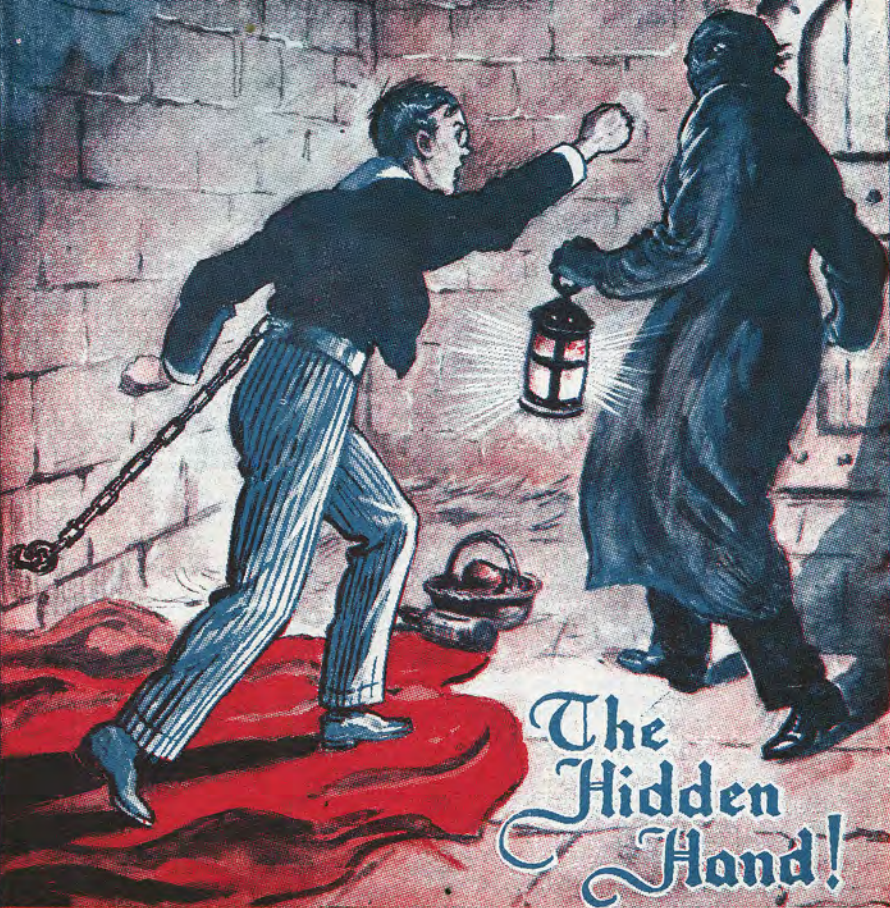


Merry Christmas to All Readers!

*The*

# GEM

24



*The  
Hidden  
Hand!*

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By Whose Hand Were Gussy and His Father Kidnapped? The Chums of St. Jim's Are Hot on the Unknown's Trail!

# The Hidden Hand!



By  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD**

There was the faint sound of someone crossing the room, treading lightly. Kerr put his head round the screen and strained his eyes to see. He caught the merest glimpse of a dark figure by the panelled wall before it disappeared in the darkness!

## CHAPTER 1.

### What Happened in the Night!

**C**OM MERRY opened his eyes, rubbed them, and yawned.

It was a cold and frosty morning. The pale sunlight of December glimmered in at the windows of the Painted Room at Eastwood House. But the electric light was still burning, and Tom for a moment wondered why.

In the mists and shadows of sleep he had forgotten the strange happenings of the previous night.

He lay half awake, his eyes fixed on the painted ceiling from which the room took its name. In the middle of the ceiling sprawled a painted Bacchus, with vine-leaves in his hair. Tom Merry's eyes were on the rosy face, and he started into wide wakefulness as it seemed to him for a moment that one of the eyes of Bacchus winked!

He sat up, staring.

But the next moment he smiled at the thought and glanced round him. In the next bed, Wally of the Third lay fast asleep. In the two adjoining rooms the other fellows had not yet awakened.

But one of the Christmas party at Eastwood House was awake. Kerr of the New House at St. Jim's was sitting up in bed, propped on pillows, with a "Holiday Annual" open on his knees. THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1,505.

He looked tired and sleepy; but he was reading, as the winter dawn crept in at the windows. Tom stared at him blankly.

"Kerr!" he exclaimed.

The Scottish junior of St. Jim's glanced up, and closed the "Holiday Annual" with a snap. Then he yawned deeply.

"Hallo! You awake?"

"Just woke up," answered Tom. "Kerr, old man, you haven't been sitting up all night?"

"Sort of," assented Kerr.

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Tom. "Mean to say that nightmare last night kept you from going to sleep again?"

Kerr grinned a sleepy grin.

"It was so jolly real!" he said.

Tom Merry looked at him with concern. Kerr, the practical, hard-headed Scottish junior, was about the last fellow he would have expected to be deeply disturbed by a nightmare—howsoever real it might have seemed. Tom did not yet know how very real that nightmare had been—and he was very far from suspecting. What had happened in the night in the Painted Room at Eastwood House was Kerr's secret—which he had his own reasons for keeping for the present.

"My dear chap, you'll be a wreck after missing your night's sleep," said Tom anxiously. "And we want you,

you know. We've got to set to work in earnest to-day to find poor old Gussy!"

"Yes, rather!" Figgins of the Fourth put his head in from the adjoining room. "You're the man that's got to think out the giddy problem, Kerr."

"I'm going to try," said Kerr.

Wally of the Third sat up in bed, awakened by the voices. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, younger brother of Arthur Augustus, grinned.

"And you're going to begin by getting nervy over a nightmare, and sitting up all night with the light on?" he inquired.

"You shut up!" said Figgins warmly. He clicked off the light. "If anybody finds your major, young D'Arcy, it will be Kerr. I jolly well know that."

"I don't think!" said Wally.

Kerr, yawning deeply, turned out of bed. The other fellows were turning out now. There was a general grin when they learned that Kerr had sat up all night, with the light on. Only Figgins did not grin. Figg was, as a matter of fact, rather worried about his chum. He could not help feeling, perhaps, that old Kerr was not, for once, showing up well. But if Figg felt that, he would not admit it to himself, and still less to anybody else.

It was hardly possible to help feeling disappointed.

# Thrill Follows Thrill Throughout this Gripping Fmas Varn of Tom Merry & Co. on Holiday.

Tom Merry & Co. were at Eastwood House for Christmas—but they were not thinking of Christmas festivities or holidaymaking.

The mystery of the fate of their chum, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, hung on their minds and weighed on their spirits.

It had startled them when they heard at St. Jim's that Lord Eastwood, Gussy's noble pater, had mysteriously disappeared from his own home. But it had been a greater shock to hear that Arthur Augustus, who had rushed home at once on hearing the news, had vanished as strangely and mysteriously as his father.

A man from Scotland Yard was in the house, seeking to solve the mystery of Lord Eastwood's disappearance. And Lord Eastwood's son had disappeared fairly under his nose.

The detective officer had smiled when he learned that the party of juniors from D'Arcy's school had set themselves the task of solving the mystery of those strange disappearances.

But his smile mattered little enough to Tom Merry & Co. They were in deadly earnest.

Mr. Dodder, at all events, had had no luck so far. He had discovered nothing, and the schoolboys could hardly discover less. Mr. Dodder agreed with Pilkington, the stately butler of Eastwood House, that a mob of schoolboys were quite out of place in Lord Eastwood's mansion in the distressing circumstances. But Tom Merry & Co. gave no more heed to Mr. Dodder's opinion on that point than to Pilkington's.

Figgins had declared, not once, but many times, that Kerr was the man—the right man in the right place. Figg's faith in the sagacity of his Scottish chum was unbounded. And the other fellows shared it to a considerable extent. Figg almost seemed to expect Kerr to produce the missing Arthur Augustus, like a conjurer producing a rabbit out of a hat!

He would not admit, even to himself, that Kerr had let him down in his expectations. But he was rather glum. And the other fellows had no hesitation in expressing their opinions.

"Any more nightmares, Kerr?" asked Herries, with a grin.

"No, thanks!" answered Kerr sedately.

"Nobody else appeared from nowhere?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Nobody," assented Kerr.

"You didn't wake up yelling again?" inquired Digby.

"I dare say he would have if he'd gone to sleep!" grinned Blake.

"Better stick in bed, old chap," said Manners. "You won't have another nightmare in the day-time, you know."

"Good egg!" said Kangaroo of the Shell. "I'll sit by you and hold your hand, if you like, Kerr."

"You didn't have enough supper, old chap!" said Fatty Wynn, shaking his head. "That was the trouble. If you'd laid a solid foundation—"

"Look here," growled Figgins.

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "What's the good of making out that Kerr hasn't been the most, Figgins? Last night he made me clunge beds in the dark. And I fancied something was up—of

was going to be. Then he whacks out with a stick in the dark and yells, and makes us all jump out of our skins,

because he fancies that somebody had got into a room with the door locked and windows shut—down the chimney, I suppose! Did you see any soot on him, Kerr?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, shut up!" booted Figgins indignantly. "Kerr's got more brains in his little finger than you School House clumps have got in your fat heads, all lumped together. And I jolly well think—"

"Draw it mild!" said Monty Lowther. "You don't think, in the New House! Tell us an easier one."

"I jolly well think—!" roared Figgins.

"Garrison!"

"I say, don't rag!" said Fatty Wynn. "Let's get down to brekker! I'm jolly hungry—this December weather makes a fellow sharp set. And you can jolly well shut up about old Kerr. Fellows have had nightmares before now."

"They haven't made such a fuss about them!" grunted Herries.

"You School House fathead!"

"You New House chump!"

"Chuck it!" said Kerr. "What's the good of ragging? We've got a busy day in front of us."

"Going to have a daymare next?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Shut up!" hooted Figgins.

"Yes, cheese it, you fellows," said Tom Merry. "The fact is, this place is

**The unknown who menaces Eastwood House has got the police guessing. But Kerr, the canny Scots junior of St. Jim's, is wise to the mystery man's identity.**

enough to put queer fancies into a fellow's head. When I woke up, I thought for a moment that that painted Bacchus on the ceiling was winking at me—"

Kerr gave him a quick look.

"Did you?" he said.

"Just a fancy, half-sleep," said Tom.

"And last night you fancied things. Let it drop, you fellows!"

And the fellows let it drop at last.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Poor Old Pilkington!

**G**EORGE FIGGINS gave his Scottish chum a rather worried look when they came down into the old hall of Eastwood House.

Tom Merry and most of the juniors had gone out on the terrace for a breath of the keen winter air before breakfast, but Fatty Wynn had made a straight run for the breakfast-room. Fatty's appetite did not need sharpening that morning—or any morning.

Figgins had advised his chum to stay in bed to make up for the loss of his night's rest, but Kerr had come down with the others. Herries had remarked to Monty Lowther, in a stage whisper, that poor old Kerr did not want to stay in the Painted Room by himself—a bad case of nerves, Herries thought.

Figgins was worried. He had never known his Scottish chum to be anything like "nervy" before.

"You'd better turn in again after brekker, old chap," said Figgins.

Kerr shook his head.

"I'll get a anoose somewhere downstairs," he said. "I can put in a couple of hours' sleep while you're gone to the station to meet Miss Cleveland and her aunt. You haven't forgotten that Cousin Ethel is coming this morning, Figg?"

"No fear!" said Figgins promptly. "I mean, of course not! But look here, Kerr, you'd get a better sleep in bed than—"

"That's all right!"

"You're not nervous about staying in that room alone after your nightmare last night, surely?" said Figgins in amazement.

"Well, yes, a little—after my nightmare last night," assented Kerr.

"Well, my hat!" said Figgins blankly.

"Feeling better, old bean?" asked Tom Merry, as he came in out of the frosty air with the other fellows.

"Right as rain!" answered Kerr.

"Whacked out at any more mysterious figures that weren't there?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Thanks—no!" answered Kerr imper-

turbably.

"Shut up, Monty, old man!" said Tom Merry.

"Come on, and let's get some brekker. Wynn's started already."

"I want to see Pilkington," said Kerr.

Tom stared.

"Pilkington! What the thump do you want to see Pilkington for?" he demanded.

"The less I see of him the better. I like it."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"If you want a dose of something for the nerves, you'd better see Mrs. Wipps," said Herries. "She's house-keeper, you know."

"Shut up, as!" said Figgins.

"Look here—"

"Well, it would be only civil to say good-morning to Pilkington," said Kerr.

"You remember he's left in charge here by Lord Conway, so long as Gussy's elder brother has to stay at Cannes with Lady Eastwood. He's head-cook-and-bottle-washer, and Lord-High-Everything-Else, and—"

"And a cheeky butler!" grunted Blake.

"Bother Pilkington!" said Tom Merry. "I jolly well know that he would have turned the lot of us out, under his authority from Lord Eastwood's eldest son, if Wally hadn't been here to see us through. If Wally disappeared like Gussy, Pilkington would get rid of us on the spot."

Wally chuckled.

"Catch me disappearing like poor Gussy!" he said. "Not likely!"

Kerr gave the sag a curious look. Monty Lowther chuckled.

"If Kerr hadn't changed beds with you last night, young D'Arcy, you'd have had that visit from the mysterious nobody who wasn't there—"

"Oh, give us a rest on that subject!" said Kerr, with a touch of impatience.

"You School House men talk too much. Henry, my lad, is Pilkington down yet?"

Henry, the young footman, was in the hall, hovering. A faint grin dawned through the wooden expression on his face.

"Mr. Pilkington's keeping to his room this morning, sir!" he answered.

Kerr's eyes glinted.

"Keeping to his room?" he repeated. "He's not ill, is he?"

"Mr. Pilkington's had a little accident, sir," answered Henry, the lurking grin more pronounced on his wooden visage.

Henry, evidently, was not greatly perturbed or grieved by the butler's little accident. Henry was the young footman who had come down one night, after the disappearance of Lord Eastwood, and seen—or fancied he had seen—a ghostly dark figure in the library. Mr. Pilkington had "jawed" Henry severely for telling such a tale to frighten the servants, and given him very plainly to understand that if he came down in the night again, it would cost him his place. No doubt that was the reason why Henry had no sympathy to waste on the stately Pilkington.

"But Pilkington was all right last night," said Tom. "Did anything happen to him in the night?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Herries. "If that jolly old kidnapper, who got Lord Eastwood and Gussy, has been getting after the butler—"

"Is that it, Henry?" asked Wally.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Henry. "It was this morning, sir. It was a fall on the stairs, sir. Mr. Pilkington fell down the staircase going to the 'ousekeeper's room, sir."

"Poor old Pilky!" said Wally, rather remorsefully. "He was jolly cheeky, and I jolly well put him in his place, but—poor old Pilky!"

"Did you see him fall, Henry?" asked Kerr.

"I heard him, sir, and ran up," said Henry. "He was 'urt, sir."

"Rough luck!" said Figgins. "Hurt much?"

"Badly cut about the face, sir," said Henry. "The doctor's coming to see him. In the circumstances, sir, Mr. Pilkington is keeping to his room for the present, being that badly cut. Mr. Pilkington is very particular about his appearance, sir."

"No bones broken?" asked Kerr.

"No, sir, only his face cut."

"Did you see him before he fell down the stairs?"

Henry could not help a little surprise creeping into his expressionless face at that unexpected question. Tom Merry & Co. glanced at Kerr. They could not imagine his reason for asking that question.

"No, sir!" answered Henry. "It was very early in the morning, sir, and Mr. Pilkington was down first."

"Oh, I see! And only his face was cut?"

"Yes, sir, but it was cut rather bad. Very 'ard on a gentleman in Mr. Pilkington's position, sir, and him so particular about his appearance," said Henry, with another half-suppressed grin.

"Poor old Pilky!" said Wally.

"Of course, sir, we're all very sorry in the servants' hall," said Henry. "Very sorry indeed, though Mr. Pilkington does speak severe at times. All very sorry and sympathetic, sir!"

Which statement the St. Jim's juniors took with a grain of salt—a large grain. But whether Henry was sorry or not, the juniors felt sorry for the butler as they went in to breakfast.

Fatty Wynn greeted them with a glowing face over the breakfast-table.

"I've started!" he said. "Only just started—I've only had a couple of eggs and rashers, and a few kidneys, and some sausages! I hear that poor old Pilkington is laid up—try those posies, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,505.

Figgy—but they're looking after us all right without him—the kidneys are good, Kerr! Sorry for the old bean—those rashers are scrumptious, you fellows! Tuck in, Kerr, old man. What you need is a jolly good feed—set your nerves right in no time."

Fatty Wynn had started first, but he finished last. There was no doubt that the provender was good at Eastwood House, and still less doubt that Fatty Wynn was the man to do it justice. Fatty was as anxious about the missing Arthur Augustus as any other fellow, but fortunately it did not affect his appetite. He lingered last at the hospitable board, and would probably have lingered longer, had not Wally ordered Ruggles to bring the car round to go to the station for Cousin Ethel.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Towser Takes Control!

"YOU'RE coming, Kerr?"

"No!"

"But Cousin Ethel's coming, and—"

Figgins stared at Kerr.

Kerr grinned. Much as he liked Ethel Cleveland, like all the St. Jim's fellows, he was not so fearfully keen on seeing her at the first possible moment as George Figgins was. He was quite prepared to defer that pleasure for an hour or two.

