

"THE PRISONER OF THE MOAT HOUSE!"

The GEM

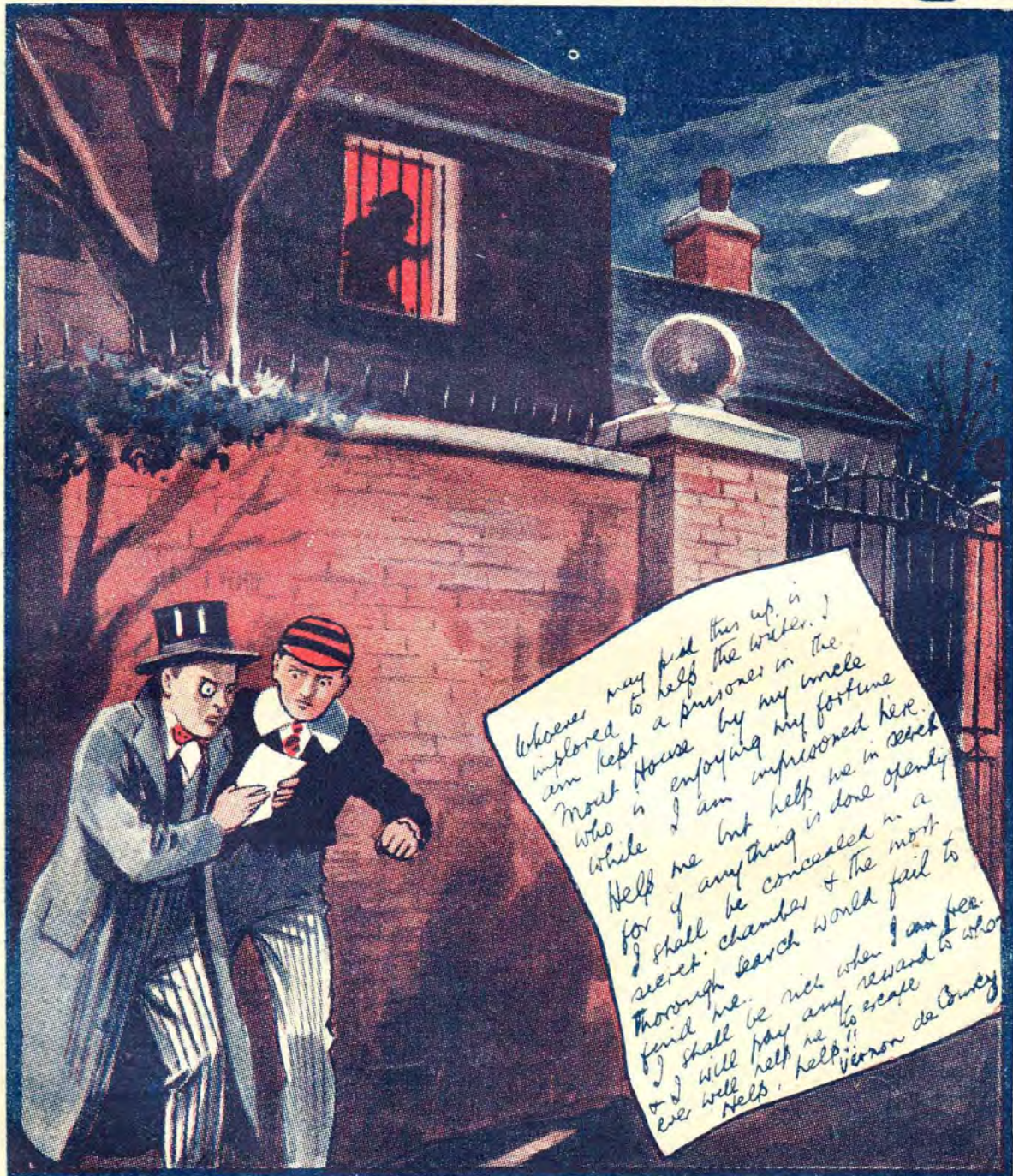
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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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POWERFUL STORY STARRING THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S—WITHIN!

IT'S THRILLING! IT'S AMAZING! IS THE GRIPPING YARN OF THE—

The PRISONER of the



WHAT A THRILL it is for the Chums of St. Jim's when they go to the rescue of a prisoner in a sinister old house! But—

WHAT A SHOCK they get as a wind-up to their nerve-tingling night adventure!

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy in a Hurry!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, pedalled up to the school gate upon his bicycle at top speed.

It was seldom that D'Arcy scorched, for he did not regard scorching as elegant; but he was scorching now with a vengeance. His face was excited, and he was leaning over his handlebars with his aristocratic nose nearly touching them, and his legs going as if by machinery. His eyeglass was streaming behind him at the end of its cord, unnoticed.

There were several fellows standing at the school gates in the sunset, and they stared at Arthur Augustus in surprise as he came scorching up.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell had been exchanging badinage with Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth, when the sight of the excited swell of St. Jim's drew all their attention to him.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What's the matter with Gussy?"

"He's scorching," said Blake.

"Yes, I noticed that. But what's he scorching for? Can't be any of the Grammar School cads after him."

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"Can't see any."

"My word! He's making the pedals fly," said Digby.

"Gussy! Hallo, Gussy!"

"Ease off!"

"Mind where you're going!"

But the excited cyclist did not hear.

He was too busy in extracting the utmost possible speed out of his machine.

With his nose on the handlebars he came whizzing on, straight for the gate, and Tom Merry & Co. jumped to right and left to avoid a collision.

"Look out!" roared Tom Merry.

"Back water, you ass!"

"Where are you running?"

"Fathead!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

He jammed on the brake, and tried to stop his machine. But it was too sudden, and he went whirling. As the machine collapsed, he threw his arms round Tom Merry's neck to save himself, and they went to the ground together.

"Oh!" roared Tom Merry.

"Gweat Scott!"

"You ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry sprawled on the ground, with Arthur Augustus sprawled over him. He rolled D'Arcy off, and sat up.

chambah. If he were shoved into a secwet chambah the police couldn't discovah him."

"And the Moat House is full of secret chambers, I've heard," said Blake. "It's one of the oldest buildings in the county; dates from the reign of Edward IV."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No, I suppose it wouldn't do to take this note to the police station, especially as the chap asks us not to," said Tom Merry slowly. "But—"

"But what, deah boy?"

"We shall have to go slow and be jolly careful, that's all. If it's a jape we don't want to be shown up to all St. Jim's as a set of duffers."

"Wathah not, but—"

"The New House fellows would never let us hear the end of it."

"That's so," said Blake. "And if it's a jape, Figgins & Co. are most likely at the bottom of it."

"Yes, rather!"

"We should have to be jolly careful, or the wicked uncle would get on the scent," said Arthur Augustus. "My ideah is that we should scout wound the Moat House and make quite certain whethah there is a pwisonah there. If there is, it shows that the thing is genuine, and then we can wade in and wescue him."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Good! If there's a prisoner there, that will make it all right. Nobody has a right to keep a prisoner in a private house, that's certain. If there's a prisoner, we'll wescue him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We shall have to go after dark, of course," said Tom Merry. "That will mean breaking bounds."

"It's in a good cause, deah boy."

"Oh, yes, of course! We shouldn't dream of breaking bounds, except in a first-class cause," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Pway don't be an ass! Will you fellows be weady this evenin' aftah lights out—say half an hour aftah?"

"Good!"

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER 2.

The Mystery of the Moat House!

"HALLO!"

"What's the matter?"

"Stop a minute!"

"Blessed if I'm going to stop!" said Figgins.

"We've got to get into St. Jim's before dark, and it's jolly well dusk now! Come on, Fatty!"

"But—"

"Yes, come on, Fatty!" said Kerr. "You can stop and contemplate the landscape, or bolt the sandwich another time. We don't want to be ragged for being late for calling-over, you know."

"But—"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Figgins and Kerr together.

"Hold on, I tell you!" said Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn had stopped in the road, and Figgins and Kerr turned back. The three juniors of the New House at St. Jim's were tramping back to the school after a visit to the market town of Wayland, and they had some distance yet to go. They had been putting speed on, for they did not want to be hauled over the coals for being late, but Fatty Wynn had suddenly halted for no apparent cause.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" exclaimed Figgins, exasperated. "I knew you wouldn't be able to keep up the pace if you had those tarts at Wayland. Why couldn't you be satisfied with the sausage rolls?"

"It wasn't that."

"Then what is it?"

"I was jolly hungry when we left Wayland," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I had only four sausage rolls, the ham and eggs, and the beefsteak pie, besides the tarts. I don't see—"

"My hat! He's going to stand there and talk all night," said Kerr resignedly. "We may as well sit down on the bank and take it comfortably."

"Look here—"

"Oh, come on, Fatty!"

"Yes, but—"

"What are you stopping for?" howled Figgins.

"What's that chap waving to us for?" said Fatty Wynn, replying by another question.

"Eh? What chap?"

"Look at him!"

Fatty Wynn pointed. The three chums had been tramping

along the road where it bordered the wall of the Moat House.

That house, unoccupied for many years, was one of the loneliest and most forbidding in the countryside. It was surrounded by a high wall and a deep moat, the latter fed by the waters of the Rhyl, and only in one spot was the moat crossed by a little bridge, which gave access to the gate.

At the gate, looking out on the bridge, was a young man. The gate was high, and the young man was evidently standing upon or clinging to something within to be able to look over the top.

He was waving his hand excitedly to the juniors of St. Jim's, evidently earnestly desirous of attracting their attention. Fatty Wynn had been the first to see him. He was waving frantically, yet he was not calling out—which was curious, for the juniors were within easy sound of his voice if he had chosen to call.

The three juniors stared at him.

"What the dickens does he want?" muttered Kerr.

"He wants to speak to us, I suppose," said Fatty Wynn. "Let's go and speak to him; he looks as if there was something wrong. There may be somebody ill."

The juniors hurried towards the little bridge over the moat. Access to the bridge was easy enough, but the gate at the end was high, and the top of it was adorned with a row of sharp spikes, through which the young man was peering at them.

As they drew nearer the juniors stared at the sight of his face. It was deadly pale, and there was a strange, hunted expression in his eyes, as if the young man was in incessant fear of observation.

Figgins & Co. stopped under the big gate and looked up.

"Anything wrong?" asked Figgins.

"Help!"

"Eh?"

"Help me!" said the man above in an eager, thrilling whisper. "I am a prisoner here! Help me!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors looked at him blankly.

They had felt, from the young man's looks and his strange position at the gate, that there was something amiss, but they had not been prepared for an announcement like this. For the moment they could only stare.

"I am kept a prisoner here," said the young man in low, tense tones. "I have been allowed to walk in the garden to-day, and I climbed up here in the hope of attracting the attention of a passer-by. But it is a lonely road."

"My only hat!" muttered Figgins.

"Listen!" said the other hurriedly. "I want you to help me. I am rich and can give you any reward you choose to ask."

"Rats!" said Figgins. "If you're a prisoner we'll help you certainly, but we don't want any money. But, look here, you're not japing us, I suppose?"

"Do I look it?"

"By Jove—no!"

"I may be seized any moment," said the other tersely. "Listen! My name is Slavonski—Prince Slavonski—and I am kept a prisoner here by a villain in the pay of the Bolsheviks!"

"My hat!"

"I may be murdered if I am not rescued!"

"Phew!"

"We'll buzz off to the police station," said Fatty Wynn.

The young man made a gesture.

"No, no! If I am sought for by the police I shall be hidden in a secret chamber—this old place is full of them—and they will never find me. I may even be murdered and hidden beneath the waters of the moat!"

"Oh!"

"If I am rescued, it must be secretly. If you could get me a rope, so that I could descend from the wall, and help me to cross the moat afterwards, all would be well."

Figgins & Co. looked serious.

They were so utterly astounded by the strange information that they hardly knew what to think or to say, but their chivalry was aroused.

If the man was a prisoner in the Moat House he was certainly entitled to his liberty, and they were just the fellows to help him get it.

"Will you help me?" breathed the man above.

"Yes!" said Figgins resolutely.

"Oh, thanks—thanks! You are a noble lad. Mind, do not let Dr. Ferrers catch sight of you or hear a word of it!"

"Dr. Ferrers!"

"The man who lives here and keeps me a prisoner. He is not really a doctor; that is only to deceive the public."

"Oh!"



"Bai Jove! Has Knox gone?" came the voice of Gussy from underneath the bedclothes. Knox hadn't! The prefect grasped the bedclothes and dragged them off, and Arthur Augustus was revealed. It was just like Gussy to give himself away!

"He could easily deceive the police, too, if they were called in. You will be careful?"

"Come to-night after dark, and—"

There was a sound in the gardens inside, and the young man uttered an exclamation. He turned his head, and the next moment his hands disappeared from the spikes, and it was clear that he had been pulled down from inside.

Figgins & Co. exchanged glances almost of horror.

It seemed like a terrible dream to them. But they realised that it was better for them not to be seen, and they scuttled off back into the lane at once.

It was certain that they would not see the prisoner of the Moat House again, and they turned their faces towards St. Jim's once more, utterly puzzled and very much excited by what they had heard.

"It's jolly curious," said Figgins. "The Moat House has only been taken a few days—but though I wondered who was going to live in such a jolly lonely place, I certainly never guessed anything of this sort."

"I don't see how it could be a jape, either," said Kerr thoughtfully. "The chap was certainly pulled down from that gate from inside."

"No doubt about that."

"And—he says he is a prince!"

"A Russian prince," said Kerr. "I believe they're nearly all princes and counts. Still, it will be something to rescue a giddy prince."

"Of course, we don't want any reward," said Fatty Wynn. "but the chap could hardly do less than stand a decent feed, I should think."

"Trust Fatty to think of the feed!" grinned Figgins.

"Well, I should think that would be a jolly good way for him to settle with us," said Fatty. "A good feed is—"

"Get a move on!" said Figgins. "We shall be late for calling-over!"

The chums of the New House broke into a run.

But they were late for calling-over, and they received lines; but they did not care very much for lines just then. They were thinking of the prisoner in the Moat House, and planning his rescue, and what were lines at such a time?

CHAPTER 3.

After Lights Out!

"GROO-OO-OO!"

Jack Blake made that remark as half-past ten chimed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

He sat up in bed, yawning portentously.

"Half-past ten," he said. "You fellows awake?"

There was a sound of regular breathing and a snore or two. Nobody was awake in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House, with the exception of Jack Blake himself.

Blake stepped out of bed, and shook Digby and Herries and D'Arcy in turn. They sat up, rubbing their eyes.

"Tain't rising-bell!" grunted Herries.

"It's half-past ten, though!"

"Oh!"

"I say," Digby remarked, in a thoughtful and reflective way, "has it occurred to you, Blake, that it will be jolly hard to find one's way about that giddy Moat House place in the dark?"

"Well, I don't suppose it will be easy," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"But wouldn't it be a good wheeze to leave it till—till morning?" suggested Digby. "We could get up very early, and—"

"Out you come!"

"Of course, I—I'm willing to get up, you know, but I—I thought it would be a good idea, and—and—ow! Beast!"

And Digby rolled out of bed with a bump, with Jack Blake's sinewy hands grasping him.

He picked himself up and growled.

"Don't make a row," said Blake warningly. "I suppose you don't want to wake up half the dorm. Shut up!"

"Look here—"

"Cheese it! Are you getting out, Gussy?"

"Ya-a-as," said D'Arcy hastily. "I was just stoppin' to think a moment whethah it wouldn't be a good ideah to do as Dig suggests. Ow! Yow!"

Arthur Augustus rolled on the floor.

"Blake—"

"Shut up!"

"I regard you as a beast!"

"Good! Get into your togs!"

"I refuse to regard you as a friend."

"Hip-pip! Dress yourself!"

"You uttah wottah—"

"Are you going to talk all night, Gussy?"

"Hallo! What's that row?" came a sleepy voice from Reilly's bed. "Faith, and who's that jabbering?"

The chums of the Fourth were silent at once.

"Dry up!" whispered Blake.

Reilly was asleep again in a minute or two.

The Fourth-Formers dressed quietly, and Blake led the way to the door. They did not speak again till they were outside in the passage.

Jack Blake closed the door softly.

"Lucky to get out without alarming the whole dorm," he said. "Of course, Gussy could be relied upon to give us away if possible."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dry up!" grunted Blake.

They went quietly along to the end of the passage. There the starlight streamed in through the high window, and revealed dimly the walls and the linoleum. There was no sign of the Terrible Three.

Blake grunted again as he looked round.

"They're not here," he said.

"Wathah not!"

"We'd better go and wake 'em, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" said Blake abruptly.

The Fourth-Formers made their way in the dim passage to the door of the Shell dormitory. Blake opened it cautiously and peered in.

"Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Quiet, ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass!"

"You'll wake the lot of them up!"

There was a chuckle in the darkness of the dormitory.

"It's all right," said the voice of Kangaroo. "We're awake! My hat, the whole family's in it! Are you getting up, Tom Merry?"

"Phew!" said Blake.

