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The **GEM** 2d



*The
Mystery Man
at St. Jim's!*

The MYSTERY MAN



"I shall come on Saturday at midnight and take your picture," said the voice of "X." "If you care to ransom it afterwards, the price will be three thousand. I do not work for nothing!" "You impudent scoundrel!" exclaimed the Head. "If you come here you will find us ready."

CHAPTER 1.

Quite Forgotten!

TOM MERRY tapped at the door of Bernard Glyn's study in the School House at St. Jim's. As there was no response, he turned the handle to enter.

The door did not open. "Oh, blow!" murmured Tom Merry. "The silly ass has forgotten!" He thumped on the door.

Manners and Lowther of the Shell came along the passage and joined Tom Merry. Anybody who had passed the Terrible Three at that moment would have glanced at them a second time.

The Terrible Three were looking as spick and span as if they had just stepped out of a set of band-boxes. Their trousers were nicely creased, their boots were beautifully polished, their jackets were carefully brushed, their collars were spotless white, and their neckties tied most elegantly. They carried three beautiful shiny toppers all ready to put on, and the polish on those toppers might have made even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, a little envious.

It was evidently a very special occasion.

"Isn't he in?" asked Manners, as he saw that Tom Merry was waiting outside Glyn's study.

"Somebody's in," said Tom Merry. "I can hear him moving."

"Why don't you go in then, fat-head?"

"Because the door's locked, ass!"

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"Oh, biff on it!" said Monty Lowther. Thump! Biff! Bang!

The combined assault of the Terrible Three elicited a reply at last from the locked study. The voice of Bernard Glyn, the junior from Liverpool, was heard, raised in tones of wrath.

"Go away!"

Thump! Bang!

"Go away! Buzz off! Scoot!"

"Open the door!"

"Can't; I'm busy!"

"But we've come!" roared Tom Merry indignantly.

"Well, go, then!"

"You ass!" shouted Monty Lowther through the keyhole. "Open the door!"

"Rats!"

"It's time to go."

"Well, don't I keep on telling you to go?"

"You fathead!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Look here—"

"Open the door!"

"We're all ready!"

There was no reply from within the study this time. A faint whirring sound was heard as of a machine that was starting in business on its own account, and that was all.

"The awful ass!" growled Manners. "He's on one of his rotten inventions again, and he's forgotten that he's asked us to go over to tea at Glyn House. He's forgotten all about the tea—and all about us."

"We'll remind him," grinned Monty Lowther. "Now, then, all together!" Bang, bang, bang!

There was a crash inside the study, and a roar of wrath from the schoolboy inventor.

"Oh, you asses! You've made me drop the battery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! What's the wow, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form came along the passage with Jack Blake, also of the Fourth.

Blake looked as neat and clean and fresh as the chums of the Shell. But all four of them faded into insignificance in the presence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. D'Arcy was a perfect picture, from the tips of his gleaming boots to his beautiful necktie and his gleaming monocle.

"Isn't Glyn ready?" asked Blake.

Who is "X," the mystery cracksmen who has eluded the police for years? Nobody knows him; nobody has seen him; yet like a flitting shadow, daringly defiant of the most elaborate plans to trap him, he visits the victim he has warned, robs him, and then fades away again into the night! Who is he?

AT ST. JIM'S!

By
Martin Clifford.

"No; the ass has locked himself in," growled Manners. "He's working on one of his rotten inventions, and he's forgotten the appointment."

"Bang on the door."

"All together," said Tom Merry.

Bang, bang, bang!

There was no answer from within the study. Bernard Glyn was busy picking up the fragments of his shattered battery. It was only too evident that the schoolboy inventor had forgotten the important business that was "on" that afternoon.

Bernard Glyn was a most enthusiastic inventor, and his inventions were fearful and wonderful. Sometimes they worked, and sometimes they didn't, but they always made the study in a terrible state of untidiness and smelliness, and Glyn's study-mates were frequently driven to doing their work in the Form-room, or in some other fellow's study. When he was working upon an invention, Bernard Glyn forgot time and space, and often one of his study-mates had dragged him by main force out of the study, and rushed him down to lessons to save him from punishment.

Bang, bang, bang!

Harry Noble, otherwise Kangaroo, came along the passage, as resplendent in his attire as the other fellows.

"Trying to bust my study door in?" he asked.

"Glyn won't open it," howled Monty Lowther. "The silly ass is working on some rot, and he's forgotten that he's taking us to tea to Glyn House this afternoon."

The Cornstalk junior chuckled.

"All serene!" he said. "I've got a key."

"Good egg!"

Kangaroo inserted a key into the lock, and knocked out the key that was inside. Then he unlocked the door.

There was an exclamation from within, and the schoolboy inventor rushed to the door to jam his foot against it. In an instant, however, the whole crowd of juniors outside had thrown their weight upon the door, and it flew open.

Bernard Glyn was hurled back, and he crashed bodily into the study table.

The table was loaded with the paraphernalia of the schoolboy inventor. It went flying, and Bernard Glyn rolled on the floor in the midst of a crashing and smashing assortment of wet batteries and dry batteries, coils of insulated wire, electric bells and receivers, and tools of all kinds.

The havoc was terrific.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Glyn, old man, you'll smash up your property if you play those tricks."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh!" gasped Bernard Glyn.

"Do it again!" said Kangaroo cheerfully. "Is it a gymnastic exercise or a conjuring performance?"

Bernard Glyn sat up in the midst of the wreckage. He was smothered with water and sal-ammoniac from the wet batteries, and a coil of wire was clinging round his neck.

"Oh, you asses! You silly jossers! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You look like a silly

jossah at the present moment, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, regarding the schoolboy inventor through his famous monocle. "You are hardly in a fit state to come to tea, Glyn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kangaroo helped his study-mate to his feet. Bernard Glyn glared at the juniors.

"You—you frightful asses!" he exclaimed. "Look what you've done!"

"We didn't do it, deah boy. You did it yourself. I saw you distinctly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses, what is there to cackle at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All your own fault," said Kangaroo cheerfully. "It's past the time to start for Glyn House. Have you forgotten that you're going to take us to tea?"

Glyn started.

"My hat! I'd forgotten all about it!" he exclaimed. "Excuse me, you chaps. I shall have to change—"

"Bai Jove! You will!"

"And wash!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I won't keep you long," said Glyn,

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recovering his good humour. "Wait for me here. You can pick up those things while you're waiting."

"Right-ho!"

And Bernard Glyn rushed away to the Shell dormitory to clean himself and change his clothes.

The juniors sat round the end study, waiting for him, and the more industrious of them set the table upon its legs again, and picked up the fallen articles from the floor.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unwelcome Guest!

MELLISH of the Fourth came along the Shell passage, and looked into the end study.

He was met by a general stare from the juniors.

Mellish was not popular with Tom Merry & Co. Mellish was the sneak of the School House, and he was specially in bad odour lately. He had narrowly escaped being expelled from St. Jim's, and his conduct had not been forgotten. As he looked into Glyn's study the juniors there frowned, and D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and scanned Mellish as if he had been some strange animal. Mellish looked round the study.

"Glyn here?" he asked.

"No!" snapped Kangaroo.

"You fellows going to Glyn's place to tea?" asked Mellish, with a curious glance at the juniors.

"I don't see that it's any of your business," said Jack Blake. "But we are, certainly."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! I'm coming, too!"

There was a general exclamation of surprise.

"What!"

"You?"

Mellish nodded coolly.

"Yes, I!" he said.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "You don't mean to say that Glyn has asked you?"

"Oh, no! He hasn't asked me."

"You're coming without his asking you, do you mean?"

"Exactly."

"Weally, you wottah? We will see what Glyn says about that."

"Good!" said Mellish, seating himself upon a corner of the table. "Certainly we'll see what Glyn says about it; but I'm coming, whatever he says."

"Wats!"

"There's a house-party at Glyn House," said Mellish. "Glyn's pater being a millionaire, he does you jolly well when you go there. I hear that there's champagne flowing, and there's all kinds of things."

"There won't be any champagne for us, you ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, no! Not champagne," said Mellish, laughing, "but lots of other things, and I'm going to have a good time."

"Bosh!"

"You're not coming!"

"Look here, Mellish!" said Tom Merry. "I don't want to have to be rude to you, but your company isn't welcome. You and Crooke and Levison have got yourselves into bad odour, and we don't want to talk to you. You pretty nearly ruined Lumley-Lumley among you, and it will take you some time to live it down. You ought to have tact enough to keep yourself to yourself for a bit. Buzz off!"

Mellish did not move.

"You'd better go!" said Kangaroo, with a gleam in his eyes. "This is my study, Mellish, and I don't want a worm of your kind in it!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" yawned Mellish.

"As I'm going with Glyn, I may as well wait here for him as well as anywhere else."

"You're not going with Glyn!" roared the Cornstalk.

"But I tell you I am!"

"And I tell you you're not!"

"Yaas, wathah! We wefuse to cweddit your statement, Mellish, you wascal."

The cad of the Fourth shrugged his shoulders.

"Hallo! Here's Glyn!" said Tom Merry. "Mellish says he's coming to tea at Glyn House. Is it true, Glyn?"

Bernard Glyn shook his head most emphatically.

"Oh dear, no!" he exclaimed. "I'd as soon take Crooke or Levison, and as soon take Herries' bulldog as either."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I remarked that he was not speaking the twuth," said Arthur Augustus

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D'Arcy. "I regard you as an unweildable wottah, Mellish. Now, if you're weady, deah boys—"

"All ready!" said Manners.

"I'm coming, Glyn, if you don't object," said Mellish.

"But I do object!" said the school-boy inventor promptly. "I bar you, Mellish. You can go and eat coke!"

"But your pater—"

"My pater wouldn't like me to take a worm like you."

"Wathah not!"

"My cousin—"

"Oh, blow your cousin! Come on, you chaps!"

"My cousin, Captain Mellish—"

"Captain rats! Come on!"

The invited party crowded out into the passage.

Mellish followed them, with an unpleasant grin upon his face.

"Glyn," he exclaimed, "I'm really coming, you know!"

Bernard Glyn faced round in the passage.

"Buzz off!" he exclaimed. "I'm not taking you!"

Mellish laughed.

"My cousin's staying at your place on a visit to your father," he said.

"Bosh!" said Glyn.

"But he is, you know. Captain Mellish—"

"Captain of a Thames barge!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Captain of the Boobywallah Fusiliers," said Mellish, "and he's on a visit to Glyn House. I want to see him!"

"Well, I dare say he doesn't want to see you," said Glyn. "Jolly queer taste if he did. You may have a decent relation, though one wouldn't think it to look at you. You're jolly well not coming with us. Buzz off!"

"But I've got a letter—"

"You'll get a thick ear if you bother me any more!"

"I've got a—"

"Oh, come on!" murmured Tom Merry. "Mellish will keep us talking all day. He's as bad as Gussy when Gussy gets fairly good."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Look here!" said Mellish. "I tell you I've got—"

But Tom Merry & Co. walked away down the passage, and Mellish was left talking to the desert air.

The juniors were already late for starting, and they had no time to waste. They crossed the quadrangle at a run, needless of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's pathetic appeals to them to slacken speed.

"Pway don't buwwy like this, deah boys!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "We shall make our boots and twousahs dusty by the time we awwive."

"Hurry up!" roared Monty Lowther, slapping the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder so suddenly that Arthur Augustus staggered forward and fell on his knees.

"Ow! Bai Jove!"

"Hurry up!"

"You fwiughtful ass! You've wuined the knees of my twousahs!"

"Hurry up!" yelled Lowther excitedly.

Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet and rushed at Monty Lowther.

Lowther dashed towards the gate, and D'Arcy flew after him. Out into the road they went at top speed, and the rest of the party, laughing, hurried after them.

Arthur Augustus' boots were indeed dusty by the time he remembered himself and slackened speed.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped, as the other

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fellows came up. "You will have to lend me a bwush as soon as we awwive, before I pwesent myself to your sistah and patab, Glyn!"

"I'll turn the garden hose on you, if you like," said Glyn cheerfully.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Blessed if that ass Mellish isn't following us!" exclaimed Blake, looking back.

The juniors all glanced over their shoulders.

Mellish of the Fourth was sauntering down the road after them. They hurried on, and turned into the little lane that led to the great gates of Glyn House.

Mellish turned into the lane after them.

"Bai Jove! He's really coming!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Glyn stopped in the gateway for Percy Mellish to come up. He waited for the cad of the Fourth, with a grim expression upon his face.

Mellish strolled up easily.

"Look here!" exclaimed Glyn. "I'm fed-up with this rot! You—"

"I've come!" said Mellish cheerfully. "By the way, I forgot to mention that I've had an invitation from your father—"

"My father?" said Glyn, taken aback.

"Yes," said Mellish chuckling. "Your pater sent me a note this afternoon. He said he'd just learned that Captain Mellish had a cousin at St. Jim's, so he wrote to ask me to come over with you and the others."

Bernard Glyn looked at him very dubiously.

"I'd like to see that note," he said curtly.

Mellish felt in his pocket and produced the letter.

Bernard Glyn looked at it. For once, at all events, the cad of the Fourth had spoken the truth. The letter was in Mr. Glyn's hand, and was addressed to Mellish of the Fourth, and it ran:

"Captain Mellish, my guest, tells me that you are his cousin, and he would like to see you while he is down here. I shall be glad if you will come over with my son this afternoon, and at any other time when you feel inclined."

Glyn handed the letter back to Mellish. His father, of course, did not know anything about him personally. To the millionaire, Percy Mellish was simply a St. Jim's junior. Glyn had never mentioned him at home.

Mellish watched the schoolboy inventor's face with a covert grin.

Glyn attempted to be hospitable, though it was very difficult indeed to be polite to Percy Mellish.

"Come in, then," he said. "If you'd shown me this letter before it would have been all right. I didn't know my pater had asked you."

"I wanted to show you the letter, but you wouldn't look at it," said Mellish.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Glyn, with an effort. "Come in!"

Mellish nodded, and walked in with Glyn.

They rejoined Tom Merry & Co., who regarded Mellish with disfavour.

Glyn explained awkwardly.

"It's true about Mellish having a relation in the house-party here," he said. "My pater's asked him over. He's welcome, of course."

"Thanks!" drawled Mellish.

"Oh, that altahs the case, of course," said Arthur Augustus. "A chap is bound to be civil to a fellow-guest. It's all wight, Mellish!"

"Go hon!" said Mellish.

"Try not to be a disagreeable cad, you know, and we shall get on better," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mellish laughed, and they walked up to the house together.

CHAPTER 3.

"X"!

"HALLO! Something's up!"

Bernard Glyn uttered that exclamation as they entered the portico of Glyn House.

It was evident that "something" was up.

The house was in confusion.

Mr. Glyn's voice could be heard from the library in disturbed tones. Several servants were standing about whispering, and some of the guests were to be seen, all looking very concerned and surprised.

"What on earth's the matter?" Glyn asked. "Somebody ill, I wonder?"

He caught hold of the butler as that ponderous gentleman crossed the hall.

"Jenkins, what's up?"

Mr. Jenkins stopped.

"Oh, it's you, Master Bernard!" he exclaimed. "There's been a robbery!"

"A what?"

"A robbery!"

"My hat!"

"Inspector Skeat is in the library with your father, Master Bernard. Your father's very upset," said Mr. Jenkins. "It's most amazing! The Golden Mandarin has been taken!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Jenkins passed on, and Glyn turned to his companions in dismay.

"That's rotten!" he said. "Beastly awkward for a robbery to happen now, just when we've come to tea, too. The pater will be cut up if they don't get that statuette back."

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry.

"A statuette—a Chinese mandarin made in solid gold," said Glyn. "It's worth heaps of money, and was a great curiosity. The pater has been offered three thousand pounds for it. A nice little haul for the rotter, whoever he is. Rotten thing to happen when there are people staying in the house, too! Hallo! Here's the inspector!"

Inspector Skeat, of Rylcombe, came out of the library, looking a little flushed and annoyed. It was evident that he had not been pleased with his interview with Mr. Glyn.

The inspector passed on, and Bernard Glyn looked into the library.

Mr. Glyn was there, pacing up and down the room, in a state of considerable agitation.

"Hallo, dad!"

"Oh, is that you, Bernard?" said Mr. Glyn, stopping and looking at his son. "Have you heard what has happened?"

Glyn nodded.

"The inspector is an ass!" said Mr. Glyn. "What do you think he has proposed to me? To have the rooms of my guests searched!"

"That would be rather thick, dad!"

"Yes. As if I could think of such a thing. The ass!" said Mr. Glyn with great candour. "He will have to get the statuette back, though. I would not lose it for twice its value. I shall send for a detective from London. These country police—"

"When did it go, dad, last night?"

"No; to-day. I usually keep it on my desk, here, as you know, and it was gone when I came in an hour ago. Where, I don't know. But I found this here."

The millionaire jerked his hand towards the table. A small card was

lying there with an "X" inscribed upon it in red ink. There was nothing else upon the card, and Bernard Glyn gazed at it in amazement.

"What on earth does that mean, pater?"

"It was left by the thief," said Mr. Glyn irritably. "He must have come in from the grounds; the french windows have been open nearly all day."

"My hat!" said the junior. "It's rather a new dodge for a thief to leave his card, isn't it?"

The millionaire made an angry gesture.

"You have never heard of him, then, Bernard?"

"I? What do you mean, dad?"

"No, of course, you do not read the newspapers," said his father. "There is a clever thief who has committed many robberies in wealthy houses, both

"Come in!" rapped out the millionaire.

The door opened, and a young man entered. He was a tall, well-built fellow, with a soldierly air and a handsome, clear-cut face, with the tan of a tropical sun in his cheeks.

"Ah, Captain Mellish," said Mr. Glyn, with a more agreeable look. It was evident that the millionaire liked his guest.

"Excuse me," said the captain, "I was anxious to know if you have made any progress, and as I saw the inspector go—"

Mr. Glyn shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"No; the inspector is an ass!" he said.

The captain smiled.

"Then you hold out no hope of your recovering the statuette!" he said.

"Begad!" exclaimed the captain. "So you had a visit from X. A cool beggar, by Jove! I have heard that when he stole Lord Westwood's bonds, he sent a telegram to say that he was going to take them on a certain date and, by Jove, he did! They had two detectives and several fellows watching for him, and he took them all the same. Not much use the police tackling a fellow of that kind!"

"Then you think I shall not get my statuette back, captain?"

Captain Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope you will, sir," he said, in a tone that implied very plainly his belief that he did not think so.

There was a knock at the door again. Inspector Skeat came in. The inspector held a telegram in his plump hand, and his usually ruddy face was



As the crowd of juniors outside threw their weight upon the door it flew open. Bernard Glyn was hurled back, and he crashed bodily into the study table. The table was loaded with the apparatus of the schoolboy inventor, and there was a terrific smashing and crashing as it was sent flying!

in London and the country, and on each occasion a card of that kind has been left in the place of the articles stolen. The man is a very clever rascal. The police have records of a dozen robberies in which the same thing has occurred, and there has never been a clue to the thief. He chooses occasions when a house is full of guests; perhaps in order to introduce himself in some cunning disguise. Some of my guests have brought their own servants with them, and it would be quite easy for a man dressed as a valet or a chauffeur to come and go unnoticed. Mr. Skeat is an ass; he doesn't believe in the mysterious thief who signs himself X. I told him all I know on the subject, but he doesn't take any stock of it, as he says. This is an ordinary thief to him. But I am going to get the Golden Mandarin back somehow. I—"

There was a tap at the door.

"Oh, yes; he thinks he can find it. I know he cannot. I'm going to send for a detective from London."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Most decidedly. I would rather have your opinion on the case, captain, than that of a dozen policemen."

"Thank you. I would suggest that a search is made in the house."

"Why, that is what Mr. Skeat suggested."

"I must say that I agree with him. I think your guests would prefer that their rooms, and those of their servants, should be searched," said the captain, "otherwise—"

"Impossible."

"But, my dear sir—"

"I should never dream of anything of the sort. Besides, I know who the thief is."

"Really!"

"It is the rascal who signs himself X. Look at that card."

perfectly crimson with rage. He held up the telegram and tried to speak, but he was almost stuttering with fury, and the words did not come.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Glyn testily.

"This—this telegram!" gasped the inspector. "I—I—"

"What about it?"

"It was addressed to me here, and handed to me just as I was leaving," howled the inspector. "It was dispatched from London an hour ago."

"Well?"

"Read it!"

Mr. Glyn took the telegram and read it. He uttered an exclamation, or rather a shout, and passed it to the captain.

The captain whistled. Bernard Glyn took the telegram, and gave quite a yell as he looked at it. For this is how the telegram read:

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"Inspector Skeat, Glyn House, Rycombe. Go it!—X."

"My hat!" murmured Bernard Glyn. "The cool beggar!"

