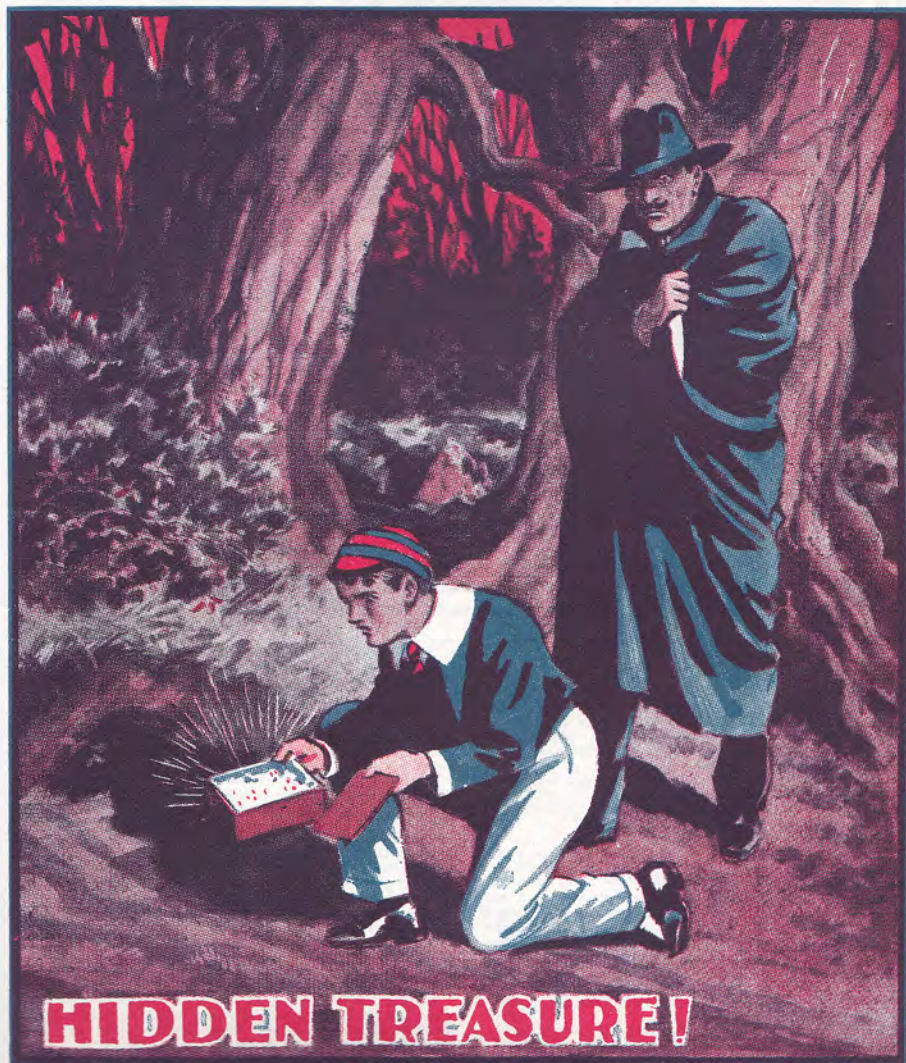


"RED STAR RANGER!" THRILLING NEW WESTERN ADVENTURE YARN STARTS THIS WEEK!

CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS—
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!

The GEM

2^d



HIDDEN TREASURE!

THRILLS AND MYSTERY AT ST. JIM'S! GANGSTER'S ATTACK ON

The TREASURE of



Tom Merry's cousin, home from South Africa, gives Tom a packet, worth a fortune, to look after—and five minutes later the packet is stolen! That's the beginning of this ripping yarn of grand adventure and super-thrills! Start on it right away!

CHAPTER 1.

A Surprise for Tom Merry!

"MASTER MERRY!"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was sitting at the table in his study in the School House at St. Jim's, with his chin in his right hand, and his elbow resting on the table, and his brows contracted in a portentous frown.

A page of German prose was before him, and Tom Merry was apparently trying to make out what it might possibly mean, and, to judge by his expression, without much success.

"Master Merry!"

Binks, the School House page, put his head in at the door. Binks had a letter in one hand, and an obliging smile on his face. He was not bound to bring up letters to the junior studies; but he would have done that, or anything else, for Tom Merry. For the frank, genial hero of the Shell was just as much a favourite below stairs, in the School House, as he was with his own Form-fellows. There were few people who could see Tom Merry without liking him.

"Master Merry!"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Tom Merry, without looking up. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Yes; but Master Merry—"

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"Can you translate German, Binks?"

"Lor' bless yer, no!" gasped Binks.

"Then get out!"

"Eh?"

"Get out! I'm busy! I'm going to extract some meaning from this blessed German, if I burst a boiler! There must be some meaning in it, because Goethe wrote it. I can't see any at present, but I'm going to stick to it. Run along and play!"

"But—"

"If the Head wants me, tell him I'm busy. If it's Mr. Railton, say, I can't come. If it's Kildare, give him a thick ear, with my kind regards! Bunk!"

"But—"

"Buzz off!"

"But it's a letter, Master Merry."

"I've got enough letters here, and each one like a spider's leg!" growled Tom Merry. "Can't you buzz off?"

"It's a letter for you—"

"You can leave it. Be off!"

Binks grinned. Tom Merry had not even looked up during the dialogue. His forehead was wrinkled furiously. If he did not succeed in making that German mean something, it would not be for want of concentrated effort.

Binks was about to lay the letter on the table and retire, when Monty Lowther and Manners came into the study. Lowther and Manners were Tom Merry's study-mates and his chums in the Shell Form.

TOM MERRY! JUNIORS SEARCH FOR MISSING DIAMONDS!

RYLCOMBE Woods!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Lowther jerked the letter from Binks' hand.

"This for me?" he demanded.

"No, Master Lowther; it's for Master Tom."

"Rot! I'm expecting a letter!" growled Lowther. "I dare say this is for me, and the wrong name has been put on by mistake. What do you mean by bringing up a letter into this study without a silver salver, Binks? Take that!"

Lowther said "Take that!" in a truculent tone—but "that" was a sixpence, which Binks took, with a cheerful grin. He left the study, and Lowther turned the letter over in his hands.

"I say, Tom, here's a letter for you."

"I'm busy."

"Now, don't be an ass! You know how jolly short of tin we are, and it's tea-time. There may be something in it."

"I'm busy!"

"But look here, you ass, here's a letter which may contain—"

"Well, open it, then, and don't bother me!"

"Oh, all right!"

Funds were held in common in Tom Merry's study, and the chums had no secrets from one another. Lowther slit the envelope and took the letter out.

He gave an expressive grunt as he unfolded it.

"Huh! No postal order!"

"Don't talk while I'm doing German."

"Shall I read the letter out to you?"

"No!" roared Tom Merry. "Read it to yourself!"

"There may be something—"

"Bosh!"

"But—"

"Shut up!"

"Oh, all right! You don't want me to read it to you?"

"No!"

"Then I'll read it to Manners," grinned Monty Lowther. "Manners, dear, come listen here. 'My dear Cousin Tom—'"

"Hullo! I didn't know Tom had any dear cousins."

"Oh, he's only rotting!" growled Tom Merry. "My cousin's in South Africa. Why don't you ring off, Monty?"

"Honest Injun! 'My dear Cousin—I'm in England quite unexpectedly, and I want to see you upon important business.'"

"Don't be an ass!"

"I tell you that's what's written here. 'I—' " Lowther broke off. "I say, Tom, you'd better read this yourself."

"I won't!" roared Tom Merry.

"But—"

"Go on, and get it over!"

"Very well. 'I'm in England quite unexpectedly, and I want to see you upon important business. I do not wish to come to the school, so I have put up in Rylcombe for the present, and I should like you to come out and meet me. I will be at the stile, in the lane, at eight o'clock this evening. Come if you possibly can, as it is of more importance to both of us than I can explain in a letter. Keep it a secret until you have seen me—even from your most intimate chums.'"

"Phew!" exclaimed Manners.

"Your affectionate cousin, Herbert Dorrian."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom—"

"If you've done rotting, let me get on with my German. I've simply got to get through this thing, if it costs me a leg!"

"But this letter—"

"Blow that letter!"

"Look here—" Monty Lowther shoved the letter fairly under Tom Merry's nose. "Read it yourself, you ass!"

A glance at the letter was sufficient to show that Monty

Lowther had not, as he had imagined, been making it up as he went along.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"You see, it's there!" said Lowther. "I'm sorry I read it now. But you really made me. If I'd had the least notion that there was anything private in the letter—"

"You couldn't—it's all right. I don't know that I should keep a secret from you two, anyway. Of course, you'll keep it dark."

"Yes, rather!"

"Blessed if I can understand it, though," said Tom Merry, looking utterly puzzled. "What can Dorrian be doing in England all of a sudden, and why should he keep it a secret? Why can't he come up to the school?"

"There's something curious about it."

"By Jove, there is!"

"He might be in trouble of some sort," hazarded Manners. "What sort of a chap is this cousin of yours?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I can hardly say. I haven't seen him since I was a kid, and I hardly remember him. He writes to my old governess, Miss Fawcett, every now and then, from South Africa, and he's sometimes sent me little things. I always thought he was a decent sort, but I don't know much about him. This is awfully queer!"

"I suppose you'll meet him?"

"I suppose I must," said Tom Merry, wrinkling his brow. "It's awfully queer, though. I don't like keeping secrets. And we look up before eight now. I shall have to ask Kildare for a pass out."

"The skipper will give you a pass all right, Tom. He knows chaps belonging to this study never get into mischief of any sort."

"Oh, don't be funny, Monty!" Tom Merry rose from the table. "Hang it! What the dickens can the letter mean?"

"Give it up."

"I wish I could; but I must do as Dorrian says."

"I suppose so."

"Blow that German! I shall give that up, anyway." Tom Merry looked over the letter. "What can it possibly mean?"

"Ask us another."

"Why can't he come up to the school?"

"Blessed if I know."

"And why should I keep it dark?"

"It's a giddy mystery."

"Blow!" said Tom Merry. "If there's anything I hate it's a mystery. I can't stand a chap with a secret, and I hate keeping one. I really don't know why my cousin has come all the way from Africa to interrupt my study of German."

"Ha, ha, ha! Better meet him, though. Blood is thicker than 'bacca-juice.'"

"Oh, I shall meet him! Hang it, though; I don't like keeping secrets!"

And Tom Merry crashed the letter into his pocket, and went off to ask Kildare of the Sixth for a pass out of the gates.

CHAPTER 2.

Jack Blake Has His Suspicions!

"BAI JOVE! Here he is!" It was Arthur Augustus D'Arey of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's who uttered the ejaculation. He was standing at the door of Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, and he turned his eyesglass upon Tom Merry as the hero of the Shell came along.

"Pway stop a minute, Tom Mewwy."

"Can't!"

"Bai Jove! He's in a bad tempah!"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy—"

"More rats!"

"Bai Jove, I—"

"Hold on, Merry!" shouted Jack Blake from the study. "I want to speak to you! Don't be a pig!"

Thus adjured, Tom Merry came to a halt. He looked into Study No. 6, where Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the chums of the Fourth, dwelt together in more or less of harmony. Harmony seemed to be reigning there at the present moment; the chums of Study No. 6 had been deep in a discussion when the Shell fellow came by.

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry. "Buck up! I'm in a hurry!"

"Why, what's on?"

"Oh, nothing! What do you want?"

Blake looked at him.

"There's nothing on, and yet you're in a hurry," he remarked. "Tommy, my son, you are trying to deceive your uncle."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom Merry. "Tell me what you want, or I'm off!"

"To come to business—"

"Buck up!"

"It's practically impossible for my friend Blake to buck up, Tom Mewwy, if you keep on intewwuptin' him."

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Blake ungratefully. "Now, Merry."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Now, Merry, we've been thinking in this study that the New House chaps have been getting too cocky lately, and we think it's about time they were taken down a peg or two. We were thinking of a Triple Alliance—us at the head, you three Shellfish, and Noble and his gang from the end study—to put Figgins & Co. through a regular course of surprises. What do you think of the idea?"

"Oh, it's all right!"

"You don't seem so jolly enthusiastic about it."

"Bai Jove, no!"

"We're thinking of beginning this evening, with a raid on the New House," said Digby. "What do you say? A general rendezvous at eight o'clock?"

Tom Merry started.

"Eight o'clock?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Sorry—can't be did!"

"Why not?"

"I—I've got an engagement this evening," stammered Tom Merry. "I—I'm going out."

"You're going out?"

"Yes. Sorry. So-long!"

"Here, stop a tick—"

"Must be off. Sorry!"

And Tom Merry disappeared down the passage. The chums of the Fourth Form looked at one another.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, polishing his eyeglass in a thoughtful manner. "It wathah looks to me as if Tom Mewwy had somethin' on his mind."

"What-ho!" said Herries.

Jack Blake grinned.

"I should rather say so," he remarked. "He turned quite red. Of course, it's perfectly simple."

"Bai Jove! I don't see it."

"There's a jape on, ass—"

"I refuse to be called an ass—"

"Duffer, then—it's immaterial. There's a jape on, and it's up against us. That's why Tom Merry turned red, my son," said Blake sagely. "What's he going out for? What's his giddy engagement?"

"It's vewy prob, bai Jove!"

"He declines the alliance," said Blake. "Well, let him rip. He's got something on—and so have we. We can let Figgins & Co. and the New House rest for a bit. We are on in this scene, my sons!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Tom Merry has an engagement at eight o'clock, has he?" grinned Blake. "I think we have an engagement about the same time, in the same place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll keep our optics on this giddy youth. He mustn't be encouraged to jape a chap older than himself."

"Oldah, deah boy?"

"Well, I've been at St. Jim's longer," said Blake. "Practically older. We're on in this act. We shall have an engagement in the same spot, and if we don't frustrate their knavish tricks, you can use my napper for a cushion."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Digby jumped up.

"Let's see what he's up to now!" he exclaimed. "He rushed off in a deuce of a hurry!"

"Yaas, wathah, he certainly was in a deuce of a hurwy! Let's buzz aftah him, deah boys—he went downstairs!"

"Come on, then!"

The Fourth-Formers raced out of the study. When they

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were not disputing with Figgins & Co. of the New House, Blake and his friends were generally at war with the Terrible Three. The mere thought that Tom Merry was planning a jape against Study No. 6 was sufficient to rouse them to battle-heat. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was generally leisurely in his movements, was excited as the four rushed into the passage.

They dashed along to the stairs.

Arthur Augustus, who was in the lead, ran right into Reilly as the latter came out of his study. Reilly stood like a rock, and Arthur Augustus broke on him like a wave.

"Faith, and is it tired ye are?" asked Reilly, as D'Arcy sat down.

Before Arthur Augustus could reply, his three chums came tumbling over him.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy. "Bai Jove!"

"You ass!" roared Blake. "What do you mean by sitting down in the passage?"

"Ow! Weally, Blake—"

Blake picked himself up, and ran on. So did Herries and Digby. Arthur Augustus sat where he was, gasping for breath.

The juniors reached the stairs, and Blake slid down the banisters. Sliding down the banisters was strictly forbidden, but Blake did not stop to think of it just then. He reached the lower passage, and caught sight of Tom Merry just entering Kildare's study.

"Oho! He's going to see Kildare—eh?"

Blake waited. Tom Merry came out of the school captain's study a couple of minutes later, and he had a paper in his hand.

Blake, Herries, and Digby affected to be busily talking cricket as he passed them, and Tom Merry was too much occupied with his own thoughts to observe them.

He had easily obtained the pass from Kildare, to remain out of gates until nine o'clock. Kildare knew the boys whom he could trust, and Tom Merry was one of them.

Blake chuckled as Tom went up to his study.

"Did you see that?" he asked.

"It was a pass."

"Yes, rather. Tom is going out of bounds."

"It's a jape—but I can't see exactly—"

"We shall see at eight o'clock," grinned Blake. "We're on the giddy track. Hallo, here's Gussy! Gussy—"

"Blake, I have been knocked ovah and twodden on!"

Blake looked at the swell of St. Jim's. He certainly looked dishevelled. His clothes were dusty, his collar torn out, his necktie hanging loose.

"Dear me!" said Blake. "Have you really? Why do you do these things?"

"Blake—"

"Is it a new form of exercise instead of Indian clubs—"

"You uttah ass—"

"It must come rather rough on your clothes, old fellow."

"Look here—"

"Let's see you do it again."

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and gave his chums a withering stare.

"I refuse to be treated in this spirit of whildwyt!" he explained. "As a matter of fact, my clothes are ruined. My geyvahn is gettin' vewy close with the fivahs now, too. I regard you as a set of asses! I—"

"Never mind, old chap; do ring off!" said Blake. "You see—"

"I refuse to wing off! I—"

"Oh, let's run for it!" said Blake. "Gussy's fairly started, and he won't ring off for a good hour yet!"

"Weally, Blake—stop, you asses, I—you uttah vottahs!"

And D'Arcy sniffed—not to say snorted—as Blake, Herries, and Digby broke into a run, and disappeared round the nearest corner.

CHAPTER 3.

Shadowed by Three!

FIGGINS & CO. came out of the New House after tea. They were in running clothes, which showed off Figgins' long slim legs to great advantage; and which seemed to be nearly bursting upon the plump figure of Fatty Wynn.

Figgins and his chums were going to sprint round the quadrangle for exercise, as they often did in the evening. They trotted away from the New House, and kept up a level pace on the grass, their running shoes pattering along with hardly a sound.

But suddenly Figgins stopped.

"Mum!" he whispered.

He caught Kerr and Wynn, who were on either side of him, by the arms, and stopped them at the same moment.

The whisper came just in time to prevent an exclamation from Fatty Wynn. As for Kerr, he was a canny Scotsman, and never spoke in a hurry.

"Listen!" muttered Figgins.

Under the shadows of the old elms, they listened. The

sound of a voice came to their ears from the direction of both the rival parties in the School House, and they were equally satisfied to score off the Terrible Three or off Blake & Co. They weren't particular, so long as they scored off the School House.

