

"THE TEN TALONS OF TAAZ!" First Smashing Story of a Super St. Frank's Thriller-Series—INSIDE.

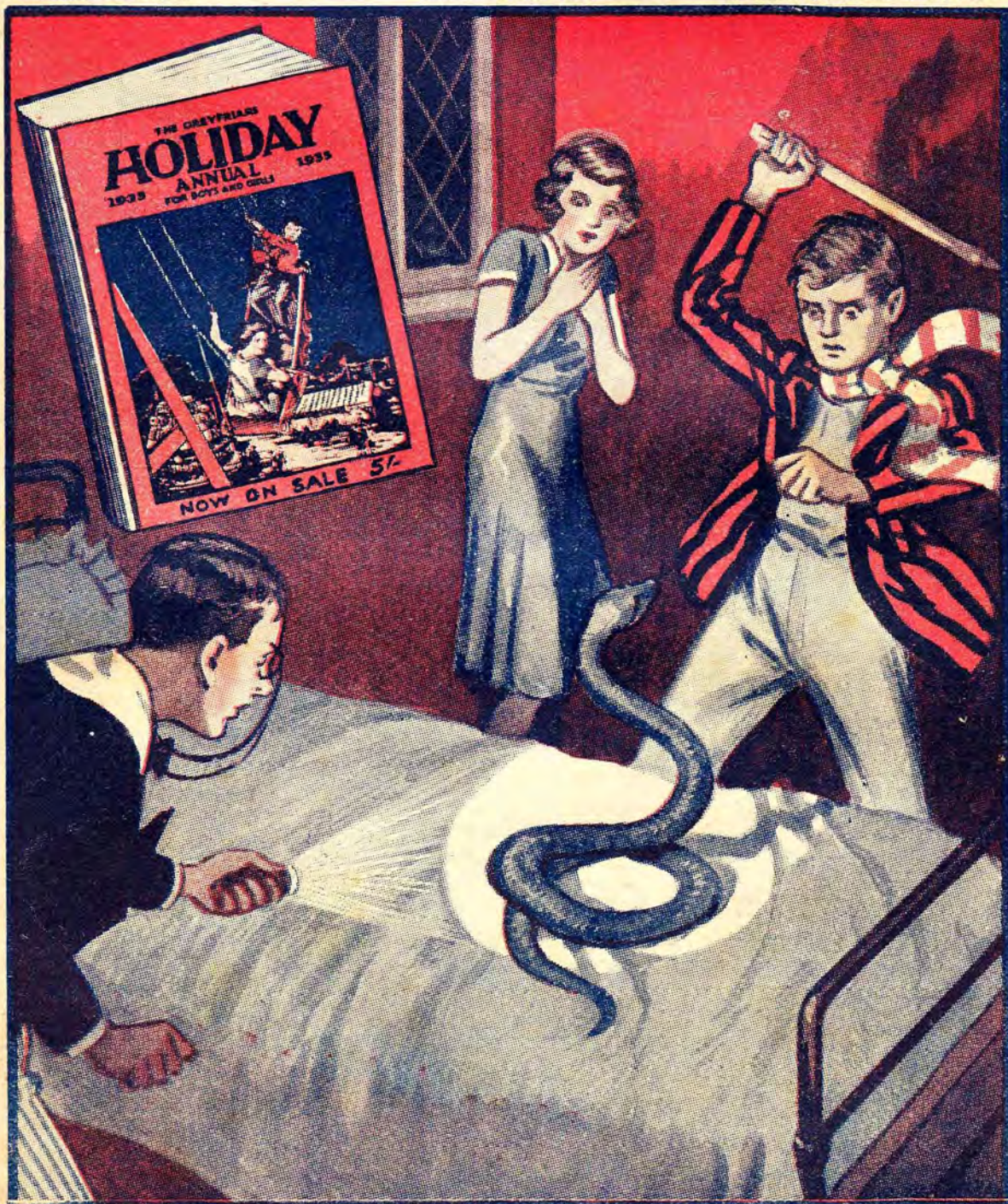
The GEM

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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AT GRIPS WITH THE SERPENT OF DEATH! Read "THE HOUSE OF FEAR!" The St. Jim's Thriller Within.

THE HOUSE of FEAR!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



CHAPTER 1.

The Terror of Cousin Ethel!

"HALLO!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What the—why the—"

"Figgy's off his wockah!"

Tom Merry & Co., the chums of St. Jim's, uttered those startling exclamations in varying tones of amazement. They had cause to be surprised.

School House juniors and New House juniors were out on the playing field talking football on the best of terms, and George Figgins was holding forth on the subject of full-back play in general, when suddenly he was guilty of the most extraordinary conduct.

He left off in the middle of a remark, and rushed off the football ground as fast as his legs would carry him.

The juniors stared after him in blank amazement.

Kerr and Wynn, his chums in the New House, were as surprised as the School House fellows. Figgins, as a rule, was a quiet and easy-going chap, and not at all given to sudden bursts of excitement or unaccountable actions. To see him break off and dash away in this manner was simply amazing.

"My hat!" said Kerr. "What the dickens—"

"He's off his wockah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with emphasis. "This is the only possible explanation. I disapprove of Figgy's conduct. I wegard it as wude."

"But what the—"

Tom Merry & Co. stared after Figgins. He was off the football ground already. He raced past the belt of elms and disappeared.

"Somebody's just come in," said Kerr. "Figgy must have caught sight of the visitor."

"But that's no reason—"

"I wegard Figgins as an ass!"

"I'm going after him," said Tom Merry. "Either somebody important has arrived, or else he's off his rocker!"

"It might be Cousin Ethel."

D'Arcy shook his head.

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"It isn't Cousin Ethel," he said. "Ethel's not able to come here now. Since her mother went abroad, she's been in charge of Dr. Gadsby, and he doesn't like St. Jim's, or the St. Jim's fellows. He's had the astounding cheek to tell me so! He doesn't like me!"

"Extraordinary!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Let's go and see what's the matter with Figgy," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined Fatty Wynn and Kerr, who were hurrying after Figgins already. The other fellows followed more leisurely in the direction of the School House.

Tom Merry was first through the elms, and he caught sight of a girl on the drive. Figgins was standing talking to her, and, although her back was turned to the juniors, they knew her at once.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in amazement. "It's Ethel, my cousin. Somethin' must have happened."

The four juniors ran on their hardest. Cousin Ethel was very popular with the chums of St. Jim's. At one time the girl had been accustomed to visit the school very frequently; but that had been stopped of late, and Tom Merry & Co. had missed her a great deal—perhaps not so much as Figgins, though. Figgins thought a very great deal of Cousin Ethel, and, indeed, had sometimes unconsciously assumed an air of proprietorship over her that excited the wrath of Arthur Augustus.

There was no doubt that Figgins had caught sight of Cousin Ethel as she passed the trees. It was really amazing how Figgy seemed to know, by some mysterious kind of instinct, when Cousin Ethel was anywhere near. Nobody else had seen Ethel, but Figgins had.

"Cousin Ethel!"

The juniors all uttered the name together. The girl turned her head, and then they all exclaimed again.

For Cousin Ethel was not looking her usual self.

The charming face, which they had always seen rosy and bright, was deadly pale. There were dark hollows

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under the eyes, and in the eyes themselves there seemed to lurk a strained expression of fear and apprehension which the juniors had never seen there before.

"What's the matter—what's the matter, Ethel?" Figgins was saying; and in his anxiety he had taken the girl's hand, and was holding it tightly in his own. "Ethel, what's the matter?"

Ethel did not reply. Her lips moved, but she said nothing. It seemed as if words would not come.

"Ethel," said Tom Merry, "what can it be? What's the matter, Ethel?"

Her voice broke away in a sob.

The juniors looked at her in utter consternation. Ethel was not a girl with nerves; she was never hysterical. And when she was so disturbed as this it was certain that there was some weighty reason for it.

"Ethel, somethin' happened to your mothah, deah gal?" asked D'Arcy.

The girl shook her head.

"What is it, then, Ethel?"

"I—I— Oh, I am so terrified!" The girl covered her face with her hand, as if to shut out some fearful sight. "Figgins, help me! Oh, I—I—"

Her voice died away. A white, fixed look came over her face, and Figgins had just time to catch her as she swayed.

Figgins, his own face as white as chalk, held the girl tenderly with as much care as if she had been a delicate piece of porcelain, liable to break at the slightest rough touch.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Bai Jove!"

"She's fainted!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Horror of the Red Room!

COUSIN ETHEL had fainted. The white face was cold and still. She lay inert, motionless, in Figgins' arms.

"Get her to the House—quick!" exclaimed Tom Merry, frantically.

Figgins nodded, and carried her quickly towards the New House. It was nearer than the School House. In a few moments he reached the door with his unconscious burden.

Ethel's eyes opened as Kerr dashed cold water in her face. The Scots junior had filled his cap at the fountain. Her gaze rested upon the juniors, and rested upon Figgins.

"Save me!" she muttered.

"Ethel, what do you mean? Are you in danger?"

"Yes—oh, yes! Save me!"

Figgins set his jaw squarely, and his fist clenched hard. There was a gleam in his eyes that boded ill to anyone who should threaten Cousin Ethel with danger.

"You're safe here, Ethel," he whispered. "Buck up, Ethel dear! You're safe here."

The girl tried to calm herself. Fellows were coming towards the spot from all directions, seeing that something was wrong. The colour flushed into Ethel's face as she realised that all eyes were turning upon her.

"Take me in—quick!" she murmured.

"Can you walk?"

"Yes—yes."

And Cousin Ethel, leaning heavily upon Figgins' arm, entered the New House. It was almost deserted; all the fellows were out of doors in the bright September afternoon. Figgins opened the door of the Junior Common-room, and led Ethel in.

There was no one else in the room.

"Shut the door," said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn closed the door.

Ethel sank into a chair, her breath coming and going in short gasps. The colour had faded from her face again, leaving her deathly white. The juniors stood round her, with anxious faces, in wonder and alarm. Figgins fanned her gently with an exercise-book.

The girl tried to smile.

"I'm—I'm afraid I have been very foolish," she murmured. "I think I must have fainted. Oh, I have been so frightened—"

"Drink some of this!" said Kerr.

He placed a glass of water to Ethel's lips. The girl sipped it.

"Thank you! I—I'm better now. It was foolish of me to faint. But I—I have been through so much. I have been so frightened."

"Who has frightened you?" asked Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! Tell us the wottah's name, Ethel, and we'll smash him!"

The girl's lips quivered.

"You—you can't protect me," she whispered. "I—I was foolish to come here. I—I knew it would only make you anxious, but—but oh, I was so frightened! I know that I am in danger."

"Danger of what, Ethel?"

"Death!"

The girl shuddered as she spoke the word.

"Good heavens!" said Figgins hoarsely. "What are you saying? Ethel, what has happened? Who is it?"

"Dr. Gadsby!"

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"Your great uncle?"

"Yes, my mother's uncle. Oh, he frightens me! I know he means that I shall never leave the Black House alive—oh!"

The girl sobbed.

"The villain!" said Figgins. "But—but how is it, Ethel? What has happened?"

"I'll try to tell you," said the girl. "You cannot help me, but—but I must tell you. As soon as I found that the Black House was near St. Jim's, I—I determined to come here to see Fig—and see you all, and tell you. I know you will save me if you can. I have stolen out to-day. I walked through the wood to Rylcombe, and came on from there by the road. Dr. Gadsby will know that I have come here—he will follow—he may arrive at any moment. He will take me back with him."

Figgins clenched his teeth.

"He shan't, if you're in danger!"

The girl moaned.

"I can't prove it. It's only suspicion—such horrible suspicion! But—but there have been two others—they were in the Red Room—and they—died!"

"Ethel!"

"Twy to calm yourself, deah gal!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was trembling with excitement now. "You must tell us what has happened, in case the man comes. We jolly well shan't let him take you away if you don't want to go."

The girl made an effort to still the wild beating of her heart. She drank the cool, clear water again, and collected herself.

"I must be quick," she said, in a steadier voice. "He may come at any time, and as he has a car, he would reach St. Jim's very quickly, when he discovered that I was gone. You—you know that my mother has fallen ill again, and has had to go to the South of France. Last time she went I was placed at school, but this time Dr. Gadsby persuaded my mother to leave me in his charge. His wife was very kind to me, and he has very great influence over my mother. He is a clever man—a dreadfully clever man! I fear him—oh, I fear him so much!"

She trembled violently.

"Dr. Gadsby had a house in Eastbourne then, and I stayed there. But since then, he moved to the Black House on the moor—you know the house—it is on the moor on the north side of the Wayland Road."

"I know it," said Tom Merry. "It has never been occupied."

"It was unoccupied for a long time, till Dr. Gadsby came to live there, but it has always belonged to him," said Ethel. "Mrs. Gadsby came, too, but she became ill, and the doctor sent her back to Eastbourne. Before she went—oh—"

Her voice trailed off again.

"Twy to be calm, deah gal!"

"Before she went, I—I tried to persuade the doctor to let me go with her, but he refused. He said she would return to the Black House soon, but she has not returned. And—and she told me—she told me that she was afraid for me, that I must be careful, and advised me to write to my friends to come and see me, and to leave the doctor if I could—she would not tell me why. She is terribly afraid of him, and—and she was frightened at having told me so. She told me never, never to live in the Red Room, even if Dr. Gadsby ordered me to take that room."

"The Red Room?"

"Yes. It is a room in the turret—there is a turret in the corner of the house, with one room that is away from all the rest—a room with thick, solid stone walls, and an old-fashioned chimney—it is painted in red, and is called the Red Room. I did not know why I was not to have the Red Room, unless because it was lonely—but—but I was frightened and curious, and I inquired about the Red Room. I—I learned something about it from an old woman who lives in Lower Wayland. She told me—and I heard it again from others—that Dr. Gadsby's first wife died in the Red Room—and his uncle died there."

"Oh, Ethel!"

"And—and both of them died in such a way that inquests were held," said the girl, shuddering. "But the cause of death was unknown—it was called heart failure, but both of them had been healthy enough up to a short time before they died."

"Ethel!"

"And the day after Mrs. Gadsby went away, the doctor said he required my room to use as a laboratory, and ordered Martha—he keeps only one maid, a deaf old woman named Martha—he ordered her to take my things into the Red Room, and said that I was to occupy that room in future."

The juniors listened with pale faces. That anyone, especially a relation, should intend to harm Cousin Ethel seemed incredible, but surely the girl's fearful terror could not be without grounds.

"I was so frightened that I could not help showing it in my face," went on Cousin Ethel in low, broken tones, "and he—he saw it! I think he never knew before then that I suspected anything. His face became as black as a thunder-cloud, and I thought for a moment that he would strike me. He did not, however; he became calm again, and smiled—such a terrible smile. He told me not to argue with him—that I was to do as I was bidden. And I took the Red Room. I—I wrote three letters that day, and took them in the hall to be posted as usual—and they disappeared. I know he took them—one was to you, Arthur—you did not receive it!"

"No, dear gal."

"Then I determined to post more letters myself. As I was going out, I was stopped by Dr. Gadsby. He forbade me to leave the house, and turned his bloodhound loose in the grounds, and warned me that if I tried to leave, I should be torn in pieces."

"Oh! The brute!"

Figgins clenched his teeth hard.

"I—I have occupied the Red Room now for two days," said Ethel. "Oh, I have been terrified at night! Each of those who died there died in the night—without a sign to show how they died!"

"Oh!" muttered Figgins.

"To-day, I—I resolved that I would come here. I had an opportunity—when the doctor went out—he often goes for long rambles on the moor, and till lately he always took his dog with him. When he went out to-day the dog followed him, and he seemed to have appeared to forget his new custom of leaving the bloodhound on guard. I saw him go from the window of the Red Room, and saw the dog follow, and he did not send it back. I stole down from the turret and ran—and ran—Oh dear!"

"You did right to come here," said Tom Merry. "But—but what is the danger you fear, Ethel? Why should he want to kill you?"

The girl shuddered.

"I—I know that he does! Why should he put me into the Red Room—where others have died—so strangely, too? And why should Mrs. Gadsby have warned me never to enter the Red Room? And when his first wife died, Dr. Gadsby had all her money, and there was very much of it—she was older than he was, and very rich—his second wife told me that. And he is very extravagant in his scientific experiments—he spends money like water, and he is in debt now—many people know that, and that he's in danger of being sold up. And his uncle, who died in that room, was a rich old man, and all his money was left to Dr. Gadsby—though he has wasted it since."

"But you, Ethel—if anything should happen to you, would the man benefit in any way?" asked Kerr.

"Yes! He would gain ten thousand pounds!"

"Good heavens!"

"I am to have that, as you know, Arthur, under my grandfather's will, when I am of age. My grandfather on my mother's side, you know—Dr. Gadsby's brother. He left it to me because I was his favourite granddaughter—but—but in the event of my not living to the age of twenty-one, it was to go to his brother, Dr. Gadsby. He was very fond of his brother, and he left him a large sum of money—which the doctor has spent, along with all the

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rest, in scientific research. Mrs. Gadsby told me that he has spent more than fifty thousand pounds in this way, and is now quite poor—and she is supported in Eastbourne by her own people. But—but if she were rich, I—I believe that she would die as his first wife died."

And Ethel sobbed.

"I know she thinks so, too—she knows him so well—she is afraid of him, though now he has no motive to kill her. He is utterly unscrupulous. In his experiments, he tortures animals—I have heard their shrieks from the turret."

"What is he experimenting in?" asked Figgins.

The girl's voice was hushed with horror as she replied: "Poisons!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Whisper of Death!

TOM MERRY & CO. stood silent, their faces tense. They could no longer doubt that the peril was real—that Ethel Cleveland was in terrible danger.

Figgins had unconsciously taken her hand. He was holding the little white fingers in his big, brown palm, and Ethel let them remain there unconsciously.

In Figgins' touch she seemed to find strength and courage.

"What can we do?" said Tom Merry at last. "You must not go back to the Black House, Ethel."

"Wathah not!"

"He will guess I have come here—he will follow—he will take me away!"

"He can't! He shan't!"

"He will. I can prove nothing. At each of the inquests he was exonerated from any blame—and that was years ago. His name is high in his profession; it is known that he is a vivisectionist, but many people uphold him. They don't know that a man who is cruel to animals is quite likely to be cruel to human beings, too. He will take me away—he has the legal right—and the power. I cannot stay here!"

The juniors clenched their hands.

It was true enough.

Dr. Gadsby had the right and the power to take the girl away with him—the law was on his side. Until he had committed some crime, no one had the right to interfere. And when he has committed the crime he contemplated, Cousin Ethel would be dead.

Figgins gave a wild cry at the mere thought of it.

"Ethel, you can't go—you shan't go!"

"Oh, I shall have to; he will be here soon. He will come here instantly he knows I have gone from the Black House. Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do?"

"Ethel, has anything happened yet—anything to show that—that he means you harm? Has he hurt you?"

The girl shuddered again.

"No. He is kind in a strange way. I believe he is fond of me—he always seems to be—he first won my mother by his regard for me. But—but he would let nothing stand in the way of his experiments—he would sacrifice me as readily as one of the poor little rabbits, or the dogs. He has cages upon cages of them—rabbits and dogs and snakes—especially snakes. He makes experiments in serpents' venom, and I've seen the poor little animals twisted all out of shape by the poison he has injected into their bodies in his horrible researches."

"The horrible brute!"

"And—and his uncle had been in the Red Room for four days when he died. He was on a visit there. He was fond of his uncle, I believe—people said so, anyway, and that helped, I suppose, to prevent suspicion. And—and Mrs. Gadsby told me that on the third night the old gentleman was in the room he heard something—he told her about it on the following morning—a sound in the room as of some-one whispering. He got up and searched the room but there was no one there."

"Someone whispering?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes, a sound like whispering, but no words—just a whisper. And when the first Mrs. Gadsby died, her husband was away from home, and it was reported at the inquest—I have read it in an old Wayland paper—that the night before she died she had imagined that she heard a whispering in the room. She told old Martha so in the morning, but she set it down to her imagination. But—but how could it happen twice like that, if it was imagination? Both of them who have died heard the same sound the night before they died—and—and when I go to bed at night I fear to hear it every moment, and I cannot sleep."

Suddenly there came the sound of a car in the quad.

Ethel sprang to her feet.

"It is Dr. Gadsby. He has come for me!"

Figgins still held her hand.

"Quiet!" he muttered. "He shall not take you away."

Figgins spoke desperately. In his heart he knew that there was no stopping the doctor. He could call upon the police to aid him if he were resisted.

The girl was shuddering in every limb.

"But you have not heard that sound in the Red Room yet?" asked Tom Merry in a low voice.