"Do you see?" exclaimed the inspector. "That telegram was sent an hour ago; the villain knew that I should be sent for. He must have sent that wire immediately he got back to London with his plunder. It's sent from Charing Cross Post Office. Imagine it—wiring to me—the thief! Telling me to go it. The impudence! The—the—"

Words failed the inspector in his indignation.

"I suppose you believe now that it was X who stole the statuette?" said Mr. Glyn tartly.

"Yes, yes; I suppose so. It is extraordinary. He must have entered the house in some sort of disguise," exclaimed the inspector. "I never heard of such coolness, such impudence. The scoundrel!"

"He does seem to be a cool hand," said Captain Mellish. "But surely this telegram will give you a clue, inspector? You can find out all the passengers that left for London to-day; you can't have a crowd of passengers at a station like this."

The inspector shook his head.

"I shall inquire," he said. "But he may have gone by Wayland Junction—there are plenty of passengers at that station—or he might have walked to Abbot'sford."

"An inquiry at Charing Cross Post Office—"

"Depend upon it, he was in some disguise when he sent the wire. But I shall certainly communicate with Scotland Yard at once about it."

And the inspector, picking up the telegram, stalked out.

Bernard Glyn rejoined his chums.

Tom Merry & Co. listened with the keenest interest and amazement to what he had to tell them.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "The chap's a cool beggar! The inspector was looking like a ruffled turkey. No wonder!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we may as well have tea, all the same," said Glyn. "Edith's got us a ripping feed ready, as she said she would. It's in the gun-room. Come on!"

"Hallo, Cecil!" exclaimed Mellish, as his cousin came out of the library.

Captain Mellish glanced at the Fourth Former.

"Percy! So you are here!"

The handsome cousin shook hands with the Fourth Former of St. Jim's. Mellish, with an air of great pride, introduced his companions to the captain. It was evident that Mellish was very pleased to have so creditable a relation to present to the St. Jim's fellows.

Tom Merry & Co. were surprised; they would never have dreamed that the big, handsome captain, with his sun-burnt face and pleasant manners, was a relative of the sneak of the Fourth.

Captain Mellish made a very agreeable impression upon all of them.

"Will you come and feed with us, Cecil?" asked Mellish. "The fellows would all like it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, do!" said Bernard Glyn. "You can tell us all about that chap X, too."

The captain nodded, and smiled.

"Nothing I would like better," he said. "I should like to come over to the school and see your quarters, too, Percy."

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"Yes, rather!" said Mellish, seeming to grow an inch or two taller at the prospect of showing his handsome cousin round St. Jim's before all the fellows. "I should be jolly glad to take you round the school, and we'll have a study feed, too."

"Good!" said the captain.

"This way!" said Bernard Glyn.

And, having paid their respects to Mr. Glyn, the juniors followed Bernard to the gun-room, where Glyn's sister had prepared a "feed" that was calculated to delight the heart of any schoolboy.

CHAPTER 4.

Mellish's Cousin.

EDITH GLYN greeted the juniors of St. Jim's with a sweet smile.

Glyn's sister was a very charming young lady of twenty-five summers.

Arthur Augustus, once upon a time, had been in love with Miss Glyn, and had even gone to the length of proposing to her—a fact which his chums never allowed him to forget.

Miss Glyn was engaged now to a gentleman who had been a temporary Housemaster at St. Jim's, and so D'Arcy's dream was over in that direction; but he did not mind. D'Arcy was rather given to having affairs of the heart, which were dreadfully serious while they lasted, but which, fortunately, did not last long.

Edith, having seen that the boys had all they wanted, left them to themselves, very tactfully on her part.

Captain Mellish sat down to the table with the juniors in the highest good humour. The juniors were very much taken with him. The more they saw of him, the more they were amazed that he should be a relation of Mellish. Indeed, it made them think more highly of Mellish to discover that he had such a really ripping cousin, as Blake remarked sotto voce to Tom Merry.

The captain was full of good humour and full of good stories. He told the juniors stories of India, where he had commanded a corps of irregulars, the Boolwallah Fusiliers. He had been in action, and the boys listened breathlessly to a story of a fight with the Afridis in a frontier pass.

The captain was very much interested, too, in St. Jim's. He talked football, and showed that he knew all about the game.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy exclaimed. "If you'd come over to St. Jim's early, sir, we could give you a game, if you'd play with juniors, sir."

"Good!" exclaimed Captain Mellish. "Nothing I'd like better! I suppose you are a great footballer, Percy?"

Percy Mellish coloured uncomfortably.

Mellish was a slacker of the first water, and he hated cricket and football and every other healthy game with the deadliest of hatreds.

"Well, I play!" he stammered.

"In the Form eleven—eh?" said his cousin.

"N-not exactly!" stammered Mellish. Blake chuckled at the idea of Mellish being in the Form eleven. Mellish would be declined as a recruit by an eleven in the Second Form, let alone the Fourth.

The captain glanced at Blake, and Blake changed his chuckle into a cough, and took a hasty bite at a jam tart.

Arthur Augustus patted him on the back.

"Gone down the wong way, deah boy?" he asked sympathetically.

"Ow! No, ass!" gurgled Blake. "Leave off punching me!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Groo-hoo!"

Mellish grinned.

The captain changed the topic; perhaps he was keen enough to see that feeling was not so cordial between his cousin and the other fellows as it might have been.

"Well, I hope I shall see you play, Percy, when I come over," he said. "By gad, it will be like old times to be among you young fellows! I'm down here for a week, and I hope your father will have recovered the statuette before I go, Glyn."

That brought the talk round to the subject of X—a topic which was full of the keenest interest to the juniors.

"I don't suppose it will ever be seen again," said Glyn. "It stands to reason the rascal will melt it down for the gold, though it will lose a lot of its value if he does. It was a jolly valuable thing—the eyes were diamonds, you know, and worth a lot of tin. I wonder—"

He paused.

"Well, what do you wonder?" said Tom Merry.

"I was thinking that the thief might have had a go at St. Jim's if he stayed in the neighbourhood," said Bernard Glyn. "There's a lot of loot at the school for a chap who knew how to get at it. You remember we've had burglars after the plate. And there's the Head's Rembrandt, too. What a haul for the bouncer if he could get at it!"

"Genuine Rembrandt?" said the captain, with interest. "I'm a bit of a connoisseur in pictures. I should like to see that."

"Yes, genuine enough," said Glyn. "You fellows know the picture; it hangs opposite the Head's writing-table in the study."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Thing that looks like a smudge, you mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it does look rather smudgy," said Glyn, "but I know it's frightfully valuable. They sold one of Rembrandt's pictures the other day for a hundred thousand quid!"

"Bai Jove!"

"This is only a little one, but it's supposed to be an extra-special good specimen," said Glyn. "I know the Head could sell it for five thousand pounds if he liked. An American collector once offered him a big sum—I don't know how much, but the fellows said it was thousands and thousands of dollars. Stolen pictures can be sold in America, and if X raided that daub—I mean, picture—"

"What a chance for X, if he knew!" said Tom Merry.

"He probably does know," said the captain. "From what I've heard of the man, he seems to know everything that's worth stealing, and that's in a handy form to be taken away. As he has honoured this neighbourhood with a visit, your headmaster would do very well to put his picture in a very safe place."

Glyn laughed.

"Oh, he wouldn't do that!" he said. "He keeps it where he can see it. He looks up from his table and glances over it, you know. Chaps have seen him standing in front of that picture for half an hour at a time looking at it—blessed if I know what for."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, really, it would be only right to give him a warning," said the captain thoughtfully. "I've a good mind to walk over to the school with you

lads and speak to him about it—after what's happened here."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We'll show you round the school, anyway."

The captain held to his idea.

After tea, when the party left Glyn House, the handsome captain walked with them to the school.

Tom Merry & Co. felt very distinguished as they walked in at St. Jim's with the captain. Fellows looked at them, and wondered who their friend was; and Mellish swanked considerably.

When the fellows learned that the captain was Mellish's cousin, they showed an astonishment that was not very complimentary to Mellish.

Captain Mellish strolled round the quadrangle with the juniors, and looked in at the gym, and walked round the playing fields.

The Sixth Eleven were just finishing a match with the Fifth, and the captain paused to look on, and he cheered as loudly as anybody when Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, kicked the winning goal.

"Goal! Bravo!" shouted the captain. And Tom Merry murmured admiringly:

"He knew that was going to be a goal before it went in: he knows footer, my infants. Where did Mellish dig up a cousin like that?"

And when Captain Mellish left the juniors to call upon the Head, he left them singing his praises right and left. And Mellish of the Fourth came in for a very unusual amount of attention.

Tom Merry, after a mental struggle on the subject, came up to Mellish and tapped him on the shoulder, in a very unusual friendly way.

"Mellish, old man!" he said.

Mellish grinned; it was the first time Tom Merry had ever called him "old man."

"Hallo!" he said.

"We're thinking of making up a match on Saturday afternoon, and getting the captain to play," said Tom Merry. "He said he would."

"Well?"

"Well, it's only fair that you should be in the team," said Tom Merry, with an effort. "Look here, if you like to put in some practice between now and Saturday, we'll play you."

Mellish nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll be glad! Only don't practise me to death!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

And he started Mellish at once with some shooting practice in the Common-room. And Mellish kicked in a way that showed that what he did not know about football would have filled libraries to overflowing.

CHAPTER 5.

The Captain's Warning!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, greeted Captain Mellish very pleasantly.

Mr. Railton was in the study with the Head when Captain Mellish presented himself, and introduced himself in a frank and engaging manner which made a very favourable impression upon both masters.

The Head of St. Jim's received, frequently enough, visits from relations of the boys, and the interviews were not always enjoyable.

Anxious mothers who feared that there might be a draught in the Form-room, and wondered whether there ought to be fires in the dormitories of a night, bothered the Head considerably when they came, though he had cultivated a manner of urbane patience that was proof against all attacks. But

Captain Mellish was very agreeable, and the Head was glad to see him—especially when the captain remarked that he had looked in to do him a service.

"Your Rembrandt, I suppose?" Captain Mellish remarked, with a nod towards the picture facing the Head's desk.

Dr. Holmes' face lighted up.

He was an amateur in art, and he would talk pictures by the hour, and he was always pleased when a visitor observed his genuine Rembrandt.

"Yes," he said. "You recognise it?"

The captain smiled.

"I do not pretend to be a judge," he said, standing before the picture and gazing at it with half-closed eyes, "but I would certainly say that it is a splendid work. And it is the genuine thing."

"Undoubtedly. It was bought by my grandfather for a ridiculous sum—seventy guineas, I think," said the Head. "It belongs to the period after the painting of the 'Night Watch'."

"Yes, I have seen that in the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam," said the captain. "There are some of the wonderful colour effects in this picture. Is not this rather an exposed place for such a valuable work? That picture would sell on the Continent or in the United States for some thousands of pounds, Mr. Holmes."

"If it were stolen, do you mean?" asked Mr. Railton.

The captain nodded.

"But it could be reclaimed, surely?" said the Head.

"Not from a collector, I imagine," said the captain.

"If you heard of it in a collection, my dear sir, and claimed it, you would be fought tooth and nail before they would give it up. It would be averred that the picture you had possessed was a copy, you see. Doubtless the purchaser would believe so, if he bought it in good faith. If it were so easy to recover stolen pictures, even when they were traced, they would not be worth the trouble of stealing."

"But the picture is safe here," said the Head.

"In ordinary circumstances, I suppose so," said the captain. "But as a

matter of fact, that picture is what I came to speak to you about."

"You do not wish to purchase it?" said the Head, with a smile.

"By Jove, I should like to," said the captain, "but that is not what I was thinking of! I am staying with Mr. Glyn, the father of one of your boys, and there has been a robbery at Glyn House. You have heard of the cracksmen who is known to the police as X?"

"Who has not?" said the Head, with a smile. "The newspapers make a great deal of him when there is a scarcity of news."

"Well, the robbery at Glyn House was committed by X," said the captain. "The fellow actually had the impertinence to send a wire to Inspector Skeat, from London, immediately after

(Continued on the next page.)

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the robbery. He must have gone straight back to town and sent the telegram immediately on stepping out of the train."

"Bless my soul! What impudence!"

"So I came over really to warn you to look after your Rembrandt," said the captain. "I heard of it from Bernard Glyn."

"Thank you very much!" said the Head gratefully. "But if the rascal has left the neighbourhood, as appears from his telegram—"

The captain shook his head wisely.

"I have my own theory about that," he said. "It was no use stating it to Inspector Skeat; he is not the man to welcome an opinion from an outsider. But, as a matter of fact, there are many cribs, as the cracksmen would call them, in this neighbourhood quite as well worth cracking as Glyn House. It occurs to me that he has returned to London, and sent that telegram with the intention of coming back to the vicinity and perpetrating another robbery. The telegram would throw the police off their guard, as it gives the impression that the man is far away. What do you think of that for a theory?"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "It is quite possible!"

"Or the wire might have been sent by an accomplice in London, the rascal remaining in this vicinity all the time," Mr. Railton remarked.

"Quite possible!" said the captain.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "We have twice had attempted burglaries at the school. I truly hope nothing of the kind will be repeated."

"A reason why you should be careful," said Captain Mellish.

"Quite so; but every precaution is taken."

"You have burglar alarms?" asked the captain.

"Well, no. But since the last attempt at burglary I have had a burglar-proof shutter put up at my window here, and it is always closed at night," said the Head. "The study door is also closed with a Yale lock. It would not be easy for the cracksmen to get into the study, even if he came here."

"He is a cool hand," said the captain, with a shake of the head. "However, you certainly seem to have made the room pretty safe. I see that you keep your safe in this room."

"Yes; and it is a strong one. I fancy X would have only his trouble for his pains, if he paid us a visit," said Dr. Holmes, with a smile.

"The picture would not be easy to take away," said Mr. Railton. "It is only a small one—eighteen inches by twelve—but the frame is very heavy."

Captain Mellish smiled.

"I imagine that a burglar would rip it out of the frame," he said. "A slash or two of a knife would do that."

"Upon my word, you are right; I did not think of that."

"Well, I thought I would give you the warning, Dr. Holmes," said the captain, "though really you seem to be pretty secure."

"Thank you very much for the kind attention however," said the Head.

"The curious thing is, that if the rascal intended to raid the place, he would be quite capable of giving you a warning first," said the captain. "Have you heard the story of Lord Westwood's bonds? The cracksmen actually sent his lordship a telegram, announcing that he would steal the bonds upon a certain date, and he did!"

"Extraordinary!" said the Head.

"There were five of us—I was staying there at the time—and we sat up all

night with pokers and things, sitting round the safe where the bonds were kept," said the captain. "We watched for him, and we did not intend him to get away again if he came. But he came, and the bonds went."

"How did he manage it?" asked Mr. Railton, with keen interest.

Captain Mellish shook his head.

"That is more than anybody can say. A stone was flung at the window, and the electric light went out. He had got at the wires somehow. There was a light on the scene in less than three minutes, and the safe was looking quite intact; but we opened it to make sure, and sure enough the bonds were gone. In those three minutes the rascal had got in and tapped the safe, and he left nothing behind but footprints in the flower-bed under the window."

"A clue for the police," said Mr. Railton.

"The police discovered the boots that had made the footprints—a very large pair. It was clear that the man had put them on over his own, and taken them off when he reached the road again and thrown them away."

"What a cunning trick!"

The captain glanced at his watch, and took his leave of the Head and Mr. Railton. A crowd of juniors walked

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down to the school gates with him, and the captain laughingly agreed to come over on the following Saturday and play footer.

"Your cousin's going to play," said Tom Merry. "We shall put Mellish in goal, and if you promise to play for us, sir, we shall be able to challenge a senior team."

"Challenge them, by all means," said the captain. "I played for my regiment in England, and I have not forgotten how to shoot. I shall enjoy it."

And the captain went swinging down the road with his cavalry stride.

"What a ripping chap!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the captain disappeared in the dusk.

"Yaas, wathah?"

"Splendid!" said Blake. "How on earth did you get a cousin like that, Mellish?"

Mellish grinned. Under the influence of his cousin, the captain, the cad of the Fourth had been much more agreeable that afternoon, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy confided to Blake that he really thought he would be able to stand Mellish.

"We'll challenge the Fifth," said Tom Merry, as the juniors walked back to the School House. "With a chap like the captain playing for us, I shouldn't mind challenging the Sixth, for that matter, only—"

"Only they wouldn't play us!" grinned Blake.

"Exactly!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

CHAPTER 6.

Fixing Up the Footer Match.

LEFEVRE, the captain of the Fifth, was in his study, talking to Cutts.

Cutts was sitting on the table, swinging his legs, and Lefevre was leaning against the mantelpiece. They were talking football when there was a tap on the door, and Tom Merry came in, with Blake and Figgins of the Fourth.

The two Fifth Formers looked at them.

"Well, what do you kids want?" asked Lefevre.

"Thick ears?" suggested Cutts.

"I hear that you're not playing on Saturday afternoon?" said Tom Merry. Lefevre nodded.

"No; the Grammar School seniors have scratched," he said. "What about it?"

"Will you play us?"

"Eh?"

"Will you play us?" repeated Tom Merry, very distinctly.

"What at?" asked Cutts pleasantly.

"Hop-scotch, or noughts and crosses?"

Lefevre laughed.

"Or leap-frog?" he asked.

"Football," said Tom Merry calmly. "Oh, don't be funny!" said the captain of the Fifth. "We're not in the habit of playing little boys. Go and eat toffee!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"You saw that chap we brought to the school to-day?" he asked.

"Mellish's relation?"

"Yes."

"A fine-looking chap!" said Cutts. "Not the kind of relation you'd expect Mellish to have. But what about him?"

"He's going to play for us on Saturday," said Tom Merry. "He played for his regiment in India. We want to get up a match worthy of the occasion, you know; we don't like to make him play against juniors. So, as you've scratched your match on Saturday, we thought we'd play you."

"Oh, that alters the case!" said Lefevre thoughtfully. "I like the chap's looks, and I should like to be civil to him. That's what I say!"

"Of course, we could beat you on our own, as far as that goes," Jack Blake remarked.

"Hands down!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Sure he's coming?" asked Lefevre dubiously.

"Oh, quite!"

"Good! Then I'll put it to the others. We should have had a practice match, and we may as well play you; and with Captain Mellish in your team you ought to be able to give us the ghost of a tussle, at least," said Lefevre. "That's what I say."

"Good! It's agreed, then."

"Well, yes."

"Right-ho!"

And the three juniors left Lefevre's study, looking very satisfied. The Fifth Form, as a rule, disdained to meet juniors on the playing fields, and they politely but firmly declined challenges from the Lower Forms.

"We'll beat them hollow!" said Tom Merry, as the juniors went back to their own quarters. "Even without the captain, we could do it!"

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"Yes, rather! Especially if you played a good number of New House chaps in the team," said Figgins

thoughtfully. Figgins, it need not be mentioned, belonged to the New House at St. Jim's.

"Rats!" said Blake courteously. "I was just feeling doubtful about that very point. On an occasion like playing the Fifth, I think the eleven ought to be all School House chaps."

"Of all the silly asses!" began Figgins.

They had reached Tom Merry's study by this time. A crowd of juniors were gathered there to hear the result of the visit to Lefevre's study. Kerr and Wynn, Figgins' chums of the New House, were there with the rest. There was a general chorus of inquiry as Tom Merry and his companions came in.

"Well, what says the oracle?" asked Monty Lowther.

"They're going to play us!" said Tom Merry.

"Good egg!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great satisfaction. "It's wippin'. We don't often get a chance of beatin' the Fifth!"

"We shall have to be jolly careful in selecting the eleven," said Kangaroo, with a shake of the head.

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps you would like to have some suggestions on the subject, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the captain of the junior eleven.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Pile in!" he said.

"Well, in the circles, we shall want an extwa special eleven, and an extwa special captain," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Of course, you fellows know that I'm not the kind of chap to put myself forward in any way. But in the peculiah circles of the case, I weally think that it's up to Tom Mewwy to wesign the captaincy in my favour, for the one occasion only."

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther.

"What do you say, Tom Mewwy, deah boy?"

"Oh, I say, rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Any more suggestions from anybody?" asked Tom Merry, looking round. "Any more budding skippers who don't want to put themselves forward in any way?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Well, I've been thinking—" began Figgins.

"Silence for Figgins!" said Monty Lowther, raising his hand. "Figgins has been thinking. At such a time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "I've been thinking, as this is a very special match, perhaps it would be a good idea to make some changes in the team."

"Yes; we're going to put Mellish in," said Tom Merry. "We can't do less."

"Yes; but besides that, as we want an extra special team, don't you think it would be the best thing for some of the School House members to stand down?"

"Eh?" said the School House fellows together. "What?"