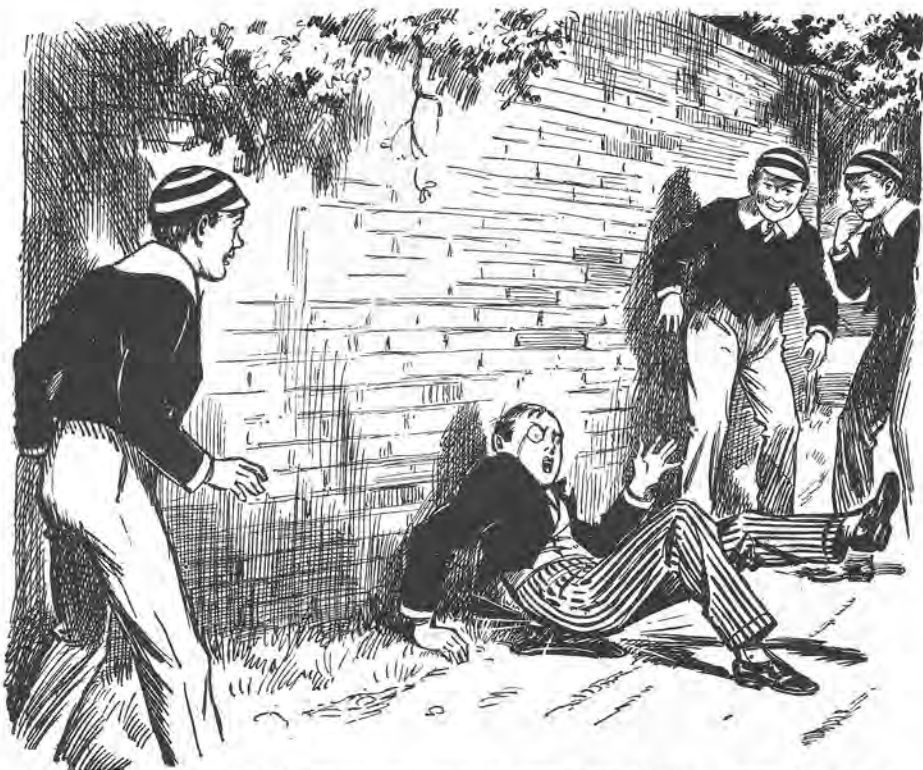
"And it did not take them long to decide that they would 'take a hand' in this little game, whatever it was, and whatever it meant.

They drew cautiously back out of earshot of the School House chums. All thought of the intended sprint round the quad was given up for the present.

"They're watching for Merry," Figgins muttered.

"That's pretty clear."

"He's going out by the gate, that's clear, too; so I suppose he'll have a prefect's pass. Let's watch for him there."



The swell of St. Jim's swung himself down the wall by his hands. Then he dropped, struck the earth with a sudden jar, and sat down. There was an ominous crunch—Arthur Augustus had sat on his own topper! "Bal Jove! I've fallen on something!" he gasped.

"I heard something."

"You are awfully gettin' nervous, Blake."

"Oh, ring off!"

In spite of that last remark, however, D'Arcy apparently did ring off, for his voice was not heard again. Silence fell.

"What do you think of that?" whispered Figgins.

"Something's on!"

"What-ho!"

"And we're on, too!" said Korr.

"That's the wheeze!" grinned Figgins.

They listened intently. They had followed the sounds of the voices keenly, and they knew that the speakers were on the top of the school wall, looking down into the road near the gate, under the shadow of the overhanging trees.

What were the School House chums of the Fourth doing there? Their own words gave them away. They were watching for Tom Merry.

Something was certainly on.

Figgins & Co. chuckled silently. They were "up against"

Figgins & Co. did not have long to wait at the gate. Tom Merry came down from the direction of the School House, and went out. Taggles was standing at the gate, and the New House juniors saw Tom Merry show him a paper. It was evidently a pass out of bounds.

Tom Merry disappeared.

"Come on!" whispered Figgins.

He led the way quickly back to the stanting oak by the wall, where they had heard the voices of the School House chums.

A low but stubborn voice was still audible.

"I refuse to jump down!"

Figgins saw a single figure on the top of the wall. It was that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Herries, Digby, and Blake were already down in the road.

"Jump, you ass!" came Blake's voice over the wall.

"It is too far to jump!"

"Then hold on with your hands and drop down!"

"I shall soil my clothes against the wall."

Blake snorted.
 "You must do one or the other, ass, unless you're going to remain on top of the wall all night!"
 "I refuse to be called an ass!"
 "Here, come on, kids; Tom Merry will be gone while we're talking to that champion ass!" growled Blake.
 "Pway, don't huvway away, deah boys. On second thoughts I will dwoop."
 "Buck up, then!"
 "Pway catch my hat!"
 "You shrieking ass, to come out on a job like that in a silk hat!"
 "I decline to be chavactewised as a shwiekin' ass, Blake, and I uttably fail to see why a chap shouldn't dwoess respectably even on an expeshid like this. Pway catch my hat. I'm afraid I might dwoop it!"
 "Oh, chuck it down!"
 The hat was dropped, and Blake made a catch at it, and missed. It fell to the ground, but D'Arcy failed to observe it.

The swell of St. Jim's swung himself down by his hands. Then he dropped, and struck the earth with his feet with a sudden jar, and sat down in the roadway.
 There was an ominous crunch.
 "Bai Jove! I've fallen on somethin'!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Was that an opera-hat you brought out with you, Gussy?"
 "Certainly not!"
 "Well, it is now!"
 "What?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy sprang up like a jack-in-the-box. He picked up the hat he had fallen on, and on which he had been sitting. It was more like a concertina than a silk topper now. Arthur Augustus gazed at it speechlessly.
 "Come on!" said Blake.
 "My hat's wuined! I thwew it to you to catch!"
 "I missed it. It's all right!"
 "It's not all wight. My hat's wuined!"
 "Blow your hat!"
 "I cannot possibly go out in a wuined hat!"
 "Look here—"
 "How can I appeah in public in a smashed hat?"
 "You'll jolly well appear in public with a smashed nose if you don't shut up!" said Blake. "Tom Merry will be gone!"
 "Come on!"
 "Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"
 "Get a move on, then."

The chums of Study No. 6 hurried away, D'Arcy pushing his hat into shape as well as he could as he hastened after them. Figgins & Co. climbed the wall and chuckled.
 "Good old Gussy!" murmured Figgins. "We came out for a run, kids. We shall have to take it outside the walls instead of inside. Come on!"
 "Good!" said Kerr.
 The three Fourth-Formers dropped into the road. With cautious footsteps they hurried on the track of the School House juniors.

CHAPTER 4. A Strange Meeting!

TOM MERRY strode on through the shady lane, quite unconscious of the fact that he was being shadowed by four, who in their turn were shadowed by three. The hero of the Shell was thinking of anything but House rows or Form japes. The nearer the time came for the meeting with his cousin the more worried Tom felt about it.

Dorrian's letter had been strange and alarming, and in spite of the caution impressed upon him in that letter, Tom had not been able to keep the secret from his two chums in the Shell.

Lowther and Manners, of course, could be trusted to any extent, but at the same time it was awkward not to have carried out his cousin's directions.

But why were these directions given?

What was Herbert Dorrian doing in England so suddenly and so secretly? And why had he arranged this mysterious meeting in the lane, instead of coming up to the school to see his relative, as he had every right to do?

It was a puzzle.

Tom could not help thinking it over in great perplexity as he went down the lane. The village clock was chiming out as he came in sight of the stile, the chimes ringing over the deep woods from Rylecombe.

Tom Merry looked at the stile and round it, but there was no one in sight.

His cousin was late, then.

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The leader of the Shell stopped at the stile, and drew himself upon the top bar to sit down and rest while he waited for Dorrian to come.

There was a rustle in the thickets on the inner side of the stile, and Tom Merry started and looked round.

A form detached itself from the bushes and came towards him.

Tom Merry could only see a man muffled in an overcoat, with loose cap pulled down over his face, but he guessed whom it was.

"Herbert!"

The man peered at him in the gloom.

"Tom! Is it you?"

"You are my Cousin Dorrian?"

"Yes."

Tom Merry held out his hand and grasped that of his cousin. He caught a glimpse of Dorrian's face under the cap, and he started. It was white, and full of undefined emotion. The hand Tom Merry grasped was trembling like a leaf.

The junior looked anxious.

"What's the matter, Bertie?"

The man did not reply. He glanced up the lane and down it and back along the footpath through the wood, and then pulled his cap lower over his eyes.

"Herbert!"

"Come into the trees, Tom."

"But—"

"Come."

Tom Merry swung himself over the stile and followed his cousin into the trees. He was more and more puzzled and alarmed.

Little as he remembered of his cousin, there was a tone of Dorrian's voice that struck a chord of his memory, and the feeling of kinship was strong in Tom Merry. If his cousin was in trouble, Tom Merry was ready to help him.

They entered the deep, sombre shadows of the trees.

Then Dorrian stopped still, with a furtive glance round him, as if in dread of shadows.

"Tom!"

"Well?"

"You had my note—you obeyed my instructions?"

"You see I am here."

"I mean about keeping the secret."

Tom Merry looked troubled.

"My chums, Manners and Lowther, know—"

Dorrian uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What?"

"You see, I let Monty Lowther read the letter out to me before I knew what was in it. But it's all right. They're true as steel."

Dorrian shivered.

"But what is it?" asked Tom Merry. "What's the matter? What are you afraid of?"

"Tom!" Dorrian laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Tom, will you help me?"

"Of course I will."

"I'm in danger, Tom."

"What kind of danger?"

"There are enemies on my track. I left South Africa secretly to elude them, but I believe they have tracked me to England."

"Who are they?"

His cousin did not reply to that question.

"Listen, Tom. I cannot remain many minutes. I have been lurking in the wood ever since I sent you that letter, hours ago. Tom, I want to trust you. I am sure you will fulfil the trust."

"You can reply on me. But—"

"I wish to leave something in your hands."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Something valuable?" he asked

"Yes; of great value."

"To take care of for you?"

"Yes."

"But why? The strong-room of a bank would surely be safer, especially if you have enemies seeking you to take it away."

Dorrian gave a strange laugh.

"A bank would not serve my turn, Tom. I cannot explain. When I landed in England with—this I did not know which way to turn. I did not know where to look for help. I remembered suddenly that Miss Fawcett had written to me that my cousin was at school in Sussex. I hurried here. Schoolboy as you are, Tom, you are the safest person for me to trust. For who would suspect that a packet of enormous value was placed in the hands of a junior in a Public school?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's true enough."

"You will take it, Tom?"

"Certainly, if you think it will be safe with me."

"It will be safer with you than with me," said Dorrian, with a hollow laugh. "If they find me and search me, that will not matter when the packet is no longer in my hands."

"Good! But if they harm you—"
"I am not afraid of that. I am only afraid of losing the packet. I am no coward, Tom, though you see me so shaken up."

Tom Merry was silent. Dorrian did not impress him at that moment as a brave man, at all events.

Besides, I am armed. I would shoot him like a dog if he crosses my path openly, the hound!"

"He! Whom?"

"The Portuguese."

"Who is he?"

"He is the man who is hunting me. He is the worst of them. I am not afraid of him if the packet is safe."

"Do you think he has followed you here?"

"It is possible."

"Then he may see me—"

"It is not likely. We are meeting in a lonely place in the dark. He cannot know I have a relation in the school. Yet, in case, remember, Tom, to be on your guard if you should see a Portuguese near St. Jim's—a little lithe, dark-skinned fellow, with the eyes of a tiger."

"I will remember."

"Take this now."

Dorrian fumbled in his coat and drew out an oblong box. He passed it into Tom Merry's hands. As far as Tom could see it was an ordinary wooden box with a sliding lid, such as dominoes are commonly kept in. The lid was not even fastened.

"Have you a safe place where you can keep it, Tom?"

"Yes; my desk."

"Does anyone but yourself go to the desk?"

"Manners and Lowther."

"Ah! You must put it somewhere else."

"Well, I can shove it in my trunk in the dorm," said Tom Merry.

"That is better. You will not open it?"

Tom flushed in the dark.

"I hope I'm not likely to open it," he said.

"Forgive me, Tom; I hardly know what I am saying." Dorrian was glancing right and left as he spoke, into the sombre shadows of the trees, and Tom could easily believe that he spoke the truth. "Take care of it, that is all!"

"You say it contains something valuable?"

"Yes—of immense value!"

"But the box is not fastened."

"No; that cannot be helped."

"Hang it!" said Tom Merry. "I'd rather it were fastened. Anything may happen, you know, to an unfastened box."

"You can put some fastening on it yourself, then. I had no time. I fled in an instant, with that hound close behind me. I have been hunted ever since. Besides, that box looks unsuspicious."

"Yes, that's true."

"Take it now, Tom; keep it carefully till I reclaim it. Good-bye!"

"But when will you claim it?"

"As soon as I can with safety."

"But—"

"I must go now; we must not be seen together!"

"One word more!" exclaimed Tom Merry, grasping his cousin by the arm, as Dorrian would have disappeared into the trees.

The young man turned back with an impatient exclamation:

"What is it?"

"Perhaps I ought not to ask the question, but—"

"Ask it, ask it!" he breathed.

"You came by this—whatever it is—honestly?"

Dorrian started.

"Is that a proper question to put to me, Tom?"

"Perhaps not; but the circumstances are so strange. I don't ask you the reason for all this secrecy. But I want your word that the thing is all right. Does this box belong to you?"

"Yes."

"And what it contains?"

"Yes?"

"Honestly?"

"As Heaven is my witness!"

"That's enough! Good-bye!"

His cousin grasped his hand, and plunged into the trees and disappeared. Tom Merry thrust the box into his inside pocket. For some moments he stood silent, where he was, thinking over the strange affair. The rustle of his cousin's passage through the thickets had died away; but just as Tom Merry was turning to get back to the stile the rustle was renewed.

Had Dorrian forgotten something, and was he returning?

Tom Merry looked towards the rustling thicket, and made a step forward as a dark form emerged.

"Is that you, Herbert?"

A pair of black eyes glittered at him. It was not Dorrian! Tom Merry drew hastily back, but a soft, silky voice spoke:

"Pare!" Then the Portuguese word was immediately repeated in English, as if the speaker remembered where he was. "Stop!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Mistake!

"PWAY halt, deah boys!"

"Rats!"

"I heard somethin'—"

"More rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Look here, ass—"

"Do you think we're going to waste all the evening?" demanded Blake. "We're off the track of Tom Merry already."

"It's really my fault," remarked Herries. "I ought to have thought of bringing my bulldog—I mean, I ought to have brought him, whether you duffers liked it or not! Towser can track down anything!"

"Especially kippers!" growled Blake. "Blow Towser! It's a jolly good thing that Towser's still chained up at St. Jim's, and I wish Gussy were chained up there with him!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Will you shut up, and come on?"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort! I wepent that I hear somethin'!"

"I can hear something now," murmured Digby.

"Bai Jove! What is it, Dig?"

"A silly ass jawin'!"

"Weally, Digbaw—"

"What do you think you heard, Gussy?" asked Blake, in a tone of patient resignation which would have suited the celebrated Griselda.

"A footpint, deah boy—I mean a footstep!"

"Well, as there are eight feet in the party, counting Herries' as only one pair—or ten, counting his as two each—that's not surprising!"

"Look here," began Herries wrathfully, "you let my feet alone! I—"

"Pway don't waste time talkin', Hewwies, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "We are wathah in a buwwy, and I weally trust that you will not keep us here wastin' time in useless talk."

"Well, of all the cleeck!" exclaimed Herries. "What are you doing?"

"I am twyin' to make you asses listen to wenson. I am certain I heard a footstep. There is somebody in the wood near us."

Jack Blake looked round him.

After all, Arthur Augustus might have heard some sound that had escaped the others, though the chances were that he was mistaken.

The chums of the Fourth had missed Tom Merry in the lane, and their shadowing was proceeding more by chance than anything else.

As a matter of fact, they had very little prospect of getting on his track again, but they would not give in.

They had left the lane, and were following a footpath through the wood, somebody having fancied that he had seen a moving form dart through the hedge—the said moving form probably being the shadow of an elm branch.

The four juniors listened intently. The woods were very silent.

Rustle!

Jack Blake started. Arthur Augustus had not been mistaken then.

It was not a footfall, but it was a rustle in the thickets, as if someone were brushing cautiously through them.

Blake's eyes gleamed.

"My only bat!" he murmured. "Gussy's right!"

"As a matten of fact, Blake, I usually am wight!"

"Shut up! He'll hear you!"

"I have no objection to shuttin' up, undah the cires, but you might word the wequest a little more politely."

"There's somebody coming towards us," whispered Digby.

"That's wight."

"He's making for the village," murmured Blake. "I don't know exactly where we are in these beastly thickets, but we must be past the stile footpath, and nearer Ryelombo."

"Yass, wathah?"

"It's Tom Merry taking a short cut."

"It might be a poacher."

"Rats! There's no poachers in these woods now."

"It's Tom Mewwy, wight-enough, deah boy. I have a feelin' that it is Tom Mewwy. You can wely on me. My ideah is to suddenly jump on the boundah and bring him to earth."

Blake chuckled.

"Good! We'll pretend to be poachers ourselves, and press a fountain-pen in the back of his neck, and make him confess what he's doing here!"

"Bai Jove, that's a wippin' wheeze!"

"Good egg!"

The juniors had been whispering faintly. They were silent now, for the rustling in the thickets was getting very close.

The unseen person was evidently making for the lane, and he would pass very close to them if he kept straight on.

The juniors waited, with tense faces and bated breath. A dark form loomed up.

"Collar him!"

In a twinkling they had hurled themselves upon the shadowy form. There was a wild cry of alarm.

"Got him!" roared Blake.

The stranger went to the earth with a crash. The four juniors sprawled over him, holding his hands and grasping his hair. He was utterly overpowered before he had time to struggle.

"Hounds! Thieves!" gasped a broken voice. "You have found me, but you will never find the diamonds!"

"Phew!" gasped Blake. "It's not Tom Merry!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Who are you?" demanded Blake, peering down at the fallen form beneath him in wonder.

The man gasped for breath.

"Let me go, you hounds!"

"Here, draw it mild!"

"You cannot rob me!"

"Bai Jove! Who wants to rob you, deah boy? We are not wobbahs!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Who are you?" said the man, in a changed voice.

"Us," said Blake, who did not intend to give away the fact that he was a junior of St. Jim's breaking bounds. "We're us, and have been for some time. But we're sorry we bumped you. We are looking for somebody else."

"Pwey release him, deah boys!"

The juniors released the stranger. He stood blinking at them uncertainly in the gloom of the thicket for a moment or two, and then he spoke in a low tone:

"You boys belong to St. Jim's?"

"Yass, wathah!" said D'Arcy, before Blake could speak. "We—Ow! Blake, you howwid wottah! What are you stamplin' on my headlay foot for?"

"Shut up, you owl!"