A candle-end glimmered out in the dormitory. Clifton Dane had lighted it. Half the Shell fellows were sitting up in bed, grinning. The Terrible Three sat up, too, looking very sheepish.

Blake blinked in the light.

"Well, you are an ass, Tom Merry!" he remarked. "The whole blessed dorm's awake! Why don't you kids go to sleep?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want to know what's on?" remarked Glyn.

"What's the little game?"

"What are you playing the giddy goat for at this time of night?"

Blake snorted.

"This is what comes of letting Shell chaps into the bizney!" he exclaimed. "You can go to sleep, the lot of you, and we'll go out on our lonesome."

"You'll go, eh?" said Kangaroo. "Where are you going?"

"Mind your own bizney!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a giddy expedition to the tuckshop, and they're going to keep it all to their little selves!" grinned Dane.

"Cheek!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, go to sleep!" said Blake crossly.

"Yes, go to sleep!" said Tom Merry, slipping out of bed. "Don't be inquisitive about the bizney of your elders, and you—"

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter with you, Gussy?"

"Somebody's coming!"

"Phew!"

"Cave!"

Blake looked anxiously down the passage. There was a glimmer of light and the sound of footsteps from the direction of the stairs.

"My hat! Quick!"

Blake drew his companions into the dormitory and closed the door quickly. The footsteps came along the passage towards the door.

Jack Blake breathed hard.

To be discovered out of their dormitory at that hour by a master or a prefect meant trouble. It also meant abandoning the expedition for that night.

Tom Merry glanced at the Fourth-Formers anxiously.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Somebody's coming along the passage."

"My hat!"

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"It's bound to be a blessed master or a prefect," said Blake. "It's just our luck! Get into bed; he may look in here."

"But you—"

"We'll have to get out of sight."

"Bai Jove! Let's get undah the beds, deah boys!"

"If he's suspicious he'll look there," said Monty Lowther. "You may have been missed from your dorm."

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Get into the beds," said Manners. "You can hide under the clothes."

"That's a good idea."

The footsteps in the passage were audible now to all, and they were evidently coming towards the Shell dormitory.

The Fourth-Formers popped into the nearest bed, D'Arcy slipping in with Tom Merry.

"Put that light out, Kangy!"

"Right-ho!"

The dormitory was plunged into darkness.

"Quiet!" whispered Blake. "Not a sound!"

"What-ho!"

"Put your head under the clothes, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"But I shall be suffocated, deah boy."

"You ass! Do you think anybody could look into the dorm without seeing your fat head unless you cover it up?"

"I refuse to have my head alluded to as a fat head."

"Well, put it out of sight!"

"But—"

The door was opening now, and a light was glimmering into the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry pushed D'Arcy's head down into the bed, and drew the clothes over it. The swell of St. Jim's murmured nauditly.

Knox, the prefect, looked into the dormitory.

Tom Merry groaned in spirit.

Had it been Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master, or even Mr. Linton, the wool might have been pulled over his eyes. Had it been Kildare or Darrell matters wouldn't have been so bad. But Knox was bad-tempered and fault-finding, and always glad of a chance of catching Tom Merry & Co.

Knox looked in, and then stepped in.

There was a sound of regular breathing, reinforced by Skimpole's snore, and nothing else was to be heard in the dormitory.

A sneering smile crossed the prefect's face. He switched on the electric light, and the long, lofty dormitory was flooded with the bright illumination.

Knox's glance swept up and down the room.

"You are awake," he said. "You can't take me in, you young rascals. I saw the light in the dormitory window from the quad."

There was no reply.

"Tom Merry!"

Silence.

"Lowther!"

No reply.

Knox crossed over to Tom Merry's bed. If anything against the rules had been going on in the Shell dormitory, the prefect was pretty certain that Tom Merry had had a hand in it. He stood and looked down upon the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry's face lay upon his pillow, and the half of it that Knox would see was quite placid, the eyes closed, the breathing regular.

But Knox had been a junior himself once upon a time, and he knew juniors. He wasn't in the least satisfied that Tom Merry was asleep.

"Merry!"

No answer.

"You may as well own up, Merry."

Silence!

The prefect frowned, and leaning over Tom Merry, shook him by the shoulder. Tom Merry started very naturally, and opened his eyes.

He looked at the prefect, blinking in the light.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed.

"You were not asleep, Merry."

"Warm to-night, isn't it?" said Tom Merry. "I suppose you can't sleep, and you're taking a stroll round the dormitories?"

"Merry! You were not asleep!"

"Of course, I suppose you've got some reason for coming here and disturbing us?" said Tom Merry. "Anything wrong?"

Knox breathed hard.

"I saw a light in the dormitory window," he said. "I was taking a turn in the quad, and I saw the light, only a few minutes ago."

"Really?"

"Yes. Had you a light here?"

"Yes, when we went to bed."

"Since then?" snarled Knox.

"I shall have to think it out," said Tom Merry calmly. "You had a light. You have been up to some pranks," said Knox. "I shall report this to your Form master in the morning."

"Just as you like," said Tom Merry affably. "I believe the others were awake here." "We couldn't very well sleep with you chirping like that," remarked Kangaroo. "I shall complain to Mr. Linton about being disturbed."

"So shall I," said Glyn. "It's too bad," said Monty Lowther. "When Knox has been dreaming things, he ought to go and tell 'em to the Sixth, not to the Shell."

Knox was red with anger. He was not quite certain that he had seen that light now; it might have been a reflection of the starlight on the panes of glass, and it was quite possible that he had unjustly suspected Tom Merry & Co. In that case, a report to the Form master would not be wholly a success.

He stood for some moments silent and angry. In the silence of the dormitory a half suffocated voice made itself audible from the depths of Tom Merry's bedclothes.

"Bai Jove! Has he gone?" It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

CHAPTER 4. Breaking Bounds!

TOM MERRY groaned. In another minute or less, the prefect would have gone, and all would have been safe; but Knox was not likely to go now.

He started as he heard the voice buried under the bedclothes, and then he grinned.

"Who is that?" he exclaimed. Tom Merry did not reply. But he knew the game was up, and he slipped out of bed. Knox grasped the bedclothes and threw them off. Arthur Augustus was revealed!

He sat up, blinking in the light. "G'eat Scott!" he ejaculated. Knox stared at him.

"What are you doing here, D'Arcy?" he demanded. "Sitting on Tom Merry's bed, deah boy."

D'Arcy slid off the bed, groping for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye. Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby turned out of their places of concealment. It was useless to remain in hiding longer, and they did not want to leave D'Arcy alone to bear the brunt of the punishment.

Knox's eyes glittered as he surveyed them. "Four of you," he remarked. "I might have guessed it! You will follow me to your Form master at once."

"Bai Jove!" "What did you come here for?" demanded Knox. Blake gave a shrug.

"We'll explain that to the Form master, as we're to be taken to him," he remarked. "Lead on, Macduff!"

"I say, I'm awfully sorry!" said Kangaroo. "It was all the fault of that duffer who lighted the candle!"

"Can't be helped," said Blake. "Come on, kids!"

And the Fourth-Formers disconsolately followed the prefect out of the dormitory. The light was shut off.

"Well, this is rotten!" said Tom Merry. "I suppose it's all over for to-night?"

"I suppose so," said Manners. "What's all over?" asked Gore.

"Never mind."

"It's really all your fault, Tom Merry, for being so precious close about the thing," said Kangaroo. "Why couldn't you explain?"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

And, with that polite interchange of compliments, the chums of the Shell settled down to go to sleep again.

Meanwhile, Blake & Co. followed the prefect down the passage, and down the stairs. There was a light under the door of Mr. Lathom's study.

Knox tapped at the door. "Come in!" said Mr. Lathom.

The prefect, with a spiteful glance at the juniors, led the way into the study. Little Mr. Lathom looked up in surprise, and adjusted his spectacles and looked again.

"Dear me!" he said. "What are you doing out of the dormitory at this time of night, my dear boys? What is the matter?"

"They were in the Shell dormitory, sir," said Knox. "I found them there. I've brought them here for you to deal with, sir."

"Thank you, Knox," said Mr. Lathom, who did not appear very grateful for being disturbed, however.

"Thank you."

The prefect left the study.

Mr. Lathom glanced severely at the juniors.

"How comes it that you were out of your dormitory?" he said severely.

"We—we came out, sir!" stammered Blake.

"You went to the Shell dormitory?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"For the carrying out of some foolish scheme, I suppose," said the Form master—"some absurd jape, as I think you call it?"

"Well, we had a little scheme, sir," admitted Blake.

"You must learn to abide by the rules of the school," said Mr. Lathom. "You will take fifty lines each."

"Oh, sir!"

"I shall expect those lines to-morrow. Now go back to your dormitory at once, and go to bed."

"Yes, sir."

"Close the door after you, please."

The Fourth-Formers retired.

They passed Knox in the passage, and the prefect looked disappointed, as he saw that they had evidently not been cased.

They entered the Fourth Form dormitory, and Blake closed the door.

"I suppose it's all up for to-night?" Herries remarked.

"Get into bed," said Blake.

"But—"

"Get in, and don't wake the fellows!"

"I don't see that it matters about waking the fellows now," remarked Digby. "The game's up, as far as to-night's concerned."

"Get into bed."

"All wight, deah boy!"

"Don't undress."

"Eh?"

"Then you mean—"

"Look here," said Blake. "We've got to do what our Form master tells us. He told us to get back to the dorm and go to bed."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"He didn't say anything about undressing, so we needn't undress. He didn't say anything about not getting up again, so we can get up if we like."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He didn't say anything about not breaking bounds, either, or paying a visit to the Moat House."

"So we're going?"

"Yes, as soon as Knox has left off prowling."

"Good!"

"A little later won't hurt. We'll wait a quarter of an hour, and then try again."

And the chums of Study No. 6 went to bed in their clothes, to wait for the stipulated time to pass. Eleven strokes boomed out from the clock-tower.

Blake slipped out of bed.

"Now, you fellows—"

"Bai Jove! I was almost dwoppin' off to sleep."

"Up you get!"

"Wight-ho!"

"Are we going to call Tom Merry again?" asked Digby.

"Not much!"

"But—"

"We should find the duffers all awake, and have another blessed show-up," said Blake. "Tom Merry can go and eat coke. The four of us are enough to pay a visit to the Moat House, I imagine."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, and be quiet!"

And the chums of the Fourth crept from the dormitory and down the passage. Knox had evidently gone to his room now, and the coast was clear.

Five minutes later Blake & Co. were in the quadrangle, and hurrying towards the school wall that bordered the lanes.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins & Co. to the Rescue!

"THIS way!" said Figgins.

While the juniors of the School House were falling foul of the prefect, and getting into trouble generally, Figgins & Co. were equally wakeful, and more fortunate, over in the New House.

(Continued on the next page.)

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They had left their dormitory without mishap, and reached the quadrangle, glimmering in the rays of the stars and of a moon that was just peeping over the branches of the elms.

Outside the House was quiet, and darkness, relieved only by the stars and a few lights from masters' studies glimmering into the quad.

With quiet steps the three juniors made their way towards the school wall, where stood the slanting oak which had aided them in crossing the wall more than once before.

"Here we are," said Kerr.

"Good! You go first, Fatty, as we shall have to give you a shove!"

Figgins and Kerr gave their plump chum a "bunk," and with many a gasp and grunt, Fatty Wynn reached the top of the wall and clambered upon it.

Figgins and Kerr were by the side of their chum the next minute, and the three New House juniors dropped to earth on the other side of the wall together.

They tramped down the shadowed lane. Figgins cast a glance behind at the school, but all was dark and silent there. It was clear that the New House juniors had succeeded in getting out without giving the alarm to master or prefect.

"Good luck!" said Figgins. "I'm not so sure how it will turn out at the Moat House, but we'll do our best for the prince."

"Yes, rather!"

"It will be one up against the School House, too," Figgins remarked, with a chuckle. "Tom Merry will be ready to kick himself when he hears about it. It's a bigger thing than those chaps have ever dreamed of—rescuing a prince."

Kerr wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It's awfully odd," he remarked.

"What's odd?"

"About the prince. Prince Slavonski must be a Russian, I suppose—but that chap looked English enough, and spoke good English."

"Well, I dare say he lived in England a lot. He may belong to the Russian Embassy. I shouldn't wonder if this affair gets into the papers and we get a lot of kudos."

"H'm!"

"What are you 'h'ming' about, Kerr?" demanded Figgins warily. "I suppose you are not going to throw cold water upon the whole thing?"

"Well, no, but—"

"But what?"

"Well, look here, as a matter of fact, I can't help thinking there's something fishy about it all," said the Scots junior.

"What's fishy?"

"I don't know," said Kerr frankly. "But it doesn't seem to me to be quite in order. It's too much like a giddy novel."

"Well, novels are founded on real life."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, blow your 'buts,' " said Figgins. "It's as straight as a string, in my opinion. Didn't we see the prince looking over the gate?"

"Well, yes."

"Wasn't he pulled down from inside?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't that prove it's all straight?"

"I suppose so."

"It's pretty clear that he's a prisoner, I suppose, whether he's a prince or not?" said Figgins.

Kerr nodded assent.

"Yes, that's pretty clear."

"Well, then," said Figgins, "nobody has a right to keep a prisoner in a private house in England."

"That's true."

"And we're jolly well going to rescue him!"

"Yes," said Kerr. "Look! Here's the Moat House!"

The three juniors halted.

In the dim moonlight the Moat House loomed up before them.

The high wall, topped with sharp spikes, and with the masses of ivy upon it, and the roofs and square tower within, stood out blackly against the silvered sky.

The house was dark and silent, as far as the juniors could see.

They stopped at the end of the wooden bridge over the moat. Below the planks the moat ran dark and deep, murmuring faintly in the silence of the night. It was fed by the Rhyl stream, and there was a current through the moat, that rustled the rushes growing thickly on its edges.

Over the bridge the gate was closed, and, doubtless, secured.

The juniors of the New House at St. Jim's stood hesitatingly for some moments.

"I'll try the gate," said Figgins.

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He trod lightly across the bridge, and tried the high, solid wooden gate. It would not budge a fraction of an inch.

"It's fastened!"

"Well, it was bound to be," said Kerr.

"Yes, I suppose so. You've got the rope,"

"Here it is."

"Hand it over."

Figgins uncoiled the rope, made a loop at one end, and skillfully lassoed one of the spikes along the top of the gate.

Then he climbed up the rope, and in a few moments was holding on to the spikes and looking over into the gardens of the Moat House.

Most of the windows of the house were dark, but a light streamed out through the curtains of one window, casting a broad bar of illumination into the gloom.

"They're still up, some of them," said Figgins, turning his head.

"Can you get over the spikes?"

"I think so. Give me the sacking."

The New House chums had come fully prepared for the adventure. Kerr extracted a roll of sacking from under his coat, and passed it up to Figgins. Figgins jammed several big flat corks on the tops of some of the spikes, and laid the sacking over them. The spikes were no longer dangerous, and it was easy for the active junior to pull himself over. He hung on the inner side of the gate a minute later.

"It's all serene," he whispered. "Follow your leader!"

"Right—ho!"

Figgins dropped to the ground.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn climbed the rope, and threw it over on the inner side of the gate, so that it would be available for their escape when the time came.

Then they dropped down into the garden and joined Figgins.

In the gloom of the garden the three juniors stood silent, with wildly beating hearts. It did not occur to them that their adventure was anything in the nature of a burglary, but if a policeman had found them there, there would probably have been a painful misunderstanding on the subject. But they were intensely excited, for if the prince were really kept prisoner by Bolsheviks, who knew what dangers they might be running into?

"Come on!" said Figgins abruptly.

There was no alarm, no sound from the house. The juniors, with the skill and caution they had learned as Boy Scouts, took their way towards the gloomy building without a sound.

CHAPTER 6.

Behind the Bars!

"HIST!" Figgins uttered the warning suddenly, catching hold of his chums and stopping them.

"What is it?" muttered Kerr.

"I heard something!"

"Ah!"

"Listen!"

In the silence of the night the three juniors listened intently.

There was a sound of an opening window; a sash being cautiously raised. It came from almost directly over their heads. They were close to the house now.

The juniors felt their hearts beat painfully.

Were they discovered?

If they had been seen getting over the gate—and they could see now that the moonlight was glimmering upon it, and would have shown them up in full view if anybody had been looking in that direction.

They waited, silent, with thumping hearts.

The sound ceased.

Figgins turned his glance upward.

Above him was a window, and across it he could see dark iron bars. The other windows of the house were not barred; but this one, was guarded with a crossbar and an upright of solid iron, and Figgins guessed at once that this must be the room in which the prisoner of the Moat House was confined.

A face glimmered at the window.

The eyes caught the moonlight and gleamed strangely as the occupant of the room looked downward between the bars.

That he saw the juniors was clear; but Figgins was not alarmed. He recognised the young man who had appealed for help over the gate that afternoon.

"Hallo!" muttered Figgins.

The eyes glinted at him.

"Who are you?" murmured a voice.

"I'm Figgins—the chap you spoke to over the gate, you know."

"Oh!"



