isn't the time to get ragging. Shut up, Gussy!"

"That's all vewy well, Blake. I should be weally sowwy if anythin' had happened to Tom Mewwy, but I cannot allow any boundah to tweek me with diswesspect!"

"Gussy, old man, here's a chance for you to show your skill as a bloughound!" exclaimed Digby. "Tom Merry has mysteriously disappeared. Find him."

"I don't weally believe he has disappeahed at all!"

"Well, he can't be found."

"Which really amounts to the same thing," said Herries. D'Arcy looked thoughtful.

"Vewy well, Blake, undah the circs I will postpone thwashin' Lowthah, and will find Tom Mewwy. Perwaps he has been cawwied away by the current, or perwaps he had the cwamp or somethin'. The pwopah place to look for him is by the wivah."

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Skimpole, who had

come by in time to catch something of what was being said.

"Haven't you found Merry yet, Lowther?"

"No!" growled Lowther.

"That is very singular. If you can furnish me with a clue, I shall be happy to look for him, and—"

"I'll furnish you with a thick ear, if you talk your silly rot while I'm worried!" growled Monty Lowther.

"I regard that as almost rude, Lowther."

"I will go and look by the wivah," said D'Arcy. "You can come along if you like, Skimpole, and I will put you up to a wrinkle in detective methods."

"A wrinkle! What do you mean by a wrinkle? There are no wrinkles in the river. I believe they are a kind of shell-fish found only at the seaside."

"He means a wrinkle!" grinned Jack Blake.

"Oh, I see! As a matter of fact, D'Arcy, it is I who am more fitted to give you instructions—"

"Oh, don't talk wot, Skimpole, old chap!"

"I am talking sense. With your defective intellect—"

"My what?"

"Your defective intellect, you naturally require the assistance of a more powerful brain. I am willing to help you—"

"Of all the uthah asses!"

"Of all the silly dummies!"

The voices of the rival detectives died away. But the group of juniors in the passage were looking serious. Lowther and Manners were worried.

"Nothing can have happened to him," said Blake.

"Then where is he?"

"Blessed if I can guess. It can't be a trick of Figgins & Co., can it?" exclaimed Blake suddenly, as a new idea struck him.

The chums of the Shell brightened up. Figgins & Co., the chiefs of the juniors of the New House, were at perpetual warfare with the School House juniors, and there was no end to their raids against the rival House. True, they had never gone so far as to carry off one of the School House leaders in the night; but there was no telling as to what length Figgys' audacity might go.

"My hat!" exclaimed Manners. "I never thought of that. Of course, it is a jape of Figgins & Co. They've collared Tom Merry."

"Caught him as he came back from the river, of course," said Lowther. "And they're chuckling over us now, I suppose. Perhaps they're going to hold him to ransom, as we did one of the New House rotters once."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Digby thoughtfully. "But it's rather curious about Merry having gone down to the river in his pyjamas, isn't it?"

"I suppose he had a wrap."

"H'm! That's all very well at the seaside."

"Well, it's the only thing I can think of," said Lowther. "Unless Figgins & Co. raided the School House in the night and collared him out of bed."

"That's what I was thinking of," said Blake.

"I don't see how they could get him away without a row."

"It's a puzzle, certainly. But—Hullo! What's that?" Blake had glanced round and seen two figures standing by the Hall window, talking seriously, with very grave faces. They were Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, and Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of the school.

"Something up," said Manners.

"Looks like it."

The captain of St. Jim's left the Housemaster, who went into his study. Kildare came along towards the juniors and stopped, scanning their surprised faces with his blue, Irish eyes.

"Did any of you young rascals break bounds last night?" he asked.

"No, Kildare."

"H'm! Well, someone did. The hall window was found unfastened on the inside this morning. Somebody left it open last night."

"Perhaps it was a burglar," suggested Herries.

"Nothing has been stolen that can be discovered, and there was no alarm. It looks as if somebody has been breaking bounds. The matter is going to be inquired into, and there will be a row."

And Kildare passed on, a grim expression on his handsome face, leaving the juniors looking at one another significantly.

"That makes it pretty clear, I think," said Blake. "If any School House fellow had broken bounds, he wouldn't have been ass enough to leave the window unfastened to show what he's been doing. But if Figgins & Co. got the window open from the outside, they couldn't fasten it before leaving."

"It's quite clear," said Monty Lowther. "Figgins & Co. worked the little trick; though how they managed it I don't know."

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exactly understand. They took Tom Merry out before any of us were awake, and had to leave the window unfastened. What surprises me is that we haven't heard from them. They must release Tom in time for morning calling-over."

"Well, they shall hear from us," said Blake. "Come on, and let's look for them."

"Right you are."

The juniors hurried out into the quadrangle. Three youths were strolling down the path by the New House, chatting together, and it did not need a second glance to show that they were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—famous in St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.

"There they are!"

"Go for 'em!" muttered Lowther.

The School House juniors made a sudden rush. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn heard the hurried steps on the gravel walk, and turned quickly—but not quickly enough. The School House juniors were upon them, and in a twinkling the New House trio were sprawling in the gravel, and the assailants were sprawling victoriously over them.

CHAPTER 6.

A Strange Mystery!

"WHERE is Tom Merry?"

Monty Lowther, sitting on Figgins' chest, pronounced that question, while at the same time he industriously rubbed Figgins' head in the gravel, taking a handy grip of his hair to enable him to do so.

Figgins gave a howl.

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Where's Tom Merry?"

"Blow Tom Merry!"

"Let me gerrup!" gasped Fatty Wynn, breathless under the combined weight of Blake and Digby. "I am out of breath, you rotters! Let me get up!"

"Where's Tom Merry?" demanded Blake.

"Hang Tom Merry!"

"Ow, you cads!" gasped Kerr, making a desperate effort to tear himself loose from the grip of Manners and Herries.

"Ow, you rotters! Ow, you beasts!"

"Where's Tom Merry?"

"Confound Tom Merry!"

"They won't tell us!" grinned Blake. "Very well, we'll rub their heads in the gravel till they do. Say when you've had enough, Figgys."

"You—you—you—gr-r-r-r!"

"Say when."

"Nuff!" gasped Figgins. "Stop it! What's the matter? Are you all off your silly rockers? Pax, you confounded asses! What's the row about?"

"Where's Tom Merry?"

"Tom Merry! How should I know?"

"Well, you ought to know," chuckled Blake, "as you sneaked into the School House last night and whisked him off!"

"Off your onion?"

"Do you mean to say that you didn't?"

"Of course I didn't."

"Look here, Figgys, that won't wash! Tom Merry disappeared from his bed before we got up this morning," said Monty Lowther. "Either he went down to the river for a bathe, and was collared as he came back, or he was taken out of the dormitory."

"Well, we didn't take him," said Figgins. "Do you think we've got nothing better to do than to go around collecting up your old rubbish—Ow!"

"Is that honour bright, Figgys?" asked Blake.

"Yes, honour bright."

"I dare say we've been a little hasty, come to think of it," said Lowther, getting off Figgins' chest.

"I dare say you have!" howled Figgins. "And I dare say I'm going to give you the hiding of your life for it!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Figgys!" said Blake. "We naturally jumped to the conclusion that you had done it. We didn't think any of the other fellows in the New House would have the confounded nerve, you know."

"Well, they didn't," said Figgins. "If Tom Merry has lost himself, you'd better put an advert in the paper for him. I don't know anything about him."

"Look here! Some of you chaps have got him somewhere," explained Lowther, "and we're going to have him! Understand that?"

"I tell you you're on the wrong track," said Figgins. "Do you think any fellow in my House would try on a jape like that without my knowledge? Why, I'd snatch him bald-headed for his cheek, if he did! I'm boss of the New House juniors, I can tell you! There's not two parties in my House always ragging one another, as there are in that old casual ward you call a School House!"

"Rather!" said Kerr. "It's honour bright, you chaps. Tom Merry hasn't been raided away by any of us."

"You're quite on the wrong track," said Fatty Wynn. "You've taken all my breath away, too, by jumping on me like that. Under the circumstances, I don't see how you can do less than stand a feed in compensation."

Monty Lowther was looking worried.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "A window was found unfastened in the School House this morning. Tom Merry was gone before we woke up, and he was gone without his clothes. If it wasn't a New House raid, what has become of him?"

Figgins gave a whistle.

"Surely nothing can have happened——"

"Let's get down to the river!" said Blake abruptly.

Skimpole could be seen, apparently engaged in an excited argument.

The juniors hurried towards them.

"Have you seen anything of Tom Merry?" asked Lowther quickly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No, certainly not!"

"Well, you don't agree, that's certain," said Blake. "What do you mean by saying that you have seen him, D'Arcy?"

"I haven't pwecisely seen him, deah boy, but I have found his footpwint," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Nothing of the sort," said Skimpole. "It's too large for Tom Merry's footprint, and I have not the slightest



The door of the bath-room suddenly opened. "Ah, thank you, D'Arcy," began Skimpole. "I—I—ow! Wooo!" A shower of water shot from the open door and Skimpole staggered back, drenched. "Now pewwaps you will go away and stop wowwyin' me, you wottah!" said D'Arcy.

The School House juniors left the gates of St. Jim's. Figgins & Co. accompanied them. There might be endless warfare between the two Houses at St. Jim's, but at a moment when matters seemed to assume a serious aspect, the juniors could be trusted to stand by one another, shoulder to shoulder. Figgins & Co. were as concerned at the thought that something might have happened to Tom Merry as his own chums were.

"Hallo, Taggles!" exclaimed Figgins, catching sight of the school porter. "Has Tom Merry been out this morning?"

"Which I ain't seen him," said Taggles.

"Let's get down to the river," said Monty Lowther, in a low voice.

They hurried on to the green sloping bank of the silvery Rhyl. The river danced and glimmered in the morning sun. There was no one near the school boathouse, which was locked up, but farther down the river Arthur Augustus and

doubt that it is the footprint of a tall man, about five feet nine in height, with grey side-whiskers, and——"

"Oh, cheese that! Where is the footprint?" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"It is here, deah boy."

"Yes, that is it, Blake. The deep indentation shows that the person who made the mark possessed considerable weight, and I therefore deduce that he was a tall man. From the circumstance that——"

"You unutterable idiots!" said Blake, looking at the indentation in the grassy bank the amateur detective pointed out to him. "Is that it?"

"That is it, deah boy, and I wefuse to be chawactewised as an unuttewable idiot! That expwession applies vewy well to Skimpole, but——"

"Can't you see that it is the hoof-mark from a cow or a bullock?" howled Blake. "It's not a human footprint at all!"

"I wufuse to admit anythin' of the sort. It is Mewwy's footpwt—"

"It is the footprint of a tall man with grey—"

"There's no sign of him here," said Blake, turning away. "That mark was made by some animal that strayed on the river-bank. There are dozens of the marks here. If Tom Merry came down to the river, where is he?"

The juniors did not answer, but a mist came over the eyes of some of them.

Where was Tom Merry? Could the shining, gurgling river have told a tale of a tragedy?

"But we have no proof that he came down to the river," went on Blake hastily. "That was just a surmise, that's all. Let's get back to the school—he may have turned up."

"But if he hasn't—"

"If he hasn't, we had better speak to Mr. Railton. There must be something wrong."

The juniors re-entered the gates of St. Jim's. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was crossing the quad, and he called to Figgins & Co.

"You will be late for breakfast! What is the matter? Has anything happened?" the prefect added, as he saw the lugubrious look of the juniors.

Blake explained. The prefect's brow grew very grave.

"That is strange!" he said. "If Tom Merry is not in the School House when you get in, I should advise you to speak at once to Mr. Railton."

Tom Merry was not in the School House. His singular absence was now being commented upon by all the Fourth and the Shell who boarded in the House.

Where was Tom Merry?

That was the question that was exercising every mind.

"Better speak to Mr. Railton," said Lowther.

"Nothing else to be done," assented Blake.

Mr. Railton was talking to Kildare in the Hall. Blake crossed over to him, and the Housemaster looked down curiously at the pale and anxious face of the junior.

"What is the matter, Blake?"

"Tom Merry has disappeared, sir!"

"What?"

Lowther explained how Tom Merry had been missed from the dormitory. The Housemaster listened with surprise that was soon tintured with alarm.

"You have done quite right to tell me, my lads," he said,

after a pause. "The matter must certainly be looked into at once."

The juniors went into the dining-room. But Tom Merry's accustomed place at the Shell table was empty, and Mr. Railton, too, was absent from the senior table.

Where was Tom Merry?

The question haunted every mind, and it was a miserable meal that Tom Merry's chums made that morning.

CHAPTER 7.

Awake or Dreaming!

TOM MERRY awoke.

He came to with a sudden start out of a tangled dream.

There was a blaze of light in his opening eyes, and his head was aching dully. He lay in the thick, rich grass and blinked at the sunny sky.

For some moments he lay without thinking, simply gazing at the sunny heavens, feeling the scorch of the July sun on his cheeks and hearing the buzz of insects in the long grass.

Then, with a flash, memory returned.

He started and struggled up into a sitting posture, a cry of amazement breaking from his lips.

Where was he?

What had happened?

Round him stretched the grassy moor—mile on mile of rough grassland, glowing in the morning sunlight. Away on the skyline a belt of trees broke the level, but there was no sign of a human being, no trace of human habitation.

Tom Merry passed his hand over his brow.

Was he dreaming still? In his vision strange forms and fancies had been mingled together—Figgins & Co., the Grammar School boys, and the cunning, low-browed faces of the two ruffians who had assailed him in Rylcombe Lane; strange faces and forms jumbled together, with a sense of oppression, of suffocation! He had come out of it all with a start. But was he awake?

He had gone to bed as usual in the Shell dormitory, at the School House at St. Jim's. He had awakened—where?

He gazed at the rolling, grassy expanse in utter amazement. He pinched his arm to make sure that he was not dreaming.

He was awake! Then what did it mean?

He staggered to his feet, and gazed round him. Grass and sky—sky and grass! Nothing else met his view! A feeling of weakness overcame him, and he sank down into the grass again.

Why was he feeling so exhausted? He usually awoke in the morning as fresh as a lark! What was that strange throbbing heaviness in his head? Above all, how came he out here on the grass under the sky, instead of awakening in his bed in the School House dormitory?

He sat up again. He had not the faintest recollection of having risen from bed, or having dressed himself. Yet he must have done so, for he was fully dressed, even to necktie and gloves.

What did it all mean?

A terrible thought flashed through his mind for a moment that his mind was wandering—that the blue sky, the green grass, were the disordered visions of a sick brain. But that did not last long. He was sane enough—he was himself—but there was a mystery in it that he could not solve.

He had never, that he knew of, been giving to sleep-walking. Yet that was the only reasonable explanation that occurred to him.

In a fit of somnambulism, he had left his bed and dressed himself, and wandered away from the school. Yet where had he arrived? This scenery was strange to him. There was a moor within a few miles of St. Jim's, certainly, but he knew it well, and it was not this moor. He was on strange land.

"Good heavens!" murmured Tom Merry. "What has happened? If I am not mad, what has happened? I cannot have wandered here; this is nowhere near St. Jim's. If I was brought here—how—by whom? How was it I did not awake?"