"I refuse to shut up! And I uttably decline to be chawactewised as an owl! I—"

"Are you friends of Tom Merry?" asked the stranger.

"Yass, wathah! We are lookin' for the wottah to bump him, you know! We are goin' to give him a fearful waggin', you know, in a friendly epiwit."

The stranger laughed slightly.

"I took you for somebody else," he said. "I am sorry I called you names. Good-night!"

"Good-night, air!"

The man plunged into the thicket. The juniors stared after him.

"Wonder who that was?" said Digby.

"Stranger in these parts," said Blake. "Must have shaken him up a little when we bumped him. He called us some pretty names. Well, we haven't found Tom Merry."

"If you fellows will keep quiet, I will examine the ground for twacks now. With my skill as a scout—"

"Br-r-r!"

"Come on!"

And they went on, though with but little hope of finding the one they sought. But suddenly through the woods came a faint cry.

"Help!"

The juniors fairly jumped. It was Tom Merry's voice!

"Bai Jove! That's Mewwy!"

"Come on!" gasped Blake; and he tore away recklessly through bush and briar in the direction of the sound.

CHAPTER 6. Robbed!

"STOP!"

The foreign word, which he guessed to be Portuguese, had warned Tom Merry that this was the man his cousin had spoken of—the man following him from South Africa.

He hesitated as the word was repeated in English.

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The man was a little fellow, not much taller than Tom Merry himself, though evidently a full-grown man.

Tom Merry could only catch a glimmer of his face in the deep gloom of the wood, but he made out a pair of keen, black eyes.

"Stop, senior!"

Tom Merry stood where he was, on his guard, and faced the man. He was not afraid of the Portuguese.

"What do you want?" he said.

"Only a word with you, little senior."

"Then say it where you are, said Tom Merry sharply.

"Don't come any nearer."

The foreigner laughed softly.

"And why not?"

"Because I don't like your looks, that's all."

The Portuguese laughed again.

"Be it so," he said, and he stopped four or five paces from the hero of the Shell, his black eyes scintillating like a cat's. "But do not run, or I shall have to stop you."

"I shall not run," said Tom Merry scornfully. "But you will not stop me when I choose to go."

"Never mind that now. Who are you?"

"That is no concern of yours."

"It might be, senior."

"My name is Tom Merry."

"Ah!"

"I belong to the school up the road—St. Jim's," said Tom. "Is there anything more you want to know?"

"Si, senior."

"Oh, go ahead!"

"Have you met somebody in the wood?"

"That is my business."

"Have you seen a man in this part of the wood?"

"Perhaps."

"Will you answer me?"

"No."

"Then I take it that you have seen a man."

Tom Merry was silent. If his life had been in peril he would not have lied to save it; but his silence was as good as an answer in the affirmative to the Portuguese.

"I take it that you have met him," said the foreigner.

Tom Merry did not speak.

"I wondered," went on the silky voice. "I wondered why he came here to this quiet place—this lonely wood."

"What business was it of yours?"

"I shall not explain that to a boy. Come, you have met the man I am looking for—the Englishman, Dorian."

Tom did not speak.

"Is he a friend of yours, little senior?"

"Suppose he might be—what then?"

"A relative, perhaps?"

"Possibly."

"What has he told you?"

"Nothing that I shall repeat to you."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"No!"

"Did he tell you where he was going?"

"He did not."

The Portuguese chuckled.

"You have admitted, then, that you met Dorian?"

Tom Merry gave him a disdainful look.

"I am not afraid to admit it."

"Did he place anything in your charge?"

The boy's heart beat faster. He had expected that question, and the weight of the little wooden box in his breast pocket seemed heavy upon his heart for a moment. He was alone in the wood—a man against a boy. What chance had he in a fight for the mysterious box? Yet he never flinched.

"I shall answer none of your questions," he said. "I have wasted too much time on you already."

"You will answer every question I choose to put, little senior, or it will fare the worse with you!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"You will see how much I care for your threats," he said. "I will not answer another question, not a word."

The Portuguese came closer.

"Then I shall make you speak!"

"You cannot!"

"I shall show you! Listen, little senior! I am a desperate man! I have come from a land where desperate deeds are done for less than the fortune Dorian has robbed me of!"

"It is a lie! My cousin never robbed you or anyone!"

"Your cousin!" exclaimed the Portuguese. "Good! I know now why he came here—your cousin!"

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"He gave you something to take care of, then," went on the Portuguese. "He knew he could not keep it long from Da Silva. He was afraid. This was his device, to hide it in the hands of a schoolboy. Good! I should never have thought of it, if I had not been so close upon his track. But I am in time."

He came closer to the boy. Tom Merry backed away, his fists clenching.

"Keep your distance!"

"Bah! Give me the box!"

"I will not!"

"It is mine!"

"I do not believe you!"

"Mine or not, I will have it!" cried the Portuguese.

And with the quick, silent spring of a tiger he was upon the boy.

But Tom Merry was ready.

The champion athlete of the Lower Form at St. Jim's was not an easy customer to tackle. His right-hand fist

his pockets. Tom Merry struck at him, and struck again, but the blows did not tell. The foreigner gave a yell of delight as he felt the wooden box through Tom Merry's jacket.

"I have found it."

The next moment his grasp was on the box. Tom Merry made a tremendous effort, and for a moment he almost threw off his foe. Then the thin, savage hands fastened on his throat.

"Help!" shrieked Tom Merry.

Then a cruel grasp shut off his voice. The black savage eyes were glittering down upon him. Did the man mean murder?



"Stand back!" snapped Tom Merry. "Ah, do you think I am afraid of your stick?" snarled the Portuguese. He leaped savagely forward and the stick came crashing down.

came up, and flashed out straight from the shoulder. The blow caught the foreigner fairly on the mouth.

He reeled for a second, muttering maledictions, but came on. The blow had been a heavy one, but it had only made him reel. The boy, with beating heart, drove his left out and up, and it crashed under the dusky chin; but the grasp of his enemy was upon him.

Little as the Portuguese was in stature, his strength was great. Tom Merry struggled fiercely, but he was borne to the ground in a moment.

The Portuguese was growling fierce curses. The heavy blows Tom Merry had dealt had hurt him severely. Yet he hardly seemed to think of that. He crushed the boy to the ground in a savage grasp, and pinned him there with a knee on his chest.

"Where is the box?"

Tom Merry did not speak. He was struggling fiercely, but with a sinking heart. He was at the mercy of his assailant now.

The thin, wiry hands of the Portuguese searched through

the scoundrel had thrust the box into his own pocket. He grasped Tom Merry's throat with his left hand, with his right he was fumbling, as if for a weapon. Tom Merry tore at the clutching hand and released his throat.

"Help!" he cried hoarsely.

There was a crash in the thickets. The next moment a running form bumped right into the Portuguese, and the rascal released Tom Merry as he rolled on the ground.

"Bai Joy!" gasped a voice. "Here they are!"

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins & Co. Take a Hand!

TOM MERRY gasped and choked; he could not speak for the moment.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stumbled over him and fell. Three other forms came running up. The Portuguese muttered an oath, and darted away.

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There was a crash in the thickets, and then he was in the footpath and running for the lane.

Tom Merry sat up, gasping painfully.

"Blake! Is it you?"

"Yes, rather. Safe, old man!"

"Yes."

"Who was it? What was it? Here, lend a hand to get him up."

"No; that's all right! Listen! I've been robbed! The fellow's got off—the man who ran. After him! He's got a box of mine. For Heaven's sake get after him!"

"Bai Jove!"

Jack Blake stopped to ask no more questions. The running footsteps of the thief were still audible. He had just cleared the stile into the lane.

Blake dashed in pursuit, and after him went Herries and Digby at top speed.

Arthur Augustus helped Tom Merry to his feet.

"Are you hurt, dear boy?" he asked.

"No; it's all right!" panted Tom. "He was choking me—I couldn't get my voice for a minute, that's all! Let's get after them."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry staggered as he tried to run for the lane. But he quickly recovered his strength. He vaulted over the stile, and ran after Blake and his chums, followed by the swell of the Fourth.

Jack Blake was running as if for a big prize on the cinder-path. He kept on the grassy belt beside the lane, and the Portuguese, looking back, did not hear him or see him in the shadow of the trees. The fugitive slackened a little to get his breath, and as he slackened Blake was upon him.

With a bound the junior holed himself upon the Portuguese, and brought him to the ground.

Bump!

"Help!" roared Blake, sprawling over the foreigner and clinging to him. "I've got the thief. Help!"

The Portuguese gritted his teeth savagely.

He made a great effort, and threw Blake off, and leaped up. As he did so, Herries and Dig arrived on the spot and rushed straight at him.

There was no time for the rascal to run. He had to fight—or give in. He gave a wild glance round, and then sprang clear across the wide ditch beside the road, and clambered desperately over the palings that bordered the wood on the inner side of the ditch.

For a moment the juniors were nonplussed.

"He's never got over!" gasped Digby.

But the lithe, active rascal was clambering over already. Blake did not hesitate. He made a spring to pass the ditch, and fell with a loud splash up to his knees in water.

"Ow!" he gasped.

Then he was after the foreigner. He made a clutch at the disappearing ankles, but they whisked away, and he heard the Portuguese roll down on the inner side of the fence.

Blake made a desperate spring, and caught the top of the fence in his hands. Then he went clambering over.

After him went Herries and Dig. But they weren't quite up to the jump. Tom Merry came plunging through the ditch, careless of his clothes.

He was thinking of the box that had been entrusted to him by his cousin, and of which he had been already robbed.

"Give me a bunk up, Dig."

"Right-ho!"

Up went Tom Merry, and over the fence, and he rolled recklessly on the inside. There was a shout from the gloom of the wood.

"This way!"

Tom Merry ran after Blake.

"Can you see him?"

"I can hear him."

The crashing in the underwood was a sufficient guide to the ear. The wood was very thick in this spot, and could not be trodden in silence. At every step the branches and twigs cracked and rang.

Tom Merry dashed off, with Blake at his side, while the other juniors more slowly clambered over the fence and followed.

Crackle, crackle, crackle!

"Stop, thief!" roared Tom Merry.

And Blake echoed the shout till the woods rang with it.

"Stop, thief!"

The Portuguese heard the shouts, and it warned him that there might be foes in the wood besides those behind him. He gritted his teeth as he ran, his black eyes flashing to right and left apprehensively.

The wood was growing clearer now, and he came out into a wide glade where he could run more freely without the dragging branches impeding his course. And now he could run silently, his footsteps unheard on the grass.

Was he safe, then?

"Stop, thief!"

The shout rang more faintly in the rear from the juniors still struggling in the thickets.

The Portuguese stopped for a moment to take a panting breath.

"I have baffled them."

The next moment he uttered a yell of dismay.

Three figures were running down the glade, and their footsteps were as inaudible on the grass as his own. Three pairs of hands grasped him even as he uttered his exultant words aloud, and he went to the ground in a heap.

A heavy knee was planted on his chest, and each of his wrists was grasped by a strong pair of hands.

"I don't know whom you are," said a cheerful voice; "but you're jolly well going to stop here till you explain yourself! That was Blake's voice—what he calls a voice—yelling just now, wasn't it, Kerr?"

"Yes, rather, and Tom Merry's!"

"Let me go!" gasped the Portuguese, vainly struggling—"let me go! I will give you money—five—twenty—fifty pounds!"

"Whose money?" said his captor caustically.

"A hundred pounds—quick!"

"My hat!" said a voice in the gloom. "What a standing feed we could stand for that, Figgy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A hundred pounds—"

"Oh, shut up, you thief! Do you think we want any of your stolen money?"

Tom Merry came panting up.

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"We've got him, Merry, old son. You can safely trust a job of this sort to a New House chap, you know," Tom Merry uttered an exclamation of amazement. "Figgins & Co.!" Figgins chuckled. "Yes, in the right place and the right time, as usual."

CHAPTER 8. Missing!

TOM MERRY looked down at the Portuguese writhing under the weight of Figgins & Co., and drew a deep breath of relief.

How the New House juniors came to be there just then he did not stop to inquire. That did not matter. They had appeared on the scene in the nick of time, and that was enough.

The Portuguese had not been able to escape with the box. "You scoundrel!" said Tom Merry, as he looked down into the scintillating eyes of Da Silva. "Where is the box?"

"Find it!" "That's soon done." "What has he stolen from you?" asked Figgins. "A little wooden box. It contains valuables." "Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming up considerably tattered and torn. "It is wathah weckless of you to cawwy a box of valuables about in the woods at this time in the evenin', Tom Mewwy." "It had only just been placed in my charge." "Oho!" said Blake. "So that was why you came out—eh?"

"What do you know about it?" "Well, you ass, why couldn't you tell us it wasn't a jape?" demanded Blake, rather indignantly. "Of course, we thought you were up to some little game, or we shouldn't have shadowed you."

"Shadowed me?" "Yaas, wathah!" "Well, you bouders!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "They shadowed you, and we shadowed them, and we all missed one another in the wood."

"Bai Jove!" "You don't mean to say you saw or heard—" began Tom Merry, somewhat perturbed.

"Nothing!" said Jack Blake. "We were only shadowing you for a lark. You don't think we should poke our noses into your affairs, do you?"

"Weally, Blake, that is not exactly a wopah wemark to make. It would be quite imposs for Tom Mewwy, as a gentleman, to suppose anythin' of the sort." "Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Under the circumstances, as you've come in so useful, I won't lick you Fourth Form kids."

As there were seven Fourth Form "kids" this generous forgiveness from the hero of the Shell was not received with boundless gratitude.

"Good!" said Blake. "And we won't bump you for a cheeky Shellfish, so we're even. As for these New House bouders—"

"I wogard that expession as injudicious undah the cires, Blake. Figgins & Co. have played up vewy well, considewin' I could not have stopped this wottan bettan myself."

"What-ho!" said Figgins, in hearty agreement. "Let me go!"

The Portuguese gasped out the words. The juniors laughed. They were masters of the situation now, and, dangerous pullian as Da Silva evidently was, they were not afraid of him. As Blake put it, there were enough of them to eat him.

"Better yank him along to the village and shove him in the lock-up," said Blake. "He's not the sort of chap to be allowed to run loose."

"Senors!" "You shut up!" said Figgins. "You're dead in this act. Shall we yank him along to the lock-up, Tom Merry? It would sound well at St. Jim's. Desperate criminal arrested! Startling recovery of stolen property by New House juniors—"

"Well, the police station's the proper place for him. I suppose," said Tom Merry, hesitating. "Let me take my box away from him."

"He'll have to hand that over when we get him to the station."

"Oh, no, no! It's a secret! I—I mean, I don't want a lot of fuss about it!" exclaimed Tom Merry hastily.

"Why not?" demanded Blake. "The man's a thief, and he ought to be locked up. You will have to appear in the witness-box."

"Yaas, wathah! It is the duty evwy decent chap owes

(Continued on the next page.)



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HOW LONG!

Official (visiting prison and arriving in taxi): "You can wait for me."

Taxi-driver: "Yes, sir. How long are you in for?"
ERNEST HARRIS, The Firs, Long Ashton, near Bristol.

SAMSON!

Prospective Employer: "I advertised for a strong office-boy. Do you think you will suit?"

Applicant: "I think so, sir. I've just knocked the other twenty-three applicants downstairs!"
HARRY WAKELIN, 25, Rayleigh Road, Woodford Green, Essex.

SUITABLE!

Boastful Visitor (at Zoo): "Could I buy this show for my kids?"

Keeper: "No, sir; but we might buy your kids for the show!"
JIM CHAPLIN, 46, Stock Road, Forest Gate, E.7.

A GOOD REASON!

Teacher: "Sandy, why are you late?"
Sandy: "On my way I saw a man looking for a sixpence, and I couldn't leave him."

Teacher: "Why?"
Sandy: "I had my foot on the sixpence!"
ERIC RICHMOND, 3, Dundas Place, Haymarket, Hingate, York.

SMART!

Jack: "This liniment makes my arm smart!"
Tom: "Why don't you put some on your head?"
FRANK HANDLEY, 207, Southey Hall Road, Southley, Sheffield, 3.

VERY WORRYING!

Attendee: "The lion tamer's being worried to death, sir!"
Manager: "What's worrying him?"
Attendee: "The lion, sir!"
H. H. PITCH, 35, Cardigan Crescent, Kirkstall Road, Leeds, 4.

A STRANGE GAME!

Sara: "What's the matter with your face, Tim?"
Tim: "Oh, I went to a party last night, and we had a game to see who could pull the worst face."

Sam: "What happened?"
Tim: "They all pulled mine!"
JOAN B. BARKER, 1a, Olivedale Road, Mossley Hill, Liverpool, 15.

NOT YET!

Tommy had been playing truant, and had spent the day fishing. "On the way home he met a friend. 'Caught anything?' asked the friend.

"No," replied Tommy. "I haven't been home yet!"
A. SADLER, 271, Hacknall Lane, Bulwell, Nottingham.
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THE TREASURE OF RYLCOMBE WOODS!

(Continued from page 11.)

to his country to come down vewy heavy on thievs, you know, deah boys. It is quite imposs to wegard a thief as havin' any claim to consid'ration whatever."

"Yes, but I must have that box!"

"Well, if you're particular about it, we'll soon have it," said Figgins. "It's dark here in the wood. You strike some vestas, Kerr, and give us a light to search the cad."

Kerr struck a succession of wax vestas. The flickering light glimmered on the savage, swarthy face, the gleaming black eyes of the foreigner.

But there was a mocking smile on the lips of Da Silva.

"Now, be quiet, or you'll get hurt, you animal," said Figgins. "I'm going through your pockets."

The Portuguese grunted his teeth.

"I shall remember you, senor."

"Thank you," said Figgins politely. "I wasn't asking for a tip. Now, then, roll the beast over!"

And Figgins, by the light of the vestas, went through the pockets of the foreigner in a really scientific way.

He turned out a clasp-knife which Blake promptly picked up and tossed far away into the depths of the shadowy wood.

Other articles were turned out, among them plenty of money, but there was no sign of the wooden box.

Tom Merry's face grew dark and serious.

Figgins rose to his feet at last.

The foreigner's property lay in a little heap in the grass, and Figgins had finished his search.

"You haven't found it, Figgins."

"It isn't there."

"But it must be! He took it from me!"

"How big was it?"

"About six or seven inches long, and two wide, I think."

"Then he can't have swallowed it."

"No," said Tom, laughing. "It must be about him somewhere."

"Well, have a look yourself, old chap."

The mocking smile was still on the swarthy face of the Portuguese.

