

"CLUE TO A FORTUNE!" Ace-high Yarn of Thrilling Schoolboy Adventure,
Starring Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. INSIDE

The GEM ^{2d}



*Tom Merry's
Dramatic
Discovery!*

THE PIECE OF PAPER THAT WAS WORTH TWENTY THOUSAND POUNDS!—

CLUE to a FORTUNE!



"Take zat," said Maro Luigi in a low voice. "I have write zero where it is zat ze money is. Capite?" "Yes," said Tom Merry. "I understand." "If I no come to you vizin four day," went on the Italian, "you keep secret and find ze money!"

CHAPTER 1. First Aid!

"**A**RE you weady, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, asked the question. He looked into the Shell dormitory through his famous eyeglass. "Shan't be a tick, Gussy!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Wight-ho!" said D'Arcy. "The fellows are waitin' in the quad, you know. You were a feahful ass to get lines this aftahnoon, Tom Mewwy, when we're goin' out on a Scout run!" "Ass!" said Tom Merry politely, as he plunged into his Boy Scout garb. "I didn't ask old Linton for the lines. But I shall be ready in a tick."

It was a glorious afternoon, and a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Down in the quadrangle a crowd of juniors in Boy Scout costume were waiting for Tom Merry, their leader. Tom had been detained to do lines, hence the delay. But he was changing now at lightning speed; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing in an elegant attitude at the door, watched him through his eyeglass with great admiration. Changing clothes was a long and painstaking operation with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

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"Pway don't bweak your neck about it, deah boy!" he remarked. "I'd wathah wait a few minutes extwa than buwwy a chap in changin' his clobber. I'm afwaid your tie is wathah ewooked."

"That's all right."

"You have laced your boots wathah iwewegulahly."

"Go hou!"

"How long are you going to keep us waiting, Tom Merry?" came Monty Lowther's voice along the passage from the stairs.

"Ready!"

Tom Merry jammed on his wide-brimmed hat, picked up his staff, and rushed for the door. It had not taken him three minutes to change. He charged playfully at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with his staff held like a lance, and the swell of St. Jim's hopped through the door in a hurry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" he protested.

"Come on, Gussy! Don't keep the fellows waiting."

And Tom Merry linked his arm in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's, and rushed him along the passage. Tom Merry was in great spirits. He was overjoyed at getting out of the Form-room after his detention, and at the prospect of a run in the woods on a bright, fresh afternoon. He rushed Arthur Augustus down

the passage towards the stairs at top speed, in spite of the protest of that elegant youth. Arthur Augustus gasped for breath, and strove in vain to get his arm away.

"Pway welessee me, Tom Mewwy!"

"Come on!"

"You are thwowin' me into quite a fluttah, you awful ass! We shall wun into somebody!" shrieked D'Arcy, as he was whirled along at top speed.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"All the worse for somebody, then!" he said.

And he led Arthur Augustus down stairs three at a time.

"Bai Jove! Weally—I— Oh!"

As they dashed round the landing at the bend of the staircase, Levison and Mellish of the Fourth were coming upstairs. Levison and Mellish did not belong to the Boy Scouts' organisation at St. Jim's, and they were not taking part in the run that afternoon.

The two wasters of the School House were more likely to be found smoking cheap cigarettes in the box-room than taking part in any healthy outdoor exercise. Levison and Mellish did not care for exercise in any form, but they received some now, that was as sudden as it was violent.

The two Scouts rushed right into them, and they went flying. Levison

—THRILLS, FUN, AND ADVENTURE THROUGHOUT THIS GREAT ST. JIM'S YARN.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

caught hold of the banisters, and just saved himself, and held on for his life, and Mellish went flying downstairs with a wild yell. He had grabbed hold of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's rolled down with him. Tom Merry sat down violently on the stairs.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy and Mellish rolled on the mat at the foot of the stairs. The swell of the Fourth sat up gasping, and groping wildly for his eyeglass. But a boot had crashed upon that famous monocle, and it was destined never again to be jammed into the aristocratic eye of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry breathlessly, as he sat on the stairs.

"Gwreat Scott!"

"Ow!" groaned Mellish. "My legs are broken! Yow! You're sitting on my chest, you silly chump! Gerroff!"

"Pwaw excuse me, deah boy. I weally didn't notice it," said Arthur Augustus, scrambling off Mellish. "I am sowwy."

"Oh! You silly chump!"

"Weally, Mellish—"

"You dangerous fathead! I'm injured! What do you mean by rushing into a fellow on the stairs—yow! You ought to be locked up in a lunatic asylum—groogh! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, there is nothin' to laugh at. My eyeglass is broken, and Mellish says his legs are broken. I shall have to go to my study and get a new eyeglass."

"Ha, ha, ha! You'd better get Mellish some new legs, too, if they're broken."

"Ow!" groaned Mellish. "I shall complain to the Head! Ow!"

Tom Merry rose and came downstairs at a more moderate pace now. Mellish was still groaning on the floor. He had had a most unpleasant bump, and he was not the kind of fellow to take it good-humouredly.

"Can't you get up?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Ow! No!"

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Jack Blake, coming in from the quad.

"Mellish has fallen downstairs, and his legs are broken, and he can't get up," explained Tom Merry.

Blake grinned. He knew that Percy Mellish was malingering, in order to make the most of his mishap, and Blake had no mercy on malingerers.

"Well, if Mellish is crooked, it's up to us as Boy Scouts to render first aid," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ow!" groaned Mellish.

"You can't get up?" demanded Blake.

"Ow! No! Ow!"

"Then what you want is first aid."

Blake grasped his Scout staff and poked the fallen junior in the ribs with it.

Mellish gave a roar.

"Hallo! His lungs aren't hurt, at any rate," said Tom Merry. "Can you move now, Mellish?"

"Oh, leave off! Yow!" roared Mellish, as Blake prodded him in the ribs again.

Blake shook his head.

"I'm not going to leave off when I'm administering first aid to an injured person," he replied. "You'll be able

to get up as soon as I've prodded you thoroughly. You'll see."

Prod, prod, prod!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Mellish. "Oh, you beast!"

He leaped to his feet.

"There!" said Blake triumphantly. "I told you so! Completely restored by a simple administration of first aid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish scowled savagely, and went upstairs. Levison was waiting for him on the landing. Levison was scowling savagely, but he did not care to venture within reach of the Scouts' staves. On the mat where Mellish had been lying a little packet lay, and Jack Blake picked it up with a sniff of contempt.

"Cigarettes!" he said scornfully.

"The rotters!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mellish stopped on the stairs and scowled down at the Scouts.

"I'm going to complain to Mr. Railton about your knocking me downstairs," he growled. "You silly set of guys! You'll jolly well get licked!"

"Don't forget to mention that you've dropped your cigarettes, you rotter, when you make the complaint!" said Blake, holding up the packet.

Mellish started.

"Give that to me!" he shouted.

"Can't be did!" Blake replied. "It's against the rules, you know, and very bad for the wind. These smokes are

Just a piece of paper with a pencilled message, but it was the clue to a fortune hidden on a lonely isle in the Adriatic! And with three desperate crooks seeking its secret, the paper comes into the hands of Tom Merry of St. Jim's!

confiscated, and I'm going to chuck them into the first ditch I come to. Ta-ta!"

"That packet's my property!" yelled Mellish. "Give it to me!"

"Come and take it," suggested Blake.

Mellish did not accept that invitation. He scowled furiously, and the Scouts laughed, and went out into the quadrangle.

"Here you are at last," said Manners. "We've been waiting for you, you duffers! Are you all ready?"

"Gussy! Where are you going, Gussy?"

"It's all wight, deah boy! I shan't be a few minutes! I've got to get another eyeglass!"

Blake grasped his elegant chum by the arm, and dragged him out into the quad.

"This isn't an eyeglass brigade," he said. "Come on!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Besides," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "you'll be able to scout better if you don't have a pane in your eye, Gussy."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We're all here," said Tom Merry. "The New House bounders are waiting over there by the gates. Come on!"

And the Scouts started across the quad.

Arthur Augustus' face showed signs of the most acute distress. Blake kept a

tight grip on his arm, apparently oblivious of his chum's efforts to release himself.

"Blake, deah boy, I must have my eyeglass, you know."

"Can't you see without it?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas, but—"

"But rats!" said Blake cheerfully.

And the School House fellows joined the New House crowd, who were waiting at the gates for them, and the whole party went streaming down the road. And then the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lighted up suddenly as he groped in his pocket.

"It's all wight!" he exclaimed.

"What's all right?"

"I've got another in my pocket."

And Arthur Augustus jammed the monocle in his eye, and walked on cheerfully.

CHAPTER 2.

A Sudden Surprise!

IT was a glorious afternoon. The sun glistened on the fresh green leaves of the wood, and fell in golden pools on the greensward under the trees.

The St. Jim's Scouts were in great spirits. The dim recesses of the wood echoed with their merry voices.

Tom Merry called a halt in a deep green glade.

"Now, you fellows know the programme," he said. "Gussy and I have got to have five minutes start, and then you track us down. If we keep out of your hands and get back to St. Jim's, you're beaten. Remember that we are giddy foreign spies, scouting in advance of an invading army, and do your best."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys! And wumembah the motto of the Boy Scouts. 'Be pwepared—'"

"Oh, you won't get through!" said Jack Blake confidently. "We shall have to fix up something else after this. We shall lay you by the heels in ten minutes after the start."

"Weally, Blake—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't think you will," he remarked. "We shall give you plenty to do all the afternoon, I think, and when you get back to St. Jim's you'll find us having tea in the study."

"Rats!" said Blake promptly.

"The contest closes at five o'clock," continued Tom Merry. "If you haven't caught us by then, you go back to the school. But if you see us outside the gates, we're still liable to capture. That clear?"

"Clear as mud," said Monty Lowther genially.

"Who's going to be left in command, then?" asked Figgins of the New House.

Blake smiled.

"I don't think there's much doubt on that point," he said.

Figgins nodded.

"Well, I suppose not," he said. "Of course, it will have to be a New House chap."

"Now don't you be a fathead!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "I'm Scout-leader, I think, and you chaps have to obey orders. I name the commanding officer."

"I'm willing to give somebody a thick ear who says it ought not to be a New House chap," said Figgins generously.

"Order! I leave Blake in command."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"Against the rules for a Scout to tell his leader not to be funny," said Kerr of the New House. "Especially when he can't help it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" roared the commander-in-chief. "I leave Figgins second in command. Now, no House rows while I haven't got my eye on you, you know. Five minutes start, and then you've got to track us down. Ready, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then!"

And Tom Merry and D'Arcy disappeared into the wood.

Figgins took out his watch to time the start. Two or three other fellows took out watches. Fatty Wynn of the Fourth took out a packet of sandwiches. Meanwhile, the two "hares" plunged into the depths of the wood.

"Pway be careful not to leave any twacks, Tom Mewwy, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, as Tom pushed back a clinging mass of brambles.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry. "You've left two big hoof-marks here! Look!"

"Bai Jove, I didn't observe that the ground was so soft!"

"Use your eyes!" said his leader severely. "Now, follow me!"

Tom Merry swung himself into the lower branches of a big tree. Arthur Augustus fastened his eyeglass into his eye and looked after him in surprise.

"Bai Jove, there's no time for playin' twicks now, Tom Mewwy!" he expostulated.

"Ass! Follow me!"

"What for?"

"We're going this way for a bit to puzzle the pack."

"Bai Jove, it will be howwibly wuff on our clothes!" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "And those bwanches are vewy dirty to take hold of."

"I see you've forgotten your kid gloves," said the chief Scout sarcastically. "Don't you remember the motto—'Be prepared'?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If you stand there talking much longer the pack will be on the back of your neck," said the Shell fellow pleasantly. "The time's up now, and they've started."

Arthur Augustus sighed. His Boy Scout costume was a picture to behold—so clean and neat and elegant it was. But evidently it had to be sacrificed; and D'Arcy, remembering that he was training himself to defend his native land some day, heroically nerved himself for the sacrifice. With his eyeglass fluttering loose at the end of its cord, he swung himself into the tree.

Tom Merry worked along the branch, where it penetrated the branches of the next tree, and swung himself from one to the other. The trees grew very thickly in this part of the wood, and progress was easy for an active lad with plenty of nerve. Tom Merry had plenty of nerve; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy feared nothing but spoiling his hands. But suddenly Tom Merry found that his companion was stopping behind.

He turned his head and peered through the foliage. He could see an elegant leg among the leaves; but that was all that was visible of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Why don't you come on?" he called out, in a suppressed voice.

"I'm caught, deah boy."

"Caught! What's the matter?"

"My beastly monocle has caught in the bwanches!"

"Jerk it."

"If I bwreak the stwing the glass will be lost."

"Lose it, then, fathead! What does it matter?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Buck up, you chump! The pack are lookin' for us now!"

"Pway wait a minute!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"You fearful ass!" he murmured.

"I wufuse to be called a feahful ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Will you come on?"

"Yaas, when I've released my eyeglass."

"Don't jaw; they may hear your voice!"

"Vewy well, deah boy, I won't say a word. In the cirms, it would be more pwudent not to speak to one anothah, deah boy. Don't you think so?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently, as he struggled with the refractory monocle.

"You chump! What are you doing now?"

"Extwactin' my eyeglass."

"Will you come on?"

"Pway don't call out like that, Tom Mewwy. It would be much more cautious not to uttiah a word. I think we had better keep our mouths shut, deah boy, as sound twavels vewy far in the open air, you know, and they may hear us. It would be awfully wotten to be caught in the first quartah of an hour, deah boy. I think—"

"Shut up!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Certainly, deah boy! That's what I'm wecommandin'," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "I considah—"

"You awful ass! Keep your silly head shut, and come on!"

"It's all wight now."

And the eyeglass having been rescued, Arthur Augustus crawled along the branch, and joined the leader in the next tree.

Tom Merry eyed him grimly.

"Now, buck up, deah boy!" said D'Arcy briskly. "Mustn't waste time, you know. And be sure you don't talk. I think—"

"If you don't shut up," breathed Tom Merry. "I'll hammer you! Do you understand that?"

"I should wufuse to be hammahed, deah boy. I—"

"Coo-ee!"

The signal cry rang through the distant woods. Tom Merry started.

"That's Kangaroo!" he exclaimed.

"They're getting near. I fancy they lost our track when we got into the tree."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!"

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to make for the Poacher's Glade first, and lie low for a bit till they're quite off the track. Shut up, and come on!"

The juniors worked their way along the thick, heavy branches, pushing through the twigs and foliage. D'Arcy had put his eyeglass into his pocket now, so he was not caught again by the string, and the two Scouts made good progress.

Tom Merry dropped to the ground at last, in a track that wound through the heart of the wood. They pressed on fast, treading lightly in order to leave no telltale tracks for the pack to pick up.

Deep in the heart of the wood was a deep depression of the ground which was called the Poacher's Glade. There was a story that a poacher had been shot there upon some occasion, and superstitious people in the vicinity had fancied that his spirit had been seen

revisiting the spot where he had met his death.

But the juniors did not trouble their heads about the ghost story. The two Scouts pressed into the glade, down the steep declivity clothed with young trees and thick bushes.

Arthur Augustus gave a dismayed glance sometimes downward at his clothes. As they pressed on, they listened keenly for sounds to indicate whether the pack were near. Far in the distance came faintly the cry of the Australian junior:

"Coo-ee!"

"Good way off!" said Tom Merry. "They're spreading out to keep us from getting out of the wood towards Wayland. They're bound to beat this glade for us as they come through, I think, but they won't find us. We're going to lie low here."

"In covah, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather! They'll miss us, and when they're past we'll simply get out and walk back to the school!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"It'll be good exercise for them, beating the wood from end to end," grinned the Shell fellow. "And when they get back they'll find us having tea. This way."

Tom Merry knew the wood like a book. He paused at a spot where heavy thickets clothed an abrupt rise in the ground.

The acclivity was at least fifty feet, and almost as steep as the wall of a house. Tom Merry seemed to be scanning the thickets for a passage through, and Arthur Augustus tapped him on the arm.

"You can't get through there, deah boy!" he said.

"Why not?"

"The gwound wises on the othah side. It's a vegulah hill."

Tom Merry snorted.

"I know that, ass! There's a hollow there like a cave. I found it by accident one day, and I remember it's close here somewhere. Hark!"

A sudden sound came through the wood, close at hand in the thick trees. It was a low, musical whistle—evidently a signal.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy looked at one another in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That doesn't sound like one of the fellows. I've novah heard that whistle before."

"It was a signal."

"Yaas, but—"

"Might be other Scouts practising here," said Tom Merry. "Might be the Grammar School bounders. Anyway, they won't find us."

He drew aside a heavy mass of foliage, and a dark opening in the hillside was revealed. There was a slight sound behind the bushes, and D'Arcy uttered an exclamation.

"There's somebody in there, Tom Mewwy."

"Only a rabbit or a stoat."

Tom Merry plunged in through the thicket and D'Arcy followed him. The great mass of foliage fell back into place, and completely concealed their retreat. It would have been difficult for any searcher to guess that anybody had passed through that mass of vegetation into the apparently impenetrable hillside.

It was very dim in the hollow under the hill, and to the juniors, fresh from the daylight, it seemed densely black.

Tom Merry stumbled over a trailing root and fell forward on his hands and

knees. As he did so a hand gripped his shoulder from the darkness, and the junior, with a sudden start and a thrill like ice in his veins, felt a steel point against his neck, and a voice, soft and low and menacing, muttered in his ears some strange tongue he did not understand:

"Silenzio o la morte!"

CHAPTER 3.

An Amazing Encounter!

"SILENZIO!"

The word was hissed again, and the sharp point penetrated a fraction of an inch into Tom Merry's skin. The junior did not attempt to rise. The grip that was upon him was like iron, and the knife was at his neck; and although he did not understand the words that were spoken, he understood what they implied.

He remained quite still.

D'Arcy came stumbling after him into the cave.

Then the grasp upon Tom Merry was relaxed as his unknown assailant saw that he had two to deal with.

"Bai Jove!"

A dark figure leaped up, and Arthur Augustus was grasped and hurled into the cave. He stumbled against the damp earthen wall.

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

The dark figure was between the two juniors and the narrow opening of the earthen cave. In the dim light they saw a powerfully built man with a

swarthy face—swarthy but strangely pale. His eyes seemed to burn in their sockets; and they saw, with shudders, that there was a streak of red across his cheek—a stain of blood. There was a glimmer of steel in his right hand, and the hand was raised in menace.

The man was evidently a foreigner—a Spaniard or Italian. And the two amazed juniors, utterly astounded as they were, recovered confidence a little as they saw that the man was in a state of greater fear than they could be.

As he stood, barring them from the entrance with uplifted weapon, his head was thrown back, and he was listening with painful intensity for some sound from the wood.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

The foreigner made a fierce gesture.

"Silenzio, sotto pena della vita!"

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

The juniors were silent. It was easy enough to guess what "silenzio" meant. It was still easier to read the threat of the shining steel in the dusky, upraised hand.

From the wood came a low, penetrating sound—that soft, clear whistle which the juniors had heard while they were outside the hidden cave.

At the sound of it the Italian's face blanched yet whiter, and the hand that held the knife trembled.

"Silenzio!" he murmured, but his voice was now shaken, and more pleading than threatening in its tone.

The juniors stood mute. They were lost in wonder.

Tom Merry had expected to find the

hidden cave in the hillside untenanted, unless, indeed, by some animal of the wood. He was utterly astounded at this encounter.

Foreigners were not common in the quiet neighbourhood of Rylcombe, and to find a foreigner, evidently wounded, armed with a deadly weapon, and in a state of mortal fear—that was a surprise the juniors could not easily recover from. They stood and stared at the Italian in blank wonder.

The man was evidently being searched for by enemies. That was the meaning of the signal whistle. Who were they? Who was he? What did it all mean? What tragic mystery had the two Boy Scouts suddenly stumbled upon?

"Silenzio! Silenzio, ragazzi!"

There was a sound of footsteps in the glade outside the cave, a brushing of the thickets, a murmur of indistinguishable voices.

Closer the voices came.

The Italian lowered his upraised hand. He bent his head towards the juniors and pointed towards the screen of thickets.

"Silenzio, signorini. Sono morto se trovato."

The juniors could not understand the words, but they were in no doubt as to what the man meant. And, in spite of the rough reception he had given them, they did not feel hostile towards him. A man in fear of his life could be excused for a little roughness. And the man clearly was in fear of his life.

The voices came nearer. The juniors were silent save for their hurried breathing. The Italian seemed hardly

Levison and Mellish were coming upstairs as Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus came dashing down. There was a violent collision, and Mellish went flying downstairs with a wild yell. He grabbed at D'Arcy to save himself, and the swell of St. Jim's went rolling down with him!



to breathe. Every nerve in his body seemed to be bent upon listening. The voices could be heard now, speaking in a tongue the juniors could not understand, but which was evidently quite clear to the ears of their strange companion:

"Non e qui."