He staggered up again, and stood unsteadily. He passed his hand across his brow, and as he did so the glimmer of his sleeve-link caught his eye. He looked at it again in wonder. A diamond flashed in the link of his shirt-cuff, and Tom Merry had never worn diamond sleeve-links in his life.

He examined them again. They were handsome and valuable links, but they did not belong to him, and he had never seen them before. Then he looked further—he glanced at his clothes, his gloves, his boots. They were all of the best cut, but they were not his own.

Tom Merry gasped. It seemed to him as if the sky was turning round and round. It was mystery on mystery,

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bewilderment on bewilderment. How came he here, wearing clothes that belonged to someone else, in a place he had never seen before?

"If I'm not off my rocker," murmured Tom Merry, "somebody else must have been, to play this mad trick on me!"

In the hope of discovering something that might elucidate the mystery, he ran his hands through his pockets. He was wearing a gold chain, and he pulled a gold watch from his pocket. It was a very valuable one, and there was a monogram on the back in brilliant—"R. G."

"R. G." The letters seemed to dance before the eyes of Tom Merry. He usually wore a silver watch himself, with his monogram plainly engraved on the back of the case; but his monogram was "T. M."

Who was "R. G."?

How came his watch in Tom Merry's pocket? It was pretty plain that he was wearing "R. G.'s" clothes as well as his watch. But how—why?

He searched further. There was money in one of the pockets of the trousers—a handful of silver. In a note-case were two pound-notes. He had not been robbed—or, rather, the person whose clothes he was wearing had not been robbed. What could it mean?

There was a silver pencil-case, bearing the same monogram, in another pocket, and a folded letter. The letter commenced: "My dear Reggie."

"Reggie!" Reginald was evidently the Christian name of the unknown "R. G."

Tom Merry did not read the letter. It was in a feminine hand. He thrust it into his pocket again. It belonged to the unknown Reggie, and he had no right to read it.

"Well, of all the idiotic happenings that ever happened, this takes the biscuit!" murmured Tom Merry, in amazement.

The situation was so strange, so startling, that he could not even attempt to grasp it. He became conscious of the fact that he was hungry, and again his eyes swept the wide horizon for a sign of human habitation.

Here he was, far—he did not know how far—from St. Jim's, dressed in another fellow's clothes, and with another fellow's money in his pockets!

He was alarmed and amazed, and yet inclined to laugh. It seemed all too absurd to be true; and yet there was no doubt about it. He looked at the watch, and found that it was going. The hand indicated nine o'clock.

"By Jove! They've done breakfast at St. Jim's now," he muttered. "I wish I had had some, too. I'm jolly hungry. Morning chapel now—and without me there along with the Shell! I wonder what they think of my being away? I suppose I am Tom Merry—and not Reggie! I suppose I'm not off my rocker!"

There really seemed room for doubt.

"Reggie, or Tom Merry, I know I'm jolly hungry!" muttered the junior, with a touch of his old humour. "I've got money in my pockets, so there's no need to starve. It's not my money, but I can refund it to Reggie, whoever he may be, when I meet him. And I'll make the bouncer explain how it is I happen to be in his clothes instead of my own, confound him! It's a lark, I suppose, of some kind, though I'm blessed if I can make out how it was worked."

He scanned the horizon. Over the belt of trees he saw a dim patch of grey on the sky, and he guessed that it was caused by the smoke of a farmhouse. He set out towards it. The keen breeze of morning was invigorating, and the junior's strength returned to him as he tramped across the grassy moor.

In a quarter of an hour he came in sight of the farm buildings through openings in the scrubby trees. The smoke proceeded from a heap of rubbish that was being burned in the yard, and a man in corduroy trousers and big boots was poking it with a pitchfork to make it flare up.

"Good-morning!" said Tom Merry.

The man looked round.

"Marnin', zur!"

Then he resumed poking the fire.

"Can I get some breakfast here?" asked Tom Merry, with a smile. "I have money to pay for it."

The man jerked his head towards the farmhouse.

"Ask t' master."

Tom Merry walked on. A stout woman in an apron was at the door, and she answered his greeting cheerfully. She looked at him curiously when he asked for breakfast, evidently wondering what he was doing in that lonely quarter at such an early hour, in clothes so unsuitable for the moors. But breakfast was soon forthcoming, and Tom Merry ate heartily of the plain and wholesome fare, and felt more like himself as it went down.

"Can you tell me the road to the nearest town?" he asked. The farmer's wife was watching him curiously.

"You follow the cart-track, and turn to the left at the end," she said; "then along the lane till you come to the finger-post."

"Is it far?"

"About four mile."

"I have lost my way," explained Tom Merry. "I don't know exactly where I am. What is the name of the town?"

"Westlake."

Tom Merry had never heard of it before. He reflected that it was probably some small country place, dignified with the name of town by the farmer folk who had never seen a city.

"And what is the name of this moor?" he asked.

"West Moor."

"And—and what county is it in?" asked Tom Merry, almost desperately. He felt that he must have some clue to his surroundings.

The woman stared, as well she might.

"You don't know what county you are in?" she exclaimed.

"I have lost my way."

"Well, Hampshire."

Tom Merry jumped.

"Hampshire?"

"Yes, for sure."

Tom Merry drank his tea meditatively. Wonders were piling on wonders. He had gone to bed in Sussex, and he awoke in Hampshire. What did it all mean?

He did not stay long at the farmhouse. The good woman evidently regarded him as rather wrong in his head. She refused any payment for the breakfast, however, and Tom Merry went on his way with the money of the unknown "Reggie" still intact in his pocket.

CHAPTER 8.

P.-c. Wright Makes a Discovery!

THE sun was high in the heavens, beating down upon the open track with scorching heat. Tom Merry was wearing a silk hat which he had found close to his head when he awoke in the grass on the moor. It was little protection from the sun. He pushed it to the back of his head, and took off his gloves and put them in his pocket. It was hot and dusty on the farm cart-track, and when he reached the lane it was not much better.

The lane ran between high hawthorn hedges, a ribbon of white through the green country. The hedges afforded no shelter from the sun. Tom Merry was tempted to throw himself down under one of them and rest—but he did not. The desire to find out where he was, and what it all meant, was growing upon him intensely.

He tramped doggedly on, his face burnt by the blaze of the sun, the perspiration clotting on his brow. He glanced at his watch. Morning lessons were in full swing at St. Jim's now; what did the fellows think of his absence? He tried to picture to himself what Manners and Lowther would be thinking—and Blake—and Figgins! But he could not. He felt that his vanishing in so inexplicable a way must have taken his friends completely off their balance. He could not imagine what they might surmise on the subject.

"Ah, that's the finger-post!"

The finger-post cast a bar of shade across the lane like a letter T. Tom Merry paused and looked up at it.

"Westlake, three miles."

Three more miles in that blazing sun! Tom Merry threw himself into the thick grass that grew round the foot of the post, and leaned back against the wood wearily.

He was thirsty now, and the dull ache in his head seemed to be returning. The sun beat down upon him till he wondered whether his brain was swimming. In that savage glare of sunlight he seemed unable to think or reflect.

There was a footstep in the dusty lane.

Tom Merry looked up. It was a country policeman, with a ruddy, somewhat jolly face, perspiring now in the heat of the July morning.

He glanced at the boy sitting in the grass, leaning against the rough, wooden post, and stopped, with a cheery nod.

"Hot, sir!" he remarked.

"Jolly hot!" said Tom Merry.

The policeman looked at him curiously. Doubtless, like the farmer's wife, he thought Tom Merry's attire uncommon for a lad tramping in the country lanes that morning.

"Got far to go?" he asked curiously.

"I don't know," said Tom Merry frankly. "Have you ever heard of St. Jim's—St. James' Collegiate School, near Rylcombe, in Sussex?"

The policeman shook his head.

"I belong there," said Tom Merry. "I—I've lost my way. If you could show me a way of getting back there—"

"Never heard of the place," said the policeman, looking

at him more and more scrutinisingly. "If you belong to a school in Sussex, how do you come here?"

Tom Merry was silent. He was greatly inclined to tell the man the whole story—he seemed an intelligent fellow—but he hesitated. It was so strange, so unheard-of that the man was almost certain not to believe him.

"How did you come here?" repeated the constable.

"I've lost my way."

"But you must have come a good many miles."

Tom Merry did not answer.

"Better tell the truth, young man. You've run away from school, I suppose, and want to get back again?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"Nothing of the sort."

The policeman laughed.

"Then how did you get here?"

"I don't know."

"Come, come, that's a little too thick. What's your name?"

"Tom Merry."

"Tom Merry! H'm! And you don't know how you got here?"

The policeman laughed. But suddenly he broke off, as he scanned Tom Merry's face more closely, and uttered a sharp exclamation:

"By Jupiter!"

Tom Merry stared at him. A new and inexplicable excitement had come into the man's manner. He was staring blankly and amazedly at Tom Merry, and, fumbling in his pocket, he drew out a crumpled blue paper, and looked over it, and then looked at Tom Merry, and then at the paper again.

"About fifteen—good; dark eyes—good; curly hair—good; wearing a gold watch with the monogram 'R. G.'—by Jupiter!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Tom Merry sharply.

The policeman came closer to him.

"Will you let me see your watch, sir?"

"I—I haven't my watch—"

"You are wearing a chain—"

"Yes, but—"

The man stooped and suddenly jerked the chain, and the gold watch glistered in the sunlight. Tom Merry turned crimson, and he saw the mocking look of unbelief in the policeman's face.

"I didn't mean that I hadn't a watch!" he exclaimed hotly. "I mean that I hadn't my watch. This watch isn't mine."

"Whose is it, then?"

"I—I don't know."

The policeman smiled. The reply indeed seemed absurd enough. He turned the watch over and glanced at the monogram on the case.

"'R. G.'"

"It's not my watch," said Tom Merry. "These are not my clothes. I was wearing them when I woke up, you see—"

"Not your watch—and not your clothes! How did you come to be wearing them, then?" said the policeman, with a grin.

"I don't know."

"I'm afraid that won't wash, young man. The game's up, you know."

"What!"

"I tell you the game's up. I know you."

Tom Merry's face became crimson again. His situation was so inexplicable that it was certainly open to suspicion, but—

"If you think I stole this watch—" he broke out angrily.

The policeman laughed.

"I don't think anything of the kind. You couldn't steal what's your own, I suppose."

"It's not my own. I don't know to whom it belongs. I don't know to whom these clothes belong. I tell you—"

"Come, come, you can't expect me to swallow a yarn like that!" said the man, with a touch of impatience. "It's too ridiculous on the face of it, you know."

"I know it sounds strange."

"I should say so. I have told you the game is up, and it's no good you sticking it out any longer."

"But I don't understand. What game is up?"

"The little game you have been playing, young master."

Tom Merry looked utterly bewildered.

"But I haven't been playing any game. I don't understand."

"Come, come! Now you're found out you may as well own up. You were not kidnapped at all, I know that now."

"Kidnapped!" said Tom Merry, with a start.

"Yes; that's what all the country has supposed."

"All the country!" said Tom Merry dazedly.

"Perhaps you don't know that your disappearance from home has made a row all over the shop," said the policeman, "and that your description is in the hands of the police in all the southern counties."

"My—my description."

"Of course. Do you think your mother wouldn't have you looked for?"

"My mother! Are you mad? My mother died when I was a baby!"

"Oh, stop that!" exclaimed the policeman testily. "Your mother has offered a reward of two hundred pounds for your recovery—and I've recovered you."

"Either you are mad, or I am," cried Tom Merry. "In the name of all that's idiotic, whom do you take me for?"

"You name your own name well enough."

"My name is Tom Merry."

"Gammon."

"I belong to the Shell Form at St. Jim's."

"Oh, chuck it! You can't impose on me! I'm not a country yokel—I'm from London," said the policeman. "I know a thing or two, my lad, and you can't take me in with yarns about schools and Shells, or whatever you're talking about. You must come along with me."

"I don't mind coming with you, but—"

"Well, come along, then."

Tom Merry rose to his feet. He was more amazed than ever. The policeman evidently took him for someone he was not—and that someone was undoubtedly the person whose clothes he was wearing. But how had he come into that person's clothes—and what did it all mean? Was it all a mad dream, and was he really asleep in his bed in the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's?

"You wasn't kidnapped, after all," grinned the policeman. "You left home on your own accord—I can see that now. Though why you should do it is a mystery to me. The description only reached us this morning, and it was fresh in my mind, or I mightn't have noticed! But I've found you!"

"I tell you—"

Potts, the Office Boy!



There was a rattle of wheels in the lane. A farmer's cart was approaching at a trot. The policeman held up his hand.

The cart clattered to a halt, and the driver looked inquiringly at the policeman. The latter caught Tom Merry by the shoulder.

"I want you to give me a lift to Westlake, Giles."

"Ay, ay, Master Wright," said Giles.

"Let go my shoulder," said Tom Merry.

"You've got to come with me."

"I will come with you, but I will not be taken like a criminal," said Tom Merry, with a flash in his eyes.

The policeman looked at him for a moment, then released him.

"Well, come on, then!" he said.

Tom Merry clambered into the cart, and the policeman followed.

Giles looked at the boy with a slow grin.

"Poaching?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Run away from home."

"T' young roggs," said Giles.

And he drove on. Tom Merry was a prisoner, but he was glad of the lift to the town. The cart drove at last into the streets of Westlake—a little old-fashioned country town, alive only on market days. It stopped before the police station, and there Tom Merry and his captor alighted.

The constable nodded to Giles, who drove on. Then he entered the station with Tom Merry. A little fat inspector with an important manner met him, and looked at him eagerly.

"I found him, sir," said Constable Wright.

"Eh?"

"I've found him."

"Found who?"

"Lord Reginald Grahame."

Tom Merry gave a jump. The little fat inspector jumped, too.

"Nonsense, Wright! The description was only sent down here on the off-chance. The kidnapped boy has been taken to London—at least, the police in the district believe so—and the famous detective, Ferrers Locke, is looking for him there. What do you mean by saying you have found him? Don't talk nonsense, Wright."

"Look at him, sir—and look at the description—especially of the clothes. Look at this, sir!"

P-o Wright jerked out the gold watch, and showed the glittering monogram to the startled gaze of the inspector.

"By George, you're right—you've found him!"

CHAPTER 9.

Still Missing!

"**B**AI Jove, you know, I am feelin' completely wotten!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who made that observation, in an exceedingly lugubrious tone.

Morning school was over at St. Jim's, but the chums of Study No. 6 had not gone down to the river or the cricket field. They stood in a serious group in the quadrangle, with sad and thoughtful faces. D'Arcy's remark endorsed the general feeling. The juniors were all feeling decidedly "rotten."

"You're right, Gussy, it's rotten," said Jack Blake, with a sigh. "What on earth has become of Tom Merry?"

"I simply can't imagine," said Digby. "We must give up the idea that he went down to the river and had an accident there. The place has been thoroughly searched."

"Then where is he?" said Herries.

"That's a mystery."

"The only explanation is, that he wandered off somewhere in his sleep," said Digby. "But he never walked in his sleep before."

"But he'd have wakened up by now, deah boy, and we should have heard from him."

"Yes, that's so, too."