"I'm sleepy," he explained. "I got no sleep last night, and I've got to make up for it this morning; if I'm going to be any use."

"If!" Herries murmured in Blake's ear; and Jack Blake grinned.

So far, Kerr had only distinguished himself as a dreamer of dreams. In the opinion of the School House fellows, Figgins had trotted out his canny Scotsman as the man who was going to work the oracle, solve the problem, and elucidate the mystery, and all that that canny Scotsman had put up was a nightmare. Only the loyal Figgy clung to his faith; even Fatty Wynn was dubious.

"Well, you could get a nap in the car," said Wally. "Some of us will have to walk. You can go in the car and get a snooze—safe as houses—and I'll wake you up if you get another nightmare and begin to yell."

"I'm not going to give you all that trouble," said Kerr placidly, while Figgins glared at Walter Adolphus. "You fellows get off to the station, and I'll get a bit of a nap while you're gone."

"Well, I'll see you tucked up in bed, then," said Figgins.

"I'm not going to bed, fathead! I'll get a snooze on the settee here."

Tom Merry & Co. looked at Kerr of the Fourth. They were more and more surprised. Kerr had woke up the whole party in the night with a story of having whacked out with his stick at an unseen figure in the Painted Room—a figure that had crept in the dark to Wally's bed, into which Kerr had charged after the lights were out.

No extraneous person being discovered in the room, he had had to admit that it was a nightmare—at all events, he had allowed the other fellows to draw that conclusion. But that the episode should have shaken his nerves to this extent was astonishing. Obviously the recollection of that nightmare made Kerr unwilling to sleep in the Painted Room in broad daylight.

He had sat up reading for the remainder of the night with the light on. Now he refused to enter the room again on his own. Some of the juniors

grinned, and Figgins coloured with vexation. Kerr did not seem to mind, but the loyal Figgy was feeling this for his chum.

"This is a jolly comfortable settee," said Kerr calmly. "I'll get a few cushions and a rug, and I shall be all right."

"Like Henry to come and sit with you!" grinned Wally.

"Thanks—no!"

"What about Pilky?" asked Wally. "Two jolly old invalids might as well keep one another company—what? The doctor's coming for Pilky's face, and he can give your nerves the once-over at the same time."

"You shut up, you cheeky fag?" roared Figgins.

"Well, I think it's a jolly good idea," chuckled Wally. "Pilky can sit on one end of the settee nursing his face, while Kerr sits at the other end nursing his nerves. And they can take equal whacks in the medical wallah."

"Cheese it," Wally said Tom Merry, laughing. "I say, the car's ready! We'd better be getting off to the station. After all, Kerr must have some sleep; and he will be all right here."

"Right as rain," said Kerr. "Can I have your bulldog, Herries?"

"Eh—Towser?" ejaculated Herries. "What do you want Towser for?"

Herries looked rather pleased. He was flattered by Kerr wanting his bulldog. Towser was the finest animal in the wide universe, in the opinion of his owner; but it was seldom that anyone but Herries of the Fourth yearned for his company.

"I'd like him to sit by me while I go to sleep," explained Kerr.

"To keep off the giddy nightmares?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Sort of," assented Kerr.

"Look here! I—I'll stay with you, if you like, Kerr," said Figgins heroically.

George Figgins wanted very much to be the first to greet Cousin Ethel at the station. But he was loyal to his chum. Possibly, however, he was relieved when Kerr shook his head.

"No; that's all right, Figgy. You buzz off!" said Kerr. "Towser will keep me company, if Herries will fetch him in."

"Pleased!" said Herries at once. And he went to fetch in the bulldog.

"Pilkington makes rather a fuss about Towser being in the house," said Manners, rather dubiously.

"He won't be able to make a fuss now he's laid up," said Kerr, with a smile.

"Blow Pilky!" said Wally warmly. "I'm sorry he's damaged his dial; but he's not going to be cheeky. If Pilky blows in and jibs at Towser, Kerr, you tell Towser to take a nip at his calves. He's rather keen on it. Towser doesn't like Pilky a little bit."

"That's all right," said Tom Merry. "Pilkington's keeping to his room, and he's not likely to blow in."

"He might give me a look in while you're gone," remarked Kerr. "But I don't think he'll arguo with Towser."

Herries returned with the bulldog. Kerr fastened the end of the chain to one leg of the settee, and Towser lay contentedly down to sleep, though with one eye open—in the manner of bulldogs.

If Kerr feared an enemy more solid than a figure in a nightmare, there was no doubt that he was safe with Towser on guard. Though what enemy was to be expected, in broad daylight, in a house crowded with servants, was rather a puzzle. Tom Merry & Co.

could only conclude that the alarm of the night had thoroughly upset Kerr's nerves—generally as steady as steel.

Figgins saw his chum comfortably settled on the settee, with a cushion under his head, and a rug over him; and then, with a rather worried brow, he followed his friends out.

Some of the fellows were going in the car, and some were walking—among the latter, Figgins. It was understood that Figgy was to be in the car for the return—when Cousin Ethel would be a passenger—Figgy's special right to Cousin Ethel's society being tacitly recognised by the rest of the party.

The Scottish junior heard the car drive away. He lay on the settee, with a deeply thoughtful shade on his brow. To the other fellows it seemed that Kerr was thinking chiefly of his nightmare. They would have been surprised had they guessed the thoughts that were passing in the cool and canny brain.

The servants came in to clear away the breakfast things, glancing rather curiously at the junior reposing on the settee. Towser lifted his massive head and looked at them, but did not growl. According to Herries, Towser never growled without good cause, and if he helped himself to a bite, it was only a proof of his sagacity—the fact that the victim was bitten by Towser proving that the victim was a bad hat, and deserved what he got.

But when a voice floated in from the hall—the voice of Mr. Pilkington—Towser gave a faint growl.

Towser had made it clear—painfully clear—that he did not like the butler of Eastwood House. Pilkington had had to clamber on the banisters on one occasion to prevent Towser from taking a sample from his calves. Perhaps it was natural, after such an experience, that Mr. Pilkington objected to the bulldog's presence in the house. Pilkington was rather a muscular man, but he was no doubt past the age of enjoying acrobatic performances on banisters.

Pilkington was speaking to Henry. Kerr grinned a sleepy grin as he heard his voice. There was an exceedingly sharp tone in Mr. Pilkington's voice. No doubt the damage to his features had disturbed his temper a little.

"Which one, Henry?"

"Master Kerr, sir," answered Henry.

"In the breakfast-room?"

"Yes, Mr. Pilkington."

"Is the boy ill, or what?"

"From what I hear the young gentlemen saying, sir, Master Kerr had a fearful nightmare in the night, sir, and fancied that the ghost of Eastwood House had got him, sir, in the Painted Room."

"Absurd! That is what comes of you telling fanciful stories, Henry. Your foolish imagination—"

"But I did really see a dark figure in the library that night, sir," pleaded Henry.

"It gave me a turn, Mr. Pilkington."

"Nonsense! You have frightened the servants, and now you have frightened one of these silly schoolboys. You are a fool, Henry!"

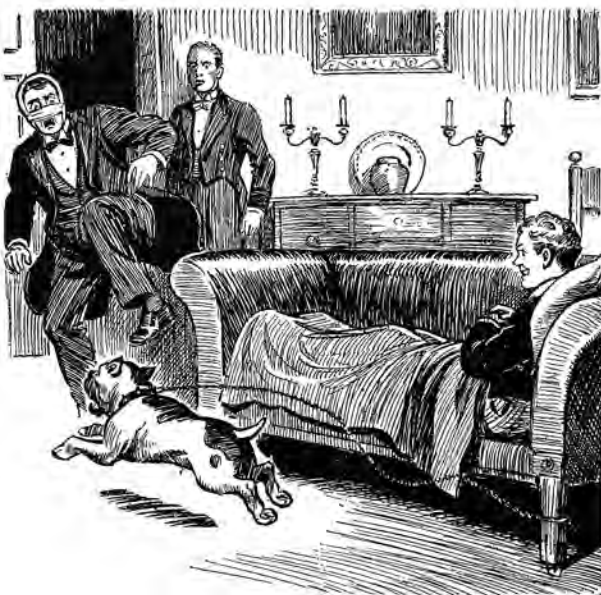
"Yes, sir," murmured Henry.

"If the boy wishes to sleep, he can go to bed, Master Walter has gone with the others to the station!"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; I will speak to the boy. I shall not allow this in the house of which I am in charge!"

There was a heavy tread, and Mr. Pilkington looked in at the doorway of the breakfast-room.



As Pilkington strode angrily towards Kerr, Towser woke to life. With gleaming eyes and open jaws, the bulldog jumped for the butler. Pilkington started back in alarm. "Oh!" he gasped. "Help! Call that dog off!"

Kerr looked curiously at the butler of Eastwood House. Pilkington's face was in bandages. Over the bandages his eyes glinted with a very unpleasant glint.

Evidently Mr. Pilkington was in an angry and irritated temper.

Towser lifted his head, his eyes fixed on the butler. But he did not give tongue for the moment, and Pilkington did not observe him. He stepped into the room, with his eyes fixed angrily and contemptuously on Kerr.

"Oh, you are here!" he snapped.

"Here!" assented Kerr cheerfully. He suppressed a grin. From what the butler had said to Henry, it was clear that he intended to take advantage of the temporary absence of Master Walter. It was in his power to give orders, and clearly he was going to give them. He had reckoned without Towser!

"What does this mean, Master Kerr? If you desire to sleep, there are bedrooms at your disposal," said Pilkington.

"I'm quite comfy here, thanks, Pilkington!" said Kerr.

"Possibly! But while I am in charge of Lord Eastwood's house, I decline to permit such unusual, I may say disorderly, proceedings!" said the butler. "I shall be obliged, Master Kerr, if you will go to your room, if you desire to turn day into night."

"I'd rather stay here, Pilkington."

"I request you, Master Kerr, to go to your room if you are going to sleep. In fact, the servants will be busy in this room this morning; there are certain things to be done—"

"That's all right; they can get on with it."

"You compel me to speak plainly,

Master Kerr!" said the butler with a venomous note in his voice. "I am in authority here, and I will not permit you to remain in this room. It is bad enough, in the distressing circumstances, for the house to be invaded by a mob of noisy schoolboys. I will not permit them to go to sleep all over the house in the daytime. Leave this room at once, Master Kerr."

Kerr smiled, but did not stir. Had Tom Merry & Co. witnessed that little scene, they would have guessed that Kerr had foreseen this visit from the butler, though certainly they would not have guessed how. Towser was on guard against something much more solid and substantial than a nightmare or a ghost!

"Are you going, Master Kerr?"

"No," said Kerr. "I'm not going."

Pilkington set his lips.

"I have said, Master Kerr, that I am in authority here! If you dispute the authority placed in my hands by his lordship's eldest son, I shall have no resource but to remove you from this room."

"Bow-wow!" said Kerr cheerfully.

"What?" Pilkington gasped. "What did you say?"

"I said bow-wow!"

"Leave this room!" thundered Pilkington. "Unless you go at once, I will remove you with my own hands. Do you hear?"

"I'm not deaf!"

"Are you going?"

"Oh, no!"

Pilkington said no more. He made a stride towards the settee, with the obvious intention of grasping the St. Jim's junior and dragging him off. Henry, at the doorway, stared in blankly.

Gr-r-r-r-r! came suddenly from Towser.

There was a rattle and a clink of a chain, and the bulldog emerged from under the settee. With gleaming eyes and open jaws, Towser jumped for Pilkington.

The butler was striding towards Kerr, but he stopped, and made a backward jump as actively as a kangaroo, as he beheld Towser. He fairly bounded. After him flew Towser.

"Oh!" gasped Pilkington. "Help! Call that dog off!"

Gr-r-r-r!  
The chain clinked and tautened. It stopped Towser short, which was very fortunate for Mr. Pilkington. His teeth were about six inches from the butler when the chain dragged him to a halt. Pilkington tottered back to the door Towser, dragging at the chain, glared after him, and growled ferociously.

Henry grinned, and disappeared. Pilkington stood in the doorway, panting for breath. Towser eyed him grimly. Kerr grinned.

"I have forbidden that dog to be brought into the house!" gasped Pilkington. "Master Kerr, take that dog away at once."  
"You take him away!" suggested Kerr.

"Will you take that dog out of the house?" roared Pilkington.

"Leave it to you, partner."  
Pilkington stood breathing hard and deep. For a long minute he stood there, while Towser eyed him with a hungry eye. Then he turned and went.

Towser settled down again, with one eye open! Kerr, grinning, closed his eyes and went to sleep. If Pilkington looked in again, it was to meet a gleaming eye from under the settee. Certainly he did not venture to approach Kerr again—a growl from Towser would have awakened the Scottish junior at once. Kerr did not awaken, he slept soundly and peacefully, safe under the guardianship of the faithful Towser.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Something Up His Sleeve!

"**E**THEL!"  
Cousin Ethel smiled brightly.

The car was waiting outside Eashope Station, Tom Merry & Co. were on the platform, waiting for the train to come in, bearing Cousin Ethel and her aunt, Miss Drusilla Cleveland. Figgins was the first to spot the girl's bright face at a carriage window, and he rushed up to that carriage before the train had fairly stopped.

He dragged open the carriage door and gave Cousin Ethel a grin of welcome, a grin that lighted up Figgins' rather rugged face, and made him look quite handsome, at least in Ethel's eyes.

Miss Drusilla Cleveland was the first to alight, and she accepted Figgins' helping hand. It was Tom Merry who helped out Cousin Ethel. But Figgins had her company as they went out to the car.

Cousin Ethel looked as fresh and charming as ever, but her sweet face was unusually grave. She had been deeply concerned about her uncle, Lord Eastwood; and the news of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's disappearance, following that of his father, had been

a great shock to her. She was so serious and grave that Monty Lowther suppressed a whole series of little jokes, with which he had intended to entertain her, on the subject of Kerr's extraordinary nightmare.

"You have not heard anything of Arthur?" was Cousin Ethel's first question.

"No," said Figgins, "we're hunting for him."

"Hunting everywhere!" said Wally. "The huntfulness is terrific, as that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"But they've got poor old Gussy parked somewhere," said Wally. "Still, we're jolly well going to root him out."

"Somehow," said Tom Merry, not perhaps very hopefully. Tom had banked on Kerr even more than he had realised; and the fact that Kerr had failed, and had practically croaked up, was a severe blow to the hopes of the St. Jim's party.

"Is there not a detective at Eastwood House, searching for Arthur and Lord Eastwood?" asked Aunt Drusilla.

## OUT A DAY EARLIER NEXT WEEK!

Owing to the Christmas holidays, chums, you will be able to get your GEM one day sooner next week. So remember to ask for your copy next Tuesday, December 22nd. Safer still, order in advance!

"Yes, but he hasn't found anything out so far," said Tom. "We—we hope to find Gussy ourselves."

"We're jolly well going to find him!" declared Kangaroo. "We'll root all over Hampshire, from end to end, but we'll jolly well root him out."

Miss Drusilla smiled faintly. Perhaps she did not think it probable that the St. Jim's juniors would succeed where the local police and a special man from Scotland Yard had so far failed.

"It is terrible," said Ethel as she sat in the car, bowling along to Eastwood House through the frosty December morning. "Of course, there can be no doubt that poor Arthur was kidnapped."

"No doubt about that," agreed Figgins, "and—we've got to find the secondreds that did it. Kerr's thinking the whole thing out, you know, and Kerr's an awfully deep chap. I think he will hit on something or other," said Figgins. His own hopes in the sagacious Scottish junior had been dashed.

"I hope he will," said Ethel a little dubiously.

"Well, he's fearfully deep, you know," said Figgins.

"Kerr isn't with you now?"

"No. He was awake most of last night, and—he's taking a nap," confessed Figgins.

"Dear me!" Aunt Drusilla looked at

Figgins. "Why was Kerr awake most of the night?"

"Watching for the giddy kidnapper!" grinned Blake, who was in the car. "He found a nightmare, that was all. And he wouldn't go to sleep again."

"Why not?" asked Ethel.

"Nerves!" said Blake.

Ethel looked at him quickly. "That's not like Kerr," she said. "I always thought him very practical. He cannot have been frightened by a nightmare."

"He's not frightened," said Figgins sturdily. "Kerr's as brave as a lion. But—but he does seem to have had a sort of attack of nerves. I can hardly make the old chap out."

Ethel looked puzzled. "I can't imagine Kerr with nerves," she said. "Did anything at all happen in the night?"

"Only Kerr's nightmare," answered Blake. "He fancied that some sportsman might be after Wally, so he changed beds with Wally in the dark—thought the jolly old enemy might be looking in through the keyhole, I suppose. Then he went to sleep, and dreamed that somebody was grabbing him, and whacked out with a stick, and yelled!" Blake chuckled. "He fancied at first that it was the thing in his dream that yelled—something he fancied was grabbing him. We had a lot of trouble convincing him that it was all a dream. But he had to own up, of course, when we searched the rooms, and there was nobody there."

"He owned up that it was a nightmare?"

"Well, as good as owned up, at any rate. I don't know whether he still fancies that some Johnny might have dropped down the chimney. We didn't find any foot about, at any rate."

Cousin Ethel smiled. But her face became grave again at once.

"I don't quite understand this—in Kerr," she said. "He might have some reason for keeping something to himself."