"E sicuro?"

"Per bacco! Ho cercato, Pietro—non equi: andiamo."

"Andiamo!" responded the second voice.

And the footsteps passed on.

The sounds died away in the glade. The Italian maintained the same attitude till every sound was still. Then he drew a deep breath, or rather a sob. The knife was trembling in his hand.

"They're gone, whoever they are," said Tom Merry.

The man started. It seemed as if, in his mortal terror, he had forgotten the presence of the juniors. He fixed his fierce black eyes upon them now.

"Siete soli qui?" he demanded.

"I don't understand you."

"Bai Jove! He's speakin' in Italian," said Arthur Augustus. "I know some Italian from singin' songs in it, you know. Fowwaps I can pitch it to him in his own lingo."

"Try!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Questi e quella per me pari sono," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully to the Italian.

The man stared, as well he might. D'Arcy's words were the first line of an operatic solo, and they meant:

"This and that one are the same to me." But they were Italian, at all events, and the best that D'Arcy could do in the circumstances.

"Non capisco," muttered the man.

"Bai Jove! The chap doesn't understand his own language," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Don't you speak English?" asked Tom Merry.

"Speak little English," said the man, with evident difficulty. "English spoken—yes. Me Italian. Me Maro Luigi."

"Maro Luigi!" repeated Tom Merry.

"What are you doing here?"

The Italian waved his hand towards the screen of thickets before the cave.

"I nemici!" he said.

"That means enemies," said Arthur Augustus. "He means that he's got enemies who are lookin' for him."

"Yes, so it seems," said Tom Merry.

"But I'm blessed if I understand it. I don't see why he can't apply to the police for protection!"

"Chi e Lei?"

"Eh?"

"Who—you—are?" articulated the Italian, grappling bravely with the difficulties of the English language.

"Me honest man—tutto onesto. Me Maro Luigi. Un marinaio."

"That's a sailor," said D'Arcy, delighted at being able to comprehend.

"He's a sailorman, Tom Merry. We're schoolboys, my deah chap—we belong to a giddy school—"

"I don't suppose that he'll understand what a giddy school is!" grinned Tom Merry. "We belong to a school near here."

"Scuola?" said the man, evidently understanding. "Buono! Why you come?"

"He wants to know what we've come here for, deah boy."

"We Boy Scouts," explained Tom Merry. "Having a run in the woods. We didn't know you were here."

"Haden't the slightest ideah, you know."

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"We wouldn't have disturbed you if we had known," said Tom Merry. "You'd better put that knife away, my man. People are not allowed to carry knives in England."

"Wathah not; and you might cut somebody with it, you know."

The man looked at them in a puzzled way, and then put the knife into his belt.

"You no stay here?" he asked.

"No, we get out," said Tom Merry.

"You say nozzing?"

"He wants us not to mention that we've seen him," said D'Arcy. "I suppose we can undertake to do that, deah boy?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Me Maro Luigi, Italiano di Livorno."

"Italian from Leghorn," said D'Arcy, in the role of interpreter. "I dare say he came in a ship from Leghorn to Southampton—lots of Italians do. But I weally cannot guess how he got here."

"Zey look for me—cercare," explained the man. "Look for to kill—capite?"

Tom Merry started.

"Those fellows are looking for you—to kill you?" he asked.

"Si, si, signorino," Maro Luigi nodded violently. "Si, si, certo!"

"Who are they?"

"I miei nemici!"

"His enemies, he means," said D'Arcy. "Yaas, I suppose they must be enemies if they're lookin' for the poor chap to kill him. I should certainly wegard it as unfriendly, to say the least."

"Ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Why don't you go to the police for protection?" asked Tom Merry.

The man shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Non sarebbe—what you say—no good!" he replied. "Non capite—you no understand!"

"No, I'm blessed if I do!" said Tom Merry. "Are you going to stay here?"

Maro Luigi nodded.

"Have you got nothing to eat?"

"No."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"Non so."

"What on earth does that mean?" asked Tom Merry, puzzled.

"He means he doesn't know," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, but you can't stay here without any food!" said Tom Merry. "You'd better go to the police!"

"Non puo westar e qui senza mangiare," said D'Arcy, grinding out Italian with as much difficulty as Maro Luigi found with the English. "You can't stay here without something to eat."

Luigi shrugged his shoulders again. Evidently hunger had no terrors for him in comparison with the mysterious "nemici," who were seeking him in the recesses of Rylcombe Wood.

"Shall I go to the police for you, and tell them how you're fixed?" asked Tom Merry.

Luigi shook his head energetically.

"No, no, signor! Ecco! Go 'vay viz yourself and say nozzing—zat is all zat I ask of you. You do zat, or is it zat!"

He touched the knife in his belt.

Tom Merry nodded at him sternly.

"You needn't threaten us," he said. "We're not afraid of your knife."

"Wathah not!"

"Knife or no knife, you wouldn't find it easy to handle the two of us," said Tom Merry, grasping his staff. "But if

you're an honest man, we don't want to do you any harm. If you choose to stay here in hiding, I suppose it's your own business, and we'll say nothing about having seen you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You say nozzings?"

"Yes."

"Grazie, signorini, grazie—tanto grazie!"

"That means many thanks, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with the gentle smile of superior knowledge. "It's all wight, my man. We'll keep mum."

"Zen you go?"

"Yaas, we're goin'."

"Buono, and say nozzing—nozzing?"

"Nothing," said Tom Merry.

The juniors moved towards the screen of thickets at the mouth of the cave. Then Tom Merry turned back. In the pallid, troubled face of the Italian, he thought he could read that the man had suffered, and his impression of him was that he was an honest man.

"Have you been here long?" he asked.

"Non capisco?"

"Have you been here a long time—how many hours?"

"Ah! Venti ore!"

"Twenty hours!" said D'Arcy.

"Have you had nothing to eat?"

"Niente," said Maro Luigi, with a shake of the head.

Tom Merry drew a packet of sandwiches from his pocket. The man's eyes fastened upon them with a hungry gleam. Tom Merry held them out to him, and he seized them, and devoured them with evident hunger.

"Grazie, grazie!" he murmured.

"I wish I had some more to give you," said Tom Merry pityingly. "Look here, are you going to stop here to-night?"

"Si, signor!"

"And to-morrow?"

"Si, signor!"

"But you'll starve?"

"No morri di fame—I not die of ze hunger," said Maro Luigi.

"By Jove! Look here, you can't stay here without any grub!" said Tom Merry uneasily. "What say you, Gussy?"

"It would be vewy wuff, deah boy!" said D'Arcy sympathetically.

"He looks to me like an honest man," said Tom Merry in a low voice. "The men looking for him weren't police, anyway. If he had done anything against the law, it wouldn't be Italians who would be looking for him, but English bobbies. I dare say it's some row—some giddy vendetta, you know; they go in for that kind of thing in Italy. If the poor beast is going to stick here over to-morrow, he ought to have something to eat. It's up to the Boy Scouts to help strangers in distress!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Would you like me to bring you some food?" asked Tom Merry.

The Italian grinned.

"The signorino is good—much good!" he said. "But not possible. If zey see him, zen he come—"

"They won't see me," said Tom Merry. "Look here, I'll come back after dark, and bring you some tommy."

"Cho cosa e tommy?" asked the Italian, puzzled by that word.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I mean food—something to eat."

"Qualche cosa per mangiare," explained Arthur Augustus.

"If ze signor be so good—so kind—me tank—tank so much!"

"All right!" said Tom Merry. "It's settled. Good-bye!"

"A riverderci!" said Maro Luigi.

"That's an revoir," said D'Arcy. "An revoir, deah boy!" And the juniors plunged through the thickets, and the Italian within the cave carefully closed again the screen of bushes that had saved him once more from his enemies.

CHAPTER 4.

Caught!

TOM MERRY and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stared at one another blankly when they were in the sunlight again. It seemed like some strange dream that had happened.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, speaking first. "I wegard that as a vewy we remarkable occuwnence, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"I should jolly well say so!" said Tom Merry. "I hope we haven't undertaken to help a rascal! But he looked like an honest man, and he was hurt, too. It's up to us to see that he doesn't starve in that blessed cave, anyway!"

"Yans, watah!"

Tom Merry scanned the trees round them.

"I wonder where the fellows are——"

"Coo-ee!"

"Bai Jove! That's Kangawoo!"

"Coo-ee!"

Tom Merry looked round anxiously.

The Cornstalk junior's signal was answered from different directions, and Tom Merry realised that during the time they had been in the earth cave the Scouts had been closing in on them. They had left the place of concealment now, and could not return to it, and they had to take their chance.

"Bethah wun for it," said Arthur Augustus. "We mustn't be beaten, deah boy. It was beastly unfortunate wunnin' into that foweyn chap just now!"

"Can't be helped. This way!"

Tom Merry led the way through the wood. He advanced very cautiously, peering through the foliage as he advanced. The enemy were close at hand now, and some of them might be sighted at any moment. A figure passed before Tom Merry's eyes on the other side of the bush, and he stopped suddenly and made a signal to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's halted behind him in the underbrush, breathing hard.

"Is it one of the boundahs, deah boy?" he whispered.

"It's somebody; I can't see."

"Might be one of those Italian chaps——"

"I'm going to see."

Tom Merry cautiously parted the leaves before him and looked. A man had halted within six paces of him, knee-deep in ferns and bracken. He was a powerfully built man in the garb of a sailorman, with an officer's peaked cap. He had a very keen face, and a very sharp and prominent nose, and little grey eyes set close together.

He was looking full towards Tom Merry, and the junior felt for a moment that the man must see him, but he did not; the leaves and twigs hid the St. Jim's junior from sight. The sailorman was looking about him keenly, too. Tom Merry wondered whether he had anything to do with the party who were seeking Maro Luigi.

"I guess he's vamoosed!"

The man uttered the words aloud, with a savage snapping of the teeth. They were enough to enlighten Tom Merry as to his nationality.

"Bai Jove! He's aftah that chap in

the cave, too, Tom Mewwy," D'Arcy murmured in the Shell fellow's ear.

"Yes. Hush!"

The man swung on again through the wood, trampling down the thick ferns, and brushing against the bushes. There was a sudden yell, and three or four figures came leaping through the bracken.

"Got one of them!"

"Collar him!"

"Hurrah!"

The first voice was Jack Blake's: the second was Figgins'. The St. Jim's juniors fairly leaped upon the American sailorman and bore him with a bump to the earth. In the thick underbrush they had not seen him clearly, and they had acted rather hastily, under the hurried impression that he was one of the "hares." They had not expected to meet anybody else in the shady depths of the wood.

There was a startled yell from the sailorman as he went down, with three or four juniors sprawling over him.

"Maro Luigi! It's you, you swab! Why, what——"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Figgins. "It's not Tom Merry—or Gussy, either! It's a man!"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

Tom Merry chuckled softly in the concealment of the bushes, and D'Arcy smiled. They were very silent; the Scouts did not guess how near they were.

"You young scoundrels!" roared the sailorman, sitting up in the grass and ferns and glaring and blinking at the juniors. "You—you— Lucky for you I didn't draw a bead on you!"

"Well, you are an ass, Blake, to make a mistake like that!" said Figgins.

"Didn't you make the same mistake, you fathead?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, don't argue!" said Figgins loftily. "I say, sir, we're sorry we bumped you over. We took you for somebody we're looking for."

"Don't often see strangers in this wood," explained Kerr. "We're Boy

Scouts at scouting practice, looking for some chaps. We're sorry."

"Yes, rather, sir!"

The man regained his feet with a scowl, muttering angrily; but his expression changed suddenly, and he spoke civilly to the Scouts.

"Well, I guess it's all right if it was a mistake. Who might you be looking for in this wood?"

"Some more Scouts who are dodging us," explained Figgins.

"Oh! Have you seen any strangers about here, by any chance?" asked the American. "I'm looking for somebody, too—a friend. Have you seen anybody?"

"Not a soul, excepting ourselves," said Figgins.

"Not an Italian?"

"Italian!" said Jack Blake in astonishment. "No fear! Don't see many Italians in this part of the country."

"Thank you, my lad. Never mind about knocking me over; accidents will happen. So-long!"

The American sailorman plunged away through the wood.

"Well, that was a sell!" said Blake.

"You are an ass, Figgins!"

"Awful sell!" said Figgins. "You are a chump, Blake!"

"You're a pair of chumps, if you ask me!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, we didn't ask you," said Blake. "Now, don't waste time jawing. We've got to find those bounders before five o'clock. It would be too bad to let them dodge us."

"Can't let 'em dodge us," said Manners, "especially that ass Gussy; it would be too rotten——"

"Weally, Mannahs——"

Manners jumped.

"Hallo!"

"Why, he's here!" roared Blake.

Tom Merry bestowed a glare upon his companion. Arthur Augustus, by his involuntary remark, had given the game away with a vengeance. Blake & Co. were rushing into the thicket, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy were surrounded in a moment. The Scouts set up a yell of victory.

"Got 'em!"

His RECORD CONDEMNED HIM!

★
The Boy
Who Tried
To Make
Good!



Anybody seen Prout's ten-pound note? Up and down Greyfriars the question is being asked—but nobody can supply the answer. Suspicion falls on Eric Wilmot who, expelled from his last school, has come to Greyfriars

resolved to blot the bitter past out of his mind. You must read "HIS RECORD CONDEMNED HIM!" Frank Richards' latest and greatest yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.

The MAGNET

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"Here they are!"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Well caught!"
 Tom Merry made a grimace.
 "Well, you've got us!" he said good-naturedly. "If anybody wants to boil Gussy in oil I won't say no!"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What did you give us away for, you ass?" roared Tom Merry.

"I refuse to be called an ass! I spoke because Mannahs made use of an opprobrious expression concernin' me, and—"

"I only called you an ass," said Manners cheerfully. "In the circumstances, I withdraw the word ass."

"Vewy good!"
 "And substitute the words blithering idiot!" went on Manners calmly.

"Weally, Mannahs—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, I'm getting pretty peckish," remarked Fatty Wynn. "Let's get back to tea. We've caught the hares, and I'm hungry. Didn't you have some sandwiches with you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Fatty."
 "Have you eaten them?"
 "No."

"Going to eat them?" continued Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry shook his head.
 "Then you can hand them over to me," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm awfully hungry. I always get extra hungry in this April weather, you know."

"Sorry, Fatty."
 "Oh, dash it all, you can hand the sandwiches over if you're not going to eat them!" said Fatty Wynn warmly.
 "Don't be a giddy dog in the manger!"

"Haven't got them now," said Tom Merry.

"Well, my hat! Do you mean to say that you've lost them—good beef sandwiches?" Fatty Wynn exclaimed, in horror and disgust.

"No; not exactly lost them. You see, I—I gave them away."

Tom Merry coloured a little as he spoke. He did not intend to mention the man hiding in the earth cave in the Poacher's Glade, but already he was finding out the difficulties of keeping a secret.

"Gave them away!" said Fatty Wynn, in dismay. "Well, you must be an ass!"

"Let's get back to the coll, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's vewy nearly tea-time now."

And the Scouts started for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

A Secret to Keep!

TOM MERRY wore a very thoughtful expression as he came into his study for tea, after the return of the Boy Scouts to St. Jim's. He could not help thinking of the man hidden in the earth cave in the wood. The pale, scared face, the burning eyes, the shaking hand with the knife in it, seemed to haunt him.

He had promised to help the man, and he did not regret having made the promise. But it would be a difficult one to keep—he knew that. For he had promised to keep the whole matter a secret; and it was not easy to keep secrets from Manners and Lowther.

The Terrible Three of the Shell were inseparable, and they were almost always together, and Tom Merry knew that it would not be easy to get out without Manners and Lowther knowing.

all about it. And they would naturally expect some information upon the subject.

Once before he had had a secret from them—when he was mixed up in a very unpleasant business with Cutts of the Fifth—and at that time he had resolved never to have another. But this affair had happened unexpectedly, and he could not refuse the fugitive's plea to him to keep the secret of his hiding-place from all.

But the knowledge that he was keeping a secret from his chums weighed somewhat upon Tom Merry's mind.

How was Arthur Augustus likely to keep the secret, too? Arthur Augustus was the soul of honour, of course, and incapable of breaking his word. But although he prided himself upon being a fellow of tact and judgment, he was by no means a good hand at keeping a secret. He was far more likely to show by his manner that he had a secret to keep, and to keep it with such elaborate care that everybody would soon be on the track of it.

"Aren't the eggs good?" Monty Lowther suddenly asked, as Tom Merry was helping in the preparation for tea in the study.

Tom started.
 "Yes; they're all right, Monty," he replied.

"And the saveloys—are they all serene?"

"I think so."
 "Nothing wrong with the tarts?"
 "Not that I've noticed."

"Tea all right?"
 "Yes," said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"What on earth are you getting at, Monty?"

"Then if the grub's all right, what are you scowling about?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Was I scowling?" asked Tom Merry.
 "You were."

"Well, I didn't mean to be."

"Perhaps it was a thoughtful frown," conceded Monty Lowther. "It looked like a scowl, but it may have been simply a thoughtful frown. What were you thoughtful frowning about?"

Tom Merry laughed.
 "The eggs are done," he said, turning them out of the frying-pan.

"Nothing gone wrong, Tommy?" asked Manners.

"Nothing at all."

"You haven't spoken for a quarter of an hour, that's all," said Manners, with a glance at the clock.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Never mind; I'll talk nineteen to the dozen now, and make up for it," he said. "You wouldn't have caught us to-day if Gussy hadn't given us away like a champion ass!"

Monty Lowther wagged a forefinger at his chum.

"Looks suspicious, changing the subject like that," he said. "Tommy, my infant, are you keeping secrets from your kind uncles again?"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry.

"Are you getting mixed up again with Cutts of the Fifth, and his dead certs and sure snips, and information straight from the horse's mouth?" demanded Lowther.

"No, ass; I haven't spoken to Cutts."

"Well, that's all right, then," said Manners. "Can't have our only ewe lamb going and getting himself into trouble again."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry.
 "Tea's ready. Let's have tea, and not so much gas."

And the Terrible Three sat down round the tea-table cheerfully. The setting sun was glowing on the window,

and the old quad looked very green and picturesque outside.

A tap at the door interrupted the Terrible Three's conversation. The door opened, and an eyeglass gleamed into the room. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded affably to the Terrible Three.

"Pway excuse me, deah boys. I didn't know you were havin' tea," he remarked.

"Come in, my son," said Monty Lowther. "There's enough for four, and you're as welcome as the flowers in May, or the flours in a mill."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy, but I've had tea in Study No. 6," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I just looked in to speak to Tom Mewwy, that's all."

"Well, you can speak to him—no law against that."

D'Arcy shook his head.
 "It's all wight," he said. "I'll come in again."

"Oh, pile in!" said Manners. "I can eat while you talk. I don't eat with my ears, you know. Same with Lowther."

"Just the same," said Lowther solemnly.

"Pway excuse me, deah boys, but I have a little mattah to discuss with Tom Mewwy all by himself," D'Arcy explained.

"Hallo! Secrets again?" growled Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What trouble have you been getting into?" demanded Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I have not been gettin' into any twouble at all, and I fail to compwehend the dwift of your wemark."

"Tommy is not allowed to have secrets from his kind uncles," Lowther explained.

"Oh rot!" said Tom Merry. "Don't play the giddy goat, Lowther. Gussy, old man, you ought to have a prize medal for putting your foot in it."

"I am sowwy if I have put my foot in it," said D'Arcy, in surprise. "I have not said a word on the subject so far."

"Oh dear!"

"And I shall be vewy careful not to do so, you may be sure," said D'Arcy. "A pwomise is a pwomise, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry groaned. The fact that there was a secret to keep was out now, and that was the first step, and half-way towards the secret itself being out.

Manners and Lowther were looking very peculiar. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made the chums of the Shell a graceful bow, and retired from the study. Manners and Lowther fixed their eyes upon Tom Merry in a way that made him feel very uncomfortable.

"More blessed secrets," said Lowther. Tom Merry turned very red.

"It's really nothing," he said. "Gussy is an awful ass, that's all."

"Nothing to do with Cutts of the Fifth this time?"

"Nothing—honour bright!"

"I don't want to be inquisitive," said Manners, "but really, Tommy—"

"Yes, really, Tommy—" said Lowther.

Tom Merry shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"It's really nothing," he repeated, "only—it happens to be a secret. But it's not any kind of trouble—not for us, anyway. It—it's connected with a chap outside the school—only I can't tell you about it, because I promised. See?"

"No, I don't see," said Monty Lowther. "But never mind, let it drop!"

But you're not to go round looking for trouble again."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I shan't do that!" he said.

And the subject dropped, and no more was said about it as the chums of the Shell went on with their tea. But the Terrible Three were feeling constrained—they never had secrets from one another, and this one cast a shadow upon their spirits. Tom Merry would have given a great deal to be able to explain to his chums, but his promise to the man in the cave held him bound, and he could say nothing. Tea in Tom Merry's study finished in uncomfortable silence.