As Gussy was stepping very gingerly across the moat his foot suddenly slipped on the wet plank. "Look out!" gasped Blake. "Hold him!" But it was too late! There was a big splash as Arthur Augustus fell into the muddy waters of the moat!

"We've come to help you."
 "Oh, splendid, splendid!" said the man at the window.
 "It is brave of you. You are sure you have not given the alarm?"
 "Not so far," said Figgins.
 "Good! I have been waiting for you," said the man at the window. "I hoped that you would come. I trusted that you would. You have not failed me!"
 "Not much!"
 "I will give you ten thousand roubles when I'm free!"
 "Oh rats!" said Figgins. "We don't want any tin."
 "You know who I am?"
 "Yes, Prince Slavonski."
 "Exactly!" said the other, after a moment's hesitation.
 "I am kept a prisoner here by my uncle, who—"
 Figgins uttered an exclamation.
 "Your uncle?"
 "Yes."
 "I—I thought you said the Bolsheviks," said Figgins, in surprise.
 There was a moment's pause.
 "Yes, of course, my lad. My uncle is a Bolshevik."
 "Oh, I see!"
 "Can you get the bars away from the window?" said the prince. "I cannot get out until they are gone."
 "Phew!"
 "Can't you open the door?" said Kerr.
 "It is locked and bolted."
 "What about the chimney?"
 "It is barred across."
 "Phew! It won't be easy to get those bars away, and

we haven't any files with us," said Figgins. "I—I never thought of that, you know. It would take hours to file through the bars, too."
 "It must be done!"
 "Yes, I suppose so. Give me a bunk up, Kerr!"
 "Right-ho!"
 Figgins climbed on Kerr's shoulders and reached the window-sill. He felt over the bars with his hands. They were thick and strong, and clamped to the stone window-frame, not set in the stone. It was evident, even in the moonlight, that the bars had only recently been added to the window.
 Figgins' face was very close to the prisoner's now. The latter was very eager and excited, and his panting breath fanned Figgins' cheek.
 "I think these bars could be wrenched away if I had a jemmy, or something of that sort," said Figgins doubtfully.
 "Is there anything in your room I could use? A poker might do?"
 The young man shook his head.
 "I have nothing here that would serve as a weapon."
 "No, I suppose not. Look here, we shall have to get away and come again, and I'll bring something with me to get at the bars," said Figgins.
 "No, no! You must not leave me here!" exclaimed the young man, in an agitated voice.
 "But—"
 "Do not desert me!"
 "We won't desert you," said Figgins. "Look here, I'll

buzz down to the village and get some tools, and get back here in an hour. The other fellows will wait here."

"Yes, that is a good idea."

"I'll go now."

"Hush!"

"What is it?"

"I can see a light under my door. They are coming to my room," said the young man, in a hurried whisper.

"Great Scott!"

Figgins dropped to the ground again.

The three chums stood in the shadow of the shrubbery under the window, still and silent. They saw a bar of light fall from the window above.

The window was still open, and they heard the murmur of a voice from the room.

Then the prince's voice was heard.

"Why do you disturb me?"

A low and rather pleasant voice replied, in tones too low for the juniors to catch what was said.

"Well, I want to sleep," said the young man.

"But you are not in bed."

The juniors heard the voice now. The speaker had evidently noticed that the window was open and crossed towards it.

"Well, leave me!"

"Your window is open."

"You need not be afraid—the bars are still there," said the young man bitterly. "I shall not fly."

"Come, come!"

"Why will you not set me free? I will pay you ten thousand roubles from the revenue of my estate in Moscow for my freedom!"

There was the sound of a soft laugh.

"Twenty thousand roubles, then!"

"We won't talk about that now," said the pleasant voice. "You should be in bed, my dear fellow!"

Figgins ventured a glance up to the window. He caught a glimpse of a stout man in a frock coat in the light, and he wondered if this was "Dr. Ferrers."

The window was closed down, and the juniors heard no more. A few minutes later the light was gone from the room.

Figgins & Co. stole out of the shrubbery and made their way silently towards the gate. Under the trees within the high wall they paused.

"I'll get down to Rylcombe as quickly as I can," Figgins whispered. "You fellows stay here—I won't be long."

"Right you are!" said Kerr.

"Keep on the watch for me. I'll sprint all the way. I think I should be able to manage those bars with a jemmy and a chisel."

Figgins climbed the gate and swung himself over. He threw down the sacking and the corks and the rope to Kerr in case they should be discovered and thus betray the presence of the juniors.

"Mind you wait for my whistle," he said.

"Right-ho!"

And Figgins dropped upon the wooden bridge and ran out into the lane and set off for Rylcombe at a fleet run that could have been equalled by very few other juniors at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy Gets a Ducking!

"**B**AI Jove!"

"What's the trouble?"

"Look there!"

Four juniors were tramping steadily along to the Moat House, and had just come in sight of the gloomy building, when D'Arcy halted.

He jammed his monocle into his eye with one hand and pointed towards the Moat House with the other.

"My hat!" said Blake softly.

A figure had just dropped from the gate, crossed the bridge, and darted up the lane.

The chums of the School House had only a momentary glimpse of it as it flitted away in the moonlight.

They noted that the figure was long and slim, and moved with great swiftness, but whether it was that of a man or a boy they could not tell.

It disappeared in a twinkling.

"My word!" said Digby. "That was somebody coming out of the Moat House."

"Looked like it."

"It may have been the prisoner escaping."

"That's odd," said Herries. "I don't see how anybody could get over those blessed sharp spikes. Look at them!"

Blake looked, and shook his head.

"It couldn't be done," he said.

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"Wathah not!"

"Then who was that chap?" said Digby.

"Somebody trying to get in, perhaps, and gave it up as a bad job," said Blake thoughtfully. "I don't quite catch on. Anyway, it can't have been the prisoner escaping. De Courcy couldn't get over those spikes—that's what they're there for."

"We've got to get in, you know," said Herries. "I don't see how we're to get over the spikes, either, for that matter."

Blake grinned serenely.

"Didn't I tell you I knew a way?" he demanded.

"Yaas, wathah! Go ahead, deah boy!"

"The spikes are over the gate, but they don't go along the whole of the wall," said Blake. "At the back of the house they used to depend on the moat to keep people out. Of course, it's too deep and broad to get across easily, and as the wall rises sheer from it—"

"It will be imposs. to get over there."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I've got a wheeze," said Blake. "I've been in the Moat House grounds before, ass. That was when the place was empty, and some of us went in to clear the raspberry bushes in the season. There are lots of them there, and the fruit was never gathered when the house was unoccupied—except by us. There's a way of getting over the wall at the back."

"Good!"

"Then let's get on," said Digby. "We might be spotted any minute standing here. If Crump the bobby, came along he would want to know what we were doing out of school this time of night."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This way," said Blake.

He clambered over a fence into a field along the lane and led the way through the bushes in the darkness without once falling.

He knew the ground well, and he never hesitated a moment. And the others followed him in silence, rushing through the bushes.

"Stop here," said Blake.

They stopped on the edge of a stream or running water, near the bank of the Rhyl. Arthur Augustus put on his eyeglass and looked round in surprise.

"Did you say stop here, Blake?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass, and I fail to see why we should stop here. This is not the moat!"

"It's the canal that connects the moat with the Rhyl, duffer!"

"Yaas, but—"

"And if you had the sense of a chip of wood," said Blake genially, "you'd see that there's a plank across it that the labourers use to get from one field to the other."

"Yaas; but we don't want to get from one field to the other, deah boy."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Lend a hand here."

"But, weally—"

"We're going to borrow the plank," said Blake. "That's what we're going to get across the moat with."

"Oh! Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know!"

"You wouldn't," said Blake.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Dry up, and lend a hand!"

The four juniors grasped the long, broad plank that lay across the cutting and easily lifted it from its place. They carried it between them through the bushes towards the moat, in the rear of the dark, silent house.

On the edge of the moat Blake paused and carefully surveyed the high stone wall that rose on the other side.

He gave a grunt of satisfaction as he caught sight of a patch of creepers that hung in a mass over the wall.

"That's the place."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon it.

"What is there, Blake?"

"That's where we can climb the wall. The stones are broken away, and the creepers cover it up, but it's quite easy to climb if you know the place."

"Jollay good!"

"We can push the plank out across the water, and rest the end on a chunk of stone where the wall is broken away."

"Good!" said Digby. "Sure?"

"I've done it before."

"Oh!"

The juniors pushed the plank out carefully over the water. It floated on the dark surface of the moat, and the end touched the wall opposite them. Blake scanned the base of the wall in the darkness, and at last found the right spot,

and the plank was elevated a little, with some exertion, and the end found a resting-place in an interstice of the wall.

There it lay firm, about three inches above the water. "Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That's wippin'! I'm glad I brougth you with me, Blake."

"Go hon!"

Blake led the way across the narrow bridge.

The plank was not more than twelve inches wide, and it was wet and slippery. Jack Blake trod across it with great care.

He reached the wall, and held on to the creepers.

"Mind how you go!" he whispered across the moat. "It's slippery. Mind, Gussy. You'd better let Dig hold your arm."

"Wats!"

"Look here——"

"I am quite capable of lookin' aftah myself, deah boy. I will hold Dig's arm, if he likes, if he does not feel safe."

Dig sniffed.

"I should feel a jolly lot safer without you holding my arm!" he remarked.

"Weally, Dig——"

"You'd better help Gussy, Dig," said Blake.

"I wefuse to be helped!"

"Well, be careful, then, ass!"

"I decline to be called an ass, Blake. I should be sowwy to intewwupt the pwesent pwoceedings by givin' you a thwashin', but——"

"Are you going across the plank, Gussy?" asked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! I——"

"Then you'd better start. You're keeping us waiting."

"I was explainin' to Blake——"

"You can do your explaining some other time," said Digby. "Do stop jawing, old chap, and get a move on."

"Weally, Dig——"

"Shove him into the moat if he won't move," said Blake.

"I wefuse to be shoved into the moat. I'm comin'."

"Come on, then, fathhead!"

Arthur Augustus stepped on the plank, and trod gingerly enough towards the wall. He was in the middle of the plank, when his eyeglass escaped from his eye and dropped to the end of its cord.

He made a grasp at it, and his foot slipped on the wet plank.

"Look out!" gasped Blake, as the elegant junior staggered. "Catch him!"

But it was too late.

There was a sudden splash, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared into the dark waters of the moat.

CHAPTER 8. On the Scent!

"MY hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"He's done it now!"

Arthur Augustus came up in a moment, and grasped the plank. His face, thick with mud, looked decidedly peculiar in the moonlight as he blinked at his chums.

"Ow! Yow! Gwoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could not help it.

At the risk of alarming the inmates of the Moat House that burst of merriment escaped them. The aspect of the most elegant junior at St. Jim's was irresistible.

"Bai Jove! Pway help me out, deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know——"

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "I should like you to do that again, Gussy! It's as good as a circus."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Help him out," said Blake, wiping his eyes. "Oh dear! I know Gussy will be the death of me some day!"

Digby and Herries, chuckling, crept along the plank, and helped the swell of St. Jim's to clamber upon it.

There was a terrible squelching as the soaked junior stood upright.

"Ow!" he mumbled. "I feel howwid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My boots are full of beastlay mud."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm drenched to the beastlay skin, you know."

"Oh dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I attahly fail to see anythin' to laugh at. I wegard the whole mattah as bein' a sewious one, and not in the least comic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally——"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "You can't stay there all

(Continued on next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Fine footballs are awarded every week for the two best jokes received, and a half-a-crown is paid for every other joke that appears in this column.

COMPLIMENTARY.

Barber: "You are getting a bit thin on the top, sir. Might I ask if you have tried my famous hair restorer?"

Customer: "No; it's not due to that!"

A football has been awarded to L. Hickman, 7, First Avenue, Lancing, Sussex.

MORE SCOTCH!

Scotsman: "Hoo much do ye charge to tak' folk across by the ferry?"

Ferryman: "A halfpenny each, sir."

Scotsman: "And hae ye nae excursions?"

A football has been awarded to V. Sargent, 23, Bristol Avenue, Levenshulme, Manchester.

HA, HA, HA!

Teacher: "Jones, do you know what a laughing hyena is like?"

Jones: "No, sir."

Teacher: "Then look at me, and listen!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Faulkes, Claremont, Stanley Road, Hinckley, Leicester.

AWAITING REPLIES.

Passer-by: "Have you hooked any fish yet, sonny?"

Boy: "No; but I've dropped them a line!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Fairbairn, 42, Eastern Avenue, Reading.

GETTING HIS OWN BACK!

Judge: "I think I have seen your face before."

Prisoner: "Yes: I taught your daughter to sing."

Judge: "Ten years!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Barnes, 122, Clonmore Street, Southfields, London, S.W.18.

BRAINLESS.

Tom: "Our debate is going to be a battle of brains."

Tim: "How brave you are to go unarmed!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Brownjohn, 103, Battenburg Avenue, North End, Portsmouth.

A LONG LAUGH.

George: "I was historical with laughter."

Jack: "You mean hysterical."

George: "No, no—I laughed for ages!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Fulford, Trueman's Heath, Hollywood, near King's Heath.

FATHER'S FAILING.

Father: "I wonder what would have happened if when I was a boy I asked as many questions as you do now?"

Son: "Perhaps you'd have been able to answer some of mine!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to I. Wright, 43, Hall Road, Smethwick, Staffs.

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night, Gussy. I think you had better cut back to St. Jim's and get yourself dried, and we'll attend to this affair with-out you."

"I decline to entertain the suggestion for a moment."

"You may catch cold, you know."

"Wats!"

"You'd better cut back," said Digby. "I think——"

"I refuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"Well, come on!" said Blake resignedly. "Don't tumble into the water again, old chap. There's no time for it now."

"Do you think I tumbled in on purpose, you uttah ass?" demanded Arthur Augustus, in a suppressed voice.

"I really don't know why you did it. Why do you do these things?"

"You feahful ass!"

"My word!" said Digby. "Gussy's dug up some fearful smells out of the moat. I'd rather you keep a bit farther off, if you don't mind, Gussy."

"Weally, Dig——"

"Talk about ancient kippers," said Blake, sniffing. "Gussy could give them all points and beat them hollow!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look here! Don't you come too near."

"I——"

"Get off!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Stand out there on the plank till we've got over the wall," said Blake. "You've no right to dig up these awful smells and plant them on us."

"I refuse!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" said Blake. "Scrape yourself down while I'm climbing the wall."

Blake groped in the creepers and began to climb.

The wall was broken and ragged here, the openings in the shattered stonework being concealed by the heavy creepers.

The wall was easy to climb, and in a couple of minutes Blake was at the top.

There were no spikes here, and the junior sat on the wall, astride, and lent a hand to Digby and Herries to climb.

Then D'Arcy held up his hand for aid.

Blake sniffed.

"Look here, Gussy, hadn't you better stay out here and keep watch?" he asked. "You will be able to whistle if there's danger, and——"

"I refuse to stay out here and keep watch."

"It will be safer, and——"

"Pway help me up!"

"You're so awfully whiffy, you know."

"I wegard you as a wottah, Blake! Help me up."

"Well, if you must, you must!" said Blake. "I really think you might be more careful in the way you pick up scents, though."

And he dragged the swell of St. Jim's to the top of the wall.

Arthur Augustus was certainly odorous. There was a slow current through the moat, but the water was almost stagnant, and as it was never cleaned out, huge masses of fungus and smelly mud had accumulated. D'Arcy had covered himself with it, and the scent was decidedly unpleasant.

It was not surprising that his chums preferred to give him a wide berth.

Blake clambered down the inner side of the wall.

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy followed him.

Only D'Arcy lost his footing as he descended, and landed on the grass with a bump and a gasp.

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurt?" asked Blake,

"It's nothin' of any consequence, deah boy."

"Come on, then!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake peered towards the house.

It loomed up among the trees, black and gloomy. There was not a single light to be seen in any of the rear windows. Blake led the way towards the house.

The rescuers were on the spot now, and the next step was to effect an entrance into the house and find the room where Vernon de Courcy was imprisoned.

That was likely to prove more difficult.

The juniors halted near the house and observed it. Suddenly, from the darkness, came a brilliant glare of light.

Blake uttered a suppressed exclamation.

It was a lantern flashing through the gloom as a man came round the corner of the building from the front.

"Cover, quick!" whispered Blake.

The rays of the lantern were not turned upon the juniors; but, if they had been, the quartet would have been shown up at once.

Blake plunged into the rugged thickets that grew by the

house wall, and the others followed him quickly, breathing hard.

In the dense shrubbery they were concealed, and they lay low, waiting with beating hearts.

The lantern came nearer.

"Hark!" whispered Blake.

A voice was audible in the garden.

"In this direction, you think, Larking?"

"Yes, sir," said a deep, gruff voice.

Blake peered out of the shrubbery.

Two men had halted close to the thicket, and in the lantern light he could see them both.

One was a stout gentleman with a fat face, in a frock coat, with the unmistakable stamp of a prosperous medical man about him.