"And play New House chaps instead."

"Bai Jove! Of all the cheek!"

"What do you say, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, I say the same as I did to Gussy!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, don't be an ass!" said Figgins persuasively.

"I don't intend to be," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I shall play you, and Kerr, and Wynn. Wynn can play back, instead of goal, as usual. We'll

put Mellish in goal, I think. He'll do least damage there. Two chaps will have to be left out to make room for Captain Mellish and Mellish of the Fourth."

"Ahem!" said all the juniors.

"Any offers?" asked Merry.

Silence!

There were evidently no offers.

"I call upon D'Arcy to resign," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Somebody will have to make a start," explained Blake. "It's D'Arcy's place to lead. I've heard you say often enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Mellish takes D'Arcy's place."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"That's settled!"

"I wefuse to wegard it as settled!" shouted the swell of St. Jim's. "I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy. I am bound to play. Not because I specially want to, but I am vewy keen on the Fifth bein' beaten."

"But you can help us to beat them splendidly by keeping out of the team, Gussy," Monty Lowther suggested.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Lowther with a glare.

"You uttah ass, Lowthah—"

"Now—" began Tom Merry.

"Hallo! What's that?"

A bell suddenly rang in the passage. Tom Merry looked out of the study. The passage was empty. He turned back into the study, looking mystified.

"Didn't you chaps hear a bell?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In the passage?"

"Yes," said Blake.

"Well, there's nobody there."

"That's jolly queer," said Monty Lowther. "I—Hark!"

Buzzzz!

The juniors made a rush to the door and looked out into the passage. The bell had rung outside the door. But when they looked into the passage it was empty.

"What on earth—"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's the giddy ghost of St. Jim's," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You know he always appears in Nobody's Study at Christmas-time."

"Well, it's a long time to Christmas yet, fathead!"

"No; he's a little bit previous, that's all," said Lowther. "And he's getting up to date, too, ringing electric bells, instead of clanging a giddy chain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bell rang again.

Buzzzz!

Tom Merry dashed out of the study. In a dusky corner of the passage he saw a little electric bell, and a wire ran from it along the passage towards the end study.

Tom Merry jumped towards the bell, and came down upon it with both feet. There was a faint, agonised buzz from the bell, and then it was silent for ever.

"It's that ass Glyn japing us," growled Tom Merry. "He won't jape anybody again with that giddy bell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door of the end study opened, and Bernard Glyn came running out. He looked at the squashed bell, and gave a roar.

"Oh, what silly ass did that?"

"I did!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You shouldn't jape us with your giddy electric bells, you ass!"

"You fathead!" roared Glyn. "I

(Continued on the next page.)



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THE CULPRIT!

Tommy: "What would you do if someone had broken that flower vase on the table?"

Mother (suspecting Tommy): "I should spank him very severely."

Tommy: "Well, get your sleeves rolled up—dad's just broken it!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Culpan, 3a, Broad Street, Halifax, Yorks.

SPOKE TOO SOON!

Plumber: "All them silly jokes about us leavin' things be'ind and such like won't do in our case, will they, Bill? I'm 'ere, you're 'ere, and all our tools are 'ere."

Maid (coming on scene): "Haven't you men come to the wrong house?"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Adams, South Berks Club, Newbury, Berks.

HIS MISTAKE!

Nature Lover (gazing at tree): "O beautiful oak, if you could only speak, what could you tell me?"

Gardener (near by): "If you please, guv'nor, he would say he was an elu-tree—not an oak!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Rapp, 33, Hillcrest Avenue, Edgware, Middlesex.

A GOOD START!

Student: "What is the date, sir, please?"

Master: "Never mind the date; the examination is more important."

Student: "Well, sir, I wanted to be sure of getting something right on my paper."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Badger, 25, Eldon Terrace, Percy Main, Northumberland.

DISCORD!

The theatre orchestra was rehearsing a new piece of music. The harmony, however, was rather spoilt by the trombone player, who was a new member of the band.

"What on earth do you think you were doing?" roared the conductor. "You were a couple of bars ahead of everyone else."

"Sorry, sir," replied the trombone player. "You see, I used to play in a street band, and the one who finished first took round the hat."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to "A Reader," 401, Chipstead Valley Road, Coulsdon, Surrey.

HELPFUL!

"What shall I do?" cried the actor dramatically, as he walked on the stage and fell over the heroine's body. "There has been foul play. What shall I do?"

Came a voice from the gallery:

"Give 'em a free kick, mister!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Buntain, 4, Gole Place, Troon, Ayrshire.

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wasn't japing you. I was just testing the bell for the telephone I am making, you frightful chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Well, I thought it was a jape!" gasped Tom Merry. "The next time you test your blessed bells, you'd better put a notice up. Ha, ha, ha!"

Bernard Glyn picked up the shattered bell, and retired to his study with the wreck, speechless with wrath. And Tom Merry & Co. gathered in the study again, and resumed the discussion upon that important point, which members were to be left out of the Junior Eleven on Saturday.

They discussed the question most earnestly, not to say excitedly; but it could not be said that they got much "forrader."

CHAPTER 7.

Rung Up!

DR. HOLMES was wearing a very thoughtful expression.

He was seated in his study, and Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, had dropped in for a chat after dinner.

Outside, in the quadrangle, the September evening was drawing in.

Dr. Holmes gazed across at the picture opposite his table. It was evident that Captain Mellish's warning was still in his mind, and he was uneasy about his picture.

"After all, it is safe enough," he said, breaking the silence.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"You are thinking about the picture?" he asked.

"Yes," said the Head, smiling, too.

"After all, even if the rascal is still in the neighbourhood, which is doubtful, he could not get at the picture. When the shutters are closed in this room, I would defy any cracksmen to enter. But I think it would be a good idea for Taggles' mastiff to be turned loose in the quadrangle at night, for the present. He would give the alarm immediately if a stranger succeeded in penetrating into the grounds."

Mr. Railton nodded.

Buzzzz!

It was a sudden ring at the telephone. Dr. Holmes rose to his feet, and took up the receiver.

"Yes?" he said.

"Hallo!"

"Well?"

"Is that St. Jim's School?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Holmes?"

"I am Dr. Holmes."

"Good! I am X."

Dr. Holmes almost dropped the receiver.

"What? You are—what?"

"X," came the reply from the telephone.

"Good heavens!" muttered Dr. Holmes.

Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"Nothing the matter, I hope, sir?" he exclaimed.

"A hoax, I think," said the Head, very much agitated. "Take the other receiver, Mr. Railton, please, and listen. It is a hoax, undoubtedly, or, at all events, it is very extraordinary."

"But—but what—"

"Take the receiver."

Mr. Railton took the second receiver and listened.

"You hear me?" came the voice, clear and distinct, to both the masters. The wires disguised the natural tones

of the voice, perhaps, but there was a clear, metallic tone in it that both the masters thought they would know again, if they ever met the man who was speaking over the line.

"I hear you," said Dr. Holmes. "Is this a hoax?"

"Certainly not!"

"You have said that you are X."

"Yes."

"The cracksmen?"

"Yes."

"The man who robbed Mr. Glyn to-day?"

"Yes."

"Upon my word!" muttered Mr. Railton, aghast. "The astounding impudence!"

"Do you believe him?" asked the Head.

"Either it is he, or it is a hoax, of course," said the Housemaster. "I hardly know what to think. Listen! He is talking."

"You may expect me," went on the hard, metallic voice over the telephone.

"What?"

"You may expect a visit from me."

"A visit?" said the Head, dazed.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand plain English?" asked the voice, with a mocking tone in it. "I will say it in French if you like—"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, of course I understand. But what do you mean by saying that you are going to pay me a visit? Who are you?"

"X!" was the reply.

"That is not a name."

A chuckle was distinctly audible on the telephone.

"No, it is a sign of the unknown quantity," came the reply. "And I am an unknown quantity—a very unknown quantity."

"Is this a hoax, or are you really the rascal you pretend to be?" the Head asked indignantly.

"You will find that it is not a hoax."

"In what way?"

"When I have taken your picture."

The Head started violently.

"My—my picture?" he stammered.

"Yes, I am coming to take it."

"My picture! You—you are coming to take my picture!" said Dr. Holmes, scarcely able to believe his ears. "Am I talking with a madman?"

"No. With X."

"And you say you are coming to take my picture?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"On Saturday night."

"You impudent rascal!" exclaimed the Head. "I only hope that you will dare to come here. You shall not get away again easily."

"I shall get away again quite easily, and I shall take your picture with me," said the voice.

"The cool scoundrel!" murmured Mr. Railton. "No wonder the police are unable to deal with him. Who ever heard of a thief notifying his intended victim in this manner?"

"It must be a hoax!" muttered the Head. But he spoke without conviction. In spite of himself, it was borne in upon his mind that at the other end of the telephone wire was in reality the mysterious cracksmen—the unknown criminal whom the police knew as X.

"You may expect me on Saturday night, at exactly midnight," said the voice. "You hear me? Saturday night."

"You rascal!"

Another chuckle.

"I always keep my word. But I am

going to make you an offer—a really generous offer. I can sell your picture in Amsterdam or New York for three thousand pounds. But I will sell it back to you for two thousand. What do you say?"

"Bless my soul!"

"I shall lose on the transaction, but something is due to courtesy," said the voice. "And I have a great esteem for you, Dr. Holmes. I have heard a great deal about you, and I feel very friendly towards you."

"You—you—"

"I understand. You do not feel very friendly towards me. It is only natural. Now, if you accept my offer, I will sell you the picture at once, without bothering you by removing it from the school. What do you say? Two thousand pounds sent in cash to an address which I will name to you, and your word of honour to say nothing about the transaction till I have collected the cash? This is a good business offer."

"It must be some rascal who has heard of the thief's reputation and is trying to blackmail me," muttered the Head.

He did not intend to speak those words into the telephone, but they were heard at the other end. There was a chuckle again.

"No; I am the real and genuine X," came the voice. "I am making you a good offer, because I respect your character, Dr. Holmes, and shall be sorry to trouble you. Of course, I should only trouble you in the way of business."

"I could not accept your ridiculous offer if I wished," said the Head. "I should find it very difficult to raise two thousand pounds, even to recover my picture, if I had lost it. And certainly I should not hand over such a sum to you or any other rascal."

"I am sorry. Then there is nothing for it but to take the picture."

"You are welcome to do that, if you can," said the Head grimly. "I shall take the best care of my property, I assure you."

"It will be useless."

"We shall see."

"I shall come on Saturday at midnight and take the picture," said the voice. "If you care to ransom it afterwards, the price will be three thousand. I do not work for nothing."

"Bless my soul!"

"I shall ring you up on the telephone the following day, and ask you whether you want it at that figure," said the voice. "Now, remember, Saturday night at twelve."

"If you come here, you will find us ready."

"Good! Expect me."

"I shall. Are you there?"

There was no reply.

The unknown interlocutor had rung off.

Dr. Holmes laid down the receiver and looked at Mr. Railton blankly. The School House master looked at him, breathing hard.

"Well, what do you think of that, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head, as soon as he found his voice.

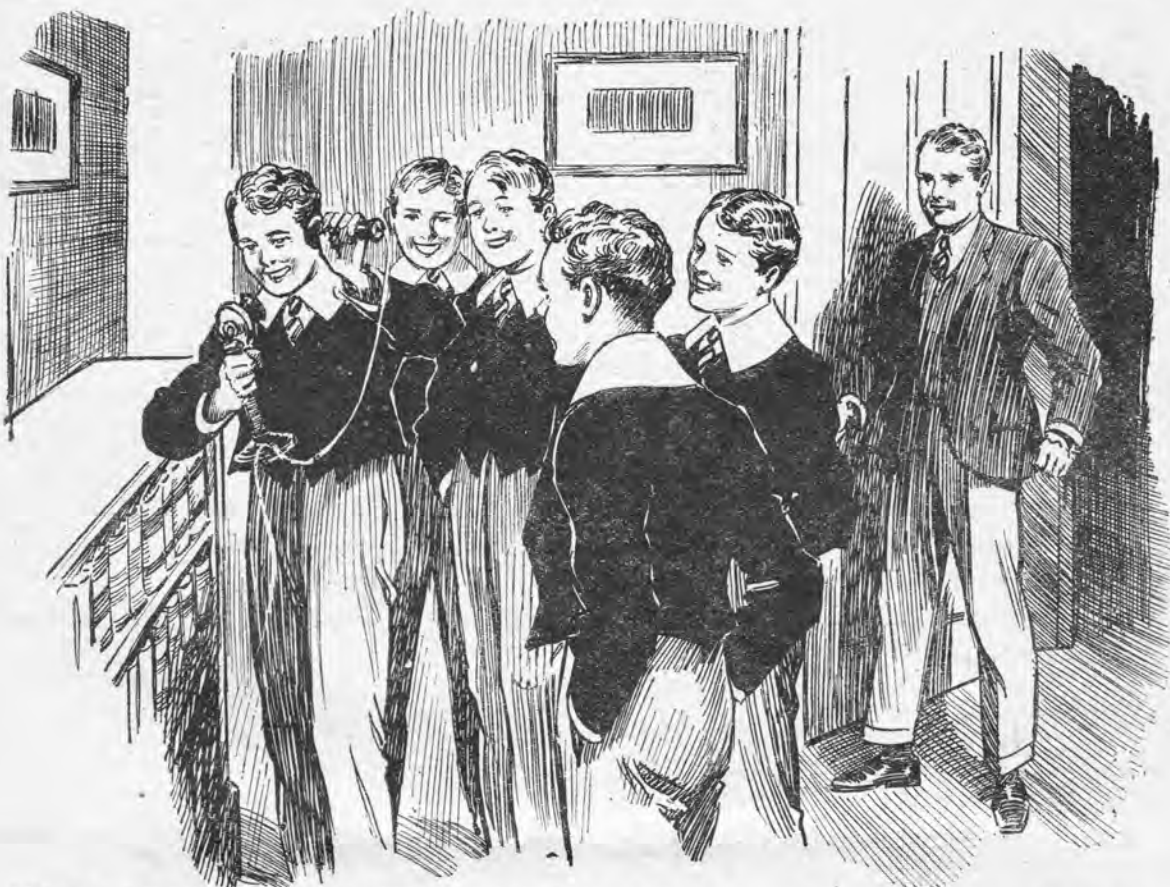
"It is amazing!"

"It must be a hoax."

Mr. Railton was silent.

"You do not think so?" asked the Head.

"Frankly, I do not," said the Housemaster. "This is in keeping with the character of that astounding rascal. It is in keeping with his action in sending a telegram to Lord Westwood that he was coming to steal his bonds."



"Fancy Kildare sitting up in the biked to look after his bike in case 'X' comes after it!" said Blake. The juniors roared. "Pile in, Glyn!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We'll never let the Sixth hear the end of it if Kildare sits up!" The japers little knew that Kildare was standing listening to them!

"And he came—and stole them?" said the Head musingly.

"Exactly."

"And you think—"

"I think he will come here," said the Housemaster, finishing the sentence.

"Yes, I think so."

"On the day—at the time he declared?"

"I think so."

"But he will be mad to do so!" exclaimed the Head in an agitated voice. "After receiving this warning, I shall certainly not go to bed on Saturday night. I shall stay up—in this room. And you will stay up with me, Mr. Railton?"

"Undoubtedly. And it would be only wise to have the inspector from Rylcombe here as well, and a couple of the prefects," said Mr. Railton. "The man is a desperate character, and if he appears there will be real trouble."

"But if we are thus prepared, what can he do if he does come?"

"We shall certainly capture him, I hope, sir."

"Very good," said the Head. "At all events, he will not succeed in getting the picture, and that is the important point."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"No; I do not think he will succeed in getting that," he said. "I only hope that we shall succeed in getting him. The man is a cool and determined rascal, but I think he has over-reached himself this time, and it may be at St. Jim's that the mysterious X will meet his Waterloo."

CHAPTER 8.

Glyn's Little Wheeze!

THAT strange talk on the telephone was not kept a secret.

The masters heard it from Mr. Railton and the Head, and the boys soon heard it, too, and all St. Jim's discussed it, to the exclusion of every other topic.

Dr. Holmes wisely considered that it was best to let the whole school know about it, for the boys would then naturally be on the alert for any suspicious characters that might appear near the school. The whole of St. Jim's, indeed, would be like an armed camp against the intended invader. It was not likely that even X, accomplished cracksman as he was, would attempt to break into the school without spying out the lie of the land first. He would want to know how to get at the place, and, more important still, how to get away again when he had secured his plunder. If, during the next day, any person in the least degree suspicious in appearance had hung about St. Jim's, there were fifty fellows ready to pounce upon him and make him give an account of himself. But nobody appeared—nobody who could, by any stretch of imagination, be supposed to be the cracksman in disguise.

"I suppose the Head will be keepin' watch in his study on Saturday night," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully, as the juniors discussed the matter in the Common-room after lessons.

"Most likely," said Tom Merry. "I

know I should if anybody were coming after my props."

"Yaas. I think I shall ask the Head to let me keep watch with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry.

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at in that remark, Tom Mewwy," he said with asperity. "This beastly cracksman appeals to be a weally dangewous chawactah, and what is wanted to deal with him is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Ask the Head and see what he says," said Blake with a chuckle.

"I intend to do so, deah boy," said D'Arcy loftily. And he walked away towards the door of the Common-room.

Blake stared, and shouted after him.

"Where are you going, Gussy?"

"I'm goin' to the Head."

"What for?"

"I've just told you."

"My hat!" exclaimed Herries. "He means it—he's going to ask the Head! What will you bet on his getting lines or a caning?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come back!" roared Digby.

"I wufuse to come back."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked out of the Common-room with his aristocratic nose high in the air.

"My only Aunt Maria!" said Tom Merry. "He's going to ask the Head! Well, I should like to be one of the party sitting up, if the Head would let me. But—"

"But I don't suppose he'd see the

value of juniors in such a case," Manners remarked.

Tom Merry laughed.

Bernard Glyn came into the Common-room, grinning. There were stains of chemicals on his hands, and stains of all sorts of things on his clothes, but he looked very pleased with himself. He nodded to the juniors, with a grin.

"Finished your giddy telephone?" asked Tom Merry.

Glyn chuckled.

"I've put that off for a bit," he said. "I've been working out a new wheeze."

"What's the wheeze—something up against the New House?" asked Blake.

"No," Glyn glanced round. "Where's Gussy?"

"Gone to see the Head. He wants to stage-manage the scene on Saturday night," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good old Gussy! Has it occurred to you fellows that X—I believe the chap's called X—that X might make another haul here as well as the Head's giddy Dutch daub?"

"What else—the school plate?"

"No. Gussy's ticker."

The juniors looked curiously at the schoolboy inventor. They could see that Bernard Glyn had some idea in his mind.

"What are you driving at?" asked Blake bluntly.

The Liverpool lad chuckled again.

"I'm talking about Gussy's ticker. You know he's lost it times without number. It always turns up again like a bad penny. Now, suppose X, the crackman, were to telephone to Gussy that he's coming after his ticker at twelve to-night—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he won't," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, he will!"

"What do you mean?" asked Tom Merry, puzzled. "The Fourth Form kids haven't got telephones in their studies yet, at any rate."

"Not necessary. There's a telephone in the prefects' room, and the juniors are allowed to use it when their loving parents call them up to ask if they've changed their socks, and things of that sort. And I—" Glyn paused.

"Well?" demanded the juniors all together.

"You'll keep it dark?" said Glyn mysteriously.

"Yes. What is it?"

"You'll keep it frightfully dark?"

"Yes!" roared Tom Merry. "What on earth have you been doing?"

"I've—" Glyn paused to chuckle.

"I've— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well?"

"I've— Ha, ha, ha!" roared Glyn. Jack Blake caught up the poker.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "Next time you cackle, you silly ass, you get the end of this in your silly ribs! Now, what's the joke?"

"I've run a wire— Ha, ha, ha!"

Biff!

Blake kept his word, and Bernard Glyn roared in good earnest as he caught the hard end of the poker in his sixth rib.

"Ow! Yow! Yaroooh! You've punctured me! Ugh! Oh!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" growled Kangaroo. "Why can't you explain yourself? What have you been up to, you silly owl?"

"I— Ow! I've— Yow! Groo! I've run a wire— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, there he goes again!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "Blessed if I don't really puncture him this time! I'll—"

"Hold hard!" exclaimed Glyn. "I must tell you before Gussy comes back."

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I've run a wire from the end study to the prefects' room—shoved it under the edge of the linoleum in the passage, you know."

"What on earth have you done that for?"

"To connect up the telephone there with one in my study," grinned Glyn.

The juniors stared at him.

"But what—what—"

"Don't you see?" said Glyn, chuckling. "We can talk along the telephone from the end study now, and anybody we're talking to there will think we're miles away. We can ring up Gussy from the Shell passage, and, unless he discovers the wire—which he won't—he will think somebody is talking to him from the call-office in Rylecombe."