"Not yet; but I fear—I fear—"

"It would seem that the danger does not arise till that sound is heard, by the two cases that have happened. Ethel, if this man takes you away—Ethel, if you should hear that sound, let us know, and we shall know you are in danger, and we shall save you if we have to come and take you by force."

"But—but how can I let you know?"

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"After this I shall be closely watched. I shall not be

"Oh, it's ripping!" he said. "Trust Kerr to think of a way out. Ethel, you could get a telegram like that through. You could word it so that the old villain would think you were putting us off from paying a visit."

"Yes—yes."

"Don't forget," said Kerr. "There seems to be no danger till you hear that sound in your room, and as soon as you hear it, you get that message through. If we don't get a wire of some sort, we shall know you've been stopped, and we'll come scouting. But write or wire if you can, and any letter that doesn't contain the word picnic will be taken to mean that you're all right. Dr. Gadsby would rather let you seem to be unrestrained, I should think, so long as he reads your letters, and sees nothing suspicious in them."

"Yes, yes!"



"She shan't go back to that man's house!" said Figgins defiantly. To allow Cousin Ethel to be taken back to the house she dreaded and placed once more in the room of death was unthinkable. Figgins was resolved to prevent it if he could. "Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff, "you are acting disgracefully!"

allowed to leave the house or send a letter or a telegram. I shall never see the world again—never! I am going to my death!" sobbed Ethel.

Figgins groaned aloud.

"I think I have it," said Kerr quietly.

Figgins turned to him quickly. In a time when hard thinking was required, Figgins had a great faith in his Scots chum.

"What's your idea, Kerr?" he said.

"We must have a code," said Kerr. "Suppose, for instance, you wired to us: 'The picnic must be postponed.' Dr. Gadsby would let that come."

"Yes, but—"

"The word picnic means danger," said Kerr quietly. "If you send us a letter or a wire, and the word picnic occurs in it, we shall know that you are in danger. Make up any innocent-sounding sentence, but if you are in danger let that word occur. Do you understand?"

Cousin Ethel's face brightened.

"Oh, yes! He could never guess that."

Figgins nodded.

"Hark!"

The door of the Common-room was pushed open, and Mr. Ratcliff, the sour Housemaster, came in with a frowning brow. After him came a thin, half-bald old man, with a wrinkled face, from which two bright eyes glittered and gleamed like diamonds.

Ethel trembled at the sight of him.

"Dr. Gadsby!" she murmured.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"Dr. Gadsby complains that his niece has left her home and come here without permission," he exclaimed. "I see that it is the case."

"Come, Ethel!" said the doctor in a honeyed tone.

"I—I will not come back!" exclaimed Ethel.

"My dear child," said the old doctor softly, "why should you leave my house in this way? Really, you will give people reason to make unpleasant comments upon your conduct. My dear child, you must come back immediately."

The old gentleman's voice was kindness itself, and, save for the deep glitter in his eyes, his face expressed only

benevolence. The juniors could hardly believe their eyes. Was this the monster Cousin Ethel feared—this kind, queer gentleman, who appeared to be a most affectionate uncle? Arthur Augustus, who knew the doctor well, and had always considered him a kind old fellow, looked dubiously at the girl. Was Ethel allowing the loneliness and evil reputation of the Black House on the moor to work on her imagination and give rise to groundless fears?

Even Ethel seemed to be moved. She gazed at the doctor in surprise mingled with horror, but the kind smile never changed from his old face.

"Come, Ethel dear. I cannot allow these wild escapades," he said. "If you do not wish to remain with me, you shall go to your aunt's in Eastbourne to-morrow. But you must come home now, my dear child."

"Let me remain here with Mrs. Holmes till I go to Eastbourne," said Ethel.

"Impossible! We could not trouble her in that way, and besides, I cannot have my authority in my own house flouted. You must come home, child."

"I—I will not!"

"Do not compel me to exert my authority," said the doctor gently. "You must know that I am your legal guardian during your mother's absence."

"You—your shan't take her!" muttered Figgins. "You shan't!"

CHAPTER 4.

Taken Away!

FIGGINS clenched his hands hard.

He knew he was attempting the impossible. He could not defy his Housemaster; he could not defy the forces of the law. But to allow Cousin Ethel to be taken back to the house she dreaded—to allow her to be placed once more in the room of death—he was resolved to prevent it if he could. His face was white, and he stood tense with excitement and anger.

"Figgins!" said Mr. Rateliff.

"She doesn't want to go back to that man's house, sir. She can stay with Mrs. Holmes. The Head and Mrs. Holmes would be glad to have her!"

"Yes, yes!" said Ethel.

"Figgins," repeated the New House master, with a brow

like thunder. "Figgins, you are acting disgracefully—encouraging a young girl to treat her lawful guardian with disrespect. You will take a thousand lines, Figgins, and if you say another word I will cane you severely."

"You can cane me, then, sir," said Figgins recklessly. "Cousin Ethel shan't go back to that man's house if I can stop it. I'll appeal to the Head."

"I think you must have taken leave of your senses, Figgins," said Mr. Rateliff in amazement. "Miss Cleveland, your guardian has come for you. I will not give my opinion upon the subject of this indecorous flight from his house. But I must ask you to return with him at once."

"I must go," said Ethel.

Tom Merry caught her hand.

"Come to the School House," he said. "Mr. Rateliff is master here, but not over the way. Come with us."

Ethel shook her head.

"I must go," she said. "I—I knew I could not stay here. If Mr. Rateliff or the Head came here, Tom, they could only submit to the law—my guardian has the right to take me away. I must go."

It was true enough. The juniors realized it. Kerr drew the excited Figgins back, and held his arm.

"She shan't go!" muttered Figgins.

"She must, old man. But we will look after her," Kerr whispered. "We can't keep her here. The Head would have to let her go if we called him in."

Figgins groaned.

"Come, Ethel," said Dr. Gadsby, in the same soft and gentle tones. "I am sorry you do not like staying in my house, but this is not the way for a young girl to act. To-morrow you shall join Mrs. Gadsby in Eastbourne."

"Very well," said Ethel dully.

The juniors stood in helpless rage while the girl followed Dr. Gadsby from the house. They could do nothing.

The car was waiting. Dr. Gadsby handed the girl into it and entered himself. Tom Merry & Co. looked on from the doorway.

They waved their hands to Cousin Ethel as the car swung down the drive.

But the girl did not wave back.

She sat in her seat like a statue—white, motionless, lost to everything but the terror that was filling her very soul.

The car whizzed out of the school gates and disappeared.

"I—I feel quite in a fluttah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy faintly. "It's howwid, you know."

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"We shall look after her," he said, "and if anything should happen, we can help to bring the scoundrel to justice. But—"

"But isn't it possible that—that Ethel has been a bit frightened because people have died in that room?" Blake hazarded. "The doctor certainly seems a kind old chap enough, to judge by his manner."

Tom Merry looked dubious. But Figgins had no doubts. Figgins' faith in Cousin Ethel was firmly founded as upon a rock.

"Ethel's a sensible girl!" he said. "She wouldn't imagine things. If she thinks there's danger, there's danger."

And Kerr nodded.

"What do you think of the chap, Kerr?" asked Tom Merry. Like all the others, he had a great faith in the keenness and penetration of the Scots junior.

"If he's acting, he's doing it jolly well," said Kerr. "And upon the whole, I believe he was acting."

"But he could have taken Ethel away by force if he'd liked," said Tom Merry. "Why should he take the trouble to put on kindness if it wasn't real?"

"To keep up appearances, so that it would be said afterwards that at all events he appeared kind and considerate enough," said Kerr. "You see, questions may be asked afterwards at the inquest."

The juniors shuddered.

Figgins pressed his hands to his temples.

"I shall go dotty, I think, if she remains with that villain," he muttered thickly. "What can we do?"

"Nothing," said Kerr. "But it seems that the danger doesn't arise till that sound is heard in the room; that's how it was in two cases that happened there. Cousin Ethel hasn't heard that yet."

"What could the sound be?"

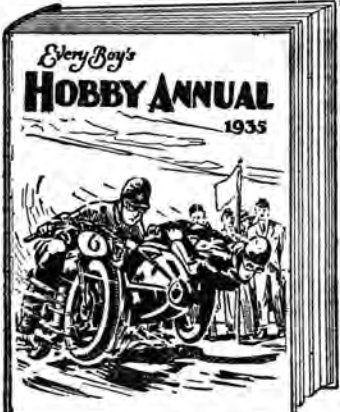
"Perhaps the opening of a secret panel. Perhaps the sound of a syringe spraying some poison into the room," said Kerr quietly. "You never know. That man is clever—you can see it in his face, and he is a specialist in poison. If we get that wire from Ethel, we shall know."

"But to wait!" groaned Figgins.

"Patience, old boy!"

Figgins walked back into the House. Mr. Rateliff met him in the Hall. The Housemaster's sour face was sourer than ever.

"Figgins," he said, "you have acted disgracefully. I shall expect that thousand lines from you."



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Figgins made no reply; he did not even hear. He was in no mood for the henpecking of Mr. Ratcliff just then.

"Did you hear me, Figgins?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, raising his voice.

Figgins started.

"Eh? No, sir."

"You have a thousand lines to do."

"Eh? Yes, sir! All right. Don't bother."

Mr. Ratcliff jumped. He had never been told not to bother before by a junior in the Fourth Form.

"Figgins!" he shouted. "This insolence—"

"Oh, can't you let a chap alone?" asked Figgins.

"Come into my study!"

And Mr. Ratcliff led Figgins into his study, and caned him there and then. Figgins endured it quietly; and Mr. Ratcliff never knew how terribly near he was just then to getting a terrific uppercut from the junior.

CHAPTER 5.

The Prisoner of the Black House!

COUSIN ETHEL sat quiet, without a word, in the car as Dr. Gadsby drove it along the country roads.

The doctor did not look at his niece. All his attention was given to driving the car. Through the village of Rylcombe, and by the bridge to the Wayland Road, and then by the road across the moor, the car sped at a rapid rate, and finally the doctor turned it from the road upon a rough path through the gorse. Against the blue sky a black mass rose to view, silhouetted on the blue. It was the Black House on the moor.

The house was very well known in the neighbourhood, and the juniors of St. Jim's had frequently passed it in their paper-chases, and, indeed, had ventured more than once into the wild, unkempt grounds to gather fruit. A high wall surrounded the grounds, and over the wall appeared the top of the house, with the high turret in the east corner. Creepers grew over every wall, and surrounded the turret. The woodwork of the house was painted black, and the old stones were almost black with age and moss—which had doubtless given rise to its sombre name. Cousin Ethel raised her eyes as the house came in sight, and shuddered a little.

The doctor, though he was not looking at her, divined her feelings. He turned towards her with a kind glance.

"My dear Ethel, what are you afraid of?"

The girl did not reply.

Dr. Gadsby alighted and opened the gate himself, and then drove in the car. He closed the gate behind him and locked it, putting the key in his pocket. He might have been a wander, taking back an escaped prisoner, who had been recaptured.

There was a deep bay, and a huge dog came bounding from the rugged bushes that filled the unkempt garden. It was a great bloodhound. Ethel shrank back in the car, but the dog did not notice her. He rubbed his head against the doctor, as the latter turned from the gate. Dr. Gadsby's face lighted up as he fondled the huge head of the bloodhound. If there was affection in his nature, it was extended to the dog.

Ethel stepped from the car and ran into the house. An old woman, with the peculiarly stolid expression of one who had long been very deaf, met her at the doorway.

"So you have come back, miss!" she said, in a cracked voice.

"Yes, Martha," said Ethel.

"It weren't any use, miss," she whispered. "He's too clever. It wasn't any use. Don't you try it again."

"Chattering, Martha?"

It was Dr. Gadsby's voice. His tone was quite pleasant, but there seemed to be an undercurrent of something in it that terrified the old woman. She changed colour and hurried away without replying to the doctor.

The doctor was left alone with Cousin Ethel.

The girl's heart was beating wildly. His manner was kind, his look was gentle, but she had seen the same kind expression upon his face when he was going into his laboratory to torture helpless animals in his horrible experiments, and she knew how much it was worth. Indeed, she had more than once suspected that too much scientific research had unhinged the brain of the doctor, and that he was not wholly in his right senses, though, with the cunning natural to the insane, he tried to conceal the fact from the outer world.

"Now, Ethel," said the doctor, "tell me why you ran away."

"I—I wanted to see my friends at St. Jim's," said the girl. "My mother always used to let me go there. Why should I not go?"

"But I had forbidden it, Ethel!"

"You had no right to forbid it."

"Your dear mother placed you in my charge, Ethel."

"But my mother understood that Mrs. Gadsby would be with us always," said Ethel. "If she had known where you were going to keep me, and in what way, she would never have placed me in your charge. You did not make the change until after she was abroad, and until after my brother had left England on an expedition. You know you would not be allowed to keep me here if they knew."

"Nonsense, Ethel—nonsense!" said the doctor, rubbing his hands together. "I do not know why you should mistrust me."

"I think you mean me harm," said Ethel, in her fearless way.

"Why? I've always shown you affection, Ethel," said the doctor. "I've always been fond of you, my dear girl—very fond. But if you do not wish to remain with me you shall go."

"Let me go to-day."

"That is impossible. But to-morrow, or the next day, you shall go—for good."

"I hope you will keep your word, sir," said the girl. "You have not kept your word to my mother."

"What have you told the boys at St. Jim's, Ethel?"

The doctor's tone was still quiet and calm, but there was a trace of anxiety in it now. Ethel understood the reason. If anything happened to her the boys would certainly tell what she had told them, and the result would be serious for the doctor.

"I told them I—I was afraid to remain here," she replied.

"Because I meant you harm?"

"Yes."

His hands worked like the claws of a wild animal now. Ethel shrank back against the wall with such terror in her face that it recalled the doctor to himself. In an instant he was quiet again, and calm, and a kind smile was on his face.

"Ethel dear, you have wronged me very much," he said gently. "This strange idea that has taken possession of your mind—that is why I will not allow you to see your friends or to write to them. You have maligned me to the world; your talk would have the effect of blackening my reputation and doing me a great deal of harm, and I need not say how it would distress your poor mother if it reached her ears. While you are in this extraordinary mood, Ethel, I have no resource but to keep you within doors. But that is my only motive."

Ethel did not speak.

"You must learn to think better of me, Ethel," said the doctor. "You must learn to trust me. Why do you distrust me? Has Mrs. Gadsby been telling any nonsense to you—before she returned to Eastbourne, I mean?"

His eyes glittered as he put the question.

"You need not ask me anything, uncle," said Ethel quietly. "I do not trust you—I cannot trust you. That is enough. I do not wish to talk about it. But—but others know how I fear to remain in this house, and—and if anything happens to me"—her voice broke for a moment—"they will see that justice is done."

"Ethel!"

"I believe my life is not safe here," cried Ethel. "Why have I been put in the Red Room? Your uncle died in that room, and your first wife. Why have I been put there?"

The doctor's face worked with fury. The kindness was gone now. It had dropped away like a mask, as it were.

"So you know that old story!" he exclaimed. "You have been spying—inquiring—eh? You shall learn better, my dear. Go to your room!"

"To the room in the turret?"

"Yes."

Ethel clenched her hands.

"I will not go there!" she cried. "I will not enter the turret room again! I will not go there—I will not!"

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Girl"—he strode towards her and grasped her wrist so tightly that she cried out with pain. "Come with me!"

"I will not! I will not!"

"Will you make me drag you by force?" shouted the doctor.

He drew her to the stair that led to the turret. Ethel followed. Her strength was nothing to his, and she could not resist. The stair led out upon a flat, leaded roof, from which a door opened into the square, black turret.

The doctor threw the door open.

"Enter!" he said.

Ethel shrank into the room. The man stood in the doorway, regarding her with eyes that gleamed and glistened.

The room did not look terrifying. The afternoon sun gleamed in at the broad window opposite the door—the window that opened on a sheer wall of a hundred feet. Excepting for the window and the door there was no means of egress from the room, unless by the wide, old-fashioned stone chimney. The sun gleamed upon the red-painted woodwork, upon the old oak furniture, upon the wide hearth and the brass fender. The room looked comfortable enough. But in that room two inmates had died mysteriously; in that room a sound had been heard that foretold a death to come; in that room suspicion and horror lurked in every shadow.

The girl stood trembling in the centre of the room. Dr. Gadsby looked at her from the doorway.

"You had better remain alone!" he said harshly. "To-morrow, Ethel, or the day after, you will see me no more, so be satisfied."

He drew back, closing the door after him.

Ethel was alone.

Alone in the turret room—the Red Room! And the doctor's last words rang strangely in her ears. To-morrow—or the next day—she would see him no more. Did that mean she was to be sent away, or—

A cry broke from her as she realised what a fearful significance his words might have. The unhappy girl threw herself upon the bed and sobbed with sheer terror.

CHAPTER 6.

Poor Old Figgy!

"FIGGY, old man, cheer up!"

It was Kerr who spoke.

Figgins was walking to and fro in the old quad, under the trees, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets. Kerr and Wynn were with him. They had been doing their best to cheer Figgins up, but without result.

Figgins seemed determined to have the blues.

"Cheer up, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn dismally.

Fatty Wynn's plump face, usually quite sunny and cheerful, was overcast now; he felt his chum's distress very keenly.

"I can't cheer up," said Figgins. "I'm thinking of Ethel; she's in danger. Oh!"

"But it's all right for the present," said Kerr.

"You must have something to eat, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn distressfully. "You didn't eat anything at tea. I had hardly anything myself; only some ham and eggs and a few tomatoes and some potatoes and bacon and a cucumber and a pork pie and a few sausages. I was feeling too upset to eat much."

"Better keep your pecker up, you know," said Kerr. "If we have anything to do for Cousin Ethel it's no use getting out of condition; you'll have to be fit."

Figgins stopped in his weary pacing.

"Can't we do anything?" he asked.

"What can we do, Figgy?"

"Can't we raid the Black House, or something?" said Figgins desperately. "Tom Merry and Blake and the rest of them would join us. We could raid the place and—carry off Cousin Ethel and—hide her somewhere in safety."

Kerr shook his head sadly.

"It can't be done, Figgy—you know it can't. If we tried anything of the sort it would only lead to the police being called in, and we should be arrested and most likely expelled from the school. That would worry Cousin Ethel, too. It's no good going in for heroics, old chap."

"But I can't help her!" he said. "I know she's in danger, and I can't help her."

"Hallo! Here's Tom Merry."

Tom Merry was looking very grave as he came up, with Manners and Lowther and Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—all of them, in fact, were looking very serious. A weight was upon the minds of all the juniors who knew Cousin Ethel's peril.

"Not heard anything, of course?" asked Tom Merry.

"No."

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"We're all feeling rotten," said Tom Merry. "Gussy has been proposing to raid the Black House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So has Figgy," said Kerr. "But it can't be done. We must wait."

"But what might happen to-night?" muttered Figgins huskily.

The juniors were silent; every face was dark. A bell rang, and they parted to go to their Houses.

Figgins & Co. tramped up to their study. Figgins threw himself into a chair and stretched out his long legs and stared gloomily at the wall.

"You ought to get on with your prep, Figgy," said Kerr gently.

"Hang the prep!"

"What about the thousand lines old Ratty gave you?"

"Hang the lines!"

"But to-morrow Ratty will—"

"Hang Ratty!"

Kerr gave it up. He ploughed through his prep, and Fatty Wynn did the same, while Figgins remained staring at the wall, the picture of gloomy misery.

"You fellows had better let me alone," he said at last. "I shall give you all the blues. I can't help it."

"We'll stick to you all the same," said Kerr. "Look here, you will have to show up some of those lines to-morrow."

"Blow the lines!"

"I'll begin them, then," said Kerr. "I can turn out a fist just like yours when I try. No good having old Ratty down on you, in addition to your other troubles."

"You're a good chap, Kerr."

Kerr was a rapid writer. He had turned out four hundred of the lines by bed-time, working steadily away and never saying a word. Fatty Wynn ate doughnuts and cake, but he considerably kept his back towards Figgins as he did so. He felt that perhaps he might not be expected to feel hungry at a time of distress; but, unfortunately, there never had been any occurrence in Fatty Wynn's life that affected his appetite.

Figgins rose heavily at last when it was time to go to bed. He went up to the Fourth Form dormitory with the rest with a heavy heart and a slow step.

He did not speak a word while he was undressing. Figgins was generally cheery and chatty, and the difference in him excited great attention in the New House portion of the Fourth Form. But to all inquiries Figgins replied only with a grunt, and the juniors gave it up at last.

"You'll try to get to sleep, Figgy?" said Kerr, as Figgins turned in.