The other was rougher in appearance, and might have been a porter or a lodgekeeper, evidently a servant of some sort.

This man was holding the lantern, and he threw the rays round in every direction, peering into the gloom on all sides. Blake popped back into cover as the light swept towards him.

The stout gentleman was peering to and fro through his glasses.

"Are you sure, Larking?"

"I know I heard somethin', sir."

"What sort of a sound was it?"

"Sounded like somebody laughin' and talkin', sir, and then I heard a bump."

"H'm! It is very strange. What?"

The two men came nearer to the shrubbery, and the porter cast the lantern light over the thicket. The juniors scarcely breathed.

"It seemed to me that there was something afoot when I went into my lodger's room," the stout gentleman remarked. "He had the window open, and I thought I heard him speaking as I came to his room. He might have been talking to himself, but——"

"Looks to me as if there's someone in the grounds, sir."

"Make a thorough search, Larking!"

"Yes, sir."

"Dear me!" went on the stout gentleman, sniffing. "What a curious smell there is here. Do you notice it, Larking?"

Larking sniffed.

"Yes, sir."

"Is it the decaying vegetation? The gardens have been very much neglected, I know. I shall have them seen to if I enlarge my establishment here, as I expect to do."

The juniors breathed hard.

They knew very well what scent it was that had caught the nose of the occupants of the Moat House. It was the scent of the mud that D'Arcy had raked up from the depths of the moat.

Would it lead to their discovery?

"I can't make the smell out, sir," said Larking. "I think I'll take a look through the shrubbery, sir."

"Do, by all means. I will stand here."

Blake gave an inward groan.

All was up now.

Larking came striding into the shrubbery, casting the light of the lantern to and fro, and he uttered a sharp exclamation as he caught sight of the crouching forms.

"I've found 'em, sir—— Oh!"

Larking broke off suddenly. Blake, with the spring of a tiger, was upon him.

CHAPTER 9.

Hunted!

JACK BLAKE had acted suddenly and without stopping to reflect. He bounded straight at the porter, and Larking, powerfully built man as he was, reeled back under the sudden and unexpected attack, and crashed to the ground.

The lantern smashed into the shrubs, and was instantly extinguished.

There was a sharp cry from the stout gentleman.

"Good heavens! What is it? What is it, Larking?"

"Help, doctor!"

Blake rolled the porter into the bushes, and tore himself free. But the man was grasping at him, and he was dragged down again.

"Help, you chaps!" he gasped.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Pile on!"

The juniors piled on.

Larking was wrenched away from Blake and sent whirling into the bushes by three strong and determined pairs of hands.

(Continued on page 14.)

GOOD NEWS! MANY MAGNIFICENT FREE GIFTS ON THE WAY!



Let the Editor be your pal! Write to him to-day, addressing your letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, 'chums! Once again the GEM has "turned up trumps"! FREE GIFTS are on the way! Isn't it a wonderful surprise for you all? Can you beat it? I'll say you can't—nor our coming Super Free Gifts! They're simply the best ever given away with any boy's paper. Your Editor has just completed all arrangements for this colossal Free Offer to his countless chums, and the result, I can assure you, will be well worth waiting for.

But what are the Free Gifts? I can hear you all asking. Well, I want the Free Gifts to come as a grand surprise, so I am going to keep the nature of them a close secret for the present. Let me warn you early, however, that there will be a big rush on future numbers of the GEM, so if you have not a standing order with your newsagent, please place one right away. Incidentally, you will do your pals a good turn if you put them wise to the good news.

"ROLLING IN MONEY!"

This is the title of the next ripping yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's. It tells that some fellow has suddenly come into a lot of wealth. Who is it? It's our Gussy. His father, Lord Eastwood, thinks he is spending too much, so he hopes to cure him by opening a bank account for him, and making him shoulder the responsibility of a large sum of money! What does Arthur Augustus do? That you will discover when you read this very amusing story. Martin Clifford has treated this original theme in a way calculated to produce the maximum of schoolboy fun and adventure of the very best type. And the fact that Gussy is in the leading role is quite sufficient indication that there is not a dull line throughout the yarn.

"ST. FRANK'S VERSUS FOO CHOW!"

The next powerful chapters of our popular serial sees the St. Frank's chums homeward bound—but they have yet to experience the biggest thrill of their long holiday trip! Foo Chow is not yet done with! He's out for revenge, and the form it takes will leave you breathless with excitement. On no account must you miss the next thrill-packed instalment.

As I fully anticipated, Mountie Mick has become a great favourite with all readers. Shown in next week's set of pictures, you will see what happens when he goes out after a missing companion, and runs into as thrilling an adventure as he has experienced so far.

To round off this grand programme, there will be another column of readers' prize-winning jokes, for which the Jester awards footballs and half-a-crowns.

A GREAT NEW ST. FRANK'S STORY.

Recently, one of the most frequent visitors to my office has been Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks, and we have spent many hours in close confabulation. The reason? What else than the planning of a great new St. Frank's story, with which we intend to make a real sensation. Mr. Brooks, in his enthusiasm, vows that it will "lick creation," so that I think we shall be quite safe in looking forward to something quite out of the ordinary. As I write these words, he is hard at work on the opening chapters of this super story, and I confess I am burning with impatience to get the manuscript into my hands.

JUST A REMINDER.

Don't forget about the two wonder annuals which are now on sale—"The

Holiday Annual" and "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories." The former contains many ripping school stories and thrilling adventure yarns, as well as a host of other fascinating features, and it sells at the reduced price of five shillings. "The Popular Book" is a big budget of big-thrill adventure stories staged in all parts of the world, and its price is two shillings and sixpence; but it now has 192 pages. Don't miss these two grand books, chums.

THE IMPERIAL FILM CLUB.

Mr. F. W. Minde, the Hon. Sec. of this Club, 100, Dalston Lane, London, E.8, wishes it to be known that the Club is giving a dance at the Portman Rooms, Baker Street, W.1, on Saturday, October 25th. Tickets, 2s. 6d. each member, 3s. non-members, may be obtained from him at the above address. Mr. F. W. Minde has for years been a keen reader of the St. Frank's stories.

THE LARGEST PEARL.

George Edwards, of Hampstead, writes to ask me which is the largest pearl in the world. Did you think you had got me with that one, George? To the best of my knowledge, the largest pearl in the world is the "Queen" pearl which was found in America in 1857, and was then sold to the Empress Eugenie for five hundred pounds. This pearl, George, is four inches in circumference and weighs one thousand eight hundred grains. Its value to-day is estimated at about four million pounds!

SITTING IN A BLAZING CABIN.

The real confidence of a man in the absolute safety of his own invention was shown the other day when Major von Rollegem, a Belgian, tested a new invention which he has just completed. This consists of a fireproof material, and the major claims that any box or cabin lined with this material will remain unharmed even in the fiercest blaze, and, which is even more important, the temperature inside the box or cabin will remain normal. To test this, first of all a box containing mail, and lined with the new fireproof material, will be placed in a fire, and then the major himself will sit in the cabin of an aeroplane which has been lined with the material, while the plane is drenched with petrol and set on fire. What nerve!

THE EDITOR.

G. Butler, 82, Queen's Head Street, London, N., wishes to hear from readers of the Companion Papers who are collectors of the old issues.

S. A. Rieveley, 123, Kingsway, Widsnes, Lancs, wants to hear from stamp collectors.

Jack Gale, 40, Stanley Park Road, Wallington, Surrey, wants to hear from readers who collect film stars' portraits and autographs.

Miss Rose Slaek, 25, Willow Drive, Handsworth, Sheffield, 9, wants girl correspondents overseas.

Ernest T. Franks, Rosemount, Jugiong, via Coolac, N.S.W., Australia, wants members for his Tiger Correspondence Club; would also like to hear from readers keen on the old series of "The Nelson Lee."

Lance A. Wharidall, 7, Devon Street, Mile End, Adelaide, Australia, wants to correspond with readers interested in back numbers.

Miss Lorna E. Nielsen, Main Avenue, Wilston, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wants girl correspondents who will exchange snaps, magazines, etc.

Len Nielsen, Main Avenue, Wilston, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wants correspondents; ages 20 to 22.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,341.

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal post your notice to The GEM LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

David Whiteford, Langerags Farm, Glenfield, Paisley, Scotland, wants a correspondent who is interested in stamp collecting and books.

Miss Elsie Goddard, 5, Rectory Road, Hornsey, London, N.8, wants girl correspondents in France, Germany, and other European countries, also Channel Islands, U.S.A., and South America; ages 19 to 20, interested in films, etc.

H. Crabtree, 17, Marlborough Avenue, Pasture Road, Goolle, Yorks, wants correspondents in South Africa and Australia.

T. M. Carthew, c/o Isolation Hospital, Whipton, near Exeter, Devon, wants to hear from readers overseas.

L. Kirby, 9, Blackburn Avenue, Bridlington, East Yorks, wants correspondents interested in Meccano, model farms, or any hobby.

THE PRISONER OF THE MOAT HOUSE!

(Continued from page 12.)

The doctor was hurrying towards them, peering in the darkness, and he walked right upon Larking and stumbled over him.

In a moment the porter's grasp was fastened upon him, the excited man taking him for one of his assailants in the darkness.

The doctor, under the same impression that he was grappling with an enemy, fastened upon Larking, and grappled with him fiercely.

The rustling in the bushes, and the fierce and hurried breathing of the two men warned the juniors of what was taking place.

Jack Blake gave a breathless chuckle.

"Come on," he muttered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They plunged away into the bushes. As they went they heard the excited and gasping voice of the doctor.

"Surrender, you scoundrel!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Is it you, Larking?"

"Is it you, sir?"

"Bless my soul! I—I thought I had seized one of the scoundrels—"

"I thought I 'ad 'old of one of them, sir."

"Dear me! They will be escaping!" exclaimed the doctor, rising hastily to his feet. "Light the lantern, Larking."

"Ave you got any matches, sir?"

"No, no."

"I ain't, either, sir. I'll run into the house and get a light."

Blake and his comrades, chuckling softly, plunged away, and finding themselves in a gravel path, ran quickly round the house.

Here, safe for a moment, at all events, they stopped to breathe.

"Bai Jove, this is wotten!" Arthur Augustus muttered.

"We've given the alarm!"

"You have, you mean!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"It was your blessed smelliness that gave us away!"

"Weally—"

"Never mind that now," said Herries. "The question is, what are we going to do? They'll be hunting for us now we've given the alarm."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They're bound to find us if they hunt long enough," said Blake, "and goodness knows what will happen! They may have revolvers."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Perhaps we'd better slide out while we've got the chance," said Digby.

"Weally, Digbay, I wegard that suggestion as wotten! We came here to rescue Vernon de Courcy from his wicked uncle."

"We shall want rescuing ourselves soon!" growled Digby.

"We're not going!" said Blake decidedly. "Not unless we have to, anyway. Look here they are certain to search the grounds from end to end."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then there's only one place where we've got a chance."

"Where's that?"

"In the house."

"Bai Jove, in the house!"

"Yes," said Blake resolutely; "we came here to get in, and we're going to do it—and it's the last place they'll look for us. Besides, we may have a

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MICK O THOMPSON

OUR THRILLING PICTURE-STORY



"Help, help!" Mick o' the Mounted, on his way to round-up some horse rustlers, heard that piercing cry, and saw that an Indian was being swept along in the treacherous current of the river.

Ahead lay the rapids—the Indian would be whirled to his death! Mick raced along the bank and, taking off his tunic and hat, clambered on to a low tree-branch which overhung the river.



To Mick's dismay, he missed the trail. But dismay turned to excitement when, from the ridge of a canyon, he saw below him three men guarding some horses. "The rustlers!" exclaimed Mick.

Cautiously he made his way down the steep side of the canyon, only to slip and dislodge some small rocks. In a moment the rustlers had turned and seen him. "Stick up your hands!" cried one.



A thunder of hoofs as the terrified horses bore down upon the helpless Mountie! Then, from the side of the canyon, darted a lithe figure—and just in time Eagle Eye dragged Mick to safety!

Hidden behind a big boulder, the Indian cut Mick's bonds, while two rustlers dash into an opening in the side of the canyon, thinking the Mountie and his rescuer had gone that way.

(Another nerve-tugging)

MOUNTIED!

OF THE WILD WEST!



h legs clamped tightly to the branch, swung head downwards, arms outstretched. Nearer swept the Indian, and Mick felt a terrific wrench as the Indian managed to clutch one of his hands.



"Eagle Eye very grateful—you save life of Eagle Eye!" said the Indian, who was a young brave. "Me not forget!" But Mick only laughed, and when the Indian had recovered, rode on his way.



Two of the rustlers covered Mick with their guns; the third whirled a lasso and d him. "Guess we know what to do interfering Mounties!" hissed the man with the rope.



Bound hand and foot, Mick was thrown to the ground. Crack, crack! Revolver shots rent the air. The rustlers were deliberately stampeding the horses, and Mick would be trampled to death!



The third rustler came running up and right into Eagle Eye's fist as the Indian lunged from behind the boulder. "Ugh!" the man grunted and rolled over, while Mick seized his fallen gun.

(Picture of Mick next week.)



The tables were turned now. The two men in the cave surrendered and were roped up with their pal. Mick had captured the rustlers—and Eagle Eye had repaid his debt to the Mounties!

chance of finding De Courcy and setting him free while they're buzzing through the gardens."

"Yaas, that's poss."

"Come on, then!"

Blake's idea was a bold one, but the juniors did not hesitate. Blake led the way towards the house. The door was open, and a blaze of light came from the lighted hall into the garden. They saw Larking issue from the door with a lighted lantern in his hand, and hurry round the house towards the spot where he had left the doctor.

"Shall we dodge in at the door, deah boys?" asked D'Arcy.

"No, ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"There's certain to be somebody else inside, duffer!"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"Of course you didn't!" growled Blake.

"We're going to get in at a window, and here's one that will suit us."

Blake paused close to the side wall of the house. A window above was open at the top, and the room within was dark. A good many of the house windows were open at the top, doubtless to air the empty rooms.

There was a rainpipe up the wall beside the window. Blake grasped it.

"Give me a bunk up and I'll try it," he said.

Blake was bunked up.

He climbed the rainpipe easily enough; it was a large, rough one, fastened to the wall with great iron clamps, that afforded him an extra hold at intervals.

In a couple of minutes he was upon the window-sill, and had pushed up the lower sash of the window.

He stepped into the darkness of the room.

The other juniors followed him quickly, clambering one after another into the little window. Blake shut down the sash.

"Look!" he whispered.

Round the building came a gleam of light. It was the lantern in the hands of Larking. The doctor followed him.

They passed on, searching the gardens, without a glance upward at the window from which the chums of St. Jim's were looking.

The light vanished.

Jack Blake drew a deep breath of relief.

"All serene!" he muttered.

"Hark!"

There was a shout in the garden, followed by a crashing of bushes and scuttling of feet, and all the sounds of a struggle.

"Bai Jove! What's happening, deah boys?"

"Sounds as if they have caught some other trespassers," said Blake. "I wonder who they are?"

Little did the four School House juniors guess who they were!

CHAPTER 10.

The Wrong Party!

KERR and Fatty Wynn, in cover among the trees near the gate, had been patiently awaiting the return of Figgins, when the sound of voices and the flashing of the lantern warned them that something was afoot.

That the School House chums were at the Moat House they had not the faintest idea, and they watched the moving light in wonder and with some anxiety. Kerr guessed soon enough that the occupants of the Moat House were searching the gardens.

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"My hat!" he exclaimed. "This is rotten, Fatty!"

"Eh?" said Fatty Wynn.

"We're in a fix."

"Yes, we've been waiting a long time," said Fatty Wynn. "The worst of it is, I'm famished! Got any toffee about you?"

"You porpoise! We're in danger!"

"I shall be in danger of getting ill if I don't have some supper!" said Fatty Wynn. "I don't see what other danger there is."

"Look at that light!"

"It's a lantern," said Wynn.

Kerr sniffed.

"Yes, ass, it's a lantern, and they're searching the grounds."

"Phew! I don't see why. We haven't made a sound."

"Perhaps Slavonski has given us away somehow. Hang it all, they're coming in this direction!"

"By George!" said Fatty Wynn, waking to a sense of his peril and Kerr's at last, and forgetting for the moment that he was hungry. "They'll bowl us out!"

Kerr watched the moving light.

The searchers were certainly coming towards the clump of trees.

If they searched the trees the discovery of the New House chums could not fail to take place.

There was no other cover into which they could dodge near at hand without going out into the open, when the moonlight would infallibly betray them.

They could only wait in tense anxiety.

The light came nearer.

At that moment, as if by fatality, came a sound of a faint whistle outside the gate.

Figgins had returned.

Kerr gritted his teeth.

The whistle sounded low, but clear, through the deep stillness. It evidently reached the ears of the two men who were searching, for the movement of the light was suddenly arrested. The two men stood still and listened.

Kerr dared not reply to the signal whistle.

To do so would have been to betray himself immediately to the searchers, who were not a dozen paces away from the clump of trees.

Figgins was evidently puzzled by the silence.