"My ideah is that he has been cawwied off," said Arthur Augustus, with a wrinkle of thoughtfulness on his brow. "You know the hall window was found unfastened. He has been cawwied off by some wotten boundah!"

"Why?"

"That's a mystewy. You wemembah the two wuffians who attacked him in the lane—they didn't twy to wob him, you know, but just to dwag him into the wood—and that looked as if they wanted to cawwy him off."

"How do you know that?"

"Lowthah says so, and Tom Mewwy told me so himself last evenin'."

"I say, Lowther."

Manners and Lowther were walking by, their hands deep in their pockets, their faces dark and restless. They came towards the chums of the Fourth as Blake called.

"Haven't heard anything, have you?" exclaimed Lowther eagerly.

"No," said Blake. "But an idea has occurred to us—"

"To me, deah boy."

"Well, to Gussy. What about those chaps who went for Tom Merry yesterday soon after midday—a couple of foot pads, weren't they?"

Lowther started.

"Yes. I had forgotten them."

"Did they try to rob Tom Merry, or to yank him off somewhere?"

"Well, they didn't seem to want to rob him," said Lowther reflectively. "They were trying to get him into the wood, I think. I suppose they thought it was safer to go through his pockets there."

"That's it," said Manners.

"But they told him a yarn about having mistaken him for somebody else," went on Lowther. "They made out that it wasn't Tom Merry they wanted at all."

"They may have lied—in fact, most likely they did. They may have been going to kidnap him, for some reason we don't know—and as you chaps came up and stopped them they did it last night instead!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

"My hat!" said Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder! It looks like it!"

"Fortunately, I have their descriptions," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I obtained them from Tom Mewwy when I took up the case—"

"That wouldn't matter," said Lowther. "Manners and I could give their descriptions if they were wanted."

"By Jove, yaas! I nevah thought of that, you know!"

"Hallo, here's Figgins, and he looks as if he had news!" exclaimed Digby, as the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors came sudding across the quadrangle.

Figgins stopped, panting for breath.

"Any news?" demanded Manners and Lowther together.



HE DIDN'T DUCK!

"Yes, rather!"

"About Tom Merry?"

"No; but I dare say it has a bearing on the case."

Lowther and his chum looked disappointed. But the Fourth-Formers plied Figgins with eager questions.

"Shut up!" gasped Figgins. "Give a chap a chance to talk! There has been a case of kidnapping a few miles from St. Jim's. A chap has been taken away from his home—it happened yesterday afternoon, early—"

"Who was it?"

"Lord Reginald Grahame, the youngest son of the Marquis of Northwood. He's been kidnapped, and is going to be held to ransom—at least, so people are saying in the village. Rylcombe is full of it. They say that the boy was seen in a motor-car with two men yesterday about three o'clock—"

"Kidnapped, then?"

"So the papers say. I've got a copy of the 'Rylcombe Times' here, and there's a long account of it. Here's a description of the two men in the motor-car, so far as the police have been able to gather it from some yokel who saw the car pass—one was tall and thin, and had a short beard, the other was short and thick-set."

Manners gave a cry.

"The same two!"

"What?"

"I'll bet my hat it was the same two Americans who went for Tom Merry in the lane yesterday—there's not the slightest doubt about that in my mind. And the time was less than an hour after we met the rascals!"

"H'm!" said Lowther thoughtfully. "It's possible they were lying in wait for the marquis' son, and mistook Tom Merry for him. Then they found the right chap afterwards."

"But why should they take Tom Merry, too?"

"Blessed if I can guess!"

"I think the Head ought to know about this," said Blake. "It looks to me as if we have the description of the kidnapers, and, anyway, the information ought to be given to the police. It can't do any harm. If Ferrers Locke would take up the case, I think we should soon know what had become of Tom Merry."

"Ferrers Locke! I wonder the Head hasn't thought of him. He is Tom Merry's friend, and he's certain to take the case!"

"Bettah suggest it to the Head," said D'Arcy, "although, if I had time, I have no doubt that I could follow up the case quite as well as Fewwers Locke."

"I'll mention it, anyway," said Blake.

"Pewwaps I had bettah be the one to intahview the Head, though. I could explain the mattah to him much more clearly and concisely, deah boy!"

"You car go and eat coke!"

"I wefuse to do anything of the sort!"

Blake walked away towards the House. The juniors stood in an eager group, discussing the news Figgins had brought. The mystery was still unsolved, but the news seemed to let some light into the matter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strolled away, his brows wrinkled in thought, and nearly ran into Skimpole.

"Sorry!" said D'Arcy. "I didn't see you. I weally wish you wouldn't blundah into my way like that, Skimpole. It ihwows me into a fluttah."

"I wanted to see you, D'Arcy. I have been thinking that it would be a good idea for us to take this case out of the hands of the police, and search for Tom Merry and find him."

"Bai Jove, it's wathah a good ideah!"

"Do you agree, then? Tom Merry was a decent chap, and if he is in danger we ought to do something."

"Vewy twue; but the last time we twied the amateuah detective business togethah, it ended in a wotten muck-up."

"Oh, yes," said Skimpole. "That was because you were allowed an equal voice in the arrangement, you know. If you come with me this time, I shall be leader, and that must be understood from the first."

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and bestowed a withering look upon the brainy man of the Shell.

"You uttah ass!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"The pwvious expedition was mucked up because I allowed an ass like you to have a voice in the mattah—"

"Oh, no, that is quite a mistake. It was due to your stupidity—"

"It was due to your wotten idiocy—"

"I must insist, D'Arcy, that it was due—"

"Oh, wing off!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "I

should absolutely wefuse to entah upon any awwagements with you unless I was leadah fwom the vevy beginning!"

"That, of course, would be impossible. Your defective intellect—"

"You uttah duffah—"

"You see—"

"Wats!"

And the swell of St. Jim's walked away indignantly.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole, "that is almost rude of D'Arcy! It is very unreasonable of him, too, not to see that that failure was entirely his fault, when I had explained it to him so patiently."

Meanwhile, Jack Blake had found the Head of St. Jim's in his study, deep in an anxious discussion with Mr. Railton.



There was a crashing of thickets as a man forced his way up the hillside like spring by Ferrers Locke, and the man went to the ground under the tree and cried "Yes."

The two masters listened with much attention to what the junior had to say, and their faces seemed to lighten when he had finished.

"It looks like a clue, sir," said Mr. Railton.

"I was thinking so. I wish we had known this before."

"If you please, sir—" began Blake.

"Go on, Blake," said Dr. Holmes kindly. "Have you anything more to tell us?"

"No, sir—but might I suggest—"

"You may speak."

"Well, sir, Ferrers Locke would be glad to take the case, I should think, if he knew that Tom Merry had disappeared. He was very fond of Tom Merry."

"I have already thought of that, Blake, you may be sure. I wired to Ferrers Locke some hours ago, asking him to come here, and received a reply that he was engaged upon a most important case, and could not possibly come yet. He

asked me, however, to send on any information I could gather, and I shall certainly let him know what you have told me. He will do all he can for Merry, you may be sure."

And Blake left the study.

A boy brought in a telegram as he went. The Head opened it with a worried look.

"It is from Miss Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess," he explained, in reply to Mr. Railton's inquiring look. "I had to inform her of what had happened. She is coming down to St. Jim's, as I expected. I must send a car to the station for her."

And the Head sighed.

The thought crossed Mr. Railton's mind that the intended



emerged into the path to the ruins. There followed a quick panther-
light of the detective who had been watching for him. "Silas Shucks,"
Merry.

visit of Miss Priscilla Fawcett worried him almost as much
as the strange disappearance of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 10.

In the Hands of the Law!

"FOUND, by George!"

Inspector Snigg and P.-c. Wright looked Tom Merry over with great satisfaction, a good deal as if he had been some rare animal at the Zoo.

The boy was too amazed to speak.

In fact, for one dizzy moment his brain seemed to reel under the weight of evidence in support of the policeman's belief, and he wondered whether he really was Lord Reginald Grahame, and not Tom Merry of St. Jim's at all.

"Found, by Jove!" repeated the fat inspector. "We've found him!"

"I've found him, sir!" said P.-c. Wright, with significance in his tone.

The inspector shifted uncomfortably.

"Well, of course, Wright," he said, in a condescending tone, "you actually brought him to the station."

"Yes, sir, and you'll bear me out when it comes to claiming the reward, sir."

"Well—er—yes—of course, Wright."

"I found him in Westmoor Lane," said the constable. "He tried to palm off a yarn on me about having lost his way and belonging to a school—"

"Ha, ha, ha! He couldn't take us in like that, Wright! I happen to know that Lord Reginald didn't go to school, but had a private tutor at Northwood Grange."

"Yes, I told him as much, sir!"

"Then it's pretty plain that he wasn't kidnapped, either," said the inspector thoughtfully. "Do you know, Wright, I had my doubts of that theory all along."

"So did I, sir!"

"That story about his being driven off in a motor-car by two men—it was a little too thick, Wright."

"Just so, sir!"

"As a matter of fact, he wandered away from home in a fit of waywardness—a sort of boyish escapade—"

"So I should say, sir."

"And now, I've no doubt, he will be very glad to be restored to the arms of his loving parents," said Inspector Snigg.

"I should think so, sir," said his faithful echo.

"Lady Northwood will be happy when she hears that we have found him, Wright."

"That I have found him, you mean, sir."

"Yes—er—exactly, that is what I mean. You will be glad to go back to her ladyship now, young man, eh?"

"Eh?" said Tom Merry.

"I say you will be glad to go back to her ladyship, and, doubtless, be forgiven for this escapade," said the inspector.

"It will cost your mother two hundred pounds."

"I am not Lord Reginald Grahame."

"What?"

"I've never heard of him before."

"Come, come, that won't do, you know!"

"Where did you get that watch from, then?" asked Wright, with a grin.

"And that handkerchief?" said the inspector, jerking one out of Tom Merry's pocket, and showing a monogram and a crest in the corner.

"And this letter?" said Wright, jerking it out.

Tom Merry caught his hand.

"You have no right to read that letter."

"Quite right," said the fat inspector, with an approving nod. "Hand it to me, Wright. I will read it."

"Nor you, either!" flashed out Tom Merry. "That letter belongs to the chap these clothes belong to, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha! To yourself."

"I am Tom Merry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I belong to the Shell Form at St. Jim's."

"Dear me! Doesn't he keep it up well?"

"If you would send a wire to the school—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You would hear from Dr. Holmes that Tom Merry of the Shell was missing."

"Go on! Keep it up!"

"I tell you I am Tom Merry, and I never heard of Lord Reginald Grahame in my life before!" shouted the bewildered lad excitedly.

"Come, come, you must surely see that this is useless now!" said Inspector Snigg, in a soothing tone. "I suppose you had some motive for wandering away from home like this, though it's a mystery to me. But you've got to go back now!"

"I should say so, sir."

"I tell you—"

"Can't imagine what makes him so obstinate, sir!" said the constable. "He's been telling the same yarn all the time. Perhaps he expects her ladyship to be severe with him."

The inspector smiled significantly.

"It's all right," he said. "I know what the trouble is!"

"Do you really, sir?" said the constable, with great admiration.

"Yes; I wonder I didn't guess at first," said the inspector, drawing the constable aside, and lowering his voice. "Of course, it's a case of mental aberration!"

"Is it really, sir?" said Wright, who had only a very dim

idea as to what the word "aberration" might possibly mean.

"Yes; a case of hallucination, you know."

"Oh, I see!" said the constable, who was about as wise as before.

"Off his chump, you know," explained the inspector, descending to language which was more easily comprehended by Mr. Wright.

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"That's it. A wandering mind, you know—doesn't remember who he is, or where he lives—clearly a case of delusion."

"Of course!" said Wright. "Takes a man like you to think of these things, inspector!"

"Well, I may say it does," agreed the inspector. "It's a case of mental aberration, and the unfortunate lad does not remember his name or rank. He has a strong fancy that his name is Merry, and that he belongs to a school. It's marvellous what the imagination will do in a case of this kind!"

"Marvellous, sir!"

"The police theory that he has been kidnapped will be knocked on the head now—we have elucidated the truth."

"Yes, sir."

"It's a case of mental aberration, not of kidnapping. This will mean a lot of kudos for us, Wright."

"Will it, sir?" said Wright, who did not know what kudos was. "Will you get it, sir, if I have the reward?"

The inspector sniffed.

"First thing is to communicate with her ladyship, and let her know that we have found the boy—"

"That I have found him, sir."

"Yes, exactly. Then—"

"If you're going to communicate with Lady Northwood, you needn't tell her that you have found her son," broke in

Tom Merry, "because you haven't, you know. Why can't you wire to the Head of St. Jim's instead?"

The fat inspector smiled.

"Curious how these delusions creep into a brain, and stick there," he murmured to the constable. "Of course, there is no such school as St. Jim's in existence."

"Of course not, sir!"

"Lord Reginald may have known a lad named Tom Merry, and so have got the name into his mind, or it may be merely a figment of his fancy."

"You're quite right, sir."

"I tell you I'm Tom Merry—"

"Yes, yes; but don't get excited!" said the inspector soothingly. "You shall go home in good time, my little man!"

"You utter ass—"

The fat, little inspector turned purple.

"Wh-wh-what?"

"You utter ass! You ought to—"

"My dear lad," said the inspector, recovering his urbanity as he remembered it was a case of mental aberration. "You must not speak to your elders like that, though, really, a lad in your unfortunate position—"

"Are you going to send a wire to St. Jim's?"

"My dear child, that is only your fancy—there is no such school as St. Jim's in existence," explained the inspector.

"You shrieking idiot!"

"Now, look here! I can't stand that! You must—"

"If you don't send the wire, I will!"

"Yes, yes; you shall send as many wires as you like presently," said the inspector, with the idea of humouring the deluded lad. "Lots and lots, if you like."

"Well, I'm jolly well going to do it!" said Tom Merry, and he made a rush for the street.

"Stop him!" yelled the inspector.

The policeman on duty seized Tom Merry before he could escape. The boy struggled furiously, but Wright came to the other constable's aid, and the junior was dragged back into the inspector's office.

Inspector Snigg smiled indulgently.

"You must not be violent, my dear boy," he said, smiling urbanely at the panting lad. "You will be detained here till I have communicated with her ladyship—"

Tom Merry controlled himself with an effort.

"Will you let me tell you my story?" he said. "When I explain it all, you will see that you have made a mistake."

"Certainly. Tell me the whole story, my lad. Give him a chair, Wright."

Tom Merry knew that the fat inspector was only humouring him, and had a perfect disbelief of his story before he had told a word of it. But in the hope of convincing his captors, he told his grim experience. The inspector winked slyly at P. C. Wright, who grinned behind his hand.

The policeman on duty at the door listened, with suppressed chuckles. And, indeed, Tom Merry, as he told his story, realised how hopelessly absurd it must sound.

"If'n!" said the inspector. "You went to sleep in a bed in a school dormitory—"

"Yes."

"And woke up in the middle of a moor in another county—"

"Ye-es," said Tom Merry, with a sinking heart.

"Dressed in another lad's clothes, and wearing his watch, and with a letter addressed to him in your pocket?"

"Ye-es."

The inspector coughed significantly.

"I know it's a strange story, sir," said Tom Merry. "I know it must sound almost impossible to you."

