

"BILLY BINKS' BURGLAR!" GRAND LONG COMPLETE
SCHOOL YARN OF ST. JIM'S.

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

The GEM

2^d



THE
SECRET
PANEL!

MEET "DEADSHOT" BINKS, THE BOOTBOY AT ST. JIM'S! HE WANTS
ARTHUR

BILLY BINKS'



Manuel da Silva, the Portuguese desperado, is determined to get the diamonds entrusted to Tom Merry by his cousin, but Tom is equally determined to keep them—and he means to catch Da Silva, too! Read this gripping yarn of thrilling school adventure!

CHAPTER 1.

The Enemy!

TOM MERRY stirred in his sleep and awoke.

The June night was very quiet and still.

The School House at St. Jim's was wrapped in silence and sleep. The hour of midnight was long past, and the latest light had been turned out, the last door had closed.

The high windows of the Shell dormitory in the School House glimmered with silver light. The round moon rode in the sky, and the light fell in silver flakes in the wide quadrangle, and glimmered in at the windows.

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Across the dormitory it lay in ghostly patches, broken by the shadows from the bed, abnormally long in the clear light.

Tom Merry turned his head on his pillow.

He had awakened. He did not know why. There was no sound in the House; not a footstep, not a shutting door, at that hour. Faintly through the dim dormitory came the steady breathing from the other beds.

Yet what was that?

In the deep stillness a faint creak sounded—faint, slight, but sufficient to catch the ear of the awakened boy by contrast with the heavy silence.

Tom Merry started.

As he lay in bed his eyes were upon a patch of moon-

TO BECOME THE TERROR OF THE ROCKIES—BUT HE'S SCARED OF AUGUSTUS!

BURGLAR!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"All right. I say, we'd better tackle him before he gets in. A shove would send him spinning off the window-sill."

Tom Merry shook his head. "It would kill him!"

"Well, I suppose a burglar has to take the risks of his business, like

a soldier or a policeman," murmured Monty Lowther, who would have joked if he had been bound to the stake.

"Don't be funny, Monty! Look here, he won't get that window open in a hurry. It's as stiff as anything. We ought to have some fellows here to collar him when he gets in."

"Better not let him get in. He may have a revolver."

"We can't knock him off the window-sill, though. Hang it, a man's life is a man's life, even a burglar's."

"Yes, but look here; he can't get in. He may have a pistol, and we're not going to have him in."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

Creak!

The window was creaking, but it was hardly moving.

"Look here," whispered Lowther. "I'll get out and call Kildare and some more of the Sixth, and Mr. Railton. They can go into the quad and call to him to come down and surrender. He'll have no choice if there's some fellows ready to collar him in here, top."

"Good! Cut off! Keep in the shadow. He may be able to see you if you get into the light."

"Right-ho!"

And Monty Lowther, carefully keeping out of the patches of moonlight, made his way to the door, and silently left the dormitory.

Tom Merry stepped to Manners' bed and shook him, awakening him with the same precautions as in Lowther's case.

"What's the row?" whispered Manners.

"Burglars! Look at the window!"

Manners looked and shivered.

Creak!

"My hat!" murmured Manners. "I say, Tommy, there strikes me as something familiar in the cut of that fellow's napper. He's got a Homburg hat on. That Portuguese chap we were rowing with the other day was wearing one. He said we hadn't seen the last of him. Is it possible?"

Tom Merry started.

"Manuel da Silva! By Jove!"

Was it possible?

Tom Merry had almost forgotten the mysterious box which had been placed in his charge by his cousin, Herbert Drorian, and which was now locked up in his study in the Shell passage.

Da Silva, the Portuguese, who had tracked Drorian from South Africa, had made desperate efforts to obtain the box, and had nearly succeeded in doing so.

Tom had not thought that the Portuguese would follow the matter farther, in spite of his threats.

Was this an attempt to obtain possession of the wooden box?

He watched the silhouette at the window keenly.

Truly there was something familiar in the outline—something that recalled the slim, lithe Portuguese.

Creak!

The window was moving at last.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Better wake the fellows!" whispered Manners. "We can't have the brute get in."

"Wait a moment! Hark!"

Through the silence of the night from the quadrangle rang a clear, sharp voice.

"Come down, there! Come down, and surrender!"

The shadow at the window gave a sudden start.

CHAPTER 2. No Capture!

IN the old quadrangle at St. Jim's the moonlight lay in a sea of silver. Objects were almost as visible as by day.

A group stood under the window of the Shell dormitory in the moonlight. Monty Lowther had awakened the Housemaster and some of the seniors; and they had turned out immediately to look for the housebreaker.

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light that streamed in at the nearest window, and lay in a silver flood beside his bed.

The patch of light had been suddenly darkened.

A new shadow lay on the floor.

It was not the shadow of a branch stirred across the window by the wind. It was a huge shadow, abnormal, eerie, but unmistakable.

The shadow of the head and shoulders of a man.

Tom Merry lay quiet, breathing hard, fully awake now, with his heart beating like a hammer.

A man at the window!

That was what the shadow meant.

Slowly, cautiously, the junior turned his head so that he would be looking at the window instead of at the floor.

The glimmering square was darkened by the outlines of the form outside.

Head and shoulders.

A black silhouette.

Tom Merry's lips came together hard. He could see nothing but the black mass of the head and shoulders. The features were invisible. Yet it seemed to him that the man was looking straight at him.

But that was only fancy. He could see that form in relief against the moonlight. The man could not see through the glass into the dim dormitory.

Tom Merry stepped quietly out of bed.

His heart was beating hard, but he was not afraid. He knew at once that it must be a burglar. Had he heard someone enter the dormitory stealthily he would have taken it for granted that it was a Fourth Form raid, or, perhaps, a visit from the School House juniors' rivals over in the New House.

But this was the head of a man, and only a desperate man would have ventured the dangerous task of climbing up a rainpipe to the dormitory window.

The creak had been caused by an effort to open the window. The window was open at the top like most of the windows at St. Jim's. The intruder had only to push up the bottom sash from outside. But that was not easy. The lower sash was stiff from disuse, and the man's position was awkward on a narrow sill more than fifty feet from the ground.

A fall meant death—grim death on the stones of the quadrangle.

Creak!

Some implement had been forced under the lower sash, and the man was steadily exerting a pressure to raise it.

As soon as he could get his fingers under it, it would be easy to do the rest.

Tom Merry smiled grimly.

The intruder did not know that the first sound had awakened one of the sleepers, and that his telltale shadow in the moonlight had betrayed his presence.

Tom Merry stepped to the next bed, where his cousin Lowther slept, taking care to keep in the shadow, and not to step out into the patch of moonlight on the floor.

He lightly shook Monty Lowther by the shoulder, and then placed a hand over his mouth. The caution was necessary.

"Br-r-r-r!" mumbled Lowther, as he awoke.

"Quiet!" whispered Tom Merry.

"Wh-wh-what—"

"Shut up!"

"I'll jolly well shut you up, you ass!" mumbled Monty Lowther. "What the—"

"Burglars!"

"Wh-what?"

"Burglars!"

"Honest Injun!"

"Yes."

"My hat!"

Lowther rolled out of bed. Tom Merry pointed to the window, and Lowther gave a gasp.

"Phew!"

"Quiet!"

Mr. Railton stood there, with a stout stick in his hand, and Kildare, Darrell, and Rusden of the Sixth with sticks or pokers.

"There was not much chance for the burglar to get away, if he descended into the quadrangle.

Nor was there any chance for him inside the House.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, and North and Knox had gone up to the Shell dormitory, in case the burglar should make a desperate break through the window.

Tom Merry and Manners bundled on their clothes quickly as Mr. Linton came in, and quietly left the dormitory to join the party in the quad.

"We'll jolly well have him now," said Tom Merry, as he picked up a cricket stump. "The brute ought to be shoved in prison. He might have scared some of us into fits. Not ourselves, of course."

"Of course not!" agreed Manners. "Some of the others."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Come on!"

They hurried out into the quadrangle.

Mr. Railton was looking up steadily at the man on the high window-sill, who was looking down at him with eyes that caught strangely the gleam of the moonlight.

The Housemaster waved his hand.

"Come down!"

The black shadow did not move again, nor was a word uttered.

Only the glittering eyes were fixed upon the group below in the quadrangle.

"You cannot escape!" called out the Housemaster. "Better come down quietly, or you will be seized from inside the window at great risk to yourself."

Still the black shadow did not move.

There was a creak at the window; but this time it was caused by the opening of the sash from inside.

Then the dark figure made a sudden, convulsive movement.

It rose on the sill, one hand clutching at the rainpipe that ran beside the window, and for a moment a terrible thrill ran through the group below.

Was the baffled burglar about to hurl himself from the window-sill to the ground? It was possible that a desperate man, with a long record of crime, might prefer death to arrest.

Tom Merry shuddered.

As the man rose, the moonlight gleamed on his face—the dark, swarthy face and the black eyes of the Latin—and he knew that it was the Portuguese.

"Da Silva!" he muttered breathlessly.

The others did not hear him; and he did not speak again. Of the strange adventure with the Portuguese, nothing was known at St. Jim's, excepting by Tom Merry & Co., and they were keeping the secret.

But it was not the intention of the Portuguese to hurl himself down to death.

Life was too dear for that, to the reckless, rascally adventurer from South Africa.

His grip was on the rainpipe, and he swung himself clear of the sill as the window opened.

Mr. Linton looked out, and looked round to the side of the window where the rascal hung to the pipe. He was beyond easy reach.

But he was not descending.

He was climbing the pipe—higher and higher—and the group below guessed his intention at once.

He intended to climb to the roof of the School House, and make an attempt to escape over it.

Mr. Railton shouted to him.

"Come down, madman, come down!"

The Portuguese did not reply.

He climbed steadily on, watched with horror by the eyes below. Above the window, the rainpipe made an abrupt slant to the roof, and the climber had to work his way along it, swinging with his hands, with no foothold whatever, his feet dangling in the air against the bricks.

It was a dizzy sight.

A moment's failure of nerve, and the wretch's body would have come hurtling down to grim death on the stones.

But the man's nerves seemed to be of iron.

He swung on steadily, and reached the edge of the roof, and slowly but surely dragged himself upon it.

Mr. Railton gave a great gasp of relief.

"Thank Heaven he is safe!"

That was the general feeling.

Burglar and thief as the man undoubtedly was, all there felt that a human life had been in danger, and were intensely relieved to know that it was in danger no longer.

"Jolly glad he's done it!" murmured Tom Merry. "But he'll get away now!"

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"Looks like it!"

"Get round the House!" said Mr. Railton abruptly. "He must not get away. He is plainly a desperate character."

A crowd of fellows had been awakened by this time, and were pouring out into the quadrangle, dressed or half-dressed.

Willingly they spread round the buildings to search for the burglar when he should descend to terra firma.

But the search was not an easy one.

He might come down in any of a hundred places, or he might remain hidden on the roof for hours to tire out their patience.

There were plenty of fellows who would willingly have climbed to the roof and searched for him there, but that the Housemaster strictly forbade.

It was better to let the burglar escape than to risk life and limb for his capture.

After the hunt had lasted nearly half an hour, Mr. Railton gave orders for the boys to return to their beds.

Taggles, the school porter, was told to let his dog loose in the school quadrangle, a sufficient precaution against the return of the burglar, although in the circumstances he was hardly likely to return.

Then the boys went back to their beds, and the House was locked up again.

Needless to say, it was a long time before sleep revisited their eyelids. The excitement in the Shell dormitory was keen.

"It's curious that the chap should try to get in here," Harry Noble remarked. "There must be easier ways of getting in. I should think."

"Nothing in this room specially to steal, either."

"Off his rocker, I should think."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in the darkness. Why had the Portuguese tried to enter the Shell dormitory? Had he discovered that that was Tom Merry's room? And did he want to get at the hero of the Shell?

Perhaps he thought that Tom was keeping the mysterious box in the dormitory, as, indeed, he had thought of doing. Perhaps he had thought of waking the boy, and with threats, forcing him to reveal where the box was placed. But, in that case, how had he known anything about the Shell room? How did he know that Tom Merry was sleeping there? Was he in communication with someone inside the House?

That was a startling thought.

"It was the Portuguese, right enough," Monty Lowther whispered to Tom Merry, from his bed.

"Yes. I saw his face distinctly!"

"He was after the box, do you think?"

"I suppose so."

"Or after you?"

"Possibly."

"We shall have to keep our peepers open, Tommy. It wouldn't be a bad wheeze to borrow Herries' bulldog, and keep him in the form of a night, for a bit."

"H'm! I think I'd rather have the burglar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said a voice from Skimpole's bed. Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, and the inventor of impossible airships, was in a very perturbed frame of mind. "Dear me, that is a good idea, Lowther! I do not like Herries' bulldog, but I think it would be a good idea to have him in the House for a time. It may save me from irreparable loss."

"Eh? What have you got to lose?"

"Surely you know why this desperate attempt was made to enter the House, Lowther?"

"I think I can guess."

"Undoubtedly, the rascal was the emissary of a foreign government."

"A what? Of a which?"

"An emissary of a foreign government," said Skimpole firmly. "His object was to steal the plans of my new aeroplane."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing whatever to laugh at, Lowther. I have already written to the War Office to offer to place a fleet of aeroplanes at their disposal, each capable of carrying fifty men and a dozen machine-guns, if they will place a few million pounds at my disposal. I have received no answer to my letter."

"Amazing!"

"By Jove! Something ought to be done about this," said Gore. "Those War Office chaps are always neglecting the true interests of the country."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Gore—"



A form came flying through the doorway and a boot was seen behind it, the boot obviously furnishing the motive power! Skimpole flopped with a loud thump at the feet of the startled Arthur Augustus. "Ow! Dear me! Wow!" he gasped.

"Perhaps their reply has been intercepted by the emissaries of a foreign government," suggested Harry Noble.

"I have thought of that, Noble. It is very probable, and this attempt to enter the School House is the result."

"Oh, carry me home to die!" murmured the Cornstalk. "What do you say to wiring for a regiment of Territorials to guard the secret, Skimmey?"

"Pray do not be absurd, Noble! That would be far too sensible a thing for our War Office to do. Some precaution must, however, be taken. I am thinking of borrowing the electrical apparatus from Glyn's study and putting up an electric alarm."

"My only hat!" said a voice from Glyn's bed. "I'll burglar alarm you if you go into my study collaring my things!"

"As a patriot, Glyn, you must be—"

"Rats!"

"I shall require your apparatus—"

"You will require a surgeon afterwards."

"Really Glyn, I must insist—"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I cannot sleep under the circumstances."

"Sleep under the blankets, then!"

"Really, Glyn, you are absurd. I shall remain on the watch all night. The burglar undoubtedly knows that I keep the plans of my aeroplane in my pocket, and he knows

to which room to come for them. I shall remain on the watch!"

"Oh, go to bed!"

"Better get in, Skimmey! You'll fall asleep, anyway."

"Not at all, Merry. I shall walk up and down the dormitory all night to keep awake."

"You jolly well won't!" roared Manners. "I'm going to sleep if you're not. Get into bed, and don't be an ass!"

"If I find myself getting sleepy I shall sing to—"

"You'll find yourself getting broken up if you do," said Clifton Dane, groping in the darkness for a boot.

"Really, Dane—"

"Oh, go to sleep!" sang out a dozen voices.

And the Shell fellows settled down upon their pillows. Skimpole thought it out, but it was cold out of bed, and he finally decided to sit up in bed with the clothes round him and watch there.

He did so for five minutes. Then he had an ache in his back, and he reasoned it out that he might as well lie down, but it would be all right if he resolutely kept his eyes wide open.

He put his head on the pillow, and resolutely kept his eyes open for about ten seconds, and then they resolutely shut of their own accord, and Skimpole snored.

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CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy Keeps Watch!

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's uttered the ejaculation quite emphatically for him.

Arthur Augustus was not emphatic as a rule.

Emphasis of any sort did not agree with the manners and customs of the swell of the Fourth Form, who studiously cultivated the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

Arthur Augustus was emphatic this time, however. He thought it really too bad. Arthur Augustus had slept all through the disturbance of the previous night. In fact, nobody in the Fourth Form dormitory had awakened at all. The Fourth-Formers naturally felt indignant. They had been left out of it. But that was not the worst. For, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy explained to his special chums—Blake, Herries, and Digby—he had not the slightest doubt that if he had been called he would have captured the burglar.

Hence the unusual emphasis of his ejaculation as he listened to the tale of moving adventure related by exultant Shell fellows.

Jack Blake was really indignant.

"Why didn't you call us?" he demanded.

Tom Merry shook his head. He was about two months older than Blake, which was quite sufficient reason for assuming airs of seniority towards him, especially as that exasperated Blake.

"We thought it better to keep you kids out of it," he said. "You might have got hurt, you know, and then we should have had to explain to your sorrowing parents." Blake glared.

"I'll sorrowing parents, you—you mollusc!"

"Peace, little boy! It was for your own good!"

"By Jove, I'll—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry to his chums. "The infants are getting excited."

And the Terrible Three walked away, leaving the Fourth Form fuming.

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and fixed a look upon the retreating form of Tom Merry which really ought to have bored a hole in his back. But the hero of the Shell did not seem any the worse for it.

"The cheek of these fellows is astoundin'," he said, turning his glance to his chums. "I have a sweat mind to wush afair Tom Mewwy and bump him, but the wotchah would be sush to struggle and wumple a fellah's clothes. It was uttaly rotten of them to leave us out of it. I am certain that if I had been upon the spot I should have thought of some wheeze for captuin' the burglar!"

"Of course you would—not," agreed Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Oh, Gussy might have sung his top B flat to him," said Blake. "Of course, that would have led to all the bother of an inquest."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dear me! Is that you, Blake?" Skimpole came hinking along the passage. "Will you fellows help me? I want you to keep a watch for me."

"Certainly, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus politely. "I'll put it on my chain, instead of the silver pencil-case. But why can't you keep it yourself?"

"Eh? I am going into Glyn's study."

"That's no reason why you can't keep a watch yourself, I suppose?" said the swell of St. Jim's, looking puzzled.

"Why, of course it is, D'Arcy! How can I go into Glyn's study and keep a watch in the passage at the same time?"

"What on earth do you want to keep a watch in the passage for?"