He repeated the whistle, a little more loudly this time.

The light moved on towards the gate. Kerr caught a glimpse of the stout doctor and the porter.

"It is a signal," he heard the doctor say.

"That's certain, sir."

"It is an accomplice outside the gate."

"Looks like it."

The whistle sounded again.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn remained silent. The doctor and his servant were close to them now, and they hardly dared breathe.

There was a sound of a heavy body against the gate. Figgins had made a spring up, and caught the top of the gate, between the spikes, in his hands.

Hanging on by his hands, Figgins peered through the spikes into the gloom of the garden, trying to make out his chums there.

The gleam of the lantern dazzled his eyes.

"Kerr!" he whispered. "You ass! What have you got a light for?"

There was no reply.

"Throw up the rope, Kerr! I can't get in over the spikes without the corks and the sacking, too!"

The doctor gave a soft chuckle.

He stepped quickly to the gate and unbolted it, and threw it open. In a moment Figgins was swinging in on the opening gate before he knew what was happening. He was still half under the impression that it was Kerr there, having as yet no suspicion that the Moat House was alarmed.

"I've got you, my fine fellow!"

Figgins gasped.

He dropped from the top of the gate, and rolled on the ground, and at the same moment the doctor seized him.

Figgins struggled hard.

He grasped the fact at last that the Moat House was awake and alert, and that he had run into the hands of the enemy.

"Rescue!" he shouted. "Kerr! Wynn! New House to the rescue!"

Kerr and Wynn were already dashing from the trees.

All was discovered now, and they had no thought but to rescue Figgins and escape. The rescue of Prince Slavonski would have to wait.

Figgins fought hard for his freedom, but the doctor, stout as he was, was a muscular man, and the athletic junior was no match for him.

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Figgins was held in a grasp of iron, in spite of his struggles.

"I've got you," said the doctor coldly. "You may as well give in."

"Rescue!" shouted Figgins.

Kerr and Wynn rushed up. Larking had placed the lantern on the ground, and he met the rush of the New House juniors.

Fatty Wynn was bowled over by a drive on the chest, and fell with a bump on the ground, every ounce of breath knocked out of his plump body.

Nothing daunted, Kerr went for the burly porter, hitting out fiercely; but a powerful grasp was laid on him, and the lad was hurled down beside Fatty Wynn.

Then Larking collared them both, and each was pinned to the ground under the weight of a powerful knee.

"Gr-r-roo!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "M-mind, you ass! You'll suffocate me!"

Larking grinned.

"I've got them, sir!"

"And I've got the other one," said the doctor grimly.

Figgins gave in at last.

He was an athlete, but no match for a muscular man, and his chums being prisoners now, there was no chance of rescue.

The struggle ceased, and the sounds to which Blake & Co. had been listening with intent ears, died away.

The four School House juniors wondered what had happened, but they little dreamed that Figgins & Co. were so close at hand.

Had they known it, it is extremely probable that they would have forgotten the intended rescue of Vernon de Courcy, and rushed to the rescue of Figgins & Co.

But they did not know it.

The three New House juniors, helpless to escape, gasped for breath in the grasp of their captors.

The doctor picked up the lantern, holding Figgins with the other hand. He flashed the light upon the boys.

Then he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"They are not burglars!" he exclaimed. "They are only boys!"

"Burglars!" ejaculated Figgins. "You rotter!"

The doctor smiled.

"I think the mistake was natural," he said. "You seem to be schoolboys, by your dress, but this is hardly the time and place for you to be out. What are you doing here?"

"Trying to get my breath," said Figgins.

The doctor laughed. It was a pleasant laugh, and it struck Figgins what an awful villain he must be to be able to laugh so pleasantly, when he was a wicked uncle, and in league with Bolsheviks.

"You are pleased to be humorous," said the doctor. "I suppose you came here for some reason."

"I think I know, sir," said Larking.

"Oh, you know, do you?"

"They belong to the school, sir—the big school up the road. The kids used to come here and take the fruit when the house was empty, sir. They mayn't have known there was anybody living here now."

"Ah, that is probably it!"

"I think so, sir," said Larking.

The doctor looked keenly at Figgins.

"Is that the case, my boy?" he asked.

"Find out!" said Figgins.

The doctor frowned.

"That is not the way to speak to me, my lad," he said reprovingly. "I am Dr. Ferrers, and the tenant of this house."

"I know that, and I know you!" said Figgins warmly.

"Indeed! I do not know you."

"Don't jaw too much, Figgy," said Kerr.

"Right-ho! Mum's the word."

"I really do not understand you," said Dr. Ferrers, puzzled. "I suppose you boys came here for what you would call a lark?"

The juniors were silent.

"Come, answer me!"

"I've nothing to say," said Figgins doggedly.

"I suppose you know," said Dr. Ferrers slowly, "that I could hand you over to the police, if I chose, for breaking into my premises like this?"

Figgins' heart thumped. It had not occurred to him before, but what the doctor said was perfectly correct.

"I shall not do so," went on Dr. Ferrers, much to the juniors' relief. "I should not like to punish a foolish, boyish freak so severely. I think, however, that it will be my duty to acquaint your headmaster with what has happened. What is your name?"

"Figgins."

"You belong to the school—St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come here?"

Figgins did not speak. He did not intend to give it away that they had come for the rescue of Prince Slavonaki. That, above all, must be kept very dark, if they were to have a chance of rescuing the prince.

"Who is your headmaster?" asked Dr. Ferrers, after a pause, during which he waited in vain for a reply from Figgins.

"Dr. Holmes."

"Very well, I shall call upon Dr. Holmes in the morning," said Dr. Ferrers. "I think it is my duty to do so."

"Just as you like," said Figgins doggedly.

"I do not see what else I can do. Why will you not explain to me exactly why you came here?" said the doctor. "If it was a boyish freak, I should not wish to be hard upon you. If you were looking for the fruit, I would allow you to come in daylight and fill your pockets, if you liked."

"My hat!" said Fatty Wynn. "That's a jolly decent idea, Figg! Look here! I believe he's a good sort, and not such a villain, after all."

The doctor started.

"Shut up, Fatty!" said Kerr.

"Yes, but—"

"Shut up, you fathead!"

"So you thought me a villain?" said the doctor. "I am a stranger in this locality. But may I ask you what you have heard about me?"

"You may ask," said Figgins grimly.

"But you will not tell me?"

"No."

"I do not understand you," said the stout gentleman. "You are very strange boys, indeed. You may go, and I will consider whether to call upon your headmaster. I do not desire to get you severely punished, but, at the same time, I cannot have my house disturbed at night like this, and myself insulted. Let them go, Larking."

And the three juniors were bundled over the bridge, and the gates closed and locked and bolted behind them.

They went out into the road in dismay.

"Well, this is a ripping ending, I must say," growled Kerr.

Figgins grunted.

"How did you come to give the alarm?" he asked.

"We didn't!"

"Then how—?"

"I don't know. They started searching the grounds; something else must have alarmed them, or else it was a guilty conscience," said Kerr. "Perhaps they're always on their guard in case of a rescue, and they may search the grounds every night."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"We'd better get back to St. Jim's, I suppose," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm awfully hungry, and—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins.

"Well, there's nothing more to be done here to-night, I suppose?"

"Fatty's right," said Kerr. "Let's get back."

Figgins grunted again.

"Oh, all right!"

And they tramped disconsolately back through the dark lane towards St. Jim's. Figgins & Co. had certainly had hard luck. Blake and his chums had given the alarm, and Figgins & Co. had taken the consequences. And Dr. Ferrers and his man, as they returned to the Moat House, had no suspicion that they had discovered the wrong party, and that the other party were, even at that moment, within the walls of the Moat House.

CHAPTER 11.

Fatty Wynn is Fallen Upon!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Groo-oo!"

"Merry—Tom Merry!"

"Yaw-aw!"

"Tom Merry! Wake up!"

Tom Merry opened his eyes and blinked round him. A man holding a lamp was standing by his bed and shaking him by the shoulders.

It was Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form, and Knox, the prefect, was near him. Tom Merry sat up in bed and stared at them in amazement.

"Mr. Lathom!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Wake up, Merry!"

"I'm awake, sir!"

"I want to ask you a question, Merry," said the little Form master.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where Blake is?"

"Blake!"

"Yes; and Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries."

(Continued on next page.)

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"Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries," murmured Tom Merry dazedly.

"Yes. Do you know where they are?"

"In bed, I suppose, sir."

"They are not in bed."

"No!"

"Listen to me, Merry," said Mr. Lathom severely, as the hero of the Shell looked at him in blank astonishment. "Knox reported these four juniors to me for being in the Shell dormitory after lights out. Before going to bed I looked into the Fourth Form dormitory, to make sure that they were in their proper places. Their beds were empty."

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

The truth rushed into his mind in a flash.

Blake & Co. had not gone to bed, after all, but had left St. Jim's upon the expedition to the Moat House by themselves without calling the Terrible Three again.

"They are gone somewhere," said Mr. Lathom. "As they came to the Shell dormitory in the first place, I suspected they might be here—and Knox thought so."

"I quite expected to find them here, sir," said Knox.

"Quite so."

"They're not here, sir," said Tom Merry.

"No; I can see that they are not now," said Mr. Lathom.

"The question is, where are they? They are not in their dormitory."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Do you know where they went after they left this dormitory, Merry?"

"I thought Knox took them to your study, sir."

"Yes, yes; but after that?"

"I suppose they went back to bed, sir."

"Then you have seen nothing of them since?"

"Nothing, sir."

"They have not been back here?"

"Certainly not."

"Thank you, Merry. It is very strange—I shall wait up for them," said Mr. Lathom, "and I shall have something very plain to say to them!"

And he left the Shell dormitory with the lamp.

Half the other fellows were awake now, and Monty Lowther and Manners were sitting up in bed.

"Well, this is a nice go!" said Manners. "The young bounders went out, after all!"

"And without calling us," said Lowther.

"Like their cheek!"

"Yes, rather!"

"They've been bowled out," said Tom Merry. "It will mean an awful row. It's a serious business getting out of the school at night. And a chap generally does it for a rotten motive! And Blake can't very well explain the facts."

"My hat! No, it will be rotten for them!"

"Still, it was like their cheek to go without us," said Lowther. "It's just what they might have expected—Fourth Form duffers trying to manage a thing like this by themselves!"

"Just so," agreed Manners.

"What the dickens is it all about?" demanded Kangaroo.

"What's the row?"

"Don't be inquisitive, old son, and you'll hear no fairy tales," said Monty Lowther.

"Exactly," said Tom Merry. "It's not our secret, as a matter of fact."

"Oh! Are you getting up?"

"Yes."

"Going out?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going to sleep," said Kangaroo, with a yawn.

"Best thing you can do," said Manners. "You've made bother enough by staying awake. I think."

"Oh, rats!" said the Cornstalk.

And he closed his eyes and was sleeping in three seconds.

The Terrible Three dressed themselves.

Until Mr. Lathom woke Tom Merry to question him the chums of the Shell had no suspicion that Blake & Co. had gone on with the adventure, after all. But now that they knew the Fourth-Formers were out, the Terrible Three meant to be out, too.

"They were firmly convinced that the party from Study No. 6 would make a mess of the matter without their valuable assistance, for one thing."

But besides that, there was their natural determination not to be left out.

Tom Merry opened the dormitory door and peered out. The passage was dark.

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry.

The three juniors stepped into the passage, and Tom closed the door softly. He crept to the head of the stairs and listened. There was a light below.

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"Careful!" he muttered. "Lathom's going to sit up and wait for Blake—nice for Blake when he comes in."

"Yes, rather!"

"Still, we can warn them, and they can get in at the back and go to their dorm, without Lathom seeing them, perhaps."

Lowther chuckled.

"It would be rather funny for him to sit up all night and find them in the dorm, in the morning," he remarked. "He'd think he'd dreamed it all."

Tom Merry laughed softly.

"We shall have to get out at the back, and without going downstairs," he remarked. "The rainpipe from the bathroom is the place."

"Right-ho!"

The chums crept away with silent feet. To descend from the bath-room window to the ground was not difficult, and in a few minutes they were standing under the stars.

Tom Merry led the way to the slanting oak.

Several windows were still glimmering with light into the gloom of the quadrangle, but there was no one to see the chums of the Shell as they fitted away.

One after another they climbed the slanting oak to the top of the school wall. In the shadow of the big tree there was no glimmer of moonlight—the darkness was intense.

Tom Merry crossed the wall, and, hanging on with his hands for a moment, dropped into the road.

The drop was not a formidable one, and Tom Merry expected to land upon his feet, as he had often done in making that drop before.

But the unexpected happened.

Instead of dropping down to the road his feet landed upon something soft, and he went wildly reeling, to crash into the road on his back.

"Yosh-osh!"

There was a yell from the soft object he had dropped upon.

"Great Scott!" muttered Lowther, from the top of the wall. "Who's that?"

Tom Merry lay dazed in the road.

"Ow! I—I'm squashed!" came a rumbling voice. "Yow! Yaroooh! Somebody's dropped on me!"

"Fatty Wynn!"

"Hallo! That's Lowther's voice!"

"And that's Figgins!" said Lowther.

"What are you Shell rotters doing out here at this time of night?"

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

"Did I fall on Fatty Wynn?" he gasped.

"Ow! Yow! Yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you ass! I'm squashed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was just banking Fatty up," said Figgins. "It was just his luck for you to be dropping off the wall at the same moment!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther and Manners dropped into the road, Figgins & Co. taking care to give them room.

Tom Merry peered at the New House chums.

"What are you chaps doing out of doors?" he asked.

Figgins chuckled.

"That's a giddy secret."

"Rats!"

"Well, it is. What have you come out for?"

"That's a secret."

"Fit for tat," grinned Figgins. "All right!"

"Have you seen anything of Blake?" asked Tom Merry. Figgins whistled.

"Is Blake out, too?"

"Yes, rather! And Dig and Herries and Gussy. Have you seen anything of them?"

"No. Where have they gone?"

"Where we are going," said Tom Merry mysteriously.

"And where are you going?"

"That's a secret."

Figgins laughed.

"What do you say to swapping secrets?" he suggested.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "It really isn't our secret, but we can let you into it if you promise to let it go no further—honour bright!"

"Honour bright!" said Figgins.

"Right! We're going to the Moat House."

Figgins jumped.

"The—the—the Moat House!" he stammered.

"Yes."

"But—but that's our secret, too!" exclaimed Kerr. "We've just been to the Moat House."

"My hat!"

"You're not going to rescue a prisoner, by any chance?" said Figgins.

"But we are!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors stared at one another in amazement. It was a great surprise on both sides.

"Well, this beats it!" said Figgins at last. "May as well have the whole story out now. We were going to rescue a Russian prince, who's kept there by a villain in the pay of the Bolsheviks; but it hasn't been a success. Sounds like a giddy novel, doesn't it?"

"You're not rotting, I suppose?"

"Honour!"

"Certainly!"

"Then we'll come back with you."

"Right-ho, come on!"

And the School House and the New House juniors started down the lane together. That Blake & Co. were in the Moat House they felt certain; and, in view of the character of Dr. Ferrers, there was no telling what danger they might be in. To help the Fourth-Formers, and to effect the rescue of the two prisoners—that was what the juniors meant to do; but how it was to be done was another question.



In a moment the four juniors sprang upon the porter. They had been discovered in the Moat House, and their position was desperate! Taken utterly by surprise, the man crashed to the floor under the sudden attack of Blake & Co. "Hold him!" panted Blake.

"Isn't that your prisoner?" asked Kerr.

"No; we were going to rescue Vernon de Courcy."

"Vernon de Courcy?"

"Yes; chap kept a prisoner there by his wicked uncle, who wants to inherit his title and estates."

"My hat! That sounds like another giddy novel."

"But it's jolly straight."

"It's jolly curious," said Kerr. "Then there are two prisoners in the Moat House?"

"I suppose so."

"My word!" said Figgins. "That chap Ferrers must be a double-dyed villain. He must run a regular business at keeping people prisoners."

"Looks like it."

"But are Blake and the others at the Moat House?" asked Kerr.

"So I believe."

Tom Merry explained matters. Kerr uttered an exclamation as a light dawned upon his mind.

"Oh, that explains!"

"Explains what?"

"It must have been Blake and his lot who gave the alarm. And the doctor and his man dropped on us instead of them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We got the order of the boot," grinned Figgins. "Look here, are you chaps going to the Moat House now to look for them?"

CHAPTER 12.

In the Lions' Den!

"PWAY be quiet, deah boys!"

"Shut up!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't jaw, Gussy, old chap!"

"I—I—"

"Silence!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and gave Blake a withering stare. The juniors were dimly visible to one another in the moonlight that glimmered in at the window of the room.

D'Arcy felt called upon to keep his comrades in order, but Blake was evidently not inclined to be kept in order.

"Blake—"

"Cheese it, Gussy," said Digby. "I say, I can't hear anything!" Digby was listening at the door of the room.

"Weally, Dig—"

"They've come back into the house," said Blake. "I heard the door close downstairs."