CHAPTER 6.

D'Arcy Keeps a Secret!

JACK BLAKE fixed his eyes upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and watched him with growing curiosity. Arthur Augustus seemed quite unconscious of it. The swell of St. Jim's was sitting at the table turning out his pockets. He was extracting coins from various pockets, and piling them up before him, and counting them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in an unusual state of hardupness, as a matter of fact.

"Thwice shillin's," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was never good at arithmetic. "Two sixpences—that's one shillin'—and nine pennies and four halfpennies—that makes three-and-fourpence—no, it doesn't, it make's one-and-ninepence-halfpenny—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

Arthur Augustus glanced up from the distressing problem.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why don't you work it out in algebra?" asked Digby, grinning. "A is the shilling, B is the sixpence, C is the nine pennies, and X is the sum you arrive at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If A added to B equals C, then A C and B X equal E J and K H," said Blake solemnly. "Then you add four, and take away the number you first thought of, and there you are."

"You uthah ass, Blake!"

"What are you adding up your cash for?" demanded Blake. "This is the first time I've seen you playing the giddy miser."

"I trust you do not regard me as a misah, deah boy. I am twyin' to make out exactly how much money I've got, because I want some money for a vewy partichular purpose."

"Well, keep on counting it, and it may grow more and more," said Blake. "If you keep on all the evening, you'll have enough to buy a motor-bike by the time you've finished. Is it a motor-bike you want to buy?"

"No, you duffah! I want to go to the tuckshop and get as much gwub as I can for the money I've got. It's extremely awkward that I should be short of weady money at a time like this!"

"At a time like what?" demanded Herries.

"This, deah boy."

"But what is there very particular about this very special time?" asked Blake, puzzled. "We've had tea."

"I was not thinkin' of tea in this studiy, deah boy."

"Well, if you're thinking about tea to-morrow, something will turn up," said Blake. "In fact, I feel like Mr. Micawber—I have every confidence that something will turn up, my dear

Copperfield. I'm expecting a remittance to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be too late. I must get in the gwub to-day."

"You don't mean to say that you're standing a feed outside the study at a time when the finances are in such low water?" Blake asked indignantly.

"Not exactly a feed, deah boy."

"Then what—"

"Two shillin's and two sixpences—that's two shillin's, isn't it?" said D'Arcy. "Suppose you add eight half-pennies, and a threepenny-piece, then the—"

"Then how many apples would the farmer have left?" said Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't intewrupt me with fivlous wemarks, Dig. I am not vewy good at awithmetic," D'Arcy confessed. "It is much simplah to pay for things in notes, and then the people will give you change, you know, and they have to do all the weekonin'. That is a vewy simple method, you know. If a man's sellin' you somethin', it's up to him to do all the weekonin', I considah. But it comes awkward, you know, when you wun short of money."

"I suppose it does," agreed Blake, with a grin. "I could suggest a better method still. Pay for everything in five-pound notes, and don't stop for the change. That would be beautifully simple, and it would make you popular with the tradesmen."

"Yaas, I dare say it would," agreed D'Arcy unsuspiciously. "But a chap would have to be awfully wick to do that, you know, though it certainly would save a lot of twouble. The twouble now is that I want to buy some things, and I haven't enough money. It's a doocid awkward posish, you know. It stuwck me that it must be simply fivhtful to be a vewy poor chap, and to have to work these pwoblems out ewwy day. Suppose, for instance, you have to work for your livin'. Lots of chaps do. You get, say, a pound a week, and you have to pay rent and wates and income tax and things, as well as these blessed insurwance stamps. It must be a feahful pwoblem for a chap with a wogulah pound a week, and with-out a govornah to wite to for money."

Blake gurgled.

"It would be rather a tenses," he admitted. "But chaps on a pound a week do not usually keep more than three or four servants at a time, and they don't have to pay income tax, you know. And they get an old-age pension at the age of ninety-five—or a hundred and five. I forget."

"Pewwaps you wouldn't mind countin' up the money for me, Blake, and tellin' me how much it is, deah boy."

"Certainly," said Blake, with a grin. And he performed the great feat with perfect ease. "You've got three shillings and ninepence-halfpenny."

"Bai Jove, that's not vewy much! But I dare say Tom Merry has got some, and it's as much up to him as to me."

"What is?" asked Blake, Herries, and Digby together.

"Gettin' the gwub, you know."

"You and Tom Merry are standing a feed to somebody?" asked Blake, mystified.

"Yaas, in a way."

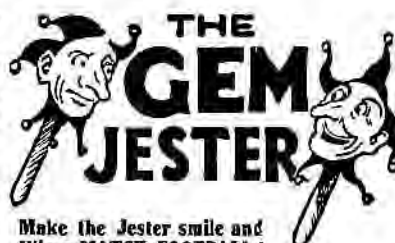
"Who is it?"

"It's a—a—a person you know."

"Go hon! What kind of a person?" demanded Blake. "First, second, or third person, and singular or plural?"

"Weally, you ass—"

(Continued on the next page.)



Make the Jester smile and Win a MATCH FOOTBALL!

Send your Joke to The GEM Jester, 1, Tallis House, John Carpenter Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

AGED.

A lad of fourteen went to the manager of a League team and requested a trial. He was refused and told to come back when he was older. A week later the lad turned up again. "But I told you to try again when you were older," said the manager. "I know, sir; but seeing the team play on Saturday put years on me!" A football has been awarded to N. Hughes, 97, Greenway Road, Taunton, Somerset.

SALESMANSHIP.

Customer: "You're very young to be left in charge of a chemist's shop. Have you a diploma?" Young Assistant (anxious to prove his mettle): "No, sir; but we've a preparation of our own just as good!" A football has been awarded to R. Wolstencroft, 5, Iona Street, Oldham.

KEEPING IT DARK.

First Office-boy: "Don't you ever have any holidays?" Second Office-boy: "I can never get away." First Office-boy: "Why? Can't the firm do without you?" Second Office-boy: "Yes, and that's just what I don't want them to find out!" A football has been awarded to G. Walker, 73, Longford Road, Chorlton-cum-Mardy, Manchester.

PERHAPS.

Prison Governor: "Convict No. 89, your work on these mailbags is disgusting!" Convict: "Very well, if you don't like my work, I'll leave at once!" A football has been awarded to D. Gazzard, 105, St. Thomas Road, Finsbury Park, London, N. 4.

A GOOD TURN.

Mother (to son who has just been to see a conjuring show): "Was the conjurer good, Tommy?" Tommy: "Good! Why, I lent him a dud half-crown, and he gave me a good one back!" A football has been awarded to K. Burnham, 22, Gosforth Road, Allerton, Liverpool 19.

BREAKING THE NEWS.

Teacher: "Which are the three quickest ways to send news?" Bright Boy: "By telephone, telegram, and tell a woman!" A special prize has been awarded to M. Provera, Box 159, Gordon Vale, North Queensland, Australia. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,469.

"If you are not wandering in your mind, would you mind explaining what all this is about?" asked Blake politely. Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I'm afraid I cannot, dear boy."

"Why not?"

"It's a secret."

"You're keeping a secret from this study?" demanded the three juniors together.

Blake rose to his feet.

"There's only one thing that will meet the case," he said, "and that's to bump our noble friend for his cheek. Collar him!"

"Pway don't be a wuff ass, Blake! It's a wathah important mattah, and I'm sowwy I can't take you fellows into my confidence, but I've given my word, you know—honah bwright! I can't possibly tell you about it, or I would, you know, at once. I pwomised the man not to say anythin', and so did Tom Mewwy. You see, we were both awfully sowwy for him, especially as he's in a stwange countwy, and can't speak English."

"Ho—him—who?" roared the perplexed Blake.

"The man, you know."

"What man?"

"That's a secret."

"And he can't speak English?" asked Blake diplomatically, feeling that he would learn more by drawing D'Arcy out than by bumping him.

"Hardly a word, dear boy."

"Then what language does he speak?"

"Italian, of course, as he's an Italian," said D'Arcy, in surprise. "You wouldn't expect him to speak Wussian, or Fwench, I suppose?"

"It's the organ-grinder in Wayland, I suppose," said Digby. "They're going to give him a leg-up. Blessed if I see any reason to make a mystery of it!"

"It is not the organ-gwindah in Wayland, Dig. He's a complete stwanghai in this part of the countwy, and Tom Mewwy and I were vewy surprised to see him there—vewy much indeed!"

"Where?" asked Blake.

"In the wood, you know, this aftahnoon."

"Well, my only hat!" said Blake. "You and Tom Merry have met an Italian in the wood this aftahnoon, and you're going to take him grub, and you haven't said a word about it!"

"Couldn't, dear boy. We pwomised to keep it a secret, and I'm jolly well not goin' to say a word about it, either," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "When you've got a secret to keep, it's wisah not to say a single word on the subject."

"Gussy, you talk like a giddy oracle," said Blake solemnly. "When I have any deadly secrets to keep, I shall hand them over to you to keep—I don't think! It would be as good as advertising them in the papers, and cheaper."

"We ally, Blake," expostulated D'Arcy, while Digby and Herries chuckled—"we ally, you know—"

"What's the Italian's name?" asked Blake.

"That's a secret, dear boy. In fact, I think it is better not to wifer to the fact that we met the Italian at all," said D'Arcy. "Pway don't ask me any questions, and I shall not have to wufuse to answah. I will get down to the tuck-shop now, before Mrs. Taggles closes, as I must have the grub to-night."

"Why to-night? You can't see the giddy Italian again till to-morrow, I suppose, can you?" asked Blake.

"I'm afraid I can't confide any details to you, dear boy. I'm sowwy. The Gem Library.—No. 1,469.

But, you see, a pwomise is a pwomise. Besides, I don't know how you youngsters would keep a secret!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. And the swell of St. Jim's gathered up the coins he had so carefully collected, and left the study.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at one another rather expressively.

"Well, if this doesn't take the cake," said Jack Blake, with emphasis. "Tom Merry and Gussy have met an Italian in the wood, and they're going to take him grub to-night. That means breaking bounds after lights out. What sort of idiotic trouble are those two duffers getting themselves mixed up in? One thing's jolly certain; Gussy's not going to break bounds at night, and get himself sacked from the school, to go and see any old Italians, not while his Uncle Blake is here to look after him. No fear!"

"No fear!" said Herries and Digby, with equal emphasis.

"We'd better go and see Tom Merry, and see what all this rot is about," said Blake, rising. "If he keeps secrets as carefully as Gussy, we shall know the whole story soon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Fourth quitted Study No. 6, and proceeded in search of Tom Merry, whom they ran to earth in the Common-room.

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus is Surprised!

TOM MERRY was standing by the fire by himself. Manners and Lowther were still in the study, but Tom Merry had not cared to remain with them. He had a very uncomfortable sense of awkwardness with his chums. It was not long since he had got into serious trouble through keeping a secret from them, and though this was quite a different matter, they could not know that. Tom Merry was thinking it over, with a wrinkled brow, when Blake, Herries, and Digby came into the Common-room, and marched up to him at once.

Tom Merry nodded to the Fourth Formers.

"What's all this rot?" asked Blake, coming to the point at once.

The Shell fellow looked surprised.

"What rot?" he asked naturally.

"Gussy is keeping some idiotic secret," said Blake, "and you're mixed up in it. We're not going to let Gussy play the giddy goat. Now tell us the whole story, like a good chap, and let's know what kind of trouble the ass is getting himself into."

Tom Merry turned red. He had not had much confidence in D'Arcy's powers of keeping a secret, and evidently his uneasiness had been well-founded. The proverb of the East says that whosoever would hide a secret, should conceal the fact that he has one to hide. But that was apparently beyond the elegant Fourth Former. D'Arcy kept his secret with such elaborate precautions that he might as well have confided it to the whole School House at once.

"Ha, he blusheth!" said Digby, watching Tom Merry's reddening face.

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said Tom Merry uneasily. "What has Gussy been telling you?"

"He hasn't been telling us anything—he's been keeping a secret," said Blake. "Keeping it so carefully that we've got about half of it, so far. It seems that you and he met somebody in the wood this aftahnoon while we were hunting you."

"The ass!"

"An Italian, it seems. Chap who can't speak English."

"Oh crumbs!"

"It's true, I suppose?"

"Yes, it's true."

"And Gussy has been counting up his cash, with a view to providing a feed for the man," said Blake. "What is it—some foreign tramp you want to help?"

"Not exactly that."

"Then what?"

"Don't jaw about it here," said Tom Merry hastily. "There's Mellish listening with all his ears. He's only pretending to read."

Jack Blake made a sudden dive for the poker in the grate, and whirled round towards Percy Mellish. Mellish made a jump out of his chair, and fled across the Common-room in alarm.

"There, that's all right!" said Blake. "Mellish can't hear now. And if Levison comes any nearer I'll prod him with the poker. Now go ahead and explain."

"I can't very well," said Tom Merry. "As Gussy has let out so much, I may as well tell you that we've seen a man who's in trouble, and we're going to take him something to eat."

"Good Samaritans up to date!" grinned Blake. "No harm in that. But why break bounds at night to do it? Why couldn't you give him the tin to buy the grub himself?"

"Well, you see—"

"No; the trouble is that I don't see," said Blake affably. "But I dare say I shall see when you explain. Go ahead."

"I can't explain. The man doesn't want to show himself, and we've promised to keep dark about having seen him," said Tom Merry desperately. "Gussy oughtn't to have said a word. He's a silly ass. As he's blabbed to you, it's up to you to keep it dark. The man's in trouble and is hiding; that's the fact of the matter."

Blake whistled softly.

"Then he must be a criminal, or something; no need for an honest man to hide," he said.

"No, it isn't that. He's a foreigner, and—and the men who are looking for him are not bobbies," said Tom Merry.

Blake shook his head.

"It sounds to me as if you've got mixed up in something jolly queer," he said. "I don't like these mysteries, I must say. If you've promised the man, of course, you can't tell me about it; but I'm not going to let Gussy break bounds and get himself into trouble."

"No need for that. I'd rather go alone."

"Then you're going?"

"Well, yes."

"Bad business, Tommy, my boy," said Blake. "Suppose a prefect spots you breaking bounds?"

"I shall be careful."

"Bounders on the bound sometimes get spotted, however careful they are. You remember Lumley-Lumley, when he used to play the giddy ox? He was very careful, but he was spotted."

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Hang it all, Blake, you don't think I'm going out to do anything that I should be ashamed to have known, do you?" he asked.

"No, I don't. I think you're going to play the giddy goat and get yourself into some fix; that's all," said Blake.

"Well, if I do, I'll get out of it somehow by myself."

"Which is a polite way of telling me to mind my own business," said Blake imperturbably. "Well, I'll do it. I suppose you can play the giddy goat if



With a thrill like ice in his veins Tom Merry felt a steel point against his neck as a hand gripped his shoulder. A voice, low and menacing and in a strange tongue, hissed: "Silenzio o la morte!"

you like. But I'm going to keep an avuncular eye on Gussy. Hallo, here he is!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into the Common-room with a bag in his hand. He joined the group by the fire.

"I've been lookin' for you, Tom Mewwy," he said. "I went to your study to tell you that I'd got the gwub, and you weren't there, and Manners and Lowther were quite inquisitive. Of course, I didn't tell them anything."

"You ass! You're a nice fellow to keep a secret!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I twust a secwet is quite safe in my keepin', especially when I have given my word of honah!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Oh, your honour's all right; it's your fatheadedness that worries me!" said the captain of the Shell.

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a fathead, Tom Mewwy! I hope you have not given the secwet away to these inquisitive youngstahs!" said D'Arcy, with a severe glance at Blake, Herries, and Digby. "They have been pumpin' me, the boundahs, but I have been extremely careful not to let anythin' out!"

The Fourth Formers chuckled.

"You've let out about there being an Italian in the wood, and about our going to take him grub!" said Tom Merry tartly.

"Weally, deah boy, I must say that that is a vewy impwudent remark!" said D'Arcy. "These chaps will tumble to the whole bizney soon if you keep on like that! Pway be more careful, old fellow, or you will be givin' Mawo Luigi entirely away!"

"Maro Luigi!" murmured Blake.

"The poor chap is confidin' in us, you know!" D'Arcy went on, with gront severity. "If you gas like that, Tom Mewwy, it won't be much use his keepin' hidden in the cave—"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I wegard you as havin' given away the whole show!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy hard cheese on Luigi. Howevah, we can wely on Blake and Hewwies and Dig not to let it go any furthah. Bai Jove there is that cad Levison listenin' to what I am sayin'! Levison, you wottah!"

Levison grinned.

"What blessed rot are you talking?" he asked. "Who's the giddy Italian hiding in a cave? What are you romancing about?"

"There! You see what you've done, Tom Mewwy! Levison's got hold of it now!"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry, exasperated.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, aifah givin' away the secwet like that, you might just—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Gussy, you're worth your weight in gold! You'd better ring off now. You'll have a crowd listening to you."

Tom Merry strode out of the Common-room, with knitted brows. There wasn't very much left of the secret now. With Levison and Mellish, the two telltales of the School House, in possession of it, the secret might as well have been cried from the housetops.

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye, and gazed after Tom Merry more in sorrow than anger.

"I am weally vewy much surprised at Tom Mewwy!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vewy much surprised indeed!" repeated Arthur Augustus, with emphasis. "Of course, I know he meant to keep the secwet, as he had pwomised, and he is a fellow of his word. Chap who has a secwet to keep can't be too careful, and I must remark that Tom Mewwy has been fwightfully careless! Ewery boundah in the House will know about it now!"

"They will if you run on!" said Blake, grasping his chum by the arm and dragging him out of the Common-room. "For goodness' sake, shut up, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas; but I must wepeat that I am vewy surprised at Tom Mewwy!"

Meanwhile, Levison and Mellish foregathered in a corner of the Common-room. They compared notes with suppressed excitement. Levison and Mellish were afflicted with a born incapacity for minding their own business, and they always wanted to know what was going on; and they generally succeeded, not being very scrupulous about the way they gained their object.

"There's something awfully fishy about this!" said Levison in a low voice. "You know that story there was about Tom Merry going in pubs, and so on? They explained it away all right, but I had my doubts all the time. It looks to me as if this is some more of it—something pretty bad, I think!"

"Quite so," agreed Mellish. "Going out at nights to meet a foreign chap in the wood—well, it takes the cake!"

"I'm jolly well going to know what it all means!" said Levison determinedly. "If Tom Merry is doing something to disgrace the House, he ought to be bowled out and shown up!"

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"Ahem! Quite so!"

"He can hoodwink the masters and the prefects and the other fellows," said Levison, "but he can't hoodwink me! I'm on to this, and I'm going to have it all out!"

"How are you going to do it? He'd punch you if you asked him questions!"

"I'm not going to ask him questions. I'm going to find out for myself. If Tom Merry goes out to-night, I suppose I can go, too!"

Mellish started.

"Follow him?" he said breathlessly.

Levison nodded coolly.

"Certainly! You can come, too."

Mellish shifted uneasily. He was as inquisitive and as ill-natured as his friend, but he lacked Levison's nerve.

"H'm! I—I don't think I'll do that," he said. "You—you see, we might be spotted by some rotten prefect! Kildare has his eyes wide open, you know, and—"

Levison sniffed contemptuously.

"Then stay in if you funk it!" he said. "I'm going, and I'll jolly well have the whole story; and if Tom Merry is disgracing the House, I'll show him up!"

"Good for you!" said Mellish.

And when the Fourth Form went to bed that night there was one fellow in the dormitory in the School House who remained awake—very wide awake indeed. It was Levison.

CHAPTER 8.

Shadowed!

"TOM MEWWY, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus tapped Tom Merry on the arm as the Shell fellow was going up to the dormitory. Manners and Lowther looked at him and sniffed, and passed on with the Shell fellows. It was some more of the secret they could see that, and Manners and Lowther were getting "fed-up," as Monty expressed it, with that secret.

"Well, what is it, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry wearily.

"Pwaw step into my study for a while. I want to speak to you."

"Oh, all right!"

Tom Merry followed D'Arcy into Study No. 6. Blake, Herries, and Digby had already gone up to the Fourth Form dormitory, so the study was empty. Arthur Augustus closed the door very carefully.

"I'm afraid the chaps have got on to somethin', Tom Mewwy," he said.

"Go hon!" said Tom sarcastically.

"I'm surprised at that."

"It was owin' to your want of care, my deah boy. I don't want to wepwoach you," said Arthur Augustus kindly. "The damage is done now, and it can't be helped. But weally you are a pwecious fellow to keep a secret, I must say. However, it's no good waggin' you about that. The twouble is that Blake and Hewwies and Dig have tumbled to it somehow that I'm goin' out to-night to take gwub to that Italian chap in the wood, and they've got their ears up about it. Blake declares that he won't let me go out, and if I twy to get out of the dorm, they're goin' to stop me. Of course, I should uttally wufuse to be stopped. Although they are my fwien'ds, I should give them a fearful thrashin' if they twied anythin' of the sort. But I—"

"It's all right, Gussy! No need for you to go; and I shall manage ever so much better without you."