"My dear D'Arcy, you see—"

"Oh, it's all right, deah boy. I'll keep it for you!"

"Thank you, D'Arcy! You are very obliging!"

"Not at all, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus drew out the end of his watch-chain, where he wore a neat silver pencil-case, and detached the pencil-case from the fastener. Skimpole watched this proceeding through his spectacles, with considerable surprise depicted on his countenance.

"Well, where's the watch, deah boy?"

"Eh?"

"Where's the watch?"

"What watch?"

"Bai Jove! The chap's off his wotchah! Didn't you say you wanted me to keep a watch for you?"

"You misunderstand me, D'Arcy. I want you to keep a watch in the Shell passage."

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"Oh, deah! The chap's certainly wockay in his uppah ewast! Come on, deah boys! I weally do not undastand why I can't keep the watch heah instead of in the Shell passage. But a pwomise is a pwomise."

Blake, Herries, and Digby followed their chum, grinning. They could see the little misunderstanding that was perplexing the swell of the School House.

Skimpole led the way upstairs, and stopped in the Shell passage, outside Glyn's study. Glyn always had an almost endless supply of apparatus of various kinds in his study, and Skimpole thought that he was entitled to use it when he wanted to. Glyn had other ideas on the subject, and instead of arguing it out in words of four or five syllables, as Skimpole would willingly have done, he had a brutal way of bringing a cricket stump or a boot into the argument.

Hence certain precautions were necessary when Skimpole wished to obtain apparatus from Glyn's study without permission.

"Stand here," said Skimpole mysteriously.

"Bai Jove! How long are we to stand heah?"

"Until Glyn comes, or I come out of the study."

"Oh, vewy well! Where's the watch?"

"Eh?"

"You want me to keep a watch?"

"My dear D'Arcy, you don't understand. I want you to keep a watch for Glyn."

"Why can't he ask me himself if he wants me to keep his watch?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake, exploding all of a sudden.

"Weally, Blake, I fail to see any cause for laughab. I wogard Skimpole as bein' absolutely off his wotchah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You ass—"

"I wufuse to be called an ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You see, Skimmey wants you to keep a watch for Glyn—to watch for him. The verb to watch—I watch, thou watchest, he watches, nous watchons, vous regardez, ils regardent," explained Blake, conjugating the verb for the further enlightenment of his chum. "You're to watch for Glyn, in case he discovers that Skimpole is purloining his property."

"Oh, I wogard you as an ass, Skimmey!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Why didn't you explain that before?"

"You are so remarkably obtuse. You see, with your deficient brain power—"

"With my what?" said Arthur Augustus, pushing back his cuffs.

"Pray do not be offended, D'Arcy. You are not to blame for being the last rotten and decayed product of an outworn race, as any Determinist would explain to you—"

"Lemme go, Blake! I have no wescource but to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"I did not mean to offend you, D'Arcy. We will drop the subject. You understand at last, I hope? You are to watch in case Glyn should have the effrontery to interrupt me while I am getting the apparatus I require for my burglar alarm."

And Skimpole popped into the study.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I did not know that Skimmey was comin' here to commit a burglary to prevent a burglary. I weally don't know whethah we ought to keep a watch for him!"

"You've said you would, now."

"Yaas, watah! But weally—"

There was a patter of feet in the passage, and Bernard Glyn of the Shell came tearing along, looking very excited.

"Has that dummy Skimpole come this way?" he gasped.

"Somebody says he's going to put up a new burglar alarm, and he—"

"Yaas; we're keepin' watch for him heah in case you come along," said D'Arcy, putting up his eyeglass, and staring at the excited fellow. "Bai Jove, now I come to think of it, I ought to call out and warn Skimmey. Skimmey, dear boy—Skimmey!"

But the Liverpool had already rushed into the study. The chums of the Fourth grinned and awaited events.

There was a sound of a struggle, and a terrific puffing and gasping in the study, and then a form came flying through the doorway, and a boot was seen behind it—the boot evidently furnishing the motive power.

Skimpole flopped at the feet of Arthur Augustus and gasped.

"Ow! Dear me! Wow!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Dear me! Skimpole scrambled up. 'I—I think I will depart, as Glyn seems to be very much excited.'"

And Skimpole shot down the passage. Bernard Glyn rushed out of the study and shot after him; and they disappeared helter-skelter, leaving the chums of the Fourth roaring with laughter.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy Feels That He is Responsible!

TOM MERRY came out of the Shell class-room after morning lessons, and made a straight line for the quadrangle.

The Fourth Form were already out, and most of them were exercising their lungs to the fullest capacity. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not taking part in the general hilarity which followed dismissal of classes.

He was standing under one of the elms, leaning against the trunk—very likely, in case he should soil his Eton jacket—and regarding the merry scene in the quad with unseeing eyes.

His monocle was jammed into his right eye, but merely from force of habit; he was not looking at anything in particular.

Tom Merry stopped and regarded him curiously.

"Sorry, D'Arcy!" he said softly.

D'Arcy started and looked at him.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! What are you sowwy about?"

"About the waistcoat."

"What waistcoat?"

"The one that doesn't fit."

"I twust, Tom Mewwy," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity—"I twust you do not imagine that I have a waistcoat that doesn't fit?"

"Oh, I thought it must be that," said Tom Merry gravely. "I saw you looking as if the world were coming to a sudden end, and so I naturally concluded that your tailor had been giving trouble."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it would be a howwid thing to be disappointed in the fit of a waistcoat, although you appeah to wegard it in a frivolous light. It is not, howevah, quite so bad as that. I have not been disappointed by my tailah. I am wathah worried. It's about Binks."

"Binks!" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah; Binks, the page in the School House. You know what a young ass he is; always weadin' these wotten American twashy stowies, and thinkin' that it would be wippin' to go to the Wockay Mountains and call himself Reddick Binks. I have noticed for a long time that he's wathah a fuonny begghah, you know."

"So have we all," said Tom, laughing. "But Binks is all right. His blood-and-thunder never goes any further than reading about it in rotten books."

"Yaas, but you wemembah the time he played those wotten twicks by pwelendin' to be a ghost in the secret passage?"

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"That shows that he's capable of bein' led away to do asinine things," said D'Arcy; "and lately he has been lookin' more peculiah than evah. I've noticed it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"But Binks isn't in your charge, you know," he suggested gently. "It's not exactly your business to look after Binks."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am wathah surprised at you," said Arthur Augustus, with a considerable amount of severity in his manner.

"Zh?"

"I wepeat that I am surprised. Binks is a silly ass—"

"Oh, I see; you think that like should look after like!"

"I do not think anythin' of the sort. What I mean is, it's up to a chap of supewiah bwaïn powah to look aftah a sillay ass, you know. You know that when we had our little wim to Coventry, and to Livahpool, I looked aftah you fellows—"

"Why, you cheeky duffer—"

"I wufuse to be chawacterised as a duffah. It's up to a chap like me to look aftah you fellows. Now, Binks is a poor chap, and has nevah had anybody to look aftah him. He had a mother—"

"I believe most chaps have at some periods of their career."

"Pway do not make funnay weemarks on a sewious subject, Tom Mewwy. Binks had a mother, and he has one still, for that mattah, but he lives a long way from her, and she cannot look aftah him. I undahstand that she is a washahlady—"

"A what?"

"A washahlady," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I object to the term 'washahwoman,' which seems to me to have a diwapagin' sound, especially as the washahladies are a most estimable and deservin' class of female. In face, I have sometimes welected that, while the country could do without dukes or earls at a pinch, it would be vewy hard to do without the washahladies."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good for you, Gussy!"

"That is a welection that has occurred to me, Tom Mewwy. Binks' estimable pawent is a washahlady, and I believe she has quite a large family of small children to support; I have observed the same phenomenon in othah

cases. Billy Binks is a silly ass, but he is a good duffah. I know perfectly well that he sends nearly all his wages home to his estimable pawent. I do not know what his salawy is, but I believe the salawy of a boots is not a vewy large one."

"Less than a thousand a year, I believe," said Tom Merry, cocking his head thoughtfully on one side, and appearing to make a mental calculation.

"Pway don't be an ass, Tom Mewwy! Now, Binks bein' a deservin' chap, and also a silly ass, it's up to a fellow of my bwaïn powah to look aftah him. I feel a certain amount of wespansibility in the mattah."

"Good! You are going to adopt him, I suppose?"

"Nothin' of the sort! He is oldah than I am, and it would be ridiculous—Oh, I see you are wottin', you wottah! I am goin' to look after him."

"Well, there he goes," said Tom Merry, indicating the figure of the School House page, which had just then come into sight under the green elms. "There he is, Gussy. Wait till he's passed, and then you can look after him!"

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"By Jove, though, he does look a little more rocky than usual!" remarked Tom Merry, looking at the page.

William Binks was coming straight towards them, but he did not see them.

He was walking along with his eyes on the ground and a deep frown of thought upon his brow.

He was muttering to himself, and the juniors could catch his words as he came along.

"Aha! They little know!"

"I've heard the ass say that before!" Tom Merry remarked. "But it does seem to be getting rather thick, and no mistake! Speak to him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! They little know! Clean those boots, Binks! Have you done the knives, Binks? Ha, ha, ha! Little do they dream of the thoughts in the mind of Binks! The day will come when, mounted upon my coal-black charger, I will— Oh!"

Binks broke off as he nearly ran into the juniors. He blinked at them. Tom Merry took him by the shoulders, and ran him against the tree, and pinned him there.

"Now, Binks, what's the matter?"

CHAPTER 5.

Binks is Mysterious!

BINKS blinked at Tom Merry, evidently very much confused, either at being so suddenly startled out of his reverie, or at Tom Merry's mode of questioning.

"Wh-wh-whot, Master Merry?"

"What's the matter?"

"The—the matter?"

"Yaas, wathah, Binks! We are goin' to look aftah you—that is to say, I am goin' to look aftah you, and Tom Mewwy is goin' to help me," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as bein' up to me to look aftah you, you know, because you are a silly ass!"

"I don't want lookin' after."

"That is not the point, deah boy."

"I won't be looked after!" said Binks sullenly.

"Pway keep to the point!" said D'Arcy, waving his hand. "I am goin' to look aftah you, you know! That's all wight! Now—"

"I ain't goin' to be bullied!" said Binks. "Lemme alone! I clean your boots, don't I? You ain't nothin' to complain of. I know I ain't the same as you. I ain't 'ad the chance. Master Gore says I'm a low beast! P'raps I am. I ain't 'ad the chance to be nothin' else, 'ave I?"

Tom Merry turned red.

"Did Gore say that to you, Binks?"

"Yes; he did."

"I'll speak to Gore presently," said Tom Merry. "Don't take any notice of the cad, Binks! There's always a worm like Gore to be found everywhere. The mongrel isn't worth taking notice of! You've never found any decant chap here talking to you like that."

"Well, I know I ain't," said Binks, looking a little less sullen. "You wouldn't do it, Master Merry, nor Master D'Arcy, neither."

"Wathah not! I wegard Gore as a wottah, and I shall make it a point to give him a fearful thwashin'!"

"Leave that to me," said Tom Merry quietly. "I'll see that no chap in my Form insults anybody who can't answer him back. But look here, Binks—"

"Yaas, wathah! Look here, Binks—"

"You see—"

"You see—"

"Leave it to me, Gussy."

"Wats! I'm lookin' aftah Binks!"

"You'd better let me—"

"More wats! As a fellow of tact and judgment, not to say supewial bwain powah, it is my biz to look aftah Binks!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"Wats! Binks, deah boy, I am vewy much concerned to see that you are gwowin' wockiah in your nappah the last few days—"

"I'm all right!" grunted Binks.

"You are not all wight, deah boy!"

"I ain't goin' to be hordered—"

"Dey don't talk German to me, Binks! I do not speak it sufficiently well—"

"Who's talkin' German?"

"I imagine that hordered is a German word. It sounds like one."

"I said hordered, and that's plain English!"

"What's he mean by hordered, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ordered, I suppose," said Tom Mewwy.

"Oh, I see! It's a case of a misplaced aspiwate. I am not ordahwin' you, Binks. I have no authority to ordah you; and, in any case, I should not take advantage of your position in the House to give you ordahs. I should wegard that as the act of a cad like Goah, for instance. I am goin' to look aftah you in a twindly spiwit."

Binks blinked at him.

"Ow can you be friendly with the likes of me?" he demanded.

"I am afwaid, Binks, that you are no gentleman," said D'Arcy severely, "othahwise you would not suspect the motives of a chap who wanted to be fwendly."

Binks grinned.

"I am goin' to look aftah you as a fwend," resumed D'Arcy. "I am vewy much concerned to see that you are makin' an ass of yourself! What was that vot you were muttewin' about a coal-black chahgar?"

"Why shouldn't I 'ave a coal-black chahgar?" demanded Binks. "Dead-Shot Dave was a boot-cleaner till he shot his governor, and 'ooked it—"

"He what?"

"'Ooked it!"

"What does he mean by ooktit, Tom Mewwy?"

"'Hooked it, I think."

"Bai Jove! I am no wisah than before. Is to hook a verb, Binks?"

"It means run away," grinned Tom Mewwy.

"Oh, I see!"

"E 'ooked it," said Binks, "and he mounted on a coal-black chahgar, and became the Terror of the Rocky Mountains!"

"The howwid wascal!"

Binks gave a sniff.

"He wasn't a rascal, Master D'Arcy; he was the 'cro!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The rascal in the story was the detective who tried to arrest him. Dead-Shot Dave and his trusty band hung him on a pine-tree and riddled him with bullets!"

"Bai Jove! The howwid wottahs! And this is the stuff you read, is it?"

"It's good!" said Binks. "I learn a lot from them books—a lot that will be useful to me later on!"

"When you are a pirate?" grinned Tom Mewwy.

"'Oo knows?" said Binks mysteriously.

"Binks, I wegard you as an ass! I don't believe there evah was any such person as Dead-Shot Dave, but if there was, he ought to have had a fearful thwashin'. I wegard it as my duty to stop you weadin' those wotten American books!"

"They're better'n what you read," grunted Binks. "I have looked through some of your books, and there ain't a single bit of blood in the 'ole lot. Gimme somethin' lively!"

"You have a wotten bad taste in litewature, Binks!"

"Mebbe it won't be always readin', too," said Binks darkly.

"Bai Jove!"

"I don't suppose I shall be long in this 'ere berth."

"You're not going to leave St. Jim's?" exclaimed Tom Mewwy, rather concerned. He liked Binks, in spite of the boy's peculiar taste in lurid literature. Binks was all right at heart, and it was only want of education that made him prefer cheap American trash to decent English stories. "Come, now!"

"P'raps I've got some new prospects."

"A new situation, do you mean?"

Binks gave a hollow laugh, in the true style of the Mysterious Marauder of Dead Man's Gulch.

"P'raps I'm goin' to South Africa," he said. "P'raps I've got a friend that'll show me how to git to the diamond mines."

"What about your mother, if you leave England?" said Tom Mewwy.

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Tom Merry, seeing plainly enough that the lad had some foolish idea in his mind, and thinking to touch him upon what he knew was Binks' tenderest spot.

But Binks only grinned.

"That's all right," he said. "Mother'll be pleased, I s'pose, when I send her a packet of diamonds from the mines."

"You young ass!"

"Oh, all right! You'll see, Master Merry. When I'm leavin' my trusty band of freebooters in the veldt I may send for you, and give you a job."

"Freebooters! Do you mean to say that you are going to steal things?"

"W-well, not exactly steal," said Binks, wriggling a little.

"You—you see, they don't c-e-all it stealin'."

"What is it, then?"

"Freebootin'."

"What's the difference?"

"Well, you see—"

"I see you're a young ass!" said Tom Merry. "Luckily, there's no chance of your getting abroad, anyway. You would be certain to get the giddy ox!"

"That's all you know, Master Merry!"

"Undah the cires, Binks, I should wefus you my permish to go abwoad. I am goin' to look aftah you."

Binks wriggled away from Tom Merry.

"You ain't a bad sort, Master D'Arcy," he said. "When I'm the terror of the diamond mines I'll send you a thousand pounds' worth of diamonds as a present. Now I've got to go and clean the knives. Aha, they little know!"

And Binks stalked away, leaving the juniors staring at one another blankly.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "I'm blessed if I know quite what to make of Binks this time!"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"I'm going to look aftah him," he said. "It will be all wight, Tom Mewwy, with me lookin' aftah him."

CHAPTER 6.

Commercialism I

TOM MERRY could not help thinking of the Portuguese adventurer as the sun went down that day. It was likely enough that Da Silva would make another attempt to enter the school, in spite of the precautions that had been taken.

Tom Merry was a great deal worried in his mind as to whether he ought to tell the Head all he knew of the foreign scoundrel. But the story of the wooden box entrusted to him by his cousin, and which he had accidentally discovered was crammed with valuable diamonds, was too strange. The Head would certainly refuse to allow such a thing to remain in the possession of a junior, and Herbert Dorrin had impressed upon Tom Merry the necessity of his keeping it in his own charge and not saying a word about it to anyone.

Yet when he heard the surmises of the subject of the burglary, Tom Merry felt a guilty sense of concealing something.

It was an awkward position for him, and he heartily wished that Herbert Dorrin would return and claim the box he had left with him.

But of that there was no sign.

Since the day Dorrin had placed the box in his hands, under the trees in Rylcombe Wood, he had seen nothing of his cousin.

The junior had finally decided to keep his own counsel. But when the night drew on he felt that he could not trust to the precautions that satisfied the masters.

Taggles' ferce mastiff was to be trusted loose in the grounds. The police at Rylcombe had been informed of the matter, and were supposed to be on the look-out for suspicious characters in the neighbourhood.

But Tom Merry, who knew that this was no ordinary burglar, was not satisfied. The average crackman, of course, would have fled from that part of the country immediately after his failure on the previous night. But with the Portuguese it was different. He would not go till he had laid hands on the wooden box Herbert Dorrin had brought from South Africa.

Tom Merry, knowing the man he had to deal with, believed that he would return, and his chums shared his opinion. But as they could not take the upper powers into their confidence, they had to decide for themselves what they would do.