"Yes, I heard that."

"I wonder what the row was about?"

"Blessed if I can guess. Either some other party had got into the grounds, or else Vernon de Courcy may have got out of his room, and they had to capture him."

"Yaas, that's poss."

"I think we can begin looking for him now," Blake remarked, listening at the door. "The house seems quiet now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How shall we know which room he's in?" said Digby.

"I suppose De Courcy's door will be fastened on the outside, if he's a prisoner," said Blake. "We shall know it by that."

"Yaas, I nevah thought of that."

Blake opened the door.

It gave access to a passage of great length, with several side passages opening from it. At the end was a staircase dimly lighted.

"There's a light in the hall," said Blake.

"Then they've not gone to bed."

"No. Quiet!"

"Yaas, deah boys!"

"Don't talk, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, gag him, somebody! Come on!"

The juniors crept out into the passage.

A dozen or more doors opened on either side of it. The Moat House had been a large country house in the old days. The rooms, though small, were numerous.

There was the sound of a voice below.

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, Larking!"

Then heavy steps ascended the stairs.

Blake frowned.

"It's that porter chap coming up to bed," he growled.

"Hop into one of the rooms while he passes."

"Good!"

Blake reached to the nearest door. It did not open to his touch, and feeling over it hastily, he found that it was locked and bolted on the outside. The key was there in the lock, but he did not turn it.

He uttered a low exclamation.

"My hat!"

"What the—"

"This is the prisoner's room!"

"Phew!"

"Get into another, quick! That chap will be here in a minute!"

"This way!"

Exactly opposite the locked door in the passage was another door, and this yielded to Blake's touch as he tried it.

The juniors stepped hastily into the room, and Blake silently closed the door again. They stood in complete darkness. A blind was down at the window, shutting out every ray of light.

"Not a word," muttered Blake.

They stood dumb.

The heavy footsteps of the porter came along the passage, and stopped—at the door close to which the juniors were standing with beating hearts.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

Blake's heart almost ceased to beat.

Had the porter stopped simply to examine the prisoner's door, to make sure that it was secure, or—

Or had the juniors taken refuge in the very room which Larking was about to enter?

It was more than likely.

The porter had his choice of rooms in the great empty house, and he would naturally occupy one directly opposite the prisoner's room in order to keep a better guard over the captive in the Moat House.

Blake was not left many seconds in doubt. A hand tried the door of the room, and it turned, and the door came open, knocking against the juniors as they stood there.

They hardly breathed.

The door closed again, and then a match flared out.

The porter had entered, but he was stepping straight towards where the gas-jet was suspended, and he did not see the juniors for the moment.

That he would see them the instant he lighted the gas was certain, and he was already turning the gas on.

Blake exchanged a desperate look with his comrades.

There was only one thing to be done, and they were ready to do it.

The porter put the match to the gas, and it flared alight. He threw the match into the grate. At the same instant the four juniors sprang upon him, and he was borne to the ground.

"Hold him!"

Blake panted out the words.

The porter was too dazed by the sudden attack to even cry out, and Blake was on his guard against that.

As Larking crashed to the floor, Blake put a hand over his mouth, and as the porter, recovering himself a little,

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opened his mouth to call for help, Blake rammed a handkerchief into it.

A low gurgle came from the porter.

He struggled almost silently, but desperately, in the hands of the juniors, his face inflamed with rage. For two of them he would have been fully a match, and probably three, but four were too many for him. Besides, the surprise had given the juniors a great advantage, and they did not lose it again.

Larking was on the floor under their weight, and his greatest efforts could not throw them off.

Digby clung to one of his arms, and Herries to the other, and he could not get his hands free, and Blake sprawled on his legs, and D'Arcy sat on his chest.

He was almost helpless.

Yet he fought hard, and it was not without difficulty that the chums of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's secured him.

But his strength was expended in vain efforts, and exhaustion followed, and he lay gasping powerlessly under the weight of the juniors.

"Mind he doesn't get up!" gasped Blake. "He's got to be tied up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The porter made an effort to speak; but no word, only a faint gurgle passed the crammed handkerchief that filled his mouth.

Blake glanced round for something to tie him with, and jerked a sheet from the bed in the corner, twisted it into a rope, and bound the man's ankles fast together. Then a pillow-case torn into strips furnished bonds for his wrists, which were bound fast, in spite of his resistance.

"Now we're going to get your prisoner out, you confounded rascal!" said Blake.

A look of alarm came over Larking's face, and Blake chuckled.

"You didn't think we knew anything about that, did you?" he asked.

The bound man shook his head, still looking very alarmed. He made a great effort to speak, but Dig was tying the gag with a strip of cloth round his head, and the effort was even more ineffectual than before.

"Well, we do know about it," said Blake. "When your precious doctor finds you, you can tell him that some of the St. Jim's fellows have bowled him out, and we've taken De Courcy away. You can look out for the police soon, you scoundrel! We'll telephone to them from St. Jim's, and they'll come here for you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake turned out the light.

"Come on, you chaps!"

The juniors left the room, and Blake closed the door.

They listened for a moment in the passage.

There was no sound from below.

"All serene!" said Digby, with a chuckle.

Blake gave a soft tap at the locked door on the other side of the passage. There was the sound of a movement within.

Blake unlocked the door, and drew the bolts softly.

Then he threw the door open.

A man's form loomed up in the gloom before him.

Blake struck a match. As Blake held up the match the juniors saw a young man, fully dressed, with a pale and strangely bright eyes, looking at them from the darkness of the room.

"Here he is!" said Blake.

The match went out; but the moonlight was streaming in at the window, casting the shadow of the bars in the form of a cross upon the floor.

"Who are you?"

"We're the fellows from St. Jim's," said Blake. "We've come to rescue you."

"What?"

"We picked up the note that was chucked over the wall this afternoon," said Blake. "Or rather, Gussy here did."

"The—the note?"

"Yes. I—I suppose you're the chap we're looking for," said Blake, slightly puzzled. "You are kept a prisoner here, I suppose?"

"Yes—yes."

"Who are you?" asked Digby.

"I'm Lord Mount-Ararat," said the young man, in a hurried whisper. "I am kept prisoner here by my nephew, who wishes to inherit my estates."

"Gweat Scott!"

"By George!" said Blake. "This place is a nest of 'em! Look here! We came to look for a chap named De Courcy, who was kept prisoner by his wicked uncle."

The young man shook his head.

"He is not here."

"Not here?"

"No."

"Has he been taken away?"

"No."
 "Then—then what—"
 The young man bent forward, and lowered his voice to a thrilling whisper.
 "Shall I tell you a secret—a fearful secret?" he whispered.
 "Ye-es."
 "He's been murdered!"

CHAPTER 13. Amazing!

JACK BLAKE jumped.
 D'Arcy uttered a slight exclamation. Digby and Herries shuddered violently. They were all taken back by the terrible statement.
 "Murdered!" muttered Blake.
 "Yes."
 "By—by whom?"
 "By Dr. Ferrers! He was murdered this afternoon!"
 "Good heavens!"
 "Prince Slavonski was murdered, too!"
 "Prince Slavonski?"
 "Yes."
 "Was—was he a prisoner here?"
 "Yes. He was murdered this evening."
 "Oh!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "I—I say, this is horrible!" muttered Digby. "Let's get out, for Heaven's sake!"
 "For goodness' sake, let's go!" muttered Herries.
 Blake was shuddering. He could hardly believe what the young man told him. It all seemed so horrible and unreal.
 Yet there seemed no reason to doubt the statement. This man, at all events, was a prisoner in the Moat House—the locked and bolted door proved that.

"Are there any—any other prisoners here?" stammered Blake.
 "Not now."
 "Were there any?"
 "Yes."
 "Have they been—been—?"
 "Murdered—yes?"
 "Oh!"
 "I should have been murdered to-night," said the young man in a hurried whisper. "You have saved my life by coming here."
 "Let's get out!" said Digby, in a stifled voice.
 "Come on!" muttered Blake.
 He took the young man by the arm and hurried away. They reached the stairs. The hall below was dark now; the doctor having evidently retired to his room, if not to bed.

They reached the door. It was bolted and locked, but the key was in the lock, and it was easy for the juniors to open it, though there was a sound of grating as it swung open.

They passed out into the gardens. They felt refreshed as the cool night air blew on their faces.

"Do you feel up to climbing a wall?" Blake whispered to the rescued man, who was walking along beside him like one in a dream.

The young man started.
 "Yes, yes!" he muttered.
 "Good! This way!"
 Gr-r-r-r! Yowl!
 "My hat!" muttered Digby. "It's a dog!"
 Gr-r-r-r-r!

There was a sound of growling and barking, and the brushing of a heavy body among the irregular bushes in the garden.

The juniors halted in dismay. It was evident at once that there was a dog loose in the garden! Doubtless the animal had been turned loose in case Figgins & Co. returned.
 Gr-gr-oof!

A large animal bounded into view in the moonlight.
 "Down, down, dog!"
 "Get off, you beast!"

The juniors waved their hands threateningly.
 The dog scuttled back, not offering to attack them. But he barked more furiously than ever, and the gardens rang and echoed with it.
 "Prince! Prince!"

It was the doctor's voice calling to the dog. The animal barked furiously in response.

"So they've come back!"
 The juniors heard the doctor's exclamation.
 "Bowled out again!" muttered Blake. "We shall have to run for it!"

And they ran.
 As soon as they started running the dog dashed at

them with open mouth and teeth that gleamed white in the moonlight. Blake turned round and kicked out, and the animal retreated again, barking loudly.

There was a crash of a door flung open, and the form of the doctor appeared in the moonlight. He had a stick in his hand.

"Prince! Prince!"
 The dog barked again. His barking guided the doctor, and the juniors heard him running in pursuit. There was every sound of disturbance in the Moat House now. Lights flashed from several windows, and doors were opened and voices called.

Blake gritted his teeth.
 "It's all up now, unless we get out!" he muttered.
 "They're all awake!"

The doctor's footsteps were crashing through the thickets in pursuit.

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake, grasping the arm of the young man. "This way!"
 The rescued prisoner burst into a wild laugh.

"Free!" he exclaimed. "Free!"
 "Yes, if you buck up."

He started off at a pace that Blake had some difficulty in equalling. They dashed round the house, with the doctor and his dog in pursuit, and reached the gate.

Blake dragged at the fastenings. The gate was bolted and chained, but it required only a couple of moments to find the fastenings and drag them open. The gate swung back, creaking and grating on its hinges.

There was a shout in the distance.
 "There they go!"

The dog dashed up, making the night ring with its barking.

The fugitives crowded out upon the wooden bridge. There was a rush of rapid feet behind them.

Dr. Ferrers, running wonderfully well for so stout a man, was close behind, and with him came Larking—evidently discovered and set free by the other servants of the Moat House—and another powerfully built man, half dressed. In the distance, by the lighted door, two female servants could be seen, shrieking and gesticulating.

"There they are!" gasped the doctor.
 "Run for it!" gasped Blake.

"Wun like anythin', deah boys!"
 And they ran.

But the pursuers were upon them, and even as they dashed away they were seized, and there was nothing for it but to fight.

"Line up!" roared Blake. "Give 'em socks!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

Then came a shout from the shadowed lane.
 "Rescue, St. Jim's!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry!

Tom Merry & Co. had arrived in the nick of time. As they drew near to the Moat House they had seen the lights moving and heard the barking of the dog and the excited voices, and they did not need telling that the Moat House was alarmed, and that Blake and his chums were in trouble.

They had dashed up at top speed to render aid, and they arrived just as the four juniors were collared outside the gate of the Moat House.

They did not stop to ask questions. Without pausing a second they threw themselves into the tussle, and Dr. Ferrers and his two assistants were seized and hurled away.

The odds were hopelessly against them. The three men were no match for ten sturdy juniors, all in deadly earnest. Dr. Ferrers, Larking, and the third man were hurled to the ground and left there in a dazed state as the juniors streamed away towards St. Jim's, with the late prisoner in their midst.

(Continued on the next page.)

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They did not pause till the walls of St. Jim's loomed up before them.

Manners pulled at the bell, and a loud peal rang out on the silence of the night. But Taggles, the school porter, was not in a hurry to get out.

Manners rang again and again, and it was not till five minutes had elapsed that there was a glimmer of light within, and the sound of somebody coming down to the gates.

It was Taggles, half-dressed, with a lantern and a bunch of keys in his hand, and a decidedly displeased expression on his face. He peered at the juniors through the bronze bars.

The school porter almost dropped the lantern when he recognised a crowd of St. Jim's juniors standing in the road.

"Crumbs!" he ejaculated, in blank amazement.

"Open the gate, Taggy!"

"Which I'll hopen the gate and report yer to the 'Ead, too!" growled Taggles, as he inserted the great key in the lock.

The gates swung open.

The juniors crowded in. Taggles cast the light of the lantern upon them and stared at the sight of the rescued prisoner.

"Who's that, Master Merry?"

"Friend we're bringing in," said Tom Merry airily. "It's all right, Taggles!"

"All right, is it? I wonder if the 'Ead will say so?"

Tom Merry laughed as he led the way to the School House.

There was a light in the Hall, and the door was open. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was standing in the open doorway, and behind his athletic form was the more diminutive figure of Mr. Lathom.



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They had evidently heard the loud pealing of the bell, which had echoed through the still quadrangle of St. Jim's.

"They're ready for us!" murmured Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You'd better drop behind, Gussy."

"Why?"

"You're still awfully smelly. No need to give them too great a shock at once."

"Weally, Blake!"

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton, in a quiet, ominous voice which boded little good to the breakers of bounds, unless they were able to furnish a remarkably good explanation of their conduct. "Nine—ten of you, including New House boys! Come in! Why—what—who is this?"

He broke off in amazement as the stranger walked in.

The rescued prisoner gazed about him vacantly.

The juniors came in quietly.

"I know this must seem rather strange to you, sir," began Tom Merry.

"It's very strange to me, Merry."

"Let me explain—"

"Who is this man?"

"He's Vernon de Courcy, sir."

"Eh?" said Figgins. "There's a mistake somewhere. He's Prince Slavonski, sir."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He's nothin' of the sort. He's Lord Mount-Awawat!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir!"

"This is no time for jokes. I—"

"I was not joking, sir. This chap says he is Lord Mount-Awawat."

"He said so, sir," said Blake.

"I do not understand this," said Mr. Railton. "How comes he here at all?"

"We've rescued him, sir."

"You have—what?"

"Rescued him," said Tom Merry. "He was kept a prisoner in the Moat House, sir—the old house down the lane that was empty so long, and was lately taken by a Dr. Ferrers."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes, sir. He threw out this note, and we went to rescue him."

Tom Merry handed Mr. Railton the note that D'Arcy had brought back to St. Jim's in such a hurry that afternoon.

The Housemaster glanced at it, and an expression of great amazement came over his face.

He glanced at Tom Merry, and then at the young man, who had not said a word.

"Will you kindly tell me who you are?" he asked curtly. The young man nodded.

"Certainly," he said.

"Then who are you?"

"I am the President of the United States!"

CHAPTER 14.

The Amiable Lunatic!

MR. RAILTON almost staggered. He was prepared for almost any statement but that.

The juniors gasped.

The young man did not seem to be aware of having made any extraordinary remark.

He smiled at the juniors and the Housemaster, and nodded in the most genial way in the world.

"My only hat!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"What does it mean?"

"Has he been pulling our leg all the time?"

The thought made the juniors turn quite cold.

If they had been japed—if the whole business was a stupendous jape devised by this young man with a very singular sense of humour—what would the consequences be?

What did it all mean?

Mr. Railton recovered his voice.

"What did you say?" he exclaimed.

"I am the President of the United States!"

"Are you joking—or are you mad?"

"Mad!" said the other cheerfully.

"Eh?"

"My hat!"

The stranger smiled.

"Mad," he repeated. "Surely you were aware of that?"

"Dear me!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"At least, so they say," went on the young man, with a charming smile. "I have some doubts about it myself. My view is that I am quite sane, and that the rest of the world is mad. What do you think?"

"Bless my soul!"

The juniors stared in silence at the man they had rescued from the hands of Dr. Ferrers. That he was insane, though in a harmless, babbling way, was evident. His good humour and self-satisfaction were striking.

"This afternoon," went on the young man, "I was Vernon de Courcy, imprisoned in the Moat House by my wicked uncle."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I wrapped up a note in a paper, and threw it into the road, just as the imprisoned hero of a novel always does."

"Bai Jove!"

"I was in hopes that it would fall into the hands of someone stupid enough to take it seriously, and help me to escape from the private asylum."

"Asylum!" murmured Tom Merry. "Oh, what frabjous asses we've been."

D'Arcy's face was a study in scarlet.

"Fortunately, it fell into the hands of such a person," said the amiable lunatic.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Then these young gentlemen saw me," went on the young man, with a nod towards Figgins & Co. "By that time my identity had changed, and I was Prince Slavovski, imprisoned in the Moat House by the Bolsheviks."

"Oh!" murmured Figgins.

"My word!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

Kerr sniffed.