Figgins beamed. If his loyal faith in his chum was a little shaken, a word from Cousin Ethel was enough to set it firm on its foundations again.

"Why, of course, so he might!" he exclaimed. "We never thought of that! You jolly well never thought of it, Blake. Kerr's fearfully deep, as I've said often enough—"

"Too often!" murmured Blake.

"And he might be keeping something dark—"

"Well, what then?"

"Blessed if I know!" confessed Figgins. "But Ethel thinks he might have something up his sleeve—don't you, Ethel?"

"It seems to me possible," said Ethel. "There you are, Blake!" said Figgins triumphantly. And Jack Blake grinned and said no more. Evidently, from Figgins' point of view, Ethel's was a judgment from which there was no appeal, and Blake let it go at that.

Cousin Ethel asked many questions as to what the juniors had done since their arrival there to search for the lost swell of St. Jim's. There was little to tell, however. Nobody could think that the search that Tom Merry & Co. had undertaken looked promising. But Figgins, at all events, was no longer looking glum. Between Cousin Ethel's charming presence and her happy suggestion that his canny Scottish chum might have something up his sleeve Figgins was pretty bucked.

The car stopped at Eastwood Home at last. Pilkington was not to be seen—

perhaps he did not want the ladies to see his bawdied face, being, according to Henry, very particular about his appearance. Aunt Drusilla and Ethel went to their rooms, and Figgins rushed off to the breakfast-room, to see whether Kerr was all right.

The Scottish junior was fast asleep on the settee. Towser looked out at Figgins, but with quite an amiable glare. Kerr woke up as Figg's heavy footsteps came tramping in.

He sat up, threw off the rug, rubbed his eyes, and yawned. Figgins regarded him a little anxiously.

"Had a good sleep?" he asked.

"Fine!" answered Kerr. "I'm all right now." He rolled off the settee.

"Jolly lunch-time, isn't it?" "You'll see Ethel at lunch, old chap. Bit rotten missing her like this, but of course, you had to get some sleep. She'll be down to lunch, old fellow," said Figgins consolingly.

Kerr grinned.

"And I say, what do you think?" added Figgins.

"Carry on!" said Kerr.

"Ethel thinks that very likely you've got something up your sleeve, old chap. I never thought of it, but since Ethel mentioned it, I shouldn't wonder. Have you, old bean?"

"If I have, Figg, I'll keep it there for the present," murmured Kerr. "Never mind that now. We're starting after lunch."

"Starting?" repeated Figgins in surprise. "Where?"

"We're going out."

"Well, we're ready to go out if there's anything to go out for," said the puzzled Figg. "But where?"

"Into the park."

"The park?" repeated Figgins. "I—I say, old chap, we'll go rooting in the park, of course, if—if you think so. But—but why?"

"I'll explain when we get there," said Kerr. "Let's go to lunch now. I'm ready—and I've got a sort of feeling that Fatty is, too."

"What—ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "This December weather gives a sort of edge to a fellow's appetite, you know. Has it ever struck you fellows how jolly lucky it is for Christmas to come in the middle of the winter, when a fellow's appetite is at its very best?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Well, look at poor old Kangaroo, when he's at home with his Christmas in the middle of the summer!" said Fatty. "Rough luck, what?"

"Frightfully!" said Kerr. "Kangy doesn't seem to feel it much, but it must be fearful—in fact, excruciating!"

"Well, I don't know about that—but it's a rough luck," said Fatty seriously.

"Still, let's be thankful that we eat our Christmas in winter. I say, I believe I heard the gong. Come on; no good being late for lunch. To tell you fellows the truth, I'm hungry."

"Did anybody guess that one?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cousin Ethel and her aunt joined the juniors at lunch. It would have been a very merry meal but for the shadow that hung over the party—the shadow of the unknown and mysterious fate of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his father. Every now and then faces brightened and there was laughter—but it was always checked by the thought of Arthur Augustus, pining in imprisonment in some unknown hiding-place, in desperate and merciless hands. That thought checked even Monty Lowther's flow of humour—

## WE'RE ALL PALS AT CHRISTMAS!

By Jack Blake.

"DO School House and New House bury the hatchet at Christmas time?" somebody asked me the other day.

I should just say they do! When breaking-up time draws near chaps who have spent half the term going for each other like fighting cocks start cooing to each other like turtle-doves. Peace descends on the quad, which, for thirteen weeks, has been a battlefield.

Fellows who usually stop to punch each other's heads stop to shake hands. School House gangs that usually stroll across the quad looking for trouble stroll across looking for a New House gang to join them in ring-oroses. In fact, it's no exaggeration to say that we're all pals at Christmas.

I can assure you, chums, it would have been a revelation to you to come to the junior inter-House gathering last week. Every face radiated good will and good-fellowship; every chap seemed to be fraternising with someone from the other House.

Of course, there were one or two friendly arguments; that was only natural.

When Figgins and his crowd first arrived, for instance, Kerr started a peaceable little discussion about which side was responsible for the burying of the hatchet. It was all quite friendly, though; just a couple of black-eyes and a cut lip!

which broke out occasionally, only to be checked again.

Kerr, except for a few pleasant words to Cousin Ethel, had little to say at lunch. The talk chiefly ran on the search for Arthur Augustus, but what transpired chiefly from the discussion was the hopelessness of the task that the St. Jim's juniors had set themselves.

"If there was only a clue—just the faintest clue!" said Tom Merry. "If a fellow only knew where to begin to look—"

"We're beginning in the park after lunch," said Figgins.

"Are we?" said Tom. "Why?"

"Kerr thinks we'd better."

"Oh!" said Tom, and he smiled faintly. Twenty-four hours ago he would have been keen enough to follow Kerr's lead. He did not feel so keen now.

Herries gave a grunt.

"What does Kerr expect to find in the park?" he inquired. "Think we're likely to find poor old Gussy sitting under one of the trees, Kerr, in the park?"

"Bit too parky—what?" murmured Monty Lowther. Sad and serious as the state of affairs was, Monty could not help it. "I think I see Kerr's point. We're to look in the park, because Gussy's parked somewhere!"

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "Look here, Kerr! We're at a loose end, and nobody has the faintest idea where to begin. If there's any reason for going through the park, we'll go, of course. But—"

"Not much use wasting time," Herries pointed out.



Then the question arose which House was the better at singing carols! Just to put it to the test, we had a cordial little carol-singing contest and voted on it. School House fellows naturally voted for School House, and New House fellows for New House. As there were more School House men than New House, School House won. That didn't seem to satisfy Figgins & Co., and there was a bit of a scrimmage for ten minutes or so, but it was all on entirely friendly lines.

Oh, yes, and there was a debate about the cost of the tuck, too. Herries said that Fatty Wynn ought to count as six for contribution purposes, and New House got a little bit peeved over it. But a few mince pies slung at each other soon put us all in the best of spirits again, and the evening ended with everybody swearing eternal friendship—except the small minority who were wrestling on the floor.

Bury the hatchet at Christmas-time! You bet we do! It's a jolly good thing Christmas doesn't come round a dozen times a year. We'd all be perishing from sheer boredom!

"Anything better to suggest?" grunted Figgins.

"Well, what about giving Towser another chance?" said Herries. "You know what Towser is like on a trail, but Ethel hasn't seen him at work yet, and—"

"For goodness' sake," said Wally, "give Towser a rest!"

"Well, I jolly well think—"

"I'll leave it to Ethel to decide," said Kerr. "I've rather an idea that we might begin in the park this afternoon. What do you say, Miss Ethel?"

Cousin Ethel's eyes were rather keenly on the Scottish junior's face. She smiled.

"I vote for starting in the park," she said.

"That settles it!" remarked Figgins innocently.

And the other fellows grinned and admitted that it did. No one, at all events, had any better suggestion to make—except Herries, whose happy idea of giving Towser another chance as a man-tracker was unanimously sat upon. So when lunch was over, the whole party prepared for a walk in the snowy, frosty park—Cousin Ethel, of course, a member of the party.

It was a pleasant enough walk in the keen, frosty air. Figgins, of course, had eyes only for Cousin Ethel. Herries gave Blake a sarcastic glance, and Blake permitted himself a slight shrug of the shoulders. It could not be said that anybody looked or felt hopeful, unless Kerr did. Whatever might have been Kerr's thoughts or feelings, they were not expressed in his face.

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Ever since that strange happening in the Painted Room the night before, Kerr had tolerated a great deal of chipping from the other fellows, with undignified acquiescence. Only to Cousin Ethel had it occurred that the keen, canny schoolboy from the land of cakes might have "something up his sleeve." Tom Merry & Co. were about to learn that he had.

## CHAPTER 5. Awfully Deep!

THE park at Eastwood, with its big leafless trees rimed with frost, was cold and desolate as the St. Jim's juniors came into it from the terrace. Tom Merry & Co. were following Kerr's lead, but they were puzzled and wondering.

"Old Kerr isn't quite the same as usual to-day," Figgins confided to Cousin Ethel. "He seems to have queer ideas. I suppose he had an awful nightmare; and then missing a night's sleep has knocked him up, you know."

Cousin Ethel glanced at the healthy face of the Scottish junior.

"Kerr doesn't look knocked up," she remarked.

"No; he looks as fit as a fiddle," Figgins agreed. "Of course, he may have something up his sleeve, as you said. But I admit that I'm blessed if I see what we're going to do in the park. There's nobody here but ourselves."

Kerr had stopped, and he caught the last words and looked back with a smile.

"That's why we've come, Figgys," he said. "Let's get on to that seat by the lake, and Miss Ethel can sit down while I'm talking to you. I've got to explain to you chaps what happened last night."

"What happened last night?" repeated Tom Merry in wonder. "But that was explained in the Painted Room, Kerr, old man. Don't you remember?"

"I remember well enough," said Tom Merry.

"You had a bad nightmare, old man," said Tom Merry.

Kerr laughed. "I didn't have a nightmare," he said. "I let you fellows say so, for a reason you would have guessed if you'd had a bit more sense."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "And what was the reason?"

"I didn't want to be overheard," explained Kerr.

"Overheard!" exclaimed all the juniors at once.

"Exactly! The person who could have overheard me was the person who came into the Painted Room, and whom I struck with my stick in the dark," said Kerr calmly.

"But—but you didn't, you know," said Figgins. "You owned up that it was a nightmare."

"I didn't, Figgys. I simply let you chaps say so, because I knew that the fellow, whoever he was, was listening to every word that was said in the Painted Room."

"You—you know that?"

"Yes; and I didn't want to tell him what I'd found out," said Kerr calmly. "So I let you call it a nightmare, and that fellow went away thinking that I was satisfied that it was a nightmare. See?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "Didn't I tell you old Kerr was awfully deep?" said Figgins in great admiration.

"Where was the chap if he was still listening?" asked Blake.

Kerr shook his head.

"I don't know yet. We've got to find him out. But listen, and I'll tell you exactly what happened. After we put the light out, and the fire had died down, I changed beds with Wally. I had my reasons for thinking that Wally was in danger of going after Gussy and his pater if the rascal got a chance at him. I didn't go to sleep; I didn't even close my eyes once. About two in the morning someone was in the room."

"But how?"

"We've got to find out how. Someone was there, and he came to Wally's bed—where I was, of course—and the fact that he came to the bed where I was showed that he was after Wally."

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally.

"I don't see it quite," said Kangaroo. "How could anybody outside the household know which bed Wally had taken?"

"I didn't say anybody outside the household knew," said Kerr calmly.

There was a general jump.

"You mean that it was somebody belonging to the house who came into the room!" Wally exclaimed in great amazement.

"Draw it mild, Kerr, old man!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Don't pile it on too thick!" said Monty Lowther. "There's a limit, you know!"

"Let Kerr go on," said Cousin Ethel, with an encouraging look to the Scottish junior. "I am very interested. Tell us what happened, Kerr."

"I repeat that, whoever it was, he came to the bed where Wally had lain down. Wally had changed out after the room was quite dark, and so if a watch had been kept the watcher could not know that Wally had changed out."

"A watch!" said Manners. "How could anybody watch us there! Through the keyhole, do you mean?"

"Through some opening, at all events," said Kerr. "Whoever it was, he came up to the bed, hardly making a sound. Then I smelt chloroform."

"Chloroform!" said Cousin Ethel.

"Yes; I know the smell well enough. I had my stick ready in my fist. I judged the distance as well as I could in the dark, and brought the stick down on the chap's head. I think it caught him across the face. You all heard the yell he let out. Then I put on the light as quickly as I could, but the man was gone. I had had some hope of catching him, but I knew that he might be too quick for me, knowing the secret of the room, and I not knowing it. But I counted on marking his face with my stick so that I should know him again."

"But how did he get out?" yelled Wally. "Did he go up the chimney, or vanish into thin air—or what?"

"That's easy to work out," said Kerr. "The doors were all locked, and the windows were all fastened; the chimney has iron bars across it inside. Yet the man had come in and gone out again. The obvious conclusion is that there's a way of getting in and out of the Painted Room without using doors or windows."

"Vanishing through the ceiling?" suggested Monty Lowther humorously.

"I noticed that the walls are panelled," said Kerr. "And the room is very old—one of the oldest parts of the house, I should say."

"That's so," said Wally. "I know the ceiling was painted in the reign of Charles the Second."

"Those old panelled rooms in ancient houses often have secret doors," said Kerr. "They were common enough at the time the houses were built. Men often had to dodge out of sight in the

time of Jacobite conspiracies. Isn't there a story that one of the lords of Eastwood was found dead in that room, and the door fastened, and his murderer had escaped—no one knew how?"

"That's a yarn," said Wally.

"It might easily be true, if there's a secret door in the room. Have you ever heard of such a thing, Wally?"

"Never. If there was a secret door, the pater didn't know anything about it, either. Nobody knew. There was a sliding panel in the picture gallery once, but it was screwed up in my grandfather's time."

"Then it is known that such things have existed in Eastwood House?"

"Yes; so far as that goes."

"Depend upon it, there's one in the Painted Room, by which the possessor of the secret was enabled to enter and leave as he pleased," said Kerr, "and that's how the rascal got in and out."

There was a short silence.

Tom Merry & Co. hardly knew what to think.

Kerr held up the stick he carried in his hand.

"That was the stick I had last night," he said quietly. "Look at it! Can you see a stain?"

The juniors, with awed looks, gazed at the dark stain on the wood. It was there right enough, and they could not doubt what it was.

"Blood!" said Tom Merry, in a hushed voice.

Kerr nodded.

"That came from the nose, I think, or the face, somewhere. I think I caught him right across the face with the stick."

"Great Scott!"

"And if I dreamed that," grinned Kerr, "do you think that I could have dreamed this?"

He took his handkerchief from his pocket. It was wrapped round something. The juniors watched him with breathless interest as he unrolled the handkerchief. A cotton wad was disclosed from which came a faint, sickly smell.

"Chloroform, my hat!"

"Where did you get that?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"I picked it up on the floor of the Painted Room. The man dropped it when my stick caught him across the chin."

"Oh!"

The juniors gazed at the chloroform pad. There was no doubt about that, and Kerr's story was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Do you think I dreamed it?" said Kerr.

"No," said Tom Merry. "It happened; but—but it rather takes my breath away."

## CHAPTER 6. The Suspect!

THE St. Jim's juniors were impressed at last.

The stain upon the stick was convincing enough, and the chloroform pad finished the matter. There was no other way it could have come into the Painted Room than in the way Kerr had described.

Wally's face was quite white as he gazed at the pad. But for Kerr's foresight the previous night that pad would have been pressed over his face while he slept, and he would have awakened from a drugged sleep, to find himself—where? Where his father and his brother were now kept prisoners by the mysterious kidnapper.

"I—I say, Kerr, old man, you've done rae a jolly good turn!" said the fag, in a faltering voice. "They'd have had me sure enough."

"I think they would—or he would, rather. There was only one," said Kerr, as he carefully wrapped up the pad again, and restored it to his pocket.

"It's settled, then," said Tom Merry. "There's a secret way of getting into the Painted Room, and the kidnapper knows about it."

"Exactly!"

"And we've got to find it out."

"That's right."

"We'll ask all the household," said Wally. "Pickington may know something about it, as he's lived in the house for a year or more."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors stared at Kerr as he burst into an involuntary laugh. They did not see anything comical in D'Arcy minor's remark.

"What's the joke?" asked Blake, puzzled.

"I couldn't help laughing at Wally's idea," grinned Kerr. "Don't you see? Anybody outside Eastwood House couldn't know anything about the secret panel, and couldn't get inside the house to use it, anyway. It must be somebody inside the house. If we say a word in the house about this discovery, we shall simply warn the kidnapper that we are up to his little game."

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, apbait. "That's so, too."

"Somebody in the house," said Cousin

Ethel slowly. "Then you suspect that it was one of the servants, Kerr?"

"Naturally—as there is no one else in the house."

"Which one?" asked Figgins. "Go on, Kerr! I'll jolly well bet that you know which Johnny it was!"

"I don't know; but I suspect. Let's take the facts in order," said Kerr, who was always very precise. "We've established the existence of a secret door. An outsider couldn't know anything about the secret panel in the Painted Room. It was one of the household staff. We've got to find the one that other circumstances point to."

"But there aren't any other circumstances," said Herries. "At least, I can't see any."

(Continued on next page.)

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"I dare say you can't," said Kerr. "But I hope to be able to worry out one or two."

Figgins grinned.