Skimpole, who was firmly convinced that the housebreaker was an emissary from a foreign government in search of the plans of his new aeroplane, had planned out the most elaborate precautions against a second attempt. But the Terrible Three did not feel inclined to rely upon Skimpole. They consulted with the chums of Study No. 6, who knew

most of the circumstances of the case, and they had plenty of advice, practicable or not.

"It's a great pity," D'Arcy remarked, "that you didn't call me last night. If the wascal had been captured, all this wowsy would have been averted."

"Of course, you would have captured him," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! I should have spyung upon him and hurled him to the ground, and—"

"You'd have to make a jolly big spring to get up to the dorm window!"

"But suppose the rotter gets in another way?" suggested Manners. "He might try another window this time, you know."

"Can Towser be in two places at once, Herries?" asked Blake.

Herries stared at him.

"Eh? No, I suppose not."

"Sure not?"

"Yes, ass! What do you mean?"

"Oh, I know any common dog couldn't; but Towser is such a wonderful dog, you know," said Blake blandly. "I



"Why did you tell the wascal about the secret passage?" asked D'Arcy. Binks staggered back and collapsed upon the bed. "H-h-how did you know?" he gasped.

"Pwaw don't be fivulous, Lowthah. Tom Mewwy havin' neglected to call me to deal with the mattah, the burglah escaped. Pwewaps I had bettah remain on the watch to-night."

"On what watch?"

"I decline to discuss the mattah in a fivulous spiwit."

"You can have my bulldog in the Shell dorm if you like," said Herries. "I don't mind. Towser will jolly well see that no burglars get in."

"I object to Towser. He has no respect whatever for a fellow's trousers!"

"The Shell fellows aren't going to bed in their trousers, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Herries' idea is jolly good," declared Blake. "Have Towser in the dorm, and it will be all right."

thought I'd ask you. There's no telling what Towser can do."

"Look here—"

"But if the rotter gets in at one of the other windows he's bound to come in the Shell dorm for Tom Merry," said Digby. "He can't look for his blessed box without Tommy to help him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How the deuce does he know which room is the Shell dorm, or that Tom Merry is in the Shell at all?" exclaimed Blake, puzzled. "I can't make it out!"

"He must have had information from somebody inside St. Jim's."

"Yes, that's pretty clear. But whom?"

"Perhaps he jawed to one of the maids."

"Well, they wouldn't be likely to have anything to say

to a ruffian-looking foreigner like that Portuguese chap. I can't make it out!"

"He must have had some information from one of the fellows."

"It's a blessed puzzle. But, anyway, there's the fact—he does know. And as he knows which is the Shell dorm, he may know which is Tom Merry's study."

"Bai Jove! It's quite poss."

"And in that case he might search there first without comin' to the dorm at all."

Tom Merry started.

"Of course, I keep the box here," he said.

"In a safe place?"

"Well, locked up in my desk."

"I don't suppose that would bother the Portuguese long."

"No, I suppose not."

"Pewwaps you had better entrust it to me, Tom Mewwy. I will take the greatest care of it."

"Thank you, Gussy, I think I'd rather look after it. But I'll jolly well take it up to the dorm and hide it in my trunk."

"That's a good wheeze."

"And look here, you can change your trunk for mine—in the place of mine, I mean," said Manners. "The rotter seems to know a lot about our arrangements, and he might know where to look for your trunk."

"Good egg!"

"D'Arcy! D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove, here's Skimmay! What's the matiah, Skimmay?"

Skimpole presented a sight that told of trouble.

His collar was torn loose, his necktie hanging over his left shoulder, and his jacket was partly split up the back. There was ink on his face and a swelling on his nose.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Skimpole in great interest and curiosity, and the others stared at him.

"Bai Jove! Have you had an accident, Skimmay, deah boy?"

"Been wrestling with a lawn-mower?" asked Blake sympathetically.

"Or a motor-car?" said Monty Lowther.

"Really, I have been used with shocking brutality," said Skimpole, blinking at them through his big spectacles. "I simply paid another visit to Bernard Glyn's study, to obtain the apparatus I needed for my burglar alarm, and Glyn and Noble and Dane came in while I was there."

"Hence these tears!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"I tried to explain my views to them, but they refused to listen."

"Too bad!"

"They seized me in a rough manner. As a Determinist, I could not return violence for violence, great patience under injury being a principal part of Determinism. But I struggled, my temper on this occasion being the outcome of my heredity, and, therefore, quite excusable, as no fellow can be supposed to be responsible for his heredity."

"Nor for his actions, in your case, Skimmay."

"You mean that remark in a frivolous spirit, I fear, Blake; but, as a matter of fact, you are right. No Determinist is responsible for his actions."

"Ha, ha, ha! Get on with the thrilling tale! Did they kill you?"

"Pray do not be absurd. I struck Glyn upon the nose with considerable force, and he—"

"Died?"

"He laughed—laughed in the most disrespectful manner! Then they hurled me forth from the study."

"Where did you pick up that nose?"

"I think I must have knocked my nose on something—my elbow, or Glyn's elbow, or Noble's boot, I am not quite clear which."

"Well, it really doesn't matter, so long as you've got the nose," said Digby.

"I want D'Arcy to help me—"

"Weally, Skimmay, I cannot undahtake to thwash three fellows in the Shell. I should find it quite a sufficiently big ordah to thwash Kangawoo by myself."

"You jolly well would!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I did not wish you to thrash them, D'Arcy. Glyn appears to regard this matter in a spirit of vulgar commercialism. He says that he paid money for these things—five or six pounds, I forget which—and he wants them himself. It is a very common thing, this absurd and brutal importance which is attached to mere money. If you could hand over the price of the articles, I have no doubt Glyn would give me the apparatus I need."

"Bai Jove!"

"You probably have a few pounds about you?"

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"I weally think I should not lend it to you if I had it, Skimmay. I always regard the matiah in a spirit of vulgar commercialism, you know."

"But I must have the apparatus for my burglar alarm."

"Wats!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"More wats!"

"And many of 'em," said Tom Merry. "You're jolly well not going to fix up rotten electric alarms in our dorm, anyway!"

"Really, Merry—"

"More bosh!"

"I will explain to you—Dear me, how extremely rude of fellows to walk away while I am talking to them!" murmured Skimpole. "I must, however, have the apparatus. I shall have to watch my opportunity while Glyn is out of his study."

CHAPTER 7.

Visitors for Gore!

"BINKS!"

Binks gave quite a jump. He was leaving the School House in the dusk of the evening when Tom Merry called to him. He slowly and hesitatingly turned back.

"What do you want, Master Merry? My work's done."

"I don't want you to do anything for me, Binks," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I want you to come with me for a few minutes, that's all."

"I'm goin' out, Master Merry."

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Well, I've got an appointment," said Binks.

"Never mind, then; but I shouldn't keep you more than five minutes."

"I'll come with you if you want me to, Master Merry; five minutes don't make no difference."

"This way, then."

Tom Merry led the way upstairs to the Shell passage. As he passed the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth, he tapped at the door and looked in. Blake and D'Arcy were there—D'Arcy brushing a silk topper and Blake roasting chestnuts.

"Coming along?" asked Tom Merry.

"Where, deah boy?"

"To Gore's study."

"I'm not on visitin' terms with Goah, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Neither am I. We are not going to visit him. He wants to apologise to Binks for having been rude to him, and I thought there ought to be witnesses."

"Bai Jove! If Goah is goin' to do the decent thing, I shall be vewy pleased to be on the spot," said D'Arcy, laying down the pad, and placing the hat in the hatbox. "It will be a great surprise to me, and I shall congratulate Goah on doin' the decent thing. Yaas, wathah!"

Blake looked at Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Has Gore agreed?" he asked.

"Well, you know what a disagreeable chap he is," said Tom Merry. "You can't expect him to agree."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say—" began Binks.

"Am I to undahtand, Tom Mewwy, that Goah has not agweed to apologise?"

"Well, you see, I thought you would be able to explain things to him, Gussy, in your well-known style, and induce him to play up," said Tom Merry. "If not, Blake and Lowther and Manners and myself will try persuasion."

"I think I oatch on," said Blake, rising. "I'll come with pleasure."

"Yaas, wathah! I have no doubt that I shall be able to put it straight to Goah, and induce him to do the wight thing."

"Come on, then."

They walked on together up the passage. Manners and Lowther joined them at the door of Tom Merry's room, and they passed on to the next study, which belonged to Gore and Skimpole.

Tom Merry knocked and opened the door. Skimpole and Gore were there, and the sound of voices in hot argument was heard.

"What do you fellows want in my study?" said Gore, turning on the newcomers. "Get out!"

"It's my study as well as yours, Gore, and Tom Merry and his friends are perfectly welcome to enter it."

"They're not! Get out, you rotters! Chumming up with a beat-boy!" said Gore, with a sneer. "This is the latest, I suppose! The Terrible Three had better change its title to the Terrible Four; latest addition, Binks, the boots."

"Binks the boots, would be a more welcome addition than a cad like you, Gore."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Oh, get out!"
 "We've come to talk to you."
 "I don't want your jaw."
 "You are wandewin' from the point, dear boy. Pway close the door, Lowthah. Goah, we have a wathah important mattah to discuss with you."
 "Go and eat coke!"
 "I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. I—"
 "You see, Gore—"
 "Pway don't intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy. I—"
 "Excuse me a moment," said Skimpole. "I—"
 "I wufuse to excuse you if you intewwupt me, Skimmay. I—"

"One moment!"
 "Wats!"
 "Have you seen Bernard Glyn?"
 "Yes, he's in the Common-room, jawing to Kangaroo and the Canadian," said Blake. "No good beginning on him again, Skimmay."
 "Thank you. I am going to look in at his study."
 "I expect the door's locked."
 "Ahem! I will see."
 And Skimpole left the study.
 Manners closed the door after him, stopping Gore, who evinced a great desire to follow Skimpole.
 "Haven't finished with you yet, old man," Manners remarked.

"I'm going out if I like."
 "Your mistake."
 "Look here—"
 "Oh, come off!" said Tom Merry. "We want to talk business."

"Pway leave the biz to me, Tom Mewwy. Goah, you have spoken in a most insultin' way to Binks, the respected youth who takes charge of the boots and knives in this establishment. Binks, what did he call you?"

"He called me a low beast," said Binks.
 "So you are!" hissed Gore. "You're a low beast, a guttersnipe, and a rotter! I wouldn't touch you!"

"That's enough!" said Tom Merry curtly. "Now, look here, Gore! Nobody expects you to be anything but a rotten cad!"

"It would be expecting too much," said Blake. "But there are limits which even Gore's dirty caddishness cannot be allowed to pass."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 Gore has now passed the limit, and he has got to get back, said Manners. "We are here to help you to get back, Gore. You can apologise to Binks, or be bumped, whichever you like."

"You rotters!"
 "You can call us any name you like," said Tom Merry quietly. "We are in a position to slang you back, or to punch your head. Binks isn't. He's employed here, and if he knocked you down, as you deserve, he would get the sack. Only a coward and a cur would take advantage of that!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "Well, of course, Gore is a coward and a worm," said Lowther, "but our business is to keep his cowardice and his wormishness within bounds."

"Exactly."
 "You—you rotters!"
 "Pway shut up, Goah, and listen to me. It is impos- that you would evah undastand how to act as a gentleman should, but I will do my best to explain—"
 "Oh, shut up!"

"Ordah! I declined to be intewwupted!"
 "Leave off talking piffles, then, you aaz," said Gore savagely.

"I wufuse to be called an ass, and to have my remarks characterised as piffles!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I think the proceedings had better stop for a few minutes, dear boy, while I thwash Goah."

"Hold on! Gore, shut up!"

"I won't shut up! I—"
 "Stand ready, you chaps!" said Tom Merry. "If he makes objectionable remarks, bump him—and bump him hard. You needn't mind about damaging the floor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Now then, Gore, what's it to be, apologise to Binks, or be bumped?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Gore scowled savagely. But the juniors looked as if they meant business; and Gore, though he could rag Skimpole, and bully Binks, was not of the stuff that heroes are made. He had a certain amount of dogged courage, but he did not want a tussle with half a dozen "bumpers." His only alternative, therefore, was to apologise.

He turned towards Binks, palpitating with fury.

(Continued on next page.)



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Half-a-crown will be paid for every joke that appears in this column.

NOT QUITE THERE!

Sambo: "Rastus, does that mule eber kick you?"
 Rastus: "No; but he frequently kicks de places where I recently was!"
 JACK C. SIMPSON, 4, Park Grove, Battersea Park Grove, London, S.W.11.

SO LONG!

Visitor: "I suppose you've lived here all your life?"
 Oldest Inhabitant: "Why bless 'e, I lived here when there weren't no such place!"
 LESLIE KANE, 8, Readhead Road, South Shields, Durham.

GETTING THE SACK!

Conductor (to passenger with sack): "Fourpence, please."
 Passenger: "But, mon, the fare is only twopence!"
 Conductor: "Yes, but there's twopence for the sack."
 Passenger (opening sack): "Sandy, come out and pay ye ain fare!"
 F. HENDRA, 27, Dunblane Road, Well Hall, Eltham, S.E.9.

JUST FOR ONCE!

Photographer: "Look pleasant, please."
 There follows the sound of the camera clicking.
 Photographer: "And now, madam, you may resume your normal expression!"
 JACK INSKIP, Wolverhampton Street, Bilston, Staffs.

QUITE A MISTAKE!

Father: "Johnny, are you sure it was an accident that you blacked Tom's eye?"
 Johnny: "Oh, yes, father! I was aiming at his nose!"
 DAVID LINCOLN, 1, The Grove, Greenhithe, Kent.

WINDY!

Diner: "Waiter, will you close that window, please."
 Waiter: "Surely there isn't a draught, sir?"
 Diner: "Oh no, nothing to speak of, but this is the third time my steak has blown off my plate!"
 H. G. MORGAN, Kingarth, 82, Blackness Avenue, Dundee.

ABSOLUTELY!

Customer: "What do your envelopes run to?"
 Impertinent Assistant: "They don't, sir; they're stationery!"
 PETER WINTLE, 19, Wellgarth Road, Knowles, Bristol, 4.

STRANGE!

Patient: "When I was playing last night, doctor, spots kept coming before my eyes."
 Doctor: "What were you playing?"
 Patient: "Dominoes!"
 G. CRUISE, 14, Ackmar Road, Parnson's Green, Fulham, S.W.6.
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"I—I apologise," he stuttered.
 "Vewy good!" chimed in D'Arcy. "You are sowwy you acted in a caddish way?"

"Yes."
 "Are you satisfied, Binks?"
 Binks grinned.
 "Yes, thank you, Master D'Arcy. I am quite satisfied."
 "Vewy good! I am satisfied, too, then, and we are done with you, Goah."

Binks chuckled, and left the study. The whole affair appeared very humorous to him, though the juniors were in deadly earnest.

"One word more," said Tom Merry sternly. "We shall keep an eye on you, Gore. We know you; you are the kind of fellow to try to take it out of Binks because we have forced you to act decently for once. Let us see a sign of that, and we'll give you such a time that you'll remember it for ever more."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 And Gore's visitors quitted the study, leaving Gore in a frame of mind bordering upon frenzy.

CHAPTER 8. An Alarm in Study No. 6.

"H AVE you seen that ass Skimpole?"
 It was Bernard Glyn who asked the question wrathfully. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lowered his teacup, and looked at the red and excited face that was looking in at the door.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Good! Where is he?" demanded Glyn. "The ass has been in my study. I left the door unlocked—"

"That was wathah careless of you, considewin'—"

"Well, a chap can't always be locking his door, can he?"
 I left the door unlocked, and he's been there."

"Anything missing?" grinned Blake.

"Yes; a hundred-yard coil of insulated wire and a set of electric bells and pushes," said the Liverpool lad. "I was going to use them for an experiment, and he's collared the lot."

"How do you know it was Skimmy?"

"Of course it was Skimmy!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"It would be unjust to condemn Skimmay on such frivolous grounds," he said. "You did not see him."

"Ass! He's been trying to get in my study all day."

"But you did not see him, therefore you do not know—"

"I do know, dummy! Look here! Where is he?"

You've seen him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, tell me where he is?"

"Undah the circus, as there is no direct proof of Skimmay's guilt, and it is only a suspish against him, I refuse."

"You utter ass!"

"Weally, Glyn—"

"You champion duffer!"

D'Arcy raised his teacup to his lips again, to show Glyn how scornful he felt by loftily taking no notice of his words.

Glyn stamped out of the study, and slammed the door with a terrific slam.

Arthur Augustus gave a howl.

"Ow! Yow!"

The hot tea from the cup had swooped out over his waistcoat with the start he gave at the slamming of the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "What did you do it for, Gussy?"

"Oh, my waistcoat's ruined!"

"Well, you can't expect it to stand that sort of usage."

"It was an accident, of course. It was caused by that duffah Glyn slammin' the door."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy jumped up, and commenced mopping his drenched waistcoat with a silk handkerchief. The silk handkerchief was soon reduced to the state of a limp rag.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "You are an ass, and no mistake! You'll never get the stains out of that handkerchief."

"That's all wight!"

"Looks like a good one, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, if you don't mind—"

"I don't mind a bit, deah boy. You see, it's not my handkerchief," said Arthur Augustus calmly, as he mopped away at his waistcoat.

"Ha, ha ha! Is it Dig's?"

"My word!" exclaimed Digby. "If—"

"It's all wight, Dig, deah boy, it's not yours! It's Blake's!"

Blake gave a yell.

"Mine!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Jack Blake jumped up. Arthur Augustus held out the sopping silk handkerchief to him with a bland smile.

"Thank you, deah boy! I've finished!"

And he sat down at the table.

Blake took the handkerchief and looked at it, and looked at D'Arcy. But the face of Arthur Augustus was so beautifully unconscious that he swallowed his wrath. He threw the handkerchief into a corner, and sat down himself.

"I don't know whether you'll ever be found dead in the School House, Gussy," he remarked, "but if you are, you'll know the reason."

"I should utterly refuse—I mean, I wegard your remark as widdleous."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries suddenly. Herries had not the quickest wit in the Fourth Form, and it sometimes took him a few seconds to see a joke, and his great laugh often came along after the rest had been reduced to gravity again.

Blake stared at him.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Then what's the matter?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Nothing!"

"If there's nothing the matter, what are you making that ghastly row about?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm not making a ghastly row!"