"That's just what I'm afraid of, Tom

Mewwy; you are oval-confident in yourself, and I don't know how you'll get on without me to guide you," said Arthur Augustus dubiously. "Do you think you could manage it without me?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You see, I should thwash Blake and Hewwies and Dig if they twied to stop me, but that would make a wov and wake up the othah fellows, and Mellish and Levison are in our dorm, you know, and they are already suspicious owin' to what you let out in the Common-room this evenin'—"

"You stay in bed, Gussy, and leave it to me," said Tom Merry, in great relief.

"Do you think you can manage it all wight?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I twust you will not make a muck of it," said D'Arcy. "I have anothah suggestion to make. Suppose you come to my dorm atfah lights out, and get into my bed, and I will slip out quietly. You can pwetend to be me—"

"I'm afraid I shouldn't be up to that, Gussy. Better let me go. You can give me instructions before I start," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Yaas, that's a good ideah," said D'Arcy, with a nod. "I've the gwub here, in this bag, and you can come into the study and take it, you know. Pwaw be vewy careful. Don't go till atfah half-past ten, as the pwefects go to bed then. And mind you don't run into any twouble, deah boy."

"I will be awfully, frightfully careful."

"You are quite sure that you couldn't slip into my bed and pwetend to be me, so as to keep Blake quiet?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

"Quite sure!"

"Then pewwaps—"

Monty Lowther opened the study door and looked in.

"Are you coming up to bed?" he asked. "Kildare is waiting in the dorm, and he may possibly get ratty in the course of time."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm coming! Good-night, Gussy!"

"Good-night, deah boy!"

Tom Merry went up to the Shell dormitory with Lowther. Lowther did not speak, and they went into the dormitory in silence. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, looked at Tom Merry grimly.

"I'm waiting to put the lights out, Merry," he said.

"Sorry, Kildare! I won't keep you a minute."

"Buck up!" said the Sixth Former tersely. Tom Merry tumbled quickly enough into his bed. The lights were put out, and Kildare quitted the dormitory. There was a buzz of talk among the Shell fellows after Kildare had gone, and Tom Merry joined in it. But one by one the juniors dropped off to sleep, and silence reigned in the dormitory.

Tom Merry did not close his eyes.

He was tired enough, after the run with the Scouts in the afternoon, but there was to be no sleep for him for the first part of that night, at all events. He had his promise to fulfil to Maro Luigi.

The man was hiding in the hidden cave in the wood, and he would be expecting Tom Merry with the promised aid. Tom could not help feeling that he had made a rash promise in the kindness of his heart. But a promise was a promise, and it had to be kept.

Tom Merry was not experienced in the ways of the world, but he had a quick

eye for an honest face, and he was convinced that the man in the cave was honest enough—though what his quarrel might be with the other men, Tom could not guess.

The thought of the poor wretch hiding there, in cold and darkness, without food, was quite enough to solace the junior for the unpleasant prospect of leaving his warm bed and taking the risk of breaking bounds after lights out.

Tom Merry lay awake listening to the slow chimes from the old clock tower of St. Jim's.

"Eleven o'clock!"

The junior sat up in bed at last. Most if not all of the Sixth would be in bed at that hour, and there was little danger of falling in with any watchful prefect. Most of the masters, too, would be gone to bed; early hours were kept at St. Jim's. Tom Merry slipped quietly out of bed and dressed himself quickly in the dark.

There was no sound in the dormitory but the steady breathing of the other Shell fellows. His chums were fast asleep.

Tom, taking his boots in his hand, crept quietly to the door, and let himself out into the passage.

He closed the door softly behind him.

All was dark in the passage. Lights had long ago been turned out there. Tom Merry put his boots on silently. He had just finished when he gave a sudden start, and bent his head to listen. From the blackness of the passage he had caught a sound as of a sudden movement.

"Anybody there?" he called out softly.

It had occurred to him for a moment that D'Arcy might have turned out after all. The sound was from the direction of the Fourth Form dormitory. But there came no reply to his cautious call, and the silence was unbroken.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "I'm getting into a state of nerves!"

He went down the passage on tiptoe.

It did not take him many minutes to get the bag of provisions from Study No. 6, and then he made his way to the lower box-room.

The window opened silently, and Tom Merry climbed out on the roof of an outhouse below, and closed the window behind him.

Then he dropped lightly to the ground, the bag in his hand.

Without a glance behind, he hurried across to the school wall, which bordered the lonely road to Rylcombe.

A minute later the box-room window was cautiously reopened, and a face glimmered in the darkness as it looked out.

A gleam of starlight fell upon it, and disclosed for a moment the features of Levison of the Fourth.

But Tom Merry was hurrying away under the shadowy old elms of the quadrangle, and he did not see it. He did not know that Levison had climbed down from the box-room window and dropped to the ground—that the cad of the Fourth was following him at a cautious distance across the quadrangle, and that when he dropped over the school wall into the road, Levison dropped after him only a minute later. He was unaware that, as he tramped in the darkness down the lane towards Rylcombe, Levison followed him, treading silently, and taking advantage of every shadow to conceal his pursuit.

CHAPTER 9.

Levison's Night Out!

LEVISON caught glimpses of Tom Merry on the dark road. He saw the Shell fellow plainly as he passed the lamp at the cross-roads. Levison crept by in the shadow of the trees in case Tom Merry should glance back to where the lamp glimmered.

Tom Merry did not glance back, however; he had not the faintest suspicion that he was followed. He strode right on to the stile and clambered over it to the footpath. Levison reached the stile and passed over it in his turn, and then he paused.

If Tom Merry had gone down the footpath, it would be easy enough to follow him; if he had taken to some track through the black woods, the pursuit would not be easy—in fact, it would be next to impossible.

Levison listened keenly.

His curiosity was roused to the highest pitch; he intended to know where Tom Merry was going, and what he was going to do.

He heard a rustle in the wood and started in that direction. Under his feet was a narrow, trodden track, invisible in the darkness of the trees. But Levison knew the path, and he knew that it led through the heart of the wood, and passed the deep glade where, according to the legend, the poacher had met his death. He knew that it was near the Poacher's Glade that Tom Merry and D'Arcy had been captured by the Scouts that afternoon; he had learned that from the talk of the juniors. He thought he could guess Tom Merry's destination now, and he pressed on with more confidence.

Several times he heard a rustle of displaced twigs in advance, which showed that he was still on the right track.

Suddenly the sound ceased.

He listened intently, but he could hear nothing.

He paused for a full minute, and then trod cautiously on the path again, peering ahead of him with watchful eyes.

He caught sight suddenly of the junior he was tracking, standing in the middle of the track, and looking intently back.

Levison had just time to draw back into the darkness under a tree and conceal himself; another second, and he would have been in full view of Tom Merry.

His heart was thumping now.

He understood what had happened. He had been guided on his way by the rustling Tom Merry made in moving along the narrow track among the bushes, and Tom Merry on his side had heard Levison's movements behind, and was thus warned that he was being followed.

Tom Merry stood quite still for several minutes, looking intently behind him along the path he had come by.

The Shell fellow felt certain that someone had been following him from the rustling he had heard; but he was not thinking of the cad of the Fourth. He was thinking of the men who had been seeking Maro Luigi. Might they still be in the wood, searching for the hidden Italian? It would be the worst of services he could render the hidden man if he unintentionally guided his enemies to his hiding-place.

Levison remained perfectly still, scarcely breathing.

Tom Merry resumed his way at last. But he no longer followed the track.

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling!



Hallo, everybody.

Tip for Easter hikers: Don't walk on an empty stomach; the owner may object.

Did you hear about the keen motor salesman who sold himself a £2,000 car for Easter?

Irish story: Pat and Mike were shipwrecked on a desert island. "Look," exclaimed Mike, "there's a ship!" "No good," sighed Pat, "it's going the wrong way."

"Gosh, you look terrible!" said Kerr to Pratt. "Yes, I feel like an accident going somewhere to happen," agreed Pratt.

Easter query: What's the diff. between a dancer and a duck? The dancer goes quick on the legs, and the duck goes quick on its eggs.

Kerr says a cheap watch and a river have much in common. Neither will go long without winding.

Young Gibson says he makes a rule of avoiding trouble on one day a week. His "Good" Friday!

An ice-skater gave a lecture in Wayland. Illustrated by numerous slides!

A writer of jazz lyrics advertises he is now "at liberty." How did he get out?

"What is a bright young thing?" asks Skimpole. A baby glowworm.

I hear Crooke is going on a diet. He is still in the "fast" eat.

News: "A 28-stone swimmer means to swim the Channel this Easter. "Weight" and "sea"!

Skimpole has a big bruise on his cranium. He says it is where Gore tried to swat a wasp. "Swat!" a shame!

A music-hall performer claims he cannot feel kicks or punches. What an ideal football referee!

Scotch story: "I can't stop her—she's running away!" gasped the taxi driver. "Weel," exclaimed the Scots passenger, "ye can at least stop the meter!"

Holiday story: "Is your son home for the holidays, Mr. Smith?" "I guess so. I can't find any of my ties."

Skimpole complains he suffers from insomnia. Have you tried talking to yourself, Skimmy?

"£600,000 Suit," reads a headline. I should think it had two pairs of trousers!

I hear a Wayland bankrupt is now a switchback attendant. Still having his ups and downs.

Of course, you heard of the optimistic poultry farmer who tried to get Easter eggs by feeding his chickens on cocoa and coloured ribbon?

"What is an Easter egg, really?" asks a reader. Nothing, surrounded by a thin shell of chocolate.

Oh, and you heard about the chap who wouldn't use his lawnmower at Easter because it was Lent?

Wally D'Arcy says he is sure Mr. Solby has a definite aim in life. He thinks he's it!

Hot News: A box of lead coins has been unearthed at Hastings. A prehistoric slot-machine?

Last shot: "But I couldn't give you enough work to keep you occupied," said the farmer. "Mister," said the applicant, "you'd be surprised what a little it takes to keep me occupied!" Happy Easter, lads!

He plunged into the thickness of the wood, confident of his ability to find his way, in spite of the darkness.

Extensive as the wood was, Tom Merry knew every glade of it, from the constant scout practice of the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's. But Levison was by no means well versed in woodcraft, and when he reached the spot where Tom Merry had turned from the track, the cad of the Fourth paused in dismay.

Levison ground his teeth as he stood there in doubt and indecision.

"Hang him!" he muttered. "He's guessed that I'm after him! Hang him! I shall lose myself if I get deeper into the wood at this time of night!"

He remained there for several minutes, listening for some sound to guide him. Minute after minute passed; he heard nothing. The rustling Tom Merry had made died away, and Levison was not even certain of the direction the Shell fellow had taken.

He debated in his mind whether he should make directly for the Poacher's Glade, on the chance of catching sight of Tom Merry again. But he was not certain that that was the Shell fellow's destination.

Levison ground his teeth with angry disappointment. It looked as if he had left his bed and taken the risk of

breaking bounds at night for nothing—for nothing but a weary tramp in the darkness.

Then suddenly he started and pricked up his ears.

There was a sound in the wood—a murmur of voices. As Levison listened he distinguished a foreign voice speaking in a strange, soft tongue.

He could not distinguish the words—he could not have understood them if he had distinguished them. But it was easy for him to guess that it was an Italian speaking; and he knew—or suspected, at least—that Tom Merry had come to the wood to meet the Italian.

His eyes glittered with triumph; he had run the junior down, after all—with his unknown companion. Levison did not hesitate. He stole cautiously through the underwoods in the direction of the voices.

The voices ceased.

Had the speakers heard him? He paused, hesitating, and as he hesitated there was a rustle in the underbrush, and a hand grasped him, and he was dragged down to the ground.

Levison uttered a sudden, startled cry.

That grip of iron that was laid upon him could not have been given by a

junior's hand. He was in the grasp of a man—and a powerful man. Who was it? Into what danger had he stumbled in his spying on Tom Merry?

That iron grip forced him down to the ground, and Levison did not even think of resisting. His dazzled eyes caught a gleam of steel. That gleam of steel in the darkness of the wood sent a shudder of terror through Levison's whole body.

There was a crashing in the under-woods, and two or three dark and sinewy figures came plunging to the spot.

"Have you got him?" It was a sharp, metallic voice in English. "Tu l'hai trovato, Beppo?"

"Ho trovato qualcuno!" growled the man who was holding Levison down.

"I guess—but—non è Luigi!"

"Credo che non!"

"Bring a light here!"

Levison lay palpitating with terror under the grasp of the Italian. He did not understand what was said, excepting the words in English, which were spoken with a strong American accent.

Into whose hands had he fallen? What gang of rascals was this, haunting the dark shades of the wood in the quiet English countryside?

They could not be poachers—there would have been no foreigners in a poaching gang. Who were they—what were they? At the thought that his life was in danger, Levison almost fainted with fear.

There was a glimmer of a lantern in the darkness.

The light was turned upon Levison's face, dazzling him with its brightness.

He closed his blinded eyes for a moment.

There was an exclamation of annoyance and disgust from the American.

"I guess you've got the wrong pig by the ear, Beppo. That is a schoolboy!"

Levison opened his eyes again, and blinked at the dark faces bent over him.

It was a strange and terrifying scene.

The man Beppo had a knee planted on Levison's chest, pinning him down in the damp grass. A swarthy Italian held a lantern with the rays directed upon the junior's face. A powerfully built man was looking down at him in the light—a man with a long, keen nose like a knife-blade, and sharp eyes set close together.

"Who are you?"

The American rapped out the words savagely.

Levison panted.

"I—I'm not doing any harm here," he said.

"Who are you?"

"I—I—I'm a schoolboy. I belong to St. Jim's!"

"What's that?"

"A Public school near here—near Ryecombe."

The big man grunted angrily.

"Another of that crowd I met here to-day, playing the fool at scouting, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes! I——"

"Go slow," said the American sailor-man. "Tell me the truth. I guess there's something fishy about this, and you may know something of what we want to know. I suppose they don't allow boys out at midnight in your school, hey?"

"No!"

"But you're out, I guess!"

"Yes!"

"What are you doing here, then?"

"I—I—I——"

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"Do you know anything about a man hiding in the wood here—an Italian?" asked the sailorman, bending over him.

"I—I——"

"I guess you do," went on the adventurer, reading Levison's face with perfect ease. "This may turn out a good catch after all, Beppo. Il piccino sa qualche cosa—capite?"

"Sì, sì, Signor Finn!" grinned Beppo.

"And I guess he's going to tell us, or my name's not Hiram Finn!" grinned the Yankee. "Now, my young buck, you're going to tell us what you're doing here—savvy?"

"I—I—I——"

"What did you come into the wood at this time of night for?"

Levison hesitated a minute. Hiram Finn made a sign to Beppo, and the Italian advanced his revolver so that the lantern light gleamed upon the barrel. Levison shuddered.

"I—I'll tell you!" he panted.

"I guess you'd better."

"I came here to—to follow a chap!" stuttered Levison. "One of our fellows—he sneaked out of the school, and—and I followed him. I knew he was going to meet an Italian—a foreign chap hiding in a cave, and to take him food——"

Hiram Finn uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Gee-whel! Now you're talking! Go on!"

"I—I lost the track in the wood," faltered Levison. "I—I thought it was him—when—I heard you! I—I—that's all!"

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"Where did he go?"

"Into the wood."

"Which direction?"

"I couldn't make out in the dark."

"So he's going to take food to an Italian hiding in a cave," said Hiram Finn, with a chuckle. "I guess that doesn't leave much doubt in the matter. I guess we're going to find this young gentleman who plays the Good Samaritan in the night—some! You know what part he was making for, hey?"

"I—I don't! I——"

"I guess you do. I guess you're going to guide us there, and if you fail, there will be a dead youngster lying in this wood in the morning," said Hiram Finn.

"You—you wouldn't—you daren't, you——"

"I reckon there's not much Hiram Finn would stop at, on the track of a hundred thousand dollars," said the big man.

"I—I——"

"Let him get up, Beppo, but keep hold of his fin. You keep behind him, Pietro, and if he tries to run, give him six inches of your knife. Capite?"

The Italian nodded and grinned; he evidently understood English, although he did not speak it. Beppo dragged the trembling Levison to his feet. The end of the fourth was white with fear. He would have given a great deal at that moment to be safe back in bed at

St. Jim's; and would willingly have undertaken never to spy into another fellow's affairs again. But it was too late to think of that now.

"Now I guess you're going to guide us, cocky," said Hiram Finn. "March on!"

"I—I——"

"'Nuff said—git on!"

"I—I'm not sure about it!" panted Levison. "I think Tom Merry was making for a place called the Poacher's Glade. I think there's a cave in the hillside there; I found it one day. But I——"

"I guess that'll do; you're wasting time. Lead on!"

Levison was silent, and led the way. The big American walked behind him,



The man's hand dived for his pocket—Tom Merry knew quickly. Snatching up the lantern, he hurled it into the

and Beppo kept hold of his arm. Pietro walked behind. The lantern was extinguished now, and darkness reigned in the wood again.

Levison stumbled on, inwardly anathematising his bad luck. He had not dreamed of any encounter of this sort when he left St. Jim's to follow Tom Merry to the wood. The three men were evidently desperate characters, and if he failed them, there was no telling what might happen to him. He did not even think of trying to escape. It would have been useless. Beppo's fingers were grasping his arm like an iron band, and the gleam of the revolver was ever before the junior's eyes, whether he could see the actual weapon or not.

He stumbled on, weary and perspiring. The three adventurers did not waste time, and they kept Levison

going at a good speed, in spite of his efforts to slack down. He was feeling done up by the time they entered the dark shades of the Poacher's Glade. Through the opening in the trees overhead, starlight glimmered down into the glade. The mass of the hill rose black and solid, clothed with under-woods.

"Where is that cave you mention?" asked Hiram Finn, looking about him doubtfully. "If you've been fooling us—"

"Give me time to find it. I know it's somewhere here."

"Quick, then! We don't want to alarm our bird!"

Levison stopped at last before the mass of foliage that hid the opening of

captors had forgotten him, and Levison did not lose the opportunity. He turned and sped back the way he had come—running, stumbling, picking himself up, and running again—panting heavily, but never pausing till he was out in the Rylcombe road again, with St. Jim's in sight. Levison had had more than enough adventures for one night.

CHAPTER 10.

A Narrow Escape!

TOM MERRY emerged from the wood into the deep glade, and glanced round him cautiously. He had made a wide detour through the wood to throw off the track whoever it was that had been tracking him, and had reached the Poacher's Glade by a roundabout course.

The glade was dark and deserted, and Tom Merry was reassured. He came through the damp ferns and bracken towards the cave, and then suddenly stopped with a start. A light was gleaming through the foliage there—a lantern was burning in the hidden cave.

"The awful ass, to burn a light here!" muttered the junior. "If those fellows are still looking for him—"

He broke off.

From the hidden cave under the hill there came a murmur of voices. Maro Luigi was not alone.

Tom Merry remained quite still for some moments, and then he cautiously crept towards the cave and listened.

The thought had come into his mind now that Maro Luigi's enemy had found him. The man who was hiding in fear of his life would hardly have been imprudent enough to betray his presence by burning a light in the cave. And the voices—what did that mean?

As he drew closer, Tom Merry heard a voice with a strong American accent—a voice he had heard before. It was that of the man with the knife-blade nose, whom Blake and Fig-gins had captured by mis-

take in the afternoon.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

All was clear now. Maro Luigi's enemies had found him, and they were in the cave now. What had happened to the Italian?

The foliage before the cave had been torn and trampled, and no longer concealed the opening completely. Tom Merry could see into the interior, and as he peered through the twigs and leaves, a strange and startling scene met his gaze.

Maro Luigi lay upon the ground, bound hand and foot, with the lantern light gleaming upon his pale and hunted-looking face.

The big American was seated upon a mound close to him, with his hand resting on his knees, and a revolver in his hand.

Two Italians were standing close to

the captured man, and one of them was wiping away blood from a knife cut across the face. Maro Luigi had evidently not been captured without resistance.

The Yankee was speaking.

"I guess we've got you now, Maro Luigi. I guess we've got you where your hair is short—what?"

Maro Luigi muttered something indistinctly, but did not reply.

"Has he hurt you much, Beppo?"

The wounded Italian growled.

"Per Bacco! I am hurt!"

"We're going to make him pay for it," said Hiram Finn. "He's going to pay a hundred thousand dollars—eh, Maro, my old chum?"

Luigi was silent.

"I guess you'd better go and get that cut seen to, Beppo," said Hiram Finn, looking at the deep slash in his follower's face. "You can get it bound up in Wayland. Let the surgeon think you got it in a row with the bargemen on the river. I guess I can look after our friend Maro now that he's tied up some!"

"I bleed like vun stuck peeg!" growled Beppo.