"My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So it will be quite easy for X—any X, you know—to ring him up, just the same as he did the Head, and tell him he's coming for his watch to-night at twelve."

The juniors simply shrieked.

"Bai Jove! What's the joke, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming into the Common-room and regarding the juniors inquiringly through his famous monocle.

"You are!" said Monty Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"How did you get on with the Head?" asked Blake.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"The Head said he was vewy much obliged, but that he wouldn't twouble

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me. I twied to point out to him that it would be no twouble, but he told me to leave the study. I don't know why. I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bernard Glyn rose.

"Well, I'm going to my study," he said.

"I'm coming with you," said Kangaroo, rising, too.

And the Terrible Three rose and said they were coming, too; so did Blake, Herries, Digby, and Reilly—all the juniors, in fact, who had been taken into the confidence of the schoolboy inventor.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down to write. He was doing an article on the latest fashion for trousers for "Tom Merry's Weekly." He was deeply interested in it, and his pen glided over the paper rapidly. He was interrupted by Mellish clapping him on the shoulder.

He looked up with annoyance.

"Weally, Mellish, I wish you wouldn't intewwupt me!" he said.

"You're wanted," said Mellish.

"What am I wanted for?"

"The telephone."

"The telephone!" exclaimed D'Arcy in surprise. "Who could be wingin' me up at this time?"

"Somebody is," said Mellish. "Kildare told me. You'd better go."

"Yaas, wathah! Thanks for tellin' me!"

And Arthur Augustus hurried out of the Common-room to answer that unexpected call on the telephone.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus is Alarmed!

THERE was nobody in the prefects' room, as it happened, when D'Arcy arrived. He hurried to the telephone and picked up the receiver from the table.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Hallo!" came back in a far-away voice. "Is that D'Arcy of St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The Honourable Arthur Augustus?"

"Yaas."

"Good! I am X."

"Eh?"

"No, not A—X!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You have heard of me, I suppose?"

"Gweat Scott! Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Have you still got your gold ticker?"

"M-my what?"

"Gold ticker!"

"Yaas!"

"Good! I want it!"

"You—you want it?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! That's a fwrightful cheek on your part, deah boy—I mean, you awful wascal! I shall certainly not let you have it! I wegard you as a wank wottah!"

"I am coming for it!"

"You are comin' for my gold tickah?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! I wish you would! I should give you a feahful thwashin', you wottah!"

"Look out for me at twelve to-night!"

"What?"

"I am comin' for your gold tickah at twelve o'clock exactly! X-actly! Do you see?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You had better go to bed and put your head under the clothes! If you watch for me, it will not be any good; I shall keep your watch for you! Ahem! That is a pun!"

"You—you—"

"When midnight strikes, I shall be there! If you resist, I shall imbrue my hands in your gore! Got that?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"If you struggle, I shall strew the churchyard with your bones! I am bound to have that gold ticker! Watches were made to go, and yours is going to-night!"

"Bai Jove! You fwrightfully cheeky wascal! I shall stay awake to-night and watch for you with a cwicket-stump!" said Arthur Augustus furiously. "If you come aftah my watch, I shall bwain you without wemorse!"

"Expect me at twelve!"

"Weally, you awful wascal—"

"To-night! And keep your ticker handy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Leave it on the washstand, beside your bed, instead of putting it under your pillow, as usual! It will save me the trouble of waking you up! Your face might give me a shock in the dark."

"Why, you—you—you—" stammered D'Arcy.

"Remember, twelve o'clock!"

"I wefuse to speak to you! I shall stay awake and watch for you! Bai Jove!"

"I will ring you up again in ten minutes! If you like to send me twenty quid, I will let you off the watch! You can pawn your eyeglass to raise the money."

"Bai Jove!"

"Or you might raise it among the fellows in a subscription. Promise not

to sing any more tenor solos this term if they all subscribe!"

"You—you—you—"
There was no reply. X had rung off. Arthur Augustus breathed fury over the telephone receiver. Kildare of the Sixth came into the room.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"The awfully cheeky wascal!"

"What—who—"

"The feahful boundah!"

"Why, what—"

"The impertinent wottah—"

The captain of St. Jim's grasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy by the shoulder and shook him. The swell of the Fourth was almost stuttering with indignation.

"What is it?" roared Kildare. "What are you talking about?"

"The fwithful wascal—X!" gasped D'Arcy.

"What—what do you mean?" asked Kildare, in astonishment. "You don't mean to say that X has been ringing you up, too, do you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't be a young ass!" said Kildare. "But it's quite twee, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly. "He says he's coming at twelve o'clock to-night for my gold tickah!"

"Rubbish!"

"But I tell you he says so!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Bosh!" said Kildare. "It's one of the fellows japing you! I remember one of the young bounders rang up Mr. Ratcliff on the telephone and japed him!"

"But all the fellows are indoors now, Kildare, deah boy!"
Kildare started.

"By Jove, that's so!" he exclaimed. "He's goin' to wing me up again in ten minutes, to see if I will send him twenty pounds, instead of havin' my tickah stolen!"

"Is he?" said Kildare. "Then I'll be at the phone, and hear what he has to say! I can't quite swallow that it's the real and genuine X after your tickah, D'Arcy!"

Buzzzz!

"Bai Jove! There he is!"

This time it was Kildare who took up the receiver.

CHAPTER 10. Not So Funny!

"HALLO!"

"Hallo!"
"Is that the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy?"

"I am answering for him! Who are you?"

"I am X!"

Kildare started.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"At the telephone, of course!"

"I mean, are you in Rylcombe call-box?"

"Never mind where I am, old fellow; I'm keeping that dark! Is D'Arcy going to hand over that twenty quid, or is he going to have his tickah taken?"

"What is he sayin', Kildare?"

Kildare handed the receiver to Arthur Augustus. He was utterly mystified. He could hardly believe that it was the famous cracksmen who was speaking, and yet who else could it be? If it had been day-time, it might have been some japer of St. Jim's speaking from Rylcombe; but that was impossible now. If it was a joker, that joker must know about the telephone call the Head had received; and how could anybody in Rylcombe know?

"Are you there, Gussy—I mean, D'Arcy?"

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling



Hallo, everybody! A conjurer has been arrested for shoplifting. Disappearances were against him. Some shell fish sleep for months, observes Skimpole. Rip Van Winkles! Then there was the man who walked into the police station to report some stolen burglar tools. A "cracked" cracksmen. A Wayland tradesman says he wants to put some "lift" into his business. Try some T.N.T. Peeps at Third Form exam papers: "Raleigh was the first to see the Invisible Armada," wrote Frayne. "Louis XVI was gelatinized during the French Revolution," wrote Hobbs. And D'Arcy minor wrote: "A defective verb is a verb which is not all there." Then there was the new assistant at the Zoo who apologised because he simply couldn't clean the giraffe spotless. Heard in Wayland: "Who was this 'ere Nero, Fred?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about the twenty quidlets?"

"I wefuse!"

"The fellows would subscribe willingly if you promised not to sing any more this term. They would think it cheap at the price."

"You impertinent wascal!"

"Well, look out for me at twelve o'clock, that's all."

"I shall sit up for you."

"Yes, I am going to make you sit up!"

D'Arcy thought he heard a chuckle on the telephone.

"When from the tower strikes the hour I'll meet you in the haunted bower—I mean in the Fourth Form dormitory."

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, the young rascal!" murmured Kildare.

The Sixth Former chuckled softly. Arthur Augustus looked round, and saw that the captain of St. Jim's was examining a wire that ran behind the telephone, and disappeared along the wainscot of the wall.

"Bai Jove, that's a new wiah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in surprise, lowering the receiver.

Kildare laughed.

"Yes; and there's only one fellow at St. Jim's who understands these things well enough to connect up the telephone on his own," he said. "The cheeky young rascal, to meddle with the telephone. Go to my study and fetch me a cane, D'Arcy."

"But—but—I weally—"

"Quick I tell you!"

"Yaas, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus hurried out. The telephone-bell rang; the mysterious interlocutor apparently had not finished his conversation.

Kildare picked up the receiver, to keep the other fellow at the end occupied until D'Arcy returned with the cane.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Who's that?" asked the voice.

"I'm Kildare."

"Oh, you're Kildare, are you? I'm coming for your bike to-night."

Wasn't he the chap who was always cold?" "No, that was Zero, anuvver chap altogether!" Quickly, now; The difference between a tunnel and a trumpet? One is hollowed out, and the other is "hollowed" in. And a queen is like a book, because? They both have pages. "Nobody knows where the younger generation is going to," says Mr. Ratcliff. Perhaps not, but they seem to be enjoying the trip. Remember, slugs won't eat your lettuce if they're sprayed with paraffin and soft soap. Neither will you. A Jew complained to a doctor of pains in his back. "I think you must have twisted yourself," said the doctor. "Impossible!" said the Jew. I hear St. Jim's fellows are eating 200 per cent more salt. Yes, you have to take a lot of things with a pinch of salt. New House Scouts have formed a concert party. They're going to do at least one "good turn" a day. A desert explorer says the wind howled about him. Ah, the desert "shrieks"! Reminds me of the hiker who thought he was following a map—but found it was a chart of the nervous system! He had a "nervous breakdown"! End story: "Here's an airgun, pellets, and a mangel-wurzel," said the Scot. "What's the mangel-wurzel for, uncle?" asked the wee sportsman. "Tae shoot at, laddie. Then cut it open and get back your pellets!"

Keep smiling, lads!

"What?"

"I'm X."

"Oh, you're X, are you?" said Kildare grimly, with his eye on that new wire, which he was pretty certain ran as far as the end study in the Shell passage, and no farther.

"Yes. At midnight to-night I am coming for your bicycle."

Kildare grinned.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came back into the prefects' room with a cane and handed it to the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare handed him the receiver.

"Keep on talking to the chap, D'Arcy," he said. "Keep him busy for a few minutes while I follow this wire to the other end."

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"Then it's a jape, deah boy?" he asked.

"Yes; and I'm going to surprise the japer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talk to him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus grinned into the receiver, and talked. Kildare left the prefects' room, and followed the course of the wire.

"Are you still there, you wathah?" asked D'Arcy, on the telephone.

"Yes, I am here."

D'Arcy chuckled softly. Now that he was enlightened by the discovery of the wire, he thought that he could recognise the voice of Bernard Glyn, although the schoolboy inventor was speaking in disguised tones.

"Vewy well. You are comin' for my tickah?"

"At midnight's hour—"

The voice broke off suddenly.

Arthur Augustus spoke again.

"Are you there?" he asked into the receiver in his blindest tone.

No reply.

"Are you there, you ass?"

Silence.

Arthur Augustus chuckled, and hung up the receiver, and hurried out of the seniors' room.

Kildare had followed the wire.

The captain of St. Jim's did not

CHAPTER 11.

Pulling Gussy's Leg!

really need the wire to guide him. He had a pretty clear idea of where he would find the other receiver. The wire indeed was well concealed, close by the dark wainscot of the passage, and wherever possible pushed under the edge of the linoleum. If Kildare had not been looking for it he would certainly not have discovered it.

He hurried along the Shell passage, with the cane in his hand and a grim expression upon his face. There was a buzz of voices in the end study.

Kildare opened the door softly.

Six or seven juniors were gathered round the telephone Glyn held on the opposite side of the study.

All of them had their backs to the study door, and as Kildare had opened it very softly, they did not see or hear him.

Kildare looked at them with a grim smile.

"Poor old Gussy!" Blake was murmuring. "Fancy him sitting up in bed with a cricket stump waiting for twelve to strike."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Kildare, too! Fancy him sitting up in the bikhed to look after his bicycle in case X comes after it."

The juniors roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pile in, Glyn, old man!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We'll never let the Sixth hear the end of it if Kildare sits up—"

"Indeed!"

The juniors swung round as if electrified as they heard Kildare's voice in the study.

Bernard Glyn dropped the receiver.

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

"Ah!" murmured Blake.

"M-my hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo.

"Well?" said Kildare grimly.

"We—we—we're just experimenting with a—a—an amateur telephone," said Monty Lowther blandly. "Glyn's invention, you know."

"How funny if I should have sat up watching over my bike!" remarked Kildare.

"Ahem!"

"You would never have let the Sixth hear the end of it, would you?"

"Ahem!"

"You young rascals!"

"A-a-ahem!"

Kildare strode towards the juniors, and the cane sang in the air. There was a wild rush round the table. The juniors were quick, but the senior was just as quick. The cane rose and fell, and there was a terrific roar.

"Ow! Ow! Oh! Yah! Yowp!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yah! Oh! Yaroooh!"

The juniors dodged wildly round the table. Kildare halted, panting. An elegant figure appeared in the doorway, and an eyeglass glimmered in the study.

Arthur Augustus smiled sweetly at the gasping juniors.

"Hallo, deah boys! Will you have the gold tickah or the twenty quid? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh!"

Kildare strode out of the study, laughing. Arthur Augustus chuckled softly, and followed him.

The juniors rubbed the places where the prefect's cane had fallen, and glared at the schoolboy inventor.

"Ow!" groaned Tom Merry. "You ass! If you ever say telephone to me again, I'll take you into a quiet corner and suffocate you! Ow!"

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ARTHUR AUGUSTUS did not stay up that night to watch. In fact, it was Blake who felt more sleepless than the swell of St. Jim's, as Blake had caught several cuts of Kildare's cane in Glyn's study.

Arthur Augustus smiled sweetly at his chums when the Fourth went to bed.

"I twast you do not feel sore, Blake, deah boy?" he remarked.

Blake grunted.

"It was weally vewy clevah of Glyn to connect up the telephone, wasn't it?" persisted the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And don't go off like a cheap American alarm-clock!" growled Digby.

"Weally, Digby, I wefuse to be compared to a cheap American alarm-clock," said Arthur Augustus with dignity.

"Now, then, you kids not in bed?" said Kildare, looking into the dormitory.

"We're talkin' about telephones, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

And Kildare laughed.

After lights were out, and the prefect had retired, several fellows talked telephones to Blake, Herries, and Digby. Arthur Augustus chuckled softly. The intended jape had turned out very much against the japers, owing to Kildare's discovery of the extra wire, and Arthur Augustus was entitled to his triumph.

"I'm not goin' to sit up to-night, deah boys," he remarked presently. "But, as a mattah of fact, although the Head does not seem to think so, I ought to be on the watch on Saturday. It would be vewy wotten if that boundah X did come here and lift the Head's Wembwandt."

"Don't you think that perhaps Mr. Railton and the Head and Kildare and Darrell may be able to handle him without your assistance?" suggested Mellish.

"It is not only stwength that is wequiahed, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What is wequiahed in a case like this is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah," said D'Arcy. "I shall certainly make it a point to remain awake on Saturday night."

"It would be a jolly good idea to have my bulldog Towser in the House," Herries remarked, in a thoughtful way. "I suggested it to Kildare, but he did not seem much taken with the idea, somehow."

"Weally, Hewwies, I twust you will not be allowed to have that feahful beast in the House undah any pwetext whatevah. He has no wespsect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs!"

"He would jolly well nab the burglar if he came," said Herries. "I know that! You remember how he can follow a track—"

"Yaas, I dare say he could follow a railway twack, or a cycle twack," agreed D'Arcy.

"Why, you ass—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"It's not a bad idea, really, for some of us to stay up on Saturday night," said Jack Blake thoughtfully. "If the cracksmen comes, and gets away from the Head, we may be able to nab him. That would be one in the eye for the New House if we nabbed X!"

"X-actly," said Levison.

"Oh, don't!"

"I shall be vewy pleased to have some of you fellows stay up and watch undah my diwections—"

"I dare say you would," said Blake, with a chuckle. "But you'll have to stay in bed, Gussy. I think I'll stay up with Dig and Tom Merry—three will be enough."

"Weally, Blake—"



The juniors were keenly on the watch for the mystery rounded by a crowd of them. Redfern fugged at the man as the unfortunate

"Oh, go to sleep!" yawned Lumley-Lumley.

The Fourth Formers dropped off to sleep one by one—many of them to dream about X, and the threatened raid upon the Head's picture.

The next morning, when St. Jim's turned out at the clang of the rising-bell, there was only one topic in the school—and the topic was X.

The juniors were as keenly as ever on the watch for suspicious characters, and a tramp who tried to beg at Taggles' lodge was surrounded by a crowd of them, and Redfern of the Fourth tugged at his beard to make sure that it was not a disguise.

It was a real beard, as the unfortunate man's yell of anguish testified; and that tramp fled at top speed down the road without waiting to extract the price of a drink from anybody, fully convinced that he had called at a private lunatic asylum by mistake.

Tom Merry & Co., however, had another matter to think about, as well as the threatened raid of the cracksmen.

The next day was Saturday, when they were going to play the Fifth, with the assistance of Captain Mellish.

Lefevre and Cutts and the other footballers of the Fifth Form were taking the thing very much in a humorous spirit, but the juniors were deadly earnest about it.

Tom Merry selected his eleven with great care. He had promised Percy Mellish that he should play in the eleven, out of compliment to the captain, and Mellish held him to his word.

The slacker of the Fourth did not, however, care to practise very hard, and Tom Merry realised that putting Mellish into the team practically meant playing one man short. Upon further consideration, he decided to play Fatty Wynn of the New House in goal, as usual, and make Mellish a half-back.

Mellish was no better as a half-back than as goalie, but he might do less harm there. But Tom Merry hoped that the brilliant new recruit, Captain Mellish, would more than make up for any shortcomings of his cousin.

The match with the Fifth was a matter that the juniors of both Houses of St. Jim's could join heartily in. As a rule, School House and New House were deadly rivals, but now it was juniors against seniors, and Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. co-operated heartily.

On Friday evening Tom Merry posted up the finished list of the Junior Eleven, and it was read with eagerness by the juniors, especially by those who had hoped against hope, up to the last moment, that their names would be included.

The eleven consisted of Fatty Wynn; Figgins and Kerr; Mellish, Redfern, Noble; Tom Merry, Herries, Captain Mellish, Blake, and Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at the names on the board, and read down the list of names carefully. Then he read them down again. Then he carefully polished his eyeglass and jammed it in his eye, and read the list down for a third time. Then he ejaculated:

"Bai Jove!"

"Not quite right, is it, Gussy?" Figgins remarked, with a shake of the head.

"Wathah not, Figgy, deah boy."

"Only four New House chaps," said Figgins.

"Oh, I was not thinkin' of that," said D'Arcy, with a sniff. "I wegard four New House chaps as quite suffish, as far as that goes. That's not what's wrong with the list."

"Why, what else is wrong with it?" asked Figgins, with an air of surprise. "Excepting that it doesn't give the New House a very good show, I think the list is all right."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Of course, there's a weak spot—Mellish in the half-back line," said Figgins. "But the captain would expect to see his cousin in the team, you know. And Captain Mellish will more than make up for the harm Percy does."

"Yaas, wathah! I was not thinkin' of that."

Kangaroo shook his head. He had just read his own name, Harry Noble, on the list, and he was quite satisfied with Tom Merry's selection. Indeed, every fellow whose name was down there considered that Tom Merry had shown unusual ability in the art of selecting a footer team.

"Seems to me all right," said Kangaroo.

"Couldn't be improved that I can see," Blake remarked.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the juniors. They were all quite grave and solemn, and apparently quite unconscious of the thoughts that were working in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's mind.

"I must say I wegard you as a set of asses, deah boys!" said D'Arcy wrathfully. "This team would do vewy well for any othah occasion—it would be all wight for playin' the Gwammah School. But on an occasion like this, of playin' a seniah Form, it behoves—"

"Be-whiches?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Behoves," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "It behoves a pwopah captain to select the vewy best playahs available."

"Well, that's what he's done," said Blake. "My name's down."

"Exactly!" said Kangaroo. "Mine's there!"

"And mine!" said Lowther. "I don't see anything wrong with that list."

"Only the best playah in the juniah Forms is left out," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Lowther looked thoughtful.

"You mean Lumley-Lumley?" he asked. "Well, Lumley is a good footballer, I know, but I don't know that he's all that class."

"I was not wefewwin' to Lumley."

"You mean a New House chap?" said Figgins. "Lawrence, I suppose?"

"I was not thinkin' of Lawrence."

"Owen, then?"

"Certainly not."

"Thompson of the Shell?" hazarded Figgins.

"I was not thinkin' of a New House chap, Figgins. I wathah think there are too many New House boundahs in the eleven already."

"Ah, you mean Manners," said Lowther. "But Manners is standing out this time, you know. He's going to photograph the match, and keep a record of our lickin' the Fifth."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You weren't thinking of Manners?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

"Certainly not."