"Well, it sounds like one," said Blake. "The sooner you—"

He broke off suddenly.

Instead of finishing the sentence, he whirled round in his chair, and fixed his eyes with an expression of great surprise upon the oak-pannelled wall.

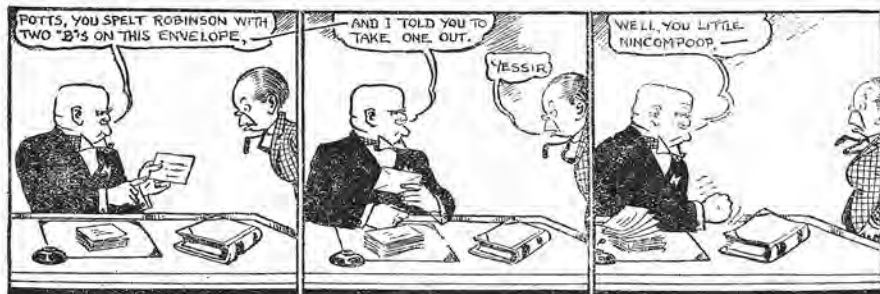
The others followed his glance.

"What's wrong?" asked Digby, instinctively hushing his voice.

"Listen!"

From the oaken wall came a slight sound.

Potts, the Office Boy!



And again, as he touched the bed, there came a louder and more prolonged buzz.

Buz-z-z-z-z!

The buzz reached other ears than Mr. Linton's.

In the Junior Common-room, where the juniors were putting away shoes and whatever they had in hand, preparatory for bed, Skimpole gave a sudden jump.

He was reading a big book—a book that weighed about a dozen pounds avoirdupois, and was probably heavier still in the reading, to judge by the look of it.

The great volume, which contained the latest lucubrations of Professor Balmyscrumpet on the subject of Determinism, went to the floor with a crash.

Skimpole jumped up, his spectacles nearly sliding off his nose in his excitement.

"Hark!"

"I hear the watchdog bark!" said Monty Lowther.

"It was not a watchdog, Lowther," said Skimpole, who never pretended to be able to see a joke. "It was the alarm."

"What alarm?"

"The burglar alarm!"

"Which?"

"There is only one—the one I have fixed in the Shell dormitory," said Skimpole, blinking excitedly. "It was for that I borrowed Glyn's wires and bells—"

"You—you ass!" growled Glyn, who had just come into the room. "I've been looking for you! Are you ready to be slain?"

"Please do not be violent, Glyn. If you must fight, let it be for a noble cause, not in a spirit of vulgar commercialism," said Skimpole severely.

"Well, my hat!"

"Besides, there is a burglar!"

"Where?"

"In the Shell dorm. Listen!"

The buzzing should be clearly heard, in spite of the distance of the Shell dormitory from the room downstairs. The bells were large ones, the battery Skimpole had borrowed very powerful, and the ringing was very loud indeed.

The Shell fellows stared at one another.

"Sounds as if there's something in it!" said Noble.

"Something in the Shell dorm, anyway," grinned Lowther.

"By Jove! If it's the giddy burglar—"

"Let's look!"

"He wouldn't come as early as this."

"He might have come to get in before we go to bed!" exclaimed Dan excitedly. "It might be his dodge to hide under one of the beds, or to dodge into one of the empty studies, and wait till it was safe to come out."

Tom Merry could not help a start.

The thought of the savage, unscrupulous adventurer from South Africa being hidden in the House, waiting a favourable moment to emerge, was a disgusting one.

"Let's go and have a look, anyway!" he exclaimed.

"He is after plans of the aeroplane," said Skimpole. "I have placed especially more wires round my bed and my box so that a mere touch will sound the alarm. The plans are hidden under my mattress, and the villain is after them. Come on! Don't bring a light or he will be alarmed, and fly. If he escapes with the plans of the aeroplane we may have a fleet of enemy aeroplanes coming over the week after next."

"Come on, you chaps!"

The Shell swarmed upstairs.

They reached the open door of the dormitory, and the buzzing of the bell was now simply furious, mingled with gasps and jerky breathing.

There was certainly somebody in the dorm.

"Come on!" whispered Tom Merry. "We'll rush him in the dark and collar him before he's got a chance to skip!"

"Yas, wathah!"

"Go it, ye cripples!"

"Now then—altogether!"

And the juniors rushed in.

They knew the lie of the land, so to speak, well enough to be able to run about the dormitory in the dark without knocking against any of the permanent articles of furniture there, but they weren't prepared for the electric wires.

There were grunts and gasps as feet were caught, and the owners of the feet went wildly stumbling.

Several of the juniors however, rolled over a struggling form on the floor and promptly seized it.

The form began to struggle furiously, but they grasped it and piled upon it in numbers.

Arthur Augustus received a knock under the chin from an elbow in the excitement, and rolled over on his back.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of the School House, under

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the impression that the burglar had struck him. "Bai Jove! You wathah! You have hurt my bustlay thin considerably. Bai Jove! Collah him!"

And Arthur Augustus reached out and seized a throat, and rolled the owner thereof on the floor, and sat on him, bumping him in high excitement.

His unfortunate victim gasped and struggled, but D'Arcy was strong enough when he exerted himself, and he exerted himself now, and his prisoner was pinned on the floor.

"Help, dear boys! I've got him, and he's swaggled like a zethon!"

"Switch on the light!"



"At him!" shouted the inspector. The hand of the Portuguese went and a knife dropped to the floor. Tom Merry sprang upon the ruffian and

"Gettuff!"

"A light! A light!"

"I've got him!"

"We've got him, too!"

"Bai Jove! Then there are two of them!"

"Keep him tight!"

Monty Lowther found the electric switch at last, and the scene was suddenly brightly illuminated.

"Bai Jove! Lend a hand, dear boys!"

"Gettuff!"

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus gazed down at his prisoner in dismay. It was Digby. "Dig, you uttah ass! What do you mean?"

"What do you mean, you spluttering idiot?"

"I wese to be called a splutterin' idiot! I wegard you as an ass! This is not the time to pretend to be a burglar!"

"You ass! You didn't give me a chance!"
 "Pony don't attempt to excuse yourself, Dig! It was
 weally too bad!"
 "You shrieking idiot!"
 "You uttah ass!"

A yell of amament from Tom Merry interrupted the
 Fourth-Formers.

The supposed burglar had been extracted from under the
 heap of sprawling juniors, and in the ruffled, rumpled,
 red and excited prisoner the Shell recognised their Form
 master.

"Mr. Linton!"



quese went under his coat, but the inspector grasped his arm and tore it away,
 the ruffian and dragged him down, and in a flash the prefects were upon him.

CHAPTER 10.

As One Gentleman to Another!

MR. LINTON staggered to his feet, gasping for
 breath. He was in such a rage that he could
 hardly speak.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom Merry, in dismay. "We
 —we are sorry, sir!"

"Bah! Jove! I should say so!" exclaimed D'Arcy, turn-
 ing his attention from Digby to the much-injured Form
 master.

"It's too bad! It's all the fault of that uttah ass, Skim-
 pole, with his fatheaded burglar alarms!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Wats! You ought to be licked!"

"Boys!" Mr. Linton found his voice at last. "This—this
 trick—"

"It—it wasn't a trick, sir—it was quite an accident! I
 never thought—"

"We took you for the burglar, sir."

"We thought it was that rotter breaking in again, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I believe you so far," said the Shell master, almost
 choking. "But those wires were placed on the floor to
 catch someone!"

"Weally, sir—"

"I came here to see that the windows were secure before
 we went to bed, and I was caught in this villainous trap,
 and hurled to the floor."

"Oh, sir!"

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir."

"You placed these wires in the dormitory!"

"Skimpole blinked at him."

"I am very sorry for the accident, sir."

"Did you place these wires in their present position?"

"I really hope you are not hurt, sir."

"I am hurt!"

"Then I am very sorry."

"Will you answer my question, Skimpole? I asked you
 whether you placed the wires in their present position."

"I should prefer to change the subject, sir."

"Answer me, boy!" thundered the Form master.

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully. It was extremely
 probable that he would get one of the soundest canings he
 had ever experienced if the guilt were proved.

Skimpole was a Determinist, but he had his wits about
 him in other respects.

"Really, sir, is it quite the thing to ask a chap to accuse
 himself?" he asked. "If I am upon my defence, I have
 a right to be silent, sir. That is law, sir."

"Skimpole, I know you were the guilty party, from what
 D'Arcy just said. I shall, therefore—"

"Pwey allow me a word, sir. I wegard it as not bein'
 cwicket to take advantage of an unguarded expression
 dropped by myself. It is placin' me in the posish of a
 sneak!"

"Silence!"

"Certainly, sir! I twust, howevah, upon reflection, that
 you will not place me in the posish of a sneak."

"Leave the room, D'Arcy!"

"With pleasah, sir! Before I go, howevah, I must
 remark that, as one gentleman to another, I twust you
 will not place me in the posish of a sneak."

And Arthur Augustus walked out.

Mr. Linton looked round upon the juniors. He was not
 really a bad-tempered man, and now that he was cooling
 down, he realised that, perhaps, it would not be advisable
 to take advantage of the words accidentally dropped by
 D'Arcy.

"I will give you a chance to explain, Skimpole," he
 said. "Why did you place the wires in this position?"

"I shall be happy to explain, sir, without prejudice,"
 said Skimpole; "that is to say, without admitting anything
 to tell against myself. That being admitted, I will explain
 that the wires were placed as a burglar alarm."

"Oh!"

"I was expecting the burglar to return to-night, sir, to
 carry out the nefarious project which was interrupted last
 night."

"What? Is it possible, Skimpole, that you are acquainted
 with the burglar's object in entering this dormitory?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"And what was his object?"

"To steal the plans of my aeroplane, sir!"

Mr. Linton almost staggered.

"To—to what?"

The juniors could not suppress a giggle. The expression
 upon the Shell master's face was too funny, added to the
 perfect seriousness of Skimpole.

"To steal the plans of my aeroplane, sir. I had invented
 an aeroplane, compared with which the present flying
 machines will be mere toys. Some foreign government
 has sent an emissary—"

"A what?"

"An emissary, sir, to steal my plans."

"Skimpole, I begin to believe that you are little more
 than an idiot!" exclaimed the master of the Shell.

"Really, sir!"

"If I thought you were joking, I should cane you
 severely. I suppose, however, that you are talking this
 utter nonsense seriously."

"It's not nonsense, sir," said Skimpole, in astonishment.
 "It seems nonsense to you, sir, owing to some mental
 defect—"

"Bless my soul! You will write five hundred lines, Skim-
 pole, for impertinence!"

"I made my confession without prejudice, sir, in a legal sense."

"I am not punishing you for this folly, but for your impertinence."

"Really, sir—"

"Upon the whole, however, I pardon you," said Mr. Linton. "You are really hardly a fit subject for punishment. But if I find any more burglar alarms in the dormitory, Skimpole, I shall make an example of you!"

"But, sir—"

"No more. You may go."

And the boys crowded away.

"Jolly good of Linton to take it like that!" said Manners. "Skimpole, of course, ought to be in a lunatic asylum instead of a school, and Linton knows it."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, joining them in the passage. "Has Linton let the uttah ass off, deah boys?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Jolly good! I shall have to acknowledge it to him."

"Better keep off the grass," said Tom Merry, catching the swell of the School House by the arm. "Linton isn't any too sweet just now."

D'Arcy pulled himself away.

"I feel bound to give Mr. Linton a word of recognition on the subject, Tom Mewwy."

"Ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched into the Shell dormitory.

Skimpole was collecting up his burglar alarms under the severe eye of the Form master.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Linton looked at him.

"What do you want, D'Arcy?"



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"I wish to express my sense of your kindness and piwopah conduct, sir, in lettin' off that uttah ass Skimpole, sir."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I regard you as havin' played the game, sir, and, as one gentleman to another, I beg to tendah my acknowledgments, sir."

Mr. Linton looked at him curiously.

"Very good, D'Arcy! It is a distinction indeed for a Form master to earn the approval of a junior boy! You may go!"

"Yaas, sir."

And D'Arcy went, perfectly satisfied with himself and with the way he had put it with Mr. Linton, as one gentleman to another.

CHAPTER 11.

An Amazing Mystery!

G-R-R-R-R-R!

"Keep that beast away from my legs, Herries!"

"Rats! Keep your legs away from Towser!"

"Look here—"

"Get out of the way!"

"I say—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Bai Jove, Hewwies—"

"Bosh!"

Herries dragged on the chain, and Towser, who showed a strong inclination to sample the calves of all the juniors in the passage, followed him ambly.

Towser wasn't allowed in the House, but the present occasion was of sufficient importance to justify eluding the rule on the subject; at least, so the juniors of the School House thought.

Tom Merry had asked Herries for the loan of his bulldog, to keep in the dormitory for the night, and Herries had gladly acceded.

Towser was the apple of Herries' eye, and his faith in him was unbounded. He persisted in the belief that Towser had once tracked down a burglar, though Blake declared with equal persistence that Towser had only tracked a kipper which had by chance come across the trail.

Towser had willingly left his kennel when Herries fetched him out, under the impression that he was to be taken for a run.

When Herries led him into the side doorway of the School House and up the back stairs, Towser objected.

"Mind he doesn't bark," said Tom Merry anxiously. "We don't want a giddy prefect down on us for bringing him into the House."

"He's all right."

"Shall I hold my hand ovah his mouth, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Certainly. If he bites you—"

"Eh?"

"If he bites you, I've got some stuff you can rub on the place. Jolly good stuff. I've used it myself, and it's a caution!"

"Is he likely to bite me, Hewwies, if I put my hand ovah his mouth?"

"Well, only in a playful way."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Herries, and then upon the bulldog. Towser's splendid array of teeth seemed to indicate that even a playful bite from them would not be a wholly pleasant experience.

"Upon second thoughts, Hewwies, I will not put my hand ovah his mouth."

"Shove yours there, Tom Merry."

"Ahem! Towser looks very quiet. It would be—or—an insult to Towser to suggest that he couldn't keep quiet."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, doggie!"

G-R-R-R-R!

"Sounds like sharpening a saw, doesn't it?" said Monty Lowther. "I say, is he likely to break out at all in the night, Herries?"

"He's as quiet as a lamb."

"Yes, he looks it," agreed Harry Noble. "I like specially the sweet, calm look in his eyes."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

Herries grunted, and dragged Towser into the Shell dormitory. Skimpole had finished collecting up his burglar alarms and had taken them away, with dire threats as to what would happen if he ever contrived any more of them. Skimmy was a little worried about the danger to the plans of his aeroplane, but he realised that it was of no use to argue with an obstinate Form master.

The genius of the Shell blinked at the bulldog as Herries dragged him in.

"Better tie him to my bed, Herries," he said. "The emissary of the foreign government is certain to make for my bed."

"Rats!"
 "Really, Merry—"
 "Tie him to Tom Merry's bed," said Blake.
 "Right-ho!"

Towser was secured to the leg of the bed. He was persuaded to lie under the bed, out of sight, the chain being a long one and allowing him plenty of room.
 "That's all right," said Arthur Augustus. "I trust that he will not feel bungy in the night and climb on the bed and make a meal of Tom Merry!"
 "Well, I'll leave him a few biscuits," said Herries.
 And Towser was left under the bed.
 About ten minutes later was the bed-time of the Shell, and the juniors accordingly turned in.

Darkness and silence lay upon the School House. In the Shell dormitory Tom Merry slept with the soundness of healthy youth and a clear conscience.

Towser, under the bed, gave him every confidence, for Towser, whether he possessed the trailing virtues attributed to him by his master or not, was certainly all that could be desired as a watchdog.

If Tom Merry shifted on his pillow, Towser gave a movement; and, in fact, if he slept at all he must have slept with one eye and one ear open.

Midnight had tolled out from the clock tower, unheard by the sleeping ears.

Towser had blinked in the darkness as the sound rolled through the silence of the night.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then the quarter sounded more faintly, and then another sound, fainter still. Fainter, but closer at hand.

It was the sound of an opening door.

The door was opened with the greatest caution. But it made a slight sound, and Towser's eyes opened wide in the gloom.

He looked towards the door of the dormitory, but he did not growl. He bared his teeth and crept out from under the bed, and his eyes blinked greenish in the deep gloom.

Towser was on his guard.

If the collar had not been on his neck he would have been upon the dark form that entered the dormitory with a single bound.

As it was he watched it—a dark, shadowy form looming up in the darkness—vaguely, eerily.

Towser's jaws opened. The alarm was about to ring forth from them, but it did not. For the intruder, after pausing for some moments inside the doorway, made straight towards Tom Merry's bed.

He was advancing directly upon Towser. And Towser, like a wise dog, withheld his barking and prepared to use his teeth instead.

And still all the dormitory slept.
 Nearer and nearer, with hardly a sound, and hardly visible in the gloom, came the shadowy form.

There was a sudden growl, a jingle of a chain, and then a fearful yell rang through the Shell dormitory.
 Tom Merry started up in bed.

For the moment he thought he was in the grip of a nightmare, so wild and terrible were the sounds than rang through the dormitory.

The growling of the dog, the trampling of feet, the hoarse screaming of a startled and terrified man, mingled in a wild uproar.

Tom Merry sprang out of bed. After the first moment of horrified surprise he understood. It was the enemy!

The junior had placed matches and candle beside his bed in case of need, and in a few seconds he had a light.

Bernard Glyn sat the same moment switched on the flare of an electric glow lamp, and a bar of white light fell across the strange scene in the dormitory.

A lithe man was struggling fiercely with the bulldog. Towser's grip was on his leg, and there was blood upon the dog's jaws, and the burglar seemed to be terrified out of his wits.

Tom Merry seized a cricket stump and sprang towards him.

It was the Portuguese. He knew the dark, hard face of Da Silva, the swarthy face of the adventurer from South Africa. He stooped quickly and snapped open the fastening on Towser's chain. At the same moment the Portuguese tore himself desperately from the dog, and ran for the door.

Towser was after him like a flash.

The foreigner was wearing a dark sack-like coat, and Towser's teeth fastened in the cloth, and the bulldog was dragged away by the flight of the Portuguese.

"After him!" roared Lowther.

A crowd of Shell fellows rushed out into the passage.

The whole House was alarmed. There was a sound of opening doors, and of loud voices.