Tom Merry knelt beside him, and searched through his clothes. He dragged off the jacket and waistcoat and coat, and turned them inside out. He groped in every possible recess where the box could be hidden—he even examined the hat and boots of the captured thief.

But the box was not to be found.

It was missing.

Tom Merry's face grew pale as he realised it.

The box was gone after all!

"You can't find it!" asked Blake.

"No."

"He must have chucked it somewhere when he was running."

"I—I suppose so."

"Then it's lying about here somewhere," said Figgins, with a glance round into the endless shadows of the wood.

"Bai Jove! We shall nevah find it now!"

"Impossible—to-night!"

"We'll all come and have a jolly good look in the day-

light," said Digby. "It's bound to turn up if we all hunt for it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And this rotter had better be safe under lock and key, or he'll be joining in the hunt," said Figgins. "Bring him along!"

"Hold, seniors!"

"Shut up, you alien toad!"

"One word—"

"Rats! Yank him along!"

The dishevelled foreigner was dragged to his feet. He struggled in the grasp of the juniors.

"Hold!" he cried savagely. "One word with Merry before you take me to the lock-up, one word with him."

"Go on," said Tom Merry.

"I must speak to you—alone."

"Yes—and dodge off!" said Blake scornfully. "We're not mugs. Don't let go the cad!"

"Wathah not!"

"It is about your cousin, little senor."

Tom Merry's face contracted.

"Let him speak, you chaps," he said. "Fasten up his wrists and ankles with your handkerchiefs, and then he'll be safe."

"Just as you like."

The foreigner's hands and feet were tied. Then the juniors retired beyond hearing, leaving Tom Merry alone with the Portuguese.

"Now, then," said Tom sharply, "what is it?"

CHAPTER 9.

A Bid for Liberty!

DA SILVA stood leaning against a tree; he could not stand upright with the bonds upon his limbs. The Portuguese was pale now under his tanned skin. He knew he was in a tight corner.

"Listen to me, little senor—"

"I am listening."

"Do you know what that box contained?"

"It is not my business to know."

"Diamonds," said Da Silva, fixing his eyes upon Tom Merry's face in the gloom, and trying to read its expression.

"Diamonds worth twenty thousand pounds!"

Tom Merry started.

"Well, that makes no difference," he said. "I do not care to know it, even if it is true. And I shan't take your word for anything."

"You don't know where the stones came from?" went on the Portuguese.

"From South Africa, I suppose."

Da Silva laughed.

"Have you ever heard of I.D.B.?"

"I.D.B.," said Tom Merry, puzzled. "I think I have—I do not remember. What do the letters stand for?"

"Illicit diamond buying."

"Yes, I have heard of that."

"Now can you guess where the stones came from?" said the Portuguese mockingly. "Your Cousin Dorian and I bought them—from kairs working in the Kimberley mines. We are both liable to imprisonment for that. The stones can be taken back by the law, and sent to their original owners. Now do you understand?"

Tom Merry's face was white.

"I do not believe it!"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"It is true. That is why Dorrian fled from South Africa—he took the whole of the loot. If you had looked at the box he carried the diamonds in, you would have found my name written upon it."

Tom was silent.

"You understand, senior? The diamonds are as much mine as Dorrian's."

"It is not true—it cannot be true!"

"Take me to prison," said the Portuguese, unheeding; "take me to prison, and I have only to tell the truth—and the officers will be on your cousin's track. You will send your kinsman to penal servitude. Take care, little senior."

"You lie!" said Tom Merry fiercely. "This is a tale to make me let you go. You would make me believe my cousin is a thief!"

"He is a thief!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

"Very well. You say so—you shall have a chance to prove it. Here, you fellows—"

"Silence, you young fool! I tell you—"

"You fellows—come here!"

The juniors ran up.

"Lend me a hand to get this brute to the village," said Tom Merry hoarsely. "I shall smash him, I think, if he says any more to me. Get him along!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Portuguese ground his teeth with rage.

"Ah, you shall repent this!" he cried.

"I will risk that."

Blake released the foreigner's legs. The ruffian was hustled along among the juniors, his wrists still tied. They reached the footpath leading to the village, and the man was forced along it towards the lane.

The ruffian's wrists were fastened with only a handkerchief knotted round them. As he moved along he was wriggling his hands loose. He succeeded, just as the juniors came in sight of a solitary lamp blinking in the lane where the footpath joined it to the wood.

Da Silva drew a deep breath.

Now was his chance!

Figgins and Blake were holding his arms, and the others were all round him. All depended upon a desperate bid for liberty.

The Portuguese suddenly dragged his arms free, and struck out desperately on either side. Figgins reeled against a tree, taken by surprise. Blake staggered, and trod on D'Arcy's foot, and there was a yell from the swell of St. Jim's.

Da Silva made a spring for the thickets.

Half a dozen hands clutched at him and missed, and he plunged into the shadows, and was gone in a moment.

"After him!" roared Blake.

"Ow! You have ewished my foot!"

"Blow your foot!"

Blake dashed away in pursuit. The juniors followed him hotly; but in a few minutes it was clear that the pursuit was hopeless.

The rascally Portuguese had vanished into the recesses of the wood.

The juniors, angry and disappointed, met in the footpath again, and found Arthur Augustus there, sitting on a root and nursing his foot.

"The cad's cleared off!" growled Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter? It can't be helped now."

"I wasn't thinkin' of that chap, Blake. That is quite a

minah mattah. I was thinkin' of my boot. The shape is utterly ruined!"

"Do you want the shape of your features to be utterly ruined to match?" asked Blake grimly.

"Certainly not, dear boy. I regard the question as ridiculous!"

"Then you had better ring off."

"Well, he's gone," said Tom Merry. "We had better get back to the school. I shall come out here first thing in the morning, before breakfast, and have a hunt for that box. It's too dark now in the wood."

"We'll come and help you, old son."

"Yaas, wathah! I shall be vewy pleased to place my ability as a twackah at the service of Tom Merry. I have given a considerable amount of study to the subject of amateur detective work, and I have no doubt that I shall soon twack down the missin' box."

"Rubbish!" said Herries. "It's all right—I'll put Towser on the scent. I suppose you don't happen to have the lid of the box, or anything, Merry, so that I could show it to Towser, and put him on the scent?"

"No," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"H'm! That's unlucky. Still, I'm pretty certain Towser will track it down. You remember the time when he tracked down the burglars?"

"I don't think!" murmured Blake.

And the juniors returned to St. Jim's. Tom Merry, armed with his pass from the captain of the school, marched up to the gates, but the rest of the juniors had to clamber in over the wall, and descend by way of the slanting oak. They were just in time to dodge into their Houses before they were closed up for the night.

CHAPTER 10.

An Open Secret!

TOM MERRY wore a thoughtful look as he went up to his dormitory with the rest of the Shell—or, rather, the School House fellows in that form.

Manners and Lowther looked at him rather curiously. They had not heard a word yet; there had been no time to speak to them. But from Tom Merry's look they knew that something of unusual interest had happened.

Tom was thinking of the loss of the wooden box.

He had done his best, he had not been to blame. But how had he fulfilled his trust? Within so short a time after the box had been entrusted into his care he had lost it.

True, it was not in the hands of his cousin's enemy.

But, now that the Portuguese had escaped, he had no doubt at all that the rascal would be in the wood with the first glimpse of daylight, searching for the box, and he would know more accurately where he had thrown it than Tom Merry knew. He had far more chance of finding it.

Where had he thrown it?

When he plunged over the ditch and clambered over the fence he had still been full of the hope of escape, and he had certainly not parted with the box then.

He must have retained it till he met Figgins & Co. in the glade, and then, finding himself captured, he had hurled the box into the trees, hoping to find it afterwards, but in any case determined to keep it as long as possible from being recovered by Tom Merry.

Or had he dropped it by accident during the chase—anywhere between the spot where Tom Merry had struggled



GEE!

with him and the place where he had been captured by the New House juniors?

In that case search would be practically hopeless.

But Tom Merry remembered the mocking smile on the face of the Portuguese when they had begun to search him—a smile he had not understood until he found that the box was missing.

No, the box had not been dropped by accident; the thief had retained it till the last possible moment, and it was still lying somewhere in the darkness of the woods, within a throw of the spot where he had been captured.

Tom Merry meant to be first in the field at daylight, at all events. He frequently went out very early for a bath, and it would not be difficult for him to get out a little earlier.

He was in a deep reverie on the subject, turning over the various possibilities in his mind, when he received a slap on the shoulder.

"Twopence for your thoughts," said Monty Lowther. "The usual offer is a penny, but you look as if you had a twopenny assortment this time."

Tom Merry laughed as he kicked off his boots.

"It's all right, Monty. Are you game to come out before dawn to-morrow?"

Monty Lowther whistled.

"What's in the wind? A raid on the New Hosen?"

"Oh, no!"

"A row with the Grammar School?"

"A row with nobody, my son. I want to look for something; something I've lost in the wood."

"Any reward for finding it?" asked Dave over Tom Merry's shoulder.

Tom looked vexed and annoyed.

He had not known Gore was so near, and now that Gore knew there was something on, it would not be long before the whole Shell knew it.

"No," he said shortly.

"What is it? Grub?"

"Oh, no! Nothing of the sort."

"A watch or anything?"

"No, no!"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Gore. "Any giddy secret about it?"

"Well, you see—"

"I might take a hand and help you look for it."

"Oh, I wouldn't bother you!"

Gore looked keenly at Tom Merry. He saw that there was something in this that the hero of the Shell did not choose to explain.

Gore was "up against" the Terrible Three whenever he had anything like an opportunity, and he thought he scented an opportunity now.

"My word, here's a giddy mystery!" he exclaimed in a loud voice. "I say, you chaps, who's game for a hunt in the woods at daybreak?"

"Why, what's on?" asked Harry Noble, the Australian.

"Blessed if I know. Tom Merry's got something on, but it's a giddy mystery."

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, turning his spectacles upon Tom Merry. "Did you say a mystery, Merry?"

"No, I didn't!" growled Tom Merry. "Gore did."

"Ah! I shall be very pleased to look into it for you. As you know, I have wonderful gifts as an amateur detective," said the genius of the Shell, fumbling for a notebook in the jacket he had just taken off. "Perhaps you will let me have a few details."

"Perhaps I won't."

"Really, Merry—"

"Good!" exclaimed Gore. "Go it, Skimmey! Why can't you let Skimmey take up the case, Merry? You know what a jolly good private detective he is."

"Yes, as good as Gussy in that line," Clifton Dane remarked, laughing.

Tom Merry looked worried.

"Look here, you chaps, let this drop," he exclaimed. "It's a private affair, and only concerns me, only Gore had to poke his nose into it."

"What-bo!" exclaimed Noble promptly. "If that's how it is, my son, we won't say a word."

"Oh, I didn't mean you! I'd like you to lend me a hand, and Dane and Glyn, if you feel inclined to get up early."

"I'll be up with the lark, then."

"So will I!" said Gore, with a malicious grin. "I like doing good-natured things. I'll come and help you, Tom Merry."

"No, you won't, you cad!"

"Well, I call that ungrateful," grinned Gore. "I wonder what he has been losing? A banknote, perhaps, that belongs to somebody else."

Some of the fellows laughed, and Tom Merry strode up to the cad of the Shell, with a blaze in his eyes.

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"Another joke like that, Gore, and I'll wipe up the floor with you!" he said. "Now, keep that in mind."

"Oh, keep your wool on!" said Gore uneasily. "I was only joking."

"Keep your jokes to yourself, then."

"Ah, here is my pencil!" said Skimpole, blinking through his spectacles. "I will now take some notes, Merry."

"Hats!"

"But I want to take up the case."

"Rubbish!"

"Really, Merry, that is hardly polite. I want to do you a service. I have studied the business of a detective from an amateur point of view, and I am convinced that I can



"I have baffled them!" gasped Da Silva. The next moment the Portuguese desperado even as he spoke.

solve any terms that would baffle the combined intellects of the Flying Squad. I am quite willing to find the villain who has committed this crime."

"As! It's only something lost in the wood."

"Has there been any bloodshed?" asked Skimpole, whose ideas of detective work were mainly gathered from cheap American fiction. "Did anyone hear the report of the pistol?"

"What pistol?"

"Ah! It was a knife, then?"

"What was?"

"The weapon that was used."

"Ass!"

"Really, Merry—"

"Clump!"

"I must remark that I consider that almost rude, Tom Merry. You have not answered my question as to whether there was any bloodshed."

"Fathead?"

"That is no answer. That is simply a rude epithet. Have you any ulterior motive for concealing the name of the assassin?"

"The which?"

"The assassin," said the amateur detective firmly. "I am convinced, from your attempts at subterfuge, that there has been a serious crime."

"Oh, hold me, somebody!" said Tom Merry.

"I trust," said Skimpole severely—"I trust that it will not be necessary for me to accuse you of participation in the crime, Merry. Is it your knife that you have lost in the wood?"



moment he gave a yell of dismay. Three pairs of hands grasped the spoke, and he went to the ground in a heap.

"My—my knife?"

"Were there any tell-tale stains upon it?"

"Tell-tale stains?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes. I demand a reply. Place the details in my hands, and I will take up the case and clear you, if possible."

"Clear me?"

"Certainly I—"

The door opened, and Kildare looked in. "Are you going to keep me waiting all night?" he asked pleasantly.

The Shell fellows tumbled into bed.

Kildare turned out the light, bade them good-night, and closed the door.

Tom Merry, who was fatigued with his exertions that evening, turned his head on the pillow to go to sleep.

In the stillness of the dormitory a voice made itself audible:

"Tom, Merry!"

"Yes-ees."

"Will you give me the details of the crime?"

"Rats!"

"I am willing to take up the case in your interests."

"Rubbish! Bosh! And more rats!"

"Then I shall take up the case independently, in the interests of the truth only. As a sincere Determinist, I am bound to establish the truth!"

"Brrrr-r-r."

"I am still willing to take down the details."

Snore!

"Merry!"

Snore!

"Really, Merry!"

Snore!

And Skimpole gave it up.

CHAPTER 11.

Early Risers!

TOM MERRY could generally depend upon himself to awake, and he awoke on the following morning when the first fugitive ray of the sun was stealing in at the high windows of the Shell dormitory in the School House.

He sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. It was shadowy, and it was chilly, in the long dormitory, and he was far from inclined to get up.

But it was not a matter of inclination just then.

He slipped out of bed and groped for his clothes. He had a lusty wash; there was no time for the usual tub that morning, and Tom Merry promised himself a tub in the bathroom when he got back to the school.

He shook Monty Lowther by the shoulder, and Lowther opened his eyes.

"Going to get up, Monty?"

"Gr-r-r-r."

"I'm off, you know."

"You must be—fairly off—to get up at this time in the morning?"

"I've got to go to the wood."

"Good-bye!"

"You're not coming?"

"Rats!" grunted Lowther. "Blow you! Blow your lost property! Blow your cousin! Blow everybody! I'm coming!"

And Lowther tumbled out of bed. He shook Manners in his turn, but did not give him the option of remaining in bed. Manners was yanked out head first, and did not know that he was awake till he bumped on the hard floor.

"What on earth are you up to?" roared Manners.

"Waking you up."

"You utter ass!"

"I've saved you all the agony of mind I've been through myself," said Lowther. "You haven't got to decide whether to get up and to make a big sacrifice for the sake of friendship. You're up already. You ought to be thankful!"

"I've a jolly good mind to—"

"Don't thank me; it's all right."

Manners snorted.

"I wasn't going to thank you. I—"

"Then don't! Get a move on—also some clothes!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Don't wake the whole dormitory," suggested Tom Merry.

"Who's waking the whole dormitory?"

"You are," chuckled Harry Noble, from his bed. "I'm awake!"

"Are you the whole dormitory?" asked Manners, whose temper was considerably ruffled by his sudden exit from a warm bed to a cold floor.

"Not quite; the principal inhabitant, that's all!" grinned the Cornstalk. "I say, Merry, old man, shall I come? I don't want to get in the way."

"I'd like you to; you ought to be up to some bush dodges that will help in a case like this."

"Then I'm on!"

And the Cornstalk jumped up actively enough.

The rest of the dormitory seemed to be sleeping, and the four Shell fellows let them sleep. They finished dressing and left the dormitory, and as they did so Skimpole sat up in bed.

"Dear me!" murmured the genius of the Shell. "I heard a noise. I am convinced that I heard a noise!"

"Go hon!" said Gore's voice from the pillows.

"Are you awake, Gore?"

"No," said Gore sarcastically; "I'm fast asleep!"

"Dear me! You are speaking very connectedly for a fellow talking in his sleep," said Skimpole, who never could see anything approaching a joke.

"Ha, ha, ha! You ass!"

"Really, Gore—" "Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther and Kangaroo have just gone out," said Gore. "Ain't you going to investigate the case?"

"Dear me! Yes, certainly!" Skimpole crawled out of bed. He groped for his glasses and put them on, and blinked at Gore.

"Are you coming, Gore?" "Well, I was coming," said Gore. "But—but I think I'll have another snooze, on second thoughts. Buzz off!"

"I should be glad of your assistance in working out the case, and in helping me to make any arrests that might be necessary."

"Ass!" "Really, Gore—" Gore snored.

Skimpole dressed himself, and left the dormitory. He blinked round in search of Tom Merry & Co. Passage and stairs were very dusky, and no one—not even the early housemaid—seemed to be stirring.

But a group of juniors were standing outside the door of the Fourth Form dormitory. Tom Merry had met Blake and his chums just coming out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was wearing a cap. It would be necessary to leave the school in the same way as before, and D'Arcy did not mean to risk another topper.

"I hardly expected to see you fellows up," Tom Merry remarked.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you must wemembah (that we said that we would be up.)"

"You might have overslept yourself."

"Not when it was a question of keepin' an appointment," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard your wemark as callin' for an apology, Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, apologise, then!"

"I mean an apology f'rom you to me."

"Rats! Come on!"

"Undah the cires—"

"Don't make a row and wake the House, you know!"

"I wufuse—"

"Come on!" said Jack Blake, linking arms with his elegant chum. "Not so much talking, you know. This was!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Take his other arm, Dig!"

"Right you are!"

"I'm going round to get my bulldog," Herries remarked.

"Better have Towser on the scent, I think."

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther. "If he tracks down wooden boxes as he tracks kippers, it will be all serene!"

"Look here, Monty Lowther—"

"Dear me, are you ready?" asked Skimpole, coming up.