"Almost!" murmured the inspector.

"But it's true, every word of it. I can't explain how it happened—"

"I should rather think not!" Inspector Snigg murmured.

"It's a mystery to me. But it's true."

"Now, my lad, I know you believe this yarn," said the inspector soothingly. "But it's all nonsense. You have dreamed it all, you know; and you are not quite yourself."

"I tell you—"

"Well, well, it shall be inquired into," said the inspector. "You must remain here for a time, while we inquire into the whole circumstances."

"What worries me most is that my friends at St. Jim's will be alarmed about it," said Tom Merry, his face showing the distress he felt.

"Yes, yes. Of course! Very right and proper," assented the inspector. "We must do our best to relieve their fears at once."

He spoke gravely, but Tom Merry knew what he meant. He was humouring one whom he regarded as the victim of a mental delusion. The boy's heart sank. He cast a look towards the door, but the policeman was on the watch.



"Gussy, the Runaway"

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Sooner than face a punishment which he thinks he has not deserved, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the priceless swell of St. Jim's, temporarily "retires" from the School. In other words, he bolts! Amazing adventures follow! Gussy jumps for freedom over a wall—into a girls' school! Here is a spanking tip-top yarn, brimful of fun and cheery adventure. Boys, get yourselves a copy of "Gussy the Runaway!" at once, and start on this ripping, full-of-laughs story!

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"Come!" said Inspector Snigg. "It will not hurt you to remain here for a time, while we communicate with—with your friends at St. Jim's. I have a nice little room where you can stay—my own house adjoins this building, and my wife will look after you—while I wire to St. Jim's."

"Very well," said Tom Merry wearily. "I can see that you don't believe me, but I told you the truth."

"Yes, yes, of course! All will be set right soon."

"I suppose so, for as soon as Lady Northwood sees me she will know that I am not her son."

"Ye-e-es, of course," assented the inspector, with a wink to P.-c. Wright. "Now, come with me, my little man. But mind, no bolting, you know!"

"I won't bolt," said Tom Merry quietly. But in case of accidents, P.-c. Wright followed close behind as the inspector left the station with the junior.

CHAPTER 11.

Ferrers Locke Takes the Case in Hand!

"**W**HERE is my darling Tommy?"

An anxious-faced old lady, in a bonnet of Mid-Victorian date and fashion, hopped excitedly out of the station hack at St. Jim's. She addressed the question incoherently to a group of juniors standing on the steps of the School House.

"Where is my dearest child?"

"Hallo!" said Gore of the Shell. "It's the old lady from Huckleberry Heath! How do you do, ma'am? Tom Merry must have known you were coming, for he isn't at home!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish.

A hand grasped Gore's shoulder, and a hand grasped Mellish's. There was a loud crack as their heads were brought forcibly together. Gore gave a yell, and Mellish a shriek.

"Who did that?" roared Gore, turning round furiously.

He found himself looking at Monty Lowther and Manners. Instead of answering his question, Lowther hit out from the shoulder, and Gore went rolling down the steps. Jack Blake put his foot out and gave him a shove as he passed, and he rolled out on the gravel.

Miss Priscilla, in her anxiety and alarm, hardly noticed it at all.

"Where is my dearest boy?"

"We are extremely sorry, dear Miss Pwiscillah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "but we cannot produce him at the present moment. He is not heah."

Miss Fawcett gave a wail.

"Oh, my poor, lost boy!"

"Don't be alarmed, ma'am," said Lowther. "We don't know for certain that anything has happened. Tom Merry has disappeared—"

"Ah! I feel that I shall never see him again!"

"Pwaw don't be downhearted, ma'am!"

Miss Fawcett entered the House with bowed head, and a look on her face that touched every heart. Her affection for her ward, and her boundless pride in him, might have a somewhat comical aspect at times, but now there was no fellow there who could not feel for her. Even Gore, as he picked himself up from the gravel, looked somewhat ashamed.

"I have come to see Dr. Holmes," said Miss Priscilla faintly. "Take me to him, please."

Monty Lowther gave her his arm, and led her to the Head's quarters.

Dr. Holmes was expecting her, and he assisted her to a seat.

Lowther retired, with a deep frown upon his usually reckless face. There was something like a lump in his throat.

"My dear Miss Fawcett," said the doctor helplessly, "you must have courage."

"You have heard nothing of him yet?"

"Nothing."

"The police are at work?"

"Yes; the phone has been busy for hours."

"There is no clue?"

"None, except that a window was found unfastened. Tom Merry was spirited away in the night, unless he was a victim of somnambulism. Have you ever known him to be subject to sleepwalking?"

Miss Fawcett shook her head.

"Never, sir—never!"

"Neither do the circumstances seem to point to anything of the sort," said Dr. Holmes. "A sleepwalker leaving the House would be more likely, I should think, to use a door than a window; and, in any case, would hardly close the window carefully behind him. Besides, the neighbourhood

has been searched, and no trace of him has been discovered. A somnambulist could not have gone far."

"My darling has been taken away!"

"I am afraid that is the only possible hypothesis, unless he has left the school of his own accord."

"Impossible!"

"I had a faint hope that you might have heard something of him—that it might turn out to be a boyish prank. It would not be like Merry, but it seemed more likely than a case of kidnapping. Yet he seems to have gone without his clothes. It appears that he was removed from his bed in the night, and taken away. Why he did not give the alarm is a mystery."

"My poor, darling Tommy—he may be killed!"

The Head started.

"Nonsense, Miss Fawcett! There is not the slightest reason to suppose that he has been injured!" he said sharply.

"Why has he been taken away?"

"That is impossible to say at present. I have every hope that Ferrers Locke may be able to take up the case, and unravel the mystery for us."

"Let no expense be spared, Dr. Holmes. I am rich. I will spend every shilling for dear Tommy's sake. Let a reward be offered at once—"

"I have instructed the police to offer fifty pounds."

"It is not enough. You are perhaps aware that there has been a case of kidnapping a few miles from here. Lord Reginald Grahame has been stolen from his mother. Her ladyship has offered two hundred pounds' reward for his recovery. Five hundred at least must be offered for the finding of Tom Merry—"

"My dear madam—"

"Pray gratify me in this, sir!"

"But five hundred pounds will not spur on the police to do more than they can do," said the Head of St. Jim's. "If you make it two hundred pounds I shall raise no objection. But that will be ample, and will make the searchers put forth their best efforts."

"Very well, Dr. Holmes, I yield to your judgment. But let it be done at once."

"Certainly; I will send instructions without delay."

Miss Priscilla rocked herself to and fro while the Head telephoned to the police station at Rylcombe. Then Dr. Holmes turned to her.

"You must be fatigued, Miss Fawcett, with this sudden journey—"

"I hardly feel it."

"If you would like to retire to your room and rest, I will let you know directly there is news of any kind."

And Miss Priscilla was prevailed upon to take some repose.

The Head sighed when he was left alone. His anxiety as to Tom Merry's fate was his chief feeling just now, but the trouble of the whole affair was great.

The long July afternoon was wearing away, and the shadows of the old elms were growing longer in the quadrangle when Mr. Ferrers Locke was announced. The doctor sprang to his feet with a cry of relief. In this hour of trouble he felt that he could lean upon the iron strength of Ferrers Locke.

"I am glad to see you, Locke." He grasped the detective's hand warmly. "Then you were able to come, after all."

The detective nodded.

"As you see."

There was a grim shade on the detective's handsome, clear-cut face. It was plain that he felt keenly this mysterious misadventure of the boy who had been his comrade in peril once, and to whom he was strongly attached. He sank into a chair.

"I would gladly have come before," he said, "but I had already been engaged by Lady Northwood. I dare say you have heard of the loss of her son?"

"Yes; he has been kidnapped, I hear."

"It appears not, now. I received a communication from her ladyship yesterday afternoon, informing me that the boy had been kidnapped, and that he had been seen driving away in a motor-car with two strangers. The recent case of a kidnapping and holding to ransom affair, in which two American criminals were concerned, had alarmed her, I suppose, for it now turns out that the boy was not kidnapped at all."

"I have lately had a wire from Northwood Grange to tell me that her son has been found wandering on a moor some forty miles from his home, and apparently labouring under some mental disorder. I have been wasting my time on the case, you see—time which might have been better spent in

(Continued on page 19.)

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HALLO, chums! I've got another sparkling long complete St. Jim's story for you next week. It's entitled:

"ST. JIM'S UNDER CANVAS!"

and in it, Martin Clifford has really let himself go! You'll laugh at the merry pranks of Tom Merry & Co., and Frank Monk & Co. from the Grammar School. Don't miss this corking yarn, whatever you do! Potts, the Office Boy, will bring another smile to your faces when you gaze at next week's comic "strip," while Ned and Jinks, of the Victorious, are up to their necks in further exciting adventures against their old enemies. The wise reader will order his copy of the GEM in advance! Are you all wise? Of course! 'Nuff said!

OUT OF THE BLUE!

We often hear the phrase "It's raining cats and dogs"; but we don't take it literally. Yet, quite recently the people of South Africa, in the Cape Province, remarked that it was "raining fish"! And it was! Real fish hurtled down from the heavens! What do you think of that? All right, if you are hungry—what? But don't ask me how this phenomenon came about—I'm just as much in the dark as you are. To my mind comes back a tale of real frogs dropping from the skies during a rain storm in the days gone by. And the yarn of the red rain I have already touched upon in an earlier chat. What next, I wonder?

SNORE!

Snore! Snore! Bless the fellow; you simply can't sleep with him making the air hideous! Is there no cure for snoring; can't something be done, you ask yourself. And the answer is—yes! An inventor has been giving a deal of his time to the problem of the snorer. Now he has patented a device which is guaranteed to wake the offender, no matter how heavy he sleeps. The vibrations the snorer sends out—providing he goes in for this device—sets up a reaction on the delicate apparatus. Then things happen! Out shoots a needle, with a fine point, which jabs into the snorer and wakes him first time of asking. But whether any of the fellows who used to worry me with their snoring when I was at school will adopt this method is uncertain. If I snored, I think I should give that jabbing needle point a miss!

THE HOLD UP!

Motorists were muttering under their breath; something had happened on the main road to London, The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,273.

for the traffic had remained stationary for half an hour. Few of them knew the cause of the hold up—and few believed the story of a squirrel being responsible even when they were told. But a squirrel, it was. The little chap had climbed up a telegraph pole, and started to walk along the wire; but half-way between two poles he got the wind-up. He stopped and positively refused to go farther—or go back! His plight aroused the pity of people passing by, and several girls held a sheet beneath the trembling squirrel in the hope that it would brave a jump. But not that squirrel—he wasn't jumping! Then a brainy merchant tried to dislodge him, so that he would fall into the sheet, with a fishing-rod. The rod was a trifle too short. Somebody brought a ladder, and then it was that a smart policeman hit upon the great idea. The ladder was propped against an omnibus, and up it clambered a clergyman, fishing-rod in hand. Patiently, and gently he prodded the nervous squirrel until it fell off the wire—slap into the sheet held out below. It was a forty-foot drop, and that squirrel howled some; but he was unharmed. He was in that sheet scarcely a second—the next he was scuttling into the woods and shinning up a tree, from which place of vantage he doubtless murmured his thanks in his own way!

COKER, THE JOKER!

Ever met Horace James Coker? If you haven't, you've missed a real treat! Horace is in the Fifth Form at Greyfriars—but he only got into that senior Form through his Aunt Judy. She bullied the Head until he promoted him. Horace is lacking in brains, but there's no doubt about his brawn and his courage. He's as strong as an ox, and as brave as a lion. In this week's long complete story of Greyfriars, Horace James Coker plays a leading part. Every Gemite is recommended to read "COKER, THE CHAMPION CHUMP!"—which appears in the current issue of our splendid companion paper, "The Magnet." There are laughs and surprises galore in this grand story—and exciting adventure!

PEDALLING ACROSS THE CHANNEL!

Swimming the Channel is a bit too exhausting for most people, so an ingenious Dutchman looked at his bicycle, thought vaguely of floats and things, and set to work. When he had finished, two floats, about twelve feet in length were attached to his bicycle, and by clever gearing, the pedals were

made to operate two small paddles. But he still had the Channel to cross. Did he do it? You bet! It took this hardy traveller—he is fifty-one years of age—fourteen hours to get across that stretch of water dividing us from France, and he reached land exhausted but triumphant.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Magistrate (giving sentence): "Five pounds or three months!"

Prisoner: "Thank you, sir, I'll have the five pounds!"

TRY THIS!

Get two lumps of sugar, then tell your pals that by rubbing them together, you can produce light. Probably they'll scoff, if they don't know the trick. Then you smile knowingly, turn out the light, so that the room is in complete darkness, and rub the two lumps of sugar together. If done properly, the sugar will throw off a faint light.

The sugar, however, must be perfectly dry!

SPEEDING-UP THE LINE!

This month sees the Southern Railway's latest experiment being put to the test. Electric trains on the London-Brighton route will be so streamlined that a speed of seventy miles an hour is confidently expected. The new coaches have been constructed to the width-limit of the track, which means that the usual "bay-window" out of which the guard looks in the ordinary train will have to go "West." But the guard will be quite happy. He will see all that he wants to see through a special periscope which projects through the roof of the streamlined train, giving a clear view of the track ahead. The man in the signal-box, too, will find that he has not been overlooked in this general improvement scheme. A complicated electrical device warns him of the approach of a train long before it heaves into sight, describes it, and gives its correct time. The passenger has not been forgotten, either. The standard of these new streamlined coaches will be as high as the present first-class compartments. Comfort and plenty of elbow-room for the biggest of us. Hurrah!

BEATEN BY ONE!

"Hurrah!" The crowd roared themselves delirious with joy. Round and round the ground echoed the cheers of thousands of cricket enthusiasts. After 34 years it had been done at last. There followed a gasp of amazement and the next moment the crowd was roaring its disapproval! What was it all about? Well, it was like this. Sutcliffe and Holmes, going in first for Yorkshire, in their recent match against Essex, decided to stay there, and before Sutcliffe was out he had scored 313 and the total score was 555 runs! This score beat the previous first wicket record, also made by two Yorkshiremen, Brown and Tunncliffe, by one run. Naturally, the crowd cheered. But suddenly the figures on the board changed to 554, so the record was only equalled. Then the scorers started a search for that lost run, and eventually they discovered that one "no-ball" had not been added in and the score went back to 555 again. Again the crowd cheered. The record was broken.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING HEIR!

(Continued from page 17.)

searching for Tom Merry. I did not get her ladyship's wire immediately, either, as I was away pursuing my investigations. It was very annoying. However, I am now free to look for my young friend."

"I am glad of that, at all events."

"The latest information you sent me, which you learned from Tom Merry's chums, interests me very much," went on the detective. "The description of the two men who attempted to seize him in Rylcombe Lane, so far as I have it, tallies with that of the two American criminals whom I suspected to be at the bottom of the kidnapping of Lord Reginald Grahame. If they should turn out to be the same men, it would be very curious."

"These two scoundrels have made their own country too hot to hold them, and have recently come over here, and some time ago they made their first attempt in the same line. They failed, but they escaped. I had little doubt that this was their second attempt, and that Lord Reginald was in their hands; but as it at present appears, they have chosen Tom Merry for their victim instead, unless they have made a mistake."