"I said it was fishy all along," he growled. "Didn't I?"

"Then I was rescued this evening," went on the young man cheerfully. "My identity had changed once more, and I had become Lord Mount-Ararat. I was Lord Mount-Ararat when I was brought here."

"My dear sir—"

"But there has been another change, and I am now the President of the United States. If I can do anything for you, I shall be only too happy to oblige."

Mr. Railton gasped.

"Tom Merry! Blake! Figgins! I hope you realise now what you have done."

"Oh, sir!"

"You have been taken in in the most absurd way by a lunatic's cunning, and have broken into a medical man's house and released his patient."

"Oh!"

"I do not know what view the law will take of the matter," said Mr. Railton. "I only hope that Dr. Holmes may be able to placate the man who has suffered at your reckless hands, and that a public scandal may be avoided."

The juniors stood dumb.

Their dismay and discomfort were so great that the House-master, deeply annoyed as he was by the whole extraordinary affair, could not but take pity on them.

There was a sudden sound in the silent quadrangle—the furious ringing of a bell.

Tom Merry started. He guessed that Dr. Ferrers had arrived.

A few minutes later a car drove up to the School House with gleaming lights, and Dr. Ferrers jumped excitedly out of it.

The doctor had evidently guessed that his patient might be at St. Jim's, where he knew the juniors belonged, and he had followed them as fast as he could in his car, and he had not been long behind them.

The stout gentleman ran up the steps, and burst into the Hall like a hurricane. He was wildly excited, and gesticulating so furiously that it really seemed for a moment that he was less sane than his escaped patient.

The patient seemed to shrink back at the sight of the doctor. He made a movement as if to go, but the juniors were round him. They did not mean to let the lunatic escape.

The doctor waved both hands wildly in his wrath.

"Ah, you are here!" he shouted. "What?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"You rascals! Villains!"

"We're sorry, sir!"

"Yaas, watah! We—"

"Are you a master here?" roared the doctor, turning to Mr. Railton, who was vainly trying to make his voice heard. "Yes, I see you are—what?"

"My dear sir—"

"My house has been broken into!" roared the stout gentleman, crimson with rage. "My servant has been assaulted, and bound in his own bed-room!"

"My—"

"A patient of mine—a lunatic—has been taken away from my care!"

"He—"

"Ah, I see he is here!" exclaimed the doctor. "Larking!"

"Yes, sir."

The Moat House porter, looking extremely surly, had followed his master into the School House.

At the sight of the dismayed faces of the juniors, however, his surly expression had given place to something like a grin.

The doctor waved his hand towards the lunatic.

"See that Thompson doesn't escape again," he said.

"Yes, sir."

The porter crossed to the young man, and linked arms with him.

Dr. Ferrers turned fumingly to Mr. Railton.

"Have you any explanation to make, sir, of this extraordinary conduct of your pupils?" he exclaimed tartly.

Mr. Railton handed the letter to the doctor.

Dr. Ferrers started a little.

"This is Thompson's writing!" he exclaimed.

"Thompson!" murmured D'Arcy. "Oh, the fearful fraud!"

"Read it!" said Mr. Railton.

Dr. Ferrers read the letter.

He stared at first in blank astonishment; then his frown relaxed, and his fat face melted into a grin.

The grin became a laugh, and finally a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton smiled, too.

"That is why my boys interfered," he said. "They found that letter, and took it seriously, sir."

"Dear me! Ha, ha, ha! Is it possible that any boy could be so stupid as to take such a letter seriously?" ejaculated the doctor.

"Weally, sir—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the stout medical man laughed himself into a good humour. The juniors did not mind his laughter; they were only too glad to see the clouds breaking, as it were.

"This is too utterly absurd!" he exclaimed. "This young man's name is Thompson. He is the son of a respectable tradesman in Lewes, and his head, always weak, was quite turned by absurd reading of novels and newspaper reports. He suffers from delusions, but he's quite harmless—fortunately for the boys who have released him from his confinement. He is under my charge by the wish of his relations, who fear that he may do himself some mischief in one of his insane fits."

"Bai Jove!"

"As he is harmless, I allowed him the freedom of the grounds," went on the doctor. "I never imagined that he would be guilty of an absurd device like this—some childish trick he has picked up from a novel or a newspaper. But—"

"But under the circumstances you will see that there is some excuse to be made for the boys," Mr. Railton remarked.

The doctor laughed again.

"Oh, yes, certainly! They have been deceived, certainly. I must say, also, that it was very brave and generous of them to undertake the rescue of a stranger from a supposed villain's hands; but it is a pity that their courage and their generosity are not directed by a larger allowance of common-sense."

Larking led the lunatic to the car, and helped him into it. Thompson made no objection or resistance. He seemed quite willing to return to the Moat House after his little adventure.

The doctor shook hands with Mr. Railton.

"I am starting a private asylum at the Moat House," he remarked. "Thompson is my first resident patient. If you have any relations or friends who require similar treatment, I shall be very pleased to quote reasonable terms."

Mr. Railton turned very pink.

"Thank you!" he said hastily. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

The doctor stepped into the car and was driven away.

"And now," said Mr. Railton grimly, "I think that perhaps you juniors had better go to bed."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry & Co. meekly, with one voice. And to bed they went.

The next morning there was an interview with the Head—an interview to which Tom Merry & Co. looked forward with considerable and very natural misgivings.

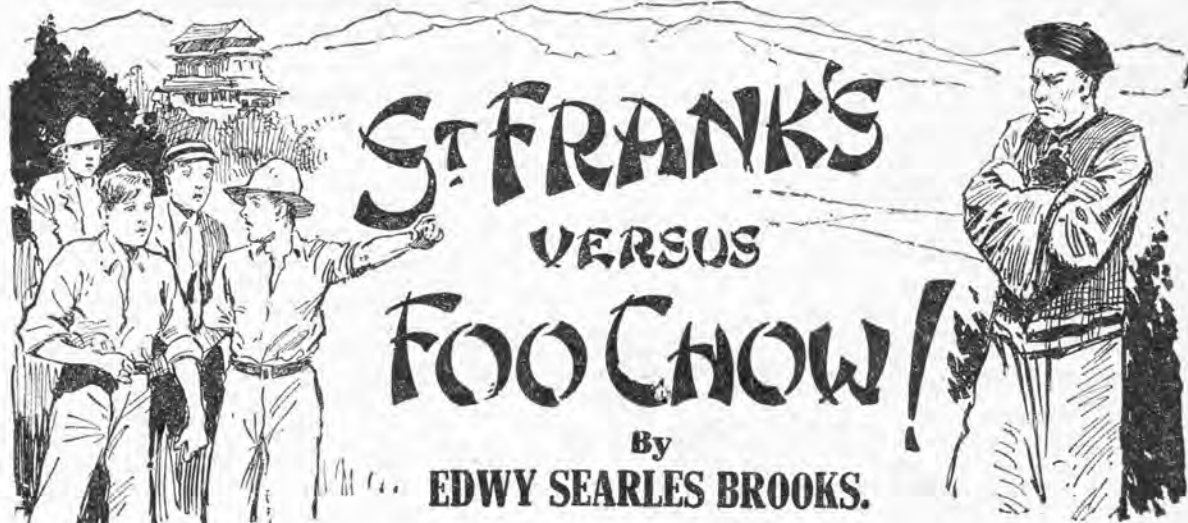
But it turned out better than they had dared to expect. Dr. Ferrers' intercession had not been in vain, and the Head of St. Jim's took a lenient view of the matter, and dismissed the juniors after a severe lecture.

THE END.

(Watch out for next Wednesday's ripping yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's—entitled "ROLLING IN MONEY! Gussy's the star turn in this story, and you'll revel in his amusing adventures.)

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HANDY WANTS TO EXPLORE AN OPIUM DEN! DOES HE DO IT? YOU BET !



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Dr. Foo Chow, a war lord of Inner China, kidnaps Yung Ching, of St. Frank's, his object being to compel the boy's father, Yung Li Chang, to surrender up the rich province over which he rules. A holiday party from St. Frank's come to the help of Ching and eventually rescue him after they have fallen into the hands of Foo Chow. War then breaks out between Foo Chow and Yung Li Chang. The St. Frank's party escape and sail in their steam yacht to Yang Fu. They go ashore for a banquet to be held in their honour by Li Chang, but Handforth says he is going to explore the city instead.

Handy's Not "Having Any" !

"**B**UT we've been invited, Handy," urged Church. "It would look awfully bad if we didn't turn up."

"They'll never miss us," declared Handforth promptly.

"And we're going to the theatre afterwards—"

"Oh, well, that's a different thing!" said Edward Oswald.

"We can easily show up in time for the theatre. But the banquet—no!"

"But, my dear chap—"

"The banquet—no!" repeated Handforth, with an air of finality. "My hat! I'm surprised that you chaps should be keen on the feed. I haven't forgotten the last Chinese banquet we attended."

They stared.

"You mean that feast at old Ah Fong's place?" asked Church.

"Yes, I do!" said Handforth coldly. "My only aunt! Stewed rat! Boiled slugs! Dried cockroaches! Ooooh! It makes me writhe to think of that horrible feed! And we enjoyed it, you know—we ate all that ghastly stuff without knowing what it was until afterwards!"

Church and McClure winced.

"Don't!" groaned Mac. "The very thought's enough."

"And yet you want to go to this other banquet?"

"You silly chump! This'll be totally different!" snorted Church. "Do you think Ching's pater would put all those insect dishes in front of us? This feast is going to be something special—something gorgeous. Why, Fatty Little has been in a kind of trance for hours, just dreaming about it."

"Well, I'm not Fatty Little—and I'm not dreaming!" said Handforth firmly. "What's more, I'm not going to take any risks. Once bitten, twice shy! You can't catch an old bird in the same trap twice!"

"But look here, Handy—"

"It's no good—I'm not listening to your rot!" interrupted Handforth. "You gluttons! All you can think about is grub! It'll be ten times more interesting to explore the city. We may come across a mystery or two, and I want to go to a few shops, too. We'll have a look round, and then get some of that silly money and do some buying."

In the thick of the crowd, Handforth managed to push his chums away from all the other members of the party. So it wasn't until the guests were actually sitting at Yung Li Chang's table that Handforth & Co.'s absence was noticed.

That sedan ride through the streets had been rather novel. The carriers were experts, and swung their burdens along with no apparent effort. And the streets were a riot of colour and life. The lanterns were hanging on festoons everywhere. There were myriads of them, of every con-

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ceivable size and colour. Some of the richer inhabitants had decorated their houses with gorgeous silken lanterns, and the gay scenes were eloquent of general rejoicing. And all along the route crackers were being let off—for there is never a festival or a rejoicing in China without an everlasting supply of crackers and other fireworks. The Chinese love nothing better than an endless din.

The banquet was being held in a kind of palace that Dr. Foo Chow had built for his own use, but which now, of course, had been appropriated by his conqueror. In some ways the building was less primitive than the other edifices of the city, but it was still picturesque in its purely Chinese atmosphere.

The entire roof space was aglow with endless lanterns, and the tables were laden with the most wonderful dishes that the Chinese chefs could concoct. But Handforth need not have worried himself. The meats were above reproach, the fish was fresh from the river, and the sweetmeat confections were bewildering in their variety.

And the banquet progressed with complete harmony. The local mandarins, having got over the shock of seeing young ladies at the table, soon entered into the spirit of the affair. And Handforth & Co. were completely forgotten—except by Nelson Lee.

"Confound the boy!" he murmured to Dorrie, when he got the chance. "I'm always uneasy when Handforth slips off like this. He means well, but he has an extraordinary facility for finding trouble."

Lord Dorrmore grinned.

"He can't be in any danger here," he smiled. "There's nothin' to worry about, old man. All the natives are friendly in Yang Fu."

"Very possibly; but I would like to know where Handforth is, and what he is doing," replied Lee. "We are proposing a start down the river at dawn, and we don't want those boys to cause any delay. Yung Li Chang has received positive information that the canyon is held by his own soldiers."

Soon afterwards Lee found an opportunity of whispering to Dick Hamilton.

"You're going to speak about Handy, sir," said Dick.

"Yes, I am, young 'un," murmured Lee. "As soon as the banquet is over—before we go along to the theatre—I would like you to get some of the other boys and make a quick search for Handforth. You'll probably learn something at once. If possible, bring him back with you."

"Leave it to me, guv'nor," promised the Remove skipper.

In the meantime, Handforth & Co. were certainly enjoying themselves. Even Church and McClure had forgotten their resentment, and were taking a lively interest in the quaint street scenes and the animated panorama.

These pictures of native life were fascinating.

Apparently it was a feasting day for all—a celebration

of the city's unexpected liberation. And wherever Handforth & Co. went they found revelry in progress.

In many of the more humble streets, where there was not sufficient room in the houses for the guests to sit, the feast was held out in the street, tables being crowded with diners, noise going on endlessly, and the Chinese lanterns overhead casting a subdued glow over all. Incense sticks were burning everywhere—as a protection against evil spirits interrupting the feast—and the air was heavy with the pungent, dreamy odour.

"Jolly good idea, burning these joss-sticks, or whatever they are," remarked Church. "They act as a kind of fumigator, and most of the other smells are drowned. My only hat! These Chinese believe in enjoying themselves! There's not much room left for the traffic!"

"What do they care about traffic?" asked Handforth. "Why, it's a common thing for a Chinaman to build a chicken-house or something in the middle of the road. They always do things backwards in this giddy country. If a Chinaman wants to shake hands with a chap, he shakes hands with himself instead!"

The chums of Study D had no necessity to go hungry.

Again and again they were invited to the native tables, the hosts expressing themselves eager to dismiss all their other guests if necessary. The juniors had their choice, and partook of various tit-bits at different tables as they continued their exploration. But they took great care fully to ascertain the nature of their food before devouring it.

Wandering away from the most animated scenes, they found themselves in a narrow alley, where only a few lanterns were glowing. They didn't know it, but they had come round in a circle, and were only a short distance from the main holiday party.

A big lantern was hung over a narrow doorway, where a Chinaman stood impassively on guard. His manner changed as the schoolboys passed, and he bowed with humble politeness.

"You come in, most honourable excellencies?" he asked softly.

"By George, this is the theatre, I'll bet!" said Handforth. "Come on, let's go and have a preliminary scout round. Why should we wait for the rest of the chaps?"

"But it may not be the theatre—" began Church. "Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Let's go in and see, anyhow."

The Chinaman offered no objection as they entered, and, having passed through a swing doorway, they pushed aside some hanging silken curtains, and found themselves in a strange-looking apartment, where the air was heavy with a curious haze. McClure gave a sudden start.

"Let's get out of this!" he muttered. "It's an opium den!"

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"An opium den!" he repeated. "I say, what luck! The very place I wanted to find! Now we'll see the genuine article!"

In the Opium Den!

CHURCH and McClure were very uneasy, and the latter bitterly upbraided himself for having spoken. Handforth might not have guessed the truth, and perhaps they would have all gone out without any further investigation. There was nothing attractive in the place, but the very mention of an opium den had done the trick. Edward Oswald was keen upon a full tour of inspection.

"Let's get out!" repeated McClure, tugging at his leader's sleeve. "We don't want to stop in this beastly place, Handy! Even in China an opium den isn't a nice place to be in. Really decent people don't visit."

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted Handforth. "We're not opium smokers, are we? We're just here to see things at first hand. There's nothing like it. If you don't want to stay you can jolly well clear out!"

"They may offer us opium!" muttered Church.

"All the better," said Handforth coolly.

He was deliberately egging his chums on, and they dimly realised this. But, at the same time, they had a fear that he would carry things too far. He had a strange habit of neglecting any danger signals.

They stood there, just inside the entrance, and took stock of the place. The light was very dim, but it was quite sufficient to reveal the beautiful decorations on the walls—the lacquered woodwork, the polished floor with its sumptuous rugs, the cushioned divans.

"It's a swindle!" said Handforth at last. "This place isn't a den at all! Of all the rot, you know, calling these luxurious shows 'dens'! Why, it's more like a club!"

"What do you expect to find—a place with bars all round it?" asked Church impatiently. "Your idea of a den seems to be based on what you've seen at the Zoo! A den can be the most expensively furnished place in the world. It all depends what goes on in it!"

"Hallo!" Handy exclaimed. "Here comes a chap with

refreshments, or something. Jolly hospitable, these Chinese, I must say."

An elderly Chinaman had appeared from behind some curtains, and he halted in front of the three juniors with a little tray. The tray contained some opium pipes, and all the necessary impedimenta for smoking the harmful drug.

"Let's go!" said Church uneasily.

Handforth was about to suggest the same thing, but such a move was now quite impossible. It was purely a matter of custom for him to oppose any proposition put forward by his chums.

"No fear!" he said promptly. "We'll try the stuff!"

"What!" gasped McClure. "Look here, Handy, you fathead—"

"A few puffs won't hurt us," said Handforth stubbornly.

"What's the good of coming to an opium den if we don't give it a fair trial?" He nodded to the withered attendant. "Allee samee yes! Smokee pipee!"