"I'll try," said Figgins.

He did try, but without much success. Monteith turned the lights out for the Fourth, and the juniors were left in darkness.

One by one they dropped off to sleep, but Figgins remained with staring eyes.

He could not sleep.

Once he closed his eyes and dozed for a few minutes, and in that few minutes a fearful dream was crowded, and he woke up in a cold sweat. In his disturbed fancy he had seen Cousin Ethel surrounded by poisonous reptiles and strange beasts in the Black House on the moor, and the glittering eyes of the doctor looked out upon her from sombre shadows.

Figgins started up in bed as he awoke.

His cry awoke Kerr, who was a light sleeper. Kerr sat up quickly in bed.

"Is that you, Figgy?" he called out.

"Eh—what?" muttered Figgins.

"Did you call out?"

"I—I think I did."

"What's the matter?"

"Only a dream."

Kerr lay down again.

"Oh, go to sleep again, old son! Repeat the multiplication table till it sends you off."

Figgins laid down his head upon the pillow, but he did not try to sleep again. Waking was bad enough, but sleep was worse. At least, while he was awake he had only his troubling thoughts, and not the horrid visions of sleep.

But the darkness of the dormitory was peopled with horrors for the disturbed and unhappy junior.

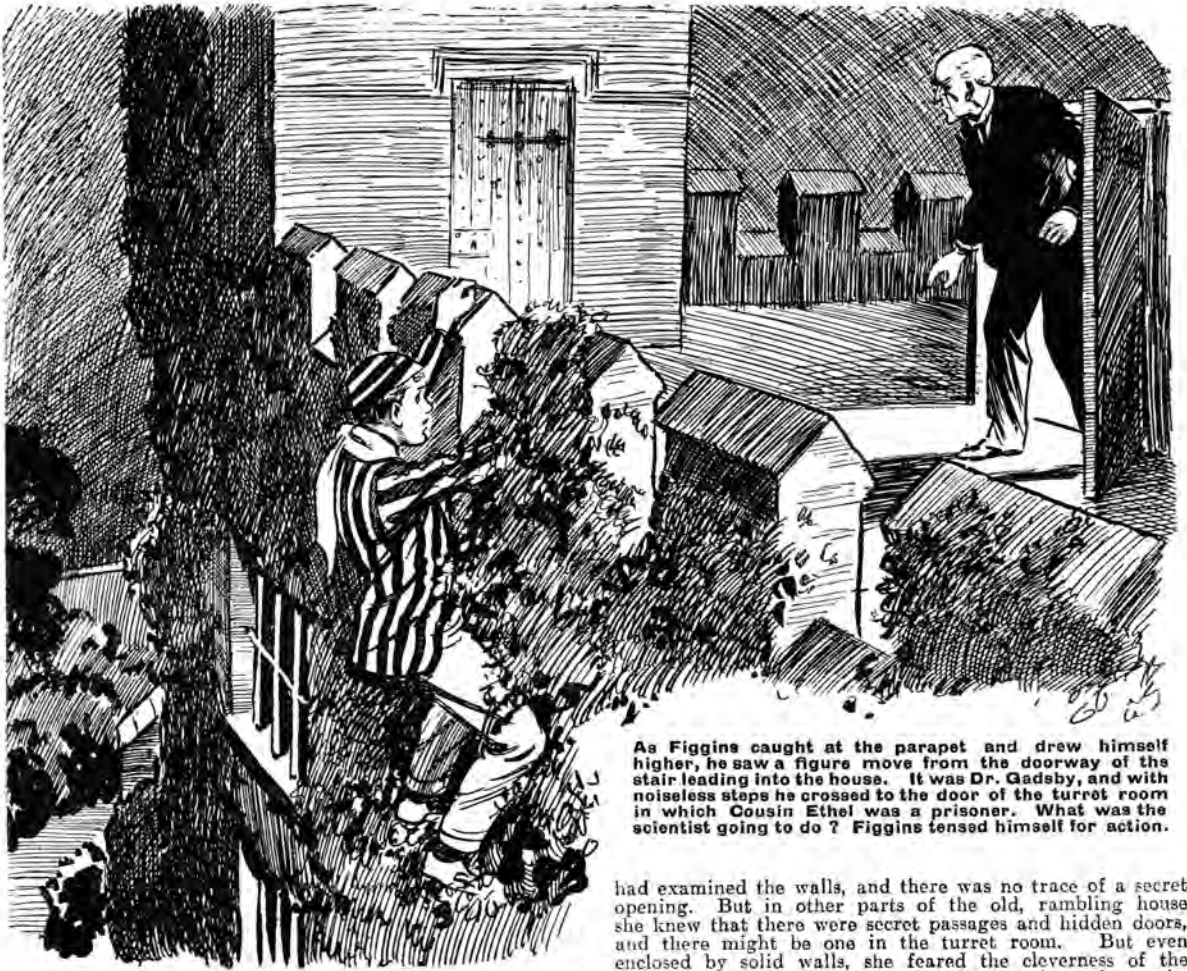
He heard the clock strike and strike again, hour after hour. The terrified face of Cousin Ethel was always before his eyes, and he fancied that he could hear her voice raised in terror and calling for help. In the rustle of the branches outside the dormitory window he fancied he heard the strange whisper which was the warning in the turret room of the Black House.

It became intolerable at last, and Figgins rose from his bed and tramped up and down the dormitory in his pyjamas.

Pratt woke up.

"Toothache, old man?" he queried sympathetically.

"No!" grunted Figgins.



As Figgins caught at the parapet and drew himself higher, he saw a figure move from the doorway of the stair leading into the house. It was Dr. Gadsby, and with noiseless steps he crossed to the door of the turret room in which Cousin Ethel was a prisoner. What was the scientist going to do? Figgins tensed himself for action.

"What's the matter, then?"
"Oh, nothing!"

Pratt yawned and went to sleep again. Figgins tramped up and down. Midnight rang out from the clock tower, and he threw himself upon his bed again.

Midnight.
It was midnight, too, in the turret room at the Black House. And what might be happening there?

CHAPTER 7.

The Horror of the Night!

MIDNIGHT!
The hour that was full of anguish to the wakeful junior at St. Jim's, was fraught with fear to the girl who watched alone in the turret room of the Black House.

Ethel was not sleeping.
She had retired to her room at the usual hour, but she did not go there to sleep. She was weary, but the greatest fatigue could not have induced her to close her eyes in the Red Room.

She had not gone to bed. The sense of danger had sharpened the girl's faculties. While an occupant of the Red Room, she had not slept in the bed, but on a couch near the window, but she was careful to disturb the bed so that old Martha, in the morning, would not know that it had not been slept in. Ethel was lying on the couch now, in deep gloom, wide awake, and fully dressed, all her nerves tense.

She was listening.
Her door was fastened on the inside, and could not be opened from the leads outside. Her window gave upon a sheer wall. She had long ago examined the chimney, and was satisfied that she was safe there. The chimney was quite wide enough to allow anyone to pass, but there were iron bars crossed inside it to prevent passage. No one could enter the room. Yet she feared!

The walls were of solid stone, where they were not wood, and there could be no secret panel. And many times she

had examined the walls, and there was no trace of a secret opening. But in other parts of the old, rambling house she knew that there were secret passages and hidden doors, and there might be one in the turret room. But even enclosed by solid walls, she feared the cleverness of the man she doubted—she feared that his cunning—almost the cunning of a madman—would overcome any obstacle that stood in his way.

That he would have killed her, or anyone who was an obstacle to him, as easily as he killed the unhappy victims in his laboratory, she felt assured. All that restrained him was fear of the law—of public knowledge of his crime.

For that reason, if she perished, it was to be by some subtle means that would defy detection—as the others had perished in the turret room.

The girl was awake and listening.

When the wind rustled the thick ivy that grew over the turret walls, she shuddered, seeming to hear in it the mysterious whisper she dreaded.

Suddenly she started.

A faint sound had come to her ears—a sound she could not define; but it was a sound, barely audible in the silence of the night.

What was it?

Ethel sat up in the darkness on the couch, her limbs quivering, her eyes staring into the gloom, her heart beating with great thumps.

It was danger!

She knew it—she was certain of it! Danger—terrible danger in the lone darkness of the night! But what was it?

She put her hand over her mouth to keep back the shriek of horror that rose to her lips.

She could not betray herself—betray the fact that she was awake, and that she was not in the bed.

The assassin must not know that she was on her guard. What was that sound from the stillness?

Ethel's heart beat almost to suffocation. From the silence came a soft, low sound—a sound like a sibilant whisper.

She shuddered, and an icy chill passed through her limbs. It had come at last! It came, she thought, from the direction of the chimney. A low, strange, lulling sound, a sound as of a soft whisper with no words—only a whisper.

A soft, hissing, wordless whisper.

"Oh, Heaven!" the girl murmured. "Oh! Heaven have mercy on me!"

Whisper—whisper!

What was it?

She sat thrilling with terror, never moving from the couch. The strange sound was audible almost continuously now—the strange, hissing, whispering sound.

It was approaching the bed.

As she sat chained down with horror she realised that. The sound was moving closer to the bed—the bed in which she was supposed to lie asleep.

If she had been in that bed—if she had been asleep—

She knew that she would never have awakened again.

What the horror was she did not know, but she knew that. She sat dumb with terror.

What was it?

Ethel could bear it no longer. She sprang to her feet with a wild, ringing shriek that echoed through the turret room.

Whether there was any further sound, she did not know. She shrieked in wild, mortal terror till the turret rang with it.

Knock!

It was a sharp tap on the door of her chamber from the leads outside. Then a harsh, angry voice was heard.

"Ethel!"

It was Dr. Gadsby's voice.

The girl ceased to cry out. She stood trembling in the darkness, shaking in every limb.

"Ethel—Ethel! What is the matter?"

She could not answer.

"Open the door! What were you crying out for?"

"I—I was so frightened!" stammered the girl at last.

"What were you frightened for?"

His voice came harshly and strangely through the thickness of the door. Ethel remembered with thankfulness how she had locked it and barred it. He could not enter.

"I—I thought I heard something, uncle."

"Nonsense! Open the door!"

She shivered.

"Open the door, Ethel!"

"I cannot."

"What do you mean, you cannot? Open the door at once!"

"I will not!" shrieked Ethel. "I'm afraid—afraid! You want to murder me! I will not open the door!"

"Fool!" shouted the doctor. "Are you mad? Open the door! I command you to open the door!"

"I will not—I will not!"

A savage hand struck on the door. He knocked again and again, and commanded the girl to open. But Ethel did not stir.

"Ethel, you will be sorry for this!" said the doctor savagely. "I will punish you for your disobedience! Open the door!"

"I will not!"

"What are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid of you."

"Fool! Do you think that I would do you an injury?"

"Yes—yes—yes!" shrieked the girl.

"Fool! I will speak to you about this in the morning, Ethel! You shall not disobey me, child."

She heard his footsteps receding over the leads.

Silence!

The hissing, whispering sound was still—she knew that she was alone in the room now. Whatever had been in the room with her was now gone.

What had it been?

Nothing human, she knew that. But what—what was the horror that had penetrated the closed and barred room?

CHAPTER 8.

The Warning Word!

ETHEL looked white and weary when she came down in the morning. She had slept on the couch for some hours, but she had awakened early and she had searched through the room in the daylight. Nowhere in the thick walls, however, had she discovered any trace of an opening.

Yet that something had entered her room during the hours of darkness, she knew.

Dr. Gadsby was out, as he usually was in the morning. But the great bloodhound was in the grounds, and when Ethel looked out of the door the animal bounded into view. He looked at her, and showed his great teeth, and the girl, shuddering, drew back into the house.

Old Martha served her breakfast, looking at the girl with strange eyes. Ethel ate nothing, and drank her tea in gulps. She was utterly unnerved by the terrible experience of the night.

"Martha," she said. "Martha!"

The old woman looked at her, and put her hand to her ear.

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"Yes, dearie," she said in her cracked voice. "Speak louder."

"I want to send a letter or a telegram, Martha."

Martha shook her head.

"The doctor has forbidden it, dearie."

"But—but couldn't you help me, Martha?" pleaded Ethel.

"Help me, dear—"

A harsh voice broke in from the doorway.

"So you are trying to induce Martha to disobey her master, Ethel?"

It was Dr. Gadsby. He had returned, and he was standing in the doorway, looking at Ethel with angry, glittering eyes. The doctor, too, had a worn look.

Old Martha shrank from his gaze, and hobbled out of the room. Ethel tried to control her emotion as she met her uncle's eyes.

"Yes, uncle, I want to send a telegram," she said.

Dr. Gadsby laughed unpleasantly.

"You will do nothing of the sort, Ethel. I do not intend to allow you to spread malignant reports about me."

"But—but, uncle, this—this message is—is about a picnic," said Ethel. "If I do not send it they will come here for me."

The doctor started.

"Who will come here?" he asked.

"Figgins and the others."

"Ah!"

"Let me send them a message," said Ethel. "I promised to do so. You shall read the message before it goes."

The doctor hesitated.

"If they came here they would not be admitted," he said; "but I do not want any public disturbance at my house, and that boy Figgins was a most insolent young scoundrel."

What message do you want to send? Write it down, and I will read it, and if I approve of it it shall go."

"Very well, uncle."

Ethel sat down at a writing-table and took up a pen.

The doctor watched her with burning eyes as she wrote.

"Figgins, New House, St. Jim's. I am sorry I cannot come to the picnic to-day,—ETHEL."

"That is the telegram, uncle."

Dr. Gadsby took it and read it, and his face cleared. His gaze was bent searchingly upon the girl.

"Is that all, Ethel?"

"That is all, uncle."

"That is what you intended to send by Martha?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said the doctor, "you shall not send a telegram; you shall write a letter, and you shall write it as I dictate. The letter can be posted in Wayland immediately, and will be delivered in the school by four o'clock, before afternoon lessons are over, and so it will reach Figgins in time."

"Very well, uncle," said Ethel submissively.

"Take up your pen."

She obeyed.

"Now write: 'Dear Figgins—' I suppose you call him dear Figgins?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Very well. 'Dear Figgins,—I am sorry I cannot come to the picnic to-day.'"

Ethel's heart leaped.

He had allowed her to use the code-word—he suspected nothing. She wrote down the sentence feverishly.

"I am sorry, too, that I came to St. Jim's yesterday. I was feeling very nervous and upset, owing to having received a letter from my mother, who is not well, and I was not at all myself."

"Uncle!"

"Write!" thundered the doctor.

"But it is not true!"

He strode towards her. The expression upon his face was terrible, and the girl shrank back in her chair, with a wild cry.

"Uncle—uncle! Don't!"

"Write as I dictate! Will you obey me or not?" he shouted.

"Oh, yes, yes, uncle!"

"Then write every word I have dictated to you."

Her pen scratched over the paper. Her hand was trembling so violently that the words were scarcely decipherable.

"Good!" said the doctor. "Now go on: 'You must not take any notice of what I said—it was only because I was feeling upset and hysterical. I am going to Eastbourne to-morrow, and so I cannot come to the picnic because I have to pack.'"

"Now sign it," said the doctor.

Ethel signed it.



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Half-a-crown is awarded to the sender of every joke that appears in this column.

A SHOCK IN STORE.

First Burglar: "Any luck last night, mate?"
Second Burglar: "None. Worked all night on a butcher's safe, and when I got it open I found it was a refrigerator."
Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Sayers, 37, Orchard Road, Dorking, Surrey.

DISTRICT DIALECT.

Old Lady: "Pardon me for interrupting you, but it is so refreshing to hear someone who still speaks the old dialect of the district."
Yokel: "That's O.K. with me, sister!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Vernon, Sunnyside Caravan, Newtown Camping Ground, Newton, Porthcawl.

MISTAKEN.

Theatre Attendant: "If you insist on hissing the actors I shall have to ask you to leave, sir."
Willikins: "Hissing? I was only telling S-S-Sammy that he s-s-singing was s-s-superb!"

Dr. Gadsby took up the letter and read it. His face had cleared again; he smiled in the old benevolent way.
"That is right," he said. "That's my own dear niece. Now, Ethel, make a better copy of this—your hand was trembling."

"Very well, uncle."
She wrote out the letter more firmly. The doctor folded it and placed it in an envelope and sealed it.
"Address it," he said.

Ethel obeyed. The doctor blotted the letter and placed it in his pocket. Then his eyes glittered as they turned upon her.

"Now, this will undo the impression you made upon those foolish boys yesterday," he said. "And the letter will remain, to prove that you did not mean a word of what you said to them. I will post this letter in Wayland at once."

He strode away. Ethel watched him from the window. The gate clanged behind him; the great bloodhound prowled in the bushes of the wild garden.

Ethel clasped her hands; her heart was beating.
"He will post it. He thinks to blind them, but he is warning them of my danger with his own hand. They will understand; they will save me if they can!"

CHAPTER 9.

Danger!

"F IGGINS!"
Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, fixed his eyes upon Figgins.

The Fourth Form were at afternoon lessons. All day Figgins had been trying to his Form-master, and Mr. Lathom's patience had given way at last.

Figgins came out of a brown study.
"Yes, sir?" he stammered.

"What is the matter with you, Figgins?"
"N-nothing, sir!"

"Are you ill?"
"N-no, sir!"

"Then why do you not pay attention to your lessons?" demanded the Fourth Form master sharply. "All day long you have been making mistakes. You have just told me that General Wolseley commanded at the Battle of Hastings, and that Shakespeare lived in the reign of Pharaoh. Pray what is your authority for those statements?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Jenkins, L.M.T. Hospital, Sandy Point, Hayling Island, Hants.

LIGHTNING LIKE.

Carpenter: "You hammer nails like lightning."
Apprentice: "You mean I'm fast?"
Carpenter: "No; you seldom strike twice in the same place!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Southway, 80, Henson Grove, Airedale, near Castleford, Yorks.

THE ONE THING MISSED.

Manager: "The last customer complained that you didn't show her any civility."

Assistant: "Then it's about the only thing in the shop I didn't show her!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Mitchell, 80, Review Road, Dagenham, Essex.

DROPPED CATCHES.

It was during the final Test match that the following remark was overheard:

"Lummy! Anybody would think this was a girl's school the number of misses I've seen!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Carr, 101, Bromley Road, Shortlands, Kent.

JUST WHAT HE WANTED!

Clerk: "Could I have Saturday off to help my wife with the cleaning, sir?"

Employer: "No, I'm afraid not."
Clerk: "Thank you, sir. I knew I could rely on you!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Packham, Kenwyn, Weston Green, Thames Ditton, Surrey.

A DUD VILLAIN.

Amateur Actor (who is taking the villain's part): "Hist!"
Stage Manager (under his breath): "And so you ought to be!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Duckworth, 29a, High Street, Doncaster.

Some of the Fourth giggled. Certainly Figgins had been unreliable in every branch of knowledge that day, but his answers in history had really passed the limit.

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir," stammered Figgins. "I—I—"

"If there is anything the matter with you, Figgins, I will excuse you," said Mr. Lathom. "You are usually an attentive pupil."

"I—I—I feel rather rotten to-day, sir."

"Oh, very well, I shall pass you over for the rest of the lesson!" said Mr. Lathom. "You certainly do not seem yourself."

Figgins sat silent till the Fourth Form were dismissed. When the signal was given to dismiss he still sat in his place, till Kerr shook him by the shoulder, and then he started.

"Come on, Figgy!" whispered Kerr.
"Oh, all right!"

The Fourth Form filed out. In the passage Fatty Wynn laid an affectionate hand on Figgins' broad shoulder.

"Now, Figgy, old man, do come and have something to eat!" he said. "You had no brekker and hardly a mouthful of dinner."

"I'm not hungry."

"But you must be," said Fatty Wynn, in distress. "You'll be ill if you don't eat, you know. It's awful to miss a meal. Eat enough is a duty a chap owes to himself, you know. Do come over to Dan's Taggles!"

"I can't!"
"Shut up, Fatty!" said Kerr. "Let him alone. You buzz off and feed."

"I—I wasn't thinking of myself," said Fatty Wynn.

"Goodness knows, I feel as cut up about Ethel as anybody. But it's a duty to eat; we owe it to ourselves. Besides, if we have to do anything it's best to lay a solid foundation."

"Oh, buzz off!" said Figgins.

And Fatty Wynn went, and his snack occupied him quite a long time. Figgins went slowly down the passage with Kerr, his hands in his pockets. Blake and D'Arcy and Tom Merry joined him.

"There may be a telegram," Kerr suggested.
"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's look!" said Tom Merry.

There was no telegram, but there was a letter in the rack for Figgins in the Hall of the New House. It was in Cousin Ethel's handwriting.