"Now, Maro, my friend, you are going to talk," said the Yankee adventurer. "I guess you can hear me. This is where you yaup—savvy?"

"Non parlero," granted the man lying on the ground, making a sudden effort to break loose from his bonds.

Hiram Finn chuckled.

"I guess you can't get loose, Maro, old chum. You won't get loose easy when Hiram Finn has tied you up with sailor's knots. I guess not."

"Non parlero—non parlero!"

"That means that you won't speak, I guess. I reckon we shall make you speak, Maro. You are coming down to the coast with us. You are coming on a ship, Maro, and between here and Venice you will talk—what? I guess you know how I shall persuade you if you don't talk—what?"

"Bah! Non parlero!"

"You can go and get that cut tied up, Beppo, and hire a car—you and Pietro. Get it as near the wood as you can, and then come back here. I'll look after our friend Maro till you come back. Get some sacks to cover him with."

"Si, signor!"

Tom Merry drew back hastily, and took cover in a tree. The two Italians emerged from the cave, and strode away, Beppo groaning and grunting as he went. They disappeared into the darkness.

Tom Merry drew near the cave when they were gone.

The Yankee sailorman was still speaking; and Tom Merry, as he saw the thin, keen face in the gleam of the lantern-light, almost shuddered at the expression of the cold and cruel determination upon it.

"I guess you are going to talk, Maro," said Hiram Finn. "You are going to talk, and you are going to write it down, every word. I'm going to have that hundred thousand dollars. Eh?"

"Non mai!"

"Never's a long word," said Hiram Finn; "a very long word! We've hunted you out, Maro. You gave us the slip at Southampton; you've given us the slip since. We nearly had you once; now we've got you. Savvy? Now we want the dollars—a hundred thousand dollars, Maro; though it's not in good American money. But we'll change all that when we lay hands on

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at for. The situation was desperate and the junior acted
of the Yankee, and the ruffian reeled back with a yell
in.

the cave. He pointed to it, wondering whether in truth a hidden man lay behind the dark mass, or whether he had led the searchers on a wild-goose chase. Hiram Finn grasped his revolver, and drew aside the mass of leafy screening.

A low voice came from the interior darkness.

"Echo! Is it you zen, signorino?"

"I guess it's an old friend of yours, Maro Luigi," said Hiram Finn. "Here he is, boys! Seize him!"

There was a cry of alarm in the cave. Hiram Finn and the two Italians rushed in, crashing through the breaking branches and twigs.

There was the sound of a hard struggle in the blackness—tramping feet, sharp exclamations, hurried breathing, and muttered oaths.

But Levison did not stay to listen. His

the dibs. The secret that you got from the drunken sailor in Leghorn you're going to pass on to me and my pals, Beppo and Pietro. What?"

"Non mai!"

"When you've got a cord tied round your neck, Maro, squeezing tighter and tighter till your eyes bulge out, you'll change your tune, I guess."

Tom Merry shuddered.

"You know where the money is, Maro—on one of the islands in the lagoon of Venice, I guess. You're going to tell us."

"Non parlero!" repeated the bound man. "La morte, ma silenzio!"

"Death, but silence!" grinned Hiram Finn. "We'll change your tune for you, Maro, when you're on board the schooner. You will see! Beppo and Pietro will be back in half an hour, and then you're going away, Maro, wrapped up in a bundle of sacks, in case any inquisitive policeman should look into the car; and when you're on the schooner—"

The Italian groaned. He evidently realised his helplessness in the hands of his relentless enemy.

Tom Merry's heart beat fast.

In half an hour the two ruffians would return, and then the bound man would be taken away a helpless prisoner.

There was nothing to stop them.

Tom Merry thought of the police; but he could not have reached the nearest police station. And then, the local policeman would not have been able to deal with the desperate gang, armed with deadly weapons, and only too clearly prepared to use them.

What could he do?

He had come there to help the unfortunate fugitive, and he had proof enough now, if he had wanted it, that Maro Luigi was a man pursued by remorseless rascals; that the right was on his side.

To let the man be taken away by that gang of scoundrels—it was impossible.

But what could the junior do?

If he waited till Beppo and Pietro returned, he would have three enemies to deal with. If anything was to be done, it must be done now, while the American sailorman was alone with the prisoner.

But to tackle that powerful ruffian—Tom Merry, strong and athletic as he was, would have been an infant in the grasp of Hiram Finn.

The thoughts raced through his head. What could he do? He would not abandon the Italian to his fate. But what could he do?

The Yankee sailorman yawned, and rose from his seat. He came towards the opening of the cave, and Tom Merry crouched back in the darkness. The American came through the screen of bushes, and lighted a cigar. He meant to wait for the return of his associates in the open glade.

The big man, his tall form shadowy in the darkness, moved to and fro. At intervals Tom Merry heard him give a faint chuckle. The man was in a state of gleeful triumph, as his chuckling indicated.

Tom Merry made up his mind.

He could not tackle the big ruffian by himself, but if he could get Maro Luigi free, between them they might handle him. Tom Merry, crouching in the dark shadows, watched the sailorman pacing to and fro as he smoked his cigar. And when the man's back was turned, and he was a dozen paces away, the junior made a sudden dash

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and passed through the thickets into the cave.

Whether the sailorman heard him or not, he did not know. He bent over Maro Luigi, opening his pocket-knife with hurried fingers.

The bound man's eyes gleamed up at him with new hope.

"Amico—mio amico il ragazzo!" he breathed.

Tom Merry cut through the cords that bound him with hasty slashes of the pocket-knife. Outside, he heard the sailorman humming a tune. The man had not seen or heard the junior; he did not suspect for a moment that anyone else was in the lonely glade at that hour. Levison had told him that Tom Merry had left the school to carry food to the Italian in the cave. But Hiram Finn was not thinking of the unknown boy who had caused Levison's presence in the wood. He had captured Maro Luigi, and his mind was busy with his success.

"Quiet!" whispered Tom Merry.

A few more slashes of the knife, and Maro Luigi was free.

The Italian sailor, lithe and active as a panther, leaped to his feet. His sharp, black eyes searched round the cave, evidently for a weapon. His knife had been taken away, and Tom Merry was glad of it. Villain and ruffian as Hiram Finn clearly was, Tom Merry did not want to look upon a scene of bloodshed in the lonely wood that night.

Some sound had apparently fallen upon Hiram Finn's keen ears. He came back to the entrance of the cave and looked in.

As he peered through the broken branches, a glare of rage came into his eyes, as he saw Maro Luigi free, and the junior standing by his side.

His hand dived for his pocket—Tom Merry knew what for. The junior was desperate, and he acted quickly. He snatched up the lantern, and hurled it into the face of the ruffian.

Crash!

There was a yell of pain from the Yankee sailorman, as the lantern smashed into his face, and he staggered back blindly. The lantern was instantly extinguished. Tom Merry grasped Luigi by the arm.

"This way!" he muttered.

He led the startled man through the thickets before the cave. He could hear Hiram Finn cursing in the darkness, as he rushed the Italian towards the trees. In a moment they were in the shelter of the wood.

"Run for it!" panted Tom. "He's got a gun! Run!"

Crack!

It was a sharp, ringing report. The American had fired. But it was a shot at random. In the darkness he could not see the junior or Luigi. Tom Merry grasped Luigi's arm, and ran with him blindly through the wood.

CHAPTER 11.

The Secret!

FOR a few minutes Tom Merry and his companion ran blindly; then Tom Merry remembered the way, and they followed a beaten track, where progress was easier.

Luigi ran without a word, only breathing heavily.

They came out on the footpath at last, and then over the stile into the road. Tom Merry led his companion up the road for a short distance, and through a gap in the hedge on the opposite side and into a dim building. It was an old barn now disused, which

the junior knew well. Then he stopped, panting.

"All right now!" he gasped. "We're a good two miles away, and I'll bet that chap won't be able to follow our giddy tracks."

Luigi leaned against the wall, breathing hard.

"Grazie, signorino—grazie!"

Tom Merry knew that that meant thanks.

"That's all right," he said. "I was jolly glad to get you out of the hands of that rotter! What did he want with you?"

"Il segreto!"

"The—the what?"

"What you say—secret—secret of ze ore—ze gold," said Maro Luigi. "I am tell by ze sailor who die in Leghorn—and he know—he would find. Capite?"

"I think I understand," said Tom Merry. "They want to rob you?"

"Si, si!"

"Well, you're out of their hands now."

Luigi breathed hard.

"I brought you some grub, as I promised," said Tom Merry ruefully, "but I dropped the bag in getting you away. I'm sorry! Of course, I didn't expect to find those rotters there. But, look here, you won't be able to get back to the cave again, now that they've found it."

"E giusto."

"You'll have to bunk?"

"I go!" said Maro Luigi heavily. "But I zink—I zink—how you say—I not get away perhaps from zen. Listen to me, ragazzo. You save my life! Zey kill me on ze ship, for I tell zey nozing."

"The rotters!" said Tom Merry. "You can go to the police for protection, Luigi. We've got law in England, you know."

"Zat non good. Zat man, zat Finn, he is il diavolo himself. Listen to me, zen; you are all ze friend zat is to me now. Suppose zat I am kill? I not vish zat ze gold lose itself. Capite?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I give you a paper," said the Italian in a low, hurried voice. "You have carta—what you say—carta per scrivere?"

"Carta?" said Tom Merry, puzzled. "Oh, paper! Yes. If you want to write, I've got a pocket-book, and you can have a leaf; and I've got a pencil. But—"

"Datemi—give to me!"

Tom Merry, in wonder, took out his pocket-book, and tore out a leaf and handed it to the Italian, with a pencil. Maro Luigi stepped to the door of the barn.

Clear starlight fell into the field outside, and it was light enough to write.

The Italian spread the leaf upon the cover of the pocket-book and wrote rapidly with the pencil.

Tom Merry did not see what he was writing, but he knew that it must be in Italian. He could not have read Italian, of course; but he did not say that to Maro Luigi. The man was in a state of intense agitation, and Tom Merry wisely decided to let him do as he chose without contradiction. The Italian wrote with feverish haste in the clear and beautiful calligraphy which even uneducated Italians generally use. He finished, and folded the sheet in two.

"Take zat!" he said.

Tom Merry took the paper.

"Listen, zen!" said Luigi in a low voice. "I have write zere where it is zat ze money is. Capite?"

(Continued on page 18.)



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

HALLO, chums! All set for Easter? You bet! Well, as they say in the States, happy week-end! It's the first holiday of the year, and let's hope the weather clerk does the right thing and gives us a good dose of sunshine. But whatever the weather happens to be, rain or shine, the good old GEM can always be relied upon to come up to scratch.

If you have read the great St. Jim's yarn in this number, then you must be eager, as I was myself, to read the sequel to it. This bears the title of

"THE TREASURE OF SANTA MARIA I"

and, what will please readers more, it is a cover-to-cover story. These extra-long yarns are always very popular, and since Christmas, I have been waiting for a chance to squeeze in another one. Next Wednesday you will have this grand yarn in your hands, and, I can promise you, the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. in Italy will give you all the enjoyment you want.

From the quiet surroundings of St. Jim's, Tom Merry & Co. set out on the treasure trail, which takes them to the Sunny South—to the picturesque old Italian town of Venice. It is near there, on the islet of Santa Maria, that they hope to find the vast treasure which Hiram Finn, the Yankee adventurer, and his Italian companions, have sought so desperately to get their hands on.

Many exciting things happen to the chums of St. Jim's before they reach the end of the treasure trail. You will follow with avid interest their humorous adventures en route, their lively experiences in Venice, and the thrilling "show-down" they have with Hiram Finn & Co. on the scent of the hidden treasure.

Whatever you do, chums, on no account miss this special extra-long Easter yarn.

GREAT SCHOOL SERIES COMING!

In this number we say au revoir, for a time, at least, to Jimmy Silver & Co.

whose exciting adventures have entertained us for so many weeks. To replace these cheery chums of Rookwood, I have arranged for a wonderful new series of school stories which, I am sure, readers will welcome with open arms. This special series will be starting in a fortnight's time, and I will tell you all about it next week.

TRY THIS TEASER!

Here's a little problem "J. G." of Fulham, sent me the other day. See what you can do with it, but look out for the catch. In certain well-known stores you can buy 1 for threepence, yet 99 will only cost you sixpence, while 500 may be had for ninepence, and 8,000 for a shilling! What are these articles? I give the answer at the end of this chat.

THE SCHOOL REPORT!

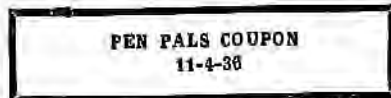
There's been a good deal said and written lately about the method of allocating marks for scholars' exam papers. It is argued, and quite fairly, I think, that while one teacher will award, say, fifty marks for a scholar's history or geography paper, another, more generously disposed, or in a happier mood, might give the same paper seventy-five marks. It becomes merely a matter of the examiner's own opinion as to the merits of the paper, and even his opinion would probably be different if he checked the paper again later. A lot, therefore, depends on the mood he is in.

An exam-checking system which allows for such a wide margin of error is obviously not fair or reliable; hence the investigation of the system by experts. It remains to be seen whether the present method is to be replaced by one more efficient and just.

But, meanwhile, when you take home

PEN PALS COUPON

11-4-38



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.

Miss Roma Bowd, Oakville, via Riverstone, N.S.W., Australia; girl correspondents; age 16-18; sports.

J. N. Manning, 103, Elm Park Road, Reading; age 13-15; overalls; stamps; also GEMS.

William G. Belmont, 88, Denman Street, Radford, Notts; members for Empire Correspondence Society.

your school report, perhaps with many misgivings as to what your father will say when he sees the few marks you've got, you now have a perfectly fair argument to put forward. If your teacher had been in better mood when checking your exam papers you might have scored double the number of marks awarded you!

THE CHEATING RACKET!

While I'm on the subject of school examinations, a new racket for cheating is being successfully worked in an American University. When an exam is due the students who are running this dishonest racket steal the exam questions beforehand and work out the answers. Then they offer them at a price to other students entered for the exam.

It has become quite a lucrative business for the racketeers, but many students who have availed themselves of the racketeers' offer, have paid the penalty of cheating. Nearly fifty have so far been expelled, while the real culprits, who, of course, work in secret, are left to carry on their cheating game.

But now other students have formed themselves into a band to fight this menace to their University. The sooner the racketeers are exposed and turfed out the better for the school and the students.

DOGS WIN THE DAY!

When the town council of Szeged, Hungary, put a tax on dogs they expected a storm of protest from the many dog-owners in the town; but they certainly never expected what actually did happen. The dog-owners got together, and 2,000 of them, each one with his dog on a lead, turned up at the town hall to protest against the tax. At a signal from their leader the 2,000 dogs were released. Immediately there was a riot in the entrance of the town hall. The dogs started a free-for-all scrap, and their barking and growling was deafening.

The mayor, who promptly came on the scene, was at his wits' end what to do, for the horde of fighting dogs threatened to cause no little damage. The mayor made up his mind. He informed the dog-owners that the tax would be abolished, and, having won the day, the latter sorted out their pets—some task!—and went home cheerfully.

RIGHT OR WRONG?

The answer to the problem is the numbers you can buy at threepence each for the front door.

TAILPIECE.

Mrs. Timpkins: "How many rabbits did you shoot last Saturday?"

Mr. Timpkins: "Twelve."

Mrs. Timpkins: "Then the poultryer's made a mistake. He's only charged for nine!"

THE EDITOR.

K. B. Soon, 232, Wanchai Road, Hong Kong; pen pals.
Jack M. Roden, 232, Liverpool Road, Warrington; Junior Aviation and Model Building Club.

William Hampton, 32, Upper Court Road, Epsom, Surrey; cycling, photos, dogs.

M. Greaves, 13, Tennyson Road, Rushden, Northants; age 15-17; music; preferably Prince Edward Island.

Miss Margaret Bryars, 34, Auckland Road, N. Kensington, London, W.10; girl correspondents.

Albert H. Oakman, Alborley, Grassmere Avenue, Hullbridge, Essex; age 15-16; football, boxing, cricket.

Joyce Green, 4, Harbour Reserve, Buffalo Street, East London, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 16-18; films.

John P. Balfour, c/o Mrs. Young, 11, Grace Street, Belgravia, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa; age 15-17; stamps and skin collecting.

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"Yes," said Tom Merry, guessing the meaning of the word "capite" easily enough. "I understand."

"Zat is all mine—for I have il segreto—how you say—"

"The secret?"

"Si, si, signorino—ze secret, I have him from ze sailor who die in Leghorn. I zink I find him, but perche—perche—vat you say—perhaps zat demonio—zat Finn—he find me first—and he kill! Capite?"

"Yes; but—"

"But zen, I give him to you."

"The secret?"

"Si, si. If I no come to you vizin, say, four day—four day—quattro giorni—you say four day—"

"Yes, four days," said Tom Merry.

"In quattro giorni—four day—I come or I send; but if I do not, I give him to you, because zat you save my life, amico. If I do not come for him, it is because zat I am dead Capite? Zen he is yours, signorino, because you good friend to Maro Luigi. But for quattro giorni—four day—you no read—you no look at ze carta."

"I understand. If you do not ask for the paper back in four days, it belongs to me," said Tom Merry.

"Certo!"

"And I am not to read it or look at it for four days?"

"Si, si!"

"I give you my word!" said Tom Merry.

"Buono, buono! I trust you. You are onesto ragazzo," said Maro Luigi. "It may be I live—zen I send to you; ozerwise, you keep and you find! Zat is yours!"

"But I say—"

"Now I go—I fly! Zey look for me again—"

"But, look here, I can't let you go away into danger like that!" said Tom, in great distress. "Why not let me take you to the police station—"

Luigi shook his head.

"I go!" he answered. "But keep promise—you guard carta—ze paper—four giorni—zen he is yours if I no send. Now addio!"

"But, look here—"

"Must go!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "I've left in the wood the grub I brought for you, but I've got some money, if that's any good. Have you got money?"

The Italian shook his head.

"Leetle," he said. "Italian money."

"That won't do much good here," said Tom Merry. "I'll give you all I've got—you can pay it back when you come for the paper, if you like. I've got nearly two pounds. It will help you on your way—"

The Italian sailor took the money eagerly enough. Then he held out a dusky hand, and Tom Merry grasped it.

"If you will go, good luck to you," said Tom Merry. "And mind, I'm keeping this paper for you, and even if you don't claim it in four days, I shall still consider it your property. Good-bye, and good luck!"

The Italian pressed his hand, and vanished into the darkness of the road. Tom Merry stood watching him till he was gone. Then he turned his steps in the direction of St. Jim's, utterly amazed by the strange events of the night.

What was the paper the Italian seaman had given him?

From what the man had said, it was apparently the clue to some hidden hoard of money—somewhere in the isles and lagoons of Venice!

More likely it was some wild tale of a sailorman which had deceived Maro.

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Luigi—for he evidently believed what he said.

Yet the keen-faced American, Hiram Finn, must believe it, too, since this was the secret for which he was pursuing Luigi.

And Hiram Finn did not look the kind of man, certainly, to be taken in by a wild tale. He was cool, cunning, and calculating, by no means the kind of man to be led away upon a wild-goose chase.

Tom Merry's brain was in a whirl as he hurried back to St. Jim's.

Would he ever see Maro Luigi again? If he did not, the paper was his—for what it was worth. Was it worth anything? he wondered.

The junior reached the old school. In a few minutes more he had climbed in at the window. He made his way silently to the Shell dormitory, and as he entered the voice of Monty Lowther fell upon his ears.

"Well, where have you been?"

CHAPTER 12.

Caught in the Act!

TOM MERRY started.

He had left his chums fast asleep in the Shell dormitory in the School House when he left the dorm, and Monty Lowther's voice startled him, coming suddenly in the darkness. He had expected to find all the fellows asleep as he had left them.

"Where have you been, Tommy, you ass?"

It was Manners' voice this time. Both the members of the Co. were awake.

"Shut up!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Don't wake the whole giddy school,"

"You've been out?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"For about two hours," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. It was a humorous reply in Monty Lowther's own style, but it did not please Monty Lowther just then.

"Oh, don't be funny!" he growled. "Look here, you've broken bounds, and if a prefect had caught you you'd have got into trouble. We're not having it, are we, Manners?"

"No fear!" said Manners.

"You got into trouble once before through keeping secrets from your pals," said Lowther. "We're not having any more of it."

"Don't jaw, old chap; you'll wake the dorm."

"I'll wake the whole blessed House if you don't explain!" said Monty Lowther determinedly. "I tell you we're not standing it."

"Not a little tiny bit," said Manners.

"I can't explain now—the fellows will wake up," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "But I'll tell you in the morning. The secret isn't a secret any longer—not from you two, anyway. The man's gone."

"Well, that's better," said Lowther.

"So you had to keep a secret about a man who was in hiding here somewhere, and now he's gone, it's not a secret?"

"That's it."