"I am glad to see that you are all in this affair. It gives me some hope that Tom Merry is guiltless."

"Off his rocker, of course!" said Jack Blake, who knew Skimpole too well to inquire into what he might possibly mean. "Let's get on!"

They descended the stairs. To save noise they left the House by the hall window. Herries cut round to the kennels to get his bulldog, in whose powers as a tracker he had a touching faith.

The others crossed to the school wall. The gates were not open, and would not be for more than an hour yet. The daylight was still hardly clear; night's shadows lurked under the old elms.

There was a sudden "Coo-o!" from the dusky quad, and Figgins & Co. came running up. Figgins grinned at the School House juniors.

"The whole family's up, I see," he remarked.

"Yas, wathah! These chaps are comin' with me to find Tom Mewwy's box. Skimpole is comin' to find the murdeweh."

"Aha!" said Skimpole. "I knew there was a murder in the case. I can generally trust my detective instinct."

Gr-r-r-r!

"Ow! Keep that bwute away f'rom my twosahs, Howwies."

"Keep your trousers away from Towser," growled Herries.

"Weally, Howwies—"

"Are you taking that beast with you?" asked Kerr.

Herries glared.

"I am taking Towser," he said. "We're not taking any beasts, excepting three fellows from the New House."

"How are you going to get him over the wall?"

"One of you fellows can hand him up to me."

"Yes—you bet!" said Blake, with emphasis. "I can see myself handing up that dangerous beast! I'll chain him up, if you like—or chop him up!"

"Look here, Blake—"

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"Or smash him up; but I jolly well won't hand him up. It's not good enough!"

"Wathah not!"

"He's going over the wall, anyway."

"Perhaps he could squeeze through the bars of the gate," suggested Fatty Wynu.

"Good egg!"

Towser did squeeze through, with some difficulty—difficulty which did not improve his temper, and made it rather unsafe for anybody but his master to go near him—and the juniors clambered over the wall and followed. Then, in the strengthening light of the rising sun, Tom Merry & Co. went swiftly down the lane.

CHAPTER 12.

A Search at Dawn!

G-R-R-R-R! "Pway keep that beast quiet, Howwies!"

"Boah! It does a dog good to growl sometimes. It's good exercise for his vocal chords."

"It's a jolly row!" said Blake.

"Blessed if you're not always grumbling at something! I never met such a cantankerous set of rotters! You'd grumble at a dove if I kept one in the study, I believe!"

Blake chuckled. Towser the bulldog was not very dove-like in his disposition. But to Herries, Towser was like the king in the British constitutional system—he could do no wrong.

"Here we are!" said Figgins, halting at the place where the Portuguese had made that desperate plunge across the ditch and fence the previous night.

In the glimmer of the rising sun, the man's tracks could still be seen in the mud. The juniors managed to cross the ditch with less damage than they had received the previous night, and they climbed the fence and dropped down inside. Under the trees the shadows of night still lurked thickly.

Tom Merry looked about him alertly.

He was pretty certain that the Portuguese would be on the scene at the first glimpse of dawn, and every shadow might conceal the lurking form of the ruffian from South Africa.

"Bai Jove, it's dark here!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It's awfully wet, too. It did not occur to me that it would be very dewy, dear boys. I shall get my boots wet."

"Take 'em off," said Kangaroo.

"My dear fellow, then I should get my socks wet."

"Take 'em off, too."

"Weally, Kangawoo, I should get my feet wet."

"Take 'em off!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Or couldn't you walk on your hands?" suggested Kangaroo thoughtfully. "Like they do in the circus, you know. That would keep your feet dry."

"I wufuse to entah into a wudiculous discuss."

"Good!" said Blake. "It's about time you shut up, as that Portuguese chap might be hanging about."

"Weally, Blake—"

"A Portuguese," said Skimpole, jerking out his notebook. "Good! Is he the criminal?"

"Duffer!"

"How do you spell 'Portuguese'?" asked Skimpole, wetting his pencil point. "Do you spell it with one or two z's, Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha, he!"

"Ahem! I should prefer to spell it correctly. Perhaps I had better put the two z's," said the amateur detective of the Shell, jotting it down thus—"Portuguezze." "Good! Did he commit the murder?"

"Ass!"

"What is his name?"

"Idiot!"

"That is not a Portuguese name."

"Ha, ha, he!"

"I shall search for the lost box," said Skimpole, putting up his notebook. "I hope that the documents it contains will clear up the mystery."

"You utter ass!" said Tom Merry. "There aren't any documents in the box."

"You are prevarication, Tom Merry. You referred to a box. Now you say there are no documents in the box. Is it a box that is lost?"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was plunging through the wet thickets in search of the lost box. Skimpole jotted down another note in his book: "Lost article, either a case or a box; the suspected party refuses to state which; looks very black."

Then Skimpole joined in the search. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered a sudden exclamation that drew the general attention to him at once.

"Rui Jove!"

"What is it?" exclaimed Tom Merry, hurrying towards him.

"Have you found it?"

"Found what, dear boy?"

"The box, of course."

"Oh, no! I was just thinkin' that if I wold my twousahs up vewy high, I shall aveit gettin' them damp."

"You uttah ass!" growled Tom Merry, in disgust.

"I wufuse to be called an ass! I—"

But Tom Merry was gone.

"Coo-oo-y!"

It was a call from Noble, who had plunged ahead in the thickets, careless of the damp dew on leaves and twigs.

Tom Merry hurried towards him.

"Have you found anything, Kangaroo?"

"Yes," called back Kangaroo. "Come here!"

"The box?"

"No—a trail."

Tom Merry joined him in the glade. In the thick, damp grass Kangaroo had turned up a candle-end and several burnt matches.

"Look at them!"

Tom Merry looked disappointed.

"What about them, Kangaroo?"

"That candle-end was turned out of a lantern, you see. It was burnt right down to the socket, and the chip put a new candle in."

"Ah!"

"Which shows that someone was searching here with a lantern last night, and kept it up a jolly long time, too, for his candle to burn right out."

Tom Merry changed colour.

He had not thought of that before.

He had arrived on the ground at the dawn—but the Portuguese had been before him. For there was no doubt as to whom the previous searcher had been. Do Silva had spent the night searching the woods with a lantern.

CHAPTER 13.

Towser Distinguishes Himself!

TOM MERRY'S face was full of dismay. He had not been prepared for that, but even if he had thought of it, it would not have been possible for him to leave the school for the whole night, and search through the shadowy woods.

Had the Portuguese found the box?

The juniors gathered round the spot, and from the clues Kangaroo had discovered, they came to the same conclusion, of course, as the Cornstalk.

"He's been here!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But we don't know that he found the box," said Kerr.

"It couldn't be easy much harder by lantern light than by daylight; and you can see that it's not easy now."

"That's true enough."

"There's one thing, too," went on the keen-witted Scottish lad, "if he found it he won't come back. If he didn't, he'll be back here looking for it at daylight. If we see anything of him, we shall know that he hasn't found the box."

Tom Merry's face brightened.

"Good for you, Kerr! That's right enough!"

And the juniors resumed the search.

They hunted high and low through the thickets, and there were several sarcastic requests to Herries to ask Towser to put them on the right track; requests to which Herries replied only with lofty sniffs.

But a sudden growl from Towser proved, soon, that he had found something. The bulldog made a dart into a thicket, and there was a hasty exclamation and a rattle of the twigs, and a lithe form leaped out and fled.

Tom Merry gave a shout.

"The Portuguese!"

"After him!" yelled Blake.

Towser was already tearing after the fugitive. Herries shouted encouragement to his dog.

"Seize him, Towser! Go it, doggie! Seize him!"

And Towser looked as if he meant business.

The Portuguese, with gasps of terror, disappeared into the wood, the dog still tearing after him with jaws ready to bite.

Tom Merry could not help laughing at the sudden plight of the foreigner. Towser had proved useful, after all.

And Tom remembered Kerr's deduction on the subject, that if the Portuguese reappeared, it would be a proof that he had not found the box.

The wooden box was still lost in the shadows of the wood.

Tom Merry felt his heart lighten at the thought.

The juniors had a good hour before them before they need return to St. Jim's; and surely the box must be found in that time, with so many seeking it.

The whole party set to work again with renewed hope.

Although only Tom Merry understood the importance of finding the box, they were all equally keen on the quest.

But the time passed on, and nothing was discovered.

The difficulty of the task became more and more apparent as they proceeded.

The ground here was densely covered with undergrowth, with thick ferns and grass and weeds, and a minute search of the whole space was required to unearth the small object that had fallen there from the hand of the Portuguese.

A minute search of so wide a space, under such conditions, might take days, or even weeks, with the space mapped out and gone over methodically.

There was naturally little method so far in the search.

The juniors spread out through the wood, searching wherever they could, and a cursory examination of the space was made, that was all.

The sun rose higher, and warmed beams poured down into the wood, lighting up the recesses in which the shadows of night had lingered.

"Dear me!"

It was a sudden exclamation from Skimpole.

Tom Merry looked towards the genius of St. Jim's.

Skimpole was standing in the glade, examining something he had picked up, and blinking at it through his spectacles.

Tom Merry ran quickly towards him.

"What is it, Skimpy?"

Skimpole blinked at him.

"The knife."

"Eh, the knife?"

"Yes."

Skimpole held it out to view. Tom Merry gave a grunt of disgust. It was the clasp-knife they had taken away from the Portuguese and hurled into the trees the night before.

"Oh, that's nothing."

"You are quite mistaken," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "It is a most important piece of evidence. I will see if there are any bloodstains upon it."

"You ass!"

Skimpole opened the knife, and seemed quite disappointed to find the blade quite clean and bright.

"Ah, this has been cleaned since the crime."

"Chuek it away, you ass!"

"It is important evidence."

"Dummy!"

"What do you know about this knife, Merry?"

"I know it's in the hands of a silly ass."

"Really, Merry—"

"Look here, you can't keep that knife—it's another man's property. You can't rob even a thief. It ought to be taken to the police station."

"I shall not call in the police till the last moment, when the case is complete. That is Sexton-Blake's method. He then allows the police to take the credit of the case."

Tom Merry laughed, and turned away. Nothing would convince Skimpole that there was a great gulf fixed between real life and a detective novel.

Skimpole made exhaustive notes in his book on the subject of the knife. As Skimpy's writing was so bad that he frequently could not read it himself afterwards, his notes were not likely to be of much value to him.

The juniors kept up the search keenly enough, but there was no other discovery made. The clasp-knife was the only thing found.

The sun was getting high in the sky, and it warned the juniors that it was time to return to the school.

"Better go, I suppose," said Tom Merry. "No good getting gated and being stopped from coming again."

"Wathah not."

"We'll come aggie immediately after morning lessons," said Kangaroo. "After all, if we can't find the thing between us, it's pretty certain that that foreign chap won't be able to find it on his lonesome."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors slowly took their way out of the wood. There was a great deal in what the Cornstalk said. But Tom Merry was despondent. The morning was before the Portuguese now; and the box might be in his hands before morning lessons were over at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry considered whether he should inform the police in Ryelcombe of the matter. It was a difficult matter to decide.

How could he make them credit so strange a story?

And if they believed it, were they not certain to jump at the conclusion that Herbert Dorrian's mysterious conduct meant that the box had fallen into his hands by means that would not bear the light?

(Continued on page 19.)

NOTES AND NEWS FROM—



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

HALLO, chums! What do you think of our new serial? It's a grand yarn, isn't it? Jerry Garrison sure is a great lad, and his pal Fusty may be bow-legged, but he's a grand shot with his six-guns. You'll be hearing more about these two buddies in next week's GEM, when further chapters of

the circus, injured arm and all, where he gave his performance of wrestling with a tiger!

THE FOOTBALL FAN!

It was a rehearsal of the Trooping of the Colour by the Horse Guards. The grand finale was reached and the trumpeters went forward to the head of the column to sound the advance. Suddenly a strange sound awoke the echoes. Horses trained to meet gunfire and stand still amid the blare of bugles, suddenly reared and plunged all over the place. Everyone was amazed, but that was nothing to what the sergeant-majors said, while even the officers seemed to lose some of their customary dignity. What was it all about? Well, a football fan, anxious to show his appreciation of the show, had let fly with his rattle!

SOME MOUTH!

Dogs who are trained to fetch game always have very tender mouths, as otherwise they are useless, but it is not often that you find an Alsatian who is quite so gifted in that way as the one belonging to a certain Sneydon policeman. The policeman's next-door neighbour had a canary, and one day he was cleaning out the cage in his garden when the bird escaped and flew to the top of a fence. Now the Alsatian had been watching, and he obviously thought that he ought to arrest the canary for some offence or other. He ran along the fence, leaped into the air, and snipped up the canary into his mouth. When the owner saw only the tail of his canary peeping out of the dog's mouth, he gave up hope. But when the Alsatian opened his mouth, there was the bird, quite unharmed!

ODDS AND ENDS.

A cricket match was about to start at Eidsings Park, Derbyshire, when five ducks waddled slowly and solemnly across the pitch. When the home team batted their score included five "ducks."

A man living in Parker Street, W.C.2, awoke one morning to find a poisonous South American tarantula spider on his arm. He knocked it to the ground and killed it before it could sting him.

The other day a golfer, who lives in Norwich, took his golf clubs and bag from the garage, and found that the bag contained a robin's nest with three eggs in it!

The London Zoo has a real live pink donkey! It is officially described as a Circassian Ass, and comes from the Caucasus, but to you and me it is just a donkey. Later on it will be used for giving children rides.

ONE MOUSE!

You probably remember Esop's fable about the mouse who freed the lion from a net, but from Rodosh, a small village near Belgrade, comes a story of an even bigger job done by one mouse. The mouse nibbled a cable in the power station and caused a bad short circuit. The result was a fire which destroyed all the pumping apparatus which is used for irrigating the fields. Without this irrigation the fields are barren. Unless the station is rebuilt and in working order again in six weeks, in time for the planting of crops, the village will be bankrupt. And all through one mouse!

HOW'S THIS FOR A RECORD?

Joan Hudson, of Baltimore, Maryland, is the youngest wireless operator in the world. She is only eight years old, but she can transmit messages in Morse code at the rate of twenty words a minute, and in an efficiency test she secured eighty marks out of a possible hundred. She holds a real wireless operator's licence, too! Bravo, Joan!

A REPLY.

Tom Baldwin, of Upton Park, writes to ask me why it is that men go bald and women do not. Well, Tom, I can only tell you that scientists say that the greatest cause of baldness in men is the wearing of tight collars. They say that tight collars restrict the flow of blood to the head, and the result is that the hairs do not get properly nourished.

Strange, considering

THE LETTERS "I.D.B."

appear in this week's story of Tom Merry & Co., that I should have just had a letter from a reader, asking me what these letters mean. Well, the initials stand for "Illicit diamond buying," which was very prevalent in South Africa many years ago, and is still carried on nowadays, although the sharpest watch is kept upon everyone employed in the diamond mines. If anyone succeeded in hiding diamonds and smuggling them out of the mines, they can, of course, get very large sums of money for them from the I.D.B. men. Some of the tricks that have been used to smuggle diamonds have been most ingenious.

Some little while ago, a workman fell ill, and was given permission to leave the mines. He asked to be allowed to take his tools with him, and this made the authorities suspicious. The result was that they sawed through his steel tools, and discovered that he had hollowed them out. Inside the hollows, packed in grease, were several of the finest stones which had ever been discovered in that particular mine!

THE SECRET SEVEN

Who are the Secret Seven avengers of St. Frank's? For a long time Mr. Hunter, the tyrant of the school, has been ruling the Ancient House with a rod of iron, meting out unjust punishment at will to the juniors. Now, he gets some of his own "medicine" at the hands of the Secret Seven, and the tyrant is baffled as to their identities. But you won't be when you read the magnificent long complete school yarn in to-day's tip-top number of the "Nelson Lee Library." You will revel in the amazing adventures of the chums of St. Frank's. Get this super story right away—it will grip and hold your interest from start to finish.

YOUR EDITOR.

"RED STAR RANGER!"

appear. There will also be another ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co., by famous Martin Clifford, entitled:

"BILLY BINKS' BURGLAR!"

and I can assure you that you will get plenty of thrills in this ripping story, so keep an eye out for it. Potts, our inimitable office-boy, will be on parade again to supply you with your tonic laugh, and in addition there will be another column of readers' jokes, for each of which I shall pay half-a-crown, and also another page from my notebook.

LEG-THEORY!

L. A. D. Lees, of Leigh-on-Sea, writes to me asking if I can find out what readers think about this leg-theory business. He wants to know whether or not you fellows think that it is "cricket." Well, here's your chance to let us all know your opinions on this most interesting subject. Send me a card to let me know what you think about it, and I will ask a few for publication on this page.

A FIGHT WITH LIONS!

At Chessington Zoo a large crowd collects every evening to watch the animals fed. The other evening there was special interest, as a new and larger den was to be used for the first time. Herr Brick, the animal trainer, went into a cage containing a lion and lioness, in order to induce them to enter the new den. Immediately he got inside the cage the crowd were horrified to see the animals crouch, roaring, in a corner. The lion sprang at Herr Brick, but he dodged in time, and the animal went through into the new home. The lioness, however, was far more reluctant to leave. She repeatedly attacked the trainer, who dodged skillfully and fended the beast off with his whip. Finally, the lioness succeeded in smashing Herr Brick against the bars of the cage, and it was seen that he had hurt his arm. For some minutes longer he tried in vain to induce the lioness to go into the new den, but at length he was forced to give the idea up. He left the cage and went straight to 'The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,321.

THE TREASURE OF RYLCOMBE WOODS!

(Continued from page 17.)

That the country police would be able to arrest the wily, elusive Portuguese, Tom Merry did not believe for a moment. Neither was it likely that they would be able to find the box. But if they found it, would they hand it over to Tom Merry unopened? It was not likely.

In fact, if they heard of its existence, they might make Tom hand it over to them if he found it, pending an inquiry into the matter.

These considerations, added to Dorrian's earnest impression upon him not to let the secret escape, made Tom Merry resolve to keep the matter away from the police.

He was compelled to resign himself to the thought that for the next few hours the foreigner would have the ground to himself.

That could not be helped.

As the juniors left the wood, Herries looked anxiously round for his dog. Towser had not yet returned, and Herries' long and piercing whistles had been unanswered. Herries had full confidence in Towser; yet he had a lurking fear, now, that the dark-skinned ruffian from South Africa might have done him some injury. Even a bulldog was not proof against knife or bullet, and the Portuguese may have resorted to either.