Figgins jumped as he saw it.

"From Ethel!" he exclaimed.

"Good!"

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins clutched down the letter, and the chums of St. Jim's hurried to a quiet corner in the quad where they could read it undisturbed. Figgins sat down on an old bench under a tree. His fingers trembled as he tore open the envelope.

The other fellows gathered round him, reading over his shoulder. The letter from Cousin Ethel, in the circumstances, of course, was common property among the juniors who were in the secret.

They all read it together.

"Dear Figgins,—I am sorry I cannot come to the picnic to-day. I am sorry, too, that I came to St. Jim's yesterday. I was feeling very nervous and upset, owing to having received a letter from my mother, who is not well, and I was not at all myself. You must not take any notice of what I said—it was only because I was feeling upset and hysterical. I am going to Eastbourne to-morrow, and so I cannot come to the picnic because I have to pack."

"ETHEL."

Figgins stared blankly at the letter.

Kerr smiled grimly.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a perplexed look. "That's vewy queeah. Ethel seems to have got ovah her fwight, you know."

"I couldn't help thinking that perhaps she was a bit hard on the old man," remarked Jack Blake.

"I can't understand it!" burst out Figgins. "Ethel uses the code word; she must intend it for that, as we arranged. The letter hasn't any sense, otherwise, as we have not arranged for any picnic."

"Bai Jove! That's wight enough!"

"It's clear enough," said Kerr, in his quiet tones.

"Blessed if I can see it!" said Tom Merry. "Make it clear to us, Kerr."

"Well, we know that Ethel isn't allowed to write letters, and so this letter must have passed through the doctor's hands, and he wouldn't have allowed it to be posted unless he chose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ethel had to word it in a way not to excite his suspicion. And he took advantage of the fact that she wanted to write to us—about a picnic, as he supposed—to force her to write a letter unsaying all that she said yesterday. Don't you see, it's a trick? He has forced her to write this."

"The bound!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, it's cleah enough now!"

"But he knows nothing about the code we arranged, and he has allowed her to leave in the word which means danger."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins rose to his feet, perspiration clotting on his forehead. He was white as chalk.

"You remember what the arrangement was?" he said.

"If Ethel heard that sound in her room—the sound the others heard before they died—she was to use the word 'picnic.'"

"That's right!" said Tom Merry.

"And here's the word," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ethel has heard the whispering in the room," said Kerr quietly. "That's what the letter means. All the rest of it was dictated by Dr. Gadsby."

"Oh, the villain!"

"She's heard it!" muttered Figgins wildly.

"We've got to save her!" said Tom Merry.

Figgins groaned.

"But how?"

"We've got to do it!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "We promised her that if we were warned we'd rescue her, and we'll do it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"She heard the sound in the room last night," said Kerr. "Each of the others died the next night after hearing it."

"It's howwible!"

"Cousin Ethel is alive and well now, or she couldn't have written the letter," said Kerr. "The danger won't come near her till to-night, when she goes to the Red Room to sleep. Keep cool, Figgy."

Figgins' hands were working, as if he were longing to have them upon the doctor. Perhaps he was.

"Ethel goes to bed at half-past nine, I believe," went on Kerr, in his calm and calculating way. "But if she is to be harmed, it won't be till later—till she's had ample time to go to sleep. That's pretty certain. Now, we go to bed at half-past nine here, and my idea is that we should bunk immediately after lights out. We can get to the Black House by ten o'clock if we buck up."

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"Good!"

"But when we get there?" said Tom Merry.

"We've got to save Ethel," said Figgins. "If necessary, we'll take her away by force, and hide her, and defy that fiend!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bettah than leavin' her to be killed, even if we all get sacked fwom the school ovah the bisney!"

"I've got a better wheeze than that, if you fellows care to hear it," said Kerr, in his modest way.

"Go ahead, Kerr, old man!"

"My idea is to get into the Black House secretly, and get into Ethel's room—one or two of us—and keep watch. If the sound is heard again, we turn on a light suddenly, and find out what it is. This is the way to catch the doctor at his tricks, and show him up as an intended murderer."

Figgins clapped Kerr on the shoulder.

"Of course," he said, "that's it!"

"The only way we can save Ethel is by showing her uncle up, and making it clear that he means her harm," said Kerr quietly. "And that seems to me to be the only way to do it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It will be a difficult bisney, getting into the house," Blake remarked.

"We shall have to do it."

"There's the bloodhound."

Kerr nodded.

"If he's loose, of course, it will make the business difficult. But we shall have to go prepared for that. I take it that we're not afraid of danger, anyway?"

"Not much, Kerr!"

"No feah!"

"If we have to deal with the dog, we must go prepared," said Kerr. "I think we shall be ready for the bloodhound."

"Good!"

"Then we shall have to get into Ethel's room without giving the alarm. Luckily, the old villain has put her at a distance from the other rooms for his own reasons—in the turret. You fellows have seen the Black House? There's a flat roof outside the door of the Red Room in the turret. We might be able to climb up the ivy."

"We'll try," said Figgins.

"We shall see better when we're on the spot," said Kerr. "I think the six of us should go—we shall be quite enough, and it's no good letting others into the secret. We don't want the slightest danger of talk about it; we should jolly soon be prevented from going if the prefects got a hint on the subject."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it's settled!" said Kerr. "I'll get the stuff ready for the bloodhound—in case we need it—and we're all to get out of bed and be at the gates as quickly as possible after lights out."

"It's settled."

"Better take a cricket-stump apiece," said Blake. "We may need them. The dog may cut up rusty—or the doctor. And I think I should enjoy getting in a good whack at Dr. Gadsby with a cricket stump."

"Yaas, wathah! I would give a whole term's pocket-money to give the feahful wascal a thwashin'!"

"He'll get worse than a thrashing—he'll get prison, and perhaps something more, if we show him up," said Kerr. "When we bowl him out in this case, the police will get on the scent of the other cases, and he may have those to answer for."

D'Arcy looked troubled.

"Bai Jove! It will be a howwible disgwace to the family," he said. "It will be in all the wotten papahs!"

"I'm afraid we can't think about that now, Gussy."

"Wathah not; but it will be howwido, all the same!"

Figgins put the letter in his pocket.

"It's settled," he said. "We're going to save Ethel—and if I can't do the thing any other way, I'll brain that old scoundrel with a cricket stump. He deserves it, anyway, for tormenting animals as he does. It makes me sick to think of him—and Ethel in his power! It's horrible!"

"We're going to save her," said Kerr.

CHAPTER 10.

The Night!

THE dusk of evening was stealing over the wide expanse of Wayland Moor, and the Black House on the moor grew blacker.

From the windows the sun was reflected in a glint of gold, but it died away, and shadow enveloped the old house. As the sombre night closed in upon the house, so it seemed to close in upon Ethel. That she had succeeded in communicating with the chums of St. Jim's—that she had warned Figgins & Co. of her peril—was knowledge that had borne her up during the day.

(Continued on page 14.)

GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR EDITOR FOR A CHAT.



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! In this great thriller number you have the first yarn of Mr. Brooks' wonderful new series of St. Frank's—a series which I anticipate will easily beat all previous serials for popularity. If you have read the first story you must all be looking forward with eagerness to the second of the series. It's a yarn to look forward to, believe me. In my opinion, it is even more thrilling than the one in this issue. The story is called:

"THE CLUTCH OF THE FIRST TALON!"

The imperturbable Vivian Travers is the first of the ten St. Frank's boys to come under the clutch of the Vulture God of Tazaz. It is midnight when Travers awakens and has an irresistible desire to go to an old oak-tree on the bank of the River Stowe. Actually, he is under the influence of the priests of the Tazaz Temple. By their will-power they compel him to do their bidding. Travers goes to the oak-tree, and the trance-like stupor leaves him. He then realises, with a thrill of uneasiness, that he is the first to undergo the ordeal. If he fails, the punishment is death. What is his test of courage to be? You will

see in next Wednesday's nerve-tingling yarn, which will hold your breathless interest throughout.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA!"

A ripping holiday-adventure yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's is another grand treat for you in next week's issue. Tom Merry & Co. go down to Clovelly, in Devon, for a short stay. While there they hit upon a strange mystery—involving them in an adventure which adds no few thrills to their jolly holiday. Make sure you go with them next Wednesday. You'll enjoy another holiday!

A SUPER LINER.

The 534, the new 75,000-ton liner of the Cunard-White Star Line, will be the biggest ship afloat, Len Godfrey, of Wandsworth, when it is launched this month. It is over 1,000 feet in length, and will have a speed of 32 knots. With

PEN PALS COUPON

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accommodation for 3,000 passengers and a crew of 1,000, the 534 will be like a floating town; for it will have many different shops, a daily newspaper, and a telephone exchange. In addition, there will be a swimming bath and a theatre, which will also be used as a "talkie" cinema. The 534 will be an all-electric ship, and two power stations will provide the electricity for lighting, cooking, heating, launching the lifeboats, and working the twenty-one lifts. It is hoped that this super liner will regain for Britain the Blue Riband of the Atlantic, which is now held by the Italian ship Rex.

A FREAK KITTEN.

Freak animals are very rare, for more often than not an animal born deformed is not allowed to live by the mother. But in Durham there is a freak kitten of which its mother is proud. It has two faces—two noses and two mouths and four eyes! As this unusual kitten seems to be two rolled into one, our office-boy wants to know whether it has eighteen lives, instead of the proverbial nine of the cat!

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH.

"Come into my parlour," said the spider to the snake, and the snake promptly did, which started a four days' fight to the death! This is what happened recently in Baltimore, U.S.A., when a grass snake got to grips with a spider. But if you think the snake won the fight, you would be wrong! The spider was more than a match for its adversary, and wove a web round the reptile until the latter had to be killed to save it from being strangled to death.

IT MADE ME LAUGH.

Householder: "Among the items on your bill you've put four and a half hours' labour, and you were only four hours on the job."

Plumber: "Yes, mister, but it took me the other half-hour to make out the bill."

THE EDITOR.



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, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

A. G. Corfield, 62, Southport Road, Plumstead, London, S.E.18, wants to hear from Rover Scouts in any country; exchange articles like badges, etc.; age 17-18.

Ernest Carter, 19, Raglan Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17, wants correspondents; interested in swimming, gymnastics, film stars, snaps; age 17-19.

Miss M. Batty, 213, Archway Road, Highgate, London, N.6, wants girl correspondents overseas; interested in books, hobbies, and photography.

Jack Fraser, 133, Ferry Road, Christchurch, New Zealand, wants correspondents; age 15-16; any subject.

Peter L. Gibson, c/o Mansions Hotel, Symonds Street, C.1, Auckland, New Zealand, wants a correspondent in Canada, South Africa, or India; interested in boxing, gymnastics, and athletic sports; age 10-12.

Harold Streeter, 655, Osborne Avenue, Verdun, Pro. Quebec, Canada, wants to hear from stamp collectors in Ceylon, Cyprus, Egypt, Gibraltar, and the Gold Coast.

Miss Arlene Simpson, 5809, Mance Street, Montreal, Canada, wants girl correspondents in Hawaii, Egypt, India, Shanghai, Mexico, U.S.A., and Wales.

Miss Jessie Beaumont, 40, Packington Street, Essex Road, Islington, London, N.1, wants girl correspondents interested in films, sports, books, and stamps; age 14-16.

Melvine Pat Gordon, 17, Mostyn Road, Bow, London, E.3,

wants correspondents; age 19-20; sports, films, snaps. G. E. Bowen, 116, Mansfield Road, Durban, Natal, South Africa, wants a pen pal.

Miss Eva Lilian Fonseca, King Street, Falmouth, Jamaica, West Indies, wants girl correspondents; age 16-17.

Reginald Martin, 20, Somerleyton Road, Brixton, London, S.W.9, wants correspondents; age 14-16.

William Tripp, 83, Distillery Road, Brentford, Middlesex, wants to hear from collectors of old coins; age 18-20.

Frank Horncastle, 22, Nursery Mount Road, Hunslet Carr, Leeds, Yorks, wants pen pals interested in electricity, drawing, and the GEM; age 15-17.

Brendan O'Byrne, 55, Dartmouth Square, Leeson Park, Dublin, Ireland, wants correspondents interested in Gilbert and Sullivan's operas, and famous Savoyards.

Richard Dellar, 33, Alexandra Drive, Surbiton, Surrey, wants a pen pal in South Africa, interested in cricket; age 11-14.

Jim Forester, c/o Smithton P.O., Tasmania, Australia, wants pen pals; exchange photos, newspaper cuttings, postcards; age 15-17.

G. F. West, 60, Seventh Avenue, St. Peter's, Adelaide, South Australia, wants correspondents; especially in Europe, India, Africa, and South America; stamps, coins, view cards, books; age 14-15.

Ray Thompson, Elder Street, Wallaroo, South Australia, wants to hear from stamp collectors anywhere; interested also in match brands and cigarette cards; age 14-18.

H. W. Hunt, Box 21, P.O. Wyong, N.S.W., Australia, wants to hear from stamp collectors in the British Empire.

F. H. Garside, 5, Herbert Street, Congleton, Cheshire, wants pen pals keen on motors and engineering.

Arthur T. Pratley, 1, Craner's Road, Coventry, wants correspondents; age 15-17.

(Continued on page 26.)

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THE HOUSE OF FEAR!

(Continued from page 12.)

But when night closed in upon the Black House her terrors revived.

Darkness was upon the moor—from the windows could be seen the distant twinkling lights of Wayland far off, the only sign of light in the blackness and loneliness. In the wild, unkempt gardens of the Black House the bloodhound was roaming loose. Within the lonely house Dr. Gadsby was shut up in his laboratory from which he had not emerged for hours. Ethel had tried to read, but the effort was a failure. She could not fix her attention upon her book. The hours passed on leaden wings to her. That the chums had received her message was certain; but would they understand—would they act upon it? That part of the letter which Dr. Gadsby had dictated for the purpose of deceiving them—would it have that effect? It was possible. But even if they understood—if they tried to help her—could they?

What could they do? St. Jim's lay far away beyond the wood. Ethel was immured within the walls of the Black House, at the mercy of the grim and unscrupulous man whom she suspected of being half mad.

Bed-time had come, but Ethel did not go to bed. She dreaded the Red Room—she dreaded the solitude of the turret. She remained with her book by the reading lamp in the dreary great room below till Dr. Gadsby came out of his laboratory. The doctor came into the room, rubbing his hands together, with a satisfied smile upon his face. His experiments had evidently gone to his satisfaction.

Two or three letters lay upon his desk, one a large legal-looking envelope. The doctor picked that up first, with a scowl replacing the smile upon his face. He did not notice the girl sitting quietly in her corner. A muttered word escaped his lips as he read the paper.

"One thousand pounds—and fifty guineas costs!" he muttered. "H'm! An execution in seven days—h'm! Hang them! Can't they wait a little?"

Ethel could not help hearing what he said, and she shuddered. She knew that Dr. Gadsby was being hard pressed by creditors, and had been so for months. He had had more than one fortune to spend, and it had flown away like water in his toxicological researches. She made a slight movement, and the old man swung round towards her.

"Ethel! You here!"

His voice was hard and rasping.

"Yes, uncle!" said the girl in a trembling voice.

"Why are you not gone to bed?" the doctor asked harshly. "You should have gone. It is nearly ten o'clock!"

"I—"

"Go at once!"

The girl rose to her feet. Her face was deadly white, and she was trembling. Her look might have melted a heart of stone, but it had no effect upon the man before her. His eyes were gleaming with anger.

"Go to bed at once!" he repeated.

"Good-night, Ethel!"

"Good-night, uncle!"

She moved slowly out of the room. The doctor followed her. Ethel ascended the stairs to reach the turret. She passed out

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No. 32. Vol. 1. (New Series).

Eastwood League

ROUSING MATCH AT ROOKWOOD SAINTS LEAVE IT LATE TO WIN

Wally D'Arcy at the Microphone

For their first away fixture of the season, St. Jim's are fielding the eleven which defeated Highcliffe last week: Wynn; Figgins, Kerr; Manners, Noble, Herries; Digby, Lowther, Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy.

The wind is flicking the Rookwood flag into life over the pavilion, so there will be some advantage in the spin of the coin. Here come the teams. Blake "balloons" one over the bar at practice—hope that's no augury! Jimmy Silver wins the toss, and kicks with the wind. They're lined up. The ball rolls from Merry's foot. Blake swings the leather out to D'Arcy and Gus is away like a deer, beating the half-back by speed. Steadying himself as the back comes out to tackle, Gus sends over a perfect centre, dropping on Merry's head. Merry leaps to it. Oh, well saved, Rawson! Marvellous save that, at point-blank range! Saints nearly had a goal lead—but at footer nearly isn't good enough. Better luck next time.

Midfield play now. Silver plays at centre-half for Rookwood, and his work is worth coming to see. Nothing escapes him, and he "dogs" Tom Merry, his opposing centre-forward, with grim persistence. Merry is away again, though, but is obliged to give to Blake, who dribbles on, and gives to D'Arcy. Gussy swings it across, Lowther makes a great effort, but only just tips the leather, which Rawson gathers almost off his toe, to clear. Baulked again!

Now Rookwood are in the picture. Here comes Tommy Dodd, the Rookwood centre, weaving his way through the defence to "draw" Fatty Wynn skilfully out of his citadel and slam home a pile-driver—oh, well done, Fatty! A swift sideways leap, and Fatty's outstretched finger-tips divert the leather past the upright. This is ding-dong, with a vengeance. Lovell goes close with a terrific shot which just skims the crossbar. Next moment, as it seems, Mornington crashes in a drive which Fatty Wynn stops

heroically on his knees, throwing the ball clear over the heads of a bunch of players. No score at the interval, and Saints have done well to keep a clean sheet against the strong wind.

Rookwood are tenacious, however, and the second half finds them pressing hard, while Fatty Wynn shows us how a Welshman keeps goal. High ones and low ones are all the same to Fatty Wynn—his goalkeeping is a masterly exhibition of quiet skill and strong determination. He is rewarded when play swings back to the Rookwood goalmouth, and Rawson is called upon to deal with scorching shots from Tom Merry and Blake in quick succession. Blake has a chance, but "balloons" the ball over the bar.

Seems that missed chance will cost us dear—Rookwood are buzzing round Wynn's citadel once again, and only a great full-length save prevents them scoring. Figgins clears the corner kick with a mighty punt, and Tom Merry leads his line in an attack on their opponents' goal. Down on the Rookwood goal they sweep. Time's getting short. Are we to have any goals at all? Merry feints as though to pass out to D'Arcy, and then slips the ball back unexpectedly to Blake, coming up at the double. This time—slam! Blake makes no mistake, and the sphere speeds straight as an arrow out of Rawson's reach into the corner of the net! Goal! One up!

Have Rookwood cracked? Here come the Saints afresh—Blake puts in a magnificent piece of dribbling, and back-heels to Merry at the crucial moment. Merry hooks the leather into the net before Rawson can make a move. Two up! And two minutes to go. They're lined up. They're off again—here they come! D'Arcy sprints down the wing, steadies himself, and slams home a tremendous cross-drive which flies just over the goal-keeper's finger-tips to add the third and final goal for St. Jim's!

Well played, Rookwood! It was speed and staying power which won the match for St. Jim's!

ST. FRANK'S RUN RIOT

Special Message by Phone

Entertaining St. Jude's, Nipper and his men of St. Frank's deluged the visitors with goals. Lunn & Co. were outclassed, finding the swift-moving St. Frank's forward line far too much for them. Reggie Pitt opened the scoring early in the game, and Nipper added another. Half time, 2-0. After the interval, Nipper's men ran riot, Nipper adding a third, Tregellis-West netting number four, Pitt snapping a couple, and Nipper piling on one more before the final

whistle. In this form, St. Frank's are a match for anybody, and they look to have a great chance of finishing at the top of the Eastwood League.

FULL RESULTS.

Rookwood ..	0	St. Jim's ..	1
St. Frank's ..	7	(Blake, Merry, D'Arcy)	
(Pitt (3), Nipper (3), Tregellis-West)		St. Jude's ..	0
Abbotsford ..	2	Claremont ..	1
Highcliffe ..	2	Greyfriars ..	4
River House ..	4	Redclyffe ..	0
Rylcombe Gram.		Bagshot ..	1
School ..	5		

Notice: We are compelled to omit an American story too "tall" for this page.—Editor.

Merry's Weekly



Week Ending September 22nd, 1934.