Fellows poured out of the other dormitories, and Sixth-Formers turned out of their rooms in all sorts of attire, with all sorts of weapons in their hands.

Tom Merry ran into Towser in the passage. He fell over the bulldog, but was up again like a shot.

"Light here! Quick!"

Glyn's light flashed on the bulldog.

Towser had a great piece of cloth in his teeth. But there was nothing to be seen of the Portuguese.

"He's got away from Towser!"

"He can't be out of the House yet."

Mr. Raiton's voice rang out above the din.

"Guard the doors and windows, and he cannot escape!"

"By Jove, that's a good idea!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming out of the Fourth Form dormitory in a really elegant pjama suit with an Indian club in his hand. "Guard the windows, deah boys!"

And he gave his club a swing, which was followed by a sort of war-whoop from Reilly of the Fourth.

"Arrah! Faith, and is it after smashing my legs, ye are?"

"Bai Jove! Did it hit you?"

"Faith, and it's nearly sprained me!" roared Reilly, clapping his leg and dancing.

"I'm sowwy!"

"You gossoun! You ass!"

"I wessus to be called an—"

"This way, Gussy," said Blake, dragging his elegant cham off to the stairs. "Don't let those Shellfish capture the giddy burglar!"

"Bai Jove, that's wight!"

Doors and windows were soon guarded by crowds of eager fellows, who were only too anxious for the midnight intruder to try conclusions with them. Not a door, not a window was found unfastened.

But nothing was seen of the Portuguese.

They hunted high and low—studies and passages, box-rooms and bed-rooms, even the garrets were explored—but the enemy was not discovered.

Da Silva was gone.

Mr. Raiton was extremely vexed. He had no doubt that it was the same burglar as on the previous night, and that theascal had some special purpose to serve by entering the School House.

How had he entered—how had he escaped?

Those questions could only be answered by his capture, and he was evidently not to be captured.

"The wretch must have a key to one of the doors," Mr. Raiton said at last, in great surprise and uneasiness. "I cannot understand it."

It was evidently useless to keep the search up longer.

An hour or more had been expended, and a hundred boys had searched everywhere, and it was quite plain that the intruder was gone. But how he could have obtained a key to a door of the School House was a mystery. The School House was a huge, rambling building, which had been added to again and again at different periods, and there were doors in the structure in the most unexpected places. If the burglar had a key, he might have entered or left it by any one of them. He was gone now, and the search had to be given up. But Mr. Raiton was very much perturbed. If the man really had a key, it certainly pointed to collusion with someone inside the house; and that was a very disturbing reflection.

When the boys went back to their beds, Towser was chained again to Tom Merry's bed, and he went to sleep contentedly under it, looking as if he knew he had deserved well of his country.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus Thinks It Out!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY took his eyeglass from his pocket, and polished it carefully upon his silk handkerchief.

He didn't want to use the eyeglass just then, but he wanted to think, and he had often declared that he thought better with the monocle in his eye.

It was the morning after the burglar's adventure with Towser. The whole school was in a buzz of excitement about it.

That the man should make a second attempt to enter the House, and that he should particularly seek to get into the Shell dormitory, astonished everybody—with the exception, of course, of Tom Merry & Co.

Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to hear all about it, and the whole school, from the head of the Sixth down to the lowest fag, discussed the second burglary during the morning, even in the classrooms.

The police-inspector came from Ryleam, and Tom

(Continued on page 19.)

ANOTHER INTERESTING PAGE IS REACHED IN—



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

HALLO, ehums! Here's all the news about next week's issue of the GEM—so it must be good news! Next week Martin Clifford, that ever-popular author, contributes one of his very best school yarns in

"BARRED BY HIS CHUMS!"

which tells of attempts made to discredit Tom Merry in the eyes of the school, and how they very nearly succeed! This is a really ripping yarn that you will enjoy from start to finish—it's Martin Clifford at his best! Then there will be further chapters of our grand Western adventure yarn—

"RED STAR RANGER!"

which will satisfy the members of the thrill brigade! What if you think of Jerry Garrison and his pal, Fussy? Pretty good fellows, aren't they? Of course, Fussy will be on parade again, and there will be another column of readers' jokes, for each of which I shall award half-a-crown. Oh, and by the way, there will be another page from my notebook!

TOO DANGEROUS!

If you live in London, maybe you have seen him—the man who sits on the pavement, and eats broken glass and coal and brickdust, and the like, and does it all in a way that suggests that it is just the most natural thing in the world to be doing! Why does he do it? Well, you see, Charles Harrison—for that is his name—wanted to do this act on the Halls, but the L.C.C. decided that it came under the Dangerous Performances Act, so they wouldn't let him, and he took to doing it on the pavements, instead. It seems a strange way to earn a living, and I don't think I should care much for dining off coal dust and candle grease—but Charles Harrison seems to enjoy it!

THE WEEK'S BEST STORY!

A carter was urging his pony up a hill—a steep hill—by means of a lifting hard and often with his whip. The pony was under-jed, and the load it pulled was far from light. Suddenly there stepped upon the scene a woman. Without hesitating she went straight up to the carter and smacked his face as hard as she could, and then proceeded to tell him, in no uncertain terms, just exactly what she thought of him. After that she walked away, and left the carter wondering just what had happened. Good for her! I hope the carter remembers his lesson.

A RACE BY TELEPHONE!

They are always doing strange things in America, but surely one of the strangest

was the recent challenge swimming match carried out by telephone! The two competitors were Ralph Flanagan, a fifteen-year-old boy of Miami, Florida, who had recently been crowned champion of America, and eighteen-year-old Jack Medina, of Seattle, Washington. Each competitor swam in the bath of his home town, and each bath was twenty-five yards long. Officials of the Amateur Athletic Union were the timing officials, and by means of a telephone a simultaneous start was made. At the end of every two lengths the times of the two competitors were announced, so that spectators at either bath knew how the race was going. The result was a win for Flanagan, whose time for the distance was 5 mins. 29 secs., which breaks Arne Borg's world record by nearly three seconds! Pretty good going for a fifteen-year-old boy, isn't it? Bravo, Flanagan!

A SLOW GAME!

I have always thought that chess was rather a slow game; but there are lots of people, like Manners and Louthier, who thoroughly enjoy this excellent game. Nevertheless, I think that even they would be rather appalled at the rate at which two brothers have been playing one another. They decided to play a "set" of three games, and the first game took four years. None, after ten years, they stand at one game each, and they have embarked upon the decider. Why do they take so long? Well, John Dodge lives in Portland, Oregon, and George Dodge lives in Montebello, California, and so they have to play by post!

ODDS AND ENDS.

In South Africa, a struggle between a hen and a snake lasted for five minutes, and when it ended the hen had killed the snake!

According to the last American Census, there are nearly four thousand people in that country over a hundred years of age!

Joseph Wyrokey, of Warsaw, was arrested and the handcuffs were placed on his wrists. Immediately he scratched his hands out of them and swallowed them! Wyrokey earns his living by swallowing broken glass watchbea. and coins!

REPLIES.

Arthur Woolter, of Hampstead, asks me why safety matches will not strike on ordinary emery paper. The answer is, Arthur, that ordinary matches contain phosphorus, which bursts into flame when rubbed against a rough surface, but safety matches have no phosphorus and they must be struck on a specially-

prepared surface which contains phosphorus. It is also possible to strike safety matches on glass and paper, but this is a matter of creating sufficient heat by friction to ignite the match.

Tom Tapping, of Eastbourne, asks why is it that a rasping noise sets our teeth "on edge"? The reason for this, Tom, is that all noises are heard by vibrations on the ear; but in the case of a rasping noise it strikes a note that causes our teeth to vibrate also, and this is called setting the teeth "on edge."

HEARD THIS ONE?

A man arrived at a second-hand motor exhibition, having driven to it in a car he intended to put up for sale at the show. An examiner of the show saw his car, and said: "I say, you know, you can't put that old creak in the show!" "Why not?" asked the owner. "Hang it all, man, it's only got three wheels!" The owner looked at his car with innocent amazement. "Well, now," he said, "that's very strange indeed. It had four when I left home this morning!"

HOW'S THIS FOR PLUCK!

Kenneth Young, of Edmonton, was travelling in the sidecar of his father's motor-cycle combination with his grand-father. Kenneth is only nine, but he's full of pluck, as this story will show you. A collision occurred between the combination and another vehicle, but the combination did not overturn, although the driver, Kenneth's father, was thrown out of the saddle. Immediately, Kenneth seized one of the handlebars and steered the machine as best he could. He succeeded in keeping a straight course for a mile, but he was unable to reach the controls and stop the machine. Eventually the runaway machine fetched up against a wall, but owing to Kenneth's resourcefulness, neither he nor his grandfather were seriously injured. Happily, his father also escaped without serious injury.

MONEY BACK!

Some pleasure cruisers didn't have much pleasure the other day, when their steamer fouled a mooring chain two hundred yards from Southend promenade. The tide was running out, so it was impossible to float the boat until the next tide. The 150 passengers were taken ashore in small boats, and their money was refunded. Still, they got a thrill for nothing!

"GOOD-BYE TO THE TYRANT!"

The headmaster of St. Frank's kidnapped! Such is one of the amazing and thrilling incidents in to-day's magnificent yarn of the adventures of Nipper & Co., the popular champions of the Renegade. The tyrant housemaster of the school is at the end of his tether, and to save himself from exposure, he kidnaps the Head, Nipper & Co., however, get on the trail—with disastrous results for the tyrant, who has to take a hurried departure. I strongly advise all Genites to read this grand story, which is on sale now in "The Nelson Lee Library."

HAVE YOU SOLVED IT?

Next week the GEM will contain the solution of our "OUTLINES" Competition, for which I offered Five James Cycles as prizes. With the solution will be a form for claiming, and full particulars of just what you have to do. If you entered for this simple competition, whatever you do, don't miss next Wednesday's issue of the GEM. Order your copy now and make quite sure of it!

YOUR EDITOR.

BILLY BINKS' BURGLAR!

(Continued from page 17.)

Merry was called into the Head's study, Darroll having reported, as in duty bound, that the head boy of the Shell had admitted knowing something about the burglar.

Tom Merry was questioned, and he replied frankly enough that the man had tried to rob him the previous week in Rylcombe Wood, and had been prevented by the other juniors. Further into details he did not go.

The wooden box entrusted to him by Herbert Dorian was Dorian's secret, and Tom felt that he could not mention it.

That the man was a Portuguese, and that his name was Da Silva, the police learned from Tom Merry, and a complete description of him was furnished.

But Tom had very strong doubts as to whether they would succeed in capturing him.

The Portuguese was lying very low, though it was pretty certain that he was still in the neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was thinking about the matter.

When his chums in the Fourth Form found him standing in the doorway of the School House, polishing his eyeglass with a slow and deliberate carefulness, they knew that Arthur Augustus had something on his mind.

And they immediately gathered round with solemn faces. D'Arcy went on polishing his eyeglass.

"Speak!" said Blake, as if addressing an oracle.

"Go ahead," said Digby.

"Fire away!" urged Herries.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"What could you have done if you had been called in time last night?" asked Blake, with great interest. "Caught the burglar, of course?"

"It is extremely pwob, deah boy."

"And now—"

"Going to track him down?" asked Digby with interest.

"Have you found a clue—the track of a boot revealing the colour of his eyelashes, or anything of that sort?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Dig."

"I don't mind putting Towser on the scent, if you're thinking of tracking him down," said Herries. "He must have gone somewhere—"

"Go hon!"

"And Towser would soon nose him out. Let's ask the Head's permission to cut classes this afternoon, and go after him."

"I can see the Head granting it—I don't think!"

"Pway listen to me, deah boys."

Jack Blake waved his hand.

"Listen to the words of wisdom."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Each sentence complete in itself, and every sentence a gem," said Blake solemnly. "Go ahead, Gussissimus!"

Arthur Augustus screwed the monocle into his eye.

"Pway don't wot, Blake. I have been thinkin' ovah the mattah, and I have soluted the mystewy—I mean I have found the solution!"

"Good! Let's hear it!"

"Pway come with me."

"Whither?"

"Follow your uncle," said D'Arcy, in Tom Merry's best style, "and don't ask questions."

Blake, Herries, and Digby exchanged glances. Upon the whole, they decided not to bump their elegant chum, but to follow him and see if there was anything in it.

Arthur Augustus settled his silk-hat more firmly on the back of his head, screwed up a considerable portion of his countenance round his monocle, and marched into the quadrangle.

Blake, Herries, and Dig followed him. Straight to Taggles' lodge Arthur Augustus led the way.

Taggles, the much-tried porter of St. Jim's Collegiate School, was sunning himself upon a little bench outside his lodge.

He looked up in what Blake described as Taggy's suspicious way as the juniors came up; but, considering the rubs he had had with the chums of Study No. 6, Taggles might be pardoned, perhaps, for being a little suspicious of them.

Arthur Augustus raised his silk hat.

"Good-mornin', Taggles!"

"Mornin'!" said Taggles.

"I trust you find yourself well this mornin', Taggles?"

"I'm the same as usual, I suppose," said Taggles, far from graciously.

"Bai Jove! I was hopin' to find you bettah, you know," Taggles glared at the solicitous swell of St. Jim's.

"Look 'ere," he exclaimed, "what do you want?"

"Nothin'."

"Then take it an' go," said Taggles.

"Wrap it up for us," said Blake.

Taggles snorted.

"The fact is, Taggles, deah boy—I mean my deah fellow," said D'Arcy, "I have strolled across the quad to have the pleasur of talkin' to you for a few minutes."

Taggles granted.

"If you've brought us across here to jolly well listen to you doing it, Gussy, you're going exactly the right way to work to get a thick ear," said Blake wrathfully.

"Patience, deah boy—"

"Ratal! Not today—"

"Pway wing off while I talk to Taggles. I undahstand, Taggles, that your mastiff was let loose in the quadrangle last night, in case the burglah should weturn."

"He was," said Taggles.

"Did he alarm you at all?"

"He didn't."

"You didn't hear him bark, or anythin'?"

"No."

"You weren't awakened by the wow in the School House?"

"Which I was too far from the School House to be woke up."

"Then you didn't know anythin' about the wascally wottah weturnin' until this mornin', Taggles?"

"Not a word."

"Have you seen any traces of him in the quad?"

"Nothin' of the sort."

"You are sure the mastiff didn't go to sleep?"

Taggles sniffed.

"Course I'm sure."

"Then how do you account for the wottah gettin' in and out of the School House without the mastiff givin' the alarm?"

Taggles' reply was worthy of a great philosopher.

"I don't account for it," he said.

D'Arcy raised his topper again.

"Thank you verry much, Taggles. That's all."

And he strolled away. There was a thoughtful frown on his face, and he seemed to have forgotten for the moment that his chums were with him.

They looked at him, and waited for him to speak, but he did not. He was evidently thinking deeply, but he did not even glance at them.

It was Blake who broke the silence in an ominous tone.

"Well?"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove, I had forgotten you, deah boys! It's all right!"

"What's all right?"

"My theory."

"What theory?"

"About the burglah."

"I give you one minute to explain yourself before I bash your topper over your eyes!" said Jack Blake, taking out his watch.

"I should uttably wefuse to have my toppah bashed ovah my eyes, Blake! But it's all right. I know how the burglah got into the School House."

"My hat! You do?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How, then?"

"By the secwet passage in Studay No. 6."

CHAPTER 13.

An Interview With Binks!

D'ARCY made the announcement with perfect calmness. But Blake, Herries, and Digby gave simultaneous jumps.

"What?"

"Eh?"

"The secwet passage."

Arthur Augustus smiled with satisfaction. He had succeeded in surprising his chums, at all events.

"Yaas, wathah!" he said quietly. "I have worked it out, deah boys. There is a secwet passage, a you know, leadin' from the old priwory to the School House, and you can get into it by the panel in Studay No. 6."

"I know that, Gussy. But—"

"But the Portuguese doesn't know it," said Digby.

"I wathah think he does."

"Look here, you're an ass. How could a chap, fresh over from South Africa—a chap who has probably never been in

England before, know anything about a secret passage in the School House here?"

"He might be told."

"But only us four know it."

"And Binks!"

"Binks!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy's chums stared blankly at him. They were beginning to catch on now to the theory in the mind of the swell of St. Jim's.

"But Binks wouldn't take part in a burglary," murmured Digby.

"Wathah not. But he might be talked into showin' that wascal the secwet passage. How would he know he was a burglah?"

"Well, a chap with any sense——"

"Binks hasn't any sense, deah boy."

"Well, that's so, too."

"Binks is an awful ass. I told you that he was goin' more than evah off his wockah lately. He was gassin' about goin' to South Afrikan, and joinin' a gang of what he calls freebootahs there. Of course, it's all wot. But he used to be jawin' about goin' to Amewicah, and becomin' the Tewwah of the Wocky Mountains. Why has he changed the scene of his silly dwreams frow Amewicah?"

"Blessed if I know."

"I've worked it all out in my bwain, deah boy. I had to think like anythin'! It's because he's got acquainted with some chap frow South Afrikan."

"By Jove!"

"And this chap is a wascal, and has found out what a silly duffah Binks is, and has filled his head with all sorts of nonsense, so as to make use of him."

"My only hat!"

"And Binks has shown him the secwet passage. When he came in that way last evenin', he wasn't just comin' home. You wemembah we thought we heard somebody with him there. I wathah think it was the Portuguese. You wemembah how awfully scared Binks looked."

"I remember."

"And that is the way the wottah got in, and the way he got out, without openin' any of the doors and windows, and without alarmin' the mastiff in the quad."

Blake rubbed his nose.

"By Jove!" he said. "I believe Gussy's hit it. But the first time the Portuguese came, Gussy, he tried to get in at the dorm window——"

"Yaas. I wathah think he had been learnin' things frow Binks, but Binks hadn't then mentioned the secwet passage. Of course, the chap wouldn't think of such a thing till Binks mentioned it himself."

"That's so."

"I think we had bettah question Binks, deah boys, and make sure about it. If we explain to him that the man he has been helpin' is a howwid burglah, I've no doubt he will own up like a little man!"

"Good! We'll see Tom Merry first, as he is the chap principally concerned in the matter," remarked Blake.

"Vewy good. There he is, goin' down to the cwickot."