Herries uttered an exclamation of relief as Towser suddenly burst from a thicket, very dewy and perspiring and muddy, and panting for breath. There was a fragment of cloth in the jaws of the bulldog, which he proceeded to lay at his master's feet.

Herries patted his dog proudly.

"Good old doggie! Good old Towser!"

"Dai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyes back upon the fragment. "That was the pattern of the wascal's trousers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Towser must have given him a run for his money," grinned Lowther. "Good old Towser! Herries is quite right about Towser. He can track anybody down—if he can see him."

And Towser came in for a great deal of petting as the juniors walked back to the school.

At the gates, which were now open, they met a cheery-looking fag of the Third Form, with untidy hair and ink stains on his fingers. It was Wally, the younger brother of the swell of the Fourth.

"Hallo, cocky!" said D'Arcy minor cheerfully, giving his major a dig in the ribs that made him gasp. "What's the little game now?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"What have you been out for so early?"

"I do not intend to confide that to a Third Form fag," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "How long have you been weaving that collab, Wally?"

"About twenty minutes."

"I was not wewefwin' to the time you put it on this mornin', I mean, how many days have you had it in use?"

"Forget," said Wally cheerfully. "Less than three months, I'm certain."

"It is vewy soiled."

"Jolly sight cleaner than yours," said Wally, with a critical glance at his usually elegant major. "You're wet and muddy all over!"

"I have been in the wood."

"What's the game?"

"Weally, Wally—"

Gr-r-r-r!

Wow-wow-wow!

"Here, call your little beast off, young D'Arcy!" exclaimed Herries. "Towser will kill him if you don't!"

"Here! Pongo! Pongo! Pongo!"

Pongo reluctantly left his enemy, and Herries marched Towser away to the kennels.

Wally stood with his hands in his pockets, and a perplexed expression upon his face, looking after the juniors.

"Blessed if I can make this out," he muttered. "There's something on, anyway. What have they been up to in the wood? Some jape, I suppose; and a Third Form chap's not good enough to be taken into the wheeze." Wally grinned. "I shall have to educate them about that, I think."

And Wally turned it over in his mind, with a result that was destined to be of very unexpected consequences to Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 14.

Gore Has Bad Luck!

MR. LINTON, the master of the Shell, looked curiously at Tom Merry in class that morning several times.

Tom was usually an attentive pupil, and gave the Form master little trouble. This morning he was so absent-minded that Mr. Linton could not help noticing it.

The Shell master was very patient. But when Tom Merry's answers grew very random, he remonstrated. It was too much to be told that one of the principal exports of the United States were wooden boxes, and that Christopher Columbus was a Portuguese. Portuguese and wooden boxes were running in Tom Merry's mind; but Mr. Linton could not be expected to understand.

"Merry!" he rapped out presently.

"Yes, sir!"

"Are you ill?"

"No, sir!"

"Then what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Then why are you making random replies to me? demanded Mr. Linton. "Why are you answering me in the most ridiculous manner, sir?"

Tom Merry reddened.

"Was I, sir?"

"You were!"

"I—I am sorry!"

"You have told me that Christopher Columbus was a Portuguese, Merry, and that the United States export a great number of wooden boxes every year."

Tom Merry's face became scarlet.

"I—I—I—"

"You are not thinking about your work, Merry."

"N-no, sir!"

"You will stay in half an hour after morning lessons, Merry, and write out a hundred times that Christopher Columbus was a Genoaese."

"Oh, sir!"

The dismay in Tom Merry's face struck the Form master at once.

"Well, Merry?"

"Am I—er—detained, sir?"

"I have said so."

"I—I—I am sorry—"

"Sorry you are detained?"

"Yes, sir!"

"I dare say that is the case, Merry. I did not expect you to be pleased," said the master of the Shell grimly.

Tom Merry sat silent, and Mr. Linton looked at him.

"Come, Merry," he said more kindly. "You are not yourself this morning. If there is anything the matter with you, say so."

"I—I am rather worried, sir, about—about something I have lost," blurted out Tom Merry.

"Ah, that alters the matter! You are one of my best pupils, Merry, and I have no desire to be hard on you," said Mr. Linton kindly. "What have you lost—something of great value?"

"I—I don't know, sir. It was given to me to take care of by somebody else."

"Ah, that is a serious matter! You have lost it about the school?"

"No, sir; in the wood."

Mr. Linton wrinkled his brows for a moment.

"You think it was of great value?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may go and look for it if you like," said Mr. Linton, after a moment's thought. "You are excused the rest of the morning lessons."

Tom Merry's face brightened up at once.

"Oh, thank you, sir! You are very kind."

"Not at all. You may go."

And Tom Merry went, very gladly. The thought of the Portuguese, hunting in the wood for the missing box, was weighing upon his mind so much that he could not possibly bring his attention to his work.

Gore looked after him evilly as he quitted the class-room. Gore was not a good-natured boy, and he was fond of attributing any kindness Tom Merry received from the masters to favouritism.

The fact that Tom Merry was a diligent and attentive pupil, and that he never tried to make the master's task harder than it inevitably was, did not appeal to Gore at all. He was lazy and troublesome himself, and received little but fines and raggings from the Form masters.

He grumbled his discontent into the ear of Skimpole, who sat next to him.

"Rotten favouritism!" he grumbled.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Really, Gore, I was thinking that it was very kind and

considerate of Mr. Linton, as Merry is worried over the box he lost."

"Bosh! That's only an excuse for getting off lessons."

"I do not think Merry would tell a lie, and besides, one should not suspect people of bad motives without absolute proof."

"Rats!"

"Really, Gore—"

"Shut up, you ass! Linton's looking!"

Mr. Linton was glancing towards them. He had caught the murmur of voices.

"Were you speaking, Skimpole?"

"Yes, sir. I cannot tell a lie."

"Very good! You will take a hundred lines."

"Oh!"

"Good old Georgie Washington!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Skimpy is a silly little ass at the hatchet business."

Gore was thinking. He began to assume an absent-minded look, and made a very random answer to Mr. Linton. The master of the Shell pounced upon him at once.

"Gore!"

Gore did not reply. He was looking at the ceiling.

"Gore!"

Gore started, as if suddenly brought to himself, and looked at the Form master.

"Yes, sir! Did you speak, sir?"

"I did, Gore! I spoke twice!"

"I'm sorry, sir!"

"Why did you not answer me the first time, Gore?"

"I—I was thinking, sir. I—I was feeling worried."

Mr. Linton fixed his grey eyes upon Gore's face. The class looked on and listened with interest. They guessed Gore's game at once, and if Gore had been as sharp as he thought he was, he would have seen from the expression of Mr. Linton's face that that gentleman guessed it, too.

"Ah, you are feeling worried, Gore?"

"Yes, sir."

"About your lessons?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Kindly acquaint me with the cause of your worry, Gore."

"I—I've lost something, sir."

"Indeed! What have you lost?"

"A—a penknife, sir."

"Your own penknife."

"N-no, sir. It was lent to me," said Gore fatuously. The calm tone and look of the Form master made him believe that Mr. Linton was taken in, and he was already looking forward to a free morning outside the classroom. "It was a very valuable-looking one, sir—silver-mounted and pearl-handled, sir."

"And you have lost it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Somewhere along the river, sir."

"And you would like to miss your morning lessons and go to look for it?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Thank you, sir!" said Gore, leaving his place.

"You need not move, Gore."

"Eh? Yes, sir!"

"I have not yet granted you permission to leave the classroom."

"Oh!"

"I wish to be further satisfied upon the subject of this knife. You say that it was lent to you?"

"Ye-es, sir."

Gore was beginning to feel uneasy now. Why on earth Mr. Linton should make all these inquiries in his case, when he hadn't made any in the case of Tom Merry, Gore couldn't understand.

He did not reflect that Tom Merry was known to be the soul of honour, and that he himself was equally well known to be the most untruthful boy in the Form. A single word from Tom Merry weighed more than the most detailed and circumstantial statements from Gore.

The Shell looked on with great keenness. They knew that Mr. Linton was on the track, and they wondered whether Gore would be able to get out of it.

Mr. Linton was smiling grimly.

"Who lent you the knife, Gore?"

"A—a friend, sir."

"In your Form?"

"Yes, sir. I—I mean, no, sir," remembering that the Shell were all there to be questioned.

"Indeed! Yes and no. Your answers are a little contradictory, Gore," said Mr. Linton, as gently as a cooing dove. He was most dangerous when he was most quiet, as the Shell well knew. "Which do you mean, Gore—yes or no?"

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"No, sir."

"It was not a boy in the Shell?"

"No, sir."

"What boy was it, then?"

"A—a chap I met out of doors, sir," said Gore desperately, seeing that the matter was now to be sifted to the bottom.

"Ah, what was his name?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Do you know him well?"

"No, sir."

"I suppose not, as you do not know his name. You do not know him at all well?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Yet he lent you a valuable knife—a knife silver-mounted and pearl-handled—this boy whom you hardly know, and whose name you do not know at all?"

Gore was silent. He had involved himself in a maze of falsehoods, and how to extricate himself he had not the faintest idea. He could only blink uneasily at the Form master.

Monty Lowther chuckled softly.

"Linton ought to be a giddy detective," he murmured.

"Well, Gore, have you anything to say?"

"I—I—I—"

"That is not very explicit. I am driven to the conclusion, Gore, that you have made an untrue statement."

Gore did not speak. It was not of much use denying it.

"You have sought to escape morning lessons, because Merry was excused to look for something he had lost. You do not give much credit to my penetration, Gore. I am afraid, Gore, that you are the most obtuse, as well as the most untruthful boy in the class. You will stay in after lessons, Gore, and remain till dinner-time, and you will occupy the time by writing out the sentence: 'It is foolish and disgraceful to be a liar.'"

"Yes, sir."

"We will now resume," said Mr. Linton. And they resumed.

CHAPTER 15.

Tom Merry Defends Himself!

TOM MERRY lost no time after quitting the Shell Form Room. He caught up his cap and hurried out of the school, and in a few moments was down at the gate.

Taggles, the porter, was standing there, and he regarded the hero of the Shell with a glance of extreme disfavour.

"Which, what are you doing out of school, Tom Merry?" he demanded.

"Walking."

"Which it's my dooty to stop you."

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You always do your duty, don't you, Taggy? It's your duty to keep strictly sober and attend to business, and you never do anything else."

"Which I says—"

"Sorry I haven't time to listen now, Taggy. Keep your remarks till this afternoon, and I'll have them after dinner. I've got leave, Taggy—special leave."

"Which I don't—"

"Tata!"

And Tom Merry dodged the porter and ran out into the road. Taggles shook his head solemnly. He was half-inclined to think Tom Merry was playing truant. But Tom did not stay to argue it out.

He went cheerily down the lane towards Rylcombe. He swung his stick as he went. He had caught the stick up in coming out. It belonged to Reilly of the Fourth, and it was a stout blackthorn, which Reilly boasted had broken many a head in County Down and Antrim before it came into his possession.

It was more than likely that Tom Merry would meet the Portuguese in the wood, and in that case he required a weapon.

The junior was soon on the scene of the morning's search. The cursory glance of the morning had failed to reveal the missing box, and it was only by a minute hunt over the recesses of the wood that he could hope to find it.

The task was long and difficult; but there was consolation in the fact that it would be still more difficult for the Portuguese, who had no one to help him in the search. As soon as morning lessons were over, Tom Merry would be joined by a dozen juniors, all keen to aid him in the quest.

In the thick grass the footsteps of the searchers were still visible. The spot was a lonely one, and had not been visited since the morning's search, unless by the man from South Africa.

Where could the missing box be? Tom Merry looked round him and wondered. Among the thicket, hidden in the grass, down among the fern and weeds? Perhaps stuck

in some crevice of one of the huge trees? For the hasty throw of the Portuguese might have sent it upward through the overhanging branches.

The wood was very lonely. Tom Merry could hear the chimes from the village church, but the thick woods seemed to be shut off from all human companionship. He kept a wary eye about him as he began to search for the missing box.

He was more likely, as he knew, to find Da Silva than to find the missing box; and so it proved.

"Senior!"

It was a soft, silky, but threatening voice. The Portuguese stepped from the trees before him.

Tom Merry recoiled a pace, his hand closing more tightly upon his stick. His eyes met the threatening glance of the Portuguese calmly.

"So you are here again, little senior?"

"Yes, as you see."

"You have not found the box, it appears?"

"No."

"Neither have I," said Da Silva. "I hurled it far—in which direction I know not. It will not be easy to find."

"I shall find it."

"I think not, little senior. You will not even look for it."

"Who will prevent me?"

"I, Emanuel da Silva."

Tom Merry swung up the stick as the Portuguese took a quick, tigerish step towards him, looking strangely like a wild animal about to spring.

"Stand back!"

"Ah! Do you think I am afraid of your stick?"

The man from South Africa leaped savagely forward. Perhaps he thought that the boy was scared, and would not dare to strike. If so, he did not know Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell stood as firm as a rock. The stick came crashing down, and it fell upon the shoulder of the Portuguese, who dodged in time to save his head.

Da Silva gave a yell of pain; but he did not recede. With a livid face and eyes that seemed to burn, he hurled himself upon the junior.

"Ah, I have you now!"

But he was mistaken. The stick swung round again, and caught him a terrific blow on the side of the head.

With a gasp, the Portuguese dropped into the grass.

Tom Merry drew a quick, sharp breath. He waited for his enemy to rise again, holding the stick in readiness; but Da Silva did not move for some moments.

A terrible fear smote the boy for a moment as he looked at him. He had struck hard; what if—

The thought was hardly shaped in his mind when the Portuguese stirred and groaned. He sat up in the grass, his hand to his head, glaring in a bewildered way at the junior of St. Jim's.

"What—what was it? Ah—you!"

Tom Merry drew a breath of relief.

"I struck you in self-defence," he said quietly. "Let me alone, and I shall not interfere with you."

He turned away. The Portuguese was looking dazed and sick, and there was evidently nothing more to be feared from him at present.

He staggered to his feet, his head singing, his brain in a whirl. With his hand to his head, he moved away from the glade. He was not inclined to push matters further with Tom Merry at that moment.

Tom Merry resumed his search in the thickets. But it was in vain.

He searched on, till a rush of footsteps in the wood made him look up, and he was surrounded by his chums.

"Hallo!" said Blake cheerily. "We came as soon as we could. Any luck?"

"No," said Tom.

"Hard cheese! Never mind, we'll find it for you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors did their best. But they had no more luck than Tom Merry. It was time soon to get back to the school for dinner, and they had to go with the missing box still undiscovered.

Tom Merry's face was clouded as he walked back towards St. Jim's.

He began to think that his search would be in vain, and that the box would remain lost in some recess of the Rylcombe thickets.

(Continued on next page.)

It helps to score



BRITISH MADE

WRIGLEY'S

MEANS BETTER CHEWING GUM

THERE'S "something to" a team that consistently refuses to come out with less than two or three hundred runs to its credit in such a short time. That team is *fit*. That is why it welcomes Wrigley's to help it score. Wrigley's is the greatest little sweetmeat known—it freshens you up . . . keeps you fresh and your mouth fit. The soothing, thirst-quenching flavour lasts and lasts. Truly wonderful value for a 1d.

In two flavours—P.K., genuine peppermint flavour; Spearmint, pure mint leaf flavour. Four generous pellets in every 1d. packet . . . the purest money can buy.



"Pongo! Pongo!"
Bow-wow-wow!

Wally and Pongo were coming down the lane. The fag stopped, and looked inquiringly at Tom Merry & Co.

"Up to your little game again?" he asked.

"Woally, Wally—"

"Now, don't you begin, Gus," said Wally, shaking his forefinger at the sweet of St. Jim's in an extremely exasperating way.

"You cheeky young wuscel!"

"Here! Pongo! Pongo!"

Wally called to his dog, and went into the wood. Arthur Augustus looked after him wrathfully; but he knew of old how useless it was to pursue the elusive Wally.

CHAPTER 16.

Wally Makes a Discovery!

WALLY whistled cheerily as he entered the wood. That the juniors of St. Jim's were up to some jape the fag was certain.

What else could have caused the Fourth to fraternise with the Shell, and caused this sudden and astonishing friendliness between the School House boys and their rivals of the New House?

And the hero of the Third meant to find out what was toward. The Third Form weren't to be left out of anything that was going on if Wally knew it.

What the juniors could possibly be plotting he did not know. But he expected to find some clue to their doings in the wood.

"Perhaps that Red Indian camping-out dodge again," reflected Wally. "I'll jolly soon know! Pongo!"

There was no answering bark from Pongo.

Wally looked round angrily. The dog had disappeared.

It was a little way Pongo had. He was as good as gold while he was on the chain. When his good behaviour had caused his master to give him a free run, Pongo took advantage of it in the most barefaced manner, scuttling off at the first opportunity.

"The beast!" murmured Wally. "He's gone! Yaa! Pongo! Come back, you brute! I'll tan you! I'll jump on you! Where are you? Pongo! Pongo!"

There was a distant bark. Pongo had no objection to the

mild excitement of a chase. Sometimes he would give Wally a long and troublesome run, and when Wally had given him up as lost, Pongo would come sneaking back with an agreeable expression on his face, as if butler would melt in his mouth. Then, of course, all the dire threats Wally had been uttering would be forgiven.

Wally was taking upon himself to miss dinner at the school, but even he would not venture to miss afternoon lessons, and so it was very necessary to recover Pongo, and get him on the chain again.

Leaving aside for the present the idea of discovering what it was that brought Tom Merry & Co. to the wood, Wally set out in search of Pongo. Somewhat to his surprise, the barking of the dog did not cease; it kept up a continual sound, intermingled with whining.

Wally was anxious as he plunged through the thickets in search of the dog. The whining, and the fact that the sound did not move from place to place, seemed to indicate that Pongo was fixed somewhere, and probably hurt.

Wally had mental visions of Pongo fastened in the cruel teeth of a trap.

"Pongo! Pongo!"

The whining continued. It guided Wally to the spot. He came out into a glade overhung with thick branches, where the grass showed the traces of many footprints. He stared round him, perplexed.

The whining was very close, and yet he could see no sign of Pongo.

"Pongo! Pongo! Pongo!"

The dog whined again. Wally plunged into a thicket, and stopped the trunk of a huge old oak. At a short distance up the trunk there was a gap in the wood, which indicated that the trunk was hollow. The whining came from the hollow within.

Wally grinned. He could guess now what had happened. Pongo had scented a rabbit and chased it, and bunny had scuttled into the hollow for safety. Pongo had pursued him there, and had been unable to climb out again. Wally tried to peer into the hollow.