"How—a mistake?"

The detective drew a miniature from his pocket, and handed it to Dr. Holmes. It was that of a sunny-faced, curly haired lad of about fifteen.

"Whom would you take that for, sir?"

"Tom Merry," said the Head. Then, after a closer look at the miniature, he added. "If it is not Tom Merry, it is remarkably like him."

"That is so. It is the portrait of Lord Reginald Grahame."

"Ah!"

"There is a striking resemblance between him and Tom Merry. This may have led to a mistake on the part of the kidnappers, or—perhaps—" The detective paused, and did not pursue his train of thoughts aloud. "Has any letter been received by Miss Fawcett, hinting at ransom?"

"Certainly not by me—nor by Miss Fawcett, I imagine, as she is here, and has not mentioned anything of the kind to me."

"H'm!" Ferrers Locke rose. "Well, we shall see. It is a strange case. I should like to see Manners and Lowther now, and question them as to this affair of yesterday afternoon. Don't send for them, I shall find them."

And Ferrers Locke quitted the study with a thoughtful frown upon his face, leaving the Head of St. Jim's looking a great deal more hopeful.

CHAPTER 12.

Her Ladyship!

TOM MERRY paced to and fro—to and fro—restlessly. Evening had set in—the long, sultry July day had drawn to its close. Tom Merry was in a comfortable looking little sitting-room in Inspector Snigg's house in the little town of Westlake—a prisoner.

The inspector did not tell him that he was a prisoner, but he knew that he was, all the same. He knew that Mrs. Snigg was keeping an eye open so that he could not leave the sitting-room without her knowledge, and that P.-c. Wright was in the garden looking out for any attempt on his part to escape by the window.

Tom Merry was half-amused and half-angered by the blunder of the police, but he was wholly anxious as to what was passing at St. Jim's. What did they think of his absence there?

They might surmise that he had run away from school—that he had met with a fatal accident—they might surmise anything. And he could not even send a wire to reassure his friends as to his safety.

He paced to and fro in the little room, his brow wrinkled in thought. The inspector was treating him well, in his belief that he was the missing Lord Reginald, excepting that he was not allowing him his liberty.

Tom Merry had given his word not to bolt, but the inspector was having him watched, all the same, convinced that the boy was the victim of a delusion and not responsible for what he did.

The St. Jim's junior could not restrain a grim laugh at the thought of the inspector's feelings when he discovered that he had caught the wrong person. P.-c. Wright had found the wanderer, and was dreaming dreams about the

expenditure of the £200 when it came into his hands. But the inspector was taking the lead in the affair, and the management of it was in his hands. He was swelling with more importance than ever now, with the belief that he had the missing son of the marquis in his hands.

Tom Merry realised that the quickest way out of the dilemma now was to allow the police to bring him face to face with "Reggie's" mother.

Lady Northwood would know that he was not her son—though she would want an explanation as to how he came to be dressed in her boy's clothes.

The explanation, of course, Tom Merry could not give.

He was utterly in the dark himself as to how it had come about. He had thought out the matter all day, without being able to hit upon anything like a solution of the mystery.

But, once he had proved to the inspector's satisfaction that he was not Reginald Grahame, he would be allowed to communicate with St. Jim's, and, at all events, would be restored to his friends.

"Ahem!"

Tom Merry stopped his restless pacing, and turned round, as the door opened, and the little inspector came in.

Inspector Snigg laid his official cap on a chair, and inserted his thumbs in his belt, and looked at Tom Merry with a bland grin.

"And how do you find yourself now, Lord Reginald?" he asked, rolling the title on his tongue as if it had a peculiar relish for him, as doubtless it had.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I am not Lord Reginald. You are making a mistake."

"Ah, yes, of course, of course! I have wired to her ladyship, explaining that you have been found, and are not in—well, not in an exactly reliable condition mentally," said the inspector. "I have no doubt that the sight of your lordship's mother will dispel these—er—illusions your lordship is suffering under."

"Bosh!"

The little inspector turned red.

"Well, we shall see. Her ladyship has wired back that she is coming immediately, and she may be here at any moment now."

Tom Merry looked relieved.

"Then you will see that you have made a ridiculous mistake," he said.

The inspector grinned.

"I will risk that, Lord Reginald. The curious thing is that you speak quite sensible, and if I wasn't sure about you—"

"You will know the truth soon."

"Exactly. When her ladyship arrives, it will all be cleared up. It is a great blow for her ladyship, and I am very happy to be the means of restoring her lost son to her maternal bosom," said the inspector, rubbing his fat hands.

"I tell you—"

There was the snort of a motor-car in the street. A tap came at the door, and P.-c. Wright looked in. There was an eager and awed expression upon his ruddy face.

"I think it's 'er ladyship, sir."

The inspector assumed an expression of majestic calm.

"If it's her ladyship, show her in, Wright."

"Certainly, sir."

"Your lordship's mother is coming now—"

"I'm sorry she is going to suffer from a disappointment when she sees me," said Tom Merry quietly. "I suppose it cannot be helped. The evidence you have is enough, I suppose, to convince you that I am her son and out of my mind. But you will soon see."

"Yes," grinned the inspector, "we shall soon see."

He stepped out into the hall.

Wright opened the door. There was a glare in the dusky street from the lamps of the motor-car.

Inspector Snigg rushed out to open the door as the car stopped.

"Two hundred pounds!" murmured P.-c. Wright, rubbing his hands. "Two hundred pounds! It will start Mary and me in that little tobacco shop at the corner of Westlake Lane, and a little over. Two hundred pounds! Wright, my boy, you're in luck! This is what you owe to your superior intelligence. A common country policeman would have passed the boy over without noticing him, though he had his description in his pocket. Nothing like that with me. I spotted him at once. George Wright, my boy, you ought to be at Scotland Yard. That's where you ought to be. Two hundred pounds! My eye!"

"Her ladyship!"

Wright bobbed his head as a stately dame in black entered the little doorway, with the fussy little inspector bobbing nervously round her.

"Where is my son?"

"This way, your ladyship. If you will honour my little sitting-room by stepping into it, your ladyship, your ladyship will find your ladyship's son waiting for your ladyship."

"Thank you!"

Tom Merry heard the words and changed colour a little. He felt that he had to go through a painful ordeal now.

The stately form of the Marchioness of Northwood loomed up in the doorway. Her ladyship put up her glasses to survey the flushed face of the boy standing there uneasily in the dim lamplight.

"Reginald!"

"If you please, ma'am!"

"Reginald—my son!"

And Tom was clasped the next moment to the paternal breast of the marchioness.

Inspector Snigg, in his enthusiasm, poked P.-c. Wright in the ribs with a poke that made him gasp.

"Affecting scene, ain't it?" murmured the inspector. "Marvellous how these nobbs have the same feelings as you or me, Wright!"

"Marvellous, sir!"

"There she is, hugging him just as if she was a washer-woman instead of a marchioness, Wright."

"Extraordinary, sir!"

"Please!" said Tom Merry.

"My son! Why did you leave your home?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am," said Tom Merry politely, "but I am not your son."

The marchioness started back.

"Dear me! What did you say, Reginald?"

"There has been a mistake. I am not Reginald Grahame. My name is Tom Merry, and I belong to the Shell at St. Jim's."

Lady Northwood put up her glasses again. The momentary emotion flickered out of her severe face.

"Dear me! What absurdity is this?"

The marchioness turned to the startled inspector.

"What does this mean? This is not my son!"

Inspector Snigg and P.-c. Wright looked at one another with simultaneous gasps.

"What?"

"What does this mean? This is not my son!"

CHAPTER 13.

Arthur Augustus on the Track!

"I 'VE got a wathah wippin' ideah, Skimpole!"

"Ah! You have decided to accept my suggestion and to follow me in searching for Tom Merry," said Skimpole. "Very good!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have decided to do nothing of the sort. I was goin' to say that I have a wippin' ideah. It's perfectly plain to me that Tom Mewwy has been kidnapped."

"I am rather inclined to favour the theory of sleep-walking."

"Yaas; but that's wot, you know!"

"I cannot admit that my theories are rot. With my trained intellect I am far more likely to hit upon the truth than you are, you see."

"Bosh! My ideah is that Tom Mewwy has been kidnapped. I was kidnapped once myself, and the wascal held me to wansom, though he never got the cash. What happened to me may have happened to Tom Mewwy. He has been kidnapped to be held to wansom."

"I think it is more likely that he walked in his sleep, and—"

"Wats! Now, when I was kidnapped by a wascally gipsy I was kept a pwisonah in the wuined castle on the hill. I had a wotten time, you know, and I am glad to say that the wottah is in pwison now. Now it has occurred to my bwain that if Tom Mewwy has been kidnapped to be held to wansom, they may have shoved him into the old castle to keep him safe."

"My dear fellow," said Skimpole, with a superior smile, "if you had studied the matter as I have done you wouldn't suppose anything of the kind. The obvious is never true. That is one of a detective's maxims. If the castle had once been used by kidnappers, it stands to reason that it wouldn't be used again for the same purpose. They would know better."

"Yaas, wathah, if it was the same wascal. But these chapss who have collahed our unfortunate fwiennd are foweigners, you know, and they wouldn't know anythin' about that old storwy."

"H'm! But they wouldn't know anything about the old castle, either."

D'Arcy thought it out.

"Well," he said at length, "you see, if they were goin' to

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go in for kidnappin' about here, they would natuwally look wuund for a safe place to hide the chap in. The old castle is lonely, and supposed to be haunted, and so it would serve their purpose vewy well. I wegard it as extwemely pwob."

"I don't."

"Yaas, but you are an ass, you know. You must admit that, Skimpole, especially as you mucked up the last affair."

"Nothing of the sort! You mucked it up."

"It's no good arguing with a chap who won't see weason," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "To be bwief, will you follow my lead to search the wuins of the old castle for our unfortunate fwiennd, Tom Mewwy?"

"It's getting dark."

"We can take a lantern."

"It's a jolly long walk."

"What is that for the sake of our unfortunate fwiennd?"

"Well, I'll come, D'Arcy; only, of course, it's understood that I'm leader, and that you obey orders."

Arthur Augustus sniffed expressively.

"Of course, nothin' of the kind is undahstood," he said. "I should wefuse to follow anybody's lead, and that's why I am not consultin' Blake, or Dig, or Hewwies in the mattah. You will have to be a follower, of course."

"With my superior intellect and mental training, I could not possibly agree to anything of the kind."

"I wegard you as an ass!"

"I considah you a fool!"

"Oh, wats! I would give you a feahful thwashin' if I had time; but undah the cires I think I ought to be lookin' for Tom Mewwy."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away.

The swell of the School House was in deadly earnest, and, though he would have preferred a faithful follower in his expedition, the obstinacy of Skimpole made no difference to his intentions. He put on his cap and left the School House, and met Figgins in the quad.

"No news yet?" asked Figgins.

"Not that I am aware of, deah boy."

"Ferrers Locke is here, isn't he? Kerr says he saw him drive in this afternoon, an hour or more ago."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose he's come to look for Tom Merry. I expect we shall soon have news now," remarked Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah, though I don't suppose it will come fwom Fewwers Locke!"

"What do you mean?"

"You will know in time, deah boy."

"I say, Gussy, where are you going? It's near lockin'-up."

"Yaas, I know it is."

And, without replying to Figgins' question, Arthur Augustus walked out of the gates of St. Jim's, leaving the New House junior staring after him in astonishment.

When Taggles came out to fasten the gates of the school, Arthur Augustus had not returned, and once more he was missed for calling-over. But little did the swell of the School House care for that. When D'Arcy had a fixed idea in his mind he usually went ahead regardless of consequences. He had a fixed idea now that Tom Merry was hidden in the ruined castle on Rylcombe Hill, and that he was on the track.

The woods were dark and lonely, but Arthur Augustus pressed on undauntedly to the slope of the hill.

Once or twice he heard a rustle in the wood, and looked round; but he set it down to a rabbit or a disturbed bird.

He came in sight of the ruins.

The sun had set, and the stars were glimmering on the masses of ancient and shattered masonry.

A shadow loomed up behind D'Arcy as he strode on towards the ancient castle entrance.

The swell of the School House turned his head as he heard a clinking stone on the path.

The shadow disappeared behind a tree, and the junior went on unsuspectingly.

Inside the old castle, amid the shattered fragments of scattered stone, D'Arcy paused and looked about him.

There was no sound, no sign of a human being. He moved on to the yawning gap which gave admittance to the vaults below the castle.

"Bai Jove! That looks wottenly dark!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's aloud. "I weally do not feel much inclined to ventuah there; but I suppose I had bettah."

He lighted his lantern and descended the shaky stone steps. It did not occur to him for a moment that if kidnappers were there his light would put them on their guard.

The tracking shadow loomed up over the gap in the flag-stones. A cautious, silent footstep followed D'Arcy in his descent.

Quite unsuspecting of the fact, the swell of St. Jim's cast the rays of his lantern to and fro in the darkness of the vaults, and advanced into the subterranean depths of the old castle.

No sound came from the gloomy depths of the vaults,

The darkness and silence discouraged the swell of St. Jim's. He paused and looked about him undecidedly. As he did so a stone clinked under a footstep behind.

Arthur Augustus swung round.

"Who is there?"

He flashed the light of the lantern in the direction of the sound. With his other hand he jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and peered right and left.

"Who is there? I heard you, you wascal!"

Dead silence.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I am quite aware that you are skulkin' there in the dark, you wottah, and I shall wefuse to leave this place until you have shown yourself. Pway come out, and—Ow!"

A sudden grip on the back of his neck made the swell of

For the length of a dozen vaults the unseen man carried him forcibly, and then stopped at a blank stone wall, and pushed on one of the great blocks of stone.

It swung round, and a strong smell of tobacco at once became perceptible to Arthur Augustus.

"Are you here, Bunker?"

"I guess so."

"Where's the glim?"