The Terrible Threes were in their flannels, going down to the cricket before dinner.

Blake & Co. called to them, and the chums of the Shell stopped. Tom Merry listened to D'Arcy's explanation of his theory with great interest, and when the swell of St. Jim's had finished, gave him a tremendous slap on the back.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed.

"Ow! You wuff ass!"

"Jolly good!" repeated Tom Merry. "I believe Gussy's hit it! Blessed if I don't take some serious steps about that rot Binks reads now! It's jolly near got him hard labour, if this is correct! The police jolly well wouldn't believe he was innocent if they knew he had helped a burglar to get into the House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go and hunt for him!"

"He is probably in the kitchen now, you know."

"Then we'll have him out!"

And the juniors entered the School House. The regions below stairs were taboo to the juniors, but Tom Merry & Co. ventured down. Mrs. Mimms, the House dame, met them at the foot of the stairs, and barred their further ingress.

"You must not come down here, Master Merry!"

"We want Binks."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mrs. Mimms sniffed.

"Binks has another of his headaches," she said. "He's gone up to his room."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mimms!"

And the juniors took their departure.

"Sowwy to disturb him if he has a headache, but this is an important mattah!" said Arthur Augustus; and he led the way up to the remote region where Binks' bed-room was situated.

He tapped at the door. There was no reply to the tap, and D'Arcy put his mouth to the keyhole and called out to the page:

"May I come in, Binks?"

For Arthur Augustus was always well-bred, and he would have taken no more liberties with the page's room than with the Head's study.

Binks opened the door. A folded paper was sticking out of his pocket, showing at a glance the true nature of the headache he was suffering from. When Binks felt an overpowering desire to follow the thrilling adventures of Dead-Shot Dave, or Cowhide Bill, he retired to his room under the plea of a headache—a departure from the truth which D'Arcy did not suspect.

"I am sowwy you have a headache, Binks," said the swell of St. Jim's, as he entered the little room. "Can I do anythin' for you?"

"I—I—I'm all right now. Master D'Arcy!" he stammered.

"If you would like to bathe your forehead, deah boy, I will get you——"

"I'm all right."

"Pewwaps a little medicine——"

"Oh, no, thank you!"

"I will get you some of Tom Mewwy's medicine. His old governess sends him lots of it, and he nevah dwinks it. He's got bottles and bottles of it!"

"I—I don't want any medicine, thank you, sir!"

"You are sure you feel well?"

"Oh yes quite, Master D'Arcy!"

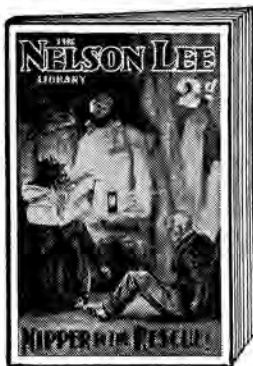
"Vewy good! I am vewy pleased with your wapid wacowwy Binks. I want to talk to you, deah boy. What's the book you have been weadin'?"

"Gold-dust Bill, the Red-hot Raider of the Haunted Gulch."

"Bai Jore!"

"You young ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Pway leave it to me, Tom Mewwy—I am goin' to talk



Stealthily Does It—

—when the cheery

and plucky Nipper

climbs over the cave wall to the rescue of the Headmaster of St. Frank's! Nipper and his chums have got on the trail of the scoundrels who have kidnapped the Head! What happens? Read all about their thrilling adventures in the magnificent long complete story—"Good-Bye to the Tyrant!"—which

appears in to-day's number of

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to Binks. Binks, you were sayin' the othah day—yestah-day, I think—that you were goin' to South Afwica!?"

"So I am, Master D'Arcy!"

"To become the howwah of the diamond mines, or some-thin'?"

"The terror of the diamond mines," said Binks.

"Yaas. I don't quite follow the distinction between a howwah of the diamond mines and tewwah of the diamond mines, but it's all wight. You have made the acquaintance of a fellow fwom South Afwica?"

"Suppose I have," said Binks, half-defiantly.

"I think I could describe him to you," said D'Arcy.

"A chap with a skin like mahogany and eyes like a cat."

Binks looked at him in astonishment.

"Yaas, wathah! His name is Manuel da Silva."

Binks shook his head.

"Tain't! It's Don Diego Fernandez!"

"Wats! The wascal probably has a new name for ewewybody he meets!" said D'Arcy. "Now, how did you come to tell him about the secwet passage in the School House?"

At this sudden and unexpected question Binks simply staggered—literally. He staggered back several paces, and collapsed in a sitting posture on his bed.

"H-h-how did you know?" he gasped helplessly.

The juniors exchanged glances. Binks, in spite of his ambition to shine as a freebooter, a pirate, and a terror of the diamond mines, was not of the stuff of which criminals are made, and he had no nerve to speak of. He gave himself away completely at the first word!

CHAPTER 14.

A Burnt Offering!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY jammed his monocle afresh into his eye and regarded Binks with an air of great severity.

"Binks, you have revealed the secwet of the pishon house—I mean, the secwet of Study No. 6."

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"You have told that wotten Portuguese about the secwet passagel"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"You have enabled the wotten wascal to entah the House!"

"Oh!"

"And he has done so!"

Binks jumped.

"He ain't, Master D'Arcy—I swear he ain't. I showed 'im the secwet passages from the old priory, that's all. He's a good sort! He's been a regular chum to me the past few days."

"Yaas, wathah! And I know why!"

"He's a good sort," said Binks, recovering himself a little. "I like him! When I met him in the wood, and he looked like a chap from foreign parts, I took to him at once. I thought he'd tell me about them furrin countries, where I mean to go some day!"

"Mounted on a coal-black chargah, I suppose?"

"I got into talk with him," said Binks. "He listened when I told him about Dead Shot Dave in the most polite way. He told me he knew fellows like that in South Africa, and that there were plenty of openings there for a lad of spirit."

"Yaas, he saw the kind of silly ass you were, and fooled you to the top of your bent," said D'Arcy scornfully.

"Oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"He knew that you belonged to the school?"

"Well, you see I told 'im. He was very interested in that, too."

"I suppose he was," Tom Merry remarked grimly. "You young ass, he was only stuffing you up because he wanted to get a hold on somebody here!"

"Oh, Master Merry! He told me yarns about the diamond fields, and offered to help me out there, and it was jolly good of him. I've agreed to go, too—I'm going! This time next year you'll read in the papers of the deeds of—"

"Dead Shot Binks, I suppose?" grinned Jack Blake.

"Why not?" demanded Binks. "I ain't fired off a revolver yet, but I s'pose I can soon learn. And I don't see why I shouldn't be a dead shot!"

"Shot dead, more likely, if you begin handling firearms, you ass!"

"So you are goin' to South Afwica to be a freebootah," said D'Arcy. "You unspeakable ass! And you have helped a burglar to get into the school for a start!"

"A—burglar!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but—" stammered Binks.

"That Portuguese chap was the burglar last night!" Binks gave a sort of yelp, and sat with wide open eyes and mouth. That had evidently not crossed his mind before.

His evident amazement was a relief to the juniors. It was a direct proof that the page had not knowingly had a hand in helping a housebreaker.

"Is—is it true?" gasped Binks at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but he said—"

"How did you come to tell him about the secwet passagel?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, I was tellin' him about the burglar that tried to get into the Shell dormitory, sir, and he seemed very interested. Then he spoke about whether there might be any other way of gettin' into the school, casual liks. I told him about the passage as a great secwet, of course."

"And then he paid us his second visit last night," said Monty Lowther. "He must have been very much obliged to you, Binks!"

"Oh, Master Lowther!"

"I suppose you can see that you've acted the giddy goat now, Binks?" said Tom Merry. "This Portuguese chap saw what an ass you were, and stuffed you up with those yarns about South Africa. He was making use of you to burgle the school!"

Binks burst into tears.

"Boo-hoo!"

"Here, this won't do!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Dead Shot Binks can't turn on the pump like this! Draw it mild!"

"Boo-hoo!"

"Buck up! What would your trusty hand think to see their red-headed chief booing and hooing like a kid?"

"Boo-hoo!"

"Fwaw don't wot him, Blake! He has been an ass, and now he has seen it and weptened. I think we can oavhlook the mattah," said D'Arcy. "The wveal fault lies with those wottahs who sell those wotten cheap American twasby books. If Dr Holmes knew about Binks lettin' that wascal in, he would undoubtedly sack him! That would be vewy wuff on Binks, who can't help bein' a silly ass."

"Oh—oh—oh, Master D'Arcy!"

"But Binks must do his little bit if the mattah is to be oavhlooked," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He must consent to part with all his wubbish!"

"Oh, oh!"

"There is no alternative, Binks!"

"Oh, oh!"

"But I do not wish to put you to a gweat loss in cash, so I will pay you the cost pwice of the papahs, Binks." Binks lifted his head.

"I won't take a penny, Master D'Arcy. I ain't that sort!"

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy. "I am sowwy to have to destroy this wubbish, if it causes you pain, but a chap must not shwink fwom his duty."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "But I'll tell you what, Binks—I've got a lot of old numbers of decent clean papers, and you shall have them for nothing."

"Thank you, Master Merry!" said Binks heavily.

The grate was soon in a flare with burning paper, and D'Arcy stirred the pile and added to it slowly and carefully.

CHAPTER 15.

Relieved of His Trust!

LETTER for you, Master Merry!"

It was just after afternoon school the same day. Binks, looking more cheerful than when Tom Merry had last seen him in his room, brought the letter to Tom Merry as he strolled down to the quadrangle.

"Thank you, Binks!"

Tom Merry gave a start as he read the superscription on the letter.

It was in the hand of his cousin, Herbert Dorrian.

The postmark was London. Herbert Dorrian was still in England, then. Tom Merry went under the elms, and opened the letter.

"Dear Tom," it ran—"I hope you are keeping safe the box I trusted to you. It contains all my fortune! Perhaps I should have explained more to you, but I did not wish to alarm you more than I could help. I hope you have seen nothing of the enemies I feared had traced me to England. The Portuguese I warned you of was the most dangerous. The others were merely spies in his pay."

"The man, Da Silva, is a criminal with a bad record, and for many years he has defied the police. I hope, however,

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as I have seen nothing of him, that he has fallen into their hands at last. If so, he is safe for ten years, at least.

"I am now ready to take the box from you, and I will meet you for the purpose this evening. This time I will visit the school after dark, and you shall hand the box down to me from the wall in the lane. I will not allow you to run any more risks for my sake.

"In the lane to-night at half-past eight, then!

"HERBERT DORRIAN."

Tom Merry breathed a deep sigh of relief.

The wooden box had been a trouble to him ever since it had been placed in his hand, and he was decidedly glad of the chance of getting rid of it.

He smiled grimly at the thought that the Portuguese rascal would probably enter the school again that night, ignorant of the fact that the box was gone.

Tom Merry burnt the letter, to make sure of it, and he waited anxiously for the hour of the appointment with his cousin.

He took the box from his trunk in the Shell dormitory, and concealed it in an inner pocket, when the time drew nigh for going to meet his cousin by the lane that bordered the walls of St. Jim's.

Monty Lowther and Manners stopped him as he was leaving the School House in the dusk of the evening.

"Whither bound?" asked Lowther pleasantly, digging him in the ribs. "Wherefore these mysterious looks?"

"Wherefore that frowning brow?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right," He tapped his breast pocket. "I'm going to get rid of this."

"The box?"

"Yes."

"Then your cousin is back?"

"Yes."

"Right! Where?"

"In the lane outside at half-past."

"We'll come and see you safe."

"Thanks, old man. Keep it dark!"

And the Terrible Threes strolled out into the dusk. Manners and Lowther gave Tom Merry a hand up to the wall, and Lowther followed him. Half-past eight rang out from the tower.

Tom Merry looked down into the dusk of the lane. A voice came from the black shadow of the wall below.

"Is that you, Tom?"

It was Dorrian's voice.

"Yes."

Tom Merry slipped down to the ground outside.

Dorrian grasped his hand.

The young man was muffled in a coat and a cap, and was quite unrecognisable in the gloom, but Tom Merry knew his voice.

"You have the box, Tom?"

"It is here."

"Safe?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

Tom Merry, gladly enough, handed back the box. His cousin pressed his hand again.

"You have been in no danger, Tom? You have not seen my enemies?"

"I have seen one of them."

Dorrian started violently.

"The Portuguese?"

"Yes."

"Heavens! How? Explain!"

Tom Merry concisely explained his adventures with the desperado from South Africa. Dorrian breathed hard as he listened.

"The villain! Then he is here?"

"He is."

"He is certain to enter the school again to-night, Tom?"

"I think so."

"Then—then it will be easy to deal with him. Tom, since he has been here, I—I must explain more. Has he told you anything?"

"He told me the diamonds had been stolen by him and by you, or, rather, illicitly bought from kufirs working in the mines."

"You did not believe him?"

"No!"

"It was a lie, Tom."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"I was sure of it!"

"But I will explain. There is a great deal of illicit diamond buying at the mines in South Africa. It is easy to get up a charge against a man—and not easy for him to prove his innocence. Those diamonds, Tom, I found myself—prospecting in the Kalahari Mountains. They were mine—mine by discovery and honest labour. Da Silva tried to rob

me. He failed—and then, with the help of several rascals like himself, he tried to get up a charge against me—a charge of I.D.B.—a charge more serious than that of murder in the eyes of the mine-owners!" added Dorrian bitterly.

"I understand."

"If I had been arrested, the diamonds would have been taken, and the charge would have been considered proved. I could not prove that I had found them in the desert. I fled—and he tracked me here. I escaped him there—and he was forced to return to his original plan of robbery."

"I see."

"I have been with my friends in London while you have guarded the box, Tom—and have made arrangements for the sale of the stones. They pass out of my hands this very night."

"Good!"

"As for Da Silva, I do not fear him, once the diamonds are safe. He cannot come out into the open himself—he is afraid of arrest. But if he's arrested to-night, I shall be secure from his revenge, at all events."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"He shall be—if he comes to the school."

"You must run no risks, Tom."

"I will have one of the masters in the study ready for him, and some of the Sixth. He will have no chance."

"Good! Then if he comes, he cannot escape?"

"We shall see to that."

"Good, again! Good-bye, Tom! You have done a great deal for me, but I would never have asked you if I had known the risk it would entail upon you. Good-bye, again!"

"Good-bye, Herbert!"

And Herbert Dorrian disappeared into the darkness.

"Give me a hand up, Monty!"

Lowther stretched down his hand. Tom Merry was quickly on top of the wall, and he dropped down inside.

"It's all right!" asked Manners.

"Right as rain!"

And Tom Merry's face was very cheerful as he walked back to the School House.

CHAPTER 16.

The Last of the Portuguese!

MR. RAILTON raised his eyebrows, and fixed a curious glance upon Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell stood before him in his study; he had just related as much of the story as he thought the Housemaster should know.

The amazement of Mr. Railton was great; greatest of all at the relation of the story of the secret passage.

"This must be seen to at once," he said.

And he proceeded immediately to Study No. 6. There the secret panel was shown to him, and he was satisfied as to the correctness of the information.

He glanced into the recesses of the secret passage, and then closed the panel again.

"Very good," he said. "This passage will probably be used again to-night, and we shall see. I need not caution you to keep silent in the matter."

Mr. Railton made his arrangements for the night quietly and thoroughly.

The boys went to bed at the usual time, only Tom Merry of the juniors being allowed to join the party that was to wait for the Portuguese in the study.

Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth were there with Mr. Railton, and Inspector Skeet, of Rylcombe, came to the school late at night, and was quietly introduced into Study No. 6.

At eleven o'clock they were ensconced in the study, with no light but that of the moon glimmering in at the window.

The table, the bookcase, and the screen were used for cover, to conceal the watchers from anyone who should enter by the secret panel.

Not a sound was heard in the study when the school clock had struck eleven.

An hour glided slowly past.

The vigil was long and weary.

But they waited patiently. Mr. Railton and the prefects and Tom Merry were keen to catch the rascal who had given them so much trouble. Inspector Skeet was almost bubbling with joy at the prospect of making a capture that would get into the London papers.

Twelve strokes sounded through the gloom.

Midnight!

The watchers breathed more quietly, their eyes gleaming in the shadows. The hour was at hand!

Another half-hour fled on wings of lead.

Then a slight sound was heard in the dull stillness.

Click!

Tom Merry's heart beat almost to suffocation.

He crouched lower in the cover of the study table.

The panel flew open.

In the dark aperture a glimmering face could be seen catching a gleam in the moonlight from the window. It was the face of the Portuguese!

He stood still, listening, watchful as a cat. He was ready to scuttle back into the secret passage at a sound.

But no sound was made.

The watchers could hear the deep hiss of the breath he gave as he stepped out into the study.

Quickly, but with stealthy, silent feet, he crept towards the door.

Click!

Mr. Railton had stepped out from behind the screen and closed the secret panel.

"At him!" shouted the inspector.

And he sprang upon the intruder.

The Portuguese gave a snarl like that of a wild animal. His hand went under his coat, but the inspector grasped his arm and tore it away, and a knife clanged on the floor.

Tom Merry sprang at the ruffian, and grasped his collar behind and dragged him down. The prefects were upon him the next moment.

But the Portuguese was as wily as a panther.

He wrenched himself loose, seemed to wriggle away like a snake, and made a bound for the door. He knew it was useless to attempt to reach the secret panel, with the massive form of the Housemaster looming up before it.

He tore the door open and dashed into the passage, barely eluding the outstretched hands behind.

"After him!" panted Kildare.

There was a sudden yell in the passage, a sound of trampling and struggling and gasping.

Then a well-known voice:

"Bai Jove! Help, deah boys!"

"Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry.

They rushed into the passage.

The Portuguese was on the floor, struggling desperately in the grasp of four or five juniors, who were sprawling wildly over him.

"Lend a hand, deah boys! I've got him!"

"Collar the brute!" cried Kildare.

The prefects laid hands on the ruffian, and the inspector and Mr. Railton were only a moment behind.

In the grasp of many hands, the ruffian had no chance.

The handcuffs were fastened upon his wrists, and then even the savage nature of the South African adventurer gave way, and he yielded.

Gasping and exhausted, he was dragged to his feet.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, picking himself up. "I wegard it as wathah fortunate that I was on the spot, deah boys."