"Oh, he's going to suggest Glyn," said Kangaroo. "Glyn's been neglecting practice lately for his rotten inventions, you know."

"You know perfectly well that I was not alludin' to Glyn, Kangaroo."

Kangaroo shook his head.

"Not Skimpole?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Certainly not Skimpole!"

"He means Digby," said Blake. "It's hard on Dig being left out, but somebody had to make room, you know; and Study No. 6 is represented by Herries and me, so that's all right. The study won't be let down."

"Yes, it seems to me a very satisfactory list, fair all round," said Lowther. "Blessed if I know who that wonderful footballer can be that Gussy's thinking of. He may have discovered some new talent that we haven't noticed. The looker-on sees most of the game, you know; that's an old saying, and Gussy



and a tramp who tried to beg at Taggles' lodge was surrounded to make sure it was not a disguise. It was a real beard, 's yell of anguish testified!

may have seen wonderful qualities in some chap who's hiding his light under a bushel. A fellow can judge of another fellow's form, you know, without being able to play much himself," said Lowther, with owl-like gravity.

"You uttah ass!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Eh?"

"You know perfectly well who I am alludin' to."

"Now, who can it be?" said Blake.

"You're jolly mysterious about it, Gussy. Not Gore?"

"You silly ass!"

"Oh, draw it mild. I'm trying to guess."

"You uttah wottah! You know perfectly well that I am alludin' to myself!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's in great warmth.

"You?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yaas."

"You are serious?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But you said a footballer!" said Lowther, with a puzzled air.

Then he fled; for Arthur Augustus was at boiling point, and he made a wild rush at the humorist of the Shell. The juniors scattered, laughing loudly, and Arthur Augustus, with a snort of wrath, made his way to Tom Merry's study to give the junior captain a piece of his mind.

CHAPTER 12.

For the Sake of the Side!

TOM MERRY was in his study, grinding through a German imposition which Herr Schneider had kindly given him.

Tom Merry's pen was driving away over the paper at a great rate, and the German characters, naturally a little weird in appearance, grew weirder and weirder as he proceeded.

Arthur Augustus looked in at the open door and coughed.

Tom Merry did not look up. He knew D'Arcy's step, and he knew that the swell of the Fourth must have read the dist in the Hall. He drove away at his imposition at top speed, apparently oblivious of the presence of the caller.

D'Arcy coughed again.

"Nun mit Entsetzen wacht ich morgens aus!" murmured Tom Merry aloud, as his pen drove way at racing speed.

Cough!

"Ich mochte bittre Thranen weinen!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Tom Merry!"

"Der mir in seinem Lauf—"

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus, dropping all politeness.

"You know perfectly well that I am here."

Tom Merry could not pretend not to hear. He gave a start, and looked up.

"Hallo, Gussy!" he said affectionately. "This is really kind of you."

"Eh?"

"Come right in," said the Shell fellow. "There's another pen there."

"Pen!" said D'Arcy.

"Yes; you can't write without a pen, you know," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"Write?"

"Yes. Sit down on that side of the table."

"Sit down!"

"Certainly! You're not going to write standing up, are you?" asked Tom Merry in surprise.

"Do you know why I have come here, Tom Merry?" demanded Arthur Augustus, breathing heavily.

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Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; you've come to help me write out my impot," he replied.

"You uttah wottah! I have come for nothin' of the sort, and you are perfectly aware of it!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Well, it would be a good deed, you know," said Tom Merry gently, "and I should like to get out of half the lines. Take that sheet, and begin at 'Und doch hat jemand—'"

"I wefuse to do anything of the sort."

"Just come to keep me company while I write, eh?" said Tom Merry. "All serene; sit down and don't jaw, there's a good chap. I'm trying to get through this. You'll find some ginger-beer on the shelf."

"I do not want any gingah-beer."

"Sorry I haven't any coffee—"

"I do not want any coffee, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, sit down, anyway."

"I decline to sit down."

"Stand up, then, old man; anything for a quiet life," said Tom Merry.

"Now, where was I? Had I got as far as Den er nach rast—blessed if I can read it myself now I've written it. I wonder how Herr Schneider will manage it?"

"I have come to talk to you—"

"After I've done the impot, Gussy."

"About the football."

"You want to sell your football?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, you ass. About the eleven, I mean."

"Oh, that's all right."

"I do not wegard it as all wight."

"Yes, that's settled," said Tom Merry affably.

"My name is not up."

"No; that's because it's not down," said Tom Merry playfully.

Arthur Augustus was in no mood for humorous remarks. He sniffed.

Tom Merry sighed, and went on writing. D'Arcy advanced to the table and smote upon it with a mighty swipe. The ink danced in the inkpot, and a number of blots scattered themselves from Tom Merry's pen over the sheet. Tom Merry gave a roar.

"Oh, you ass! You've mucked up my impot."

"Pway listen to me—"

"Look what you've done!"

"Wats!"

"Why, you ass—"

"My name is not on the list," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly. "I wequiah to know the weason for leavin' me out?"

"Better men," said Tom Merry.

"What!"

"Better men."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. In the cires, I consider that it would be judicious to hand over the captaincy to me. I shall not, howevah, insist upon that—"

"Go hon!"

"But I wefuse to be left out."

"Now, my dear chap," said Tom Merry. "I can't play the whole school, can I? What would the Fifth say if we marched on the ground fifty or sixty strong?"

"Pway don't be an ass."

"Somebody had to stand down," said Tom Merry patiently. "And as it is a D'Arcy's place to lead, why, there you are."

"Do you sewiously mean that I am to be left out?"

"I'm afraid there's no help for it, Gussy, unless one of the other fellows resigns and gives you his place."

"I wegard it as wotten!"

"You are the nineteenth chap who's said the same thing to me since I started on this giddy impot," said Tom Merry wearily. "It isn't all lavender to be a footer captain. I can't play everybody. Dig's left out, so is Lawrence and Owen—"

"That is diffewent," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "It was specially necessary to play me this time, as we particularly want to beat the Fifth."

Tom Merry smiled.

"Well, I'm afraid there's no room in the team, unless one of the chaps resigns," he said. "Eleven chaps is the limit, you know. The New House have been howling at only four New House chaps being in. The Shell have grumbled at only three Shell fellows being played in the whole team. Now you're grumbling because I've only put in two fellows out of your study. I shall have the Third Form ragging me next for not playing Wally."

"Pewwaps it was wathah a difficult posish for you," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Howevah, that does not excuse your wiskin' the match in this way. You see, I am bound to play. One of the othahs had bettah wegn."

"Ask 'em," suggested Tom Merry.

"Put it to 'em one after the other, and explain that it's time for self-sacrifice."

"Bai Jove! That's a good ideah!"

"Run along and strike while the iron's hot," said Tom Merry eagerly.

"Don't lose time."

Arthur Augustus looked at him rather suspiciously; but he walked out of the study.

Tom Merry chuckled softly, and went on with his imposition.

Arthur Augustus carried out that excellent idea. He approached the members of the team in turn upon the subject. Lowther was the first. D'Arcy found him in the Common-room and took him aside.

"Lowthah, old man," he said, with a noble forgetfulness of Lowther's offences. "Lowthah, deah boy, this is a time of self-sacrifice."

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Quite so," he agreed.

"On an occasion like this, a chap ought to be weady to sacvifice himself for the genewal good," D'Arcy remarked.

"Exactly."

"Even by stayin' out of the team, if necessary."

"Yes, quite so," agreed Lowther.

"I'm jolly glad to see you taking it like this, Gussy."

"Eh?"

"It's the proper spirit," said Lowther, wagging his head wisely. "No good cutting up rusty because you're left out."

"I don't mean that—I was not speakin' about myself—I meant—"

"Quite right, old man," said Lowther.

"Jolly sensible way for you to look at it. Hallo, there's Manners calling me! Excuse me!"

And Lowther rushed off.

"Bai Jove!"

The other footballers were not so humorous as Monty Lowther, but they were equally unsatisfactory. Mellish was not tackled by the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus felt that it would not be quite the thing to ask Mellish to stand out, when his cousin was playing, and would expect to see him in the team.

But, curiously enough, Mellish ran D'Arcy down in the Common-room, after he had given up his quest as hopeless, and broached the subject himself.

(Continued on page 13.)



**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.**

H A L L O , chums! An old favourite with school-story loving boys and girls has just made a welcome reappearance. I refer, of course, to the latest edition of the "Holiday Annual." Every year for seventeen years this popular annual has given hours of happy entertainment to readers all over the world. But the eighteenth volume breaks all records as a bumper book of school-story fun and excitement. The 1935 "H.A.," which is on sale at the bargain price of 5/-, is now an all-school-story annual. Its 256 pages are packed with ripping yarns of the adventures of the cheery chums of St. Jim's, Greyfriars, Rookwood, and St. Frank's schools. In addition, there are many other interesting school features, including a play in verse, a jolly song, breezy poems, and humorous articles.

If you've got a birthday coming along, the "H.A." is just the gift book you would like. So drop a hint in the right quarter! In any case, most newagents run subscription schemes, whereby the "Holiday Annual" and other annuals are brought within the reach of every boy and girl.

Another great book which is also just out is "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories," price 2/6. This annual contains a wonderful collection of thrilling adventure stories, which will satisfy every boy. There are ace-high yarns of motor-racing, flying, mystery, the Wild West, the circus, and many other phases of adventure. Make a note of this grand book. As well as the "H.A.," I strongly recommend it to GEM readers.

'MR. 'X' UNMASKED!'

If you have read the thrilling St. Jim's story in this number I can imagine your eagerness to get going on the sequel, which appears under the above title next week. As you can tell, "X," the unknown cracksman, is brought to book at last, and it provides a first-class sensation at St. Jim's when his identity is revealed. The story introduces the famous detective, Ferrers Locke, who is responsible for trapping the elusive "X." How

Locke does it, with the one-and-only Gussy playing a leading part, and the breath-taking excitement which leads up to the dramatic moment, makes a thriller you will remember for many a day.

"THE BLACK HAND AT ST. FRANK'S!"

Hundreds of letters have reached me already, praising in the highest terms Edwy Searles Brooks' wonderful new serial. This popular author, the master of mystery stories, has never equalled this brilliant effort.

What lies behind the murder of two men, and what connection Gallowes Mere has with the crimes, are mysteries which are of compelling interest. In the next chapters the curiosity of Handforth & Co. to find out more about the affair leads them to do a little investigation on their own, with what result you will see next Wednesday.

RABID FOOTER FANS!

Referring again to the keenness shown for Soccer, I was amazed the other day when I heard about the rabid keenness which the game works up in footer fans abroad. Such "enthusiasm" as displayed by the excitable South Americans could never be equalled in this country—and it is to be hoped it never will!

Here is a case in point. A few years ago a well-known English football team went on tour to South America. In their first match they were winning easily at half-time. They had a comfortable lead of six—nil. During the interval, however, the team received warning that it would be as much as their lives were worth to win the match! Many of the crowd were armed, and if the home team didn't win, the visiting players would be lucky to get away with their lives. The result was the English eleven lost that game seven—six! And they took jolly good care they didn't win a match on that tour!

PEN PALS COUPON

7-9-35

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Frank Corbett, 34, Station Lane, Featherstone, Yorks; stamps: age 11-12; S. Africa, India, New Zealand.

Miss Dorothy Scott, Home Farm, Overton, near Ellesmere, Shropshire; girl correspondents: age 16-18; films.

DEATH-DEALING SOCCER!

Many of the football pitches in South America are surrounded by barbed wire to prevent spectators intruding on the field and assaulting players. But, even so, barbed wire is no protection against a bullet. And it must be said that players are sometimes killed when spectators let their enthusiasm carry them too far.

In an international match between two South American countries feeling ran so high that all the spectators were searched for firearms as they entered the ground. By the time that search was over hundreds of weapons had been collected. In spite of the precaution, however, several revolvers were smuggled into the ground. When trouble broke out during the game shots were fired, and two of the players were killed and nine spectators lost their lives!

During another match in South America the crowd got out of hand and refused to return the ball when it was kicked among them. Instead of carrying on the game with another ball, the players were sent over to appeal to the spectators to return the leather. But it was of no use. So fifteen mounted policemen charged the crowd. They got the ball back—but seven spectators were killed in doing so! Give me Soccer in England—every time!

FISHING TO MUSIC!

If you want a good tip when you go fishing, take a portable wireless set with you. No, it's not to help pass the time away while angling. The music attracts the fish! At least, judging by the following story, it is a tip worth remembering. Anglers on Deal pier had had an uneventful morning. Not a bite was recorded. Then the band arrived on the pier and struck up. Result—a nice big fish was hooked! Then the band stopped for a breather, and the fish stopped biting, too. But immediately the music started again another big catch was made. Music bath charms even for fish!

A NEST EGG!

An amazing find was made recently by a railway worker, and it was the last place in the world one would expect to find a small fortune. The man was cleaning out a goods wagon when he saw a mouse's nest in the ventilator. He cleared it out and discovered that it was composed of pieces of paper. The paper was torn-up pound-notes and there were fifty pounds in that nest!

TAILPIECE!

Form-master (sarcastically to Jones, who has been reproved by the Head for drawing an insulting caricature of a master): "Well, Jones, and what did the Head say about your funny picture?"

Jones: "He said that only those of the lowest intelligence would call it funny!"

THE EDITOR.

Miss Kit Clague, 7, Church Street, Peel, Isle of Man; girl correspondents; age 14-16.

Frederick W. Johnson, 2, Coronation Road, Luton, Chatham, Kent; chemistry; U.S. and Canada.

Michael Dunne, 3, Oliver Plunkett Hill, Fermoy, Co. Cork, Ireland; stamps.

Derek Fairbrother, Lower Quinton, near Stratford-on-Avon; cricket, football.

Miss Betty Grove, 7, Eileen Road, South Norwood, London, S.E.25; girl correspondents; age 14-15; India, Egypt; sports, films, stamps.

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"I hear you're very keen to play to-morrow, D'Arcy?" the slacker of the Fourth remarked.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah, Mellish, deah boy! I do not deny it."

"They've left you out."

"Yaas," said D'Arcy, with a grimace.

"Rotten!" said Mellish.

"Yaas, I wegard it as wathah wotten. Indeed, I have been thinkin' that weally it is up to me to refuse to wecognise the match at all," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Mellish grinned.

"Do you know, I've been thinking about it," he remarked. "Of course, I'm awfully keen to play—ahem—"

"Naturally, deah boy."

"But I don't know that I ought to keep the place, and have a better man left out to make room for me," said Mellish, shaking his head solemnly.

D'Arcy looked at Mellish very approvingly. He began to have a better opinion of the cad of the Fourth than he had ever had before. After all, there was good in everybody; but, really, who would have expected Mellish to turn out a sportsman like this? Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had never expected it, and he felt his heart warm towards Mellish.

"Weally, Mellish, I wegard that as a vewy pwopah way for you to look at the mattah," he said. "But your cousin will be disappointed if you don't play."

"Not if I explain to him that I stood out from a sense of duty to let another man in," said Mellish. "That ought to satisfy anybody."

"Yaas, wathah; that's quite wight."

"Then it's a go," said Mellish.

"Take my place."

D'Arcy's heart jumped.

"Do you weally mean it, Mellish, deah boy?"

"Honest Injun! I suppose Tom Merry will let you have the place if I resign?"

"Oh, yaas; he said I could have the place if I could get any chap to weign," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy eagerly. "But weally, Mellish, I hardly like—"

"For the good of the team, you know," said Mellish.

"Yaas, that's so."

"Then it's a go."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, grasping Mellish by the hand and shaking hands with him warmly. "I wegard you as havin' played the game, deah boy. I wegard this conduct as simply wippin' of you."

"Not at all," said Mellish airily.

"By the way—"

He hesitated.

"What is it, deah boy?"

"If you could do me a small favour—"

"Anythin' you like, deah boy," said the grateful swell of St. Jim's.

"If you would lend me a quid—"

"Two, if you like."

"Well, I'll have two, since you put it that way," said Mellish agreeably.

"Thanks! Play up and beat the Fifth, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mellish strode away to his study. Levison was waiting for him there. Mellish closed the door as he came in, and Levison gave him a look of inquiry.

"Well, got out of it?" he asked.

Mellish nodded and chuckled.

"Yes. Blessed if I knew how I should be able to get out of the rotten match without giving myself away to Cecil," he said. "I've resigned in

favour of a better man—that's a reason a chap can give anybody, I should think."

"Good egg!" said Levison admiringly.

"Come down to the tuckshop," said Mellish.

Levison stared.

"You were stony to-day," he said.

"Have you had a remittance?"

"No; D'Arcy's lent me two quid."

"Oh!" ejaculated Levison.

"Come on," said Mellish.

"Who's the chap you've resigned in favour of, though?" asked Levison.

"D'Arcy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into Tom Merry's study.

The Terrible Three looked at Arthur Augustus with sweet smiles, prepared to talk about anything but the footer eleven.

But D'Arcy's first remark showed that he was not on the same track as before.

"It's all wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, beaming. "Mellish has weigned from the eleven in my favah."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Terrible Three in chorus.

"The blessed slacker!" said Monty Lowther. "Any chap but Mellish would

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have jumped at the chance of playing. But I had my doubts whether he would, all the time."

"He didn't want to displease his cousin, the captain, or he wouldn't have accepted my offer at all," said Tom Merry. "Captain Mellish is keen on footer, and our dear Percy wants to keep in his good books. I wonder what excuse he's going to make?"

"Mellish has acted in a vewy noble way, deah boys. He is weignin' in my favah for the sake of the team, to make sure of beatin' the Fifth."

"Ahem!"

"He said so himself," said Arthur Augustus, as if that finished the matter.

Monty Lowther looked admiringly at the swell of St. Jim's, and patted him affectionately on the shoulder.

"You're worth your weight in gold, Gussy," he said. "I'm jolly glad you're going to play, anyway."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry and Manners heartily.

CHAPTER 13.

The Form Match.

THE next morning at St. Jim's was divided between two great topics. One was the threatened raid of X, which was to take place at night, and the other was the Form match between the juniors and the Fifth.

The latter matter interested the juniors most, but the former was of greater interest to the masters and the seniors, and especially the Head, who

perhaps had not heard of the projected Form match at all.

Captain Mellish was expected at the school after dinner for the match, and the juniors looked forward keenly to his coming. They had seen the captain once or twice since Wednesday. He was still staying at Glyn House, and was not to leave till the following week.

Bernard Glyn, who had been home one day, had told the captain all about X's threat concerning the Head's picture, and the captain had been very interested. He had told Glyn that he was looking forward to the footer match very keenly, and that message pleased the St. Jim's juniors very much.

That the captain was a ripping fellow was the opinion that was held without a single dissentient voice, and the wonder grew that Percy Mellish should possess such a relation.

During morning lessons on Saturday it is probable that a good many fellows gave as much thought to X and the coming footer match as to Julius Caesar. But lessons were over at last, and the juniors streamed out of the Form-room, free for the rest of the day.

After dinner they changed into their footer rig, and waited for the captain to arrive.

Tom Merry & Co., with coats on over their football clothes, stood in a group at the school gates to wait for him.

They soon recognised the captain coming down the road with his swinging cavalryman's stride.

The captain looked in the pink of condition, and his eyes were very bright, and his expression very happy and pleasant.

It was evident that he looked forward to a day's enjoyment. He carried a bag in his hand, doubtless containing his football things.

He greeted the juniors in his frank, hearty way.

"A ripping day for footer!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands with Tom Merry. "We are going to beat the Fifth Form, my lad!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great emphasis.

"I hope so, Captain Mellish," said Tom Merry. "I want to ask you if you'll captain the team, sir."

"Who's the skipper?" asked the captain.

"I am, as a rule—"

"Then you shall skipper us to-day," said Captain Mellish. "I'm not going to take the command away from you. I'm just a recruit, that's all."

"You are jolly good, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The captain laughed.

"It will be a real enjoyment to me," he said.

"You'll stay to a feed in the study afterwards, won't you, sir?" said Tom Merry.

"We're going to have steak-and-kidney pies," said Fatty Wynn temptingly. "and—"

"Ha, ha, ha! With pleasure, my lads!"

"Jolly good!"

And the juniors, in an enthusiastic crowd, marched their distinguished recruit off to the football ground.

Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, greeted Captain Mellish most courteously. He could see by the look of the captain that he was hot stuff, as Lefevre confided to Cutts, and Cutts nodded assent.

The juniors felt very proud of him, as he appeared among them, and the Fifth, when they looked at him, realised that they would have to play up. Whether the juniors could hold their own against the seniors or not, there was no doubt

that Captain Mellish was a host in himself.

Mr. Railton came down to the ground and shook hands warmly with the captain.

The Housemaster of the School House had consented to referee the match, a very great honour, considering that one of the teams belonged to the Lower School.