"I'm afraid you've been getting mixed up in something fishy, all the same," said Lowther, "and I'm not going to wait till morning, for one!"

"Same here," said Manners.

"Hullo!" came a sleepy voice from Crooke's bed. "Who's that jawing?"

"There's Crooke waking up," said Tom Merry, in low tones. "Do shut up, you fellows! We don't want all the Shell to get on to it."

"Shurrup, and let a chap go to sleep!" mumbled Crooke.

"You're going to explain to-night," said Monty Lowther calmly. "If you don't want to jaw here, we'll come down to the study."

"But I say—"

"There or here—take your choice."

"You are an obstinate ass, Monty! Come down to the study, then."

Monty and Manners turned out of bed and quickly slipped into their clothes. Then the Terrible Three left the dormitory. There was a scuttling sound in the passage, and the chums of the Shell paused in alarm.

"There's somebody about!" muttered Lowther.

"I don't think so," said Tom Merry. "I heard the same sound when I came out of the dorm. Buck up, and don't make a row."

The chums of the Shell descended quietly to the study. The House was very still and silent. Tom Merry turned on the light, shading it with paper so that the juniors could just see one another. Lowther closed the door carefully.

"Now then; the giddy history of the mystery!" said Manners.

Tom Merry explained concisely.

His promise to the Italian, of course, was only in force so long as the man was remaining hidden in the cave in the Poacher's Glade. Now that Maro Luigi had taken to flight there was no need of further secrecy. Tom Merry explained to his amazed chums the meeting with the Italian in the cave during the Scout run in the afternoon, and his promise to take him food.

The chums of the Shell listened with still keener interest to Tom Merry's account of that night's strange happenings.

"My only hat!" said Lowther, at last.

"Sounds like a giddy romance. You're sure you didn't go sleep-walking, Tommy, and dream it all?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, I'm sure. I've got the paper."

"A giddy treasure!" said Manners thoughtfully. "Most likely it's some sailor's yarn, with nothing in it."

"I shouldn't wonder; but this man, Luigi, believes in it—and that Yankee, Finn, must believe in it; he was running a lot of risk doing what he did to get hold of Luigi. He wouldn't do that for nothing. I heard him say that it was worth a hundred thousand dollars."

"Quite a tidy little sum," grinned Lowther; "and it belongs to this man Luigi. But if he doesn't come back for the paper—"

"Then it's mine," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Not that it would ever be of any use to me. We couldn't get so far as Venice on a half-holiday to look for it."

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Of course, I shall keep my word, and not look at the paper for four days," said Tom Merry. "After that, if Luigi doesn't turn up, I shall read it, and take a copy of it, in case of accidents. But I shan't regard it as my property. Luigi might change his mind afterwards—if the poor chap gets clear away—and want it back; and I shouldn't dream of sticking to it. I can't really think that his life is in danger—that's rather too thick, you know. He can have his document again when he wants it. And we'll keep the secret among ourselves. And Gussy, of course—Gussy's in it."

"Where's the paper?"

Tom Merry took the paper from his pocket.

It was folded so that the writing could not be seen. The chums of the Shell

looked at the paper with great curiosity. Through the paper some trace of the writing could be seen, but it could not be read without unfolding it; and that, of course, the juniors never thought of doing.

"Well, take care of that," said Lowther. "Even if it's all moonshine, it's jolly interesting, and I want to read that paper when the time's up. Did he write it in English?"

"He couldn't have. He doesn't know English."

Lowther whistled. "My hat! Have you got a giddy document in Italian, then?"

"I suppose so." "Then you won't be able to read it yourself?"

"No, I couldn't read it. But we can get it translated somehow. Lots of chaps know Italian. Young Brooke of the Fourth does; about the only fellow at St. Jim's who does, I fancy. He goes in for languages, you know. Brooke's a good sort. He'd translate it for us, and keep mum, if we asked him. But, of course, I'm going to put it away safely till the four days are up."

"Mind Levison & Co. don't get on the track of it," said Manners. "Levison wouldn't stop short of boning it. He's jolly curious about that man in the wood already."

Tom Merry sniffed. "The rotter! He won't get on to this, though. I— What on earth are you doing, Monty?"

Monty Lowther had risen to his feet, and was stepping cautiously on tiptoe to the door. Monty Lowther had not forgotten that scuttling sound in the dormitory passage, and he had very sharp ears, and a slight sound outside the study had awakened his suspicions. He opened the door suddenly.

The figure of a junior kneeling outside was revealed.

It was Levison of the Fourth.

He had evidently been kneeling there, listening at the keyhole to the talk of the Terrible Three. So taken by surprise was he by the sudden opening of the door that he remained kneeling where he was for some seconds, staring blankly into the study.

Tom Merry's face darkened with anger. Lowther made a spring at the cad of the Fourth.

Levison leaped up then, and would have darted away; but Monty Lowther's grasp was upon him, and he was whirled into the study.

Levison was sent whirling across the room, and brought up, gasping, against the opposite wall. Lowther closed the door again.

Levison stood, panting and glaring at the chums of the Shell. He had been caught in the act, and lying would not save him now. And his looks were very apprehensive.

"You cad!" said Tom Merry. "You were listening!"

Levison panted, but did not speak.

"What are you doing out of your dorm at this time of night, Levison?" asked Monty Lowther quietly. "You see he's dressed, you chaps—even to his necktie?"

"And he's been out," said Manners. "Look at his boots and his bags."

There was no doubt about it. Levison's boots were stained with the mud of the woodland paths, and his trousers were damp with dew. The cad of the Fourth had been out, that was clear, and the Terrible Three were not long in guessing how matters stood.

"You've been out, Levison?" asked Tom Merry grimly.

"What if I have?" said Levison

defiantly. "I suppose I can break bounds as well as you?"

"You knew I was going, and you followed me."

"I didn't."

"Have you been in the wood?"

"No."

"Then where did you pick up that mud?"

Levison was silent.

"You followed me," said Tom Merry.

"I know now. It was you I heard in the passage when I got out of the dorm. And you came in before me, and you've been hanging about watching for me, in case you could find out anything more. You've been listening to all that we've been saying."

"I've heard it all," said Levison sullenly. "You know I have, so it's no good denying it. You shouldn't have secrets if you don't want 'em to be found out. I meant to get to the bottom of it, and I've done it. And I can tell you you'd get into a jolly row if the Head knew what you've been doing to-night."

Tom Merry's lips curled.

"You're a rotten cad!" he said. "You've found it all out, but I don't see that it will do you any good. If you tell the fellows, they'll only think you're romancing, and they know you to be a liar. I've a jolly good mind to give you a hiding now, though, for spying on me."

"If you lay a finger on me, I'll yell and wake up the whole House," said Levison, between his teeth. "Then you can explain to the Housemaster what you are doing out of the dorm."

"You cad!" muttered Manners.

"Look here!" said Levison. "There's no need for us to quarrel. That paper you've got is valuable. I'm quite willing to keep the secret, and to go Co. with you. I saw that Yankee chap, Finn, in the wood, and I know jolly well that he's not the kind of man to get after a thing unless there was money in it. There's money in this. That paper you've got might make us all rich. I'm willing to go Co., and keep the secret. I can get it translated for you to-morrow—"

"If you've heard what I've been saying, you know that I've promised not to look at it for four days," said Tom Merry.

Levison grinned.

"Of course, that's all rot!" he said. "If there's a fortune in it, I don't see any sense in giving the paper back to that Italian chap. We've got it now, and we can keep it. I'll get it translated, and if there's any money to be got we can get at it. If Luigi comes back, you can denounce him as an impostor, and kick him out."

Tom Merry looked steadily at the cad of the Fourth.

"I won't hit you, Levison," he said, "because I don't want to make a row at this time of night. But get out of this room, you make me ill."

"Then you won't do—"

"Get out!"

"I think you're a fool!" said Levison savagely. "I think you're—"

Tom Merry made a movement towards him, and Levison hurriedly departed from the

study. The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

"That rotter knows the whole story now," said Lowther. "He will try to get hold of that paper, Tom."

"The cad! I'll take care of it. Let's get to bed."

The chums of the Shell returned to their dormitory. Tom Merry slept with the precious paper in his pocket-book under his pillow for the rest of that night.

CHAPTER 13.

Levison Means Business!

CLANG, clang, clang, clang! Tom merry yawned and sat up in bed as the rising-bell clanged out in the morning air.

Morning sunlight gleamed in at the high windows of the Shell dormitory of the School House.

Tom Merry did not feel so fresh as usual that morning. He had had very little sleep the previous night, and the excitement had told upon him, too. He would have been glad enough of an extra couple of hours in bed.

As he turned out, he wondered for a moment whether it had all been a dream—his visit to the cave in the wood; and the strange adventures that had befallen him. In the clear light of dawn, in the familiar surroundings of the dormitory, the whole adventure seemed strange, bizarre, improbable.

He felt under his pillow and took out the pocket-book, and glanced at the paper in it to make sure that it was there. It was there safe enough, folded as he had left it. It was no dream. There was the clue, such as it was, to the supposed treasure of the Italian sailorman.

Tom Merry put the pocket-book into an inside pocket as he dressed. In the cool light of day he was less inclined than ever to believe that there was anything in it; but for honour's sake he was bound to take every care of that paper until Maro Luigi either reclaimed it, or the four days had elapsed.

Tom Merry was rubbing his eyes as he left the Shell dormitory. He felt the loss of sleep, and he was very drowsy. But a run in the keen air in the quadrangle enlivened him. The first person he met there was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. D'Arcy was down very early, eager to know what had happened to the captain of the Shell on the previous night.

"Was it all wight, deah boy?" he asked, as he joined Tom Merry in the quadrangle.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; it was all black," he replied.

"How could you expect it to be all white on a dark night?"

"You ask!" said Arthur Augustus.

(Continued on the next page.)

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"I said all wight—not all white. Pway don't give me any of the Monty Lowthah's second-hand gags, deah boy. Did you go to the cave?"

"Of course I did!"

"Then tell me what happened, and don't make wotten fwivolous jokes, deah boy."

Tom Merry laughed, and told Arthur Augustus what had happened. The swell of St. Jim's listened with the keenest interest.

"Bai Jova, it sounds like a stowly!" he said. "I twust you've got that papah quite safe, Tom Mewwy?"

"Quite safe!"

"If you can't look at it for four days, that will be Monday," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It will be wisky cawwy-in' it about for four days with that cad Levison on the twack. I think you had bettah twust it to me, Tom Mewwy."

"Go hon!"

"Well, it's wisky, you know, and it wequahs a fellow of tact and judgment to take pwooper care of it," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "You had bettah place it in my hands."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Levison will be twyin' to get at it. Pewwaps the best thing, first of all, would be to give Levison a feahful twashin'. I twust you will be weasonable about that papah, Tom Mewwy. Suppose you leave it in your jacket when you change for footer, for instance. Levison is quite cad enough to sneak it and wead it, you know."

"I know he is."

"Then pway hand it ovsh to me."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Hallo, there's the bell for brekker," said Tom Merry, as he walked away towards the School House.

"I suppose I can tell Blake and the west about it now, Tom Mewwy?" said D'Arcy, hurrying after him. "They have been wowwyin' me fwighfully about keepin' a secwet, you know. No harm in tellin' them the whole stowly now."

"None at all, Gussy! You can relieve their little minds now."

And Tom Merry went in to breakfast.

Before going to the Form-room for lessons, Tom Merry locked the precious paper up in his desk in his study. He felt that it would be safer there. During morning lessons he was thinking a great deal about the Italian sailorman. What had happened to Maro Luigi? Had the man succeeded in escaping?

It was most likely, for he had a good start of his enemies, and they could not know in which direction he had gone. Tom Merry hoped sincerely that Luigi had succeeded in getting away—though he could not think that the man's life was really threatened. He felt that Hiram Finn, unscrupulous ruffian as he was, would stop short of that crime.

If the man had escaped, he would only have to write to Tom Merry for the paper. He knew the boy's name, and where he lived. If he did not write or come, would it mean that he had been kidnapped by the Yankee, and could not; or—there was always the darkest possibility. Tom Merry drove that thought from his mind. But he was very much preoccupied during morning lessons, and Mr. Linton gave him lines twice.

After lessons, Tom Merry expected that he would find the story of the Italian talked of among the juniors. He had not expected Levison to keep his own counsel in the matter. Tom Merry did not intend to answer any questions on the subject. But he was relieved to find none were asked. Levison had

kept silent. Doubtless he had confided the matter to his chum Mellish, but they were not spreading it about the House. Levison undoubtedly had his own reasons for holding his tongue.

The Shell were dismissed about five minutes later than the Fourth that morning. After chatting in the passage for a few seconds, Tom Merry went up to his study.

The study door was closed, and as he opened it there was the sound of a quick movement in the room. Tom Merry knew that Manners and Lowther were downstairs, and the thought of Levison came into his mind in a moment.

He entered the study quickly.

"You cad!"

Levison was standing over his desk, which was open. Tom Merry's eyes blazed with anger as he looked at him.

"Levison, you rotter—"

Levison backed away.

"Hands off!"

"You rotten cad! You are trying to steal that paper!"

"I—I—"

"Have you found it?"

"No, I haven't!" growled Levison.

"I—I didn't want to take it. I only wanted to read it—just out of curiosity."

"I'll teach you not to be so curious in my study, you cad!"

"Hands off!" yelled Levison.

But Tom Merry's grasp was upon him.

He whirled the cad of the Fourth to the door, Levison struggling fiercely in his grip.

Bump!

Levison flew through the doorway, and landed in the passage outside with a terrific concussion.

"Ow! Ow! Groogh!"

Biff, biff, biff!

Tom Merry's boot made rapid play upon the sprawling junior, and Levison picked himself up and ran.

Tom Merry, with a flush in his face after his exertions, turned back into the study.

He hurried to his desk.

The paper had been placed in a secret drawer where Tom Merry kept the funds of the junior football club.

Tom opened the drawer; the paper was still there, quite safe. Levison had not succeeded in finding it; but Tom Merry took the paper out again. The secret drawer would have baffled a casual search; but if Levison had time he would find it, Tom Merry felt sure of that.

The Shell fellow put the precious paper in his pocket again, and left the study.

CHAPTER 14.

The Document!

TOM MERRY did not run any further risk with the precious paper. After a great deal of thought on the matter, he sewed it up in a corner of his handkerchief, and kept that handkerchief always in his pocket.

Levison was not likely to look there for it; and he would have had no chance of getting hold of it if he had looked.

The next day passed, and the next, and Tom Merry did not hear anything of Maro Luigi. He wondered a great deal about the man, and what had become of him.

On Saturday afternoon the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's had another run in the wood, and Tom Merry & Co. visited the earthen cave in the Poacher's Glade.

But in the cave, and the wood, they did not find any signs of the strangers who had been there on the previous Wednesday. Maro Luigi was gone, and Hiram Finn and his followers had gone, too—perhaps in pursuit of the Italian, or perhaps having given up the chase.

Tom Merry thought a great deal about the Italian sailorman, to whom he had taken a liking in their short acquaintance.

If he did not hear from Maro Luigi by Monday, he was to read the paper.

Then, according to what the Italian had said, the secret would be his—if it was worth anything. But Tom Merry did not take that too seriously. He was very doubtful whether there was anything in the story at all; and if there proved to be a treasure, he would still regard it as belonging to Maro Luigi, if the Italian ever came back to make his claim.

If his enemies were close on his track, the Italian might go into hiding, and not be able to reclaim the paper for weeks—and then Tom Merry would be perfectly prepared to give it to him. But there would be no harm in reading it when the four days had elapsed—and he was very keen to know what it contained.

Sunday passed without news of the Italian.

On Monday morning Tom Merry inquired eagerly for letters. There was one for him, but it was from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess. That was all.

"Nothing from the giddy dago!" Monty Lowther remarked.

"Nothing," said Tom Merry.

"Then you read the paper to-day!"

"Yes, if I don't hear from him to-day."

"Give him a chance till after lessons," said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's what I thought," he said.

He thought a great deal about the paper that day. Glad enough he would have been to receive a letter or a telegram from Maro Luigi to say that he was safe. But no word came.

After lessons that day Tom Merry's chums gathered round him eagerly as he came out of the Form-room. Manners and Lowther, and Blake, Herries and Digby, were equally eager to see the precious paper.

"Time!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Are you sure you've still got the papah safe, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have been feelin' vewy uneasy about it."

"I've got it tied up in my handkerchief—sewn up, in fact," said Tom Merry.

"Have you had it sewn up there all the time?"

"All the time," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Must have been a fearful twial for you not to change your handkerchief for four days, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus sympathetically.

"Ass! I've had two handkerchiefs—one with the paper sewn up in it, and the other not," said Tom Merry. "The paper's safe as houses. If you fellows want to see it—"

"What-ho!"

"Come up to my study, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about getting it translated?" said Blake. "The only chap I know who knows Italian is Brooke of our Form."

"Brooke's the chap I was thinking of," said Tom Merry. "He'll do it for

us like a shot. He's always an obliging chap."

"But he's a giddy day boy, and he'll be gone," said Blake anxiously. "My hat! If he's gone home, we shall have to wait till to-morrow for the translation."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Look for him, then," said Tom Merry quickly. "If he's started home, collar him and bring him back. Tell him it's important, and carry him, if necessary. He's got to come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and Herries ran away in search of Brooke of the Fourth. Dick Brooke was a day boy, and he generally went straight home after lessons. Brooke had the peculiar distinction at St. Jim's of being the only boy there who earned his own living—doing his work in the evening after getting home from school, and on half-holidays. In spite of that, however, he found time for many studies the other boys had no time for.

Still, he was not what the fellows called a swot, being always ready to take part in the sports, though he was already beginning to suffer a little from short sight, and he was not of so much use in the field as he had once been.

But Brooke, much as he had to do, could always be relied upon to help anybody out. But Tom Merry knew that he would work the translation willingly enough, and could be depended upon to keep the secret afterwards, if necessary.

The Terrible Three proceeded to their study, with D'Arcy and Digby, while Blake and Herries went in search of their fellow Former.

Levison watched them in the passage, with a scowl.

"Look here, Tom Merry!" he said, coming up to them. "To-day's Monday—"

"Thanks! I saw it in the calendar that it was," said Tom Merry.

"I mean the four days are up."

"Go hon!"

"You haven't read the paper yet?" asked Levison.

"Are you asking for a thick ear?"

"Well, if you haven't, I suppose you're going to read it to-day?" said Levison.

"Yes; we're just going to."

"Will you let me see it?"

"No, I won't!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"I'd like to see it," said Levison. "Look here—"

"You're jolly well not going to!" said Tom Merry coolly. "It doesn't concern you in the least. You wouldn't know anything about the paper at all, if you hadn't spied and listened, like a rotter!"

"Run away and play, Levison," said Monty Lowther. "We're busy."

Levison swung away, scowling. The juniors entered Tom Merry's study, and he took out the handkerchief in which the precious paper was sewn up. The fellows stood round the table and watched him eagerly.

Tom Merry snipped through the threads with his penknife and took the paper out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and regarded it with great interest.

"Bai Jove! Now we're gettin' to it!" he remarked.

Tom Merry hesitated as he held the paper in his fingers.

"I suppose we can read this?" he said. "I mean, get it translated. I suppose it's doing a fair thing by poor old Luigi, isn't it?"

"I think so," said Manners. "He told you plainly what you could do. It's horrible to think that he may have been done in—"

"I don't think that's likely. I heard Finn talking, you know, and he had made his arrangements for kidnapping Luigi, and taking him to Venice to make him point out where the money was buried. Finn knows nothing at all about this paper having been written. He can't even suspect its existence. If Luigi hasn't got away, I suppose he's a prisoner in that rascal's hands—may even be on his way to Venice with them."

"Finn was a sea captain, from what I could make out, and had a schooner at Southampton. Look here, you fellows! If Luigi has been kidnapped and taken to Italy, to be forced to point out where the tin is, the best thing we can do for him is to read this paper. Then if there's anything in it, we may be able to get some of our people to take it up, and look for the stuff, and get it into safety before that Yankee can get his claws on it."

"Good egg!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove! We might go and look for it ourselves!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You wemembah we did go on a tweasure-hunt once, though it ended in wathah a fwest. I should be vewy pleased to take you youngstabs to Venice, if we could get permish fwom the Head, and fwom our patahs—"

"Good wheeze for the vac, if we could go," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, let's look at the paper," said Lowther. "We can't read it till young Brooke gets here, but we can have a squint at it."



Tom Merry entered his study, to see Levison standing over his desk, which was open. Tom's eyes blazed with anger. "You rotten cad!" he exclaimed. "You are trying to steal that paper!"

"Yaas, I am weally cunvius about it, deah boy."

Tom Merry opened out the paper. The writing upon it, in pencil, was easy enough to read. The agitated hand of the Italian had scored the lines deep. And this was what the juniors read:

"La cassa di danaro e sepolta fra le rovine della capella di Santa Maria dell'isola, presso Burano, nela Grande Laguna di Venezia. La pictra e segnata d'una croce rossa."