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FUNMonty Lowther
Calling

Hallo, everybody! Forty-eight men dead-heated in a race in Scotland. An Aberdonian dropped a shilling! An organ in America has 740 stops. Mr. Selby's second-hand car has 741—when it goes out! Our gym instructor urges Skimpole to walk upright for health. The gait-way to happiness. After a short trip abroad during the vac., Mr. Ratcliff considers himself a hard-bitten explorer. He certainly got plenty of mosquito bites! A Wayland house agent advertised water in every room in a house for sale. When a storm broke last week the new tenants got it! "Water" surprise! Don't throw it! Toby, the page, was caught by Mr. Ratcliff reading a periodical in "Ratty's" study. "Is this what you are paid for?" demanded "Ratty." "No, sir," responded Toby. "I do this free of charge!" Did you know about the wasp which got into the deep-sea diver's suit? No! Well, the diver did! Skimpole remarks that it spoils your looks to sneer. Especially if you sneer at a fellow bigger than yourself! I hear the old Wayland Opera House is cracking. There is bitter controversy among local singers as to who was responsible for bringing the house down. I understand that this football season we are going straight "forward," with no "half" measures, everybody putting their "backs" into it, all striving for the same "goal," buoyed on the "wings" of hope, avoiding "traps," and nobody "feinting" until we have "passed" the "post"! We are all in "league," and the "penalty" for "back-sliding" is a "free kick"! Talking footer, the captain of a very weak eleven turned to his goalkeeper after the fifteenth goal had been scored against them, and said: "What ever made you let that one through?" "Well," said the goalkeeper, "all ten of you fellows had let it go, and I hadn't the heart to stop it!" Seeing "lights out" the other night, Kildare caught Curly Gibson out of his bed in the Third Form dormitory. "What did you get out of bed for, Gibson?" demanded Kildare. "Oh, I got out to tuck myself in!" responded Gibson. Not quite as bad as the new "effects" man at the Wayland Theatre, who was given two hefty books to tear up and use as snow. In the midst of the blizzard scene, he dropped the "snow" on the actors' heads—solid! A boxer recently stood up to 567 punches before going down. His trainer sadly remarked that what he needed was "more punch"! Skimpole says this season he is going in for football. So far his activities have been limited to "going in for" a practice ball which Kildare had left in the House! Well, boys, as the boxer remarked when he administered a terrific upper-cut to his victim—Chin, chin!

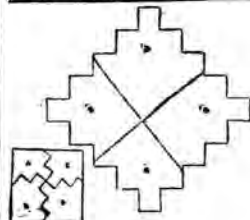
ST. JIM'S ON THE
AIR

Weather and Glyn's transmitter permitting, we shall to-night broadcast the following programme from St. Jim's. Don't blame us if you can't pick it up.

- 6.00 Talk by Mr. Selby—"Why I Hate Boys."
6.15 Talk by Wally D'Arcy—"Why I Hate Form-masters."
6.30 Prefects' Half Hour—Chatty and Instructive Talk to Prefects, by the Editor of the "Weekly," Tom Merry.
7.00 Saxophone solo (we fear), by George Herries.
7.05 Melodrama—"A Dog's Life," by Gerald Crooke.
7.05 (Alternative programme for those who like something lighter.) Grand Opera: "Tanned-howl, sir!" Very freely adapted from "Tannhauser" by A. A. D'Arcy, who will sing the leading role wearing his celebrated monocle. While D'Arcy is singing, the programme will be televised, or possibly pulverised!
7.55 Interval for Refreshments (much-needed!).
8.00 Chess. Manners v. Kerr. The breath-taking thrills will be conveyed to you in a Special Rapid Running Commentary by Jack ("Hawk-Eye") Blake. Be sure, Blake will miss none of the finer points of this fast-moving contest!
8.30 (If you are still listening.) News by Monty Lowther, who looks at the world from a "new slant"!
8.45 Bells of St. Jim's—Song, "You're Telling Me!" composed by George Figgins.
9.00 Time Signal—Chorus, "Here comes Kildare!"
9.30 Epilogue—Kildare will chant, "Lights out, kids!"

CALIBAN'S
PUZZLE
CORNER

A neat little problem this week, chums! First of all, you have got to arrange ten coins—or beans, or counters, or anything similar in three rows, with four in each row. The drawing shows you how this is done. Now for the puzzle: Can you, by altering the positions of two coins only, make five rows with four coins in each row?

Solution of
Last Week's
Puzzle

into the open air under the stars; it was necessary to pass over the open leads to reach the door of the room in the turret. Outside the door of the room she paused. She looked round in the gloom; the ivy, thick upon the old walls of the Black House, was rustling in the breeze.

The girl's whole nature recoiled from the room before her—the room of death: she could not enter it.

"Are you gone, Ethel?"

It was the doctor's voice from the head of the stairs. Ethel shivered.

"I am here, uncle!"

"Why do you not go into your room?"

"Oh, uncle!" She turned back towards him. "Uncle, I am afraid—I am afraid! Don't send me in there!"

He came towards her, his fingers working with anger. His eyes gleamed at her in the gloom like the eyes of a cat.

"Go in!" he said angrily. "What are you afraid of?"

"I cannot go in, uncle! Don't—don't send me in there!" Ethel cried, the tears running down her cheeks. "How can you wish to do me harm! Take the money—I don't care for that. I will sign anything you like. I don't care, only—only don't do what you know you are planning to do!"

The doctor stood petrified for a moment.

"Ethel! So my wife has been talking to you! I know it now! The money! You know about that, too! I—I—Bah! Why do I waste words upon you? Go into your room at once, or I will fling you there! Do you hear me?"

Ethel, sobbing, ran into the room. The doctor drew the door shut behind her, and she heard him fasten it upon the outside.

She was a prisoner—a prisoner in the room of death!

She lighted her candle.

The glimmering light fell upon the old walls of the Red Room, upon the old curtains at the windows, the glimmering casement with drawn blinds.

Ethel gave a sudden start as she came near the window. The couch had been removed. It was no longer in the room. Had the doctor guessed that she slept there instead of upon the bed, or had he merely suspected it?

Ethel extinguished the candle.

But she did not go near the bed. She sat in a chair near the window and waited. It was to be another night of terror and sleepless vigil—was it to be a night of doom?

CHAPTER 11.

Out of Bounds!

TOM MERRY half undressed himself when he went to bed that night.

The fact did not escape the notice of his chums, and they asked questions. But even to Monty Lowther and Manners, Tom Merry had not explained. The matter was so terribly serious that it was best not to breathe a word to anyone.

He turned in, leaving his clothes ready, and concealing his boots under the bed, along with the cricket stump he intended to take it with him.

Kildare saw lights out in the Shell dormitory. After he was gone Tom Merry slipped out of bed and put on his clothes and his boots again. Several inquiries were fired at him from the other beds, but he answered none of them.

"Blessed if this doesn't look rather shady to me!" said Crooke of the Shell. "Looks to me as if Tom Merry is going on the razzle. Is it the Green Man this evening?"

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"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry.
 "Blessed if I don't follow on and see what you're up to!" said Crooke.

"You jolly well won't!" said Monty Lowther.

"Who'll stop me?" demanded Crooke fiercely.

"I will!"

"Of course, I shouldn't take the trouble," said Crooke, with a yawn. "It doesn't matter to me. Tom Merry can go to the Green Man, or to Jericho, for all I care!"

Tom Merry quitted the Shell dormitory. He knew that he could rely upon his chums to stop any fellow like Crooke who was inclined to play the spy upon him. He closed the door softly and stepped away on tiptoe towards the Fourth Form dormitory. Two figures were waiting for him in the dim passage.

"That you, Tom Merry?" It was Blake's voice.

"Yes, I'm here."

"Good!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I trust you have not forgotten the cwicket stump, Tom Mewwy!"

"No; I have it here. Let's get out!"

"Wight-ho!"

The juniors quitted the School House by the lower box-room window. They dropped to the ground, and, keeping close to the shadow of the House, made their way to the school gates.

Three juniors were waiting for them there; Figgins & Co. were already at the rendezvous. Figgins had a torch and Kerr had three cricket stumps under his arm and Fatty Wynn had a parcel tied with string.

"What have you got there?" asked Tom Merry, looking at it.

"Sandwiches," whispered Fatty Wynn. "You never know what may happen, you know—and it's just as well to be prepared for anything. No good spoiling a good job through getting hungry, is it?"

"You ass!"

"Look here, you know—"

"Shut up!" said Figgins. "Come on!"

The six juniors climbed the slanting oak in turn, and dropped on the outside of the school wall. Fatty Wynn was the last. He peered down anxiously at the juniors in the road as he prepared to drop.

"Catch my parcel, Kerr!" he said.

"Oh, all right!"

Fatty Wynn slung down the parcel, and Kerr missed it in the dark, and it fell into the road and rolled to the foot of the wall. Fatty Wynn dropped from the wall, and there was a squelch as he alighted, and he rolled over, with a gasp.

"Ow! You asses! What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I fell on something."

Kerr chuckled softly.

"I think it must have been your parcel."

"What!" howled Fatty Wynn. "Oh, you fathead!"

He was on his knees in a moment, groping for his parcel. He found it, and uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Ow! It's smashed! You chump!"

"Never mind. It doesn't hurt sandwiches to be squashed," said Blake. "You can eat them, all the same, you know. They'll only be a little mixed."

"But there were hard-boiled eggs in it, too, and some jam tarts!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it will make a specially good mixture, then!" said Blake. "You can't stop to sort 'em out now. Come on!"

"Look here!"

"Come on, Fatty!" said Figgins quietly.

"Oh, all right!"

And Fatty Wynn, reluctantly abandoning his squashed and burst parcel, tramped down the road with the other juniors.

The night was dark, only a few stars gleaming in the heavens. The tall, thick trees cast heavy shadows over the road. The juniors turned into the footpath through Rylcombe Wood, and came out on the other side in the Wayland Road, and tramped on towards the moor.

It was a good distance. Ten o'clock had rung out from Rylcombe Church as they went into the wood, and half-past ten chimed from Wayland as they reached the broad expanse of the moor.

Black and grim the moor lay stretched before them.

A rugged footpath led through the shadowy gorse in the direction of the Black House. Of the house nothing was to be seen. In the day-time it could be seen from the road, the top of the turret rising to view in the distance, but now it was swallowed up in the darkness.

The juniors paused on the footpath.

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"You know the way best, Tom Merry," said Blake.

"Follow me!"

"Are you sure you are goin' quite wight, Tom Mewwy, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as they plunged on through the darkness of the moor.

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I wathah think we ought to beah a little to the left, or else to the wight. I can't wemembah which."

"Try both," suggested Kerr sarcastically.

"Weally, Kerr—"

"This way!" said Tom Merry.

"We ought to have brought a compass weally. It was wathah thoughtless of you, Blake, deah boy, not to bwing a compass."

"Oh, rats!"

"I have heard of mawinahs steawin' a course by the stars," said D'Arcy thoughtfully, turning his eyeglass skywards. "I don't know how they do it, but pewwaps some of you fellows know."

"Don't talk, Gussy!"

"I am twyin' to discovah a way out of the difficulty, Tom Mewwy!"

"But there isn't any difficulty, Gussy. I know the way perfectly well."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"That's all vewy well, deah boy, but I have a feelin' that we ought to beah to the wight, or else to the left. I'm not sure which."

"Here we are!"

A black mass loomed up against the less opaque sky.

It was the Black House on the moor.

The juniors paused for a moment, looking at it. The square mass of the walls, the oblong roof, and the square turret were unmistakable.

Figgins trembled a little. In that shadowy, sombre building was Cousin Ethel, in danger—in danger of death. Perhaps already! Figgins choked at the thought.

"Buck up, old man!" whispered Kerr.

"Is that the Black House?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes."

"Pewwaps you may be mistaken."

"Oh, rats!"

"It would be wathah wotten to get into the wong house, Tom Mewwy, and I can't help thinkin' that we ought to have turned to the wight or to the left."

"Hush!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Listen!"

A strange low sound came faintly through the silence of the night from the direction of the Black House.

The juniors shuddered.

They did not need telling what it was. It was the deep howl of a bloodhound.

CHAPTER 12.

In the Grounds of Black House.

TOM MERRY & CO. stood silent, listening. The sound came eerily through the silent night and died away in low echoes on the moor.

Kerr was the first to break the silence.

"That's the doctor's dog," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!" muttered D'Arcy.

"The brute is loose of a night. We shall have to pass him," said Jack Blake. "You didn't forget to bring the stuff, Kerr?"

"No."

"You've got it ready?"

"Quite ready."

"Good!"

"Come on!" said Figgins abruptly.

They tramped on. The huge mass of the Black House loomed up more distinctly. The juniors avoided the gate and paused under the wall at the side of the house.

It was eight feet high, supported by brick buttresses at intervals.

"Not easy to climb," said Blake.

"We shall have to get on one another's shoulders," said Figgins. "I'll go first."

"Buck up, then!"

Tom Merry stood against the wall, and Figgins climbed actively upon his shoulders and placed his hands upon the top of the wall. He drew himself up nimbly and sat on the wall, his legs inside. From the house, in the daylight, he would have been clearly seen; but now he could hardly be seen by the fellows standing outside the wall, so deep was the gloom. There was no danger of discovery, so far—only from the dog.

But the bloodhound had to be passed. It was the first difficulty, and the greatest. As Figgins swung his legs down inside the wall and sat there, there was a rustle in the

ragged bushes of the garden, and a great dim body came into view.

Two fierce eyes gleamed up, and Figgins caught a glitter of white teeth.

It was the hound!

He drew his feet up quickly. The dog stood below, looking up and growling in low tones. The gleaming eyes were fixed upon Figgins.

Kerr came up second, on Tom Merry's broad shoulders. He put his chest on the wall and looked over.

"The dog's here!" said Figgins in a whisper.

"Yes; I know he is."

"Got the stuff?"

"Here it is!"

Kerr drew the little parcel from under his jacket and opened it. It had an odour appetising to the nose of a dog. The bloodhound watched them from below, and it was evidently his intention to fasten upon them if they dropped into the garden. He was growling softly.

Arthur Augustus climbed lightly upon the wall.

Kerr tossed some poisoned meat into the garden. The bloodhound made a snatch at it as it fell beside him.

He turned his great nose towards it and sniffed at it, and then looked up suspiciously at the juniors on the wall.

Tom Merry and Blake had mounted now, and only Fatty Wynn remained at the foot of the wall outside.

"You fellows will have to pull me up," he muttered.

"Bai Jove!"

"It won't be easy," said Blake. "You'd better stay there and keep watch, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"I'm jolly well not going to do anything of the sort!" he replied. "There's no need to keep watch out here that I know of."

"Hush!" muttered Kerr.

The dog was turning over the meat with his nose.

"He won't eat it while we're in sight," said Kerr softly.

"Jump down!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors dropped from the wall again and joined Fatty Wynn.

They waited in tense anxiety.

If the hound did not touch the meat they would have him to deal with. To tackle the huge animal at close quarters would be fearfully dangerous. But Figgins, at all events, had no hesitation. He took a case out of his jacket inside pocket, and opened it. It showed a large knife as he opened the lid.

"What have you got there?" muttered Tom Merry.

"A knife."

"What for?"

"For the dog, if he doesn't touch the meat," said Figgins quietly.

"Figgy!"

"We're not going back," said Figgy. "I'm not leaving Ethel in danger."

"Listen!" said Kerr.

In the silence they heard a faint sound from the garden within—a sound of worrying.

The hound was devouring the meat.

They waited.

There was a growl, another growl, and a deep bay. Then a strange, unearthly howl from beyond the wall in the darkness.

"He's eaten it," said Kerr.

"Poor brute!" muttered Tom Merry. "But it had to be done!"

"Yaas, wathah! It was a beastly painful necessity," said Arthur Augustus. "It weally couldn't be helped, deah boy!"

They waited a few minutes longer. There was silence in the garden. Kerr climbed the wall at last, and looked over. In the darkness he could see nothing at first; but the gleaming eyes had disappeared. He made out at last, as he peered down, a body that lay motionless in the bushes.

He dropped down into the garden. His heart beat as he did so. It was possible that the hound was not dead. But he was soon reassured.

The great beast lay still upon the ground, his jaws open, his eyes half-closed. He was quite dead. The poison had acted quickly.

Figgins looked over the wall.

"Kerr, is it all right?"

"Yes."

"He's dead?"

"Stone dead!"

"Poor beast!" muttered Figgins. "It's another rotten thing for that villain of a doctor to answer for! We couldn't help it."

He joined Kerr. Fatty Wynn climbed up next over

Tom Merry's shoulder. He did not mean to remain till the last again.

Tom Merry was sturdy; but Fatty Wynn's weight was a strain on him till the fat Fourth Former reached the top of the wall, and climbed, panting, over.

Arthur Augustus, who was slim and weighed the least of all, was left till the last, and Tom Merry hung on the wall with his hands, while the swell of St. Jim's climbed over him, and was helped from above by Jack Blake.

All the party dropped into the garden at last.

"Bai Jove! We're here, anyway!" said Arthur Augustus.

"And the way's clear to the house, deah boys."

"Come on!" said Figgins.

They left the hound where he had fallen, lying still in the ragged bushes. Their hopes were high now. Their most dangerous enemy had been overcome.

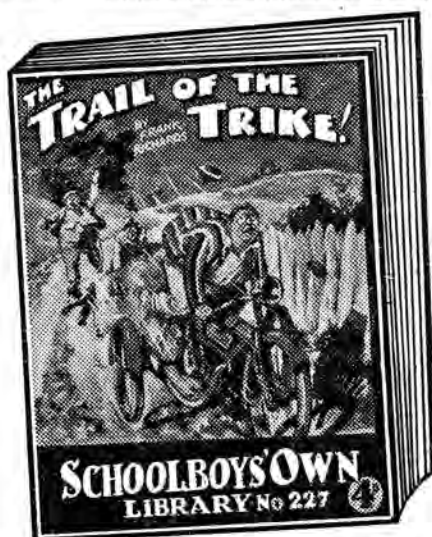
The house was tenanted, as they knew, only by Cousin Ethel, the doctor himself, and old Martha, the servant. And Martha was deaf, and was not likely to hear anything. Whatever happened during the night Martha was not likely to awake—probably the reason why the doctor kept her in his service.

The juniors had Dr. Gadsby to deal with—alone!

They paused to consult when they reached the foot of the wall above which rose the turret. They knew that Ethel was in the turret room, but there was no light in her window. The girl was sleeping, or watching in the darkness.

"There are enough of us to knock the doctor sky-high, if it comes to that!" Jack Blake muttered. "But—"

"But that's useless," said Kerr. "If he found us here—especially after we've killed the dog—he would have the right to treat us as burglars. He would simply put off his plans for a day or two, and, of course, it would be



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impossible for us to come again; and Cousin Ethel would be at his mercy."

"He's got to be shown up!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The question is—how are we to communicate with Ethel, and let her know we are here?" said Tom Merry.

"If we whistled—"

"The doctor would hear it."

Figgins looked up at the high wall. At the summit of it was the turret in one corner, and behind the turret, the flat, leaded roof, surrounded by a low parapet. The wall was thick with old ivy.

"I can climb this," said Figgins quietly.

Tom Merry shuddered a little.

"Figgins, you—you can't! You'll break your neck!"

"Is there any other way of getting up?"

"Blessed if I can see any!"

"Then I'm going to do it!"

"Hold on a minute! Let's think!"

CHAPTER 13.

A Perilous Climb!

F IGGINS waited.

The wall rose high and abrupt, with masses of clinging ivy. There was no other way to gain the leads—no way to the turret room excepting over the leads. But to climb that dizzy height, even in the daytime, would have been terribly dangerous. In the darkness the danger was fearful.

"Let's look round first," muttered Kerr.

"All right, you look round, and I'll wait here. Only don't be long. You don't know what may be happening."

"Yaas, wathah! I'll stay here with you, Figgay. I know jolly well there's no othah way up, and I'm goin', too."

"Gussy—"

"I'm goin'," said the swell of St. Jim's quietly. "I'm Ethel's cousin, and I've a right to go!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"It's no good talking, Blake. Now, look here, the ideah is to get into the Wed Woom, and keep watch with Cousin Ethel—isn't it?"

"That's it."

"Well, I'm Ethel's cousin, and her natuwal pwotectah. I'm goin'. Figgins can come, too, but I uttally decline to be left out!"

And Arthur Augustus spoke in a tone there was no denying. There was reason in what he said. Ethel was in danger. At the same time, if any fellow was to be taken into her room late at night, it was better for the fellow to be her cousin. The juniors could not deny that D'Arcy was right to some extent.