"Our referee, captain," said Monty Lowther proudly.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I hope you will have a good match, captain," he said. "You look fit enough."

"I feel fit," said the captain cheerfully. "Not time for kick-off? I hear you have a rather curious affair coming off to-night, Mr. Railton."

The Housemaster nodded.

"Ah! You have heard about the telephone message from the cracksmen."

"Yes. Bernard Glyn told me about it."

"It is extraordinary, is it not?" said the Housemaster.

"Quite in keeping with the man's character," said Captain Mellish, smiling. "A very extraordinary man, that mysterious X, Mr. Railton."

"I agree with you."

"You will be keeping watch for the man to-night, then?"

"Certainly. The Head, myself, and Inspector Skeat, from Rylcombe, and Kildare of the Sixth. I think X will find us a difficult handful to tackle."

"By gad!" said the captain. "I should like to be present and see the fun. Have you any use for another recruit?"

Mr. Railton laughed.

"I am sure the Head would be glad to have you," he said. "A gentleman of your profession, captain, would probably be of more use than us civilians if it came to a real struggle. And I have an idea that the cracksmen will not allow himself to be taken easily."

"I think you are right there," said Captain Mellish, with a nod. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Railton, I have brought over my revolver with me, in case the Head should allow me to join the party waiting up for the thief."

"You will be very welcome, captain."

"Good! Though when he discovers that we are on the watch, I think that even X will decide to leave the picture alone."

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I think not, captain. He must have known that we should keep guard. His telephone message seems to have been intended to make us do so. It is sheer impudence on the part of the criminal, a desire to give the robbery a dramatic turn. But I must say that I think he has over-reached himself. If he comes, we shall have him."

"Alive or dead?" said the captain grimly.

"If he should attempt to use a weapon, of course we shall be justified in doing the same," said Mr. Railton. "In which case, perhaps your revolver will be wanted. Ah! The boys are ready!"

Tom Merry and Lefevre of the Fifth tossed for choice of goals. Tom Merry won the toss and chose his goal, and the Fifth Formers kicked off.

The match began.

A large crowd had gathered round the footer ground to watch the match. Junior matches did not attract much crowds as a rule, but most of the St. Jim's fellows were keen to see the captain play.

And Captain Mellish fully justified their interest in him.

He was a splendid player, and he was in the best of form. The Fifth Formers found that they were playing a man who

might have been an amateur international.

Lefevre, Cutts & Co., led off with rushing tactics, intending to sweep the juniors off the field, if not off the face of the earth.

But they found that Captain Mellish came through their lines like a knife through cheese, and almost before they knew where they were he had sent the leather spinning into the net before the game was five minutes old.

There was a roar of surprise and delight from the crowd.

"Goal! Hurrah!"

Lefevre & Co. were a little more careful after that. But their care did not save them. Even when they got through and shot for goal, Fatty Wynn saved every time with deadly precision.

He gave the Fifth no chance. True, the juniors would not have had much chance of scoring against the Fifth, either, but for their recruit. But Captain Mellish worked wonders. He had had no opportunity of practising with the rest of Tom Merry's team, but he seemed to know the value and ability of each player by instinct, and to know exactly how much to rely upon them, and in what way.

Although he had declined to deprive Tom Merry of the captaincy, he was really skipping the team, and Tom Merry was only too glad to have it so.

Two more goals went in, scored by Tom Merry and Figgins, both from passes by the captain, and to him more than half the honour was due.

Just before Mr. Railton blew his whistle for half-time, the captain brought the junior front line up the field in splendid style, passing like clockwork, and the leather was put in for a fourth time in spite of the desperate defence of the Fifth.

Four goals to nil in favour of the juniors was the result of the first forty-five minutes.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" thundered the crowd, as the two sides rested for a brief interval, after a gruelling half.

"Bai Jove! It's simply wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he fanned himself.

He nodded in a very friendly way to Mellish, who was standing by the ropes with Levison and Crooke.

"Mellish, old man, you've missed a wippin' game."

"That's all right," said Mellish, who was feeding himself with an apparently inexhaustible supply of toffee in his coat pocket.

"Sense of duty, you know."

"Why aren't you playing, Percy?" asked Captain Mellish.

"Stood out to make room for a better player, Cecil," said Mellish airily. "Felt that I had to, you know, for the sake of the side."

"Yaas, it was wippin' of your cousin, wasn't it, captain?" said D'Arcy. "I wedged it, as bein' the act of a weal sportsman."

Captain Mellish laughed. Perhaps he knew exactly how much of a real sportsman his cousin Percy was.

The whistle blew for the second half. The Fifth Formers looked very determined as they lined up again.

But their determination did not help them very much. Fatty Wynn put "paid" to all their efforts to score almost up to the finish. It was only within ten minutes from the end that Cutts of the Fifth succeeded in getting the ball through, and that solitary goal was all the Fifth could boast in the Form match, to which they had looked forward with such great confidence.

When the final whistle went the score



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stood five for the juniors and one for the Fifth, and it was not surprising that the juniors yelled themselves hoarse as the teams trooped off the field.

CHAPTER 14.

On the Watch!

TOM MERRY'S study was crowded with a merry party after the football match.

The juniors were gleeful over the victory. True, they owed it in great part to Captain Mellish, but it was a victory, and a great victory. They had beaten the Fifth, and they rejoiced.

All the Fifth were invited to tea in Tom Merry's study, and a great many other fellows as well.

There was not room for half of them in the study, and they crammed in and overflowed in the passage; but everybody was happy and cheerful.

Most cheerful of all was Captain Mellish.

The juniors managed to give the handsome captain room enough to sit down and take his tea, but he was the only fellow there who had room to breathe. He seemed to enjoy the crowding and excitement with as much zest as if he had been a junior himself.

The juniors had heard that he was to remain with the Head that night to watch for the mysterious X, and some of them begged him to use his influence to get them included in the watching party, which he promised laughingly to do.

Things were still going strong in Tom Merry's study when the captain took his leave. The juniors roared out the chorus of "He's a jolly good fellow" as a send-off to the captain.

Captain Mellish took his way to the Head's study, where he found Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton.

The Head greeted him warmly.

As the time came nearer for the threatened raid of the mysterious cracksmen, the Head felt himself growing uneasy.

It had been easy enough to plan to keep watch for the rascal, and to seize him if he should venture within the walls of St. Jim's. But now that the crucial hour was close at hand, the aspect seemed to change a little.

The man who could make that threat and follow it up in person was no ordinary man. He was a desperado of the first water, and he would be captured, if at all, with the greatest difficulty.

He was only too likely to carry a deadly weapon, and to use it, and the Head, upon second thoughts, had changed his mind about having any of the prefects in the room.

The boys were in his charge, and he was responsible for them; and he felt that he could not in conscience run the risk of Kildare or Darrell being injured in a conflict with an armed burglar. And, much to Kildare's disappointment, the Head told him he would rather he went to bed as usual.

For himself, the Head was not afraid; the old gentleman was brave enough. Upon Mr. Railton, too, he knew he could rely, and Inspector Skeat would do his duty. But it was a distinct relief to find the captain ready to join the circle.

A man who had led a soldier's life, and had known what hard fighting was among savage tribes, was the man of all men to deal successfully with the desperate cracksmen.

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The Head declared frankly that Captain Mellish would probably be of more use than the rest of them put together; a remark that Mr. Railton fully endorsed.

"Do you know, I cannot help thinking that the rascal will not come, after all!" Captain Mellish remarked.

The Head drew a deep breath.

"I truly hope so!" he said.

"How can he possibly hope to get away?" the captain argued.

"I cannot help coming to the conclusion that the telephone message was bluff, after all, sir!"

"I hope it will prove so!"

There was a knock at the door, and Kildare came in. The captain of St. Jim's was looking a little downcast.

"What is it, Kildare?" said the Head. Kildare coloured.

"N-nothing, sir, only—"

"Nothing has been seen of the—the man, surely?" asked the Head.

"Oh, no, sir! But—but—"

"Speak out, Kildare!"

"If—if you thought I could be useful, sir—"

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"It would not be consistent with my duty to allow you to remain up, Kildare," he said. "I should never be able to forgive myself if harm came to you!"

"But you will need help, sir, if the man should come!" said Kildare eagerly. "Besides, if there is an alarm, of course I shall get up at once!" He glanced at Captain Mellish. "Won't you speak a word for me, sir?"

The captain smiled.

"Kildare would be very useful if it came to a struggle!" he said, with an admiring glance at Kildare's sturdy figure.

"But in case of a weapon being used—" faltered the Head.

"In that case, sir, I shall use mine!" said the captain, grimly tapping his coat pocket where the revolver reposed. "And I flatter myself that I shall be able to use it with effect. X will not be more dangerous than an Afriidi tribesman!"

The Head shivered a little.

"Well, if you think Kildare might remain up—" he said.

"Give him a chance," said the captain good-humouredly. "The more the merrier! That will only make five of the party—none too many to tackle X!"

"Very well, Kildare, you may join us!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Kildare gratefully. "Then I'll be here!"

And Kildare retired with a very cheerful face. Dr. Holmes was not looking very cheerful. He stood before his Rembrandt, and gazed at it in a thoughtful way. The captain followed his gaze and smiled.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"You will dine with me, will you not?"

"With pleasure, though those young scamps have spoiled my appetite, I'm afraid. I do not know how many jam tarts I have eaten," said the captain, laughing.

The captain was all gaiety and high spirits at dinner. Dr. Holmes was cheered, in spite of himself, though the thought of midnight was hanging heavily upon his mind. Mrs. Holmes was not present; the Head had arranged for his wife to pay a visit the past two days, and she was not to return to the school until the Monday. The Head did not wish to have an anxious woman upon the scene when there was anxiety enough already.

Mr. Railton also dined with the Head.

After dinner, during which the talk had run upon nothing but the Rembrandt picture and the mysterious cracksmen, Inspector Skeat arrived from Rylcombe. The inspector had a half-solemn, half-shamefaced air. He more than half-believed that the whole thing was a hoax, and he had a lurking fear that, by being present, he was risking compromising his position as one of his Majesty's inspectors of police. But he could not very well decline to attend. And, besides, he was very keen for the slightest chance of getting to close quarters with the famous cracksmen. If the night's adventures should end in the capture of X, Inspector Skeat was a made man.

The juniors were greatly excited when they saw Inspector Skeat come in. They marched round him in the dusky quad up to the Head's door, and gave him a cheer.

"It's simply wotten that we can't stay up and join the party," Arthur Augustus declared, with great disgust. "Howevah, I shall keep watch on my own."

Many of the fellows had decided to do that; but the Head had foreseen something of the kind, and he had taken his measures.

Before bed-time Mr. Railton made an announcement to the juniors. All boys were to remain in their dormitories that night, on pain of the severest punishment, and at a late hour the prefect would visit all the dormitories to make sure that the boys were there.

The juniors looked at one another in dismay when that announcement was made.

Arthur Augustus summed up the feelings of all with the expressive remark: "Wotten!"

The juniors went to bed at the usual time, but not to sleep. As Blake remarked, you could take a chap to the dormitory, but you couldn't make him sleep.

Excitement ran high in both Houses at St. Jim's. Even in the New House, which was too far from the scene of operations for the fellows to have any chance of seeing anything that happened, the fellows were excited and sleepless. In the School House nobody thought of closing his eyes. The prefects saw lights out in the various dormitories, and visited them afterwards to make sure that all the juniors were in bed. The juniors were all in bed, but they were not sleeping, and there was a ceaseless buzz of talk among the beds.

Later in the evening most of the seniors retired, but not to sleep. Sleep was impossible for all. Many fellows only half-dressed, to be ready to jump up and rush out at the first sign of alarm. Some of them had taken pokers and cricket stumps to bed with them, in case of necessity. It certainly looked as if the mysterious cracksmen would have a very warm reception if he kept his word and came to St. Jim's.

At eleven o'clock Mr. Railton went down to Taggles' lodge. He found the school porter wide awake and uneasy. Taggles intended to lock and bolt himself in the lodge. There was a policeman in the lodge with him, and three others were on duty outside patrolling the road along the walls of St. Jim's. Mr. Railton ascertained that Taggles' mastiff had been turned loose in the quadrangle, and that the constables were on the alert. The gates of St. Jim's were securely locked.

Mr. Railton walked back to the School House, and, in spite of his iron nerve, he could not help casting glances

to and fro in the shadow of the trees as he went. The unknown, imagined form of the cracksman was present in his mind's eye. He would not have been surprised to hear a stealthy footstep, to see a lurking shadow under the old elms in the quad; but there was no movement, no sound.

The quadrangle was silent and still in the dim light of the stars.

Mr. Railton re-entered the School House, and the great door was closed and locked and barred. Then a round was made of all doors and windows in the building, and in the Head's house, which was part of the same building.

Captain Mellish and Kildare and the inspector accompanied the House-

Mellish, as the Housemaster went to the window.

The shutters were closed. They were iron shutters, secured on the inside with bars and padlock. Burglar's tools, perhaps, might have penetrated them; but certainly not without long labour, and most certainly not without giving the alarm to the men on the watch within.

Captain Mellish looked round the room with a keen, businesslike eye. He was as cool as an iceberg, and showed no trace of the excitement which was gradually mounting in the breasts of the others.

Kildare was pale with excitement, and the Head's hands were trembling a little.

Dr. Holmes unlocked the door of the safe and swung it open.

Captain Mellish looked in, and then returned his revolver to his pocket with a smile.

"Nobody there!" he said.

The Head locked the safe again.

The captain made a round of the room. He examined the shutters once more, and peered up the chimney. The chimney was a wide, old-fashioned one, and the captain shook his head a little.

"There are bars across the chimney inside," said the Head.

"Oh, good! That settles that point!"

A sound came dully through the air. It was the chime from the clock in the old tower of St. Jim's.



"Look!" gasped the Head huskily, pointing. Every eye turned upon the picture. The frame was empty! A knife had slashed round the picture, and the canvas had been separated from the frame. X, the mystery cracksman, had kept his word!

There was a cry of amazement. The

master on his round. Every door was secured; every window was safe.

They returned to the Head's study.

The study looked very cosy and comfortable, and the electric light showed up every corner of the room.

The Head was seated there, and he turned a somewhat worn look upon them as they entered.

"You have seen to everything, Mr. Railton?" he asked.

"Everything, sir," said the Housemaster.

"The doors, the windows—"

"All are safe. The mastiff is loose in the quadrangle, and he is scarcely likely to allow a stranger to enter the grounds without giving the alarm. There is a policeman with Taggles, and Inspector Skeat's men are on duty in the road. If the man comes, he cannot escape—of that I am certain!"

"Very well. The shutters here had better be closed now."

"I was about to suggest it."

"Let me help you," said Captain

Mellish paused and looked at the safe.

"You have the key of this, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said the Head.

"It would be only wise to look into it. It would be curious if the rascal should be hidden inside it all the time. Safe locks do not mean much to X!"

The Head started.

"Good heavens, I never thought of such a thing!" he exclaimed, in a faltering voice.

"Nothing like making sure!" said the captain. "What do you think, inspector?"

"I really think you are overdoing it, sir!" he said. "That's my opinion, but take every possible precaution, by all means!"

"I will stand by with my revolver while you open the door, Dr. Holmes!" said Captain Mellish. "I have learned on the Indian frontier to leave nothing to chance! I found a Thug once hidden in a mealie-sack."

"Half-past eleven!" said Mr. Railton, in a somewhat strained voice.

"Half an hour more!" said the Head.

Kildare clenched his hands to control his growing excitement. Captain Mellish glanced out into the passage and closed the door of the study. He sat down in an easy-chair, where he could keep his eye upon the door.

"Thirty minutes before our friend the enemy is due to appear," he remarked. "Gentlemen, we have done all that is possible. It only remains to wait."

CHAPTER 15.

Stolen!

SILENCE! Deep, heavy silence as the minutes crawled by.

Almost every moment the eyes of the watchers turned upon the Head's clock on the mantelpiece.

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Never had the minutes seemed to crawl with such irritating slowness.

It seemed an age, a century, that the large hand occupied in crawling from one figure to another upon the dial.

"The quarter!" said Mr. Railton, at last.

Faintly from the quadrangle came the chime.

The next time it came it would chime midnight—the hour at which the cracksmen was to come, if he came at all.

Dr. Holmes shifted uneasily in his seat. Mr. Railton stood leaning upon a corner of the mantelpiece, his loaded cane in his hand. Inspector Skeat sat upright in his chair, grim and silent. But even the stolid inspector could not suppress the twitching of his lips, the restlessness of his eyes. Kildare changed his position several times; it seemed as if he could not keep still.

Of all the party gathered in the study, Captain Mellish seemed the only one who was perfectly cool, perfectly self-possessed. Doubtless, the strange midnight watch was less strange to a man who had fought and watched in the lonely mountain passes, carrying his life in his hands amid treacherous foes.

At ten minutes to twelve the captain took out his revolver and examined it carefully. After that he sat with the weapon resting upon his knee.

Dr. Holmes' uneasy glance rested upon the picture opposite him.

In the electric light the picture glimmered and glowed with colour; that picture, a masterpiece of a dead man's hand, for which the strange watch was being kept—and which was to be the prize of the cracksmen's daring.

The minutes seemed to crawl more slowly than ever.

Captain Mellish had his eyes fixed upon the door, his head bent a little to one side—he was listening.

Suddenly he made a slight movement.

In the still tension of the watchers in the study the slightest movement was sufficient to send the blood thrilling to their hearts.

"What is it?" breathed the Head.

The captain held up his hand.

"Did you hear nothing?"

"Nothing."

"I heard nothing," said Mr. Railton.

The captain was listening.

There was a faint sound in the midnight stillness; it came from the quadrangle.

The Head half-rose from his chair. But Mr. Railton made a reassuring gesture.

"It is the dog," he said. "He is loose in the quadrangle."

"Ah, the dog!" said the captain.

"Yes."

Captain Mellish glanced at the clock.

"Five minutes to twelve."

"Five minutes more."

The tension was growing almost unbearable.

Kildare moved again, his hand closing convulsively on the cricket stump he had in his grasp.

"Four minutes!"

"Good heavens!" muttered the Head, wiping the perspiration from his damp brow. "Will it never be over!"

"Three minutes more!" said Mr. Railton, in a hushed voice.

Captain Mellish sprang to his feet, his eyes gleaming. There was a general movement of excitement.

"Did you hear?" breathed the captain.

"No. What—"

"He is in the House!"

"My heavens! What?"

"He is in the House," breathed the captain. "I heard it, I tell you—a

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stealthy footstep. He is in the House; he is in the passage."

"Heavens!"

The captain stepped to the door. He stepped on tiptoe, without a sound. The others, grasping their weapons, watched him, with thumping hearts, with straining eyes.

He reached the door; he laid his fingers on the handle; he turned it softly.

Boom!

It was the first stroke of twelve from the clock tower.

Boom!

Boom!

The captain tore the door open and sprang into the passage. His hand, with the revolver in it, was raised.

Crack!

A shout, a crash, a rush of darkness in the passage. The light was out. Then the voice of the captain shouting—shouting for help.

With a cry the watchers in the study rushed after him. All was dark. There was a trampling of footsteps, then a ringing pistol-shot.

Bang!

"Where are you?"

"Where is he?"

"Help!"

Bang!

The sound of a confused struggle; a crash of glass.

Bang!

Mr. Railton's hand struck on somebody in the darkness. It was Kildare. Kildare called out as the Housemaster grasped him.

The Head's voice was calling; the inspector was shouting and blowing his whistle alternately; the voice of the captain could be heard. In the quadrangle the startled mastiff had set up a furious barking.

"Lights!" yelled the captain.

"Lights! Help!"

Lights were flashing from a dozen different directions now. Masters and boys were crowding into the passage—some with torches, some with candles; all of them grasping weapons of some sort.

Tom Merry of the Shell was the first to reach the Head's study—in his pyjamas, with a torch in his hand. Blake was after him with a candle, and then there came a rush of others.

Lights were on the scene at last—lights in the passage, lights in the study.

The Head was leaning against the wall, almost fainting with the reaction. Captain Mellish was in the passage, his revolver in his hand, a streak of red upon his cheek, his face blazing with excitement. Kildare was in the doorway of the study, Mr. Railton in the passage, farther off than the captain. Inspector Skeat was standing in the middle of the study, which he had not quitted, blowing his whistle shrilly.

Outside in the quadrangle the mastiff was barking furiously.

"What's happened?"

"Has he been here?"

"Where is he?"

Captain Mellish came striding into the study, panting.

"He has been!" he exclaimed. "He has been and gone. The villain fired at the lights I never foresaw that. I caught a glimpse of him before the light went, then he vanished. I heard a window crash."

"The passage window is smashed!" came Lowther's voice from the passage. "It's been smashed through with a chair. The chair's lying outside. That's the way he went."