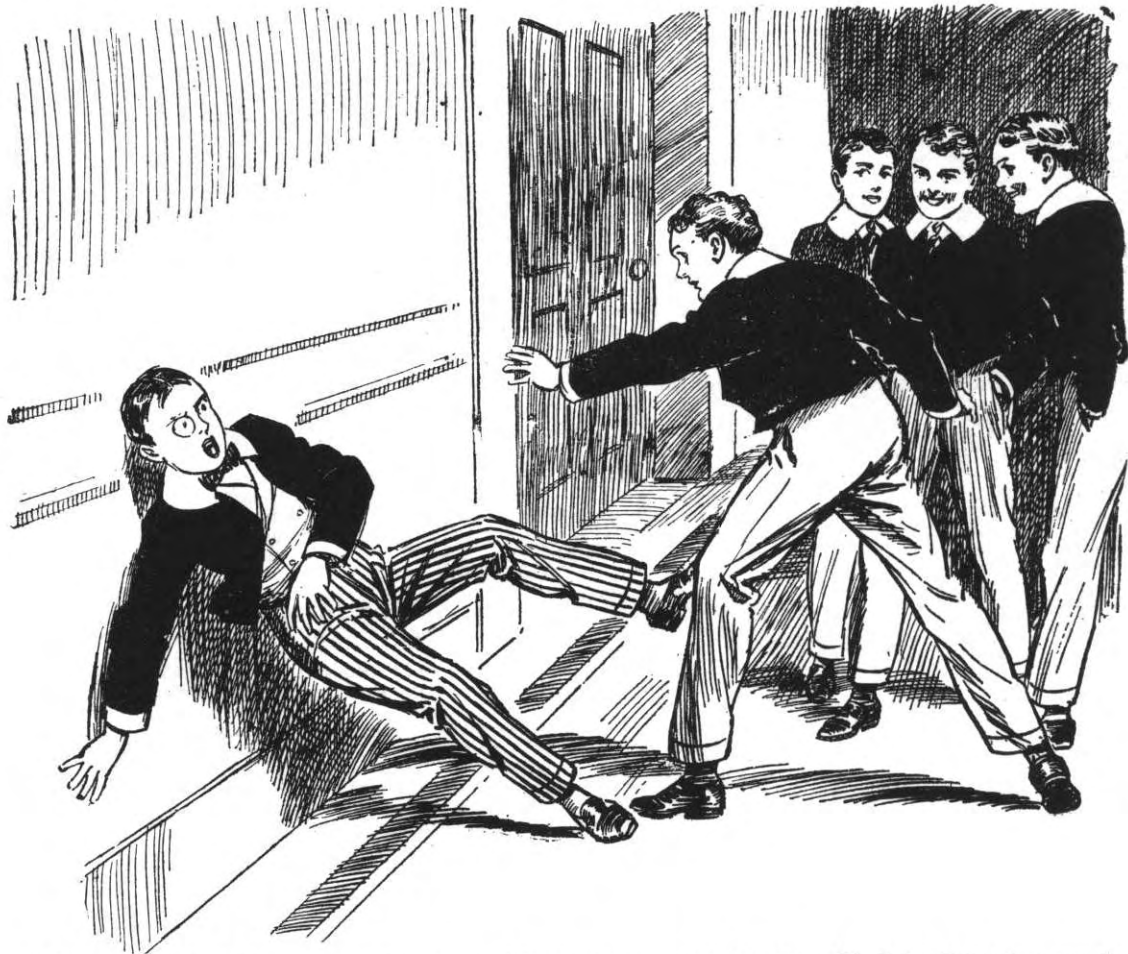
"Burnt out."

"And the kid?"

"Asleep."

Silas Shucks muttered something unintelligible. D'Arcy's heart had given a sudden leap. Who was the "kid" referred to, if not Tom Merry?

"What have you got there, Silas?"



"Have you seen Tom Merry?" asked Lowther. "I saw him last evenin', deah boy!" "Ass!" Lowther gave the swell of the School House a dig in the ribs that sent him staggering against the wall. "What did you do that for?" gasped D'Arcy.

St. Jim's break off, and in the shock of the surprise the lantern fell from his hand, and went to the ground with a crash that shattered it to pieces.

"Bai Jove!"

He realised that while he was speaking the unseen man had crept behind him.

He struggled, but he was in a powerful grip.

"I guess I've got you, you young fool!"

It was a voice with a nasal twang.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy. "Pway release me! You are suffocatin' me and wumplin' my beastlay collah! I insist upon bein' immediately released!"

There was a low chuckle in the darkness.

"Come with me!"

"I wefuse to come with you! I absolutely wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

The unseen man chuckled again, and lifted D'Arcy off the ground as if he had been a baby, and carried him away into the darkness.

The swell of St. Jim's ceased to struggle. Against the overpowering strength of his assailant he was powerless.

The darkness was intense, save for the red glow from the bowl of the pipe Bunker was smoking. But the ruffian had evidently discerned D'Arcy.

"A kid. He was looking in the vaults. I followed him from the lane to the castle. He must know something."

"Thunder!"

"This place won't be safe for us now," said Silas Shucks, with a savage oath. "It's lucky I happened on this young fool, too!"

"You wascals—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Silas Shucks savagely. "We shall have to get out of this to-night, Bunker."

"And that trat—"

"He can be left here till they find him."

"And then he will tell them that—"

"We shall be far away by then. We must find a new hiding-place, that's all. I can't imagine how the brat came fooling round here. Do you belong to the school, you pesky young varmint?"

"I belong to the Fourth Form at St. Jim's," said D'Arcy, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,273.

with dignity. He was now standing upon his feet, with the tall ruffian's hand fastened in a hard grip on his shoulder.

"Why did you come here?"

"To look for Tom Mewwy."

"Tom Merry! Why should you think he was here, you little fool?"

The ruffian shook the junior savagely.

"Why did you think the boy Merry was here? Answer me!"

"I was kidnapped once myself by a wotten wascal, and he shut me up here, so I deduced that Tom Mewwy might be heah. I am an amateur detective, you know."

"You— you— you—"

"I guess I told you no good would come of it, Silas Shucks. It was your idea from start to finish. That was understood."

"Oh, stow the cackle! We have thrown the police off the scent, and Ferrers Locke will lose time. Isn't that something? How was I to foresee that this utter idiot would blunder as like this?"

"I refuse—"

"Hold your confounded tongue! I suppose your school-mates know that you have come here, don't they?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The brat would say that, anyway. Silas Shucks, guessing that we might knock him on the head otherwise."

"I should certainly not tell an untwuth undah any cires—"

"We can't be sure either way!" growled Silas Shucks. "Tom Merry isn't here; but something more valuable than Tom Merry is here, and we must clear out."

"We can't go without the car."

"I guess I'll have it here soon. There's no time to be lost, if this brat's friends really know that he came here. Keep him safe here, Bunker, while I get the car round. It will take an hour to fetch it from Wayland garage."

"They're not likely to search here for the brat under that, I reckon."

"Probably not till morning; but we had better not waste time."

"Where are we going to take the other?"

"We can settle that later. The present question is to keep out of choker," said Silas Shucks savagely.

"I reckon so. Fasten that silly young fool up with your belt, then, and leave him here. If he starves after we're gone, serve him right for meddling! Mind, it was your idea to take that kid from the school. I was against it."

"It was a pesky good idea!"

"You see how it turns out."

"Oh, stow the cackle!"

And Silas Shucks quitted the secret vaults and closed the moving stone, leaving D'Arcy a bound prisoner and Bunker smoking his pipe. Arthur Augustus addressed one or two remarks to the kidnapper, but received only grunts or curses by way of reply, and at last gave it up. It dawned upon the mind of the amateur detective that the profession he had taken under his patronage was not wholly in the nature of a sinecure. Unless Skimpole remembered where he had gone, and thought of acquainting the others at St. Jim's with his whereabouts, it was likely to go very hard with the swell of the School House.

CHAPTER 14.

Back to St. Jim's!

"THIS is not my son!" The marchioness rapped out the words, and her cold grey eyes scanned the inspector with a glance, and, as he told his wife, made him feel hot and cold all over.

"N-n-not your s-son!" gasped the inspector.

"No!"

"I told you so," said Tom Merry, taking pity on the unfortunate inspector, whose airy castles had thus been dissipated at a blow. "It was a natural mistake for the inspector to fall into, madam, as the evidence—"

"Where is my son?"

"But—but he must be," explained the bewildered inspector. "He's wearing Lord Reginald's clothes!"

The marchioness put up her glasses and scanned Tom Merry again.

"Yes, these are certainly my son's clothes!" she said.

"He's wearing Lord Reginald's watch—"

"That is certainly my boy's watch."

And Lord Reginald's handkerchief, with his lordship's initials and his lordship's crest—"

"That is true."

"Therefore he must be his lordship. The description—"

"He is something like my son, but he is not my son," said the marchioness coldly. "It is very singular that he should be wearing my son's clothes. Has he not given any explanation?"

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"N-n-no—"

"I cannot give one, madam," said Tom Merry, his steady eyes meeting the severe glance of the marchioness quietly. "I do not know how I came to be wearing these clothes. I went to sleep last night in my dormitory at St. Jim's—I awoke this morning on a moor a few miles from here, in these clothes—and I cannot understand in the least how it came about?"

The stern old lady looked at him searchingly, and then seemed at a loss what to say. Tom Merry was evidently speaking the truth.

"Not her son!" murmured P.-c. Wright. "There goes my two hundred quid!"

"Not Lord Reginald!" groaned the inspector. "Then his lordship was kidnapped, after all, and we haven't found him."

"Then he must be in the game, sir!" exclaimed Wright excitedly. "He couldn't come by the clothes unless he was one of the gang!"

"That's so," said the inspector, brightening up. "He was an accomplice, of course."

"We've got one of them, then."

"And we may screw out of him where to find his lordship."

Tom Merry could not help laughing.

"You have not got one of them," he said. "Until to-day I never even heard of the existence of Lord Reginald Grahame, and certainly I know nothing about the kidnapping, if he has been kidnapped."

"That's a likely story," sneered the inspector. "Madam, I am sorry there has been a mistake. It is due to the utter stupidity of this constable!"

Constable Wright gasped.

"He announced that he had found your ladyship's lordship—I mean your ladyship's son—on mere superficial evidence, and, knowing your ladyship's anxiety, I naturally communicated with your ladyship at once—"

"The man is not to blame," said the marchioness. "But this boy should surely be able to tell us something of importance. What is your name?"

"Tom Merry, madam."

"And you say that you have no knowledge or recollection of how you came to be in my son's clothes, and in possession of his property?" said the marchioness, with a searching look.

"None, madam."

"He is lying, of course," said the inspector.

"On the contrary," said the marchioness coldly, "he is evidently telling the truth. Where do you come from, my boy?"

"I belong to St. Jim's—I am in the Shell there."

"You mean the Public school near Rylcombe?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then it is a real place?" gasped the inspector.

"It is a place a few miles from my house," said the marchioness. "I do not doubt the boy's word for a moment. It is very strange that you cannot see that he is telling the truth. It is quite possible that the headmaster of the school may be able to give some information. This boy ought to be returned there at once."

"As a probable accomplice of the kidnappers—"

"Nonsense!"

The inspector gasped again.

Nobody had ever ventured to characterise his observations as nonsense to his face before, but it was evident that the old marchioness allowed herself considerable freedom of speech.

"But, your ladyship, he is wearing your ladyship's lordship's clothes—"

"He is plainly innocent in the matter. It is probable that the kidnappers of my son have taken this boy, too, and dressed him in Lord Reginald's clothes, and transported him to a distance, in order to throw the police off the scent for a time—and you have fallen into the trap."

"I—I—I—"

"I received your telegram, and had not the slightest doubt that the information it gave me was correct," said the marchioness. "I therefore sent a telegram myself to Ferrers Locke, in London, informing him that my son had been found, and that he need trouble no further with the case. This was undoubtedly what the kidnappers wanted—to gain time in order to cover up their tracks."

The inspector was red with confusion. It appeared only too probable now, but he had not thought of it in time.

"With your permission, Mr. Snigg, I will take this lad to Saint James' Collegiate School in my car at once."

"Certainly, your ladyship. In the circumstances, I am not sure whether we should be justified in detaining him. But anything your ladyship wishes—"



"He, he, he!" cackled Gore and Mellish. A hand seized Gore's shoulder and a hand grasped Mellish's. There was a loud crack as their heads were brought forcibly together. Yaroooh! Wow! "Who did that?" roared Gore.

"Then we will go."
 "Whenever your ladyship pleases."
 "Are you ready to return to school, Master Merry?"
 "Quite ready, madam," said Tom Merry eagerly.
 "Then come."

In five minutes Tom Merry was whizzing through the dusk of the July evening, in the car with the stately marchioness, and Inspector Snigg and P.c. Wright were left looking almost as blue as their uniforms.

CHAPTER 15.

The Return of Tom Merry!

"D'ARCY!"
 Silence.

"D'Arcey!"
 Mr. Railton looked up severely.

"Is D'Arcey absent again?"

"Yes, sir," said Kildare, looking along the ranks of the Fourth.

The Housemaster frowned.

"This is the second time!" he exclaimed. "Blake, do you know where D'Arcey is?"

"No, sir," said Jack Blake. "I think he went out. I suppose he has been delayed somewhere—by accident, of course."

"I think D'Arcey must learn not to experience these accidents," said Mr. Railton, compressing lips, and he went on with the roll-call.

"That young ass is in hot water again!" growled Blake, when the Form were dismissed. "I wonder where he has got to. Just like him to start bothering at a time like this."

"D'Arcey hasn't come in yet, it appears," said Skimpole,

joining the Fourth-Formers. "I suppose it was really only to be expected."

"What was only to be expected?" rapped out Blake. "Do you know where he has gone?"

"Oh, yes! By the way, can you lend me a screwdriver, Blake? I am making an airship I have recently invented, and I have broken my screwdriver."

"Where has D'Arcey gone?"

"I believe you have carpentry tools, as you took up carpentry for a hobby at the time of the foundation of the Merry Hobby Club."

"Where is—"

"I have been stopped in my work by breaking my screwdriver. It was very annoying, as I was anxious to get the model finished. I expect it to revolutionise the science of aerostatics, as it is built upon an entirely new principle. I shall be very much obliged if you can lend me a screwdriver—"

"I'll let you have a thick ear if you don't answer my question!" roared Blake. "Where did D'Arcey go?"

"Oh, he went out to look for Tom Merry!"

"Where?" demanded Blake.

"He had an idea that Tom Merry might be hidden in the old castle. I would willingly have gone with him and directed him with my superior intelligence; but you know what an obstinate chap D'Arcey is. He always thinks he knows best. I say, can you lend me a screwdriver?"

"Gone to the old castle," said Blake thoughtfully. "Well, if he doesn't break his neck I dare say he'll be back presently. But what the dickens could have made him imagine that Tom Merry might be there?"

"He says he was kidnapped once himself and confined in that old castle."

"So he was; and we fished him out."

"I pointed out to him that his theory was inadmissible, and that Tom Merry had evidently wandered away from the school in a fit of somnambulism—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Can I have a screwdriver?"

"Yes, if you can find one. I sold mine to Reilly last week."

Skimpole hurried off in search of Reilly. The evening wore away, and the chums began to experience some anxiety as Arthur Augustus did not return. Manners and Lowther came along to Study No. 6. The chums of the Shell were looking anxious and depressed. There was no news of Tom Merry, and their fears were growing. Figgins looked in at the door of the study, and the Co. behind him. Many a time Figgins & Co. had come to that study to raid or to row; but there was no thought of raiding or rowing in their minds now. Their countenances were almost as lugubrious as those of the nearest chums of Tom Merry.

"Thought we'd look in," said Figgins glumly. "No news, I suppose?"

"None," said Lowther.

"Where's Ferrers Locke?"

"He went out some time back, but I think he's returned now. But there's no news," said Blake. "The curious thing is that Gussy hasn't come back. I suppose he can't have been taken away like Tom Merry, can he?"

Figgins whistled.

"He went out to look for Tom Merry," said Blake. "He may, by some wonderful chance, have got on the track, and—"

"And been kidnapped himself?" said Kerr.

"It's just possible!"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Manners suddenly, going to the window.

The zip-zip of a motor-car was heard in the quadrangle.

The juniors were all on their feet at once. The arrival of a motor at that hour in the evening was a sufficiently unusual event to awaken their interest, and all felt that it might mean that something had been discovered of Tom Merry.