"Pongo!"

Bow-wow-wow!

"Lucky for you I'm here!" growled Wally. "Where would you be if I weren't here, you duffer? You might have starved to death in that tree!"

Pongo whined.

"Come out, you dummy!"

Pongo whined again. He could not come out. Wally could not see him. The opening in the tree was too narrow to get his head in, and how deep it extended in the trunk he did not know.

He thrust his arm into the opening up to the shoulders, and groped downwards for the dog. His hand struck something hard and square, and he uttered an ejaculation of surprise and drew it out.

It was an oblong, wooden box. Wally stared at it in amazement.

The box was a common one enough, but its condition showed that it had not been long in the tree. How could it possibly have got there?

He looked it over. On the lid was written a name—Manuel da Silva.

"A Portuguese!" muttered Wally, in amazement. "It's a Portuguese name, anyway. How on earth did it get into the tree?"

Pongo whined pitifully.

Wally, reminded of his favourite, groped in the hollow again and caught Pongo's collar, and with some difficulty dragged the shaggy animal out.

Pongo frisked round him delightedly. Wally fastened the chain on to his collar at once. He did not mean to run any more risks with Master Pongo.

Then he examined the box. That it had been lost seemed clear, though how it could have been dropped into the hollow tree was a puzzle.

To open it and find out if it contained any clue which would enable him to retore it to the owner was, naturally, Wally's first thought.

He slid back the lid. Inside was a mass of tissue-paper, and he could see nothing else. But as he moved the paper he gave a shout of astonishment.

For from the box there suddenly burst upon him a blaze of brilliance that was almost dazzling. The box was crammed with diamonds.

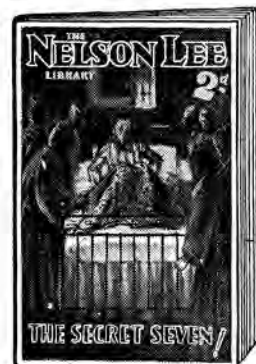
Wally held the box in his hands, staring at it blankly, hardly able to believe his eyes.

"Diamonds!" Little as he knew about the stones, he knew that the contents of the box in his hands must be worth many thousands of pounds.

"Good heavens!" murmured the dazed junior.

It was some minutes before he could even think what he should do.

Suddenly he started. There was a rustle in the thicket, and a dark face looked out at him. Wally snapped the lid



The Secret Seven

"O—o—o—oh!"

The tyrant of St.

Frank's may well sit up in bed and gasp in fright, for his seven mysterious visitors don't look at all friendly! Neither are they! Mr. Hunter can expect no mercy while he shows none to the juniors of the Remove Form. Read what happens to him at the hands of his secret avengers. This magnificent long complete yarn of school adventure at St. Frank's appears in to-day's sparkling issue of

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of the box shut, and looked the stranger in the face. It was Da Silva.

He glanced at Wally and then at the box, and then his eyes blazed. The expression upon his face made Wally start back a little. He slipped the box into his pocket and called to Pongo. His hands unconsciously closed for defence.

The Portuguese observed it, and his manner changed at once. Pongo had ranged up beside his master, his teeth showing, and growling ominously. Pongo had plenty of faults, but it was not safe for anybody to attack D'Arcy minor in his presence.

Da Silva's head was still aching and singing from the blow Tom Merry had given him, and he was not inclined for a struggle if he could avoid it; though Wally would not have been allowed to take the box away without one, in spite of Pongo's ready teeth.

"Good-day, *senhor*!" said the Portuguese. "You have found my box."

"Your box?" said Wally suspiciously.

"Yes. I was attacked by thieves last night, and threw it from me to save it," the Portuguese explained, eyeing Wally covertly.

He could guess from the boy's clothes that he came from the school, but there was no reason to suppose that Tom Merry had acquainted his schoolfellows with the story of the box. In fact, it was clear that Wally did not know about it, or he would have shown by his manner that he regarded the Portuguese as an enemy.

"Oh!" said Wally.

"It must have gone into the trees," said the Portuguese. "I have been seeking it all day in vain. You have found it."

"I suppose you can prove it's yours?" said Wally. "I was going to take it to the police station in Ryelcombe."

"I can prove it's mine."

"You'll jolly well have to before I give it to you!" said Wally.

The Portuguese smiled agreeably.

"That is easy, little *senhor*."

"Your name?"

"Yes. Manuel da Silva."

Wally nodded. That was pretty clear. It proved that the Portuguese knew the box, at all events.

"Do you know what it contains?" asked Wally.

"Yes. Diamonds."

"How many?"

"A hundred and fifty-six, of various sizes."

"H'm! I suppose you are Manuel da Silva?"

The Portuguese laughed.

"Look, *senhor*. Here are letters addressed to me, some in my own language, some in English. Look!"

Wally looked, and was convinced.

"Well, excuse me," he said. "I thought I ought to make sure under the circumstances. Here's your box." And he handed it over to the Portuguese.

Da Silva's fingers closed upon it like the talons of a hawk.

He did not stop to speak again, even a word of thanks.

He plunged into the wood, and vanished from the boy's sight.

CHAPTER 17.

The Last Chance!

TOM MERRY, Mannors, and Lowther left the dining-room in the School House at the earliest possible moment. The Terrible Three meant to cut down to the wood and have another look for the box before afternoon lessons.

Arthur Augustus and Blake came out at the same time and joined them, and the five juniors hurried to the old scene, though with little hope of finding what they sought. But, as Blake remarked, if they stuck it out long enough they were bound to succeed. It was only a question of time.

Wow-wow-wow!

"Bai Jove, I know that wow!" said Arthur Augustus, as they came through the wood. "It's Wally's mongrel, Pongo."

"What's Wally doing here?"

"I expect he's heard something about the box," Mannors remarked. "Gore and Skimpole have been chattering it all over the place."

Wally was looking round the glade as the juniors came up. He had been greatly interested by the thick footprints there, which indicated that this was the spot which interested Tom Merry & Co.

"Hallo, cocky!" said Wally cheerfully. "Back again? I thought I'd run you down. What's this little game here, eh?"

"Have you been lookin' for the box, you young wascal?"

Wally jumped.

"What box?"

"The box Tom Mewwy lost."

"Blessed if I knew he had lost a box. He never told me."

"Weally, Wally, you can hardly expect to be taken into the confidence of Uppah Form fellows, you know."

"Look here, what's that about a box?" demanded Wally, beginning to feel uneasy. "Have you really lost a box, Merry?"

"Yes. We're here to look for it."

"What kind of a box?"

"A wooden one, with a sliding lid," said Tom. "Have you seen one like it?"

"Another chap's name written on the lid?"

"Yes. A foreign name—Da Silva."

Wally changed colour.

"Is anybody else looking for it?" he faltered.

"Yes, a foreign chap—same name as that written on the box," said Tom Merry, looking at him in wonder. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Only I've found it!"

"Found it?"

"Yes."

"Good egg! Where is it, then?"

"I gave it to that chap."

"To Da Silva?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"He saw me with it in my hand," said Wally. "He described it, and told me the name that was written on it, proved that it was his name, so I—"

Tom Merry almost staggered.

"You gave it to him?"

"What else could I do?"

"Bai Jove! You are a young ass, Wally!"

"It's all right," said Tom Merry. "He couldn't know. It can't be helped. But—but we must get the box back!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I say, I'm awfully sorry!" said Wally. "I didn't know, of course. I never guessed you fellows were coming here to look for a box. How could I?"

"Well, it's no good talking now," said Jack Blake. "The thing is to get on the rotter's track and get it back!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry nodded quickly. After the first moment of surprise and utter dismay he was himself again, and ready to do anything to recover the box. Not a chance would be left untried, at all events.

"How long ago did you see the Portuguese, Wally?" he asked.

"About ten minutes."

"Which way did he go?"

Wally reflected before replying.

"He wouldn't go to Ryelcombe," said Monty Lowther.

"He doesn't know but what we've informed the police there about him. He surely wouldn't risk going to the railway station there, when the police might be watching for him."

"Bai Jove, that's wight enough!"

"He didn't go towards the village," said Wally, shaking his head. "He cut off towards Wayland, but whether he kept in that direction or not I don't know."

"That's more likely," said Mannors quickly. "The big expresses sometimes stop at Wayland, and that's just the point he would make for."

"Yes, rather!"

"But he's had ten minutes start," said Wally. "He looked as if he could get over the ground, too, if he wanted to."

"Ten minutes! Hang it!"

"What price the short cut?" said Blake quickly. "The Portuguese chap couldn't know anything about that. He'll be taking the ordinary footpath to Wayland. We could take the short cut through the woods, and get there a quarter of an hour quicker. That gives us five minutes to get ahead of him in."

It was a hot, breathless run.

But they kept up the pace, and, hot and perspiring, but keen as ever, they came out into the footpath where it joined the track over the Castle Hill.

Had the Portuguese passed?

Tom Merry looked at his watch. The run had only occupied eight minutes. Anyone following the footpath usually took quite half an hour to reach the same spot, even walking sharply.

The juniors should have been a good ten minutes, at least, ahead of the Portuguese if he had taken that path. If he had even run all the way he could not have passed this point yet.

Had he taken that path?

It seemed almost certain, yet there was a doubt. The juniors kept under cover of the bushes, watching the path like hawks. Tom Merry's state of mind might be easier imagined than described. If the Portuguese was on that footpath there was every prospect of recovering the box.

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If he had gone another way, it only remained to communicate with the police.

Blake suddenly grasped him by the arm, "Hark!"

It was a rapid footstep on the path.

CHAPTER 18.

At Last!

TOM MERRY drew a quick, deep breath.

Was it the Portuguese?

As yet the thickets hid them from the sight of the newcomer; they would not see him, and he would not see them till he was abreast of them.

Then—
They were ready to spring. If it was the Portuguese, he was in their hands at last. It might be a common wayfarer, but—

The footsteps were hasty. They heard a sound of quick, panting breath. The man was running, who ever he was—running and walking by turns, like a tired man making all the haste he could.

Wally put his hand tightly over Pongo's muzzle. But it was not needed—the dog knew too much to make a sound.

A running figure loomed up past the bushes, in full sight. A glance was enough. The dark, swarthy face, the glittering black eyes—it was the Portuguese!

Like an arrow from a bow Tom Merry leaped at him.

The attack took the ruffian utterly by surprise.

He had been glancing back in uneasiness as he ran, but from ahead he had no fear of danger.

Tom Merry tackled him low, carrying him fairly off his feet, like a three-quarter making a rush on a Rugger field.

The Portuguese went to the ground with a heavy bump.

He gave a gasp of rage and terror.

"Come on!" panted Tom Merry.

In a moment his comrades were backing him up.

The Portuguese had rolled helplessly on the grass, but now he was fighting like a tiger. He was fighting for the fortune he carried in the wooden box.

He tried to get his hand under his jacket, but Tom Merry knew what that meant. He grasped the ruffian's wrist and held it fast.

"Get his knife, Blake!"

"What-oh!"

Blake dragged away the knife the foreigner had tried to draw, and flung it far. Then the juniors piled upon the scoundrel.

In spite of his furious resistance he was soon pinioned.

He lay at last, gasping, in the grasp of the juniors, his black eyes rolling with rage.

Tom Merry knelt beside him, his face red with exertion, and very stern.

"Where is the box?" he said.

The Portuguese muttered a curse.

"BILLY BINKS' BURGLAR!"



WATCH
OUT
FOR
THIS
COVER!



A full-of-thrills long complete yarn of Tom Merry & Co., the cheery chums of St. Jim's, and the Portuguese desperado, Da Silva,

IN NEXT WEEK'S "GEM!"

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He had had no opportunity of throwing the box away this time; nor would it have been any use in the daylight to do so.

Tom Merry ran his hands through the rascal's pockets and drew out the box.

The Portuguese ground his teeth.

"Malediction! I will have it yet!" he panted.

Tom Merry laughed contemptuously.

"I will risk that," he said. "I have recovered my cousin's property, and now you can go. Let the brute alone, chaps."

"Pshaw wait a moment, Tom Mewwy. I do not wish to be hard upon the wottah, or any wottah, but, undah the ciros, I weally think that this wotten wascal would be battah in prwison!"

"Yes, but—"

"You see, it's a decent chap's duty to put down stealin', and as decent chaps we owe a duty to society, you know."

"Gussy's talking like a book," said Blake emphatically.

"I don't want to be hard on anybody, but this chap ought to go to prison."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I know that," he said. "Only we don't want to get mixed up in a case in the police courts; and my cousin asked me to keep the whole matter dark. Besides, the brute hasn't succeeded in stealing anything."

"Well, I don't like letting him go; but have your own way."

And Da Silva was allowed to rise.

He looked at the juniors, with a savage scowl, evidently feeling very little in the way of gratitude for his release.

"You have beaten me now," he said. "But my turn will come."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You had better cut off, my man," he said. "If we change our minds—"

The Portuguese stopped back quickly.

"You will see me again!" he hissed. And he plunged into the wood.

Blake shook his head seriously.

"That chap would be safer behind stone walls," he said. "But I dare say that's only gas. He can't bother us much more. Blessed if I know why he should want that old wooden box so much. I suppose there's something jolly valuable in it."

Tom Merry nodded. Arthur Augustus looked at his watch, and uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove, we're late for school."

"Let's get back, then."

"Yaaa, wathah! Wun like anythin'!"

And the juniors hurried back to St. Jim's. Wally D'Arcy was looking a little troubled. He spoke in a low voice to Tom Merry in the lane.

"I say, Merry, old man."

Tom looked at him.

"What's the matter, Wally?"

"I looked into that box when I found it. Of course, I hadn't the faintest idea that it belonged to you."

"That's all right."

"Tom Merry smiled."

"Only I know what's in it—it's crammed with diamonds," said Wally. "They must be worth thousands of pounds."

Tom Merry nodded, with a troubled look.

"I suppose it's all right, Merry?"

"What's all right?"

"It's no business of mine, but it's a curious thing for that to be in the hands of a chap in a Junior Form at school," said Wally bluntly.

"My cousin gave it to me to take care of."

"That's jolly curious, too."

"I know it is."

"I thought I'd tell you I knew, that's all," said Wally. "And if you want a tip from the Third Form, you'll find your cousin as soon as you can and give him his box back. I wouldn't undertake to mind a thing like that. That's all."

And Wally walked on, whistling.

Tom Merry could not help thinking of Wally's advice. But when was he likely to see his cousin again, or hear from him? Dorrnan had not said a word on that subject.

The juniors reached the school, and received impositions for being late with exemplary meekness.

Tom Merry's chums were all glad to hear that he had recovered the missing box. Skimpole was a little disappointed at not having been the discoverer. He had been thinking out some clues, which he stated would have inevitably led to the recovery of the box that evening, if he had been given time—a statement the accuracy of which Tom Merry took the liberty to doubt.

Tom Merry looked the box up in his study, and waited to hear from his cousin on the matter.

In a few days he had almost forgotten it. But, as he was to discover, the adventures of the wooden box were not yet over.

THE END.

RED STAR RANGER!

By
**JOHN
SPENCER**



Meet Jerry Garrison and his bow-legged pal, Fusty! You'll like 'em both, they're full of pep and personality, and can they shoot?—oh, boy, they can—and how!

Jerry Garrison!

THE heat of the day had gone when Jerry Garrison left the shelter of the Mishra Canyon and followed the broken trail which led down through the foothills to Red Rock. And the sun was sinking when from a bush-strewn mesa he saw in the distance the new wide motor road cutting across the flats.

It was time to halt, for a short ride in the morning would take him into Red Rock; and so, dismounting, he built and lit a fire, then hobbled and turned his pony loose.

Jerry had crossed two States, doing an odd job here and there on this or that cattle ranch, and as he rubbed faces with his pinto he indulged in his habit of speaking aloud.

"Dunno which is the loneliest cuss, you or me, Paintbox," he said; "but mebbe we'll both get a break in the new town."

Jerry ate dried beef and dry biscuit, washed it down with water from a flask, then donned a slicker, rolled himself up in a blanket, and soon was fast asleep.

He resumed the journey soon after sun-up, riding down the foothills, crossing the plain, and following the motor road for the last few miles into the town.

That road won Jerry's admiration. It was well laid, well made, its surface polished by the passing of countless motor wheels.

And this used to be a cow country! On these very flats Redskins had battled with white settlers. Not twenty miles away a derelict mining town was once the centre of a gold-rush.

And even to-day, so Jerry had heard, bandits lurked among the mountains, racketeering was a feature of the big towns, and sometimes bad men made their presence felt.

"The dunn place ain't half civilised, in spite of the motor road, Paintbox," said Jerry, as he eyed the pall of smoke which hung above Red Rock, eight and a half miles away. "Mebbe I'll find a job."

At a cross-road a mile farther on Jerry met two cowboys, each of whom was leading three saddle horses on a rope. "Two hombres, eight cayuses," commented Jerry, with a grin, as he rode by. "Bin hoss-stealin', guys?"

They did not answer, and Jerry promptly forgot all about those saddled ponies; he was to remember them later.

As Jerry passed into the town, he stopped a moment to pull out a wallet which contained a few dollar bills, all he had left in the world, and to make sure that a letter he carried was safe. Sure enough it was there.

Red Rock, Jerry saw as he passed along the main street,

was still a sort of junk town. New and important buildings there were, rising ten, twelve, fourteen, or sixteen stories, and this one wide street was metalled and paved. But short, squat, wooden buildings, buildings with verandas and corrugated-iron roofs, flat-topped buildings of dingy brick, shamed the towering edifices. Modern electric signs were to be seen everywhere, some of which were burning, despite the heat and the sunshine. A big cinema with marbled entrance hall loomed garishly. But most of the town was primitive.

Jerry's bright blue eyes took in these details whilst they searched for the sheriff's office. He found it on the eastern side, almost opposite the State bank.

Jerry tied Paintbox to a hitching-rail, and, mounting some steps, died through the open door of the office to look for Sim Ross, the sheriff.

Three men occupied the room. One was sprawled out in a chair, his riding-boots propped up on the desk, with flowing spotted tie of a darker hue, and wearing a big, broad-brimmed Stetson—carried a belt with two holsters that held six-guns. His grimly good-natured face was furrowed, lined, and weatherbeaten. Age uncertain.

The second man—thick-set, bow-legged, clad in faded riding-breeches, worn top-boots with spurs, blue shirt, with flowing spotted tie of a darker hue, and wearing a big, broad-brimmed Stetson—carried a belt with two holsters that held six-guns. His grimly good-natured face was furrowed, lined, and weatherbeaten. Age uncertain.