"Let's all go," said Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't be done! One or two would be quite enough," he said. "And a crowd would only make it more risky. We don't want to alarm the doctor—that's the chief thing. If he takes the alarm the whole thing's spoiled, and we shan't have a second chance. He will take care of that. He may take Ethel away somewhere where we can't get near her. Suppose he discovered us here, he might take her away the first thing in the morning to some place where we couldn't follow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Two will be more than enough," said Figgins. "One would be enough. But there's something in what Gussy says—Ethel would prefer to have her cousin with her. After all, Gussy is much the same as a brother to her."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, with unexpected warmth. "I wufuse to be wegarded as a bwothah of Ethel's. Don't talk wot!"

"Well, no need to argue," said Tom Merry hastily. "Gussy and Figgins are going."

"Perhaps Figgay would like me to go instead?" Blake suggested.

Figgins snorted.

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Ethel would like Figgins to be the one—no good blinking that. She thought of Figgins first of all. Figgins must go!"

"Of course," said Kerr.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But hold on a few minutes while we look round."

Figgins and D'Arcy remained at the foot of the ivied wall, while the other four scouted round the building. D'Arcy and the New House junior scanned the wall, and calculated the climb while they were waiting for Tom Merry & Co. to return.

Tom Merry came back through the shadows.

"Nothing else?" asked Figgins.

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"Nothing."

"The windows are all shuttered and padlocked," said Kerr. "The upper windows are barred. There's no getting in that way."

"We shall have to climb," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose there's nothing else to be done," said Tom Merry uneasily. "But it's frightfully risky."

"I don't care for the risk," said Figgins. "If I fall—"

"Figgay, old man—"

"If I fall," said Figgins quietly. "I shan't make a row! If I fall, one of you others will take it on—Tom Merry, I think."

Kerr pressed Figgins' hand.

"Go it, old chap," he said.

"Pewwaps I ought to go first."

"Hold on, Gussy! Figgay goes first."

"But, weally—"

"Shut up, old son!"

"I yield to the wish of the majowity," said the swell of St. Jim's with dignity. "You can go first, Figgay."

"I'll see if the coast is clear when I get up there," said Figgins. "If it is safe for Gussy to come up I'll drop something down—this matchbox. It won't make a noise. Until I give the signal, don't let Gussy come."

"All serene."

"I'm going now."

Figgins laid hold of the ivy. It rustled and whirled as the sturdy junior swung himself up by the thick tendrils. He climbed actively.

In a minute he had disappeared from the gaze of the juniors below. They watched with keen, bitter anxiety. Only the slight swaying and rustling of the ivy showed that there was a climber in it in the gloom.

Figgins climbed slowly and steadily.

The ivy was old and thick, and grew close to the wall. He found holds for his hands, and holds for his knees, and he carefully felt his way up.

The ivy swayed; here and there it yielded under his weight and came away, but he always managed to secure a new hold in time.

The dust of the old ivy choked him as he went on, but he hardly paused for a moment till he was half-way up the wall.

Then he held back a little to look up.

Still high above him rose the wall. His arms were aching now with the efforts he had made, and he was perspiring, and the dust choked in his eyes and his nose.

He climbed on again.

Steadily, quietly, he won his way, till his head emerged at last from the masses of tendrils and leaves and he found himself with the stone parapet of the leads before him.

He reached up, and caught the stone and drew himself higher and looked over the leads.

A gleam of light struck upon his eyes.

The doorway of the stair, leading to the leads from the interior of the house, was open. There was light there, streaming out upon the flat roof.

Figgins caught his breath.

A figure moved in the doorway—he knew the spare, drooping figure of the scientist.

It was Dr. Gadsby.

Figgins held his breath. The doctor emerged from the stair. He came out upon the leads with noiseless footfalls.

Without a sound, but with his figure casting a gigantic shadow across the roof as he moved in the light, the doctor crossed to the turret.

The turret door was closed. The room had no window looking over the leads—the only window was on the other side of the Red Room.

From the turret chamber the light and the doctor were invisible as the door was closed.

Figgins set his teeth hard.

What was the man doing there? Why that stealthy tread—those cautious movements, unless he meant harm to the girl within the Red Room.

Figgins held himself in readiness. If the doctor entered the turret room, Figgins was ready to spring upon the roof and dash after him.

But the doctor did not enter.

He paused at the door of the turret and bent his head to listen. The light from the staircase door, streaming over the leads, showed him clearly. He was listening for a sound from the chamber of death.

Figgins' heart was beating with dull, sick throbs. Had the deadly work been done—was the horrible man listening for the last cry from his victim?

He listened for a full minute, while the junior, hanging upon the wall hidden in the thick ivy, watched him with burning eyes of rage and hatred.

Then the man turned from the door, and with the same stealthy tread crossed the leads again to the doorway of the stair.

He passed in and closed the door silently; the light was shut off, and the leaded roof lay in deep blackness.

Figgins blinked at the sudden change.

The doctor was gone. All was silent and still again. Figgins dragged himself over the parapet and stood upon the leads.

There was no concealment there; if the doctor returned he would see him. Figgins had to take the risk of that; but he did not imagine that the man would return.

He had evidently effected the purpose for which he had come to the roof outside the turret door.

Figgins stood for a moment, breathing hard. His efforts in climbing the ivy had told upon him. He took the match-box from his pocket and dropped it over the parapet. A few moments later the ivy moved and swayed under a new climber.

CHAPTER 14.

A Terrible Vigil!

DEEP darkness in the turret chamber!

Cousin Ethel was not asleep.

She had been there—she did not know how long.

She dared not strike a light to see her watch lest a gleam of it should escape and warn the doctor that she was watching instead of sleeping. If he knew that she was on her guard, that she was watching for the secret danger, what would he do? Would he not abandon his tactics and perhaps effect his purpose by more open and violent means?

It was only too probable, the girl thought, with a shudder. What had he meant when, the previous night, he had demanded that she should open the door?

The girl watched and waited.

She was sick with fear and apprehension—there was a pain in her heart. What were her friends doing? Did they understand—were they coming to help her? And if they did, what could they do?

She waited.

At every moment she expected to hear the sound she dreaded—the sound of the low, hissing whisper in the darkness—the warning of death!

But it did not come.

How long had she been there—an hour—two hours—six or seven? She could not tell—she only knew that it seemed like centuries.

"Oh, they will never come—they cannot come!" the girl murmured. "Even Figgins cannot help me! I—I must die here alone, in the dark, as the others have done! Oh, Heaven help me! Oh, mother!"

Her cheeks were wet with tears.

Suddenly from the gloom came a slight sound. It was not the strange, soft whisper—it was not the sound she had heard in the chimney. It was a light tap at the door of the turret room—so light and faint that she scarcely heard it.

The girl started to her feet. Was it the doctor, come to

ascertain whether she slept so that he could proceed with his deadly work?

Tap again!

Ethel stood quivering in every limb.

She did not reply—she would not let him know that she was awake. She waited with tense nerves.

"Ethel!"

It was a soft whisper from without, scarcely audible through the thickness of the door.

Ethel clasped her hands. Were her senses playing her false, or was it Figgins' voice.

She listened.

"Ethel!"

The whisper was louder this time.

Ethel ran towards the door in the dark. She tapped on it from the inside and whispered back.

"Figgins! Is it you, Figgins?"

"Yes, Ethel!"

"Heaven be praised!"

"Open the door!"

"It is fastened on the outside."

"I have unfastened it; the key was in the lock."

Ethel unbolted the door. Figgins pushed it gently open from the outside. Ethel gave a low, soft cry.

"Figgins! Thank Heaven! Oh!"

Then she started as a second figure was visible behind Figgins.

"Look—it is—"

"It's only Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "It's only I, Ethel, deah gal. It's all wight—it's all sewene!"

"Arthur!"

"We're here to save you, deah gal!"

"Come in, Gussy, quick!" whispered Figgins.

Arthur Augustus stepped into the Red Room in the turret, and Figgins closed the door noiselessly, and pushed back the bolts into their place.

Then he breathed more freely.



The half-insane scientist gained the top of the stairs as Figgins and D'Arcy charged at him with cricket stumps. But in his wild haste to get his revolver he missed his footing, and there was a loud cry as he fell headlong. "He's down!" exclaimed Figgins.

He had taken Ethel's hand in the dark, and he still held it. The girl leaned heavily upon him, hardly conscious of what she was doing.

"Poor old gal!" said Arthur Augustus softly. "I can't see in the dark! Where are you, Ethel?"

"I'm here."

"Mustn't show a light, you know," said D'Arcy. "He would see it from the window. Where is the doctah, Ethel?"

"He was in the laboratory when I came up to bed," whispered Ethel. "That was ten o'clock. He brought me here and locked me in, and then I heard him go down to the laboratory again. He always spends hours there every night."

"I've seen him," said Figgins.

"Seen him!"

"Yes. He came and listened outside your door while I was climbing up, and I saw him. I suppose he wanted to know if you were asleep."

The girl caught her breath.

"You climbed up! Up the wall?"

"Yes, on the ivy—and Gussy, too!"

"Oh, you might have been killed!"

"It's all right. You haven't been hurt yet, Ethel?"

"No."

"You heard the sound in the room last night—that was what you meant in your letter?" Figgins whispered.

"Yes."

"That's why we came; we understood," said Figgins.

"Oh! I am so glad you understood! Dr. Gadsby dictated the rest of the letter to me, and made me write it, and I feared that you might be misled."

"Wathah not, deah gal—"

"You have heard nothing yet, to-night?" asked Figgins.

"Nothing."

"Good! We're in time!"

The conversation had been carried on in the faintest of whispers.

"You're trembling, Ethel!" muttered Figgins.

"I—I am so afraid."

"We're here to look after you. I've got a torch," whispered Figgins. "We've got a cricket stump apiece. When we hear that sound—if we hear it—we shall find out what it is."

"Oh, Figgins!"

"We're going to watch all night. You don't mind, Ethel—I mean, you don't mind us being here? It's the only way."

"Oh, I feel so much safer since you have come!" murmured the girl. "Are you here alone—you two?"

"No; there are four chaps keeping watch down at the foot of the wall—Tom Merry and Blake and Kerr and Fatty. Two are enough to come up here—and less likely to make any noise and attract attention," Figgins explained.

"Yes, yes!"

"Listen!" muttered D'Arcy.

But it was only a moan of the wind round the old turret. It brought back the howl of the bloodhound to Ethel's mind.

"The dog!" she whispered.

"That's all right!"

"But—what—what—"

"He's dead!"

Ethel shuddered.

"Dead!"

"We had to do it," whispered Figgins. "Hark!"

The moan of the wind again.

Figgins groped to a chair, and Ethel sat down. She was trembling violently. The hour was approaching when the warning sound must be heard, if it was to be heard at all that night.

And surely it must be. The preparations the doctor had made could only be for that end. The removal of the couch from the room—the locking of the door—the listening outside the door after Ethel had retired. All this proved that to-night was intended for the crime.

"You take the torch, Gussy!" Figgins muttered, passing it to Gussy. "Mind you don't switch it on till I give the word."

"Wight-ho!"

"I've got the stump ready!" Figgins went on. "If anything comes into this room to-night, it will be hurt. Ethel, what was it you heard last night?"

"A sound like a whisper—but without words—a sibilant sound—"

"It's strange! And you saw nothing?"

"Nothing. I had no light—I dared not have one. If the doctor—if he knew that I watched instead of sleeping—I—I—I fear—"

Figgins pressed her hand.

"I understand. But when you heard it—"

"I forgot everything but my fear, and shrieked and shrieked. I felt that I should go mad!" the girl murmured huskily. "Then the doctor came to the door, and asked me what was the matter. He commanded me to open the door."

"You did not?"

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"No; I was afraid."

"Oh, the villain!"

There was silence in the Red Room. D'Arcy found a chair and sat down; Figgins stood beside Cousin Ethel, leaning on the back of her chair with his left, holding her hand in his right.

The girl seemed to derive comfort and courage from his touch.

Her heart beat a little less wildly now.

The minutes went by on leaden wings—they could not compute the time. Figgins started as a faint sound came from the leads outside.

"The doctor again!" he murmured.

There was no doubt of it. The doctor was listening outside the door, upon the flat leads. Figgins' heart thumped; would the man discover that the key had been turned back in the lock? If so, discovery for the juniors was inevitable. But why should he notice the key, as he found the door closed just as he had left it, and had no suspicion that anyone had climbed the wall. The doctor still believed that the bloodhound was roaming the garden to watch for possible intruders.

The faint sounds on the leads died away.

He was gone.

The two juniors and Cousin Ethel waited tensely. They felt that the crisis was coming now. It could not long be delayed.

More weary minutes, that seemed hours. And then—

A faint sound from the chimney.

All three heard it. Figgins pressed Ethel's hand, and she returned the pressure.

Arthur Augustus made a slight movement.

"Quiet!" whispered Figgins, barely audible.

They listened in tense silence.

In the stillness of the room, so still that they felt they could hear their hearts beating—there came to their ears a faint, indescribable sound. Figgins' teeth came together hard.

It was the low, hissing sound—the whisper of death!

CHAPTER 15.

The Secret of the Red Room!

SOFT and strange and low—it came through the stillness. Ethel's form seemed to become rigid. Her fingers closed upon Figgins' hand with a clasp like ice.

It seemed to her, for the moment, that her heart had ceased to beat. Then it thumped again wildly.

Figgins gently disengaged her hand. He had to be ready now for action. Horror, and something like fear, was creeping through his own veins.

Arthur Augustus had set his own teeth hard to keep back the cry that rose to his lips.

What was it? Whence was it?

They listened with straining ears.

Soft and low and hissing.

It was as if a soft voice was whispering and lisping without words, and it came with curious distinctness at moments, and then was low and scarcely to be heard.

The sound was moving. From the broad chimney it glided towards the bed, which was close beside the disused fireplace.

"Oh Heaven!" murmured Cousin Ethel, with frozen lips.

The juniors were silent.

They had hard work to keep their own nerves steady, but they did it. They knew how much depended now upon their courage.

Whisper, whisper!

The sound was on the bed now, and there was a low rustling sound with it, as of something soft dragging over the coverlet and pillows.

Figgins teeth came hard together.

He guessed!

"Oh, good heavens!" he breathed.

Ethel sat still, turned to stone. If that low, menacing hiss had come near her at that moment, she would not have found the strength to move.

Whisper—whisper!

Figgins grasped the cricket stump in his right hand with a firm grasp. He reached out and touched D'Arcy on the arm.

D'Arcy started, with a shudder.

"Ready?" whispered Figgins.

"Yaas!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's between his chattering teeth.

"The light—quick!"

A sudden gleam of light in the darkened room! Light flashing through the gloom, dancing on the painted walls and the white bed.

Figgins leaped towards the bed, slashing madly with the cricket stump.

He rained blows on the pillows, on the white coverlet, his face white and set, his eyes staring, his arm tireless.

Thud, thud, thud!

The soft whispering sound changed now—it became a loud, fierce hissing, and it was no longer possible to mistake it.

It was the hissing now of a furious snake!

It was a poisonous reptile that had been introduced into the room by a secret interstice in the old chimney, and Cousin Ethel understood at last.

She gave a cry, and slid from the chair, and lay upon the floor in a dead faint. But even for Cousin Ethel the juniors had no eyes at that moment.

Figgins was smashing madly with the stump.

The savage hiss was loud and continuous now, and in the light of D'Arcy's torch the green eyes of the reptile gleamed.

The horrible thing had writhed off the bed, and was seeking to escape back to the chimney where it had entered; but the blows rained upon it, and it turned upon Figgins with savage hissing.

Crash, crash, crash!

Figgins, in his haste and fury, missed again and again, but many of his blows took effect, and the reptile writhed away from him.

Crash, crash!

In the midst of the din there came a furious knocking at the door of the turret chamber, a furious voice outside.

"Ethel—Ethel! Open the door!"

The juniors hardly heard it.

D'Arcy kept the light of the torch upon the snake, following its every writhe, and Figgins rained blows upon the cruel-looking head. The horrible thing was still at last.

The head was crushed almost out of semblance to its shape; the glinting eyes were dark; the horrible hissing ceased.

Strong shudders still ran through the sinuous body, but the snake was dead. Figgins paused, gasping for breath.

"My Heaven!" he panted.

"It's dead!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, thank Heaven!"

Figgins dropped the stump and ran to Cousin Ethel. He raised her up in his arms. The furious knocking at the door still continued.

"Ethel! Dear Ethel!"

"Bai Jove! She's fainted!"

"No wonder."

Hammer, hammer, hammer at the door.

The man outside was frantic with rage and terror. He could hear strange voices in the turret-room. He knew that strangers must be there. He was bewildered, terrified with the knowledge that his crime must be known.

What did he intend to do if the door were opened? What mad, murderous thoughts were in his unhinged mind?

The juniors did not heed him. Figgins supported Cousin Ethel in his arms, and D'Arcy laid down the torch, and ran to the water-jug. He threw water over the girl's rigid face, and Ethel's eyes opened at last.

She turned them with a sudden stare of terror upon the dead reptile, and shuddered and moaned.

Figgins promptly placed himself to shut off the horrible thing from her view. His arm supported her throbbing head.

"Ethel, it's all right now—the thing's dead. It's all right, dear Ethel!" he muttered.

"Oh—oh, Heaven!"

"Ethel, don't be afraid now."

"It's all wight, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus. "It was howwible, but it's ovah now. There's nothin' to be fwightened about now, Ethel."

"Oh, I am afraid—I'm afraid!" moaned the girl.

Crash!

It was a terrific blow upon the door. The man outside was growing desperate.

CHAPTER 16.

Rough Justice!

COUSIN ETHEL staggered to her feet, supported by Figgins' strong arm.

The girl was still moaning with fear. The horror of the night had been too much for her.

"The—the snake!" she murmured.

"It's dead, Ethel!"

"You—you have killed it—you're sure?"

"Yes, yes—quite sure!"

Ethel pressed her hands to her temples.

"It was a snake—it was a snake hissing that I heard last night, then. It was what the others heard—those that died! Oh, heavens!"

"It was, Ethel."

"Last night," moaned the girl, "I was here alone, with a poisonous reptile sent into the room to kill me! Oh, Figgins!"

"It's all over now," said Figgins, holding Ethel in his arms, scarcely knowing what he did in his anxiety to reassure and comfort her. "Dear, dear Ethel, you are safe now—quite safe."

"Yaas, wathah, Ethel," said Arthur Augustus. "It's all wight—we're all wight."

"Put it out of sight!" muttered Figgins.

"Good ideah!"

Arthur Augustus approached the reptile gingerly. It was a hideous thing, with a black, sinuous body, with green marks upon it. The body was still writhing. The head had been beaten shapeless by Figgins' frantic blows.

D'Arcy pushed it under the bed with a cricket stump, not caring to touch the horrible carcass with his hands.

Then he took the torch, and looked into the chimney. One of the square stone blocks that composed the wall of the chimney towards the leads, was removed, and a dark orifice was seen.

Through the little opening the reptile had been introduced into the room. The scientist handled the thing with safety, which it was death to anyone else to touch.

"The hound!" muttered D'Arcy. "The uttah villain!"

Ethel clung to Figgins as there came another terrific crash upon the door of the turret room. The doctor was evidently wielding something hard and heavy to smash in the door from the bolts. In attempting to unlock it, he had discovered that it was already unlocked on the outside. The bolts held the door fast, and the rain of blows on the outside did little more than shake it, so far.

But there was no doubt that the door would give way if the attack was continued.

"We've got to tackle him, anyway!" Figgins muttered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ethel dear—"

The girl shivered and trembled.

"Do not open the door!" she whispered. "Do not open it! You do not know him—he is desperate now, now that he knows he is discovered. He will murder you as well as me."

Figgins smiled grimly.

"He won't find it so easy to murder us," he said. "We are more than a match for him, Ethel. But he will have the door open soon, if we don't open it."

"Heaven help us!"

(To be continued on next page.)

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"We shall manage him, Ethel."

The girl tried to pull herself together. The reptile was out of sight now, and no longer thrilled her nerves with horror.

"Try to be calm, Ethel."

"Yes, yes. I am calm now."

"Remain here while—"

Ethel caught his arm.

"No—no, do not leave me! Do not go out!"

"He will be in a minute," whispered Figgins. "Conrage, Ethel dear! Be a brave girl."

"I—I will. Do as you think best, Figgins."

"That's wight, Ethel, deah gal!"

Crash!

Figgins stepped to the door and drew back the bolts. The torch was placed with its light falling upon the door.

D'Arcy and Figgins grasped their stumps; they were pale, but cool and determined.

The door, no longer fastened, flew violently open. Dr. Gadsby staggered in with a heavy stool in his hands.

The unexpected yielding of the door had taken him by surprise. As he staggered into the Red Room, Figgins leaped forward and struck. The blow fell upon the desperate man's right arm, and the stool crashed upon the floor.