"MARO LUIGI."

"Well, my only summer chapeau!" said Monty Lowther. "What does it mean?"

"Ask me another!"

"Yaas; I can't wead it," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, scanning the document through his famous monocle. "I can see that it's good Italian, and I can make out some words. 'Capella' is a chapel, and 'cassa' is a box, and 'Burano' is an island near Venice, deah boys. 'Cwoce wossa' means a wed cross."

"'Croce rossa'—red cross," said Tom Merry. "Good! We've getting on! But what does the whole disney mean?"

"I weally don't know."

"Where's that ass Blake? Why doesn't he bring Brooke—"

"Here they come!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Great Secret!

BROOKE of the Fourth had just passed out of the gates of St. Jim's when Blake and Herries sighted him and speedily bore down on him.

"Brooke!" roared Blake.

Dick Brooke turned his head. He paused as he saw the two juniors dashing after him at top speed.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he asked.

"You're wanted!" gasped Blake.

"We want you to help us with a translation," explained Herries. "We won't keep you long."

"Oh, all right!" said Brooke cheerfully.

And he returned to the School House with the Fourth Formers.

Blake and Herries marched him up to Tom Merry's study.

"Here you are at last!" said Tom Merry, as they entered the room. "Does Brooke know what's wanted, Blake?"

"Yes; I've told him," said Jack Blake.

"You want help in a translation," said Brooke, looking round. "What is it—Latin prose?"

"No fear!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We haven't fetched you up here to ask you to help us with our lessons."

"Wathah not!"

"What is it, then?"

"Italian."

"Italian?" said Brooke, in surprise. "You chaps taking up Italian?"

"Not much."

"We've got a paper in Italian we want translated," explained Tom Merry. "I think Brooke had better know about it, you chaps. He can keep a secret."

"Certainly," said Brooke.

Tom Merry explained the history of the Italian document in concise words.

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Dick Brooke listened with his eyes growing wider and wider in astonishment.

"Well, my word!" he exclaimed. "It beats a novel! And that's the paper you want me to translate!"

"That's it, my infant!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"I'll do my best," said Brooke. "You know, I'm not so well up in Italian as in French and Latin. It's a study I've taken up for pleasure, not for profit, and I haven't been able to give much time to it—"

"Queer idea of pleasure some fellows have!" murmured Herries.

Brooke laughed.

"I'll do my best with the paper," he said. "If I can't manage it, I've got an Italian dictionary, and I'll work it out with that. But let's see the paper."

Tom Merry handed him the paper.

Brooke fixed his eyes upon it, and as he read his eyes grew wider and he gave a low whistle. It was evident that he was reading easily enough the words that looked so utterly mysterious to the rest of the juniors.

It was curious to see him standing there reading what to the other fellows present was totally incomprehensible.

"Well, my hat!" said Brooke at last. There was a general shout of inquiry.

"You understand it?"

"Yes."

"All of it?"

"Every word; it's quite easy."

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, deah boy! You know, I couldn't possibly wead that," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with the air of a fellow making a very impressive and singular statement.

"Go bon!" murmured Blake.

"Let's have the translation," said Tom Merry. "This is ripping of you, Brooke!"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries. "Good thing to have a giddy genius in the Form. Write it out, Brooke, old man!"

Tom Merry handed the Fourth Former a pen. Brooke sat down to write. He read the paper over again, and then wrote out the translation easily enough:

"The box of money is buried among the ruins of the chapel of Santa Maria of the Island, near Burano, in the Grand Lagoon of Venice. The stone is marked with a red cross."

"MARO LUIGI."

The juniors gazed in breathless interest at the words as they ran from under Brooke's pen. There was a buzz as his pen ceased to travel.

"The box of money! By Jove!"

"Buwied, deah boys! A weguhah buwied treasure!"

"Near Burano, in the Lagoon of Venice!"

"Hurrah!"

Brooke rose to his feet.

"Looks to me as if there is something in it," he remarked. "If that Italian chap doesn't claim the paper again, Tom Merry, you are in for a good thing!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No more mysterious documents to translate?" asked Brooke, with a smile.

"No, thanks. Awfully obliged."

"That's all right. So long!"

And Dick Brooke quitted the study. The juniors read over the paper with great jubilation when Brooke had gone.

The mere idea of a buried treasure appealed very much to their imagination. And a buried treasure upon an

island in the romantic Lagoon of Venice was, as Monty Lowther put it, especially ripping.

And they had no doubt about it now.

Far away in the blue Adriatic, in a ruined building upon an isle, lay the buried treasure—for the sake of which the unfortunate Luigi was hunted down by the Yankee adventurer, Hiram Finn.

And the sum? Hiram Finn had said a hundred thousand dollars—that would be twenty thousand pounds in English money. The mere thought was dazzling to the juniors.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It would be wippin'! If that chap Luigi doesn't turn up again, the money is yours, Tom Mewwy!"

"I hope he will turn up," said Tom Merry.

"But if he doesn't?" said Blake.

"If he doesn't," said Tom Merry gravely, "I think it's because he's fallen into the hands of Hiram Finn and his gang, and they've kidnapped him. The best thing we can do is to get this box of money removed from where it is now, so that Finn can't get his hands upon it."

"Bai Jove, I wish we could go!"

"Why shouldn't we?" said Tom Merry. "The vacation's close now, and we shall be away from St. Jim's. Some of us can get away, at all events, and we can make up a party to pay a visit to Venice. The only drawback is that Italy is at war with Abyssinia. Of course, there's no danger in Italy, but our parents may jib, all the same."

"Yaas, that's true. But I'll write to my governah at once, and put it to him."

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther.

"I'll write to my muelc."

And the juniors left the study in great spirits.

The idea of an excursion to the wonderful city of Venice, the Queen of the Adriatic, during the coming vacation was pleasant enough, the only difficulty was that it might not come off, owing to the troubled state of Italy.

Some of the fellows were already booked up for the holiday; others were very doubtful whether their parents would allow them to go upon an excursion so far afield.

There were a good many letters written during the following days.

On Wednesday evening, as the Terrible Three were sitting down to tea in their study, the door was thrown open, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed in with a letter in his hand.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed.

"My patah's turned up twunups!"

"What's the news, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Listen to this, and I'll wead it out."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the letter in his hand. "Sent too many fivahs lately—'Ahem! That's not the place. 'Money wasted—' Ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't found the place yet, deah boys. Oh, here it is! 'My deah Arthah,—Your formah tutor, Mr. Mopps, is about to pweceed to the North of Italy to collect materials for a book upon which he is engaged. If you and your friends wish to spend a part of the vacation in Italy, I can awwange with Mr. Mopps to take charge of the party, and I hope you will find the excursion enlightenin'. That's all the part that's interestin', deah boys. The patah wuns on about the war Italy are engaged in, but he considers there's no daugh there. I won't wead

(Continued on page 23.)

THE NOTECASE THAT SAVED A SCHOOLBOY FROM A FLOGGING!

LUCKY LOVELL!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



Lovell stared in astonishment at the object wedged between two jutting branches. It was a slim russet leather notecase! The Head's long-lost wallet! "Oh srikey!" gasped Arthur Edward. "What luck!"

Not Having It!

"**T**AIN'T fair!" said Lovell savagely.

"My dear chap—"

"It's no good telling me it's fair, Jimmy Silver, because it isn't! And I'm jolly well not having it—see?"

Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth Form at Rookwood, spoke with emphasis and determination.

Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome exchanged hopeless looks. As Lovell's chums they were deeply concerned. Other fellows in the Fourth grinned.

Fair or not, it was not of much use for Lovell to declare that he wasn't "having it." Whatever his headmaster awarded to any fellow, that fellow had to have.

"For goodness' sake, old chap—" said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm not having it!" said Lovell, in a tone of finality. "If Dicky Dalton sends me up to the Head, I shall say that—"

"Quiet, you ass!" breathed Raby. "He may come along and hear you."

"I don't care if he does."

Richard Dalton, master of the Fourth, seemed to be late that morning to take his Form. All the Fourth were there—Modern and Classical—second lesson being one that they shared in common. Moderns and Classics alike sympathised with Lovell. Everybody knew that he was booked for a Head's flogging. But they were equally amused by his statement that he wasn't having it.

"Here he comes!" said Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth as a footstep was heard in the passage.

"Let him come!" said Lovell.

"You'll jolly soon see!"

"You blithering ass!" whispered Jimmy Silver. "Dicky's late because the Head was speaking to him. You can guess what it was about. Now, for the love of Mike—"

"I jolly well tell you—" roared Lovell.

That roar remained uncompleted as Mr. Dalton, looking very severe, stepped into the Form-room. He gave Lovell a glance, and Arthur Edward, excited and wrathful as he was, was silent.

"Lovell," said Mr. Dalton quietly.

Arthur Edward Lovell was famed in the Rookwood Fourth as a hunter of trouble. But never did he hunt for it so hard as in this story—to meet with the luck of a lifetime!

"Yes, sir," said Arthur Edward respectfully, but firmly.

"You will go to the Head's study after third school. Dr. Chisholm has instructed me to send you there, Lovell."

Lovell breathed hard and deep. Dalton, having made that statement, was ready to get on with the lesson as if the matter was closed. It wasn't closed.

"Will you tell me why, sir?" asked Lovell.

Mr. Dalton gave him another look.

"You are perfectly aware why,

Lovell. Your headmaster gated you for all the half-holidays this term. Yesterday you went out of school bounds, disregarding the sentence. You will receive a flogging."

"Do you call that fair, sir?" asked Lovell.

Mr. Dalton jumped.

"What!" he ejaculated.

Again Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome exchanged hopeless looks. Lovell, as usual, having got more than he wanted, was asking for more. There was a thrill of excitement in the Fourth.

"Lovell," said Mr. Dalton, "what do you mean? Have you the audacity to question the justice of your headmaster?"

"I—I didn't mean that, sir!" Lovell stammered a little. "But—"

"Then what do you mean?" rapped Mr. Dalton.

"I mean it's not fair, sir!" said Lovell stubbornly. "And if a man isn't getting fair play, he has a right to expect his Form-master to get it for him."

Mr. Dalton gave Lovell a long, long look.

"That is certainly true, Lovell," he said at last. "And if it were in my power to intervene, I would gladly do so. Do you deny that you went out of bounds yesterday, in defiance of the headmaster's order?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Lovell. "I went out all right."

"Then there is no more to be said."

"I think there is, sir," said Lovell. "Fair play's a jewel, sir."

Mr. Dalton breathed hard, but, to the surprise of his Form, he remained patient. Dicky Dalton was a very good-tempered young man.

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"If you have anything to say, Lovell, I will hear you," he said. "But be brief."

"I'm not complaining of being gated, sir," said Lovell. "I think it was pretty rough luck, because I was only trying to get back the Head's wallet, which that man Poggers pinched, and I—"

"We will not go into that, Lovell!" rapped Mr. Dalton. "Your foolish interference caused the escape of the pickpocket who had robbed your headmaster. You were very lightly dealt with. Say no more!"

It was quite futile for Dicky Dalton to give that command. Lovell had more to say, and was going to say it.

"I call it rough luck, sir, as what I meant was to do the Head a good turn," said Lovell. "Still, I know I was gated, and I went out. But it was Manders who caught me, and reported me to the Head. It's not Manders' business, sir."

"Lovell!"

"I've a right to say what's fair, sir," said Lovell. "Modern masters haven't anything to do with the Classical side. If a Classical master started reporting Moderns, Manders would kick up a row fast enough."

"I cannot discuss that with you, Lovell."

"I'm pointing out that it's not fair, sir. If Manders had minded his own business, the Head wouldn't know I was out of bounds yesterday afternoon. Mr. Manders had no right to interfere. Moderns oughtn't to hang about spying on Classical chaps."

"Lovell!"

"I don't think it's fair for a Classical man to be up for a flogging because a Modern beak can't mind his own business," said Lovell. "That's what I wanted to point out, sir."

How Lovell found the nerve to say all this to his Form-master was a mystery to his Form fellows. Every fellow, of course, fully agreed with him. Manders was a meddling old tick in the general opinion, and it was like his cheek to report Classical men. Very likely Richard Dalton, in his heart of hearts, had the same opinion as his Form. Still, it was obvious to everybody but Lovell that he was wasting his breath.

"I have listened to you patiently, Lovell," said Mr. Dalton. "You will now be silent. As you will receive a flogging from your headmaster after third school, I shall not punish you for your impertinence. But if you utter another word, I shall cane you!"

"But, sir—" Lovell immediately uttered two other words.

"Will you be silent, Lovell?" said Mr. Dalton.

"I'm trying to make you see, sir, that it's not fair—"

Mr. Dalton picked up the cane from his desk. He was a kind and patient young man, but Lovell had exhausted his patience.

"Step out before the class, Lovell," he said. "Now bend over that desk. Thank you."

Whack!

"You will now be silent, I trust," said Mr. Dalton.

Arthur Edward Lovell went back to his place. He was silent; his feelings were too deep for words. Dalton had given him only a flick—a hint that he was not boss of the show, as it were, in the Fourth Form Room—but there was clearly more to come if Lovell did not shut up.

Lovell shut up, and sat through second

lesson with suppressed indignation that glowed in his face and gleamed in his eyes. In that frame of mind there really was no telling what Lovell might or might not say and do.

The History of the Mystery!

"SILVER, old chap—" "Oh, don't bother!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"I say—" muttered Leggett. "Leave me alone!"

It was not like "Uncle James" of Rookwood to answer like that, even to a tick like Leggett, whom he disliked and despised; but Uncle James was fearfully worried and, for once, his sunny temper failed him.

In break Lovell's chums had been arguing with him. It was useless, of course. Lovell had declared that he "wasn't having it"—and he adhered with stubborn obstinacy to that declaration.

According to Lovell, he wasn't going to the Head after third school. He had to—but he wouldn't! He ended the argument by stalking away, leaving his friends overwhelmed with apprehension.

With that worry on his mind, Jimmy naturally had no patience to waste on the cad of Manders' House.

But as the Modern junior stepped back, with pale face and quivering lip, Jimmy's kind heart smote him.

"Hold on!" he said. "Look here, what did you want to say? You know I'm worried about Lovell, but cough it up."

That Leggett was in trouble was hardly a secret. The dingy black sheep of Manders' House was not infrequently in trouble. In fact, Jimmy—who had seen him speaking to Mr. Googe in Coombe Wood the day before—had a pretty clear idea of the trouble. It was not the sort of trouble with which a decent, healthy fellow like Jimmy could sympathise very much.

"I—I know it's a cheek to ask you," muttered Leggett. "We've never been friends. And—and I'm done for, Silver, if somebody doesn't help me out. And—and I can't ask anybody else."

Jimmy granted angrily.

He knew perfectly well why Leggett had picked him out for help. He knew that he erred on the side of a too-easy-going good nature, and he thought it rotten of Leggett to take advantage of it. He felt inclined to kick the Modern junior; but, instead of kicking him, he listened to his tale of woe.

"You saw me yesterday," mumbled Leggett. "I—I had to see that man Googe. I owe him money. He's going to kick up a row."

"What did you expect?" grunted Jimmy. "Do you think you can play the shady blackguard without trouble to come?"

"I—I thought the horse was going to win—"

"You silly idiot!"

"I know I've been a fool," groaned Leggett, "but that doesn't help me now. I owe him the money, and I can't pay him. If he does kick up a row, goodness knows what will happen to me here!"

"The sack, I suppose," growled Jimmy. "You've asked for it."

Leggett winced.

"Well, I don't want to rub it in," said Jimmy Silver, remorseful again.

"But, look here, what do you want?" "If I let him have a pound on account he will leave me alone till next term. I can manage then."

Jimmy compressed his lips. He wondered whether Leggett knew that he had

received a pound note as a "tip" from home that week. It looked as if he did.

"I know it's a cheek to ask you," mumbled Leggett drearily. "But I'm right up against it."

Jimmy had a struggle in his mind. His pocket-money was moderate, and he had plenty of uses for an extra "quid." To let it go to a dingy blackguard like that man Googe was the very last use he would have thought of making of it. The wretched Leggett watched him with anxious hope.

"I—I say, I—I might be able to do something for Lovell in return," he muttered.

Jimmy stared.

"What the dickens do you mean? You can't get that fathead off his flogging, I suppose?"

"Well, there might be a chance," muttered Leggett. "If the Head's wallet was found, he might go easy with Lovell."

"You silly owl!" snapped Jimmy. "The Head's wallet has been lost for weeks—ever since that night Poggers pinched it and chucked it away, when we all got after him. It's been hunted for high and low. Why, Lovell himself put in hours hunting for it, thinking that the Beak might let him off the gating if he found it. What rot are you talking!"

"I mean it!" Leggett gave a cautious glance round, fearful that other ears might hear. "I'll tell you something, Jimmy Silver. But, for goodness' sake, keep it dark! In the wood yesterday I heard that man Poggers and a pal of his he called Herbert talking about the Head's wallet. You know that Poggers has been after old Manders, trying to steal his overcoat—"

"What on earth about that?"

"The wallet was in it!" whispered Leggett.

"The Head's wallet in Manders' overcoat?" repeated Jimmy Silver, wondering whether Leggett's troubles had turned his brain.

"I know it sounds weird," said Leggett. "But that's the truth. That's why that tramp has been hunting Manders for weeks, trying to steal his overcoat. I heard him tell the other brute. That night he was caught here, you remember he was run down in Manders' House—hiding in Manders' own room. Well, he hid the wallet in a rent in the lining of Manders' overcoat hanging up in the wardrobe there. I heard him say so. That's why he's been watching for Manders ever since, trying to steal that overcoat."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "But if you found this out yesterday, why haven't you—"

"I—I never said anything about it. After I came in I went to Manders' room and—and found it there in the lining of his overcoat, just as that man Poggers said—"

"Then—"

"Oh, you won't understand!" muttered Leggett. "That man Googe had been threatening me. I—I thought I'd borrow—"

"Borrow!" repeated Jimmy.

"Borrow a pound, to keep him quiet—"

"Are you mad?" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"I was going to let it be found with the rest in it," muttered Leggett.

"Don't look at me like that—"

"You make me sick!" said Jimmy.

"You ought to be kicked out of the school, you awful toad! You dare to tell me you pinched—"

"I never did!" panted Leggett. "Manders came up to the room and caught me there. I had just time to



chuck the wallet out of the window before he could see it. He might have thought—

"He might have thought the truth, do you mean?" said Jimmy savagely.

"Well, I never touched it, as it turned out. Manders thought I was there playing some trick, and whopped me. Afterwards, I looked for the wallet, but it couldn't be found. I think it hit a tree when I threw it out of the window—I heard it hit something a good distance from the House. I've told you this because—because I—"

"Because you can't find the wallet and pinch a pound note out of it!" said Jimmy, with disgust. "Oh, you toad!" "I needn't have told you!" said Leggett sullenly. "It's somewhere about, though I can't find it. It was losing all that money that made the Head so wild with Lovell. You've got to keep dark what I've told you—if you picked up the wallet they'd believe it had been about the quad all the time. If the Beak got it back, he'd go easy with Lovell—"

"How am I to find it, if you can't?" "Well, there's a chance, anyhow. It must be somewhere, and not very far from Manders' House."

Jimmy stood silent. It was true enough that if the Head recovered that lost wallet, with the forty-five pounds ten shillings it contained, it might very likely make him take a more lenient view of Lovell's offences. But the chance was a remote one. It was pretty clear that Leggett had hunted for it and failed. But Jimmy was thinking not only of that, but of the wretched fellow before him.

"You had a stroke of luck, Manders catching you as he did," he said quietly. "You know what you'd be now if he hadn't. You must have been mad, even to think—"

Jimmy's hand slid into his pocket. The fellow was a rank outsider. But what he had thought of doing, what he

had so nearly done, showed in what desperate straits he was. Jimmy Silver's pound note was booked!

Looking After Lovell!

"ROT!" said Lovell. It was, of course, exactly like Lovell!

For weeks after the Head's wallet had been lost, Lovell had put in his leisure time hunting for it, hoping that if he found it the Head would let him off the gating. But now that Jimmy Silver proposed a hunt for the lost wallet, Lovell pronounced it "rot!"

"Utter rot!" he added, as Jimmy gave him an exasperated glare. "It can't be found. Haven't I hunted for it?"

"You're rather an ass, you know!" Raby pointed out. "It might be lying right under your nose and you'd miss it."

"Look here—" roared Lovell.

"Give me a chance to speak, you fathead!" said Jimmy Silver. "We're up to Monsieur Monceau for third school. We can chance it a bit with Mossoo, and get in late. That gives us a chance to hunt for the wallet—"

"I've told you there's no chance!" said Lovell.

"I've told you there is. I can't tell you why I believe so, because it's another fellow's bizney, but you can take my word for it."

"Somebody pulling your leg, old chap," said Lovell. "You're a bit soft, Jimmy. Anybody can pull your leg."