"You leave Kerr alone," he said. "He'll think it out. Besides, it takes a New House chap to handle a problem like this."

"Oh rats!" said Herries warmly. "If you come to that, I had found out already that there was something fishy in the house."

"You had?" said Figgins.

"Yes," you know Tower followed Gussy's track back to the house," said Herries. "We thought at the time Tower was off the scent. Now it's quite clear Tower was on the track of the kidnapper. He came straight back to Eastwood House from the willows, and if we'd had sense enough to understand we should have known he was leading us to the kidnapper. Tower's all right."

"Ahem!" said Kerr. "Not quite right, because Gussy never was in the field under the willows at all the night before last after the time he went there with Blake and Dig."

"His handkerchief was found there," said Herries.

"So was Lord Eastwood's hat, but Lord Eastwood was never there. I believe that both of them were kidnapped in the house."

"In the house?" said Cousin Ethel, with a deep breath.

"Yes, chloroformed and kidnapped under their own roof. Naturally the kidnapper wanted to make it appear that they had left the house of their own accord. He didn't want to have Mr. Dodder and the police searching Eastwood House for secret doors and things. It was quite easy for him to take Lord Eastwood's hat and Gussy's handkerchief, and drop them in a field a mile away. That put the police on the wrong scent at once. And it was quite easy for him to leave the door of the picture gallery unfastened to give the impression that Lord Eastwood had gone out that night."

"Of course," said Figgins.

"But the pater was in the library, not in the Painted Room," said Wally.

"The library has panelled walls, like the Painted Room," said Kerr. "There is another opening panel there, of course. Don't you remember Henry's ghost? I am quite sure that Henry really saw that dark figure in the library, and by the time he got the light on the man had vanished through the wall."

"Oh!"

"I believe that Lord Eastwood was taken in the library, and Gussy in the Painted Room," said Kerr.

"The poor old pater," said Wally, clenching his fists. "I'd like to get within hitting distance of the rotter, whoever he is!"

"You've been within hitting distance of him, I fancy," said Kerr, with a grin.

"Who do you think it is, then?"

"I'm coming to that," said Kerr. "The kidnapper meant to kidnap Gussy all the time, and put him along with his pater. If he is holding Lord Eastwood to ransom, Gussy is a good enough trump in his hand to make his lordship pay. And there's another reason why he wanted Gussy—the same reason that he wanted Wally."

"And what's that?"

"Because while there isn't any member of the family in the house he is safer from a search. You remember that Pilkington wanted to get rid of

Gussy's guests. Without a D'Arcy in the house, he is head of affairs there, by Lord Conway's instructions."

"Yes, that's why we wanted Wally to come especially," said Blake, with a nod. "Pilk was trying to get rid of us."

Tom Merry gave a sudden shout.

"Pilkington!"

Kerr nodded.

"You suspect the butler?"

"Yes."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I've thought it out," said Kerr steadily. "Gussy was kidnapped in the Painted Room. Now, how did he come to be in the Painted Room at all?"

"Oh, that's simple enough!" said Blake. "His own room is under repair, and Pilkington had the Painted Room got ready for him instead."

"I fancy that Gussy's old room was out of repair on purpose, and that Gussy was planted in the Painted Room simply because he could be kidnapped there, and nowhere else," said Kerr.

"Who caused him to be put there?"

"Pilk," said Wally.

"That's a coincidence, to say the least. Last night, when Mrs. Wipps arranged the beds for us in that room, Pilkington interfered with the arrangements. He tried to work it for Wally to sleep alone in that room."

"So he did!" said Wally. "So he did! The rotter!"

"That's coincidence number two," said Kerr. "Then there's the fact that Pilkington wanted to get rid of us chaps. Of course, we know all about his being a precise old codger, who doesn't like boys, and so on, and doesn't like being disturbed. But that wouldn't make him so cheeky to his master's guests without a good reason. He had led the police on a false scent a mile from Eastwood House. But we were in the house—a crowd of us—and we were pottering about, looking for Gussy and his pater. We might have hit on something at any time, and it was safest to be rid of us. If he had captured Wally last night he would not have had any member of the family to stop him, and he would have tried his hardest to get us out. And, in the circumstances, I don't quite see now we could have stayed, as he has authority from Lord Conway."

"The rotter!" repeated Wally. "It's as clear as daylight!"

Blake shook his head.

"I don't like Pilk, and I admit that it looks suspicious," he said, "but it isn't proof."

"I've got proof," said Kerr coolly.

"Oh! And what is it?"

"I marked his face last night with my stick. Whoever came into the Painted Room last night has got his face marked this morning."

"It's a wonderful coincidence that Pilkington's face is damaged this morning and the face of the kidnapper was damaged last night," said Kerr. "Put two and two together and you'll come to the facts. It was Pilkington who came into the Painted Room last night to kidnap Wally."

The juniors were silent.

Kerr had certainly worked the problem out in a very convincing manner.

It was difficult to suspect the staid and imposing butler of being the hidden hand in the mystery, certainly, but every circumstance pointed to the correctness of Kerr's theory.

"What do you think, Cousin Ethel?" asked Figgins.

"I think Kerr is very clever indeed,"

said Ethel. "I am quite sure that he is right. All the circumstances point to the same thing."

"Thanks, Miss Ethel!" said Kerr. "I am quite sure, too, as a matter of fact. I fancy that Pilkington discovered the secret panels, and that very likely put the whole scheme into his head. He must have known of the screwed-up panel in the picture gallery, and from that he reasoned out that there were others—and found them. Then he laid his plans, and, so far, he has scored."

"But we've got him now," said Blake. "We've only got to give information to the police and have him arrested, and make him tell where Lord Eastwood and Gussy are hidden."

"No fear!" said Kerr promptly. "In the first place, we've got no proof. The police would not take much notice of what I could tell them. Even if they searched for a secret panel, they wouldn't find it. But even if they took it all in, and arrested Pilkington, that would be the worst thing that could possibly happen."

"I don't see that."

"If Pilkington is doing all this alone—and I think he is—there would be nobody to take food to the prisoners if they were arrested," said Kerr. "And then what will happen to his prisoners? They may starve to death before they're found. Not a word to the police or to Mr. Dodder. We've got to handle this matter ourselves—if we don't want to risk being the cause of Lord Eastwood's and Gussy's death."

"It is quite true," said Cousin Ethel.

"But where are they?" asked Figgins. "Can you make a guess about that, Kerr?"

"Yes, I can. Lord Eastwood has been a prisoner for five days now; Gussy for more than twenty-four hours. They must be supplied with food; that goes without saying. Only Pilkington can be taking them food, and as Pilkington is never long absent from Eastwood House, the conclusion is they're not far away."

"True."

"Now we come to Henry's ghost again. The dark figure in the library was Pilkington. You remember that Henry couldn't wake him—his door was locked—when they searched the house that night. As a matter of fact, Pilkington wasn't in his room at all. He was hiding behind the moving panel in the library while the servants were searching for the mysterious dark figure."

"But what was he doing there?" asked Herries. "Why should he be in the library at all? It was the night after the kidnapping, not the same night."

"Exactly! I've said that Pilkington must have taken food to his prisoner. Naturally, he would choose the night to do it, when everybody else was in bed. It would be the only safe way. My idea is that he had visited Lord Eastwood, and was coming back when he ran into Henry in the library in the dark. Of course, he didn't expect Henry to be downstairs, and you can understand now why he hated Henry for being so jolly zealous, and forbade him ever to come down again in the night."

"My hat! That's so!"

"That means," said Tom Merry slowly, "that Lord Eastwood and Gussy are kept prisoners in some secret place in Eastwood House itself, and that Pilkington goes to them by way of the secret door in the library to take them food."

"That's it," said Kerr.

"This beats Sexton Blake," said Figgins. "You ought to be a giddy detective, Kerr."

"Now I'm coming to my plan," went on Kerr.

"Oh, you've got a plan!" said Tom Merry.

"Certainly. Pilkington must visit his prisoners. I should think, at least once in every twenty-four hours to take them food, if for no other reasons. He goes by way of the secret door in the library. I dare say he could go just as easily by way of the Painted Room, but we happen to be there. Now, if we keep watch in the library to-night, unknown to Pilkington, we've got a chance of spotting the secret panel."

"Oh, good!"

"The difficulty is, that he's a keen rascal, and we may be spotted," said Kerr. "I believe he's a thoroughly dangerous villain. I think I pulled the wool over his eyes last night in the Painted Room by letting you fellows convince me that it was a nightmare," Kerr grinned. "But I can't be sure. That's why I had Towser along with me this morning while I was having my nap. But for that, I think I should have disappeared before you came back from the station, and I should know exactly where Gussy is, because I should be shut up along with him, with Wally to follow later. While I was napping in the breakfast-room this morning, Towser went for Pilkington. He had his face bandaged. He was going to

throw me out of the breakfast-room, but Towser scared him off."

"Why couldn't you let some of us stay with you, you ass?" said Figgins uneasily.

"Towser was all right. Towser doesn't like Pilkington," smiled Kerr. "If the butler had come within reach of his teeth, the whole house would have heard it."

"Good old Towser!" said Herries. "I know perfectly well that Towser spotted Pilkington as a rascal at the very start. You remember how he went for him."

Tom Merry looked round.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," he said. "I suggest that we appoint Kerr leader, and obey his orders, until Gussy is found."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins heartily. And the motion was carried unanimously. Kerr had proved his ability to take the lead, and the whole Co. were more than willing to follow him. Kerr accepted the position with becoming modesty.

#### CHAPTER 7.

##### The Eye of Bacchus!

**C**OM MERRY & CO. strolled round the frozen lake in a state of great, but suppressed excitement.

Kerr had been elected leader, and Kerr had given his instructions.

In the first place, not a word was to be uttered upon the subject inside the house, in case it should be overheard. It was a case, literally, of walls having ears.

In the second place, the juniors were to be exceedingly careful to show no change in their manners towards Pilkington, so that he should not have the slightest chance of guessing that he was suspected.

In the third place, for the purpose of throwing dust in the rascal's eyes, Kerr advised that the fellows should seem to slack down in their search, and give up as hopeless the task of finding the hiding-place of the kidnapped father and son.

The juniors promised to follow Kerr's instructions, and they faithfully kept their word.

If Pilkington observed them during the afternoon, as he undoubtedly did, he could not fail to receive the impression that they had lost heart in the search for their missing chum.

They skated on the frozen lake, apparently thinking of anything but the disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and appearing to enjoy themselves with schoolboy zest.

Indeed, though as concerned as ever for Gussy, they had a very pleasant hour or two piloting Cousin Ethel over the frozen surface of the lake.

It was dark when the juniors came in, and they came in red and rosy from their exercise, and over dinner they



"Scoundrel!" exclaimed Lord Eastwood. "How long will you dare to keep me here?" "Until you come to my terms, my lord," said the man in black. "Your cheque for ten thousand pounds is the price of your freedom!"

## ICE-HOCKEY DEMANDS YOUTH!

By Wally D'Arcy.



If you want to play ice-hockey, boys, you want youth on your side! Those doddering old fogeys, Tom Merry and his pals, have just found that out—too late!

When Curly Gibson and I spent the first evening of the hols at an ice-hockey match the idea of forming an ice-hockey team to play on the lake at Eastwood House (if and when the lake became frozen, of course) came to us as a sort of divine inspiration. It was the ice-hockey programme that put it into our noddies. It contained an ad. requesting all boys interested in learning ice-hockey to apply at the rink any day at noon. Naturally, we applied on the following day—along with Joe Frayne, Harvey, Kent and Jameson, whom we managed to gather together from various places.

We had a lesson with a crowd of youngsters right away, and the following day and the day after we spent several hours at the rink practising.

After that, the lake at home being frozen, I challenged Tom Merry to get up a team and play us six-a-side. And the result was that Merry and five other doddering old has-beens duly tottered to meet us!

Laugh! You'd have split your sides! You could tell by the superior grins on their chivvies that they thought it was going to be easy for them. They were simply chuckling into their beards as they fixed on their skates!

But when the game started—oh boy, oh boy, what an awakening they got! Those old greybeards might have been good at making figures of eight or waltzing, but when it came to handling an ice-hockey stick they got severely left!

After a rip-smorting game, we skated off easy winners by five goals to two; and can you blame us if we chorled? Sundry piffing excuses were made by the old buffers. For instance:

**TOM MERRY:** None of us had ever played the game before, whereas the fags had been practising for days on end. The inky young beggars japed us very nicely indeed.

**JACK BLAKE:** The kids sprang it on us after we'd all had too much dinner. There'll be a different story if the game is ever played again!

**GUSSY:** Bai Jove! I uttaly wufuse to believe the young waseals weakly licked us. They must have fwamed the wules so that they were bound to win, whatever happened!

But the truth is, of course, that ice-hockey's a game for old fogeys.

They're all right at marbles or hopscotch, perhaps. But for ice-hockey you need youth on your side!

talked of a football match arranged for the morrow with the village team. That match had been arranged by Arthur Augustus with Boker, the son of the village policeman, who was captain of the Eastshore Ramblers. The juniors discussed the matter with great keenness, and asked Henry about the form of the village footballers.

They did not see much of Pilkington. The butler kept to his own room the greater part of the time; and when he was seen downstairs, he had a bandage over his face.

The part of his face that could be seen was pale, and his eyes gleamed over the bandage, showing very little of the professional calmness that had always characterised Mr. Pilkington.

"We're very much concerned about Mr. Pilkington," Kerr told the doctor, as he met the medical man coming downstairs. "Was it a very bad fall that he had, sir?"

"Very bad," said the doctor. "Mr. Pilkington's face is badly bruised. His nose must have come in violent contact with the stair or the floor."

"No other injuries, I hope, Dr. Williams?"

"No; curiously enough, all the damage is done to the face," said the doctor. "Mr. Pilkington was fortunate to escape with only a bruised face, in the circumstances."

"Quite right," Kerr remarked, after the doctor had gone. "In the circles which the doctor hasn't really been told

about—Pilkny was lucky to escape with a swollen nose. Perhaps next time it will be a bit worse."

Herries made a gesture of caution. "No talking inside the house," he said, in a stage whisper.

During the evening the party adjourned to the music-room, and the appearance of careless forgetfulness on the subject of Arthur Augustus was very well kept up.

Indeed, in the knowledge that they were on the track, and that there was a chance now of rescuing their chum, the juniors were feeling very much more cheerful; and so the jollity was not wholly assumed.

Only the thought of D'Arcy, languishing in some hidden corner, a helpless prisoner, marred their pleasure, and prevented them enjoying themselves. It was past ten o'clock when the party broke up.

Cousin Ethel's face was pensive as she said good-night to Figgins, last of the juniors. Figgins was looking a little anxious. It was not likely that any danger threatened Ethel, but Figgins could not help feeling uneasy.

"I can't help thinking of poor Arthur," said Ethel, in a low voice. "I wish I could take part in the search for him."

Figgins shook his head at once. "Oh, no, Ethel, you couldn't! There may be danger—besides, Miss Drusilla doesn't know anything about the matter, and she wouldn't let you stay down."

Ethel nodded.

"I know. But—but don't run into danger, Figgins, and—and the others, too. Don't do anything too rash."

"That's all right," said Figgins confidently. "Kerr's leader, you know, and he'll see the bimey through. Trust old Kerr."

"There may be danger," said Ethel uneasily.

"I'm thinking about you," said Figgins. "You won't forget to lock your door? And—and I'm glad you're in the same room with Miss Drusilla. I can't help feeling a bit uneasy, you know."

The girl smiled.

"There is no danger for me," she said. "That wicked man can have no object in trying to injure me. I only hope that no one else will be hurt."

"Rely on us," said Figgins. "Come down as early as you can in the morning, and we'll tell you if we've found out anything."

"I shall be down very early," said Ethel.

And she went upstairs with Miss Drusilla.

"Bed-time," said Tom Merry, and the juniors made their way to the Painted Room.

What plans Kerr had made for the night they did not yet know; and in the Painted Room, of course, it was impossible to discuss anything. From behind the secret panel the kidnapper, if he were there, could hear every word.

But Kerr was equal to the occasion. He drew a packet of Christmas cards from his pocket as he sat before the fire.

"Look at these cards, you chaps," he said.

The juniors gathered round him to look at the cards. Upon one of them Kerr wrote:

"It won't be safe for a lot of us to keep watch. We shall be spotted. I'm going down by myself."

Figgins and Wynn looked at him reproachfully; and the rest of the juniors looked very uneasy.

But they had agreed that Kerr was to be leader, and they loyally kept the bargain.

What he had written was true enough. It would be very difficult for any of them to escape Pilkington's sharp eyes, and certainly a number of them could never have kept watch in the library without discovery.

Kerr slipped the card he had written upon into his pocket, and, after keeping up a pretence of scanning the cards, the juniors prepared for bed.

It was curious and eerie to feel that probably, from some concealed spyhole in the room, they were being watched by keen eyes.

Yet if the kidnapper really had access to the house, and could watch them if he chose, it was pretty certain that he was there as the spyhole, to assist himself as to their proceedings.

Whether he would have the nerve to make another attempt upon Wally they could not guess, but it was likely enough. It was understood that in each room one of the juniors was to keep awake all the time.

Kerr's keen eyes had scanned the walls of the room many times, without appearing to do so, in search of a possible spyhole.

But there seemed to be no trace of anything like an opening in the old, time-blackened panels.