"Let's go down to the quad!" exclaimed Blake.

They hurried downstairs. The door was open, and there were fellows on the steps, looking out into the dusky July

night. In front of Dr. Holmes' house a car had halted, and in the glare of the lamps could be seen the figure of Ferrers Locke, who had just come out. The famous detective assisted a stately dame in black from the car.

"By Jove, it's the Marchioness of Northwood!" muttered Manners. "I saw her driving through Wayland the other day."

"Look!" muttered Blake, gripping his arm.

Ferrers Locke turned to the car again.

A form appeared in the glare of the light from the open door—a form the boys of St. Jim's knew well!

"Tom Merry!"

The shout burst from the juniors simultaneously.

Tom Merry heard them and looked round. Down the steps of the School House went the juniors in a wild rush, and in a twinkling they were round Tom Merry. Blake gripped him by one hand, and Lowther by the other. Manners hugged him round the neck, and Figgins slapped him on the back. The marchioness had entered the House with the Head, but Ferrers Locke stayed with the juniors. There was a smile upon the famous detective's clear-cut face.

"So you have come back, Tom!"

"Lemme go!" gasped Tom Merry. "Don't suffocate me! I know you're glad to see me, but don't pulverise me into little pieces!"

His exuberant chums released him at once. The breathless hero of the Shell staggered into the supporting arm of Ferrers Locke. There was a shrill cry.

The next moment Tom Merry was in the arms of Miss Priscilla.

"My darling Tommy!"

The old lady was sobbing and speaking by turns.

"My dearest child! You have returned, my darling Tommy! At last! My dearest, dearest child, where ever have you been?"

The joy of the meeting was too much for Miss Fawcett, and she became quite faint.

"Hannah! My darling boy! Hannah!"

"It's all right, dear!" whispered Tom Merry, kissing his old governess affectionately.

"Hannah! Hannah!" murmured Miss Priscilla.

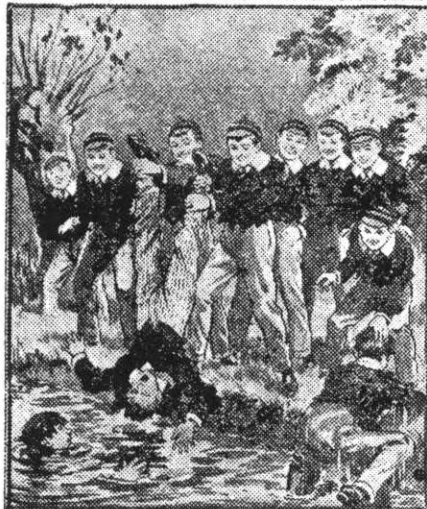
The faithful Hannah was not there, but Mrs. Mimms tenderly led the overcome old lady indoors.

(Continued on next page.)

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Tom Merry glanced round at the welcoming faces of the juniors.

"The whole family here, I see," he said, "excepting Gussy. Where's the one and only Gus?"

"He went out to look for you," said Blake, becoming grave. "He hasn't come in yet."

Ferrers Locke broke in quickly. "What is that? Is D'Arcy missing?"

"Yes. He went to the old castle to look for Tom Merry, and he wasn't back at calling-over. If he isn't in by bedtime there will be a fearful row, I expect. I only hope that nothing has happened to him."

"The old castle," repeated the detective, with a strange gleam in his eyes. "Ah! It is quite possible that something has happened to him. He ought to have been looked for before. I will go at once. If you are not tired, Merry—"

"I've only been driving in a car."

"Then come with me, and you can tell me what has happened as we go. It is important that D'Arcy should be looked for. I will leave a note explaining to the Head—"

"I say, we're not going to be out of this!" exclaimed Blake. "Gussy is our chum, and we're on in this scene."

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther promptly. "Where Tom Merry goes, we go. We're not going to let him out of our sight again."

"In that case I think I'd better come along," said Figgins, "to see that you School House kids don't get into trouble."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"You may all come," he said. "The Head will excuse you at my request, and you may be useful; but the great point is to lose no time."

"Then let's be off!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Follow me!"

The detective, who for some reason unknown to the juniors was a prey to suppressed excitement, left a hasty note for Dr. Holmes, and they quitted St. Jim's. As they hurried on the path to the ruined castle, Tom Merry gave a concise account of his strange experiences. His chums listened with wonder and amazement; but Ferrers Locke only nodded his head, with no trace of surprise on his face. It was evident that Tom Merry's story exactly fitted in with some theory the detective had already formed.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Figgins, as they came out on the rugged path up the hill to the castle. "There's the—"

"Hush!"

Ferrers Locke held up his hand. From the road below the hill came the sound of a motor-car.

"It's a car on the Wayland road!" muttered Tom Merry.

"The kidnapped boy was taken away in a car," said Ferrers Locke; "and you, too, must have been conveyed in a car to that great distance from St. Jim's, my boy!"

"Yes, by Jove!"

"Silence, and listen!"

The sound of the car died away. There was a crashing of thickets as a man forced his way up the hillside from the road, and emerged into the path to the ruins. The long, thin figure seemed familiar to the chums of the Shell.

There was a quick, panther-like spring by Ferrers Locke, and the man went to the ground under the weight of the detective.

The juniors gasped for a moment, taken by surprise by the suddenness of it; but then they piled on the fallen man, and he was secured almost before he had time to struggle.

The handcuffs clicked on his wrists, and Ferrers Locke turned the glimmer of an electric lantern upon a savage and furious face.

"Silas Shucks!" cried Tom Merry.

The prisoner ground out an oath between his teeth.

"Caught—and by Ferrers Locke!"

"Yes," said the detective tranquilly; "your scheme was a little too cunning—it has recoiled upon itself. You are my prisoner. Where is the son of the marchioness?"

"You will never find him."

"Wrong!" He is in the ruined castle, unless I am mistaken—"

The prisoner burst into a savage laugh.

"I guess the game's up!" he exclaimed. "You're right—and you've got us. I suppose you're here through that meddling young fool I laid by the heels an hour ago. If I had known you were in the neighbourhood—"

"It was your own cunning that brought us here. Tom Merry was found in your victim's clothes, and was supposed to be the kidnapped boy. I was notified, and gave up the case; the police were put off the track. So much you had planned. But you did not know that Tom Merry was my friend, and that, as soon as I was disengaged I should come down here to search for him."

"You have been one too many for me," drawled Silas

Shucks, recovering all his American coolness; "but it was a clever game, all the same. But for an accident you would never have got on the right track. We drugged Tom Merry last night, and carried him nearly fifty miles in the car, and put him out, in Lord Reginald's clothes. If we had been dealing only with the police that device would have deluded them long enough for us to have time to secure ourselves. But you—well, the game's up. Bunker is in the vaults below here, with the boy, and that meddling young fool whose blundering has brought you here. You can take these things off my wrists."

"You are safer with them."

"Well, light a cigar, then, and put it between my teeth."

Ferrers Locke laughed and complied. The rascal smoked as coolly as though no manacles clinked on his wrists, no prison waited for him.

"Remain here, some of you, and guard him," said Ferrers Locke. "Merry, Manners, and Figgins, come with me to search the vaults for D'Arcy and the kidnapped boy."

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

The juniors left to watch the prisoner watched him carefully. At the slightest movement they were prepared to jump on him. But Silas Shucks knew that the game was up, and he made no attempt to escape. They waited patiently for the return of the detective; they did not have long to wait.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Blake suddenly.

Ferrers Locke came into sight in the gloom. A slinking figure was by his side, with clinking handcuffs. It was Bunker, and he was a prisoner. A pale-faced lad, remarkably like Tom Merry in form and feature, was leaning on the arm of the hero of the Shell. It was the kidnapped boy, rescued at last after more than twenty-four hours in the hands of the kidnappers.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, I am glad to see you!" said Arthur Augustus, who was walking by the side of Ferrers Locke. "I have had a fearful time, you know, and my clothes are utterly spoiled. Undah the circs, however, my governah cannot fail to come down wathah handsome, as I have wescued this unfortunate youngstah from the grasp of the kidnappahs!"

"You have?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! It is twue that I had wathah a misfortune in my pwoceedings, but you cannot deny that, but for me, you would never have come here; and so I think I can properly wegard myself as the wescuah of our young fwiend. Fewwers Locke will acknowledge as much, I am assuahed."

"Certainly," said the detective gravely. "But now let us get back to the school as quickly as we can. We will borrow the car for the purpose; but some of you will have to walk. When we have restored this unfortunate boy to his mother, these two rascals can be taken to the lock-up. Their kidnapping scheme will be put an end to for several years to come, I think."

"It was all your fault, Silas Shucks!" growled Bunker.

"I was against it from start to finish. That's understood."

"Oh, stow the cackle!" said Silas Shucks.

There was surprise at St. Jim's when the detective and his companions returned. The kidnapped boy was greeted with amazement and joy by the marchioness, her severe old eyes melting into tears at the sight of his pale, dazed face. She had been about to leave St. Jim's, and now Reggie Grahame went with her. The two kidnappers, who had failed so disastrously in their attempt to transplant an American variety of crime to the old country, were soon in the hands of the police, and, as Ferrers Locke had said, their activity in that direction was likely to be curtailed for many years to come.

Tom Merry's strange adventure and his startling though temporary change of identity formed a nine days' wonder at St. Jim's.

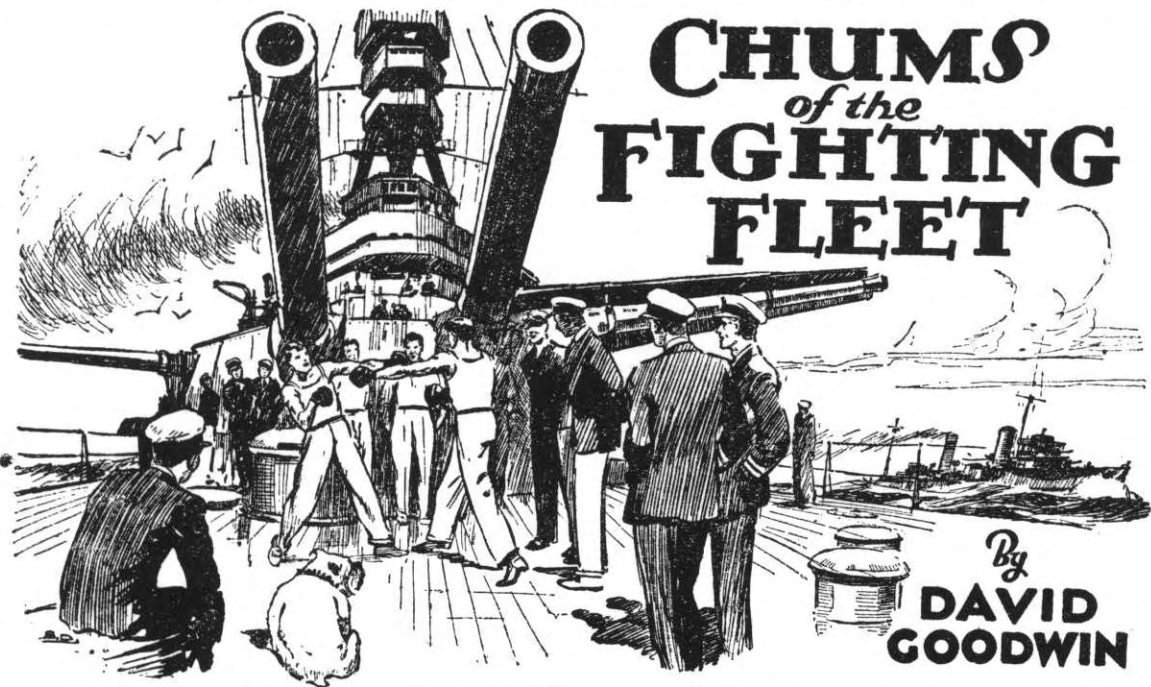
Arthur Augustus assumed to himself the whole honour of the satisfactory finish to the affair. He regarded himself as the rescuer of the kidnapped boy, and, in the height of his enthusiasm, he repeated his offer to Ferrers Locke, of accompanying him to London as his assistant in the detective profession. Needless to say, Ferrers Locke laughingly declined, and when he left St. Jim's he left Arthur Augustus D'Arcy there—with the opinion firmly fixed in his mind that Ferrers Locke would not afford him an opening in London, for fear of being eclipsed by the fame of a rival.

THE END.

(Take a look at next week's cover on the opposite page and make up your mind to read next week's ripping, long, complete yarn of St. Jim's!)

CHUMS of the FIGHTING FLEET

By
**DAVID
GOODWIN**



Ned Hardy and his pal Jinks, middies on the Victorious, are determined to clear the name of Ned's brother Ralph; who was dismissed the Service after a robbery. Ned believes he was "framed" by Russian spies. On holiday, Ned and Jinks set out in the Merlin with Lieutenant Watson hunting "coupers," who sell illegal drinks to fishermen on the Dogger Bank. Ned falls into the hands of Long Dennis, a notorious "couper," and when he fires Dennis' ship Ned is tied to the mast and left there—what time Dennis escapes in another ship. Jinks and Watson arrive just in time and Ned is rescued. Long Dennis is overtaken and Jinks leads a boarding party. Dennis is killed in the fight, and the ship captured, but the Merlin gets lost in a fog.

Jinks' Great Triumph!

THE wind freshened just before the dawn; the sea began to rise briskly. Daylight slowly grew stronger. Presently the fog split like a veil, lifted, and shrouded away, leaving sea and sky clear.

The Merlin was nowhere in sight. Not a vestige of any vessel, sail or steam, was to be seen anywhere round the whole circle of the horizon.

The prize crew were astonished. They had expected to sight the Merlin as soon as the fog cleared, but over all those miles of sea there was not a sign of her. Jinks climbed to the smack's crossrees with the only glass they had with them, and took a long look out over the sea.

"No use," he said, coming down. "We must have given each other the go-by altogether last night."

"Afraid so, sir," said the petty officer. "It'll be a job to find her, or for her to find us."

A strong breeze had sprung up from the eastward, blowing towards England, blustering and cold. Jinks made his decision.

"I'm not going to hang about waiting for her. With all these dead men and prisoners about us, we'll sail for port on our own." He thought a minute or two, trying to judge their position as well as he could. "Lay your course west by north!"

"West by north it is, sir!" said the man at the helm; and the St. Jean was soon bowling along towards England.

Jinks felt a bigger man than ever before in his life. It was gorgeous to be in command of a prize of his own capture, with the marks of hard fighting still on her, and a crew of prisoners below. A lot better than sneaking into port in tow of the old Merlin.

Jinks soon had his crew to work, the decks washed, all ropes coiled down, and everything on deck and below made shipshape and Navy fashion. Used to the spick-and-span ways of the flagship, he could not stand slovenliness on board any craft. The men made the dirty old Dutch vessel smarter than she had been since she was launched. The wounded and prisoners were attended to, and a log was made and streamed.

"How these snotties spread themselves when they get a chance!" said Pom Sheriff to one of his mates, grinning.

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"But he's a fine little buck, he is, an' has grit enough to back up even his cheek. He's the sort I don't mind sailing under."