In view of what Lovell had coming to him from the Head, Jimmy Silver did not punch his nose. But never had he felt more strongly tempted to do so.

Raby and Newcome were puzzled by what Jimmy had told them. He could not, of course, give Leggett's shady secret away. Had Leggett's dealings with that wallet become known, he would have been expelled from Rookwood on the spot. Jimmy, therefore,

As Lovell bounded out of the Form-room Monsieur Monceau entered. They met in the doorway with a crash! "Mon Dieu!" gasped the French master as he staggered back. "Vat is zat? Ooogh!"

could only tell his friends that he had a reason to think that the lost wallet might be found if hunted for—and though Raby and Newcome were puzzled, they were willing to believe that Jimmy knew what he was talking about.

Not so Lovell! Lovell always knew best—and never more inopportunistly than now!

"I'm not bothering about that rotten wallet," went on Lovell. "No good thinking about that now. It's lost for good, or it would have turned up before this."

"I tell you I've heard something about it—"

"Well, what have you heard, then?"

"I can't tell you that, but you can take my word for it that there's a chance of getting hold of the wallet, and—"

"I can take your word all right," agreed Lovell, "but you haven't much sense, old chap, and you let fellows pull your leg. I saw you talking with that tick Leggett a few minutes ago, and I'll bet he got your pound note off you."

Jimmy crimsoned, and Raby and Newcome grinned.

"Never mind that pound note!" snorted Jimmy.

"Leggett's minding it, I expect!" grinned Lovell. "Did he spin you a yarn for it? Are you ass enough to believe him if he did? You ought never to go out without your friends, Jimmy. You're too soft."

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Are you coming to help look for that wallet?" he asked.

"Not! I've got something else on hand," answered Lovell. "The bell will go in a few minutes now. I've been thinking out what to do while you've been letting that Modern tick gammon you. I've decided—"

"To go to the Head?"

"Hardly!" Lovell snorted. "I'll watch it! It's up to Dicky Dalton to stand by me, only he can't see it. Manders has no right to report me, and

I'm not having it. The old fox is thirty every day now, because of that tramp Peggors chasing him, and trying to steal his silly overcoat. Is it my fault if a lunatic gets after Manders? Well, he's not going to take it out of me. That's why he's down on me, and you jolly well know it."

"All the same—"

"You needn't jaw—and there's not much time for jaw now, anyhow, if I'm to get clear before the bell goes."

"Get clear?" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"I'm ordered to go to the Head after third school, and the bell goes for third school in a few minutes. Well, I'm not going. I'm going to cut third school so that I shan't be on hand afterwards, see?"

"See?" gasped Jimmy Silver. "No, I don't quite see. You've got to go to the Head's study, or Bulkeley will take you there by your neck—"

"He's got to get hold of my neck first!" said Lovell. "My neck will be far enough out of his reach if I'm out of gates. I'm not going into third school. I'm going for a walk."

"You—you—you're going for a walk!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "You be-nighted ass, you'd be sacked if you cheeked the beaks like that—"

"Sacked like a shot!" said Raby.

Lovell's face set obstinately.

"I don't think so!" he answered.

"But I'm chancing it, at any rate! You can go and hunt for that jolly old wallet if you like. I'm off!"

With which Arthur Edward Lovell turned round and walked away towards the gates. Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome stared after him, hardly believing their eyes.

Gates were open. Only seniors were allowed out in break, and Lovell was "gated," anyhow, and it was just on time for third school. Old Mack, the porter, was in the gateway; his eyes were on Lovell.

Arthur Edward Lovell was famed in the Rookwood Fourth as a hunter of trouble. But it was safe to say that he had never hunted it so hard as this before.

In his present state of indignant and obstinate stubbornness, Lovell was apparently prepared to set the whole school at defiance. With his chin up, he marched off to the gates.

"Lovell!" It was Mr. Manders' voice. The Modern master was in the quad, and he bore down on Lovell as the junior bore down to the gates.

"Stop! Where are you going, Lovell?" Lovell's eyes gleamed. He turned on Mr. Manders, looked that bony gentleman full in his bony face, and then deliberately turned his back on him.

Having thus demonstrated what he thought of Manders, Lovell marched on gateward.

Manders was left, glaring, crimson.

"Lovell!" he shouted. "Stop! Upon my word! Stop!"

Lovell marched on, unheeding.

Old Mack blocked his way.

"You can't go out, sir!" said old Mack.

"Now, you jest—"

"Get out of the way, please!" said Lovell.

"I don't want to push you over, Mack—and if you don't want it, either, just shift!"

"My eye!" said old Mack, blinking at him.

There was no doubt that in another moment or two Lovell would have pushed old Mack over and walked out. But at that moment there was a rush of feet behind him, and three pairs of hands were laid on him at the same moment.

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Jimmy, Raby, and Newcome dragged him back—so suddenly and so forcibly that Arthur Edward hit the quadrangle with the back of his head, and roared.

"Hold him!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"You bet!"

"You cheeky louts!" bawled Lovell.

"Leggo! Do you hear me?"

His chums did not let go. They grasped hard and tight, and whisked Lovell away.

They went at a run, anxious to get him away from the gates. Lovell objected strenuously. He struggled, he wriggled, and he roared. The bell was beginning to ring for third school as Lovell was hooked back to the House.

"Now, are you coming into Form?" panted Jimmy Silver.

"No!" roared Lovell.

"Hook him in!" said Jimmy.

"What-ho!"

Still wriggling and struggling, Lovell was hooked in, amid a grinning crowd of juniors. He was landed, with a bump, at his desk.

"Now, you blithering idiot—" gasped Jimmy.

Lovell bounced up again like an india-rubber ball. He made a bound for the door to escape.

"Look out!" shrieked Oswald.

It was too late! Monsieur Monceau, the French master, came in as Lovell bounded out!

They met in the doorway with a crash.

"Mon Dieu!" spluttered Mossoo, as he staggered back. "Vat is zat? Ooh!"

"Ooogh!" gasped Lovell.

Hands grasped him before he could dodge round the staggering French master. He was whirled back to his desk. His friends held him pinned there.

"Ciel!" gasped Monsieur Monceau. He tottered in. "Lovell! Vat for you give me vun crash like vun bull zat is mad? Vat? You will write vun hundred lines of ze Henriade after class—ecoutez? Vat is ze mattair viz you, head of a pudding?"

Lovell had to sit it out. But he gave his anxious friends grim looks. He was booked for third school; there was no escape from that. After third school he was to go to the Head—and a prefect would take him if he did not go. But Arthur Edward Lovell was not beaten yet! He had said that he wasn't having it—and what he had said, he had said!

A Startling Discovery!

"LOVELL!"

"Yes, Bulkeley!"

"I've been looking for you!" snapped the prefect.

"Well, now you've found me," said Lovell coolly.

The captain of Rookwood looked at him, so did about fifty other fellows.

Third school was over. Lovell, ordered to go to the Head, had not gone. It was known far and wide that he was not going—if he could help it.

As the next item on the programme would be a Sixth Form prefect looking for Lovell, to take him to his head-master, the general impression was that he couldn't help it.

Now the crucial moment had come. Bulkeley of the Sixth had looked for him, and here he was. Breathless attention was concentrated on Arthur Edward Lovell.

"The Head is expecting you, Lovell!" rapped Bulkeley. "Follow me at once!"

He turned to go back to the House. Lovell stood stock-still in the quad. Bulkeley turned again.

"Did you hear me, Lovell?" he hooted.

"I'm not deaf!" Lovell pointed out.

"I told you to follow me!"

"I know that."

Bulkeley looked at him almost blankly. This was a rather new experience for George Bulkeley.

"Are you coming?" he rapped.

"No!"

Bulkeley, with a red face, strode straight at Lovell, with outstretched hand. Lovell jumped back.

"Cluck it, Lovell, you ass!" exclaimed Mornington.

"Lovell, old man—" called out Erroll.

Lovell did not heed. Grim and stubborn determination was written in his face. Bulkeley rushed at him—and Lovell dodged again, and out off across the quad.

There was a roar behind him—of amazement, mingled with laughter. Lovell tore on. After him rushed the captain of Rookwood.

"Lovell!" shrieked Jimmy, in utter dismay.

Lovell headed towards the gates. Old Mack stood in the gateway—but he was prepared to up-end old Mack. But Neville of the Sixth was there, too—and up-ending Neville was another matter.

Changing his direction, Lovell ran towards Manders' House.

"Stop!" roared Bulkeley.

Lovell tore on, with the Rookwood captain in pursuit, and a whole mob of excited fellows following Bulkeley.

Lovell had the spotlight now.

He ran hard. The chase swept round Manders' House and back into the quad.

"Stop him!" roared Bulkeley, and two or three Sixth Form men, on the Classical side, ran to intercept Lovell as he came back from the Modern side.

Lovell stopped, breathless.

Bulkeley's grasp was hardly a foot off him, when, in sheer desperation, he grabbed at the ancient beech that stood in front of Manders' House, and clambered up the trunk.

The Rookwood captain grabbed at him as he went. Perhaps it was by accident, in that wildly excited moment, that Lovell's heel clumped on Bulkeley's nose. The prefect gave a yelp, and clasped his nose, and Lovell escaped his grasp.

Clambering breathlessly, Lovell got into the tree. Lodged in the branches over the thick, ancient trunk, he panted for breath and glared defiance.

Under the branches a mob of fellows swarmed. Bulkeley, rubbing his nose, stared up.

"Will you come down?" he bawled.

"No!" gasped Lovell. "I won't!"

"You mad young ass!" howled Bulkeley. "The Head's waiting for you! Do you want to be sacked?"

"Looks as if he does!" murmured Morny. "Never saw a chap beg for it so earnestly before!"

"Lovell," almost wailed Jimmy Silver. "Lovell, old chap—"

"You can shut up!" retorted Lovell.

"If you'd let me cut when I wanted to—"

"Oh, you awful ass!" groaned Jimmy.

"Come down at once, Lovell!" Bulkeley spoke quietly. He was good-natured, and hated to see a fellow asking for it in this wild and reckless way.

"I'm giving you a chance, you mad young idiot. Come down at once, or I shall have to call your Form-master to order you down."

"I'm not coming!"

"You'll have to come down if Dalton comes!" howled Raby.

"Shall I?" said Lovell. "You'll see!"

"Oh, you fathead!"

"What is all this?" Mr. Manders came jerking across from his House.

"Lovell, what are you doing on this side? Come down out of that tree at once!"

"Did you speak to me, Mr. Manders?" asked Lovell.

"What? Certainly I did!"

"Then don't!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Don't!" said Lovell.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Neville," called out Bulkeley, "go and ask Mr. Dalton to step here, will you?"

Neville of the Sixth hurried away across the quad.

Breathless excitement reigned under that old beech now, as the Rookwood crowd waited for the arrival of Richard Dalton.

Lovell, perhaps, felt a qualm. If so, he crushed it down. Deliberately he clambered higher into the beech. The branches were green with the new foliage of spring.

Suddenly Lovell uttered a loud exclamation as he stared at a small object wedged in the tree, sticking in a crevice between two jutting branches.

It was a slim russet leather notecase! From its position it looked as if it had dropped from the sky—or, at least, had been tossed from a high window. Clearly it had fallen through the branches above, and lodged in that crevice between two branches.

In his amazement Lovell forgot, for the moment, that he was a hot-headed rebel, defying authority, for he knew what it was. It was the headmaster's long-lost notecase! It was the wallet "pinched" by Slog Poggers, which he was supposed to have flung away while being hunted up and down and round about Rookwood School on the night of the man-hunt. There it was, fairly staring Lovell in the face!

"Oh crickey!" gasped Lovell. "What luck!"

He knew nothing of the amazing history of that wallet. He did not know that it had ever been hidden in the lining of Mr. Manders' overcoat; that Leggett had found it there, and thrown it out of Manders' window the day before, just in time to escape being caught with it in his hand.

"My hat!" gasped Lovell. "No wonder it was never found, if that pick-pocket chucked it up a tree! Who'd have thought it?"

He grabbed the wallet from the crevice. As he did so, the quiet but very authoritative voice of Richard Dalton reached him from below.

"Lovell, descend from that tree immediately!"

And, rather to the surprise—but greatly to the relief—of the Rookwood crowd, Arthur Edward Lovell descended from that tree immediately. With the Head's lost wallet in his pocket, Lovell was prepared to go to his headmaster. The situation was saved!

Fool's Luck!

DR. CHISHOLM turned the grimiest of grim faces on the junior who—a little red and breathless—entered his study.

The Head had been kept waiting. It was a serious matter for the Big Beak to be kept waiting. It would have been still more serious had the Head been aware of Lovell's extraordinary proceedings during the period for which

he had been kept waiting. The expression on the Head's face, as he fixed icy eyes on Arthur Edward Lovell, might have befitted the grim visage of the fabled Gorgon.

"Lovell!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You have kept me waiting for you."

"I thought you'd like me to bring you your notecase."

"What?"

"Your wallet, sir. You remember the wallet that man Poggers pinched, sir."

"Do you mean that you have found my notecase, Lovell, that was thrown away by that pick-pocket in his flight?" asked Dr. Chisholm.

"Yes, sir."

Arthur Edward laid the famous wallet on the Head's table.

Dr. Chisholm looked at the wallet, looked at Lovell, and then at the wallet again. The grim severity of his expression relaxed very much.

"Bless my soul!" he said.

"I think that's your wallet, sir."

"Certainly it is," Dr. Chisholm picked it up. "My dear boy, I had quite given up hope of ever seeing it again. Where did you find it? The whole school has been searched and searched again."

"It was in a tree, sir!"

"In a tree!" repeated the Head.

"Yes, sir; the old beech near Manders' House."

"Bless my soul!" repeated the Head. "Extraordinary! It shows very little sign of having been in the open so long. I am very much obliged to you, Lovell! It was certainly very intelligent of you to think of looking in a tree for it. No

one else thought of such a thing, so far as I am aware."

The Head opened the notecase. Quite a genial smile lighted his features as he examined the contents. It was packed with notes. The Head of Rookwood was not a poor man; still, the sum of forty-five pounds ten shillings was a considerable one. There was no doubt that Dr. Chisholm was glad, very glad indeed, to get it back.

"I am very, very much obliged to you, Lovell!" he said.

"Not at all, sir!" said Lovell modestly. "I've put in a lot of time looking for that notecase, sir, one time and another. I'm jolly glad I've found it."

He had reason to be glad! Dr. Chisholm laid the notecase on the table. Then his eyes fell on the birch, also lying on the table, which he had forgotten for the moment.

Lovell waited.

Dr. Chisholm looked at the birch; he looked at the notecase; he looked at Lovell. There was a pause.

"Lovell," said the Head of Rookwood, at last, "it was my intention, as you know, to administer a flogging for your disregard of authority yesterday. I feel, however, that I cannot do so in view of the very great service you have only this moment performed. In the circumstances, Lovell, I shall pardon you."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Lovell.

"You may go, Lovell," said the Head, after another brief pause.

"Thank you, sir."

"One moment." Lovell's hand was on the door when the Head spoke again. "In view of this, Lovell, your sentence

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of galing for the remainder of the term is rescinded. I will mention the matter to your Form-master. You may go, my boy."

Lovell went—as if he were walking on air!

Jimmy Silver & Co. were waiting for him at the end of the corridor. When they saw him come sauntering down the passage, his hands in his pockets and a cheery, satisfied grin on his face, they could hardly believe their eyes.

"Have you had the flogging?" gasped Jimmy.

"No, thanks!" grinned Lovell. "I thought I mentioned that I wasn't having it! Don't you remember?"

"Oh, don't be a goat! Why has the Head let you off, fathead?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Well, he's hardly likely to flog a chap who found his notecase for him," drawled Lovell. "He's let me off the galing, too! I rather thought he would if I found that notecase. You remember I told you more than once—"

"You've found the notecase?" yelled twenty voices.

Lovell nodded cheerfully.

"Oh, yes, I found it—"

"Where?" howled Jimmy.

"It was sticking in that tree! That's why I came down when Dicky called me. If it hadn't been for that—"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy.

"Well," said Mornington, "if ever anybody tells me after this that there isn't such a thing as fool's luck—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Edward had been lucky, whether it was fool's luck or not; there was no doubt about that. His friends marched him away in deep relief. There were happy and smiling faces in the end study that day!

Rogue's Luck!

MR. MANDERS did not smile. He was deeply displeased. Taking his walk in the quadrangle that evening, wrapped up against a chilly east wind in his thick, warm, grey overcoat, Mr. Manders thought about it with great annoyance.

The discovery of the long-lost notecase had been a matter of chance. It made no difference whatever to Lovell's offence. Yet the headmaster had seen fit to pardon him! And that miserable man, Slog Poggers, was still at large—and so long as he was at large Mr. Manders dared not venture outside the school walls, but had to take his walks within, as he was doing now! It was all very irritating to Manders.

Thinking over that matter with intense irritation, Mr. Manders was quite unaware of a lurking, slinking figure in the shadow of the beeches.

Within the walls of Rookwood Mr. Manders felt safe from the supposed

lunatic who had a remarkable mania for stealing his overcoat. Slog Poggers was too well known to venture near the school. Mr. Manders did not know that Slog now had an ally, who watched in his place, unknown by sight at the school. Still less did he know that that ally had spotted him over the wall and had dropped within, and was now watching in the dark shadows for a chance to snaffle him.

Mr. Manders had no idea of all that—till suddenly there came a rush of footsteps, a spring, and he was down on the ground, spluttering—and a pair of hefty hands were wrenching off his overcoat!

Manders forgot all about Lovell then. He sprawled and yelled! Fellows came running from the Houses; lights flashed in the dark quad; Manders was found, breathless but not otherwise hurt. But his overcoat was not found, and neither was the unknown pincher who had pinched it! After its many narrow escapes that celebrated overcoat was gone at last!

In the dark lane 'Erbert was running fast, with the overcoat bunched under his arm. At a little distance from the school a dark figure darted from the hedge and joined him.

"Got it?" panted Mr. Poggers.

"What do you think?" answered 'Erbert.

"Strike me pink!" said Slog Poggers. They ran on together, to get to a safe distance before examining the prize. They dodged into a field at last and under the lee of a haystack. 'Erbert struck matches while Mr. Poggers went through that overcoat. He went through it at first with a joyful face. It was the right overcoat this time, and under the lining was hidden—or had been hidden—a wallet packed with notes. But the joyful anticipation faded out of Mr. Poggers' face as his examination of that overcoat proceeded. Dark dismay replaced it. He ripped every inch of lining out of the overcoat before he gave up hope. But it booted not! No wallet was there!

Slog Poggers sat down and groaned.

"It's been found!" said Slog faintly.

"Strike me pink! 'Cause why, it ain't there! Strike me pink and blue!"

"You idjit, you!" said 'Erbert, perhaps by way of sympathy.

"Strike me pink and yaller!" groaned Mr. Poggers.

Two dismal figures disappeared, slinking into the night. A tattered overcoat remained to mark the spot of Mr. Poggers' cruel disappointment. Weeks and weeks had Mr. Poggers been after that overcoat. Now he had got it—and it had, as it were, turned to dust and ashes in his mouth! As he slunk away Mr. Poggers wondered, with great bitterness, whether, after all, honesty might not be the best policy!

THE END.

CLUE TO A FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 22.)

that out, as you're not weally called upon to stand it. What do you think of the idea, deah boys?"

"Hurrah!"

What the Terrible Three thought of it could be heard at the end of the Shell passage.

"Mopps makes it all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "He's an Oxford man, you know—an M.A., and a vewy tame and quiet little chap; stutters, and talks awful wot, you know, and thinks gweat guns of himself. He won't be the least twouble to us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I fancy we may be a trouble to him."

"Don't explain that before we start, or D'Arcy's pater may alter his mind," grinned Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus shook his head wisely.

"Wathah not! You can wely on me to be diplomatic. It wequiah, a fellow of tact and judgment to deal with a patah, you know. I wegard this as a wippin' lettah! What do you think?"

"Good egg!"

"Ripping!"

"Gorgeous!"

And the Terrible Three, jumping up from their chairs, clasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in their arms and waltzed him round the study; in the exuberance of their spirits.

"Weally, Lowthah—w weally, Tom Mewwy—Ow! Bai Jove! Yawooooh!"

The waltzing juniors waltzed into the tea-table, and there was a terrific crash as the table went flying, and tea and tea-things shot in a stream to the floor.

Arthur Augustus rolled over, and sat up in the middle of the broken crockery-ware. He sat there in a graceful attitude for a decimal fraction of a second, and then leaped to his feet with a wild yell.

"Bai Jove! I'm hurt! My twousahs are wuined! Ow!"

"Never mind, Gussy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You've mucked up our tea, but we'll come and have tea with you in Study No. 6."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose feelings were really too deep for words at that moment, was led away by the Terrible Three, and it was quite a quarter of an hour before he recovered the repose which, upon all occasions, ought to stamp the caste of Vere de Vere.

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