The Scottish junior stretched himself in the easy chair before the blazing log-fire, and leaned back with eyes half-closed, as if dozing.

But he was not dozing.

In that attitude he was scanning the ceiling, lit up in every corner by the bright illumination of the electric light.

It was more than likely that if the spyhole existed, it was in the ceiling, where the painting in heavy colours would help to conceal it.

The sprawling Bacchus, crowned with vine-leaves, grinned down at the junior as he gazed upward at the painted ceiling.

Suddenly a thrill ran through Kerr's limbs, in spite of himself.

He could have sworn that the right eye of Bacchus had gleamed like a living eye; that it had moved as no painted eye could move.

He kept quite still.

Through his half-closed eyelids he watched the painted face on the ceiling.

Yes, there was no doubt about it.

The left eye of the painted figure was lifelike enough, but it had not that moving gleam that he detected in the right eye.

Not the slightest hint did Kerr give in his manner of the discovery he had made. He closed his eyes, and seemed to doze.

Figgins shook him and roused him up.

"No good going to sleep in the chair," said Figgins. "Better turn in."

Kerr yawned and rose.

"Right you are, Figgins!"

And he went to bed with the rest.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Watcher in the Dark!

THE light was out in the Painted Room and the adjoining chambers.

The log-fire on the wide, stone hearth was dying low. Strange lights and shadows danced in the room, and played upon the polished, old oak walls.

Not one of the juniors closed his eyes.

It had been arranged for them to stay awake by turns, in case of a visit from the hidden enemy; but as a matter of fact, not one of them felt he could sleep. As the firelight died down, they lay awake and watchful.

The red embers died into blackness.

It was past eleven o'clock now.

At half-past eleven the last spark had expired. It was very nearly time for Kerr to take up his post in the library. True, he did not suppose that the kidnapper, if he visited his prisoners that night, would go before midnight, probably not till considerably after midnight. It was about two hours after midnight that Henry, the footman, had encountered the ghost in the library.

But it was only cautious to be on the spot early enough. As soon as the room was quite dark, and he was safe from the eyes of a watcher, Kerr slipped out of bed and dressed himself.

He put on a pair of rubber shoes, in which he could move noiselessly, and drew a dark muffler about his neck over his collar, in order to be quite invisible in the darkness.

Then he slipped into his pocket a short stout stick, which he had whittled during the day for the purpose.

Now he was ready.

In spite of his coolness and courage, the Scottish junior's heart was beating hard as he stepped towards the door of the Painted Room.

He had seen to that door himself when the juniors came up to bed. He had made a sound of locking it; but he had turned back the key with the same movement, and so the door had really been left unlocked, to allow his exit without a sound.

Kerr opened the door cautiously, noiselessly, and stepped into the corridor.

Kerr drew the door of the Painted Room softly shut behind him.

He waited for a few moments to listen.

But there was not a sound in the great house. Only faintly from outside came the wail of the winter wind in the leafless trees of the park.

So silently had Kerr gone that the other juniors hardly knew that he had started. Only Tom Merry had seen a faint shadow pass his bed.

Kerr crept cautiously towards the stairs, and, stopping every moment to listen and to peer into the darkness, he descended silently in his noiseless shoes.

He reached the great hall on the ground floor, where figures in ancient armour loomed up in the gloom around him.

There was hardly a glimmer of light, the windows being covered with blinds excluding the wintry starlight.

Continued on next page.

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Kerr waited in the hall for several minutes to listen, and to make quite sure of his bearings. He had studied the lay of the building carefully in the daytime, and he knew where he was going, but accidental collision with one of the armour-clad figures would ruin everything.

But he reached the library door at last.

The big, heavy oaken door opened softly to his touch, and he stepped into the vast apartment.

Within was the densest blackness.

Not the faintest glimmer of light from the windows, carefully veiled in blinds. Kerr groined as he reflected that Pilkington had taken care of that. The kidnapper did not want to run the risk of being seen by chance.

Kerr closed the library door.

Black as the darkness around him was, he felt his way along steadily. During the day he had decided upon his place of concealment. It was possible, though not likely, that Pilkington might turn on the light when he came to the library, and in case of that Kerr had to be concealed from sight.

Across a corner of the room was a large screen, shutting off a recess of the wall, and behind that screen Kerr encoined himself.

If the light was turned on he would be concealed, and night be able to peer out and watch the enemy.

If the light were not turned on he would have to depend upon his hearing for a discovery.

He waited.

Midnight passed.

The junior had taken the precaution of coming down very thickly clad for the cold, but, well-clad as he was, he felt the cold keenly as he stood there—motionless, silent, waiting. But he set his teeth and bore the discomfort quietly.

He had no means of telling the time; he had left his watch in the Painted Room, lest its ticking should betray him.

The dull minutes of waiting passed slowly, heavily, and always there was the dispiriting thought that perhaps it was in vain, that the man would not come that night.

Kerr estimated that he had been in the library, shivering in the darkness, at least two hours, when his vigil was rewarded.

All his senses started into alertness at the faint sound of an opening door.

Someone was coming into the library. Faintly, almost inaudibly, the door closed again, and Kerr, hardly daring to breathe, strained his ears to listen.

There was the faint, indefinable sound of someone crossing the room, treading lightly, and picking his way in the darkness.

Kerr put his head round the screen and strained his eyes to see, and just caught the merest glimpse of a dark figure by the panelled wall; then—

Click!

Faint and almost inaudible as that sudden sound was, it struck upon the junior's straining ears with the startling force of a pistol-shot.

For he knew what it meant. The secret panel had opened. The unseen prowler had passed out of the dark library by the secret door.

Click!

The same sound again; the secret door had closed.

Kerr knew whence that faint, tell-tale click had come—from the wall between two of the large bookcases that extended from floor to ceiling—a space

that was filled by panelled oak, with a large picture hanging at equal distance between the two cases.

Somewhere in the space of about eight feet in width the secret panel existed, which had opened at the pressure of the unknown finger.

Kerr waited five minutes or more to make sure that the man was gone, and then he crept out from behind the screen.

He groped his way to the wall between the cases, and felt carefully over the panels with his hands, going over every inch of the surface within his reach.

In that careful examination his hand must have passed over the secret panel, but he did not discover it. The hidden spring that worked the panel was too carefully hidden for him to find it. After ten minutes of careful search the junior gave up the attempt as hopeless. But his face was smiling with satisfaction in the darkness. He had discovered enough. He knew where the panel was, and, if necessary, it could be forced on the morrow. Kerr crept out of the library and returned silently to the Painted Room.

He entered the room, and there was a faint whisper in the darkness—the voice of Tom Merry.

"Kerr, old man!"

And Kerr whispered back:

"Get up! Wake all the others and dress quickly! But not a word!"

"One word—you've found out—"

"Yes."

"Good egg!"

And in a few minutes the juniors, breathing hard with excitement in the darkness, were dressed and ready; and Kerr led the way.

#### CHAPTER 9.

#### The Prisoners of the Dungeons!

"6 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy murmured that exclamation. A sudden light flared upon his eyes as he opened them and sat up.

Where was he?

That was the question he had been asking himself constantly for forty-eight hours without being able to find an answer.

Grim cold stone walls shut him in. It was a stone cell. Where? The heaviness of the air and the intense darkness made it certain that it was some distance below ground. On the floor were some old rugs, and wrapped up among the rugs for warmth the swell of St. Jim's had been sleeping. There was a clang of metal as he started up. Round his waist was a locked ring of iron, and to the iron ring was fastened a rusty chain, in its turn secured to a staple in the stone wall.

Clank, clank!

Long centuries before, hapless prisoners had been shut up in the grim dungeon, and had pined away their lives in the grip of those rusty old chains. Hundreds of years had rolled by since then. And now the stone-walled dungeon and the rusty iron chains found

their use again. And the prisoner they held was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

In a heap of rugs and old blankets, on the cold stone floor, Arthur Augustus had slept by night and huddled by day for warmth.

And he was not the only prisoner.

For from the adjoining cell, entered by an arched doorway, came occasionally the clank of another chain.

Another prisoner was there.

D'Arcy had not seen him, thick stone walls intervened. But he knew that it was his father.

He had solved the mystery of Lord Eastwood's whereabouts, only by sharing his imprisonment in this mysterious recess.

Arthur Augustus, as he rose from the dirty rugs on the floor, with the chain clanking about him, looked at the man who had entered the dungeon.

The man held an old-fashioned lantern in his hand, probably one of the lanterns that had been used by the gaolers in days long since past and gone, and left where it had been last used.

The light gleamed upon D'Arcy, and upon the stone walls, reeking with damp. But it did not reveal the features of the man who held the lantern. His face was covered with a black cloth, fastened over his head, and provided only with opening slits for the eyes and the mouth and the nose. The black visage looked grim and terrible, with the eyes gleaming through the slits. The unseen man was clad in a long, dark coat, completely concealing him. Even his hands were covered with black gloves, as if he feared to allow a fraction of his



The library was suddenly flooded with light and the junior secret entrance. With his assailants clutching him on Pilkington!

person to be seen, lest it might be known.

Arthur Augustus stared at him, his hands clenching and his teeth coming hard together. He would have been glad to have been at close quarters with this scoundrel; but the man took care not to come within the length of the chain.

It was the second visit Arthur Augustus had received since his capture; and on the previous occasion his captor had presented the same dark, impenetrable appearance. Who he was, and whether he had ever seen him before, D'Arcy could not possibly guess. For the kidnapper had been clad and masked in the same way on that terrible night in the Painted Room when D'Arcy had been seized and carried off.

The junior had vague and oppressive recollections of that fearful experience, of the living eye that had watched him through the orifice in the painted eye on the ceiling, of the sudden extinguishing of the light, then of a grasp in the darkness, the pressure of a chloroform pad upon his face. He had awakened sick and dizzy here, in this black and gloomy dungeon.

"You scoundrel!" was Arthur Augustus' greeting to the man in black.

There was no reply.

The man in black stooped and placed a small basket on the floor near the wall of St. Jim's. It contained a loaf, a chunk of cheese, and a bottle of water. That was the fare of the prisoner in the dungeon.

"You wascal!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wish I could get near

you. I should like to give you a faithful thrashing!"

No answer.

"Who are you, you scoundrel?" the junior exclaimed, exasperated. "What are you keepin' me here for? How dare you treat me like this? Do you understand that you will be sent to prison when my friends find me?"

Still no reply.

The man moved on towards the arched way leading into the adjoining cell. Arthur Augustus made a spring towards him, and struck out with his fist as far as he could reach. But the chain stopped him short. He gave a gasp of anger.

"Oh, you wascal! You uttah wottah!"

Still without replying, the man in black passed into the next cell, and the light disappeared with him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left in darkness.

In the adjoining cell a man lay upon a heap of old rugs, his face pale and worn, and showing signs of exhaustion and emaciation.

He did not rise as the man in black came in, but fixed his eyes upon him. He had not been sleeping.

The man in black placed a second supply of food within reach of his second prisoner; the same fare, a loaf, and cheese, and water. Upon the floor lay the unfinished remains of a similar meal.

"You've not finished your last meal, Lord Eastwood!" said the man in black, speaking in a strange, guttural voice, evidently adopted for the purpose of disguising his real tones.

"Scoundrel!" said the earl, his eyes burning as they were fixed upon the impenetrable masked visage. "How long will you dare to keep me a prisoner here?"

"Until you come to my terms, my lord!"

"That will never be!"

The man in black shrugged his shoulders.

"You can remain here as long as you like, my lord," he said. "But you are aware that your son is now sharing your privations."

"I know it."

"Does that make no difference to you?"

"None, so far as yielding to you is concerned," said Lord Eastwood firmly. "I will die in this dungeon rather than yield to the infamous demands of a kidnapper!"

"You will certainly die in this dungeon if you do not yield," said the man in black coolly. "When you have exhausted my patience I shall simply cease to visit you. Then you will die of famine here in the darkness."

"Better than making terms with a scoundrel."

"And your son will share your fate."

A spasm passed over the white face of the prisoner. It was evident that he felt more keenly the sufferings of his son than his own. The eyes of the man in black glittered through the holes in the mask as they watched the face of the prisoner.

"Does not that move you, my lord?" he asked mockingly.

"It does," said the earl, in a low voice. "Yet I will not give in. You do not understand a scrap of honour. But you may believe me when I tell you that I will never yield to your demands."

"What is it to you that I ask—ten thousand pounds for life and liberty?" said the man in black. "You have plenty, I have none. You can afford to pay for your liberty, and you shall pay my price. Your cheque for ten thousand pounds is the price. Once it is safely cashed, you are free."

"And how do I know that you will keep your word, and that you will not demand a second bribe after the first is secured?" asked Lord Eastwood.

"You must take my word for that—I promise you."

The earl's lip curled. "The promise of a kidnapper, a black-mailer, a thief! Even if I were base enough to yield to your threats, I should not be so foolish as to trust you."

"Perhaps a few more days in this dungeon will cause you to change your mind. I am in no hurry. I shall give you another week before I take stern measures."

"And then?"

"Then I shall visit you once in forty-eight hours, instead of once in twenty-four, and you will be upon half rations. If you do not yield by then, once in every third night. And if that does not cure your obstinacy, I shall fasten up the door of your dungeon, and visit you no more. You will perish miserably of hunger here, with no sounds but the dying groans of your son."

"I think, perhaps, you are capable of such villainy," said the earl, in a low voice. "But I shall not give way to you. You must be discovered and condemned, even if it is after my death."

There was a sound of a mocking chuckle under the black hood.

"I have not been discovered yet."

"But you must be. You say you have my cheque-book. How did you obtain it?"

"Your cheque-book is in its place, Lord Eastwood. I can obtain it when I choose—that is all."

"Who are you?" burst out the earl.

"How is it that you have secret access to my house?"

"That is my secret. But enough words. Are you prepared to sign the cheque I have asked for?"

"No!"

"Then good-night! I shall see you again in twenty-four hours."

"Villain!"

The man in black disappeared with the light.

He left darkness behind him—darkness, cold, despair. The hope that had upheld Lord Eastwood in the four days of his imprisonment had sunk almost to zero now. He had not been found, and yet the searchers had not yet succeeded in finding him. How could they guess the existence of this hidden dungeon? The light of hope flickered and almost expired.

Lord Eastwood called out, his voice sounding hollow and eerie in the silence and deep darkness.

"Arthur!"

Faintly from the next cell came the voice of the swell of St. Jim's in response.

"Yas!"

"Arthur, my boy, do you wish me

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leaped upon the man who had come into the room by the door, the man went to the floor, struggling madly. "He exclaimed Kerr.

to yield to that scoundrel and pay him what he asks?"

And the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was firm as he replied:

"No, dad! It's up to us to stick it out—honah first."

"You know what it may mean, my boy?"

"Yass; and I'm not afraid. Besides, the fellows will be searchin' for us, dad. They won't give it up till they've found us. Nevah say die!"

And then there was silence again.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Laying the Snare!

TOM MERRY & CO. followed Kerr silently down the broad stairs.

Hardly a sound had been spoken in the Painted Room. It was not likely that the kidnapper was watching the juniors then, but Kerr left nothing to chance.

But the Scottish junior halted on a lower landing, and spoke in a whisper. In that spot there was no shadow of danger of being overheard.

"I think we've got a chance of the rascal at last!"

"What have you found out?" whispered Tom Merry.

"He came into the library, and I just caught a glimpse of a dark figure. Then I heard the click of the panelling opening."

"Good!"

"That makes it clear that Lord Eastwood and Gussy are hidden somewhere quite near, perhaps in some unknown dungeon under this house," said Kerr. "The man wouldn't go to them that way unless they were in some place connected with this house."

"Right enough!" said Figgins.

"I can't find the panel in the library wall," said Kerr, "but I know just where it is—within a few feet. The rascal must come back that way. And we're all going to be in the library ready for him."

"Good egg!"

"There are more than enough of us to collar him as he comes through," said Monty Lowther. "We shall make sure of him, I think."

"Have the light on, and then he can't possibly get away," said Herries.

"No, no! There may be some spy-hole in the library, the same as there is in the Painted Room, and then he would see the light as he came back and take the alarm."

"My hat! You think of everything, Kerr, old man," said Figgins.

"He's a jolly cunning and slippery bird, and we can't take any chances with him," said Kerr.

"Then we're to wait in the dark?" asked Kangaroo.

"That's it!"

"He may give us the slip," said Manners.

"We must do our best. If we have the light on, I don't believe we shall see him at all. We shall hear the panel click when it opens, and then we can rush on him and collar him. One of us can be standing by the electric light switch. Figgins can do that. I will call out as soon as I've got my hands on the rascal, and Figgie can switch on the light—see?"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins.

"Follow me—and not a word, now."

They crept downstairs. The library was dark and silent as they entered it. Kerr, taking his companions in turn, led them in the darkness to the panelled

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wall between the bookcases, where the secret door was situated. By that way the rascal must come. And in the darkness the juniors waited in a ring, ready to seize him.

It was agreed that Kerr was to make the first movement, and a call from him was to be the signal for attack.

Their hearts thumped as they waited in the gloom.

In a short time now, the kidnapper, returning from his visit to his prisoners, must walk right into their hands. And then the secret of the panel would be known, and they would have but to follow the passage to the prisoners, and find them in their hiding-place.

## "SNOW" FUN!

By Herbert Skimpole.