It was his tone and his attitude that informed the Chinese of his desire. A curious-looking affair was prepared. It wasn't like a pipe at all, but there was no question about the opium. This was soon burning and sending up tiny wreaths of pungent smoke.

"Handy!" gasped Church. "Don't touch—"

"Mind your own business!" howled Handforth.

He walked towards one of the dimmest corners, determined to spoof his chums very thoroughly. He hadn't the faintest intention of smoking any of this ghastly stuff, but it was a ripping idea to kid Church and McClure.

They impatiently refused the invitations of the attendant, and stood there, nonplussed. They didn't want to start an actual riot in this place, but they felt like seizing Handforth and hurling him out into the street on his neck. There was only one dubious point. Could they do it?

"Let's grab him!" said McClure grimly.

"It's the only way!" murmured Church. "But the silly ass might resist, you know. I think we can chuck him out, but it'll take five or ten minutes, and then we shall have half Yang Fu on the scene. It'll end up in a general civil war. You know what Handy is once he starts."

"Well, let's try tact," said McClure, with rare common sense. "We'll pretend to be indifferent, and he'll follow us like a lamb."

"Go out, you mean?"

"Yes!" said Mac, in a low voice. "Ready? Good! Oh, well, we'll be going," he added loudly, with an assumption of complete carelessness. "We'll leave Handy here, and wait for him outside."

"That's the idea," said Church, with the same casual tone. "Rather a good stunt of Handy's to test the stuff on his own; but there's no need for us to wait. Come on, Mac."

Handforth was just settling himself on a corner divan, and he started. This wasn't what he had desired at all! He stared indignantly at his chums as they made a move towards the curtained exit.

"Well, my hat!" he muttered. "The—the callous rotters! They're going to leave me here, and they don't care a toss! They think I'm smoking opium, and they're going to leave me flat!"

The ruse was evidently working. Long experience of Edward Oswald had taught his chums the very best way to persuade him was to pull his leg. Violence of any kind had never been known to succeed.

"I'll make 'em sit up for this!" said Handforth darkly. "I'll just stay here for a couple of minutes, and then go out and wipe up the street with 'em! I'll teach the fatheads to leave me in the lurch!"

"Allee samee Ingleshe boy," came a murmur near him. "Velly good. Me Wong knowee you on yacht."

Handforth turned and stared. Until this moment he had had no idea that he had blundered on to somebody else's divan. But the corner was certainly dark and dim. What Handforth had mistaken for a heap of cushions was really the huddled-up figure of a Chinaman.

Handforth's own opium had long since gone out—he hadn't touched it, of course. He wouldn't have sampled it for an offer of fifty pounds. But he was already aware of a curious giddiness—a kind of dreamy sensation, as though he were floating in midair.

"Hallo!" he said. "Who the dickens are you?"

"Me Wong."

"Wong!" said Handforth, looking harder. "My only hat! Aren't you one of old Foo Chow's beastly attendants—one of his personal guards?"

"Him Foo Chow no more good," mumbled the Chinaman. "Him lost face."

"Lost his face?" gasped Handforth. "By George! In battle, do you mean?"

"Him lost face—no more great man," explained the Chinaman. "But Foo Chow ticky. Him plepore flap for white men. Wong knowe. Allee samee badde."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Handforth. "Is that his game?"

The name "Wong" seemed vaguely familiar to Handforth, although there were so many names of a similar sound that it really meant nothing. But he realized that Foo Chow had now "lost face" to such an extent that he was dirt, and beneath the contempt of his own servants.

Handforth wondered if he was dreaming all this. Somehow it seemed so vague and unreal. The fumes in the opium den were having an effect on Handforth. Having never breathed the smell of opium in his life before, it had an instantaneous effect. He did not feel sick or unwell in any way, but he was aware of a curious, increasing exhilaration.

"Rummie!" he muttered. "I must be dreaming, or something."

He bent closer to the Chinaman, and the man spoke again.

"Great Scott!" breathed Edward Oswald, as he listened. "You—you mean—that we mustn't go down the river?"

"Allee same bad," mumbled Wong.

Handforth leapt off the divan, his eyes gleaming, and he fell to the floor. The words that he had heard were burning into his brain, over and above the effects of the opium. Indeed, he had no idea that he had inhaled any opium, for he had not touched his own pipe, and he knew that it was out. Why, hang it, he had only taken the thing just to spoof his chums!

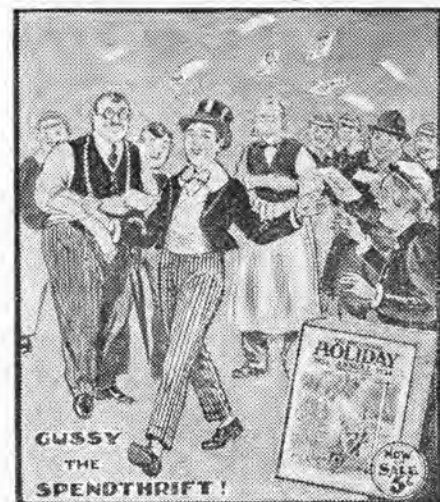
He picked himself up, and a wave of nausea came over him. The whole place seemed to be going round in circles, and when he regained his feet the effect was even more startling. It seemed to him that he wasn't standing on the floor at all. Instead of something solid beneath him, there was nothing but spongy airiness.

But dimly he saw the curtained exit, and he made for it in a dazed, befuddled condition. How he reached it he never knew, but at last he clutched at the curtains and tumbled through towards the outer exit.

A Tall Story!

"RUN to earth!" said Dick Hamilton briskly. "Absolutely!" murmured Archie Glenhorne. "Two of the dear old lads, at all events. But the principal chappie appears to be slightly missing." "They'll know where he is," said Reggie Pitt.

"ROLLING IN MONEY!"



Gussy's never been short of "tin," but even he has never had so much to play with as when his father opens a banking account for him—hoping it will cure him of his spendthrift habits. What a hope! Read the story of the amusing adventures of our Gussy—complete with cheque-book! It's a ripping yarn and appears in next week's tip-top number of

The GEM

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Half a dozen Remove fellows had just entered a narrow, dimly lit alley, and Church and McClure were to be observed some distance down it, disconsolately leaning against a doorway, underneath a lantern.

Dick Hamilton & Co. had been lucky. Coming out in search of Handforth, according to Nelson Lee's wish, they had spotted Church and McClure within the first five minutes, which was more than they had ever expected. They surrounded the pair at once.

"Where's Handy?" demanded Dick.

"In here!" growled Church. "Thank goodness you chaps have come! We can all go in and yank him out now. Mac and I daren't try it on our own. The ass would have started a riot!"

"Come on, let's fetch him!" said McClure eagerly.

"But what's he doing in there?" asked Reggie. "What is the place, anyhow?"

"An opium den."

"A which?" ejaculated the Remove skipper.

"I mean to say, good gad!" protested Archie, in horror. "Odds 'unatics and maniacs! The chappie hasn't been absolutely mad enough to penetrate an opium den, what? I mean, dash it—"

"He's in there now," interrupted Church. "What's more, he's sampling the stuff!"

"I don't believe it!" said Dick.

"I tell you he took a pipe and went to a divan—"

"That was only his rot," interrupted Hamilton. "He was just trying to spoof you, my lads. I know Handy better than that. He wouldn't touch opium for a fortune. He may be an ass, but he's not an imbecile."

Before they could make any further comments, Handforth himself appeared. He reeled out of the doorway dizzily, and stood there clutching at the air. The juniors stared at him with consternation and dismay, and Dick Hamilton's words seemed disproved on the spot.

Edward Oswald's face was somewhat greenish, but perhaps the tinted radiance from the Chinese lanterns had something to do with this effect. Anyhow, he was not himself. He looked properly befuddled.

"Look, there's Handforth!" exclaimed Hamilton.

"Air!" they heard Handy mutter. "Gimme air!"

"You've got it!" said Dick grimly. "You—you hopeless ass! Come on, you chaps, pull him along and get him out of this alley."

"I told you he'd been sampling the stuff!" muttered Church. "Thank goodness he came out in time. What next will the idiot be up to?"

They succeeded in forcing him out into one of the more open spaces, but it was necessary to direct his steps, for he was unsteady and giddy.

"We'd better keep this quiet, Handy," said Dick sternly. "You wouldn't like Irene to know that you'd been opium smoking, would you? She'd never speak to you again—"

"Eh?" mumbled Handforth. "Why, you—you hopeless idiot! What the dickens— By George! Wong!"

"What?"

"Wong!" said Handforth, with a violent start. "Quick! Where's Mr. Lee? Where's Dorrie? Foo Chow's set a trap, and everybody on the Wanderer is going to be killed!"

"Great Scott!"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

"We're all going to be crushed to pulp!" said Handforth, looking round excitedly, the pupils of his eyes strangely dilated. "The Wanderer's going to be pushed under the river, and all of us drowned!"

"Poor chap!" said Dick. "He's certainly suffering from the effects of opium! Handy, you reckless cuckoo, I gave you credit for more sense! Do you mean to say you actually smoked that ghastly stuff?"

Handforth passed a hand over his brow.

"I—I don't seem to remember," he muttered. "But I'll swear I didn't touch that giddy pipe! Smoke opium? You silly rotters! Do you think I'd touch the horrible muck? Of course I didn't! But—but my head seems all mixed up—"

He paused, frowning. It was quite obvious that he was all in a muddle.

"There was a Chinaman in there—a chap named Wong," he went on. "We've seen him before I think. Anyhow, he knows about this trap. We mustn't sail in the yacht! If we go, it'll mean death!"

"Was there a Chinaman with Handy?" asked Dick.

"Not that I know of," said Church. "He went to one of those divans, and I believe he was all by himself; but I wouldn't swear to it—"

"Of course he was by himself," added McClure impatiently. "He must have taken a puff or two of that opium without realising it, and this is the result. It's just the effect of the opium smoke. He's been having delusions."

"I tell you it's true!" growled Handforth feebly.

"Well, give me some details," said Reggie Pitt.



"Foo Chow lost face—no more gleat man," said the Chinaman. "But he tlicky. Him prepare flap for white men. Wong knows." "Great Scott!" exclaimed Edward Oswald Handforth. "So that's his game, is it?"

"Absolutely," added Archie. "Details, laddie. Those jolly little things which count, as it were. Proceed to trot out the absolute facts."

"Details?" repeated Handforth vaguely.

"Yes."

"I—I don't seem to remember—" Handforth paused and shook himself. "It seems funny, but I can't get the hang of it now," he added. "Was there a Chinaman there, or did I imagine it? Bless if I know!"

"Well, if you don't know, it's pretty certain that there was no Chinaman at all," said Dick Hamilton. "Come on, we'd better take you along to the theatre. The others have got there by this time, I expect."

"But—but I want to give a warning—"

"My dear old ass, you've been dreaming," said Dick soothingly. "As a matter of fact, Chingy's father has received confirmation of that first report, and it is now definitely known that the canyon is safe. The rock barrier is in the hands of Yung Li Chang's troops, and our last possibility of danger has gone. So you can forget those hallucinations."

Handforth scratched his head.

"It's rummy," he said slowly. "Jolly rummy! In fact, thundering rummy!"

"What-ho!" said Archie. "Rummy, what?"

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Church. "What else could Handy expect, when he goes messing about with opium? I'm ashamed of him!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"So I am!" said Church, glaring. "I thought you had more common sense, Handy. You ought to be boiled for doing a thing like that."

"You—you gibbering maniac!" roared Handforth. "Do you think I smoked the beastly stuff? I was only doing it to spoof you! I thought I'd give you and Mac a scare. I didn't touch the stuff."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said McClure sceptically.

"I tell you I didn't!"

"Well, we won't argue," interrupted Dick Hamilton, with a grin. "The opium pipe was alight, and I expect the fumes curled up and got into your nostrils, Handy, old man. We believe you. But let this be a warning to you, old chap! Let this be a grim and unforgettable lesson!"

"You drivelling chump—"

"Opium is pretty rotten stuff," added Dick solemnly. "We've saved you in the nick of time, Handy. You ought to fall on our necks and sob out your gratitude. We rescued you from the downward path—that awful path of drugs which leads to misery and the gutter!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, well put, if you know what I mean!"

"It's always better to nip these drug fiends in the bud," said Reggie Pitt. "Once they get too far along the road there's no pulling them up. Imagine the result if we hadn't discovered Handy's secret vice in time!"

"You set of babbling jackasses—"

"Picture St. Frank's!" said Pitt. "Church and McClure searching the Ancient House from attic to cellar—searching for Handy! Searching, mind you, with hollow eyes and stark fear in their hearts. And where do they find him in the end? Where?"

"If you don't stop, you blithering idiot—"

"Where?" demanded Pitt grimly. "Down in the deepest cellar, in a secret corner, soaked in opium! Not merely smoking the stuff, but eating it by the handful. That's what happens to these poor victims in the end."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we've saved you from this, Handy!" said Pitt kindly. "No, don't trouble to thank us. We're generous in that way. Whoa! Steady, you chump! You nearly biffed me that time!"

Handforth was lunging out with indignant exasperation. The other juniors yelled with laughter, and held him firm. By this time the last of the fumes had been cleared from Handy's system. The fresh air had done its work.

Dick Hamilton and the others were quite convinced that Handforth had merely been affected by the fume-laden atmosphere of that den; but it was a splendid opportunity to pull his leg.

"Well, let's get to the theatre!" grinned Dick, at length. "Are you quite sure about that Chinaman now, Handy? Or has he disappeared with the fumes?"

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Handforth gruffly. "I refuse to say another word!"

"Good!"

"I won't speak to you at all!" went on Handforth curtly. "As a matter of fact, I believe I imagined a lot of it. Anyhow, I can't seem to remember properly. And if any of you tell Irene or the other girls about this—"

"Don't trouble to invent any threats, old son!" grinned Church. "We shan't say anything. We'll keep your guilty secret. After all, we're all liable to have our moments of weakness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth gave it up as a bad job, and agreed to accompany his companions to the native theatre. The sooner this opium business was forgotten, the better!

The Continuous Performance!

WHEN they arrived at the theatre they found the other guests had been installed in the best boxes, and the performance was in progress.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We've missed the beginning!"

"You needn't let a trifle like that worry you!" chuckled Dick Hamilton. "The play's probably been going on for about a week, and there might be a faint hope of it finishing when the new term starts at St. Frank's."

Edward Oswald sniffed, considering this to be a very indifferent jest. He didn't know that Dick was speaking the literal truth.

More by luck than anything else, Handforth found himself in one of the boxes which already contained his sister, his minor, Irene Manners, and one or two others. Handforth was so pleased at being placed next to Irene that he forgot to be annoyed by the presence of Willy and Ena.

"You haven't missed much," remarked Willy. "Some chap was murdered just now, and he stood up and went out. Then they did a lot of jabbering, and the dead man's now playing another part. But where the dickens have you been all this time? Why weren't you at the banquet?"

"Mind your own business!" said his major severely.

"Ted!" protested Irene.

"Well, he shouldn't be so inquisitive," said Handforth. "How's everything going? Enjoy the feed? What's the show like?"

"It seems a terrible lot of nonsense to me," confessed Irene. "And these stools aren't any too comfortable, either. And I believe that—that things are crawling about all over the walls," she added uncomfortably.

"Things?" repeated Handforth, glancing into the dark recesses of the box.

"We haven't seen 'em, but we can hear 'em," said Willy, grinning. "Mice, perhaps."

"Alice!" cried the girls, in one voice.

"I thought that would do it!" chuckled Willy.

"Any more of that rot, my lad, and I'll buff you out!"

said Handforth darkly. "Don't take any notice of him, girls. How can we watch the play if we keep on talking like this?"

Handforth took stock of his surroundings, and he wasn't particularly impressed. He was such a matter-of-fact fellow that he probably expected to find a theatre on the conventional lines of an English place of amusement. But this Chinese "theatre" struck Handforth as being a kind of barn, and the boxes were quite different from what he had expected, too.

There was quite a good audience in the main part of the building—although why the people should take such an interest in the play was beyond Handforth's comprehension. The stage was only feebly illuminated, there was no scenery worthy of the name, and the actors appeared to believe that noise was the only essential for a successful performance.

The noise was certainly terrific. When the actors weren't shouting, they were uttering death agonies, and executions appeared to be constantly on the programme. There was no lack of action, either, although none of the visitors could understand what on earth it was all about. They would probably have been as much in the dark if they could have understood the language.

"About half an hour of this will satisfy our desire for Chinese theatres for ever," remarked Dick Hamilton, while another execution was being staged. "My goodness! Look at the chap who's just been beheaded!"

"Beheaded! The thing's a frightful fate!" remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"The 'beheaded' actor, having finished his part for the moment, had got up, and was now at the edge of the stage, drinking tea! But none of the native audience appeared to regard this as unusual.

"It's all rot!" said Handforth, as he watched. "Do they call this thing a play? Do they call—"

"Oh!" breathed Irene. "What was that?"

(What has happened to startle Irene? There are thrills galore in next Wednesday's gripping chapters. Don't miss them; chains.)

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