Mr. Railton looked at the juniors sternly. Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, and Manners and Lowther and Harry Noble were there. They looked very meek under the stern glance of the Housemaster.

"What are you juniors doing here?" demanded Mr. Railton.

"Captwin' the burglah, sir."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"We thought it would be a good ideah to keep watch in the passage, sir, in case the burglah should bweak away," explained D'Arcy. "I wathah think you must admit, sir, that we've been of some use."

The Housemaster's face broke into a smile.

"In the circumstances I shall excuse you. Go back to your beds."

"Certainly, sir. Pewwaps you would like me, howevah, to accompany Inspector Skeet to the station, to see that the burglah does not escape?"

"Shut up, you aas!" whispered Blaka.

"I wufuse to shut up. I—"

"Go back to bed, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir. But—"

But Tom Merry & Co. dragged him away before he could get any further.

Inspector Skeet and Mr. Railton, with the prisoner, went in the Head's car to the police station in Ryloombe, and the Portuguese was disposed of in the safety of a cell.

Tom Merry slept like a top that night, as may be imagined, and did not wake very easily at rising-bell the next morning.

Of the Portuguese we need say but a few words. His own Government claimed him as a criminal who had evaded justice, and he was sent to Portugal, where he was likely to be taken care of for many years to come. The only one who was not satisfied with the result of the affair—at St. Jim's—was Skimpole. Skimpole was still feeling uneasy in his mind.

"This is not the last of the affair," he remarked, with a wise shake of the head.

"But the chap's in pwison, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, yes, that chap!"

"And there's nothin' here now that he would want to come back for, anyway."

"That's all you know, D'Arcy."

"Weally, Skimmay—"

"He was simply the emissary of a foreign government, who can easily obtain other emissaries," said Skimpole. "And the plans of my aeroplane are still here."

"Bai Jove!"

And D'Arcy contented himself with that ejaculation, not attempting to demonstrate to Skimpole that nobody was after the plans of his aeroplane.

The secret passage leading into the School House was blocked up. But Skimmay shook his head still. He was convinced that further attempts would be made to steal the plans of his aeroplane, and for a long time afterwards Skimpole looked with the greatest suspicion upon anyone of the slightest foreign aspect who happened to come near St. Jim's.

THE END.

"BARRED BY HIS CHUMS!"

that's the title of

NEXT WEEK'S GRAND YARN!

Skimmay looks as if he is in trouble in the cover picture alongside, but that's nothing to Tom Merry's troubles when Blake sends him to Coventry!

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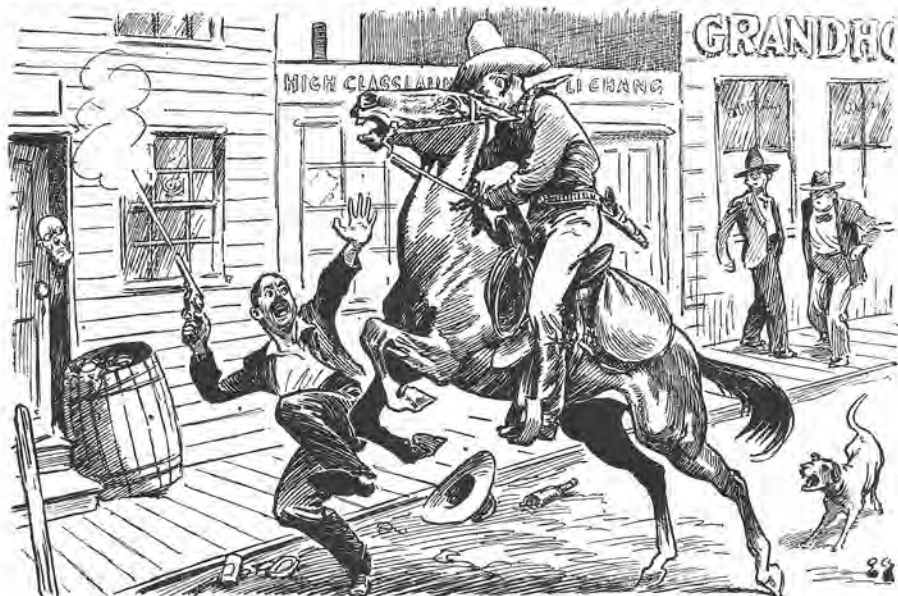
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MORE THRILLS IN OUR GREAT WESTERN ADVENTURE YARN.

RED STAR RANGER

By JOHN SPENCER.



THE STORY SO FAR.

Jerry Garrison, out of a job, rides into the new town of Red Rock, with a letter of introduction to the sheriff, Sam Ross. While he is with Ross there is a bank raid during which a gunman shoots the sheriff, and Jerry shoots the gunman. JASPER PRIVETT, the rascally mayor of Red Rock, sentences Jerry to death for murder, but while he is in prison FUSTY, the deputy sheriff, arrives and holds up the gaoler.

Escape I

THE blow had dazed the gaoler, who, holding his hands above his head, moved backwards towards the cell in which Jerry was confined.

At every step he took the bunch of keys attached to a catch on his belt jingled musically.

Fusty let out a merry chuckle.

"Sall right, Jerry!" he cried. "We're comin'. Now, back up against the bars, Cock Eye. Jerry, grab him by the neck, and if he hollers out, choke him."

Stretching his arms with difficulty through the narrow opening between the bars, Jerry managed to grip Cock Eye by the windpipe, in spite of his handcuffs. And as he held the gurgling, kicking gaoler, Fusty snapped the bunch of keys off his belt, and rid him of his six-guns.

To help quiet Cock Eye, Fusty gave him a rap over the head with a gun-butt, then, whilst Jerry held the gaoler with fingers of steel, Fusty found the right key and unlocked the cell door.

Then Fusty tore Cock Eye from Jerry's grip, and swung him bodily into the cell.

Under the menace of a gun he made the gaoler tell him which of the keys unlocked the leg irons and the handcuffs. Using the keys he soon had Jerry free.

Fusty snapped the handcuffs on the gaoler's wrists. Then he unlocked the padlock which kept shut the belt round Jerry's waist and removed it.

The long links of the leg irons were attached to this metal belt. Fusty wound the belt around Cock Eye's waist, shut it, and put on and locked the padlock. The ankle rings fastened with a spring, and snap, Fusty soon had them securely fastened around the gaoler's ankles.

Then he tore off Cock Eye's scarf, and, rolling it into a gag, tied it tightly over the gaoler's mouth and nose.

"Now, listen!" said Fusty, standing over the squatting figure of the dejected gaoler. "If you attempt to pull off

that gag inside of fifteen minutes, we'll come back and lead plug you. You sit thar quiet like, Cock Eye, an' like it."

Fusty turned to Jerry Garrison, his eyes shining, his lips spreading a broad, good-natured grin.

"Pick up those guns of Cock Eye's, Jerry," he said. "They stole yores, and fair exchange is no hold-up. Guess we'll be movin'."

"Where to?" asked Jerry, his blue eyes dancing, his boyish face literally aglow with gratitude.

"I've got my cayuse hid round the corner of the block, Jerry," Fusty explained, swinging the weight of his big-boned body first on one of his bow legs, then on the other. "I've bin lookin' after yore pinto for yer, and he's thar, too. Dunno whar we're makin' fer, but when Jasper Privett's gunmen shoot up the sheriff, and aim to hang an innocent stranger without a proper trial, it's time I cashed in as deputy and found a new job elsewhere."

"Then you know I had nothing to do with that bank robbery, Fusty?"

The deputy sheriff of Red Rock grinned.

"Of course I know it. Sam Paulo was workin' in on that. He aimed to hold our attention in the office when the raid was on. I saw him sign to Al Rivers to shoot you. But you wuz too handy with yore gun, kid."

Fusty urged Jerry through the cell door and followed him; then drew the barred door to and locked it. Back in the darkness the gagged and ironed figure of the raw-boned gaoler squatted crumpled in a corner.

In the outer room Fusty stopped, and looked hard at Jerry Garrison.

"I like you," he said. "You're clean an' fresh and honest. I ken read that in yore blue eyes. The very sight of you when you kem into the office to-day made me wanna shake the dust of Red Rock off'n my feet. Hyar, it's nothin' but graft, an' racketeering, an' blackmail, with the Mayor Jasper Privett handin' out the dope, and rakin' in the dollars. It wasn't no accident that gang killed poor Sam Ross to-day. Reckon after the speech I made in that mock

count they've put me on the spot, too; but we're movin', Jerry, before the guns play."

Fusty drew from his pocket a star such as sheriffs wear. It was the same size and shape, but instead of being silver it was of vivid, blood-red enamel. It bore the name of the town, Red Rock.

"Here, Jerry," said Fusty, handing it to Garrison, "take it, an' keep it. It was poor Sim Ross' badge of office. He had it made that way. You killed the man who shot poor Sim, and I reckon you've a better right to keep it than anybody, and I'm shore, if he knows, Sim will agree."

Jerry took the badge, looked at it in awe, and then pinned it securely inside his coat.

"Thank you, Fusty!" he said, choking, and little dreaming that that red badge was going to make him famous throughout the country.

"And now," Fusty went on, "let's go. It ain't healthy stayin' around hyar. The mayor has his own reasons for wantin' to hang you, Jerry. And, in spite of my demandin' a public trial for you, he's quite capable of sendin' a lynch-party to this hyar gall and stringing you up. Time we wuz lettin' Jerry."

Fusty led the way, waddling briskly on his bow legs, out of the gaoler's room, and along a stone corridor which connected the cells with the men's quarters.

"This calaboose is dereict," Fusty whispered hoarsely. "It's the old prison of the town. I ain't used much now. Don't suppose there's anybody on duty, barring Cock Eye, and we've trussed him up. All the same, we'll get out by the side door."

They came to a cross passage, and were about to turn down it when the front door of the prison was opened by somebody with a key.

The watchman guarding the door, who was asleep in his chair, sprang into wakefulness as a file of men swung in from the street.

They were headed by Jasper Privett, Mayor of Red Rock. Trudging on the mayor's heels came Sam Paulo carrying in his right hand a coiled, hempen rope, with noose already made.

"It's all right," Joe," said the mayor to the man at the door. "We've kom to fetch the prisoner. Gonna carry out a little ceremonial with Jerry Garrison as victim."

"O.K., boss!" replied the watchman. "But there's somebody with Garrison."

"Somebody with Garrison?" the mayor said angrily. "I told Cock Eye nobody was to be allowed to see him. Who is it?"

"It's the deputy sheriff, boss."

"What—Fusty in the gaol? Hyar, boys, kom on!" The mayor turned and glared at the string of men who crowded after him. "We've had a bit too much of Fusty, homin' in! Get another rope, and let's make a double job of it! Reckon Fusty was in that bank robbery, too!"

As the whole mob came surging on Fusty drew Jerry along a stone passage, where the deputy sheriff showed a shut, iron-barred gate ahead of them. Fusty swung the bunch of keys which dangled from his hand.

"That gate's locked, kid," he said; "but we'll soon open it. Then we'll have to scam. For when that mob find Cock Eye shut up in yore cell, there'll be an earthquake."

Fusty set a key in the lock of the gate and opened it. They slid through. But even as they passed it wild cries and loud oaths rang out behind them, and thick-soled boots pounded the stone floor.

"Beat it to the outer door, Jerry," said Fusty, looking back.

He saw the Mayor of Red Rock round the angle of the wall. After him came Sam Paulo and the whole mob, every man showing a gun.

"There they go!" shouted the mayor, as the gate clanged and Fusty ran after Jerry, his bow legs swinging briskly.

The stone passage rang with the deafening crash of revolver shots. Bullets chipped the bars of the gate and flew from the stone blocks of the wall.

Fusty grunted as he heard one plug the crown of his Stetson. At the side door of the ramshackle old gaol Jerry Garrison waited for Fusty, having drawn the bolts and set back the heavy catch of the lock.

Bullets spattered the walls and the ceiling, and at the barred gate evil faces glared at them. Arns thrust through held spouting six-guns.

"Come on, Fusty," said Jerry, alarmed lest they might get the deputy sheriff.

"Git along you!" Fusty shot back. "The cayuses is hid round the corner. Beat it!"

Reluctantly Jerry passed into the starlit open. Fusty, hiding behind the screen of the thick, iron-sheeted door, looked back grimly at the snarling crowd who, behind the bars of that shut gate, looked like hyenas in a cage.

The deputy sheriff raised his gun and at first aim fired. One of the men behind the bars uttered a yell and slumped to the stone floor.

"That's fer you," Fusty roared, "and I'm only sorry it didn't git Jasper Privett!"

Then he banged to the door, and, joining Jerry, started to race him to where the ponies waited.

Hidden in an archway of the adjoining street, and held by a boy, stood Paintbox and a useful-looking duo pony belonging to the deputy.

"That's for you, boy," said Fusty, pressing a note into the boy's hand. "Now, up in the saddle, Jerry—an' ride!"

Jerry, his face alight, his eyes bright enough to shame the stars, urged Paintbox out into the stone-paved street.

After him followed Fusty.

Nor were they a moment too soon, for as the ring of the hoofbeats echoed on the stones, wild cries answered them from the gaol.

Then followed the whine of a car.

As he swung Paintbox round a corner Jerry saw a car loaded with gunmen swing along a parallel street.

"Waal, let 'em go!" said Fusty. "They ain't out us off, but no car can go where we're goin', Jerry. Jest you follow me."

Fusty led the way, riding along this narrow alleyway, and speeding along that street, until of a sudden Jerry saw open country stretching before him.

The dun pony could move, and the bow-legged deputy could ride.

Over an open plain, along a dried up arroyo, Fusty led the race. And soon they could see the bright, staring headlights of the pursuing car coming to meet them. Two great beams of light cut the dark like horns from a lighthouse.

"Get you down, Jerry," he advised. "Let the ponies loose. They'll wait near enough for us to find 'em."

"What are you going to do, Fusty?" Jerry asked.

"Make some target practice," Fusty answered, as he whipped a Winchester rifle out of its leather sheath before he let the pony go.

Then down he flopped, and, making a nice calculation, judging his mark from the car-lamps, he aimed carefully and pulled the trigger.

An angry shout from the loaded car told him that he had scored a bull. The left lamp seemed to dip. Then Fusty had a go at the right-hand lamp.

Futile revolver shots from the car answered him.

Then Fusty sent a bullet smack in the middle of the bunch of crooks, who crowded out of the vehicle as the car stopped, and a howl of fury told him that he had not missed.

Fusty arose from the ground with a grin, and waddled after the freed ponies.

"I've shot up both front tyres, Jerry," he said, "and I've nailed one of them guys; let's hope it's that dirty crook Sam Paulo. The pursuit's stopped. We'll be up in the mountains and through Misfire Canyon before the mornin', an' safe."

"Fusty," answered Jerry, "I reckon I owe you my life. But you shouldn't have done so much for me. You can't go back to Red Rock now."

"Don't want to," Fusty rejoined, as they urged the ponies over the uneven ground and headed for the foothills. "The mayor's a crook. He aimed to get Sim Ross, and got him. Guess he framed that bank robbery, too. Reckon I wuz marked down for a killin', too. Only too glad to help you, kid. Calculate we'll both be made outlaws over this, and hev every gunman in Red Rock huntin' us. But if you're the sort of guy I reckon you are, an' can shoot half as well as me—why, we'll give Jasper Privett and his crooks and anyone else who tries to get us, a real, hard battle afore we cash in."

"Shore!" Jerry Garrison answered, as he urged Paintbox up alongside the dun pony.

And after that, in grim silence, Fusty and Jerry rode on to meet the mountains under a coal-black sky all peppered with twinkling stars.

A Ride to Red Rock.

ALL through a cold and blustering night the storm had lasted, and when, soon after daybreak, the last flash of lightning seared the all-pervading grey, and the peal of thunder died in rolling echoes through the sombre length of Misfire Canyon, two men came out of their hide-hole and looked around.

The men were Jerry Garrison and Fusty.

The blazing sun which followed the storm revealed a rain-drenched scene, and Jerry shook his handsome head regretfully as he stalked around.

"Hang it, Fusty!" he growled. "The rain has washed the trail clean. Not a hoofprint shows now. And we were on a hot trail at sundown. That would happen."

Fusty, being of a philosophical disposition, taking every thing as it turned up with unruffled calm, waddled on his bow legs to a dry rock and squatted there.

"Never mind, Jerry," he returned cheerfully. "Even if

"We'd found the trail fresh this mornin' we couldn't have followed it. We've got no supplies. Besides, we've gotta hoof the ponies down to a decent grazin' ground. After which I'll hev' to ride into Red Rock for supplies."

Jerry began to slice a piece of dry, hard meat, and to crumble a hunk of bread a week old—his breakfast.

"Consarnin' them supplies," he said, eyeing Fusty critically. "I won't have you riskin' that hide of yours single-handed in Red Rock. I'm going with you, Fusty."

"Yo're nos'd," replied the bow-legged outlaw. "Yore painted hos'd give you away in a flash. Yo're gonna wait up hyar till I git back. I'm ainin' to reach the Red Rock road by sundown. I'm ridin' in under cover of the dark. Jolliver, the printer's, expectin' me. He'll hev' printed them stars we want accordin' to instructions sent by me last week. Also, he'll hand me whatever supplies I need and the dope about how things are going in the old town. I'll collect the whole caboodle, and be back at Bird Rock, whar you'll wait for me, by sun-up. How's that go?"

"It was a long speech for Fusty, but it was clear."

"It don't go, you round-legged apology for a skeleton cayuse!" Jerry returned. "I'm not going to have you riskin' your carcass in Red Rock alone. Think I'll have you face a shower of lead while I rest me up at Bird Rock in the peace and quiet? No, sir! Jerry Garrison don't let a pal risk his hide while he suns it in the mountains where no bullets ever rain, and the crack of a gun don't startle even the humming-birds. Fusty, I'm going to—"

"Bang!" A gun-shot rang like a whip-crack somewhere on the rocky slope above, and a bullet chipped the rock on which Fusty was sitting.

Fusty bounced to the track below and dodged behind the rock. Jerry Garrison quickly followed him. Six hundred yards away a ball of powder smoke was unfolding on the breeze. Seeing it, Fusty grinned.