*Oh, why is snowballing so yalling to me?*

*This problem demands close attention.*

*Although I've thought deeply 'twixt breakfast and tea,*

*It still eludes my comprehension.*

*Oh, why do my juvenile friends all delight*

*In ossified snow's swift propulsion.*

*While all that I feel in myself at the sight*

*Of a snowfall is instant revulsion?*

*It may be my aural appendages jib*

*At the din when the snowfighters holler;*

*It may be I hate to feel wet down my*

*Or ice melting under my collar.*

*Or possibly Form-master Linton's*

*Who gave my snowballing a stopper.*

*Just once did I throw one—and that*

*In the side of his shiny new topper!*

*Whatever the reason, though youths may deplore*

*That I drop some particular "ism"*

*And snowball instead, I still say as before:*

*"I'm afraid I'm unable to whizz 'em."*

*And thus, though my juvenile colleagues have yearned*

*For icy bombardments appalling,*

*I fear that as far as Herb Skimpole's concerned,*

*Snowballing is always so galling!*

In the dead silence the juniors could almost hear their hearts beating as they waited. When would the man come?

He had been absent a long time now. Perhaps he had to tread long, dark passages to some hidden recess in the depths under the ancient house. Perhaps he was parleying with his prisoners, endeavouring by threats to extort from them the price of their liberty—for there was little doubt that his object was to hold them to ransom.

The juniors thought of their chum, shut up in some cold, dark recess underground, and they longed to get their hands upon the kidnapper.

When would he come?

Their hearts throbbed harder than

ever as there came a slight sound in the darkness. Figgins, on the other side of the room, had his hand upon the switch of the electric light—ready!

Click!

The juniors all knew what that sound meant. The secret panel had opened. Within a few feet of them, now, in the dense darkness, was the unknown—the hidden hand.

Click! again.

The panel had closed, and the man was in the room, with the secret door shut behind him, and at the mercy of the juniors.

Then Kerr, with the spring of a tiger, was upon him.

Kerr's hands, clutching in the darkness, closed upon a human form, and at the same moment he yelled to Figgins:

"The light—the light!"

There was a gasp from the unseen man—a gasp of terror and rage—and Kerr was flung furiously off. The other juniors stumbled over him as they swarmed to the attack. Even then the man might have escaped. But Figgins had obeyed the signal. The switch was turned. The vast apartment was flooded with light.

And in the flood of light the man was seen at the panelled wall, his hand seeking the secret spring—to escape!

But there was no escape for him.

Three or four of the juniors leaped upon him, and he went to the floor, with his assailants sprawling over him, clutching and gasping, in a silent and deadly struggle.

Kerr staggered to his feet, panting a little, and looked with a cool and grim eye upon the burly man struggling madly in the clutch of the juniors.

"Pilkington!" he exclaimed.

And as he spoke the butler's struggles ceased, and he collapsed under his swarming foes, and lay, gasping, on the floor, with the juniors heaped on him.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Fairly Caught!

PILKINGTON it was! There was no doubt about his identity now.

The stout, florid butler, no longer grave and respectable and imposing, lay on his back on the library floor, panting, exhausted, his face aflame, and his eyes blazing with fury.

"Pilkington!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Pilky!" said Wally, with a chuckle.

"And caught in the giddy act!"

"The scoundrel! We've got him!" Pilkington stared at his captors, rage and terror in his face. But even then the nerve and presence of mind of the rascal did not desert him. With an effort he regained something of his calmness.

"Young gentlemen!" he exclaimed, with as much as he could muster of his old smooth and calm voice. "Young gentlemen, what does this mean?"

"I fancy you know what it means well enough!" chuckled Kangaroo. "It means that we've caught you in the act!"

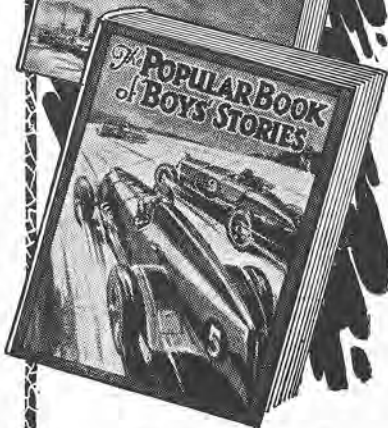
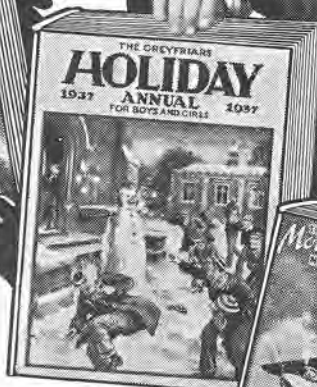
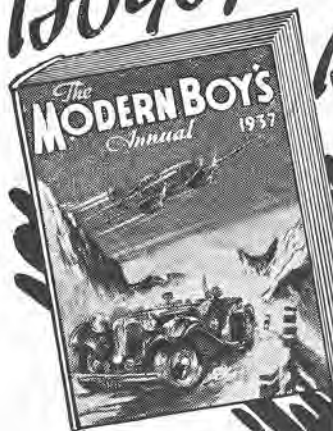
"You're a downy bird, but you've been caught at last!" grinned Figgins. There was a giddy Scotsman on your track, you see, and you really hadn't an earthly!"

"I don't understand, young gentlemen. Pray let me get up. I am quite breathless!"

"So am I," said Blake. "But you're not going to get up, you rascal. We've got you!"

(Continued on page 18.)

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## WANTED—JUSTICE FOR CADS!

By Percy Mellish.

clap who couldn't sneak or tell a fib to save his life!

When that day comes, the namby-pamby school fiction of to-day will give place to much more virile stuff. Something like this:

"Have a cig?" chorled Val Viper, the hero of the Fourth, his cheeks glowing with health as he spoke, and his lips parting in a cheery, open grin. John Goodman, the scoundrel of the Form, went as white as chalk. His eye glittered and his face worked convulsively.

"I never touch them!" he sneered. "Then what about havin' a few hands of nap?" chuckled Val Viper. John Goodman sniggered.

"He, he, he! I promised my mater I'd never play cards!"

Val Viper's face darkened with righteous anger. His voice trembled with indignation.

"You lot rotter!" he cried. "Anyway, at least have the decency to read this copy of 'Sportin' Snippin'.'"

"No fear! My grandmother always said that horse-racing is wicked!" leered the scoundrel of the Fourth with a cynical laugh.

And so on. That's the kind of story that's needed to-day! Don't you agree?

**M**Y objection to school stories is that the characters are all given the wrong labels. The namby-pamby Good Little Erics are always the heroes and the intelligent go-ahead gay dogs are always the villains!

Chaps like myself get a real raw deal. There seems to be a conspiracy between writers of school tales to make the public dislike us. They're all the same. They make us sneer and shudder and go as white as chalk and laugh cynically. They make our eyes glitter like a snake's, our lips curl, and our faces work convulsively.

It's all wrong, and it's about time somebody told them so! One of these days we downtrodden and despised sportsmen will rise in revolt against the idiotic tradition that makes us always the villains of the tale—and on our banner will be inscribed the words "Justice for Cads!"

We shall demand a new sort of school story, the hero of which will be a bold, bad blade—and the villain a

said through the hole in the eye of the painted, Bacchus on the ceiling."

Pilkington gave a violent start. His glance was murderous for a moment as he looked at the Scottish junior. Kerr had succeeded in surprising him out of his composure. But in a moment he was smooth and suave again.

"I'm sure I do not understand you, Master Kerr. My face was hurt in a fall downstairs this morning."

"That may do for Henry but it won't do for us. I spotted you, Pilkington, and I was on the watch in this room when you went through the panel more than half an hour ago."

"What!"

"Then I fetched the fellows down, and we've been waiting here for you—waiting for you to come through the panel—do you understand? As soon as you'd come in, and we heard the panel closed, we jumped on you. It's no good lying about having come down from your bed-room. We were waiting for you in this room for a quarter of an hour or more before you came back through the wall."

Pilkington's face grew deadly pale.

He understood now, for the first time, how much the juniors knew, and a hunted look came into his eyes. He knew that he was caught. But the expression on his face was obstinate and unyielding.

"I don't understand you," said Pilkington, "and I know nothing about a secret panel. I insist upon being released immediately! Mr. Dodder is in his room, and I am willing for the matter to be placed before him, as an officer of the law, if you care to call him."

"That's piffle! You're leader, Kerr. What are you going to do with him?" Kerr reflected.

"I suppose you fellows all agree that we're justified in using pretty rough means to make this scoundrel tell us what he's done with Gussy?" he said.

"Yes, rather!"

"Very well! Herries, will you go round to the kennels and fetch Towser?"

"Towser!" said Herries.

"Yes, Towser has a special fancy for biting Pilkington. If Towser once got fairly at him, Pilkington would feel it, I think."

"No doubt about that," grinned Herries.

"Then fetch Towser, and we'll see if Towser can persuade this scoundrel to open his mouth, and tell us something besides lies."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

And he hurried away. Pilkington's face was very white now. He had a terrible dread of the bulldog, and he did not know to what length the determination of the juniors might carry them. He made an effort to get loose.

"He's got to be tied up," said Kerr. "Tear his things into strips, and tie him up."

"What-ho!"

The struggling, furious man was soon bound, hand and foot. His own tie and coat, wrenched into strips, served for bonds. He lay on the floor a helpless prisoner, glaring furiously at the juniors. Then there was a pause, and silence till Herries came back. In ten minutes Herries came in, leading Towser, and the library door was locked once more.

Towser's eyes gleamed at the sight of Pilkington on the floor, and he made a spring towards him, and the chain clinked. But Herries held him in.

"Let him come within a foot of the

"Yes, you have got me," said Pilkington; "that is certainly the case, Master Blake. But I do not understand what you have assaulted me in this extraordinary manner. I shall certainly complain to Lord Conway."

"Well, of all the nerve!" ejaculated Tom Merry in amazement. "Are you trying to brazen it out, you rascal? Can't you understand that you're howled out?"

"I cannot understand you. If I had known that it was you young gentlemen, I should not have troubled," said Pilkington calmly. "I found myself attacked in the darkness, and imagined that it must be burglars."

"Oh!"

"I suppose this is a joke of you young gentlemen, but really it is too rough and violent for a man of my age. What have you done it for?"

"Well, you are a cool customer," said Blake. "But we've got you."

"And now we want you to guide us to Lord Eastwood and D'Arcy," said Kerr quietly.

Pilkington smiled. "Is that another little joke?" he asked.

"You won't find it a joke if you don't do as we tell you," said Kerr. "We're not going to stand on ceremony with a kidnapper!"

Pilkington looked astonished. "I suppose this must be a joke," he said. "Why do you call me a kidnapper, Master Kerr? I do not understand you in the least."

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake. "If you refuse to release me, I shall be compelled to call for help," said Pilkington.

rotter!" said Kerr. "But hold him in till I give the word!"

"Right you are!" said Herries. Pilkington's face was livid with terror as the great jaws of the bulldog gleamed within a dozen inches of him. Towser was evidently anxious to get to business. Towser had his likes and dislikes, and he disliked Mr. Pilkington very much.

"Take out your watch, Figgy!" Figgins took out his watch. "What time is it?" "Just a quarter to three." "Good! Pilkington, you have exactly five minutes to make up your mind. At ten minutes to three, if you have not decided to show us the secret panel, I shall tell Herries to let the bulldog loose. You know what will happen then."

"You dare not!" yelled Pilkington. Kerr's teeth set grimly. "You will see! You have five minutes!"

## CHAPTER 12.

### Towser Does It!

THE minutes ticked away. Pilkington lay upon the floor, his eyes fixed upon Towser, and the juniors stood round with their eyes upon Pilkington. The rascal could not move; he could only lie and wait.

Towser made a movement from time to time, but Herries' hand was firm on his lead.

"Three minutes more!" said Kerr, breaking the dead silence.

Pilkington turned a haggard look upon him. "You dare not!" he muttered. "You dare not!"

Pilkington's eyes searched his face, searching for a sign of wavering, but there was no such sign to be seen there; the Scottish junior's face was hard as iron.

The juniors did not feel sure that Kerr was in earnest. But one thing was certain—they would not interfere. The rascal before them had betrayed a kind master, had kidnapped the man whose bread he ate, and was keeping their chum fastened up in some dark, hidden den. There was hardly any step they were not prepared to take to rescue D'Arcy, and the obstinacy of a rascal and criminal should not stand in their way.

"One minute more!" said Kerr. Dead silence!

Kerr had his eyes on the watch, his face grimly set. He looked up from it at last and fixed his eyes upon the colourless face of Pilkington.

"Twenty seconds!" he said. "Are you going to show us the panel?"

"No!"

"Very well! Stand back, you fellows!"

"You mean it?" muttered Figgins. Kerr's eyes gleamed.

"Are we going to leave D'Arcy—our chum—shut up in a cellar somewhere, because this scoundrel doesn't choose to tell us the way to find him?" he asked.

"No!" said Figgins, between his teeth.

"No!" said Tom Morry firmly.

"Pilkington, the time is up," said Kerr. "Are you going to show us how to work that panel?"

"No!"

Pilkington snarled out the word desperately.

"Then it's finished. Let the dog go, Herries!"

Herries released Towser from the lead.

The bulldog made one spring, right at the man on the floor, his eyes ablaze, his teeth gleaming in the light.

Pilkington gave a wild yell of terror; he had no further doubts as to whether the juniors were in earnest or not.

He rolled madly away over the floor. "Call him off! I'll show you—I'll show you!" he screamed.

But Towser was upon him. Herries and Kerr made a rush to stop him, and caught the bulldog by the collar and the leash; but Towser's teeth were gripping Pilkington's arm.

Fortunately for the rascal, he had surrendered in time; the bulldog had not had time to get a grip, and only the cloth of his coat was in the jaws of Towser. But Towser refused, after the manner of bulldogs, to let go his grip, and the pieces of cloth came out in his teeth as the juniors dragged him off by main force.

Towser growled with disappointment. Pilkington, who had felt the teeth graze his skin, rolled on the floor, panting with fear.

"Take him away! Take him away!" "Hold him in, Herries!"

"Untie one of the rotter's hands and let him open the panel," said Kerr.

Pilkington was dragged to his feet, and one of his hands was freed. He cast a glance of furious hate at the juniors.

"Open the panel!" said Kerr. Pilkington hesitated one moment, but his experience at close quarters with Towser had been enough for him. His free hand glided over the panels in the wall and touched the cunningly concealed spring.

Click!

A section of the wall slid back silently, and a dark opening was revealed. In the light that shone through from the

library the juniors, as they stared curiously through the opening, could see the top of a flight of spiral steps set in the thickness of the huge old stone walls.

"Good egg!" said Tom Morry, with satisfaction. "That's the way Lord Eastwood was taken. We'll make the villain guide us; and Towser can come along, in case he shows any more obstinacy."

"What-ho!" said Herries.

"We shall want a light," said Jack Blake.

"That's all right," said Kerr; "there's one here."

Kerr had stepped into the cavity in the wall. He picked up an old-fashioned lantern—still warm, showing that it had been recently used. Close by it on the floor lay a dark coat and a black hood with eye-holes in it. Kerr picked them up, and the other fellows examined them with much curiosity.

"The rotter puts these things on when he goes to take food to the prisoners," said Kerr; "that's to prevent them recognising him. But he's bowled out now."

"Bring him along," said Blake.

Pilkington's legs were freed, both his arms being tied again. The juniors did not intend to give him the slightest chance of escape. Kerr lighted the lantern and led the way, and Tom Morry and Blake followed, holding the butler by either arm. Herries came next with Towser and the growl of the bulldog was sufficient to spur Pilkington on when he hesitated. The rest of the juniors brought up the rear.

There was plenty of room to move in the cavity in the vast thickness of the wall. From the level of the library another spiral stair led upward, disappearing into blackness, and the juniors



The light gleamed into the dungeon and a haggard figure sprang from the rugs on the floor. "Bal Jove, Tom Morry!" The juniors gave a shout. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

did not need telling that it led to the Painted Room.

The downward stair led away into damp and chilly darkness. Kerr stepped cautiously down the steps, holding the lantern before him.

Down and down and down!

They were far beneath the foundations of the house, and the stone walls about them were reeking with damp. At last they reached a square chamber, without a sign of a door. It seemed that they had come to the end of a blind alley.

Kerr turned to Pilkington.

"Show us the way!" he said curtly.

Pilkington stepped to one of the cold, slimy walls, and thrust his hand into a recess in the stonework, and a block of stone slid back, with a creak of rusty hinges. Beyond was a vaulted passage, and the party advanced into it.

From the vaulted passage, low-arched openings gave admittance to the horrible dungeons where wretched captives had pined in the good old days. And as they advanced, from one of the dungeons came a clink of iron, the sound of a moving chain! It struck a chill to the hearts of the juniors as they realised the means Pilkington had used to keep the kidnapped prisoners secure.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, in a low voice.

They passed through the low arch.

The light gleamed into the dungeon, and a haggard figure sprang from the rugs on the floor, blinking dizzily in the lantern light.

"You scoundrel! Have you come back? I—Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy!" The juniors gave a shout.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

## CHAPTER 13. Rescued at Last!

"GUSSEY!"

They were round him at once, shaking his hand, patting him on the back, with exclamations of joy and satisfaction.