He was arguing with the third man—a stoutly built, olive-skinned civilian, with black hair, dark brown eyes, and coal-black moustache.

"Fusty—Sam!" roared the man at the desk. "Pipe down! Waal, stranger, what you want?"

The look the older man shot at Jerry registered approval. But that was because the blue-eyed, sun-tanned, boyish-looking visitor was just about the smartest stranger Red Rock had seen for many a long day.

"Are you Sheriff Sim Ross?" asked Jerry.

"That's me." The sheriff's eyes rested on the belt and holsters Jerry wore, took in the neat, athletic figure, the firm full mouth, and the fearless blue eyes.

Jerry handed his letter.

"This is from Ben Tarpin, Polyanna Ranch, Sunshot, introducin' me, sheriff. My name's Jerry Garrison."

"From my old pal Ben!" Sim Ross' lean face lit up.

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"Why, I ain't seen 'im in years. Sit ye down, Jerry. Any pal of Ben's is welcome."

Jerry sat twirling his big hat, conscious of the close scrutiny of Fusty and Sam, whilst the sheriff removed his feet from the desk, cut open and read the letter. When he finished he frowned.

"Waal, now, Jerry," he said, laying the letter on the desk, "Ben wants me to find you some sort of a job; sez you're smart at gun-play, a prime hoss-breaker, and first-class cowboy. But they ain't any wild hosses about hyar; this town is now civilised, and don't encourage gun-play; and thar ain't a ranch worth speakin' of within sixty miles."

"Mebbe," said Jerry eagerly, "I could get a job in the town."

"Can't help you thar. Fact is, Jerry, the mayor runs this town, makes 'is own laws, runs 'is own racketts with a bit o' blackmailin' on the side; and at this very present moment I'm considerin' whether I hadn't better resign as sheriff before I'm fired."

Fusty uttered a warning hiss; and, looking his way, Jerry saw the bow-legged cowboy jerking a thumb at Sam behind the civilian's back and winking prodigiously.

"And thar's another thing," the sheriff went on, laying his hand flat upon the letter of introduction—"Ben sez you killed a mah. I stand for law and order. How cum that, Jerry?"

The blue-eyed youngster shrugged his wide shoulders.

"Me and a pal worked for Ben at Polyanna," he explained. "My pal, Bob Regan, was sweet on Polly Tarpin. We'd a greaser named Jaurez workin' with the outfit. The Mex got kind of crazy over Polly. One night my pal Bob heard a scream, found Jaurez threatenin' the gal, and knocked him down. Jaurez shot and killed my pal before he could draw, then I shot it out with the Mex and riddled him like a sieve."

Jerry's handsome face clouded at the recollection.

"The boss did the best he could for me, sheriff; but the Mex had influence, and they wanted me for murder. I had to flit, and I've worked my way across two States to get hyar, Mr. Ross."

"And I shore am sorry, Jerry, that I can't do a thing to help you," said the sheriff. "But if you like I'll write a letter to Jasper Privett, the mayor, and you can go along and see him. He's the big noise in this berg, and mebbe he'll find some use for you."

"Thanks, sheriff!" said Jerry. "I'm much obliged."

Sim Ross picked up a pen and began to write.

And at that moment Jerry Garrison looked out of the open door at the sun-drenched street.

Gun-play!

THE traffic in Red Rock, like its buildings and its people, was mixed. Cowboys, horsemen, motor-cars, horse-drawn buggies, motor-lorries, backboards, passed in a motley through the streets.

But at the moment when Jerry looked out of the office door a big, black saloon car drew up outside the State bank, and six men dressed as cowboys, with big, broad-brimmed hats, jumped out and hurried through the bank door.

The engine of the car was left running.

At the same moment a flivver, with engine banging and misfiring badly, turned across the street, and, coming to a dead stop, blocked the way entirely. A man got out and pretended to be trying to crank up.

Jerry's heart gave a jump.

"Say, sheriff," he cried, "there's something wrong here!"

"The only thing wrong with Red Rock, son," answered the sheriff, as he went on with his writing, "is its mayor. He does 'is law-breakin' underground."

Jerry bounced on to his feet, unbolted the flap of a gun-holster, and turned the gun butt outward.

"Sheriff," he said, "there's something wrong at the bank."

As he spoke—braaang!—a revolver shot echoed dully from inside the building opposite. The sound brought Sim Ross up on his feet. Whipping a gun out of a drawer he cleared the threshold at a bound, and leapt down into the sunlit street.

Jerry sprang after him. Fusty, turning up the flaps of his gun-holsters, waddled bow-legged on to the veranda outside. The black-haired, brown-skinned civilian sidled noiselessly down to the pavement.

Sheriff Sim Ross was sixty, but he could move. Whilst Jerry stood in the middle of the empty road, hesitating, the sheriff vanished inside the bank.

Instantly another shot rang out, a second, a third. Then out of the bank and down the steps staggered the sheriff, sagging at the knees. He waved to Jerry, dropped the gun he held, and tottered.

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Jerry ran to meet him, caught him.

Already the sheriff's eyes were dim.

"They got me, Jerry," he sighed. "And—I—wuz tellin' you thar wuz no—gun-play—in—Red Rock—"

In that quick second before Sheriff Sim Ross died, a swift glance up and down the street showed Jerry men running, a traffic block beyond the abandoned flivver. He saw the sleek, black-haired man Sam sneaking up behind him, heard Fusty bawl as he ran waddling into the road. Then out of the bank stepped a giant of a man, wearing gay-checked shirt, gun-belt, big hat, hairy chaps; a swarthy, eye-looking man; more crook, Jerry thought, than cowpuncher. The man held a smoking gun in his hand.

Out of the corner of his eye Jerry thought he saw the man Sam make a sign. The towering crook on the bank steps fired instantly, but Jerry saw the man aim his way, and anticipated the shot, firing from his hip.

Braaang—braaang!

The bullet intended for Jerry crashed through the window of the sheriff's office, but the big man on the bank steps crumpled and went down headlong.

Then Fusty took the drooping sheriff out of the crook of Jerry's bent left arm.

"Gosh, kid!" Fusty yelled. "You shore can hurl lead! You got Al Rivers—an' he was aimin' at you!"

Men were whirling round them now. Five men with big hats tore out of the bank, dumped some armfuls of bank-notes and bills into the big black car, started shooting at random, and one of them, taking the wheel, drove the car along the street and at everybody who tried to bar its passage.

The car whined away, leaving behind a cloud of choking smoke from the exhaust and vanished.

Fusty bore the sheriff into the office. A man ran by—shouting that the bank manager was dead.

And then, as Jerry thrust his gun back into its holster, wondering what next he had better do, someone struck him a violent blow from behind.

Jerry stumbled, recovered, whirled. Through dimming eyes he saw the man with the black hair, and half a dozen others, leaping at him, saw a powerfully built stranger urging the others on, and heard him say:

"He shot Al Rivers, I tell you! He's the man who murdered the sheriff! Seize him and take him to the calaboose!"

Jerry struck out at the leaping figures, tried to draw his holstered gun; but he was dazed and weak, his knees bent under him, and, as blows rained down upon his head, he stumbled and plunged face downward in the road.

In Irons!

THE next thing Jerry knew everything was black. He stifled and sighed, conscious of racking pains in the head. He moved his legs and found them held by leg-irons. He tried to lift his right hand, but found that his wrists were handcuffed together.

"Paintbox," he murmured, in half-delirium, "they shore has handled yore buddy a raw deal!"

He rose with some difficulty, and, feeling sick and dazed, reeled round his darkened cell to find one side of it composed of stout iron bars set six inches apart. He found the door and shook it, but it was as firm as solid rock.

Jerry ceased his prowling and squatted cross-legged on the flags. At least they were cool.

As his brain cleared he tried to remember what had happened.

Yes, of course, those men in the car, six of them, had robbed the bank. The sheriff had rushed to intervene, and the bank robbers had shot Sim Ross. Mebbe it was the giant Al Rivers who had shot him. Well, Jerry thought, with grim satisfaction, he had put Rivers' fight out! And that sleek, black-haired crook Sam had signed to Rivers to get him!

Five of the men had got away in the big black car. Al was the sixth. And six led horses were taken that morning by two surly cowpokes out past the crossroads.

Jerry thrilled as, in his mind, he reconstructed the bank robbery.

Eight bandits had ridden into Red Rock early that morning, two of whom had ridden and led the horses away. Six of them had borrowed or stolen a car and raided the bank, five of whom had dashed away in the big black saloon to the place where the horses were waiting for them.

They had adopted these methods, without a doubt, Jerry thought, because horses would soon have been run down had they been pursued by car. The use of the car assured a quick getaway.

And one of the gang, the man Al Rivers, had been shot. Jerry, feeling the bumps on his head with his manacled



The towering crook on the bank steps fired instantly, but Jerry anticipated the shot, firing from the hip. Brrraaang! Brrraaang! The bullet intended for Jerry crashed through the window of the sheriff's office, but the big man crumpled and went headlong down the steps!

hands, got a thrill out of that, for surely, through Al, it ought to be possible to trace the gang.

And Sheriff Sam Ross had been killed, shot by the bank robbers. Why? Was it because he had recognised too many of them?

Jerry had reached this point in his reasonings when a light showed, heavy steps tramped the stone-flagged prison, and half a dozen men appeared. One of them, a tall, gaunt specimen, with lank hair and shaggy beard, opened the gate of the cell with a key, and Jerry was ordered gruffly to step out.

The sleek-haired man Sam was there, and he and most of the others carried automatics.

"Here," protested Jerry, "you've no right to shut me up in there! I've done nothing!"

The man Sam gave him a vicious push.

"March!" he snapped, and Jerry, walking as briskly as his fetters would allow, accompanied the men along stone-paved passages and up stone steps until they entered a large wood-panelled room.

A burly and important-looking man, with a putty-coloured face and double chin, sat in the middle of a long table. His small, cunning eyes scanned Jerry as the escort marched the prisoner up to the table.

Ranged along the table on either side of him were a dozen other men. Flat black automatics lay upon the table top.

"Shut that door!" snapped the man in the big chair.
"Now, prisoner, what have you got to say for yoreself?"

"I want to know who you are, and by what right I have been made a prisoner and brought here?" he asked.

"I'm Jasper Privett, mayor of this town, chief magistrate, judge and hangman, if necessary. Jerry Garrison!" barked the putty-faced president of the tribunal. "Thanks to a letter you brought the late sheriff, we hold yore record. We're holding you for bank robbery and murder, and we've had you brought hyar to see if thar is any reason why you shouldn't hang!"

Jerry looked along the row of faces, cold, mocking, derisive faces, and knew in a moment that this illegal court was packed.

"Are you accusing me of taking part in that bank robbery?" he challenged.

"You were one of the gang!" stormed Jasper Privett, mayor of Red Rock. "Sam Paulo says you came into the sheriff's office at the time of the raid. You went there to hold Sim's attention while the bank was robbed. But one

of the gang shot the manager, and when Sim went to investigate, you shot him and then killed Al Rivers, who tried to get you, Garrison—"

"Rivers shot the sheriff!" said Jerry indignantly. "He was one of the gang! I admit I shot him, but it was in self-defence! He would have drilled me if I hadn't—"

The door opened, and a man slipped in after talking to the guards. He was behind Jerry. Jerry did not know who he was.

"Sam Paulo," said the mayor, "you saw the killin'. What's yore version?"

"I was in the office talkin' to Fusty," said Sam, glowering at Jerry. "Then this man Garrison came in. He was working with the gang right enough. When the first shot was fired I went out into the street. The sheriff made for the bank, and Garrison shot him from behind as he was mounting the steps. The sheriff turned and tried to draw, but he was dead before Rivers tried to get Garrison. When Garrison saw Rivers aim he fired first and killed him." *

"Then George Hartshorn came up and ordered us to arrest the prisoner. He tried to gun us, but we stretched him out and brought him to the calaboose."

"That's the story, Garrison," said the mayor, crashing his fist upon the table top. "And we have a letter from Ben Tarpin, Polyanna Ranch, Sunshot, saying yore wanted for murder. That's yore record. Now what have you got to say?"

"What the letter says is true," Jerry answered. "But the charge you have brought against me here is a pack of lies. I don't recognise the jurisdiction of this court. If I am to be charged, I demand a public trial, and I insist upon having a lawyer to help in my defence."

The mayor laughed, thrusting out his brutal underjaw.

"No doubt you do," he jeered, "but this is the only court you'll see in Red Rock, Garrison. I've my own way of dealing with gunmen of yore kind who kem into this berg. Yore fate's gonna be decided hyar and now. Boys, what's the verdict? Prisoner was caught red-handed, remember, and he gunned poor Al."¹²

"A bank robber," jeered Jerry, shrugging his shoulders.

"No! My pal!" boomed the mayor. "Poor Al was going to the help of the bank when you shot him. Half the town saw you kill Al. Boys, what's the verdict?"

"Guilty!" chorused the twelve men at the table.

The mayor laughed.

"Fine!" he boomed. "Then you'll be taken back to yore

cell, Garrison, and given half an hour to think in; after which you'll be rid out of town and hanged on the first tree we ken to. That's the way I deal with bank robbers and gunmen in Red Rock."

"Jerry's cry of protest was drowned in a general roar of approval, and the party began to break up."

"And it was just then that a harsh, cracked voice barked above the clamour:

"Jest one moment, Mr. Privett!"

Jerry turned his head and saw Fusty striding bow-legged up to the long table. It seemed as if the mayor was not at all pleased to see him.

"I've listened to this mock trial," objected Fusty, "and I say you can't pull this trick—"

"I'm Mayor of Red Rock. Why can't I?" snapped Jasper Privett.

"Because it's agin the law," said Fusty.

"In a case like this I make my own laws," barked the mayor.

"Wait a minute!" Fusty's voice was penetrating, his manner convincing as he leant upon the table close to the ironed prisoner. "I've something to say. The sheriff was shot inside the bank, Mr. Privett. When he staggered out Jerry Garrison caught him. Then Al kem out the bank and Al drew a bead on Jerry. The kid shot him quicker'n a striking rattler, and he wuz right. Garrison shot Al Rivers in self defence."

"The evidence proves otherwise."

"Not my evidenc."

"Al was my pal. He shot at Garrison because Garrison killed Sim Ross."

"If Al wuz yore pal, mayor, he also seemed to be takin' part in a bank raid."

"Garrison entered the sheriff's office acting as decoy."

"Sez who?"

"I say so," spluttered Sam Paulo, white under his olive skin.

"H'm, you were in the sheriff's office, too, Sam. Kem in thar before Garrison turned up; kind yu started an argyment with me. Why shouldn't you hev bin the decoy?"

"I've had enough of this," stormed the mayor. "Garrison has been found guilty. He shall hang!"

"No!" Fusty shook his grizzled head. "I'm deputy sheriff of this town, mayor. Hang Garrison if you find him guilty, but it's gotta be a public trial, and I'm gonna give evidence."

"And if I say no?"

"Why, then, mayor, I shall hev to rouse up every right-minded citizen in Red Rock and state the facts." Fusty's voice rose, and he set back his wrinkled head defiantly. "The kid shot Al, but he's no bank robber. And one of the questions I shall ask at the public trial, Mr. Privett, is why Paulo and yore pals slammed Garrison from behind and hung him in the calaboose?"

"Because he shot the sheriff and Rivers, Fusty."

"That's what you say. Others know different." Jasper Privett, Mayor of Red Rock, stamped from the table.

"All right, you shall have yore public trial, Fusty," he bellowed. "Meanwhile, Garrison stays in gaol—and in irons."

Garrison's wardens began to haul him away, and Jerry, shooting a bright smile at the bow-legged deputy sheriff, said:

"I shore am much obliged to you, Fusty."

"Sall right, kid," growled Fusty, with a piercing glance and a nod of his grizzled head, and only Jerry Garrison caught the wink he gave under the down-turned flap of his broad-brimmed hat.

Jerry was taken back to his iron-barred cell, and locked in as before. And as he sat on the edge of the stone bench which served as a bed, he wondered why Jasper Privett, Mayor of Red Rock, and that bunch of guys who had tried him, wanted to hang him. Him, a stranger, who had done nothing.

This time Jerry was not in darkness, for a dim light filtered in from an outer room, where he could see the tall, gaunt, odd-looking gaoler who had locked him in, sitting in an armchair, reading a paper and smoking.

It was a rotten old prison, Jerry thought, with its plaster crumbling between the stone blocks, its smell of damp; and it was a pity its cells were so strongly barred. No more chance of his getting out of his cell than ridding himself of his handcuffs and his irons.

If only he could draw the gaoler near on some pretext and grab hold of him through the bars he might be able to steal the keys, and—

"Hey!" Jerry roared. "Can't I have a drink of water, pal?"

"You won't want any water whur yo're going to," the man snapped back. "You won't have no public trial, neither. They'll be fetchin' you fore long."

Cheerful news! Jerry eased his position and started wondering what had happened to Paintbox.

An hour passed, and then—Jerry heard a soft step in that outer room, and looking that way saw that it was his friend, Fusty.

Fusty was clad for riding, his hands were in his pockets. "Lo, Cock Eye!" he greeted. "How's things?"

"You've no right hyar," retorted the gaoler. "The mayor giv' orders nobody was to be 'lloed in. You get goin' Fusty."

Instead of which, Fusty came nearer.

"Forgettin' I'm deputy sheriff, aintcher?" he rejoined. "Til I'm relieved of the job I've a right hyar. And besides, I'm not satisfied with this case. There's one or two pints I'd like to talk over with you, Cock Eye."

Jerry rose, watching Fusty breathlessly. This man was his friend. Jerry was thrilled. Supposing—

"I don't want to talk about any pints, Fusty," Cock Eye cut in. "I've got me orders, and I'm responsible for the safety of the pris'n'r."

"Then supposin'," said Fusty, whipping both hands out of his pockets and showing two pointed six-guns, "you put yore 'ands up?"

Cock Eye leapt from his chair with a howl of dismay.

"Put 'em up!" roared Fusty, giving the gaoler a rap on the point with the barrel of a gun as Cock Eye felt for a gun-butt. "Now," as the gaoler reeled, "back over to the cage which holds the prisoner. Back over, you leather-faced wart-hog."

(Jerry Garrison's number would surely have been up, but for the timely intervention of Fusty—that say you, chums? But Jerry's not clear of the wood yet, as you will learn when you read next week's chapters of this thrilling adventure story.)

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