"Now will you be good?" he asked. "Seems ter me you'll stand a better chance of being drilled with lead than me going into Red Rock. That shot shows that the guys we're after are hiding up beyond Mishire somewhere."

"Looks like it," Jerry Garrison agreed. "Then you stop and watch 'em while I go an' get the printin' an' the grub we want from the li'l old town."

Jerry had no further objections to offer, and a few minutes later, mounted on their ponies, they followed a steep mountain trail, keeping to cover as much as possible, and making for the foothills above the Red Rock road.

That evening, when the shadows began to creep over the mountains, Garrison led his piebald pony Paintbox to a grassy hollow, and rested there, whilst Fusty, on his dun pony Jenny, headed for the town.

Fusty knew Red Rock as he knew himself. With his face muffled up, and the brim of his big Stetson pulled down, he kept to the side streets, and reached the back of the house occupied by his friend Jolliver, as he thought, unobserved. It was sheer bad luck, however, which led a half-breed named Sam Paulo, one of the Mayor Jasper Privett's spies, to glance along the dimly illuminated passage just as Fusty dismounted and waddled to the back door, on which he knocked loudly.

As the door opened, and Jolliver, who was expecting Fusty, greeted his friend with a hearty handshake, the spy saw two bow legs, which seemed familiar, waddle into the house. His suspicions aroused, Sam Paulo hurried round to the front of the house and peered cautiously in at the shop window.

Jolliver, stretching hairy upper lip and chin in a beaming smile, set a paper packet on the counter.

"Them's the printed stars you want, Fusty," he said, with an air of pride, "all gummed and ready for use. Finished 'em yesterday. I've got a sack of canned stuff waitin' out in the kitchen. And if you want any guns or ball ammunition, say the word and they're yores."

"Got all the war stores we want, thank you, Jolliver," answered Fusty, as he slipped the packet into a bag slung from his shoulder. "What's the news?"

"Mayor Privett's sent out four posses of gunmen after you and Jerry Garrison since you rescued Jerry from the calaboose," Jolliver informed him, "an' he's as mad as a bear with a sore rump 'cos you and Jerry fooled 'em. The town's placarded with bills pronouncin' you and Jerry outlaws. Privett sez you and Jerry planned that raid on the State Bank and shot up Sheriff Sim Ross, and though they know the charge ain't true, most of the citizens are so scared of the mayor, none of 'em dare say a word."

"Well, Jolliver, I'm sayin' something when the proper time comes," Fusty answered, "and so's that smart kid, Jerry Garrison. Privett's made us outlaws, has he? Poor Sim Ross, the sheriff, was my best pal. Don't it look like the mayor had something to do with that bank raid? Didn't Al Rivers shoot Sim Ross a second before Jerry Garrison shot HIM?" And wasn't Rivers a notorious gunman?"

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"We know the facts, Fusty. Of course he was."

"Very well. Jerry Garrison and me are going to fight Jasper Privett to the last ditch. He aims to get us 'cos he knows we're dangerous. We're gonna get him 'cos we know he's a crook."

"Won't do to kemo into Red Rock too often, Fusty."

"I'll watch it. Gonna hide with Jerry up the mountains. Had to kem in for that printin' and the supplies. I'll pay you when I can dare draw money from the State Bank, Jolliver. Meanwhiles, I'll say good-night. An' I'm much obliged."

The two old friends shook hands over the counter, and it was just then that out of the corner of his eye Fusty caught sight of a face flattened against the shop window-pane.

"Just pipe that window on your left, Jolliver," Fusty said, pretending not to have seen. "Who's that dirty rat spyin' in?"

As cautious as Fusty himself, Jolliver took a peep.

"It's Sam Paulo," he said. "Time you beat it, Fusty."

The face disappeared; but even then Fusty did not hurry, striding easily through the shop and swinging himself into the saddle as if time were of no consequence. Yet he knew that he would be riddled with bullets if Sam Paulo were given time to alarm the sheriff's boys and start them ridin'.

Fing, however, did not intend Sam Paulo should give the alarm.

"Where'll he head for?" Fusty asked himself, as he rode Jenny at a hand gallop into the street and turned right to bring him into the main street of the town. "The mayor's gang'll be all town hall way."

Then he urged Jenny to a cracking gallop.

One glance showed Fusty that he had guessed rightly. A man was running like a hare in the shadow of a row of shops, most of which were shut. It was Sam Paulo.

Fusty raced Jenny down on him at top speed. As he heard the quick, pounding hoofs behind, Paulo turned, and, whipping out an automatic, stopped to aim at Fusty. But the ex-deputy sheriff of Red Rock, now an outlaw, gave him no chance of an effective shot by riding Jenny on to the sidewalk, driving Paulo off it, and chasing him until the man, hit by the speeding mare, tumbled over headlong.

Paulo's gun went off as he plunged down; but he only fired once.

"Ouch! Oo-er!"

Jenny's steel-shod hoofs hit him in the middle as she trampled over him, and before the townsmen who had heard the gunshot had time to size up the situation, Fusty had swung the dun pony about, and was riding like the wind for the road that led to the mountains.

The Bill of Reward.

FUSTY had been gone ten minutes out of town by the time Sam Paulo was led on the supporting arms of two of the mayor's gangsters into the presence of the mayor.

Jasper Privett had been entertaining a racketeer from Eatonville, a hundred and forty miles away, and was on the point of fixing a sound and lucrative contract with his guest, when Sam clamoured to see him and was brought in all crumpled up.

The mayor eyed him wickedly.

"Who's put you through the mangle, an' why?" Privett asked viciously.

"Fusty—"

"What? Fusty in town?" Privett was on his feet in a flash, his pasty face working hideously. "You get him?"

"No. Saw him in Jolliver's. He must have seen me look in, for he rode me down as I was coming to tell you. I shot at him, but he got away."

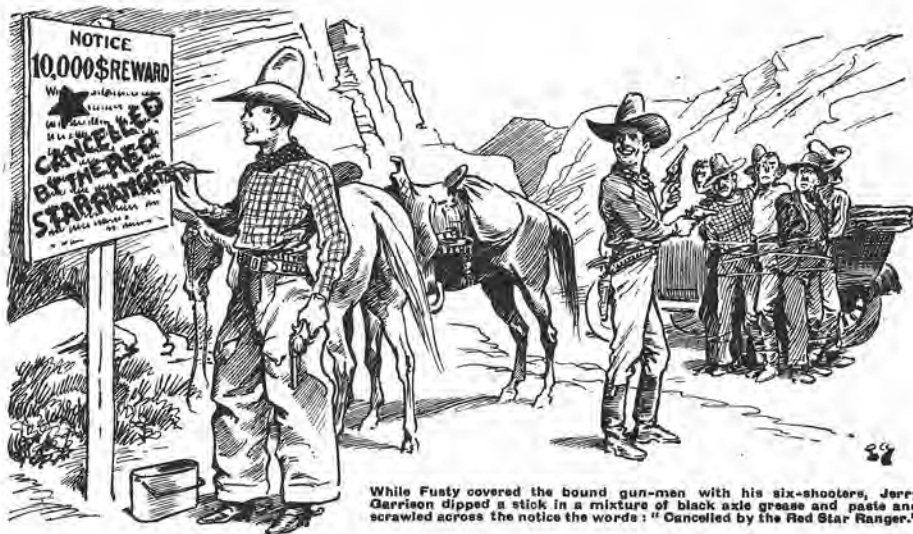
Privett pushed Sam savagely aside, and as the half-breed hit the floor, stormed out of the room.

"We'll leave that contract till I kem back, pal!" he called out to his guest. "Stay on as long as you like. I'm gonna send an army out to catch that bank robber. And as for Jolliver—"

"You can't harm Jolliver," said a gunman who trod on Privett's heels. "He's the most popular man in Red Rock. And you ain't done yoreself a sight of good outlawing Fusty, kem to that, mayor."

"When I want you to tell me what to do," snarled Privett, "I'll ask. I know how much Red Rock likes Jolliver an' Fusty. But when I've rubbed Fusty out, and got that guy, Jerry Garrison, who's hidin' up the mountains, I'll give Jolliver the works, an' clean up this town. Get out the hosses, and let's get ridin'!"

Jasper Privett lived in a big stone mansion two miles outside Red Rock. There he not only kept a fleet of fast cars, but a stable full of speedy horses as well. Twenty room-boys occupied a bunkhouse a pistol-shot away, and, within five minutes of his giving the order, the mayor of Red Rock had the satisfaction of seeing his hirelings, mounted on the



While Fusty covered the bound gun-men with his six-shooters, Jerry Garrison dipped a stick in a mixture of black axle grease and paste and scrawled across the notice the words: "Cancelled by the Red Star Ranger."

fastest bunch of ponies in the state, gallop off on Fusty's trail.

Privett himself preferred to travel by car, it being speedier and safer, and so he tore through the town with warning siren screaming to let the boys know they were wanted.

Privett's big black car streaked along the mountain road at seventy miles an hour, with a whole fleet of other cars stretching in a tail far behind. But though he combed the roads and searched the plateaus, he found no trace of Fusty.

The mounted gunmen who swept the open ground on each side of the road also drew blank. The moon was up, but there was not enough light to make out a trail. This way and that they rode, sometimes flashing pocket-torches and signalling to one another. But they didn't find Fusty.

There was a good reason why they failed. Fusty had turned the other way after starting south as a blind. He did not head for the mountains until after the fleet of cars had come back, and the mounted gunmen were scattered all over the plain.

Towards dawn Fusty, out on the plain, saw the search-party returning, and, dropping into a grassy hollow, hid there among the tall grass, with Jenny stretched beside him, playing the dead-pony act—a trick Fusty had taught her. The men, who rode within a quarter of a mile of the spot, saw nothing as they went by. Presently, when it was safe, Fusty mounted and continued his ride, arriving at the foothills just as dawn broke. He had an hour's hard riding before he would arrive back at Bird Rock.

But he had not to go that far, for as he swung out of an arroyo, through which a trickle of crystal water ran, whom should he see but Jerry Garrison waiting for him on a knoll. Jerry was seated astride his pinto, the man and the piebald pony offering a splendid target for any sniper who might have happened to be near.

Jerry's hat brim was flapping. He sat the saddle with arms akimbo. His gun-butt showed prominently in the open holsters, and were turned outward. Fusty yapped a protest as he caught sight of them.

"Hey, you, Jerry Garrison!" he bawled. "Don't you know better'n to sit your hoss up on the biggest mound you cud find fer miles?"

Jerry waved a hand, but took no other notice of Fusty. His eyes were peering over the treetops to the lower hills.

"Mornin', Frozen Face!" he called out. "I see you've got the canned grub along of you. Got them red stars, too, shouldn't wonder. There's bin a car hunt up here last night, and a crazy old flivver is coming up the hill trail now."

"They'll see you up there, Jerry, and plug you full of lead."

"They'll see nothing. I've tried to see this mound from down below, but you can't. We're safe."

Fusty ranged Jenny alongside Paintbox.

Jerry was right. A flivver was rattling its way up the

rutted mountain trail. Its noisy approach could be plainly heard, although it was more than a mile and a half away.

Fusty grinned.

"I know that Misfire Annie!" he chuckled. "She banged and coughed like that when he bought her. She belongs to Sam Paulo."

Jerry began to count.

"And she's got six guys in her, Fusty! Hallo, she's stopped, and they're gettin' out. What's that thing they're carrying up the slope? Looks like a notice-board."

"It is a notice-board, Jerry," Fusty agreed.

"And now they're beginnin' to plant it. Most that happens up these mountains concerns us, old-timer. What say we ride along and have a look?"

"Too dangerous," said Fusty, wagging his grizzled head.

Jerry Garrison laughed.

"A lot you care about danger. On your own showing you've done nothing but stir up nests of hornets ever since you started to walk. Now, about those men down there, Fusty. I've got an idea—"

"An idea at last!" grunted Frusty. "Waal, let's hear the brain-wave!"

"I reckon those men in that flivver have been sent by Jasper Privett. The notice they're going to set up on that board, I think, will concern us. We believe that Privett is working in with a mob of bandits who are hidden somewhere up these mountains. Privett runs a racket down in the town; blackmails everybody who won't toe the line. He's made us outlaws, and sent his gunmen to kill us. And there won't be much peace for us until we've put Privett behind the bars, Fusty."

"And what then?"

"What then, you locoed sage hen? I say, let's read that notice, find out who those men are, and see if we can't hit the trail which'll lead us to the bandits' stronghold up in these here mountains."

Before he finished speaking Jerry Garrison was urging Paintbox along the trail, and Fusty, shouting, had perforce to follow him.

"They'll shoot on sight! Think they won't know you and your paint box, Jerry?" Fusty pleaded.

"I can shoot, too, and you're also smart on the draw!" Jerry shouted back, as he turned in the saddle. "Stop your yappin'!"

Fusty sighed deeply and rode after Jerry in silence. He had learned by experience, short though it was, that it was worse than useless to argue with Jerry. So after a brisk ride they came out of the bush-sheltered mesa and dropped down a powdered slope at the foot of which the flivver stood.

The board had been set in the ground and firmly wedged. A man with paste-pot and big brush had just smeared a notice and slapped it up on the board, and was standing back to admire his handiwork. The other five men stood behind him, smoking and lazing. They, too, were staring

at the notice. They did not hear the dull hoof-beats of the approaching ponies until Jerry and Fusty were close upon them, and then Jerry called out cheerily:

"Hoy, fellows, what are you sticking up down there?"

Sam Paulo was one of the men. His forehead was plastered, and as he moved he limped. As Sam looked at the two horsemen, one of them riding with bags slung behind the saddle, and noticed the colour of their horses, his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"Boys!" he hissed raspingly, with a catch in the throat. "It's the outlaw, Jerry Garrison, and Fusty, the deputy sheriff, and there's a big reward offered for 'em, dead or alive!"

The men glanced at the notice and then looked at Jerry and Fusty. They felt their guns to see if they were ready to hand.

The next moment Jerry and Fusty were opposite the board.

Jerry swung his back on the six gunmen. Fusty, on the other hand, moved across to the board and brought Jenny half-way round. Two gun-buts struck out within an inch of his hanging hands. He had let the reins drop.

Jerry Garrison began to read the notice.

"My! Listen, pard," he said, "to what we have here. '10,000 Dollars Reward,' the bill says, 'for Jerry Garrison, bank robber, outlaw, and murderer, and Joe McKraw, better known as Fusty, ex-deputy sheriff of the town of Red Rock—either dead or alive!'"

Jerry rolled the words around his lips as if he loved the sound of them, and his voice deepened as he went on.

"And, say, there's a description of their hosses, pard. Listen! 'Garrison is about 24 years of age, tall, clean-shaven, grey-eyed, hair light-brown and curly. Wanted for murder at Polyanna Ranch, Sunshot. Rides a paint hoss answering to the name of Paintbox.' Here's the how'd-yo-do about your hoss, Fusty. A dun mare." And, by thunder, it says you're a bow-legged old thief. Why, pard, would yer believe it? It says—"

Jerry Garrison got no farther with his reading or his comments, for by that time Sam Paulo and the gang had come to realise that they were being mocked, and had screwed up their courage to the shooting point.

The six men drew simultaneously, and their guns began to play.

But even as the first shot was fired Jerry whirled Paintbox away from the board, swung the pony round, and, letting go the reins, drew both guns at once.

"Hands up, mob!" he cried out sternly. "Put 'em up unless you want to be lead drilled!"

Braang! Braang! Braang!

Shots from the gang were answered instantly by three sharp replies from Fusty's six-guns, the bow-legged deputy sheriff ducking the fraction of a second before he fired.

Fusty's first shot hit a gun clean out of Paulo's hand, the ricocheting bullet soaring a gunman's cheek as it flew by. His second carried another man's hat clean off his head, whilst his third, plugging a gunman's forearm, caused him to drop his gun and scream with pain.

"Put 'em up!" snapped Fusty.

Three seconds after the battle began six scared gunmen were reaching for the sky.

"Get off your hoss, Fusty, an' tie 'em up," said Jerry Garrison, as he swept his guns along the line of the reaching six. "I can see a coil of rope in the flivver. Tie 'em up in a bundle while I hold 'em steady for you!"

Fusty dropped from Jenny's back with the speed of a schoolboy bent on mischief. He reached for the rope in the car, and then went along the group of chagrined gunmen, coiling the rope in and out and round their arms. When he had finished, the whole bunch were tied up in a bundle face to face, Fusty completing his work by tying their wrists together with shorter lengths of rope, and tangling up their ankles so that they could not walk. Then the mortified bundle of humanity was set back against the car.

"You can't do this, Fusty!" howled Sam Paulo. "What are we going to do?"

"Call for mamma," Fusty answered, with a grin. "Mebbe she'll hear. If she don't, perhaps the mayor'll kem out of Red Rock and loose yer."

Jerry Garrison broke in:

"Give me that packet you got from the printer, Fusty!"

Fusty drew the packet out of his bulging pocket and opened it. In one of the smaller packets inside Jerry found several bundles of bold, red, five-pointed stars, all gummed on the back.

He licked one of these stars and stuck it on the reward bill, where it stood out boldly. Then he mixed some black axle grease with the paste, and, finding a small brush in the tool-box of the flivver, he scrawled across the reward bill the words: "Cancelled by the Red Star Ranger."

Jerry stood back to admire his handiwork, then walked up to the car. One of the tied-up gunmen cursed at him; but he stopped his cursing when Jerry smeared his scowling face with paste and axle grease.

"To-day we start a fresh campaign, Fusty!" said Jerry, as he leapt into the saddle. "Time we got safe up in the mountains!"

When Sam Paulo and the five gunmen failed to show up in Red Rock by sundown, Jasper Privett sent out a car to look for them. The search-party found the tied-up gang heaped in the dust a hundred yards from the flivver, all in a state of collapse.

With the aid of pocket torches they read the message smeared across the reward bill, and then started back to town.

Later that night fifty horsemen, armed with rifles and revolvers, clattered off of Red Rock and headed for the mountains. Jasper Privett went with them. On the way he made a vow that he would not go back to Red Rock until he had shot Garrison and Fusty, or hanged them: till they were dead—a vow which he was destined to break!

(Jasper Privett and Co. are on the trail, and Jerry and Fusty will have to look out for themselves! There are exciting adventures ahead, so whatever you do, don't miss next week's thrilling instalment!)

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