Arthur Augustus looked at them in a dazed way. Very different he looked from the elegant swell of St. Jim's they knew so well. His face was white and haggard, his clothes rumpled and dirty; but it was Arthur Augustus, found at last!

Pilkington stood with a sullen, lowering face while the juniors joyfully greeted their chum.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I'm jolly glad you found me, you know. I told the patah lots of times that you would manage it somehow. Bai Jove, this is simply whippin'!"

"Is your father here?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas; in the next cell, chained up the same as I am."

The juniors pressed through into the next cell, taking Pilkington with them.

Lord Eastwood had heard their voices, and he was upon his feet, his face flushed with hope.

"My dear boys!" he exclaimed, as they crowded in. "You have found us!"

"Yes, sir; and jolly glad, too," said Tom Merry. "We'll soon have you out of that. Pilkington, you scoundrel, unfasten that chain!"

Lord Eastwood gazed at Pilkington in blank amazement.

"Pilkington!" he exclaimed. "Has Pilkington helped you to find us?"

"Yes, in a way; not of his own will, though," said Tom Merry.

"It was that scoundrel who kidnapped you, dad!" said Wally, with a ferocious glare at the cowed and sullen rascal.

"Surely this is impossible!" exclaimed the earl.

"Oh, we bowled him out, sir!" said Herries. "My bulldog spotted him first, and then Kerr worked it out."

"But—but—"

"You didn't see who captured you, dad?" asked Wally.

Lord Eastwood shook his head.

"No. I was seized suddenly from behind at a late hour in the library, and I was made insensible with a chloroformed cloth pressed over my face," he replied. "I came to myself in this place, without knowing how I was brought here, or who had brought me. I did not think of Pilkington in connection with the outrage—"

"You've only seen him here toggled up in dark clothes, with a black mask on his face?" asked Kerr.

"Yes, exactly."

"We've found the outfit," said Kerr. "We made Pilky guide us here as soon as we bowled him out, sir. Now we'll make him let you loose. Do you hear, Pilky? Towser is still here, and he's anxious to get at you."

Pilkington, with a muttered curse, drew a rusty iron key from his pocket and unlocked the iron ring that was fastened round Lord Eastwood's waist.

The earl stood free at last.

"Now for Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Bring that rascal along!"

They crowded back into D'Arcy's dungeon. Pilkington unlocked the junior's irons with the same key.

"Bai Jove, that's bettah!" Arthur Augustus exclaimed. "So it was Pilkington? You awful wascal, Pilkington!"

"The rotter collared you in the Painted Room, I suppose?" Blake asked.

"Yaas. I found somebody watchin' me through a hole in the ceilin', you know—"

"The eye of the Bacchus," said Kerr.

"Yaas; so you have found it out, too. I was feashfully alarmed, and I jumped up, you know, and then the light went out. Thinkin' ovah that, I realised that the wascal must have some confederate in the house, as he must have had a switch placed somewhere to control the electric light in the room. Before I really knew what was happenin', I was collared, and a chloroform wag was pressed on my chivvy, you know, and aftah that I didn't know what happened. I didn't have time even to call out and wake you chaps. It was howwible to feel the chloroform overcomin' me, and not be able to cwy out, though Blake and Dig were quite close to me." Arthur Augustus shuddered. "Thank goodness it's all ovah!"

"All over for you, but it's only just beginnin' for Pilky!" grinned Wally. "He's going to have a taste of prison himself, and he won't get out of it so quick."

"Wathah not!"

"Let's get out of this," said Kangaroo. "Take my arm, sir," he added.

Lord Eastwood was tottering with exhaustion.

"Thank you, my boy!"

And they left the dungeons, Lord Eastwood leaning heavily upon the arm of the sturdy Cornstalk. Blake and Digby helped Arthur Augustus, who was also in an exhausted state.

FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY

## "THE GHOST OF ST. JIM'S!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

When a grisly spectre starts to haunt St. Jim's, suspicion falls upon Ernest Levison, the cad of the Fourth, who is caught playing ghost. But there is far more than a mere jape behind the ghostly visitations of the unknown! Here's a great, seasonal yarn that all readers will find just to their liking for Christmas!

## "ROUGHING IT AT GREYFRIARS!"

By FRANK RICHARDS

After the feast comes the reckoning! Harry Wharton & Co. have enjoyed themselves foraging for their own food in deserted and silent Greyfriars. But they little know that liquorice powder has been mixed in the custard they have eaten! They make that painful discovery in next week's amusing chapters of this sparkling yarn. Make sure you read all about it.

ORDER YOUR "GEM" EARLY

The juniors followed with their prisoner. In ten minutes more they were in the library of Eastwood House. There Lord Eastwood sank into a chair.

Wally hurried away, and returned with a decanter, and a glass of wine brought a faint flush of colour into the wan cheeks of the earl.

"I wathah think that bed's the word now," Arthur Augustus remarked.

"That miserable rascal must be taken care of first," said Lord Eastwood. "He must be placed in safe hands."

"There's a Scotland Yard detective in the house, sir," said Tom Merry. "He's here to find you, sir. He can take charge of Pilkington. You can make a charge against him, and give him into custody."

"Pray call him!" said Lord Eastwood.

Tom Merry hurried away to call Mr. Dodder. In ten minutes the gentleman from Scotland Yard, hurriedly dressed and looking very amazed, was in the library. He almost fell down at the sight of Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Lord Eastwood raised his hand and pointed to Pilkington.

"I give that man in charge for kidnapping and attempted blackmail," he said. "Please take every care that he does not escape, Mr. Dodder. I am Lord Eastwood."

"I am glad you have been found, sir, though I did not succeed myself," said Mr. Dodder, producing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. "I may say that, with the clues I had succeeded in—in discovering, I should have found you in a very short time. I am glad, however, that these young gentlemen have been before me. I will relieve you of this rascal at once."

The handcuffs clicked upon Pilkington's wrists.

Then, with the detective's grip upon his arm, he was marched out of the library, and a quarter of an hour later Ruggles was driving away the car, containing Mr. Dodder and his prisoner, to the police station.

Pilkington had gone to his trial, and to his condemnation, and then to retire from the world for three years, with ample opportunities for meditating upon his sins, in the intervals of breaking stones.

At Eastwood House, the juniors, who had baffled his rascality, gave him no further thought.

## CHAPTER 14.

### A Merry Christmas!

**C**OUSIN ETHEL had a surprise the next morning.

She came down very early, as she had promised Figgins, in order to learn what success the juniors had had in the night.

Little did she anticipate how complete that success had been.

She could scarcely believe her eyes when she came down, for one of the first persons upon whom they rested was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's, beautifully clean and elegant as usual, looked little the worse for his painful experience of the last forty-eight hours, save for a slight pallor in his aristocratic face.

Ethel stopped short in amazement, with a little cry:

"Arthur!"

Arthur Augustus's monocle dropped to the end of its cord as he ran forward to greet his cousin.

"Ethel, dear girl! Here I am!"

"My dear Arthur! I am so glad! Then you succeeded, Figgins?"

Figgins grinned. "I didn't!" he said. "Kerr did it nearly all."

"And Pilkington—"

"In prison," said Tom Merry.

"And my uncle," said Ethel eagerly—"you found him, too?"

"Yaas, wathah, dear girl! The patah's in bed. He hasn't come down yet. He can't stand these things as I do, you know," said Arthur Augustus.

"And he's had more of it, too. I don't think he'll come down to-day. But he's all wight."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Ethel. "We shall have a merry Christmas, after all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Over a very cheerful breakfast-table, Cousin Ethel learned all the particulars of the adventures of the night. Aunt Drusilla held up her hands in amazement, but pronounced that Kerr was a very dear, clever boy—an opinion in which Cousin Ethel and all the juniors heartily concurred.

"The clouds have rolled by now," Arthur Augustus remarked, as he rose from the breakfast-table, "and we're going to have a wippin' time, dear boys!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

And they did.

That afternoon they played the village team on the football ground, and Tom Merry's eleven had the satisfaction of a victory to start the Christmas holidays with. Arthur Augustus stood by with Cousin Ethel in the crowd that watched the match, favouring Cousin Ethel with his valuable opinion on every point of the game, and cheering loudly every goal for St. Jim's.

"Three goals to one!" said Arthur Augustus, when the match was over. "I warged that as vewy cveditable, considerrin' that I was not in the team. I considah that you have done wemarkably well, Tom Mewwy."

"Than which," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "there can be no higher praise."

To which Arthur Augustus replied cheerfully:

"Oh, wats!"

The Christmas holidays, which had started under such grim auspices, turned out very merry and happy, now that the clouds, as D'Arcy put it, had rolled by.

Seldom had Tom Merry & Co. had so cheery a Christmas.

And when Arthur Augustus rose at the festive board to propose the health of Kerr, for having been the means of causing the clouds to "woll by," in a speech of considerable length, there were loud cheers from every member of D'Arcy's Christmas party.

## REPORTS THAT MAKE PATERS EXPLODE!

By Harry Manners.

**T**HE bugbear of Christmas is the school report. Why they should choose Christmas, of all times, for sending our paters a classified list of our shortcomings is a mystery. But they do!

The result is roughly a million explosions of wrath from paters all over the country and two or three million groans from anxious young hopefuls who have been wondering if they'd get their presents before their reports were spotted! Can you imagine a worse start for the Festive Season? I can't!

Just before breaking-up this year, I thought I'd strike a blow for a Happier Christmas. I'd try to get those reports postponed till after the holiday!

After all, I argued, Linton has always told us to look on him as a friend, and discuss our difficulties with him in a friendly way. Why not take him at his word?

Right-ho, then! I marched up to Linton's study, swaggered in, gave him a friendly slap on the back that nearly knocked him out of his chair, and sat down on the corner of his desk.

"How'ya, pal?" I roared.

Linton smiled nervously.

"Why, Manners, my dear boy, what can I do for you?"

"Just prevent those school reports going out—that's all, pal!" I beamed.

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all, my dear lad; it's a pleasure!" said Linton warmly. "If you like, I will refrain from sending them out altogether."



"Okay, Big Boy! Thanks, a lot! So-long, pal!"

And, giving Linton another slap on the back that knocked every ounce of breath out of him, I swaggered out again.

Or, at least, that's how I pictured it when I outlined my scheme to Tommy and Monty.

The reality wasn't quite like that. Actually, I walked rather thoughtfully to Linton's study, and, after edging away several times, eventually managed to give a timid tap on the door.

Linton bade me "Come in!" and I entered—with trembling footsteps.

Linton said "Well?" and I said "I—I—I—"

Linton said "Well?" again, and I said "Er—er—er—"

Linton blinked.

"You appear to be ill, Manners," he said. "Report to the House dame at once and tell her to send for the doctor if she considers it necessary."

I gasped "Yes, sir!" and tottered away.

And that, to be quite honest, is as far as I got for my stunt for reforming the school report routine. Pity we can't do things like we do in our imagination, isn't it?

When Bob Cherry Lit the Kitchen Fire at Greyfriars He Nearly Set the School Ablaze!

# ROUGHING IT AT GREYFRIARS!

Back to Greyfriars!

"HERE we are again!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. The train pulled into Friardale Station. Bob Cherry was leaning out of the window, his cheerful face aglow: behind him in the carriage was a crowd of Greyfriars juniors.

Harry Wharton of the Remoye was coming back after the holidays, and with him were the Removites who had spent the holiday with him at Wharton Lodge. The chums of the Remoye had enjoyed their holiday, but they were coming back to school cheerfully enough.

The irrepressible Bob gave a yell as the train drew into the sleepy old station of Friardale, and waved his cap to the equally sleepy old porter.

"Here we are again!"

Bob Cherry jumped out of the carriage and executed a shuffle along the platform. The juniors crowded out after him—Harry Wharton, looking very fit, Nugent, Hazeldene, Micky Desmond, Billy Bunter, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Yes, here we are again!" said Harry Wharton, with a genial nod to the porter. "I say, Chippy, are the other fellows back yet?"

The porter shook his head.

"Not yet, sir."

"Nobody come at all?" asked Nugent. "Nobody, sir—not by this 'ere line." "Which means not at all, as there isn't any other line," said Bob Cherry. "Hasn't even the Head returned, Chippy?"

"I ain't seen him, Master Cherry."

"They're late," said Harry Wharton. "They ought to have been hours before us. Anything wrong on the line, Chippy?"

"I heard that there had been a breakdown somewhere," said Chippy. "The news hasn't confirmed. Line blocked, or something, I believe."

"Oho! That accounts for it," said Bob Cherry. "Never mind! We'll take charge of the school till the Head comes. Have all the luggage put on the cab, Chippy, and let it be sent along right side up with care. As we're rather in a hurry we're going to walk."

"Yessir!" grinned Chippy.

"The walkfulness will be pleasant," remarked Hurree Singh in his best Bengali-English.

Bob Cherry slapped him on the back. "It will be terrific," he said. "Come along, my dusky son, and let's strike up a song as we go. Blend your sweet voice with mine."

"Yes, come along," said Harry Wharton. "We—Hullo! What's that? Those besotted aliens are at it again!"

There were still two juniors who had not alighted from the carriage. They were Hoffman, the German, and Meunier, the French youth. Their voices could now be heard raised in recrimination. They never saw one another for a couple of minutes without the old national dispute breaking out, and Harry Wharton had had hard work to keep the peace during the holiday at Wharton Lodge.

"French pounder!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,505.

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

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"Sherman peeg!"

"I flings you out of te carriages!" said Hoffman, who was absolutely reckless with his plurals when he became excited. "You vas French peastly pouters!"

"Sherman rottair!"

Then there was the sound of a struggle. Harry Wharton looked into the carriage. The two juniors were wrestling on the floor in a cloud of dust.

"Hold on, you asses!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "The train is going to be shifted to a siding, and they won't wait for you!"

"Ach! I vill come mit meinself after!" exclaimed Fritz Hoffman, releasing Meunier and bundling out of the carriage.

"Ciel! I come!" gasped Adolphe Meunier.

And he jumped out after Hoffman.

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Returning from holiday, Harry Wharton & Co. find Greyfriars silent and deserted! Do they mind? Rot they! The juniors have a high old time "roughing it!"

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The juniors set out for the school, and Bob Cherry struck up a song to enliven the route.

Harry Wharton was looking thoughtful as he walked along. The old grey tower of Greyfriars College rose above the trees in the distance.

"What are you thinking about, Harry?" asked Nugent, looking at him. "Sorry the holiday is up?"

"Yes; though I'm not sorry to get back to old Greyfriars," said Harry. "But it isn't that I was thinking of. If there's been a breakdown on the line—and it looks like it—there's no telling what time the Head and the rest of the fellows will arrive."

Nugent laughed.

"It will be fun having the school to ourselves, Harry."

"Yes—in a way. It will be an unusual experience, at least," said Wharton. "Anyway, Gosling, the porter, will be there to let us in."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Gospy is a grumpy beast," said Nugent; "and, for some reason, he doesn't seem to like us much, either."

"Remarkable, isn't it?" said Hazeldene. "We're so nice, too! It shows bad taste on the part of Gosling."

"I say, you fellows—"

"If we have the school to ourselves," said Bob Cherry, having reached the end of his song, "I think we ought to have a high old time there."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, Buntly! Did you speak?" "I've been speaking for some time, Wharton," said Billy Bunter, blinking indignantly through his spectacles. "I wish—"

"Well, what is it?"

"I say, if the Head isn't there, and nobody's there, what are we going to do about grub?" said Billy Bunter anxiously. "You don't seem to have thought of that, any of you."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"And it's such an important matter—to you, Bunter."

"I should think it is!" said Billy Bunter warmly. "I'm pretty hungry, after a long train journey and a walk. I can tell you. You ought to have thought of this while we were in the village, where we could have had a feed, in case of accidents."

"Ha, ha! Never mind, Buntly. We will find something or other to eat at Greyfriars. If there's nothing in the cupboard we'll eat Gosling, the porter!"

"Really, Wharton!"

"Gosling would cut up rusty," said Nugent, with a shake of the head. "Besides, he's not at all the sort of gosling for the table."

"Oh, really, you fellows, I wish you would be serious! You'll be serious enough when you get to the school and find there's no grub."

"Well, here we are at the school," said Bob Cherry, as the juniors halted before the gates of Greyfriars. "I'll ring the bell. Better make it pretty loud, in case Gosling is having a nap. I know he wouldn't like to keep us waiting."

And Bob Cherry rang the bell with a peal that could have been heard in every corner and cranny of the ancient edifice of Greyfriars.

# Read What Happened When the Chums of the Remove Found Themselves the Only Occupants of the School!

## Bob Cherry Lights the Fire!

**C**LANG, clang, clang!  
Bob Cherry's solo on the bell was certainly a success so far as noise went. The clang of it rang through the school, and came back to the ears of the juniors waiting at the gate.

The porter did not appear.  
"Gossy is asleep," said Nugent. "He's been indulging in the cup that cheers, I expect, and is napping in his lodge."  
Clang, clang!  
Harry Wharton shook at the gates.  
"Gossy—Gossy, wake up!"

As it was four in the afternoon, there was no reason why Gosling should have been asleep, but asleep he certainly appeared to be. The bell clanged and jangled, and the juniors shook the big gates vigorously. At last there was the sound of a movement within. The figure of the porter could be seen between the bars of the gates, and the Greyfriars juniors yelled to him in chorus.

"Gossy! I say, Gossy!"  
"Buck up!"  
"Get a move on you!"  
"Are you going to keep us waiting here all night?"