"Then he's in the quad!" shouted Kildare.

Inspector Skeat rushed to the passage window and clambered out through the smashed sashes. He blew his whistle, and whistles from his men answered in the darkness. The dog barked furiously.

"Good heavens!" shouted the Head. "Good heavens! So—so he came, after all! The villain! But—but will he get away?"

"They'll have him," said the captain. "We may as well have the window open now, sir." He flung back the shutter and looked out into the quadrangle, dimly lighted by the stars, and shouted: "Have you got him?"

"Not yet!"

Captain Mellish turned back into the room with a gesture of disappointment.

"He will get away! Hang the luck! But I am sure I hit him! I fired twice—three times."

"Then the other shots were his?" said the Head.

"Yes; he was armed."

"You are wounded, captain!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, in alarm, as he caught sight of the red smear on the captain's cheek.

The captain dashed his hand across his face.

"It is nothing—the merest scratch. It might have gone closer, though it was not his fault that it did not. The scoundrel!"

"The villain!" gasped the Head. "There might have been murder done!"

"All's well that ends well," said the captain. "He has escaped, I fear; but he has gone empty-handed."

"Yes, he has not succeeded——"

The Head broke off.

His eye had turned instinctively towards the picture on the wall as he spoke. In the blaze of excitement the picture, the cause of it all, had been forgotten. But now——

The Head stared, and his voice failed him.

"What is the matter?" cried the captain, as he caught the stunned look upon the face of Dr. Holmes.

The Head pointed.

"Look!" he gasped huskily. "Look!"

Every eye turned upon the picture. There was a cry of amazement.

The frame was empty.

A knife had slashed round the picture, and the canvas had been separated from the frame.

The frame was empty, save for a few tags of canvas clinging to it. The picture was gone!

The captain's jaw dropped. He was dumbfounded.

"Gone!" he gasped.

"Gone!" muttered the Head. "My picture! The villain has succeeded, after all! My Rembrandt—gone!"

"Oh, the scoundrel!" said Kildare. "That was why he put the lights out. The picture's gone—he's got it, after all!"

The captain gritted his teeth.

"He cannot have got away with it yet!" he exclaimed. "Follow me! We'll have him yet! Come!"

He laid his hands upon the window-sill and vaulted out into the quadrangle.

Mr. Railton and Kildare followed him quickly. Tom Merry and Blake held their lights up at the window. The Head panted, and regarded the empty frame with dismay and amazement.

"Gone!" he muttered. "Robbed! My picture!"

There were confused voices from the quadrangle, trampling feet, and the furious barking of a dog.

It was a quarter of an hour before the

(Continued on page 23.)

THE BLACK HAND REACHES OUT FOR ANOTHER VICTIM. . . .

The BLACK HAND at ST. FRANK'S!



The Latest Thriller By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

The Shadow by the Mere!

WHEN a mystery airman is found shot in his wrecked plane near St. Frank's, there is a hue and cry after a black man who, it is discovered, was travelling in the plane, and saved himself by jumping with a parachute. But the fugitive eludes capture.

Eight boys of St. Frank's, who were the first on the scene of the smash, know more about the mystery than they can tell the police. For before the airman died they gave their word to deliver a package for him to "No. 1," at Gallows Mere, and keep it a secret.

The juniors—Nipper & Co.—find out that Gallows Mere is the home of Dr. Zangari, an astronomer. They are on their way there to deliver the package when they make a gruesome discovery. In a wood they see the dead body of the black man hanging from a tree, and his left hand is cut off. The juniors inform Nelson Lee, the schoolmaster-detective, and the police, who are soon on the spot. The St. Frank's boys go on to Gallows Mere. Leaving his chums outside for safety, Nipper enters the sinister old house. He is shown into a room by a servant, who departs to fetch his master, Dr. Zangari. Nipper then discovers that he is trapped—steel shutters bar the door and the window!

NIPPER stiffened as he gazed upon the steel-shuttered window. He knew he was a prisoner. As though by magic the door had closed and the shutters had slid across the window at his approach. Escape was impossible.

But after the first few tense moments he breathed more freely. It was comforting to know that his chums were outside, and if he did not soon emerge, they would want to know the reason why. He realised that he must have passed through two invisible rays, which electrically controlled door and window. Gallows Mere, then, was a house of greater mystery than he had first imagined.

"You wished to see me, mio amico?"

Nipper turned. The door had opened quite normally, and the man who had entered spoke excellent English in a quiet, cultured voice. He was small, clean-shaven, grey at the temples, and attired in immaculate evening dress. His expression, as he beheld Nipper, was one of polite inquiry. Nipper, expecting he scarcely knew what, was momentarily nonplussed by this very common-place proceeding.

"You are Dr. Zangari?" he asked, advancing towards his host.

"Yes, it is my name. You have, I understand, a message for me? But scusatemi! One moment."

Dr. Zangari walked softly to the window and drew the curtains aside. Nipper blinked. There was no evidence of steel shutters; only an ordinary looking window, which opened at a touch from Dr. Zangari.

"It is good to have the fresh air," he said, turning back to Nipper. "Yes? You come from the big school, I think?"

Nipper tried to collect himself. A minute earlier he had believed himself to be in a house of peril—a prisoner. Now, all in a moment, it was a perfectly normal house. Dr. Zangari, instead of being the sinister figure the schoolboys had imagined, was a learned-looking gentleman, with charming manners.

"You see, the fact is, I happened to be on the spot last night when an aeroplane crashed near Bellton," said Nipper. "The pilot, who was dying, gave me a message—for you."

"Io non capisco," said Dr. Zangari, shrugging. "Pardon! I mean, I do not understand. There is a mistake. What connection can there be between an aeroplane pilot and myself? I am a simple man, and my time is devoted to the great study of the stars. This man—this aeroplane man," he went on suddenly, "he gave you my name?"

"Why, no," said Nipper. "But he gave me a package, and, with almost his dying breath, he begged me to deliver it into the hands of 'No. 1,' at Gallows Mere. This house is Gallows Mere, and I take it that you must be 'No. 1.'"

Dr. Zangari laughed softly.

"So," he nodded, "I am the owner, yes, and, therefore, I must be il primo. But I read in the papers that the aeroplane, it is a great mystery. The message, it cannot be for me."

Nipper was aware of a curious thrill. Dr. Zangari's conversation was matter-of-fact enough, but in some insidious way he was conveying to Nipper the fact that he was the mysterious No. 1. His eyes were full of eagerness—and, yes, anxiety.

"It's no business of mine," went on Nipper, looking his host straight in the eye. "But it may ease your mind to know that I gave the dying man my solemn oath that I would do my best to deliver the package, and breathe no word to any other living soul. My object here is to deliver the package. Nothing more."

An expression of sudden relief came into Dr. Zangari's eyes.

"Grazie molto! I thank you, English boy," he said. "You have made it clear. You do not make inquiries, no? You are not—curious?"

"I wish to keep my promise," replied Nipper. "If you assure me that you are 'No. 1,' I will deliver the package and go."

"I am 'No. 1,'" said the other briefly.

Nipper produced the oiled silk package with its seals, and he did not fail to notice the eagerness with which Dr. Zangari grasped it, and examined the seals to make sure they had not been broken.

"Molto bene! It is good!" he said. "So! You have told nobody?"

"Nobody."

"The police? They make inquiries, do they not, with regard to the accident? You have said nothing to the police about this?"

"I gave my word that I would keep the secret, and I have done so," replied Nipper. "I am only too glad the job's over. You needn't worry, Dr. Zangari, I shan't talk. I gave my word to the dying man, and I shall keep it."

He moved suggestively towards the

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door, but Dr. Zangari laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"I am in your debt, mio amico," he said softly. "You will permit me to reward you?" He took money from his pocket, and counted out a number of pound notes. "You say nothing? You keep the little secret, yes? I cannot explain, but—"

"I haven't asked you to explain, Dr. Zangari," interrupted Nipper steadily. "I don't want paying for carrying out the last wish of a dying man. You needn't bribe me, either. I shan't talk. Is that clear enough?"

"Io capisco! Your word, yes, is your bond—so?" said Dr. Zangari, replacing the money in his pocket. "I am sorry. I did not wish to offend you, mio amico. You shall permit me to show you out and bid you buona notte."

"Thank you," said Nipper.

With difficulty he repressed a shudder. Dr. Zangari was very close to him, and his proximity, somehow, filled Nipper with an inexplicable loathing. His arm still tingled where his host had gripped him—and it was a tingle of repulsion. It was all the more remarkable because Dr. Zangari looked so scholarly and kindly. Nipper had had a similar feeling, once, when he had touched a venomous snake. He knew that Dr. Zangari's eyes were on him, and, strong-nerved though he was, he felt an urge, perilously near to panic, to get out of the house.

He was glad he had given the impression that he, alone, had given the necessary pledge of silence to the dying pilot. There was no reason why Dr. Zangari should know that seven of his schoolfellows were in the secret.

The incident was over; the package had been delivered, and that was the end of the matter. Nipper was not the kind of fellow to go out of his way to avoid danger; but he had a grim conviction that the less he and his chums had to do with Gallows Mere, the better. Nipper was not unduly susceptible to "atmosphere," but some instinct seemed to tell him that this old house and its host were both evil. He felt stifled. He wanted to get out into the open air, so that he could breathe again. He was glad to be out of the room, with its secret devices of door and window.

"I am in your debt, English boy," said Dr. Zangari as they approached the front door. "I shall be happier if you will permit me to make a small gift. You need not regard it as payment—"

"Thanks all the same, but I'd rather not," interrupted Nipper.

The other shrugged.

"Again you assure me that you have spoken no word of what passed between you and the dead airman?" he asked tensely. "You have spoken of it to nobody?"

"I gave my word, and I have kept my word," replied Nipper. "You have the package, Dr. Zangari, and the matter is ended."

"And you will accept no reward?"

"Nothing, thank you!"

"Then you leave me in your debt," said Dr. Zangari regretfully, as he opened the door. "Buona notte, mio caro amico!"

"Good-night, sir!" replied Nipper.

He strode across the threshold, and the door closed softly behind him. The darkness was intense, and it was some moments before Nipper could find his bearings. Once on the drive, however, his eyes were more accustomed to the gloom. The drive bore round in a semi-circle towards the gate, with the sinister-looking mere on Nipper's left.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,438.

He was breathing freely now, and he paused to get a firm grip on himself.

He was puzzled. For once in his life he had nearly been scared, and there was really nothing to account for his condition. Dr. Zangari had been charming throughout the interview. There was the matter of the mysteriously closing door and the steel-shuttered window. But what of it? Many honest householders equip their premises with burglar-proof devices. No; there was something else—something which Nipper could not define. It was a sort of instinct which told him that he had been in danger—and was still in danger.

It was no use ignoring the fact, too, that he was a source of danger to Dr. Zangari, and the latter knew it. Two men—one an Italian and the other an Ethiopian—had been murdered during the past twenty-four hours—murdered within a few miles of Gallows Mere. There was absolutely nothing to connect the murders with Gallows Mere—except Nipper! So, at least, thought Dr. Zangari, for the latter knew nothing of the other seven schoolboys who were in the secret.

Nipper had given his word, but there was no evidence that Dr. Zangari had accepted it. Nipper told himself that his fears were groundless. He had received nothing but courtesy in this grim old house.

"What the dickens is the matter with you, you chump?" Nipper asked himself, almost savagely. "You're as jumpy as a frightened kitten! Pull yourself together!"

Even as he chided himself thus, an overwhelming urge to run gripped him. Only by sheer force of will did he continue to walk. That same sense of imminent danger was with him. But he told himself it was absurd. His chums were on the road within earshot—indeed, almost within sight. There was no justification for his fears.

He checked abruptly. Had he heard a faint swishing, as of bare feet sweeping through grass—or was it his imagination? He swung round, staring into the gloom. His heart jumped. Something was charging straight at him!

A mere shadow, blacker than the blackness of the night, but it seemed to Nipper in that split second that he saw the almost naked body of a black man—a black man bent double, charging with head down.

There was no time to avoid the charge.

Crash!

Something struck Nipper in the very pit of the stomach, and he went hurtling backwards with a gasping cry, staggering, reeling.

Splash!

He plunged into the mere which bordered the drive. The icy, scummy waters closed over him, and he felt tangled reeds about his legs and arms. But the cold plunge revived him; his wits became sharpened. A hot fury took possession of him.

His fears, then, had had an excellent foundation!

Dr. Zangari, treating him with courtesy, had, nevertheless, arranged for an assassin to be lurking outside in the darkness! Nipper almost laughed at the futility of the crude method adopted. Did Dr. Zangari imagine that he was unable to swim? Did he think it enough to wind him, butt him into the mere, and leave him to drown?

Why, he was only a few feet from the bank, and two or three powerful strokes would—A pain, sudden and acute, attacked Nipper in the leg, as though he had been stung by some

venomous insect. The pain, while it lasted, was excruciating, but it was quickly succeeded by a dull numbness. His head was above the surface now, and he drank in the pure night air. But there seemed to be something wrong with his jaw. He could not open his mouth easily; his muscles were becoming useless.

In that same dread moment a ghastly realisation of the truth swept upon him. His legs and arms were becoming affected by the same horrible paralysis! Instead of striking out strongly for the bank, he could only flounder helplessly. He tried to shout, but the very muscles of his throat refused to function. His vocal cords failed. With incredible, ghastly speed the paralysis became complete. He sank, helpless, and never in all his life had he experienced such a dreadful sensation. For while his muscles failed, his brain remained as active as ever. He did not know it, but he managed to give a gurgling sound as he sank; his almost helpless limbs thrashed the water momentarily. Then he went under.

Down—down!

He could not even fight for his life. Like a stone, he sank through the weeds to the slimy bed of the mere.

A Close Call!

"COME ON!" whispered Handforth tensely.

"Not yet."

"But he said five minutes, didn't he?"

"Give him another minute or two," murmured Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I'm as anxious as you are, dear old boy, but we don't want to do anything rash."

"Let's give him just one more minute," said McClure.

The others agreed, and Handforth was overruled.

"All right! Don't blame me if they kill him!" said the burly Removite. "These extra minutes are just the ones that matter. By this time they've probably grabbed him, forced him down into a cellar, and are putting him to the torture! And it'll be our fault!"

The anxious juniors were crouching behind the hedge, peering through gaps at the dark bulk which was Gallows Mere. Since Nipper had been admitted—they had all seen the gleam of light as the door had opened and closed—there had been no sound, no movement. Anxiety from the very first moment, the schoolboys were now in a state of acute uneasiness.

"I'm beginning to think Handy's right, you chaps!" whispered Watson uneasily.

"Of course I'm right!" snorted Handforth. "Didn't Nipper give us definite instructions? Like his cheek to give us instructions, but we won't argue about that now. He said four of us were to go up to the house if he didn't come out after five minutes. He must have been gone pretty nearly ten minutes by now—"

"Look!" whispered McClure. "The front door's just opened!"

"Eh?" Handforth blinked. "Well, I'm jiggered! So it has!"

He seemed disappointed. The patch of light, caused by the opening of the front door of the old house, was clearly visible to the watching boys. They even saw Nipper and another figure outlined against the lighted doorway. The pair shook hands, and Nipper's "Good-night!" was plainly heard. Then the door closed, and Nipper could be heard crunching along the gravel of the drive.

"What-ho!" came a murmur from Archie Glenthorne. "So everything appears to be all serene—ho—what?"

"H'm! Looks like it!" admitted Handforth grudgingly.

"You sound frightfully disappointed, old boy," chuckled Montie. "Beggad! Are you sorry that Nipper isn't thrown into a frightful dungeon an' tortured?"

"Don't be an ass!" growled Handforth. "I'm jolly glad Nipper has come out safely—but it's a bit of a frost, all the same. In fact, it's a swindle. There's nothing for us to do at all!"

He relapsed into moody silence, and the others were silent, too. Nipper's footsteps were no longer audible, for the gravel of the drive, except immediately in front of the house, was moss-grown and grassy. Suddenly, however, a curious sound came out of the night—a kind of gasping grunt.

"What was that?" whispered Tommy. Splash!

No explanation of the second sound was necessary. Somebody, or something, had plunged into the mere! Silence followed, then a significant churning of water—and silence again.

"Great Scott!" gasped Church. "He's fallen into the giddy lake. Missed his way in the dark, and tripped, I expect—"

"Not likely!" broke in Watson. "Nipper's not the sort of chap to do a fool thing like that! Something else must have happened."

"Listen!" urged McClure.

They heard it—a faint, choking, gasping cry, followed by another gurgle of water—then silence.

"Come on!" yelled Handforth, throwing all caution to the winds.

After that bellow, it was pointless for the others to keep silent. They all broke through the hedge with a tremendous amount of noise. Handforth and Watson both carried electric torches, and they switched them on.

"Look out for the mere!" warned Handforth. "This way!"

They went racing round the edge of that noisome pool. They knew something had happened—something dramatic. For no answering shout had come from Nipper. None of them were aware of a dim, shapeless, shadowy figure which faded away into the gloom of the dense bushes near the house.

"Nipper!" yelled Tommy Watson. "Hi! Where are you?"

There was no sign—no sound. They raced on round the mere, the torchlight playing upon the scummy, weedy surface. There was no activity from the house; it remained dark and quiet. But the boys were not thinking of the house now. They were concentrating their attention on the mere. Nipper was not on the drive, so there was only one alternative.

"Look!" panted Handforth in horror. He was holding his torch in one hand, and pointing with the other. Some feet out from the mere's edge a number of bubbles were appearing on the surface, and the water itself was sluggishly moving, in a kind of lazy whirlpool.

"He's sunk! He's there!" ejaculated Watson, white as a sheet. "He fell in, and— Here, hold this, somebody!"

He threw his torch to Church, wrenched off his coat, and dived in. Quick as he was, however, he did not forestall the impulsive Handforth. The leader of Study D, without waiting to divest himself of any garments, had dived. Down he went, using powerful strokes. He had marked the spot well, for he had struck the water at the very place where the bubbles were rising to the surface. Like an otter he dived, his fingers groping in front of him. He clutched at weeds, but did not get entangled. Then the fingers of his right hand caught hold of something different—something which yielded.

He lost contact, tried again, and although his lungs were nearly bursting, he persisted.

He seized a handful of material—and he knew that he had grabbed Nipper's jacket. He pulled, and commenced fighting his way with his legs and his free hand to the surface. Luckily, Watson had now reached the same depth, and Tommy's sure fingers gripped Nipper on the other side. Together the rescuers rose to the surface.

"Ods cheers and rejoicing!" yelled Archie Glenthorne. "They've got him! Absolutely!"

Amid terrific splashing and wallowing, to say nothing of loud gaspings, Handforth and Watson dragged Nipper to the side.

"Good work, dear old boys!" said Montie, reaching out.

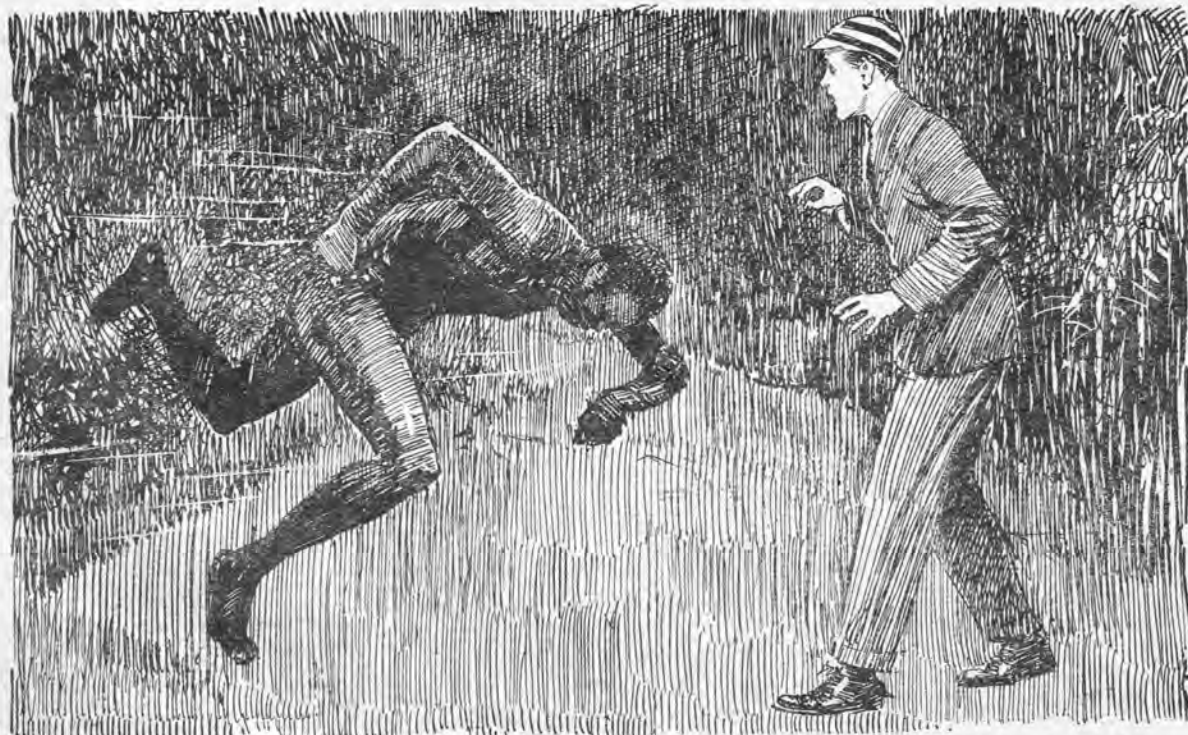
Eager hands dragged the inanimate form ashore. Handforth and Watson scrambled out unaided. They knew they had seized Nipper in the very nick of time. Another minute and it would have been too late.