One of the men below had lit the stove, and was frying some pork and boiling a large pan of coffee. All hands were piped to breakfast, and a capital meal they made.

Jinks had his pork and biscuit last, and when he came on deck the wind was blowing fresher, and the sea rising.

"Shan't be long making the Humber at this pace," said the middy, "though the wind's westerning a bit. What are those ahead—fishing vessels?"

"Yes, sir," said the petty officer, who had the glass to his eye. "Two of 'em. Antwerp or Ostend boats, like this one. They always seem to fish about here."

Jinks busied himself with taking a dead-reckoning, in order to ascertain the St. Jean's position as nearly as possible, when the petty officer stepped up to him.

"Beg pardon, sir, but those smacks seem closing in on us in a queerish sort o' way, an' I noticed 'em signalling each other."

Jinks took a good look at the strange vessels. They were on opposite sides of the St. Jean, each about half a mile from her. But it did seem as if they were deliberately closing in.

"By gum!" he exclaimed. "I believe they're the two smacks we sighted last night just before the Merlin gave chase! They've both got jib-headed topsails. What crews they carry, too! There must be a score of men on each of them! Looks rather as if they meant mischief, too, by the way they're closing on us."

"They do, sir!"

"But they can't know this craft's been chased and taken. They haven't spoken to her, and they wefen't anywhere near during the fight."

"The flag, sir!" said the petty officer, pointing aloft; for Jinks had had a white ensign from the whale-boat run up at the St. Jean's fore.

"Of course, dash it! That gives the game away. Well, I'm not going to strike my colours. All the same, we mustn't let forty men board us. We only muster eight all told—one of us wounded, as well, and Simmons isn't much good yet. We've rifles enough for all, and all must use 'em!"

Jinks thought the matter over swiftly. He was in a tight

place. His vessel had lost her topmast, the others were faster, and if they laid him aboard it would be impossible for his handful of men to hold their own against such a crowd.

It was probable that the crews were Voroff's men.

"We must keep our men under cover till the smacks get close," said Jinks, "and then slap it into them all hot, and they'll probably turn tail. A sharp lesson may turn 'em!"

He felt, however, that it was rather an off-chance. Failure meant the retaking of his prize, and the wiping out of himself and his company. It was the first time he had been up against Voroff's men, and, perilous though it was, Jinks seized the opportunity.

The great thing was to conceal the fact that he had only half a dozen bluejackets. The more unwarily the enemy came on the better. Jinks had sent his men below to clear up the cabins and hold, and look after the prisoners. He now went down after them before they could return on deck, and gave them their instructions.

Every man was to take his rifle, its magazine fully charged, and a bandolier full of cartridges. They were to go on deck by the main and fore hatches, not openly, but creeping out through the hatchways and across the deck to the bulwarks, behind which they were to crouch, rifles in hand, and on no account to fire without orders.

This was carried out. Without exposing themselves, or letting themselves be seen in any way, the seamen were soon lying close under the heavy wooden bulwarks, three on each side. The petty officer also took a rifle. Jinks and the man at the wheel remained at their posts. The smacks were no more than 200 yards away.

"Wish I'd known this was coming!" said Tom Sheriff from his place behind the rail. "If I could only ha' got the boat-gun aboard! The little pet! She'd ha' showed those swabs what's o'clock!"

"The which?"

"The boat-gun, sir—the little one-pounder quick-firer. She lies in the whale-boat towing astern there. Mr. Watson told me to put her in when the order was given to man an' arm the whaler," said the seaman-gunner regretfully.

"If I'd only known she was there!" cried Jinks. "What a confounded pity! No time to get her out now. We should have to heave-to to get the whaler alongside, and they'd be aboard us in a brace of shakes!" A jet of smoke spurted from the smack to windward, and a bullet sang past Jinks' head. "Stand by and pour it in as fast as ever you can pump when I give the word!"

"Aho, you Navy thieves!" roared a voice from one of the smacks. "You will haf der knife to your throats in von minute! Heave your sheep to, or ve burn you like Long Dennis burn der Black Witch!"

"Stand by to fire!" said Jinks warningly.

Suddenly, as the smacks closed in, an outburst of ragged firing broke from both their decks. Jinks' shoulder was ploughed by a chance bullet, and another smacked into the mast. Voroff's men were armed with Remington rifles.

"Fire!" cried the middy. "Let 'em have it, lads!"

With a rattle and a crash the six magazine rifles of the bluejackets replied. With muzzles just peeping over the bulwarks, they fired with the deadly speed and accuracy that only the modern repeating-rifle in the hands of a trained man can show. The difference between the swift, perfectly aimed shots and those of the undisciplined mob on the smacks was startling.

Four men were down on the windward smack in the first few seconds, and six on the other vessel. There was a shout of rage and astonishment from the enemy. They replied with a furious fire, worse aimed than ever, and the cool, rapid shooting of the flagship's seamen pumped lead in among them with deadly effect. It seemed to the trawlers that twenty men were pouring bullets into them, where they had only expected to meet two or three. The confusion on the smacks was terrific. Each had already lost nine or ten men, and the biggest of the two vessels, flinging her head round from the wind, turned tail and fairly ran for it. A few moments later the other followed suit.

"Keep it up, lads!" cried the petty officer, firing away till his rifle barrel was too hot to hold. "Give it 'em as long as we're in range! We shan't see any more of 'em!"

"Shan't we?" cried Jinks. "I'm going to nail both of them, the swabs! Cease firing and ship that boat-gun!" he ordered sharply. "Lay her to the wind, and get the whale-boat alongside! Get the gun mounted forward! Lively, lads, lively!"

"Good stuff!" panted the petty officer, as he worked away with the men to get the gun out of the whale-boat and mount it.

They handled the gun swiftly and skilfully. It was meant to work from the whale-boat's bows; but that was no use now, and there were no facilities for fixing it on the smack's deck, but with the handiness and resource of Navy men they improvised means of setting up the little gun and its recoil frame.

By that time the two armed smacks were dashing away at a startling pace in exactly opposite directions, and were fully half a mile distant. In the sea that was running it had been no easy matter to get the whale-boat safely alongside, and the gun out of it and mounted. Tom Sheriff sprang to the weapon's breech, and stood by the lever as the smack swung round. She turned first in the direction of the vessel to windward.

"Don't hull her!" cried Jinks, as Tom Sheriff swung the gun. "Shoot her spars away, if you can. Wing her!"

Crack, crack, crack, bang! went the little one-pounder, spitting viciously, the shots going clean through the smack's mainsail and rigging. A spatter of long-range rifle fire came from the smack, but at Tom Sheriff's fourth shell down came the mast. Shot clean through five feet above the deck, it went crashing downwards.

A cheer rose from the bluejackets, but Jinks put the St. Jean about instantly, and went flying after the other smack. She was now so far away that hitting her masts with the shells of the little gun was doubtful; but Tom Sheriff plugged away, taking no notice of the bullets that splintered the deck near him, one of them stripping the sole off Jinks' boot without as much as touching his foot—a strange chance, but one that has happened many a time under fire.

The smack hauled her wind and pointed easterly, showing her broadside for a moment, and a shell from the gun smacked her bowsprit clean off close to the gammon-iron. Down came her jib and foresail. She lurched head to wind, and lay rocking on the sea like a broken-winged gull, unable to sail or steer without her headsails, which were trailing in the water.

"Well bowled, sir!" cried Jinks. "Cease firing! That's better than dismasting her. Firing-party of six with rifles, starboard side there! Sheriff, keep the gun trained on her!"

The St. Jean came swooping up to the winged vessel, whose crew, scared and sullen, stood waiting on her decks.

"Throw your weapons overboard!" roared Jinks through the megaphone. "Over with them, now, and then form up in line. Quick, or I'll blow you out of the water!"

Under the point-blank menace of that quick-firer and the six repeating-rifles that had already done such deadly work, the enemy wanted no more. They threw their weapons overboard hurriedly, their skipper bawling out in broken English.

"If I strung you all up you'd deserve it for making an unprovoked attack, and firing on the British flag!" said Jinks. "You'll go into port with me, and your case'll be tried with the rest. Now, get below into your hold, Messrs. Voroff & Co. Quick about it!"

The whale-boat put off with a boarding party, and, under the gun of the St. Jean, searched the crew, and sent them below into their hold, after which the hatches were battened down on them securely. The bluejackets then spar-buckled the smashed bowsprit, and replaced it with a reef in it, set up the fore-rigging again, and set a small jib and whole foresail. Jinks could only spare three men as a prize crew for her, but these were quite able to handle the old "wind-bag," as they called her, under reduced canvas, and both smacks started back after the third.

This one had lain perfectly helpless after her dismasting, and the motley crew on board knuckled under even more readily than the others. Jinks disposed of them in exactly the same way, making them throw their weapons overboard, and battening them down securely into the hold.

It was impossible to sail the smack, and, for that matter, he could spare no hands save a single steersman; but Jinks did not mean to abandon his prize. He had the mast cleared and cut adrift, and took the crippled smack in tow. Ordering the other vessel in charge of his petty officer to keep within close hail of him, Jinks set his course as near west as the wind would let him.

The strong breeze, however, kept veering to the north and west, and the St. Jean had to bear away to the southward more and more. She could not beat against the wind with a heavy smack towing behind.

"We shan't fetch England anywhere near the Humber," said Jinks. "We must be miles and miles south of it; how far is more than I can tell, for there aren't any instruments aboard, and we've nothing to take an observation with. Keep a look-out aloft. We can't be far off the coast now."

"Land-ho!" sang out the man aloft an hour later. "On the weather bow, sir!"

The land was soon clearly visible—a low, flat stretch of coast that was unknown to Jinks. It was recognised by Tom Sheriff, an East Coast man, however. He declared it was the Norfolk coast, near Cley.

"Cley!" ejaculated Darby. "We're not only south of the Humber, but of the Wash as well!" He paused and thought. "There's nothing for it but to run on to Harwich. It is not eleven yet, and we'll be there by dark. Bear away, and run straight along the coast, south-fifteen-west."

Jinks rubbed his hands together and chuckled secretly. Harwich suited him very well. He did not want to make a show, but it would certainly be rather posh to sail in past the Victorious and salute her with three separate prizes under his charge.

The breeze blew strongly, and though the St. Jean was encumbered by the vessel she had in tow, and the other smack had to shorten sail to keep with her, they swung along at a good rate. Lowestoft was passed, Orford Ness was cleared by four o'clock. Just as the Cork Light was sighted, and Harwich Harbour began to open up, the dusk began to fall.

"There's only one fly in this giddy ointment!" remarked Jinks. "I do wish old Ned had been in it all with me! He'd have just wallowed in. But he's had all he can carry for a little while, what with the pinnace and Long Dennis. Wonder where on earth the Merlin is?" he added aloud, "Would she have gone back to Hull?"

"Beg pardon, sir, I think this is the likeliest place the Merlin 'ud come!" said the leading-seaman at the helm. "She'd know we couldn't get to Hull with this wind, and half crippled as we are."

"Hope Watson won't be sick at my walking off with his prize, but I couldn't help it. We took her ourselves, anyhow. There's the flagship!" Jinks exclaimed, as they rounded the Guard Buoy into the Stour. "Hail the other smack to keep on our lee-quarter. Wilcox, stand by those flag-halyards, ready to salute. The sunset gun'll go in a minute!"

It was one of the proudest moments of Jinks' life when, standing next the steersman on the foremost of his three battle-scarred prizes, he sailed past the great grey warship that claimed him as a middy. The amazing spectacle focused every eye on the captured smack, and a line of midshipmen's faces over the boat deck-rail peered in astonishment at the St. Jean.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" cried a voice. "Roll me in a bowline, if it isn't young Jinks!"

Rear-Admiral Raglan came out on the upper foredeck, and was astounded as anybody. Jinks saluted formally, and the little ensign at his masthead dipped in fealty to the flagship.

Manœuvring his three craft smartly past, Jinks brought them head to wind, and dropped anchor in a clear berth two hundred yards farther on. Then he called away the whale-boat, and went alongside the gangway of the Victorious.

"The admiral wishes to see you at once, sir!" said a messenger the moment Jinks was on the steps.

"Right-ho!" said the midddy; and he proceeded immediately to where his amazed admiral stood.

"What's this, Mr. Jinks?" said Raglan. "Have you spent your leave collecting trawlers?"

"I was sent by the gunboat Merlin to board the smack St. Jean, and take Long Dennis Clegg, sir," said Jinks, saluting. "We lost the Merlin in a fog. Clegg was killed in the action, and so were seven of his men; but we took the rest of the crew, and the other two ships attacked us, so we included them in the bill. I've got about seventy prisoners below hatches. Perhaps, sir, it might be as well to send a

good strong escort to take charge of them. We're rather short-handed."

Admiral Raglan, though one of the coolest officers in the Service, nearly staggered at the news. For a moment he thought Jinks was daring to joke; but when he saw the plain proofs of the action, and had the escort off, he called Jinks into his cabin.

Admiral Sir Francis Frobisher was already there, and the midddy, saluting, was bidden to tell his story.

"Let us have the report in full, Mr. Jinks," said Sir Francis. "This affair is simply amazing!"

Jinks quite naturally and modestly told how Ned Hardy and he had joined the Merlin instead of taking their shore leave, and all that had come of it, down to the arrival at Harwich.

"Well, sir," exclaimed the admiral, "I prophesy for you the quickest rise to flag rank that any youngster ever had in the Home Fleet! The pluck and resource you've shown are marvellous! And I may say the same of that young friend of yours, Hardy. Begad, I don't know which is the better man!"

"Beg pardon, sir!" said the messenger, who had just appeared. "Officer of the day reports the gunboat Merlin just enterin' the harbour!"

"The Merlin!" exclaimed Admiral Raglan. "She must have come in to report losing the whaleboat's boarding-party!"

"Let us see," said Sir Francis. "Signal her commander to come aboard at once!"

Jinks, eager for news of Ned Hardy, followed the two admirals on deck.

The Merlin herself was steaming in towards the anchorage. In reply to the signals from the flagship, she dropped anchor. Her gig came off at once, bringing Lieutenant Watson.

Lieutenant Watson was shut with the admirals for a long time—nearly three-quarters of an hour. When he came out Jinks hurried to meet him, saluting. Watson returned the salute, and shook the midddy warmly by the hand.

"By Jove, I'm glad to see you, Jinks!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "I was in no end of a funk about you!"

"We've got Dennis' ship and two others, sir. I say, I hope it was all right in the admiral's cabin—eh?" said Jinks anxiously. "I was afraid—"

"The admiral?" said Watson, laughing. "Rather! Everything top-hole. That poor beggar Simmons is saved, I see. I hope this'll stiffen his backbone a bit. We couldn't find you in that beastly fog. There was no sign of you in the morning, so after cruising about all day I ran in here, in the hope you'd make this port with the northerly wind. We knew you'd settled the St. Jean all right; we heard you hailing us."

"All's well that ends well," said Jinks. "How's old Ned? I've been fearfully anxious about him!"

"He's a lot better. It'll be some time before he gets over that scorching and the time he had in the pinnace. Come over to the Merlin and see him now."

(Ned and Jinks have not done with Voroff & Co. yet! Look out for more thrills in next week's instalment.)

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