The doctor sprang back with flaming eyes. His eyes glared in the light, and there was little doubt at that moment that the man was partly insane.

He stood glaring at the juniors, but there was no time to pause. They advanced upon him rapidly.

"Surrender, you scoundrel!" exclaimed Figgins. "Do you hear? Surrender!"

The doctor sprang back upon the leads. His hand was groping wildly in his coat, and the juniors knew that he was groping for a weapon—a revolver. But no weapon was there.

"You—you here!" he hissed between his teeth. "You here! A thousand curses! I will kill you—I will kill you! You shall carry away no tales from this house! My revolver! Fool to leave it— Ah, you shall not leave the Black House alive!"

He muttered the words disjointedly as he retreated from the juniors. He made a motion once to spring upon them with his bare hands, and they struck at him, but he leaped back and avoided the blows.

Figgins and D'Arcy rushed forward desperately. The doctor was making for the stairway, and if he reached his room below, if he reached his revolver, they knew what to expect. It was death—death for them in the Black House—death for Cousin Ethel, after all!

They rushed upon him. The doctor backed away, his eyes glittering, and he made a sudden, fierce leap to gain the stair, just escaping the crash of a cricket stump.

He gained the top of the stairs, and missed his footing there in his wild haste and the darkness; there was a loud cry as he fell.

Figgins echoed it.

"He's down!"

"Bai Jove! He's fallen!"

Crash!

A faint cry, and then silence.

The two juniors stood motionless, pale with horror. The man had been a murderer in intention; would have been a murderer in deed if he had reached his weapon in time. But what had happened to him?

Figgins and D'Arcy looked at one another in silence.

"We—we'd better go and see him," muttered Figgins.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins stepped quietly to the top of the stairs and peered down. There was no light on the stairway.

"Get the torch, Gussy."

"All wight."

Arthur Augustus hurried back into the Red Room for the torch. Cousin Ethel ran to him with a cry.

"Arthur, what has happened?"

"The doctor is hurt, Ethel deah."

"Not—not Figgins, or—or you?"

"No; we're all wight."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Bettah remain here, dear gal," said D'Arcy. "I want to take the light for a minute."

"I will come with you."

"Bettah not. You see—"

"I cannot remain here in the dark," said Ethel, with a shudder.

"Vewy well, deah gal."

D'Arcy crossed the leads with the torch in his hand. Cousin Ethel kept close by his side. Figgins was still at the top of the stair.

"Keep back, Ethel," he said.

"What has happened, Figgins?"

"He fell down the stairs."

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"And he is—is—"

"I'm afraid so. He hasn't moved."

"Oh!" The girl caught her breath. "Figgins, you did not—did not—"

Figgins shook his head.

"No. I tell you he fell down the stairs. We were not even close to him at the time. He missed his footing and fell. He was going for his revolver—and it was jolly lucky for us he fell, I think."

Figgins took the torch and descended the stairs. A huddled figure lay at the bottom, and it did not move as Figgins, shuddering, bent over it.

Figgins came up in a moment or two.

"Well?" said D'Arcy breathlessly.

"Dead!" said Figgins. "I think his neck is broken."

"Oh!"

"Come back into the room, Ethel."

The half-fainting girl was led into the room. Figgins left D'Arcy with her while he went to the parapet of the leads to call down to the juniors below.

CHAPTER 17.

All's Well That Ends Well!

TOM MERRY & CO. had waited in tense anxiety.

For a long time there had been silence, and when the silence was broken it was by indefinite sounds they could not understand.

They heard the crashing of the doctor beating upon the door of the turret room; but they had agreed not to climb unless Figgins or D'Arcy should whistle for help, and they waited, though sorely against the grain.

But they had not long to wait after that. It was very soon after that sound had died away that a voice called from above.

"Hallo!"

It was Figgins' voice.

"Hallo!" called back Tom Merry.

"I'm coming down to let you fellows in," said Figgins. "No need for you to get up this way now."

His voice sounded strange and far-off from the top of the high wall. The juniors could dimly see his head against the sky as he looked over the parapet.

"What has happened?" called back Tom Merry.

"The doctor's dead!"

"Good heavens!"

"He fell downstairs. The snake's dead, too. Ethel is safe."

"Snake?" repeated Kerr.

"I'll tell you presently. Ethel's safe, that's the chief thing; and she won't be in danger again. You fellows go round to the door; we're going to bring Ethel down now."

"Right you are!"

Tom Merry & Co. made their way round to the front of the building.

Meanwhile, Figgins returned to the Red Room. Cousin Ethel was more herself now. The death of her uncle had given her a shock, but she could not help feeling a great sense of relief to know that her danger was over for ever; the cunning, scheming brain could devise no more plots against her safety now.

"Put your coat on, Ethel," said Figgins. "We're ready to go, I think."

The girl started.

"To go!"

"Yes. You can't stay here, after what's happened, can you?"

Ethel shuddered.

"No, no; I could not."

"You must come to St. Jim's. Mrs. Holmes will take you in, Ethel. She's very fond of you. And when we explain what you've been through—"

The girl looked round the Red Room, with a shiver.

"Yes, I must go," she said. "I would rather pass the rest of the night on the open moor than remain in the Black House."

"Then get ready," said Figgins. "You can wait on the leads while I—while I clear the way."

Ethel shivered. She knew what that meant. She put her coat on, and D'Arcy waited with her on the leads while Figgins descended the stair with the torch.

Figgins bent over the body again. He was sick with repulsion, but it had to be done. He could not let Ethel pass such a thing. He lifted the old, withered man, and bore him into the nearest room.

Then he looked up the stairs.

"Come on!" he said.

D'Arcy brought Ethel down the stairway from the leads. "The sooner we're off, the better," said Figgins, in a shaking whisper. "This place is horrible."

"But Martha," said Ethel.

(Continued on page 28.)



BY EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Wail on the Wind!

A WILD, tempestuous autumn evening; the wind, screaming out of the south-west, blustered and whirled round the grey old buildings of St. Frank's. Overhead, the low, ragged clouds were scudding restlessly across the leaden sky.

Nipper, the popular Remove captain, stood in the Ancient House doorway, gazing out into the triangle, where the tortured chestnuts were being lashed and rocked by the gale. Half-dead leaves were whirling through the air and along the ground, and collecting in buttress corners like snowdrifts.

"What a night, you chaps," said Nipper, shouting in order to make himself heard.

"Begad! It is, really," remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Wouldn't it be a frightfully good idea, dear old boy, to close the door?"

"No, don't close it!" put in Tommy Watson. "There's something rather grand about it all. Look at those racing clouds. Look at the lurid fires of the sunset. It's—it's fascinating!"

Vivian Travers pointed a dramatic finger at the menacing sunset.

"The vengeance of the Vulture God!" he said impressively.

"What!"

"Plain as a pikestaff," went on Travers. "Old TAAZ is seriously annoyed, and this is his way of showing it."

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Reggie Pitt.

"Don't you read the news?" asked Travers imperturbably, but with a twinkle in his eyes. "Here's a midday edition of the evening paper—which I will admit I bought for Captain Cracker's 'dead cert' selections. Alas! Captain Cracker came a purler to-day, and my pocket is lighter to the extent of a quid."

"Serves you right," said Pitt. "But what's this got to do with the Vulture God?"

"Oh yes!" said Travers brightly. "It's in the paper. Here we are. 'The mysterious veiled Raa-ok, High Priest of the sinister TAAZ Temple, sailed to-day for Rangoon in the S.S. Transton, with his retinue of lesser priests.' Can you wonder at this storm? These mystery men of Tibet have failed in their mission, and they're going home disgruntled. Naturally, their Vulture God is giving us a sample of his wrath."

"You're talking rot," said Pitt with a sniff.

"Dear old fellow, it's all in the paper," protested Travers.

"He's right," said Nipper with a smile. "These priests of the TAAZ Temple came all the way from Tibet to London to make a protest against the British mountain climbing expeditions in the Himalayas—Everest, and so on. The priests say that the Vulture God is angry, and that famine has come to their lands. This old priest, Raa-ok, is a mighty queer bird. They say that if any 'unbeliever' looks on the face of the High Priest of the TAAZ Temple, he dies. It's a law thousands of years old."

"Devil worshippers," commented Harry Gresham. "I remember reading something about them now."

Nipper, still looking through the open doorway, saw a baby saloon—a Morris Minor—career through the gateway, rocking and swaying. The car sped up to the steps of the Ancient House, and came to a jerky halt. A burly, aggressive-faced youth in a red-and-blue cap fairly jumped out of the car.

"Hi, you chaps!" he bawled, as he ran up the steps. "There's a wreck!"

Edward Oswald Handforth was very excited. Even Church and McClure, his bosom chums, who followed him out of the car, were looking thoroughly agog.

"A wreck?" repeated Nipper. "Was your car mixed up in it?"

"I don't mean a car wreck, fathead!" shouted Handforth. "A ship in distress! We saw the rockets going up. The Caistowe lifeboat is out already. Anybody coming? We're going to the cliff-top to see if we can see anything."

There was an immediate rush. Shipwrecks were few and far between, and there was always something fascinating in watching a tiny cockleshell of a lifeboat, manned by staunch volunteers, battling its way out to a crippled ship.

Archie Glenthorne, with considerable energy, dashed out to Handforth's little car and bagged a seat. Nipper and Travers and Pitt rushed round to get out their motor-bikes. Nipper took Tregellis-West on his pillion, Travers took Jack Grey, and Reggie Pitt was accompanied by Tommy Watson. In that exciting minute, ten St. Frank's Removites sped off into the wild evening to the cliff-top a mile or two away.

When they arrived the gale seemed stronger than ever; it shrieked in from the sea, and the boys were compelled to bend forward in order to keep their balance. Below them in the sea, a mass of "white horses" was looking

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Ten St. Frank's boys face death at the hands of shipwrecked passengers who refuse to be rescued!

angry; the great breakers were churning and smashing on the rocks amid a smother of white foam and flying spume.

"There she is!" shouted Nipper, pointing.

He stared out across the sea, his face stung by the salt spray which was carried even to these heights on the wind. Far off, only dimly visible, was the battered hull of a fair-sized sailing vessel. She was evidently trapped on a treacherous sandbank. Her mainmast had gone, and tatters of sails whipped raggedly in the wind from the jagged stump. Great seas were sweeping over her as she rocked helplessly to and fro.

"She won't last another half-hour," declared Reggie Pitt, shaking his head. "Look! There's the Caistowe lifeboat. Well out, and going strong."

"By George! There's another lifeboat, too—over this way," said Handforth, pointing. "It must be the one from Rundle Bay."

The ten schoolboys, standing on the cliff-top, were gripped by the drama of that grim scene; they thought of the unfortunates aboard the wreck, waiting for help.

So intent had they been on watching the distant wreck that they had not noticed a fair-sized steamship which had just come into view round a neighbouring headland. She was plunging drunkenly, the seas dashing against her and breaking in smothers of flying foam. She seemed to have a heavy starboard list, and she was undoubtedly down by the head.

"They must be mad!" shouted Travers. "They're heading straight for the Devil's Reef!"

The boys forgot the sailing ship now; they were horrified by the stark danger of this ocean-going steamship which was so perilously close to the treacherous rocks.

"She's in bad trouble," said Nipper. "Must have sprung some plates, or something. Can't you see what they're trying to do? Get her round the headland so that they can beach her in Shingle Bay!"

"They'll never do it," declared Grey tensely.

Even as he spoke the struggling ship seemed to hesitate; she shuddered from stem to stern, and then, drunkenly, and with horrifying slowness, she slewed round and went almost on her beam ends.

"She's struck!" shouted Handforth.

On the wings of the wind they heard a grinding crash. They saw the steamship's blue-and-red funnel rend in twain and topple overside like a scrap of crumpled paper. Then a succession of giant seas smothered her in a cloak of hissing foam.

"Great Scott! She's on the reef!" said Nipper, his heart thudding. "And any ship which gets on the Devil's Reef never escapes! She'll break to pieces in front of our eyes."

It was true enough. The ship was pounding herself to destruction on the treacherous rocks; already she was fast, lying slantwise to the incoming seas, her hull canting steeply.

"Poor beggars!" said Travers sombrely. "They'll never get the boats away with her deck at that angle. They can't get any help, either, because both our local lifeboats have gone to that other wreck."

Handforth, his eyes blazing, pointed to a ramshackle little building in a gap far below.

"What about the old lifeboat?" he shouted. "She isn't used much nowadays—but she's as sound as a bell! We're here, and we can handle her. It's up to us, you chaps! St. Frank's to the rescue!"

There was a yell of excited agreement. Next moment the ten Removites were tearing perilously down the rugged cliff path. There were lives to be saved, and the St. Frank's boys were the only ones on the spot to man the old lifeboat! Valiantly, courageously they rose to the occasion. They gave never a thought to the danger.

The waves were thundering on the beach of Shingle Bay, but the sea had lost a good deal of its fury, for the wind was howling from the south-west and the treacherous Devil's Reef acted as a breakwater. Beyond the reef the sea was furious indeed, but on the sheltered side it was not nearly so dangerous.

Working with a will, straining for all they were worth, the ten St. Frank's boys got the old lifeboat out; they dragged her down the runway, and with a splash she plunged into the breakers.

Nipper was the skipper; he gave crisp orders. Oars dipped in unison, and backs strained with youthful strength. Out went the lifeboat, charging valiantly through the breaking waves until she was well out on the waters of the bay.

It was a noble effort—an effort unseen by any witnesses save the officers and crew of the stricken steamer.

For by now several boats had been got away, and it seemed, at first, that the lifeboat was unnecessary.

But when Nipper stared towards the wreck he saw some

figures standing against the slanting rail. No other boats were putting away, so there were still lives to be saved.

On swept the lifeboat, the boys pulling magnificently. To their starboard, at some little distance, a longboat packed with men was laboriously making for the shore. To their port, farther away, another boat was to be seen.

A man was standing in the stern of the longboat, waving his hands. A voice came thinly on the wind, and Nipper caught some of the words.

"... no good!" came the voice. "They won't come ... Turn back!"

Nipper believed that he had failed to hear vital words, for it was inconceivable that the men left on the wreck would refuse to be rescued. Obviously there were no other boats, or they would be putting away.

"Pull, you chaps—pull!" roared Nipper. "There are still people aboard! She's broken her back on the reef, and the sea on this side isn't too bad. We can get close in."

"Good enough!" panted Handforth, as he struggled with his oar. "On, the Remove!"

Nearer and nearer. Carried vaguely on the wind came a weird, unearthly wail. At first the boys thought the sound was caused by the wind itself. But no, it was coming from the wreck, and in that wail there was a world of uncanny mystery. The two human figures were still standing on the slanting deck by the rail. They were immobile, almost placid. Nipper waved, but the men did not wave back. They stood against the rail, watching, but motionless.

"Funny!" muttered Nipper, frowning.

The ship herself acted as a breakwater; the waves on the outer side of the reef were crashing against the wreck, but on the sheltered side there was a narrow area of comparative calm. The lifeboat was able to plunge straight alongside.

"Grab!" yelled Nipper, flinging a rope.

But the two men against the rail moved not an inch. The lifeboat swung dizzily into a green valley, her sides scraping against the ship's metal plates. Up she came with another sea, and this time Nipper succeeded in leaping aboard. He made fast the rope, and other boys scrambled beside him.

They stared in wonder, for now, at close quarters, they saw that the two men on deck were men with strange yellow faces, and they were garbed in rich Oriental robes! Their eyes were quite calm as they gazed upon their would-be rescuers.

Nipper caught his breath in with sudden realisation. He knew, in that second, that this stricken steamer was the *Trancon*—outward bound for Rangoon, carrying the mysterious priests of Taaz!

The Men Who Waited for Death!

NIPPER knew that his school-fellows had realised the truth, too. But he wasted no time. The deck under his feet was rocking ominously, and the wind was shrieking like a thousand demons. Solid masses of water were breaking against the exposed side of the ship, and spray was splashing all round the juniors. Nipper seized the arm of the nearest yellow man.

"The boat!" he shouted, pointing. "Get in! We've come to save you."

He intended by his actions to illustrate his meaning, for he had little hope that the man would understand English. But the robed priest, impassive and indifferent, shrugged his shoulders. He smiled with infinite charm.

"My son, you are brave," he said in perfect English; "but you have risked your lives needlessly. We cannot go."

It was strange to hear such words, spoken so calmly to the accompaniment of the grinding crashing of metal as the stricken ship tore herself on the jagged fangs of rock.

"But you don't understand," shouted Nipper. "We have come to save you."

"It is you who do not understand, my son," said the yellow man, with that same impassive smile. "Go whilst there is still time. Our good friends the English sailors offered us places in their boats. But we cannot go."

"But if you stay here, this wreck will go to pieces under your feet," yelled Handforth. "That'll mean certain death."

"We are ready for death," replied the yellow man calmly. To argue with him was useless. The boys could only stand and stare mystified, amazed by this exhibition of apparently senseless stoicism. There was a brief lull at that moment, during which the force of the wind lessened and the waves ceased to crash.

Like a chorus of souls in torment came a crooning, chanting wail from somewhere below. It was a sound so uncanny, so inhuman, that the boys looked at one another in awe and fear.

"It's the other priests!" exclaimed Nipper suddenly. "We've got to rescue them, you chaps! They'll be committing plain suicide if they stay aboard. This way!"



"Pull, you chaps, pull!" shouted Nipper. "There are still people aboard." "On, the Remove!" panted Handforth. Oars dipped in unison, backs strained with youthful strength, as nearer and nearer swept the lifeboat to the wreck.

With Nipper leading, they dashed through an open doorway into a lounge. Wide stairs yawned, and they plunged down. With a grinding lurch the ship moved, and some of the boys were flung off their balance. But, somehow, they found themselves plunging into a saloon, which was in semi-darkness. The boys halted, fascinated by what they saw.

It was, indeed, an amazing scene.

On the saloon's slanting floor about a dozen robed men were kneeling, and they were wailing in a strange manner, their voices wild and abandoned. In front of them stood a curiously carved chair, and in the chair there was a veiled figure; a man who sat utterly motionless, like a figure of death.

Behind this chair, and rearing above it, was an enormous gilded image—a fearsome creature with the shape of a vulture, with spreading wings. But the bird's head was fashioned like a human head, with hideous features. Ten awful talons reached out, as though about to clutch at the figure in the chair. Hanging and swaying near the fearsome figure of the Vulture God were some strange lamps, which gave forth a lurid, flickering glow.

"Devil worship!" muttered Nipper, between horror and curiosity.

Such a sight as this, on a stricken ship which was gradually going to pieces on a reef off the coast of Sussex, left the schoolboys breathless. It was so unexpected to be suddenly transported, in a single moment, to a mystic East. These strange priests from the Taaz Temple, in some little known corner of Tibet, were apparently indifferent to their fate. Perhaps they did not fully understand. Yet the fact that they had been left aboard by the officers and crew clearly indicated that they had no desire to leave.

The schoolboys were speechless with amazement. They had risked their lives to come out to this wreck; they had behaved nobly. Now, it seemed their efforts were to go for nothing. Handforth, at least, was boiling with indignation and impatience.

"Hey! Are you all mad?" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Don't you want to be saved, while there's still a chance?"

Even as he spoke the wreck, battered by a succession of mighty waves, rocked and swayed, and the air was filled with the sounds of tearing metal and splintering woodwork.

"Great Scott! We're sinking now!" yelled Grey.

The voices of the boys caused the wailing chant to suddenly cease; and the priests of Taaz rose calmly to their feet. Every yellow face was turned towards the schoolboys; every eye was impassive and calm.

"Go, my children!" said one of the priests, pointing to the exit. "You have no right in this sacred temple."

"Temple!" shouted Handforth. "It's a ship's saloon—and the ship's breaking to pieces!"

"Go, then, and save your own lives," said the priest.

Nipper strode boldly up to him.

"But why won't you come?" he asked urgently. "We brought the lifeboat out, and if you come at once we can save you all."

The priest smiled benignly in Nipper's face.

"Since you will not go without an explanation, I will afford you one, my son," he said smoothly. "Raa-ok, the omnipotent, the magnificent, sleeps. While he sleeps he cannot be disturbed. Thus, we must wait."

Nipper looked at that still figure in the chair, so completely veiled. Only the eyes of the high priest were visible, and they stared unseeingly. It was no ordinary sleep, but a kind of a trance.

"Can't you carry him to the lifeboat as he is?" asked Nipper.

"Nay, my son," replied the other courteously. "When Raa-ok sleeps he must not be moved. We, his attendant priests, must ever remain by his side. And so we wait."