"First aid!" gasped Handforth. "Where's the light! We've got to apply artificial respiration—"

"No. I'm—all—right!"

It was Nipper speaking, and his voice sounded curiously feeble and strained. He articulated the words with difficulty. But he had managed to sit up, and his eyes, at least, were as active and as intelligent as ever. He did not look like a person who had been half-drowned.

The truth was, Nipper's brain had never lost its keenness. The mysterious paralysis still had him in its power, but it was lessening. He had swallowed a certain amount of water, but nothing to worry about. He had managed to keep it out of his lungs. But he knew full well that unless his chums had rescued him when they did, he would have been



At a faint sound Nipper swung round, staring into the gloom. His heart jumped. A black man, his almost naked body bent double, was charging straight at him. Before Nipper could avoid the charge he was struck in the pit of the stomach.

doomed to a horrible death—death by drowning—without the means of making even a struggle for life!

"What happened?" asked Watson steadily. "Why did you sink like that?"

"Yes, what the dickens was the matter?" demanded Handforth in amazement.

His tone expressed the feelings of all the others. They knew Nipper to be a strong swimmer. Why, therefore, had he sunk to the bottom without even attempting to save himself? With a few strokes he could have easily reached the bank.

"Help me up, will you?" said Nipper, with difficulty. "I'm all—numb. We'd better get away from here—quick! I'll explain later."

"Rats! You'll explain now!" said Handforth.

"I don't understand. Something struck me and knocked me into the mere!" muttered Nipper.

"You mean—you were knocked silly?"

"No. The thing rammed me in the middle."

"Then why the dickens didn't you swim?"

"I couldn't. Something seemed to take hold of me. No, I don't mean anything in the mere. I was sort of paralysed. I couldn't move."

"Paralysed!" ejaculated Handforth. "You're dotty! It was only the weeds. Who knocked into you? Did you see?"

"It was too dark to see anything," replied Nipper slowly. "Thank goodness! I'm a lot better now. I think I can stand up. Yes, my legs are still a bit groggy, but I can manage it."

He saw the others looking at him strangely. And he wondered, then, if that mysterious paralysis had been only a condition of mind. Was it only sheer panic which had gripped him? The thought gave him something of a shock. He knew that people could be rendered absolutely helpless by panic, but he had never dreamed it possible that he would be a victim. No. His reason refused to accept such an explanation. But it was an undeniable fact that his limbs were now normal. Except for a chill, occasioned by his ducking, he was no worse for the adventure.

"I don't understand it!" he muttered, troubled. "All I know is that we'd better get away."

"It seems to me," said McClure practically, "that you've had a bad attack of nerves, old man. You must have stumbled over something, and then you tripped into the lake. The darkness—and your imagination—did the rest. We heard you say good-night to somebody, and then you walked along the drive—"

"What goes on out here?"

It was a polite, even mild, inquiry. The St. Frank's fellows, collected round Nipper, had failed to observe the opening of the front door. But they turned now. Dr. Zangari, accompanied by two men who were obviously servants, was approaching. One of them carried a powerful vapour lantern with an incandescent mantle which gave a strong light.

"Mio amico! My friend!" exclaimed Dr. Zangari with concern. "You are wet! You fell in the water, yes? Io non capisco! I do not understand."

"Yes, Dr. Zangari, I was in the water—but I didn't fall in," said Nipper quietly.

The other boys were looking at Dr. Zangari with interest. They were surprised to see so distinguished-looking a

man; yet, at the same time, they were all aware of that same feeling of repulsion which had gripped Nipper earlier. They instinctively drew away and watched fascinated.

"You did not fall in?" repeated the strange owner of Gallows Mere. "Perdonatemi! You will pardon me if I express doubt? These boys? They are your friends?"

"They are my friends—they were waiting for me in the road," replied Nipper, looking his questioner straight in the eye. "Dr. Zangari, somebody tried to kill me a few minutes ago. Somebody ran out of the darkness and charged at me, knocking me into the mere."

"But this, it is impossible!" said the other. "Who should do that?" He suddenly gave a start, and a light of understanding leapt into his eyes. "Ah! So! Io capisco! Now I understand! Here is the mystery explained! I am a thousand times sorry, mio amico!"

He seized the lantern from one of his men, strode some yards towards the bushes and held the lantern aloft. Something blackish moved in the shadows, but at a call from Dr. Zangari, it came nearer.

"Good gad! A goat!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, absolutely, a goat!"

"What!" shouted the others.

"A goat?" whispered Nipper dully. Dr. Zangari laughed amusedly.

"Tut-tut! It is ill for me to smile at your misfortune," he said, becoming more serious. "You see, it was my goat. Wretched creature! He will attack people! How do you say the word? He puts his head down and pushes them—"

"Butts them," said Tommy Watson.

"Ah, so! He butts them!" said Dr. Zangari, nodding. "I keep him tied in the paddock, but sometimes he gets away from his chain. I am so sorry," he added, turning again to Nipper.

"You are hurt?"

"I am wet," replied Nipper. "Luckily my friends were close by, and they came to my help. I can't understand it, but as soon as I got into the water I felt helpless. I couldn't even swim."

"Perhaps the goat, in butting you, affected slightly a vital nerve," suggested Dr. Zangari. "I insist upon giving you recompense, my young friend."

"Thanks all the same, but I don't want your money," said Nipper, looking him straight in the eye. "You might as well know—now—that these friends of mine are in the secret. There's one other, making eight of us all told."

"Yes! You interest me," said Dr. Zangari, and his voice was almost like a purr. "You told me, English boy, that you had given the secret to no living soul."

"And I told you the truth," replied Nipper. "When the aeroplane pilot died there were the eight of us round him. We all gave him our promise. We have kept our word. We have not spoken of the matter of the sealed package to any other living person. The secret is safe, Dr. Zangari. None of us will speak. Good-night."

He turned abruptly and walked away. In Dr. Zangari's eyes there was an expression of baffled fury—and alarm. He opened his mouth as though to speak, but changed his mind. The other boys, after a moment's hesitation, followed Nipper. No word was spoken until they were out in the road.

They glanced back. The owner of Gallows Mere was returning into the house with his men. The light vanished, the door closed, and absolute darkness swallowed the old building.

"A goat," said Handforth in disgust. "Ye gods and little fishes!"

They walked on, away from Gallows Mere—towards the spot where they had left the car and the motor-cycle. They hurried, for Nipper, Handforth, and Watson were feeling chilly. The sooner they could get to St. Frank's and change into dry things, the better.

"You'd better ride in Handy's car, Nipper," said Watson. "It's fairly warm in there with all the windows closed. I'll drive your bike."

"Thanks," said Nipper. "That's a good idea."

But before entering the car he paused.

"I don't think I'd mind anything else," said Handforth, before Nipper could speak. "But a goat! You allow a goat to butt you, and then—By George! I can't find the words I want! The whole thing's a fearful frost. In fact, it's comic!"

"Not so comic," said Nipper grimly.

"Eh?"

Nipper's tone caused them all to look at him with sudden interest.

"There was no goat, Handy," said Nipper with a serious note in his voice. "You fellows saved my life. If you hadn't been there I should have been dead in another few minutes—murdered by the most cunning methods it is possible to imagine."

"Murdered!" panted Tommy Watson, aghast. "But—but—I don't understand!"

"I doubt if you'll believe me after I've explained—but I know. It will sound fantastic—crazy—but I tell you I know. Dr. Zangari thought I was the only one to know the secret, and he meant that I should never leave Gallows Mere alive. But he did it so ingeniously, so cunningly, that there was not the faintest suggestion of foul play."

"When you've done talking out of your hat, perhaps you'll explain what the dickens you mean?" said Handforth. "What is this that you know?"

"It wasn't that goat which butted me and heaved me into the mere," said Nipper evenly. "It was a man—and, I believe, a black man."

"Begad!"

"I wouldn't swear to it, because it was very dark, and I only caught the merest glimpse," continued Nipper. "I can't prove anything, but this is my theory. As the man butted me at full speed—and the force of that charge was sufficient to hurl me into the water—he jabbed my leg with a needle, and on that needle was some kind of drug which acted as a paralyzing agent as soon as it entered my blood."

"Look here, old boy, we'd better be gettin' home," said Sir Montie gently. "You're not quite yourself—"

"You think I'm raving, don't you?" went on Nipper grimly. "Well, look here! Where's your electric torch, Handy? I'll show you the spot. No, I won't. I'll leave it till we get to the school. But I'm telling you, my sons, that a few seconds after I was in the water I was completely paralysed. It wasn't fear which gripped me. I understand now. It was a temporary paralysis which made it certain that I would sink to the bottom and drown. If you fellows hadn't been near, nothing could have saved me. Zangari didn't know

you were there—or he would never have adopted the devilish trick."

"But, my dear chap, it's all so—so silly!" said Watson gruffly. "Dash it, we saw the goat for ourselves!"

"Yes, and that's the clever part of it," said Nipper, nodding. "Dr. Zangari used the goat as an 'alibi.' I suspect he has 'bumped off' people like that before. You see, we haven't got a single scrap of evidence against Zangari. Apparently it was just an accident. A stray goat, in a butting mood, pushed me into the mere. Just that. But I tell you I know it was an attempt at murder."

"By George!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath. "I believe you, old man!"

"But, look here. Handy—" began Church.

"Nipper's right!" interrupted Handforth furiously. "Of course he's right! You saw Zangari, didn't you? Ugh! He gave me the very shudders! His eyes!"

"Let's—let's get away from here," said Watson suddenly.

A minute later they drove off—unaware that a figure, as black as the night itself, followed in their wake, loping along like some weird creature of another world.

The Clue of the Green Paint!

CHIEF-INSPECTOR LENNARD rammed the tobacco in his pipe and grunted.

"I don't understand it," he said complacently. "It doesn't make sense. It doesn't add up right."

"No?" said Nelson Lee questioningly.

"It's a case of murder—yes!" ejaculated the man from Scotland Yard. "Not a doubt of it. But why all the trimmings? Why all this theatrical stuff?"

"You mean the severed hand?"

"That's one thing," replied Lennard. "But there are others. One man alone could not have done this job. There must have been at least two. Well, if they wanted to hang their victim, why didn't they hang him on a handy branch and have done with it? Why cart him up to the very top of a big tree and hang him there? Why cut his hand off and take it away with them? Why didn't they knock him on the head and bury him in a ditch?"

"If they had done as you say, it might have been months before the body was discovered," replied Lee. "It might never have been discovered at all."

"Well? In my experience, murderers are rather keen on disposing of the body. Hiding the body is generally the snag. But these infernal people didn't attempt to hide it."

"You must be tired, Lennard, or you would surely see that the murderers in this case wanted the body to be discovered quickly."

"What!"

"You will note, however, that they left nothing on it which would serve as a clue to the man's identity," continued Nelson Lee. "They hung him in the treetop for another reason."

"What reason?"

"A black man found murdered in a quiet Sussex spinney would naturally afford good newspaper publicity; but a black man hanging from the topmost branch would create an even greater sensation. No need for me to tell you, Lennard, that the newspaper reporters will get every ounce they can out of this case. There will be very vivid accounts of the affair in the newspapers to-morrow."

"Yes, that's true enough," admitted the inspector. "And the missing hand? Don't you think it was cut off because there might have been some marks of identification on it?"

"Possibly. But I think it's far more likely that the hand was removed for the sole reason I have named—that of making the case more sensational."

"But why?"

"Because, I imagine, the murderers want the affair to be a warning to others," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Don't you see? This is the fate which awaits traitors! That sort of thing."

"Traitors? Oh, yes, I see what you mean!" said Lennard, nodding. "This man was a traitor—eh? He was seen by those schoolboys last night, wasn't he? Obviously he was the man who dropped by the parachute—the man who murdered the Italian plane pilot."

"The fact that he murdered the pilot indicates that he was a traitor; and now he has suffered the penalty," replied Lee.

"You know, Lennard, this case is most intriguing. The aeroplane, for example. Where did it come from? Where was it going to? Obviously it was owned and operated by crooks. The pilot himself was a criminal. You've seen him."

"Yes, no doubt of it," said Lennard. "This infernal plane, having flown from some mysterious starting point, was making for an equally mysterious destination. Do you think the pilot was planning to come down somewhere in this district?"

"It's possible; there are some desolate, lonely parts of the country about here," replied Lee. "The fact that the Ethiopian evaded capture also hints that he found refuge in some house—where he was accepted as a friend until the people of the house set him down as a traitor. As far as I can see, old man, your only course is to make a very thorough search of the countryside."

"Like looking for a needle in a haystack!" grunted Lennard. "Where can I start? To make things worse, I don't care about the case. It doesn't interest me. If these Italians and Abyssinians

choose to kill one another, why not? Let 'em get on with it!"

"I quite understand your point of view," said Lee dryly. "But these things have happened in the English countryside, and we've got to do the best we can to get to the bottom of the mystery. There is no evidence that this dead man is an Abyssinian. He is certainly an Ethiopian, but he may not be a native of Abyssinia."

"What's the difference?" asked Lennard. "I thought all Abyssinians were Ethiopians?"

"So they are."

"This is as clear as mud."

"But there are large numbers of Ethiopians living under Italian rule—and the Italians claim that these people are absolutely loyal to the Italian service," said Nelson Lee. "They are natives of Eritrea. Thus, while being Eritreans—and, naturally, Ethiopians—they are not Abyssinians. Do you see my point?"

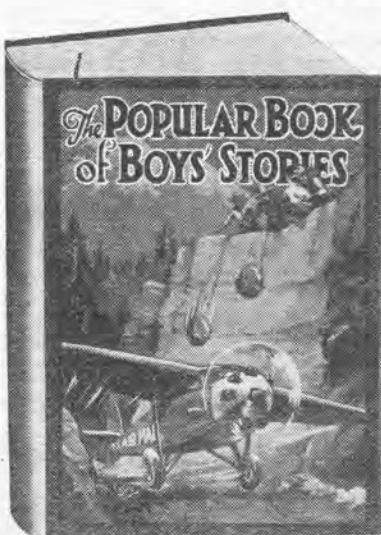
"I'm hanged if I do!"

"Yet it is quite clear. You seemed to take it for granted, when you first heard of the murdered Italian and the fugitive black man, that they must naturally be enemies," said Nelson Lee. "But the Ethiopians of the Eritrean territory are loyal to Italy. But we must not allow ourselves to be led astray by the nationalities of the two victims. It is singular that one should be an Italian, and the other an Ethiopian; but there is no evidence that the murders were due to the present dispute between Italy and Abyssinia. In fact, quite the contrary. The very nature of the aeroplane, and the character of the pilot, prove that they could not be connected with any of the Italian services. The Italians would not employ such underhand methods. Everything indicates a criminal organisation. Either there is a branch of this organisation in Sussex, or its headquarters. I've a very shrewd idea, Lennard, that there's something big behind it all."

"Perhaps you're right," said the inspector, brightening. "But at the moment, I'll confess, I'm stumped."

"The body, by this time, had been cut

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down, and had been placed on a stretcher. The police surgeon had made his examination, and could only say that death had been caused by hanging. Nelson Lee, as soon as he had got the opportunity—and, of course, he had Lennard's permission—examined the body himself. He found nothing unusual—except one thing. The dead man's remaining hand showed faint traces of green paint on the palm and inner side of the fingers. These traces were practically invisible, and the police doctor had not even seen them. Lee, however, used his powerful magnifying-glass.

"What are you looking at?" asked the inspector, who came up while Lee was busy.

"It may be nothing," replied the detective. "Have a look for yourself, Lennard. The traces are very small, but they are none the less clear. Green paint—a peculiarly sombre green."

"Yes, that's right," said the inspector. "But it doesn't get us anywhere, does it?"

"It may be a clue, or it may be just nothing," replied Lee. "Clearly, the man laid his hand on a gate, or a fence,

which had recently been painted. The paint must have been nearly dry, for only a few sticky fragments adhered to the skin. The man probably wiped his hand, thinking he had got most of the paint off."

"H'm! It looks as though it might be a clue," said the inspector, pursing his lips. "Find a gate or a fence which has recently been painted, eh? You're hinting that it might be the fence of the house we're looking for?"

"Well, you never know," replied Nelson Lee, with a smile.

Soon afterwards, as there was nothing further for him to do, he drove away. He did not attach much importance to the clue—if clue it was—of the green paint. The recently painted fence probably belonged to a perfectly innocent cottager, whose grounds the fugitive had traversed during the darkness of the previous night. It might not be a fence at all, but a railway bridge. But it was Nelson Lee's policy to take note of even the smallest details, and to keep them in his memory.

He was rather surprised that Nipper and the other boys had gone away. He was struck, too, by the same circum-

stance which had impressed itself upon Inspector Lennard. It was strange that the boys who had found the dead Italian should also have found the dead Ethiopian. Was it just coincidence—or was there something deeper behind it? Lee determined to get hold of Nipper as soon as he arrived at St. Frank's, and have a talk with him.

It was very dark now as he drove along the quiet, narrow lanes. He had much to think about. The case intrigued him, for it had many unusual features.

Perhaps he was not quite so alert as usual as he drove slowly round a winding bend, where the trees on either side arched their branches overhead to make a complete canopy. At the same time, Lee had no reason to think that he could be in any possible danger. His powerful headlights revealed the bare and empty road.

He had almost turned a bend when a black, lithe figure released itself from its hold in the canopy overhead, and it dropped unerringly upon Nelson Lee's shoulders!

(Look out next week for more thrills from this super serial.)

The Mystery Man at St. Jim's!

(Continued from page 22.)

searchers came in—worn, disappointed, and furious.

They came back unsuccessful. The Head gave them a hopeless look. He had not expected that they would recover the picture or capture the desperate man who had taken it.

"He has escaped?" he asked.

Captain Mellish nodded gloomily. "We found the ivy torn loose in one place," he said. "But the constables in the road did not see him. He is gone. The police are searching for him, but—"

"They will not find him," said the Head.

"I fear not, now. But later—"

"I have little hope."

"He has kept his word," said the captain grimly. "He has come, as he said that he would. But who would have dreamed it?"

There was nothing like sleep for St. Jim's that night.

And when morning came the inexhaustible topic was still being discussed untiringly.

X, the mysterious crackman, had kept his word. He had declared that at midnight he would take the picture—and he had taken it.

The watchers had nothing to blame themselves for; they had done their best. But they had had to deal with a man of amazing cunning, and he had beaten them. That was all. X had won, after all, and the picture was gone.

Captain Mellish took his leave of the Head in the morning in a gloomy humour.

"I feel that I ought to have been equal to the man," he said. "I came to help you, but I have been of no use. I am sorry!"

The Head smiled, a little wanly.

"You did more than any of us," he said. "And you ran more risk. I thank you very much, captain. If anybody could have saved my picture, you could have done it. But the scoundrel is a man there is no dealing with."

"The police may recover it yet," said the captain hopefully.

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"I have little hope," he said. "But we shall see. I shall not rely upon the police. I shall send for Ferrers Locke,

the detective. But we shall see. Good-bye, captain, and thank you for helping me, though, unfortunately, it turned out of little use."

Tom Merry & Co. cheered the captain as he left. They gazed with admiring awe at the patch of sticking-plaster upon his bronzed cheek.

The captain had failed to deal with the crackman, but he was a hero in the eyes of the juniors.

"It might have gone very differently if the Head had allowed me to stay up and watch," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with a wise shake of the head. "What was wanted, dear boys, was a fellow of tact and judgment."

To which Tom Merry & Co. replied, with one voice:

"Rats!"

And so the strange affair ended. But was it ended yet?

Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, was coming to St. Jim's, and the Head still cherished a lingering hope that his picture might be recovered. But the hope was very faint.

(Don't miss the sequel to this great yarn, chums. It's called "MR. 'X' UNMASKED!"—a thriller throughout. Order your GEM early.)



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