"When will he awaken?" asked Nipper.

The priest shrugged.

"Who knows, my child?" he replied. "Perchance with the breaking of the next dawn."

"The next dawn!" shouted Handforth. "But this ship won't hold together for another hour! Why don't you wake him up?"

"When Raa-ok sleeps, no hand must touch his sacred person," said the priest calmly. "My sons, I know well that you have risked your lives to save us. For that we thank you. But here we must remain."

"If you remain you will all die," said Nipper.

"So be it," said the priest simply. "Death has no terrors, my son. We are prepared."

Nipper turned to the others. He, at least, had some understanding of the fatalistic Oriental mind. Handforth, on the other hand, was openly impatient with such nonsense.

"They're all mad, you chaps!" he shouted. "We've come here to rescue them, and, by George, we're going to do it!"

"Wait a minute, Handy—" began Nipper quickly.

"Wait be blowed!" roared Handforth. "If they won't wake up the old priest, I will!"

Before anybody could prevent him, he made a rush at the veiled figure which sat, trance-like, in the ornamental chair. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,388.

chair. He grabbed, and as he did so, one of the attendant priests took hold of him.

Too late!

For Handforth had seized the coverings of the mysterious high priest of Taz; as the attendant yellow man pulled at Handforth so Handforth clutched at the rich coverings. They came away—and Raa-ok was revealed!

He was stripped of his coverings and the boys saw, in that lurid, unearthly light, a shrivelled figure of hideous aspect. The face, now fully exposed, was almost like the face of a monkey, wrinkled and disfigured with inconceivable age. Only the eyes, black and piercing, proved that life existed in those ancient veins.

More terrifying still, were the high priest's hands. They were resting on the arms of the chair, and it was clear to Nipper in a moment that Raa-ok had not moved his arms for countless years. Thus, from the elbows, they had shrivelled until they were just like bones. The hands, resting in an upright position, had the fingers splayed; hands and fingers were mummified, and they looked like the ten talons of the Vulture God. Every finger had a black, wicked-looking claw—actually, fingernails, untouched for years.

For perhaps two seconds there was a tense silence, broken only by the crashing of the waves outside and the groaning of the stricken ship.

Then, with cries like infuriated wild animals, the priests of Taz flung themselves upon the ten schoolboys. The change in the yellow men was horrifying.

Ten seconds earlier they had been benign, charming of manner, kindly. Now, all in a moment, they were like wild beasts. They flung themselves upon the boys, and the boys had no earthly chance. The men who gripped them were incredibly strong; their fingers were like steel vices as they clutched. The shouts which arose were utterly inhuman.

"Kill—kill!" screamed the attendant priest who had spoken so courteously to Nipper. "The unbelievers have gazed upon the face of Raa-ok! Kill—kill!"

The words were spoken in the men's native tongue, but Nipper could guess their meaning. He had understood the word "Raa-ok." He knew, as did the other schoolboys, of the sacred law of the Temple of Taz.

And in that second death seemed inevitable. For each one of the priests had whipped a wicked dagger from his robes, and every dagger was raised to strike death.

The Decree of Raa-ok!

THE ten boys of St. Frank's were at death's door. They all knew it, too, and helpless in the grip of their captors, they were as white as putty. The faces of the priests were distorted with such malevolent hatred that they no longer looked human. Death—murder—blazed from the fanatical eyes. And the gleaming daggers hovered at the top of the upstroke, ready to plunge.

PEN PALS

(Continued from page 15.)

Peter A. Lewis, 13, Holyrood Street, Hampton, S.7, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants to hear from collectors of stamps, cigarette cards, and match brands; age 13-17.

Murdoch Matheson-Lines, Drumblie, 23, B. Newcastle Street, Rose Bay, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants to hear from stamp collectors; age 11-12.

Colin Young, 169, 8th Avenue, Maylands, Western Australia, wants to hear from a stamp collector in Africa.

W. F. Foster, 43, Fairlawn Avenue, Boxley Heath, Kent, wants correspondents who are interested in old "Magnets" and "Schoolboys' Own Lib."; age 12-15.

W. A. Merrick, Westboro', Gweneole Avenue, Narborough Road, Braunstone, Leics., wants a French or German correspondent; age 15-16; interested in sports.

Miss L. Meyer, 54, Beckenham Lane, Bromley, Kent, wants girl correspondents; Canada, France, and U.S.A.; age 13-15.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Marine Parade, Brighton, wants correspondents interested in stamps; age 13-15; Africa, India, China, Australia, South Seas.

Douglas Leeder, 7, Station Road, Faversham, Kent, wants to hear from a correspondent keen on books and story writing; age 14-15.

M. Caldwell Nichols, c/o Sergeant-Major Nichols, D.C.R.E. Office, 1911, Buildings, Abbasia, Cairo, Egypt, wants to hear from readers interested in chemistry.

Kenneth Bell, 904, Garratt Lane, Tooting, London, S.W.17, wants members for his aeronautical club.

Edward Richard Allen, 135, Clarence Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, wants to hear from readers in Scotland, India, Australia, Africa, and Germany; age 17-20; interested in managing a cycling club.

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"Klaa!"

It was a single sharply-spoken word, commanding and very incisive. Yet it was so thin that it sounded like a whistle. It came from the withered mouth of Raa-ok, and it was instantly obeyed.

Ten daggers, about to plunge down, were arrested. The eyes of the attendant priests lost their malevolence. As though actuated by a single spring, the yellow men turned and stared at their high priest.

One or two of the boys nearly fainted, strong and plucky as they were, from the sudden reaction.

"Kill them not!" came the thin, whistling voice of Raa-ok, in good English.

The eyes hitherto staring and unseeing, were now alive. Yet the rest of the man seemed dead. Scarcely a muscle moved. Even when he spoke his wizened jaw looked still.

The priests, staggering as the ship gave another lurch, retained their grip on the ten schoolboys. Ten dagger points were thrust into ten backs. Nipper and his chums could feel the wicked points thrusting through their clothing—even penetrating their flesh. Even Handforth, reckless as he was, dared not move. For he knew that if he made any break for freedom the knife would be plunged home.

Raa-ok said something. One priest who had been standing aside now moved forward and quickly replaced the disturbed robes and veil.

"It is well," said Raa-ok. "The unbelievers have gazed upon my sacred face—and the punishment is death."

A murmur came from one or two of the priests—those, perhaps, who understood English. The others remained silent. The schoolboys, with thudding hearts, believed that they had only been reprieved—perhaps for a few minutes.

"Look here!" Handforth burst out, as he stared at Raa-ok. "You're awake now. There's still time for us to get you ashore. We've got the lifeboat alongside—"

"Nay, my son. I am not to be moved thus," said the high priest. "Perchance I shall die, and my faithful priests will die with me. Yet my spirit, and their spirits, will live on."

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Nipper, trying to keep his voice steady. "If you mean to kill us, why not get it over? Why torture us?"

"Have patience, my son," replied the high priest impassively. "You and those with you have gazed upon the face of the high priest of Taz; for countless centuries such offenders have been instantly put to death. But I remember that you came to this stricken ship on a kindly mission. Therefore, you shall be spared."

"Oh!"

It was a chorus from the schoolboys.

"Yet the talons of Taz shall strike," continued that thin, whistle-like voice. "In due course, each one of you shall be tested—each one shall undergo the ordeal."

Dennis Blamires, 21, High Park Place, Southport, Lancs., wants to exchange news and views; preferably Canada, South Africa or Australia; interested in electrical science.

Miss Beth Mares, 9, Augusta Road, Penarth, Glam., S. Wales, wants girl correspondents, preferably in Africa; age 14-15; swimming, tennis, films.

Ronald Charley, 27, Eccleston Street, Preseot, Lancs., wants pen pals; sports, motors, and mechanical subjects; age 12-14; British Colonies preferred.

R. Halley, Bree Street, Vryheid, Natal, South Africa, wants correspondents; cricket, stamp collecting, camping, photography.

Miss Pamela Lane, 10, Corbins Lane, South Harrow, Middx., wants a girl correspondent in U.S.A., India, or South America; age 12-13; writing, films, acting, snaps.

Miss H. Edgar, 18, Esk Bank, Longtown, Cumberland, wants girl correspondents; age 16-18; sports, music, films.

Stan McLaren, Sunnyfields Cottage, Ince Blundell, nr. Liverpool, wants a pen pal in Liverpool district; age 14-16; to go bicycle tours.

Miss Doris Queenie Eveling, 33, Kitchener Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17, wants girl correspondents in Hollywood, California, Australia, and Lancashire; age 15-20; radio, films, photography.

Cecil Edmund Chew, 73, Muntri Street, Penang, Straits Settlements, wants pen pals in England, France, Australia, and U.S.A.; age 15-19.

Miss Margaret Freeland, Milverton House, Carnarvon Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, wants a girl pen pal who reads the Gem; South Africa or South America; swimming, drawing, painting, films.

Herbert J. Nelson, Myola, Patterson Street, Tenneriffe, New Farm Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, wants correspondents anywhere; Canada, U.S.A., Germany, etc.; age 16-18; stamp collectors especially.

The Eagle Correspondence Club (R. Day), 5, Well Lane, Birkenhead, Ches., wants members; age 14-20.



Mr. E. S. Brooks welcomes letters from readers. Write to him c/o The Editor, The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

WHAT a glutton for work you must be, W. C. Leitch (Aberdeen). Your letters to me must entail an enormous amount of labour. Many thanks for your latest artistic effort. Yes, the Amalgamated Press, Ltd., the publishers of the Old Paper, is the only firm which is producing stories of St. Frank's. No other firm can publish them, and, naturally, I cannot write them for any other firm. Yes, that fourpenny book about which you are "suspicious" was actually written by me. Thanks for your suggestions. I don't know whether I shall be able to make any use of them, but thanks all the same.

The questions you ask me concerning Nipper are rather difficult to answer, Charles Anderson (Bermondsey). The characters of Nelson Lee and Nipper were originally created by Mr. Maxwell Scott. All the St. Frank's characters, of course, are of my own creation. Perhaps you had better write to the Editor for your information, as he'll probably know more of this subject than I do. With regard to the "small miniature photo-

graphs" of leading lights of St. Frank's, some "stamp portraits" were given not long ago. Again, this is a matter for the Editor.

Names List, No. 11. Ancient House, Third Form; Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath, Juicy Lemon, Owen minor, Bobby Dexter, Eric Gates, Jack Blythe. The above are the leading lights of the Third in the Ancient House; the others, never having been mentioned by name, need not concern us.

Glad to get a letter from an Australian reader. In the old days I used to get quite a lot of letters from my "cobbers down under." Perhaps I shall be getting a few more now that Curly Baines & Co., of Australia, have been appearing in the Old Paper. Thanks for your letter, E. Rumble (Goulburn, N.S.W.). St. Frank's stories, written by yours truly, are regularly appearing in the "Boys' Friend 4d. Library." You can generally see announcements of these in the GEM, and so you can give your orders accordingly.

Jimmy Potts is still at St. Frank's, "Old Reader from Chester." He is in Study H, in the Ancient House, with Vivian Travers and Skeets Bellton. His full name is Sir James Potts, Bart. When he first came to St. Frank's, he occupied the surprising position of bootboy, for his father had been ruined and he was obliged to get a job. It was Vivian Travers who ingeniously hoodwinked the rascal who had robbed Jimmy's father of his fortune, and thus Jimmy was able to resume his title and enter the school as a scholar.

It's O.K. with me, P. Arnold (Macclesfield). Send that book along and I'll do as you require.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

"Bedad! What does he mean?" whispered Tregellis-West. "Mark them well, my faithful ones," said Raa-ok, now evidently talking to his priests. "Regard them closely, memorise their faces. They come, it is plain, from a great school near this treacherous coastline. Mark them well, I say."

The priests, impassive again, stared intently, searchingly, into the faces of their captives. The high priest was still talking—now in his own language. The others intensified their scrutiny. And the boys felt that these grim, fanatical yellow men were looking into their very souls. There was no hurry, no excitement. Yet the stricken ship more than once rocked so alarmingly that it seemed that she would break up under their very feet and plunge them all to destruction.

"The great Taaz, the Vulture God, is ever watchful," said Raa-ok, again speaking in English. "Those who offend must prove their worth—or die. Go, my children, and take your lives with you. But remember, until your sin has been expiated the Ten Talons of Taaz will hover above you, ever ready to strike."

"But we've done nothing!" protested Handforth. "You have gazed upon my face, and Taaz is angry," replied the high priest. "Go, whilst there is yet time. And remember that Taaz will be watching. Henceforth, at any minute of the day or night, one of the Ten Talons of Taaz may swoop and clutch—and then one of the ten shall obey! If you acquit yourselves well you shall live, and the wrath of Taaz will be appeased. But if you fail, then death will be your reward."

He said something in his own tongue, and instantly the priests released their grip and withdrew their weapons. Nipper and his chums were free.

"Wait!" came the high priest's voice, and now, somehow, in spite of its whistling note, it contained an impressive sound. "Seek no protection, for thus you will make certain of death. Tell no living soul of what has passed here, for that will be equally fatal. You have been warned. Each one of you shall have his chance; but only Taaz knows when he will reach forth one of his Ten Talons. Go, my children!"

Some of them never remembered how they got out of that weird chamber. As they were climbing the companion stairs they felt the doomed ship roll half over. The boys were flung in all directions, bruised and battered. But, somehow, they managed to pick themselves up, and at last they reached the deck.

Wind and spray smote them, but they were glad of its salty freshness; they cared nothing for the dangers to come. They fled from that dreadful ship as they might have fled from the plague.

Darkness had nearly descended, and it seemed to the boys that the storm was decreasing in violence. The wind was still high, and the waves were crashing and thundering over the wreckage which had once been a fine ship.

The lifeboat was still alongside, in that sheltered spot, and the boys swarmed down into her. They pushed off into the gloom and spray, and on the wind came, once again, that wild and dreadful wailing.

Not a word was spoken by the Removites as they pulled at the oars. Each boy's thoughts were busy on the fearful events they had just passed through. In spite of the fact that they were away from the wreck, and getting ever nearer to the shore, they seemed to be living still in that ship's saloon, which was a temporary Oriental temple.

At last, in the gathering darkness, they felt the shingle under the keel of their boat. The breakers crashed around them. Some of the boys leapt out into the smother, and the lifeboat was dragged safely up the beach.

Wet through, silent, they stood staring out at the dim shape of the wreckage; and now they were certain that the gale was abating. The sea had less ferocity, the waves were losing their might.

"She won't break up now," said Nipper suddenly, his voice husky and unnatural in his own ears.

"You—you mean those terrible men will live?" asked Handforth.

"Yes."

"Ods horrors and frights!" said Archie Glenthorne, with a shiver. "And how do you suppose that will affect us, old thing?"

Handforth shook himself.

"It's all rot!" he said, before Nipper could reply. "While I was aboard that horror ship I felt pretty low, I'll admit. But now we're in the open, on a good old English seashore. Those heathens can't hurt us now!"

"You don't realise the relentlessness of Eastern fanaticism, Handy," said Nipper. "That wizened, dried-up old mummy meant every word he said. Somehow, in some way, the so-called Talons of Taaz will strike. It's no good kidding ourselves. We must be ready—and every fellow who fails in the ordeal, whatever it is, will die."

Next morning the storm had passed completely away. The Transon lay a hopeless wreck on the Devil's Reef. But she had not broken up completely. Men who went out to her found that saloon normal. The great image of the Vulture God had gone; the mystic high priest had gone, and with him, his attendants.

And no man knew how they had left the wreck, or where they were now.

And at St. Frank's, ten boys waited.

Next week; "THE CLUTCH OF THE FIRST TALON!"

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THE HOUSE OF FEAR!

(Continued from page 22.)

"What about her?"

"I must wake her up. It would be too terrible if she found—that in the morning. She has relations in Wayland. She can go there."

"Very well, Ethel. It's just like you to think of her."

Ethel showed the way to Martha's room, and the juniors waited in the passage while the girl awoke the old woman. When they went down to leave the house, Martha followed them; she had no wish to remain alone in the house of death.

Figgins undid the fastenings of the door, and threw it open.

Tom Merry & Co. were already waiting in the porch outside.

"Ethel!" they exclaimed together.

"Yaas, wathah! Ethel's all wight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Figgins has helped me wiggly."

Figgins only smiled. He had an idea that it was D'Arcy who helped him, but he did not say so. He was too happy, with Cousin Ethel quite safe and leaning on his arm, to want to argue with anybody.

"Come on!" said Jack Blake.

They crossed the wild, dark gardens to the gates, and Tom Merry unfastened them. A minute more, and they stood on the path on the moor.

Cousin Ethel seemed to grow stronger at every step in the keen, fresh air of the moor, and now that the house of death was left behind.

In the sleepy town of Wayland old Martha left them. The juniors and Cousin Ethel tramped on by the footpath to St. Jim's.

"You're not tired, Ethel?" asked Figgins anxiously. "We could knock up some inn, you know, and get a conveyance."

Ethel shook her head and smiled. She could smile now.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "This is lovely!"

And Figgins walked on, with Cousin Ethel's hands on his arm, as happy as a fellow in a very pleasant dream, and feeling, indeed, as if he were dreaming.

St. Jim's was reached too soon to please Figgins.

Tom Merry rang a loud peal on the bell. The first glimmer of dawn was appearing in the sky, and tinting the elm-trees a pale silver.

Jack Blake rubbed his eyes.

"It's been a night out, and no mistake!" he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry rang again and again. Taggles, the porter, had probably never been disturbed at that hour in his life before, but he had to turn out at last. In his old coat, with a muffler round his neck and a lantern in his hand, Taggles appeared at last, grumbling audibly.

He almost dropped on the ground as he saw the group of juniors through the bars of the gate.

"My heye! This is a nice goings hon!" he gasped.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Open the gate, Taggles, old soul!"

"Which I says—"

"Say it all afterwards," said Blake. "Open the gate, and then go back to bed."

Taggles did not reply. He opened the gate, still in a state of great astonishment, and the juniors entered. They took Cousin Ethel direct to the Head's house, and Tom

Merry rang. He had to ring there more than at the gate before a sleepy maidservant came down and opened the door, looking extremely drowsy and indignant. But at the sight of Cousin Ethel's pale face the maid's expression changed.

Cousin Ethel had frequently stayed with Mrs. Holmes, and she was liked by everyone in the House, from the Head himself to the boots.

Dr. Holmes himself, amazed by the ringing at such an hour, looked down the stairs in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"Merry!" he exclaimed, catching sight of the hero of the Shell. "What is it? And Miss Cleveland, too! Good heavens! What has happened?"

"May we come in and explain, sir?"

"Yes, yes! Certainly!"

Five minutes later Cousin Ethel was in bed, with the motherly Mrs. Holmes hovering about her, while the amazed Head listened to what the juniors had to tell him.

When Tom Merry had finished the Head sent them to bed, and wrote a note which he dispatched by Toby, the page, to the police station in Rylcombe.

The juniors were glad enough to get to bed. They were sleepy and tired, now that the excitement of the wild night had passed away.

But Figgins was in a very cheerful frame of mind. Figgins & Co. turned in, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn closed their eyes at once. Fatty Wynn was too sleepy even to remember that there was a cold chicken in the cupboard in the study.

Figgins, however, did not seem inclined for sleep.

"Kerr, old man!" he called out.

"Eh?"

"Ethel looked a lot better when we got in, didn't she?"

"Grooh!"

"I say, Kerr—"

Snore!

The snore might have been real or simulated.

Figgins grunted, and called out to Fatty Wynn:

"Fatty! I say, Fatty, old man!"

"Grooh!"

"Fatty! I say, Fatty! You're not asleep yet, surely! Did you think that Ethel still looked rather pale when we said good-night to her?"

"Grooh!"

"I suppose she will be feeling pretty fit by the morning, though. What do you think, Fatty?"

Snore—snore!

Figgins gave it up, and went to sleep himself.

Cousin Ethel seemed almost her old self in the morning, and the juniors of St. Jim's were very glad to see it.

The death of Dr. Gadsby, and the story of the poisonous reptile introduced into the Red Room created quite a sensation around the countryside. The whole story had to be told at the inquest, and the juniors told it frankly.

The verdict was one of accidental death—Dr. Gadsby had escaped punishment. His death had been accidental, but it had come about through his own wickedness, and there were few, if any, to pity him.

Cousin Ethel remained for some days at St. Jim's, and they were happy days for Figgins, who was her chief escort on all occasions, but in all her many rambles round the old school Cousin Ethel never went in the direction of the house of fear on the moor.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA!"—a great holiday yarn featuring the chums of St. Jim's in Devon.)

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