The porter growled surlily as he came down to the gates, his keys rattling. Gosling's face was red and flushed, and his eyes were heavy. It was extremely probable that he had been sampling too freely of the cup that cheers, and had been napping in his lodge when the arrival of the juniors aroused him.

"Allo!" he growled, staring at the juniors through the iron bars of the gate. "Ow did you come 'ere?"

"By train," said Bob Cherry, "and shanks' pony."

The porter granted.  
"I don't mean that."  
"Never mind what you mean, Gossy. Open the gates. We've been waiting

here for hours—or ten minutes, at least!"

"Which I've had a wire from the 'Ead, saying that there was a breakdown on the line, and 'e wouldn't arrive till very late, if to-night at all, and all the boys was in the same fix."

"Yes, but we haven't come from town," said Harry Wharton. "We came in on the local line from the other direction."

"Open the gates, Gossy," said Bob Cherry. "I know it's rather rotten of us to turn up when you wanted to snooze, but such is life! You must expect these things. Even a school porter's life is not all lavender, though he has the estimable benefit of seeing every day such nice young fellows as we are."

The key grated in the lock and the gates were opened. The Removites walked in, the surly porter watching them grimly.

"Blest if I know what you're goin' to do for grub!" said Gosling. "The housekeeper's away, and so is Mrs. Mimble. There's no grub that I know of, and the school shop ain't hopen."

"Then we shall have to carry out my original suggestion," said Harry Wharton. "Any port in a storm. We shall have to start on Gosling."

"He will want washing first," said Nugent.

"True. We can wash him in the fountain."

"Good idea! Collar him!"

The porter dodged into his lodge, slammed the door, and locked it. The juniors were quite capable of ducking him in the fountain, and he knew it.

The juniors laughed as they walked on towards the School House. Only one face was serious—that of Billy Bunter. The question of provender was a very serious one to the Falstaff of the

Remove. But there was something in the novelty of the situation that appealed very strongly to the Greyfriars juniors.

It was curious to be the first to return and to find the masters as well as the other boys absent, and even the house-keeper and the gardener away, and the school tuckshop—the last resource of the hungry juniors—closed and silent.

The great grey buildings seemed strangely silent and deserted. There was a neglected look about the sports ground, and the windows of the gym seemed to stare like sightless eyes.

At that time the Close and the school should have been alive with boys returning from the holidays. The silence struck strangely upon the juniors.

"I say, you fellows—"

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

"I'm awfully hungry," said the Owl pathetically. "What's to be done, Wharton? I'm getting into a famished state which I'm afraid will have a bad effect on my constitution."

"Oh rats!"

"It's all very well for you to say 'rats,' Wharton, but it's a fact. I eat so little that I'm bound to keep up my meals regularly, or else—"

"Yes, a chap who eats as little as you do must suffer a lot," said Nugent sympathetically. "But seriously, you chaps, we must prowl round and find some grub. I'm peckish myself."

"So am I," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose we all are, though only Bunter is in a dangerous state. Mind he doesn't suddenly fasten his teeth in the one of you."

"Really, Cherry—"

Harry Wharton tried the great oaken door, and it swung open. The hall was dark, the blinds being down.

"Well, here we are," said Bob Cherry. "I wonder where there is any grub?"



The juniors crowded back hurriedly as Bob Cherry tossed a lighted match into the grate. The paraffin ignited and there was a roar of flame. Bob Cherry was too near to escape and the flame licked his cheeks and singed his hair. As a lighter of fires Bob was not a success!

"There's bound to be something downstairs," said Harry Wharton. "The supplies for the housekeeper must be there."

The juniors looked grave. It was not a light matter to invade the quarters sacred to Mrs. Marker, the worthy matron of Greyfriars School. Juniors who had raided jam from the jar during the term had been severely dealt with. In such a case Mrs. Marker was implacable.

But, as Harry Wharton pointed out, the case was altered now. Mrs. Marker was not there to look after her treasures, or to serve out supplies to hungry juniors.

"We've got to help ourselves," said Harry. "We can't be expected to starve, I suppose?"

"Certainly not!" said half a dozen juniors. And Billy Bunter shuddered at the mere idea of it.

"We shall have to help ourselves, then," said Harry, "and"—his face broke into a smile—"it will be great fun prospecting for grub, too, and getting up a feast in the kitchen!"

Billy Bunter's face lighted up.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, striding towards the shadowy kitchen stairs. "Let's get on with it!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Pull up some of the blinds, some of you, and let in the light," said Harry Wharton. "That will make things a bit more cheerful."

"Right you are!"

The blinds were raised, and a flood of daylight swept into the hall. It raised the spirits of the juniors.

"I say, you fellows, I don't mind doing the cooking," said Billy Bunter.

"If you chaps will make up a fire and find something to cook, I'll—"

"Right-ho, Bunter! Let's get down into the kitchen."

The juniors descended the stairs. The kitchen at Greyfriars was an ancient room, with stone walls and floor and rafters ceiling. It was one of the most ancient parts of the old building, but it had been fitted up of late years with modern appliances for cooking. Harry Wharton found the switch of the electric light, and turned it on and the great apartment was suddenly illuminated. The juniors looked about them.

The great range was spotlessly clean, but dark and fireless. That was soon to be remedied, however.

"Get some wood from somewhere!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, throwing off his jacket and rolling up his sleeves. "I say, Bunter, lend me your gloves, will you?"

"What for?"

"I don't want to make my hands dirty."

"Well, you cheeky bounder, use your own gloves, then!" exclaimed the indignant Nugent.

"I don't want to spoil them."

"Catch me letting you spoil mine!"

"Look here! I'm not going to touch coal and grate-bars with bare hands, if you were all perishing of giddy famine!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"You'd better lend me a pair of gloves, Harro Singh."

"Oh, certainly!" said the Nabob of Bhampur.

A moment later the polite nabob tossed a pair of gloves to Bob Cherry, who put them on and was quickly at work. There was coal in the scuttle, and wood was quickly found. Bob Cherry jammed wood in in a way that would have made the economical housekeeper weep if she could have seen it.

"Got any paraffin?" asked the amateur housemaid, turning his head.

"What do you want paraffin for?"

"Makes the fire light quicker."

"But it's dangerous."

"If you're afraid of danger, Nugent, when it's a question of saving Billy Bunter from a violent death by starvation—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hand over the paraffin, and I'll show you whether it's dangerous!"

"Well, here's a can of it," said Nugent. "I don't mind. But I say that it's safer and better to be a little more patient and light the fire the ordinary way."

"That's all you know, Nugent!"

"Oh, have your own way, fathead!"

"Look here! I'll show you how to do a thing of this sort!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, drenching wood and coal and most of the kitchen range with paraffin.

"You as!"

"Give me a match, somebody!"

"If you light that, it will flare up!"

"That's what I want it to do."

"Stand back, you chaps!" shouted Harry. "Mind your eye, Bob! You'll— My only hat, he's done it now!"

Bob Cherry tossed a lighted match into the grate, and a flare and a roar of flame followed that made him jump clear of the floor with a yell of alarm.

#### Bunter the Chef!

"WHAT the—how the—"

"You fearful ass!"

"My hat!"

The juniors had crowded back from the flare of the lighted paraffin, but Bob Cherry was too near it to escape. He had instinctively shielded his eyes with his arm, but the rush of flame licked his cheeks and singed his hair. A volume of smoke rolled across the kitchen.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Who'd have thought it?"

"I did!" said Nugent. "I told you—"

"Oh, rats! Don't start saying you told me so, like a nagging old lady!" said Bob Cherry.

"Well, I did tell you so, you fathead!"

"By Jove, now it's roaring!" exclaimed Bob, changing the subject. "I wonder if the chimney will catch on fire?"

"If it does, you'll catch something yourself."

"Oh, don't creak!"

The fire was roaring up the chimney now. Blacks were settling over the juniors and everything else in the kitchen. The fire crackled away fiercely. Bob Cherry had certainly succeeded in lighting it thoroughly; the question was, whether he had overdone it.

If the chimney had not been in a clean condition, it would almost certainly have caught fire in that terrific upward rush of flame.

Bob Cherry's face was very grimy. There was a sniff of burning from his curly hair. It had all been singed, and he was fortunate to escape with no worse damage. The juniors listened to the roar of the flames in the chimney, and relieved their feelings by telling Bob Cherry what they thought of him.

"Of all the asses!" said Harry Wharton emphatically.

"Bunter's an ass," said Nugent, "but he's a shining oracle of wisdom compared with that shrieking duffer Cherry!"

"Oh, really, Nugent!" said Billy Bunter. "But you're right about Cherry. I don't think I ever met such an ass—present company excepted, of course!"

"I sink zat Sherry is ze champion donkey!" remarked Adolphe Meunier. "I think so, too, mein gracious!" said Fritz Hoffman. "Ach! He might haf set fire to ze kitchen before, and purnt up to school after!"

"Rata!" said Bob Cherry.

"Well, there's no denying that you are a duffer, Cherry," said Hazeldene.

"Sure, and it's a silly omadhaun he is!"

"The dufferfulness of the respected Cherry is terrific!"

"Oh, cleese it!" said Bob Cherry.

"What do you all want to jump on a fellow for? Of course, I wasn't to know that the beastly thing would blaze up like that!"

"What did you expect, when you swamped it with paraffin?"

"I wanted to make a thorough job of it."

"My hat, you've done that!" said Wharton. "Never mind; the fire's lighted, and the chimney doesn't seem to have caught fire. Let's see about getting tea."

"I think I'll go and get a wash first," said Bob Cherry. "I feel pretty mucky. There are your gloves, Inky. I'm afraid they're a little soiled."

The gloves were more than a little soiled. They were grimed with coal and dirt, and redolent of paraffin. But the nabob smiled a beaming smile, and did not stir to pick them off the table, where Bob Cherry had tossed them.

"Don't mention it," he said. "The gloves were quite useful at your esteemed disposal, my worthy chum. They were not mine."

"Not yours?"

"Certainly not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Do you mean to say that you gave me somebody else's gloves?"

"Yes; I thought it would probably spoil my own to have the fire lighted by the honourable wearer of them," explained the nabob.

"Ha, ha! You were right there! But whose gloves did you give me?"

"Your own!"

Bob Cherry's laugh suddenly ceased.

"What?"

"I thought your ownful gloves would be the most suitable for the occasion," the nabob explained, "so I handed them to you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

"You inky villain!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Is this one of your little jokes? You've spoiled my beastly gloves now, and—"

"Whoever is saucy to the goose must be saucy to the gander," said the nabob, "as your English proverb says."

Bob Cherry could take a joke, even against himself. The wrathful look faded from his countenance, and he joined in the general laugh.

"You've been done, Bob," said Harry Wharton. "Go and clean yourself; you need it; and we'll look for the grub."

"I say, Wharton, I've found some," said Billy Bunter, coming up and depositing an armful of provisions on the table. "There are lots of things in the larder."

"It was locked, I thought."

"Yes; but the lock opened when I bit it with a chopper," said Bunter. "Of course, in a case like this, we couldn't be expected to stand on ceremony."

"Right-ho!" Harry Wharton looked over the things. They had evidently been sent in fresh by the tradesmen of

Friardale, ready for the reopening of the school.

"Bacon, and jolly good bacon, too!" said Billy Bunter. "Ham and tongue, you fellows? Look at this ham—eh? My hat!"

"Apples," said Nugent, "and bananas. Good!"

"Not all meant for the Remove dining-table, I expect," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But when you forage for yourself you're entitled to all you can find, I consider. We're going to have a feast this time."

"Yes, rather!"

"The feastfulness will be terrific to celebrate the novel situation in which we discover our honourable selves."

"Exactly."

"I've found a frying-pan," said Bunter. "I'll start with the bacon now. I want some butter to grease the pan. That fresh butter would do. We can't afford fresh butter to grease the frying-pan in the study, but it's different when you don't have to pay for things yourself."

"Yes, I've noticed that about you before," grinned Hazeldene.

"Really, Hazeldene—"

"Oh, get on with the washing!" said Nugent. "You're always stopping to talk, Bunt. We're all fearfully hungry!"

"All right. I'm just going to begin."

The fire was settling down a little now. Billy Bunter took off his jacket and pushed back his cuffs. He had found a white apron in the drawer, and he tied it round him, and he really looked very businesslike. He greased out the pan with finest fresh butter—sent for the Head's table—and jammed it on the fire with the bacon. Billy Bunter was a cook of renown in the Greyfriars Remove. The chums of the Remove knew that they could safely trust the cooking to his hands.

As he presided over the frying-pan, Billy Bunter fed himself with biscuits which he had crammed into his pocket for the purpose.

The juniors were all beaming now. Bob Cherry rejoined his chums—washed and beaming, too. There was a strange novelty in foraging for food in strange quarters, and it was very pleasing to the Removes. Even Hoffman and Mounier forgot for the time to dispute, and joined in the general industry.

"How's the bacon getting on, Bunter?"

"First rate! What shall we have to follow it?"

"Must have some kind of sweets," said Bob Cherry. "Can't you make a pudding of some sort, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I should think I could, Cherry. I'll make any sort of pudding you've got the materials for, and chance it!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"A pudding would take too long," he said. "We can't wait two or three hours while it cooks."

"H'm! Something in that."

"Well, what price a custard?" said Billy Bunter. "There's custard powder in that jar."

"This one?"

"No; that's liquorice powder, as I The other jar."

"Is there enough there?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, enough to make a good-sized custard. There are lots of eggs here, fortunately. Break a couple of dozen into that basin and beat them up."

"The liquorice powder looks nice," said Nugent. "Nice and yellow, much the same as the custard powder, for all I can see."



While Billy Bunter was busily engaged in serving the eggs and bacon, Hurrey Singh quietly emptied the liquorice powder into the jar containing custard powder. It seemed an excellent wheeze to the Indian junior, but it was likely to have painful results for the chums of the Remove!

"Leave it there," said Billy Bunter. "We don't want that stuff."

"Things aren't always as nice as they look," grinned Hazeldene. "It would give you a few pains in the stomach, if I know anything about it."

"Get on with the custard, Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "I'll look after the bacon. What about frying some eggs to go with it? There are lots here."

"I'm going to. You can break them for me. And I've got some apples stewing."

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "This will be a feast for the gods. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who's that ringing the bell?"

Clang, clang, clang!

The juniors stared at one another in dismay. They knew what that clanging meant.

Somebody was at the gates of Greyfriars, ringing the porter's bell with as much energy as Bob Cherry had displayed half an hour before.

And the same thought was in every mind, and it was expressed by the dismayed words that dropped from Nugent's lips.

"The Head!"

#### The New Boy!

THE chums of the Remove stood silent and dismayed. Was it the Head who had returned suddenly to Greyfriars?

Clang, clang, clang!

The porter's bell was ringing furiously, and Gosling, as usual, seemed to be in no hurry to answer it. Who was at the gate?

The juniors, rather thoughtlessly, had taken it for granted that the Head's delay would last some time, and that

they were safe from interruption for the present.

As a matter of fact, the breakdown on the line, for all they knew, might be remedied in a short space of time, and the Head and the crowd of returning boys might arrive at any moment.

The novel delights of roughing it and foraging for themselves in the mysterious domains below stairs would be cut suddenly short if it was indeed the Head who had returned.

Whether they were called to account or not for the incursion into the kitchen, certainly their experience of "roughing it" below stairs would come to a sudden termination.

Clang, clang, clang!

"They're ringing pretty hard, whoever they are," said Harry Wharton at last. "I wonder why Gosling doesn't open the gate?"

"He wasn't in a hurry to let us in," Bob Cherry remarked.

"He wouldn't dare to keep the Head waiting," said Nugent hopefully. "He'd know if it was the Head, too."

The juniors brightened up.

If it were a contingent of Greyfriars fellows at the gate who had arrived by another road, that would not necessarily interfere with the promised feed.

"Well, one of us had better go and see," Wharton remarked; and he turned towards the door of the kitchen.

Nugent touched him on the arm.

"Wait a minute, Harry. If Gosling doesn't hear, is there any need to open the gate? Let 'em wait."

"Gosling is certain to hear sooner or later."

"H'm! I suppose so."

"Better go," said Bob Cherry. "We may as well know the worst at once. Come on!"

The juniors left the kitchen and ascended the stairs. Only Billy Bunter remained. Bunter would not have allowed his bacon to spoil for anything. Only a direct order from the Head in person, or an earthquake, could have removed Billy Bunter from the kitchen at the moment.

The juniors went out into the Close. Gosling, the porter, was looking out of his lodge window and smoking his pipe; his face was very surly.

"Why don't you open the gate, Gossy?" called out Nugent.

The porter grunted.

"I ain't hopenin' the gate to every ragamuffin that comes along," he replied.

"It might be the Head."

"I know it ain't the 'Ead."

"Well, then, it's some of the fellows come back."

"No, it ain't."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I seen 'im."

"Then who is it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Only a kid ringing the bell. I ain't attending to him, not me! It's trouble enough to hopen the gates to the varmint as belong to this 'ere school."

"But the chap must have business here, or he wouldn't be ringing like that!" Harry exclaimed.

The porter grunted doggedly.

"The 'Ead wired me not to expect 'im or the boys till this evening at the earliest," he said. "Them is my holders."

"Then it was remarkably kind of you to let us in," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose you knew we should get over the gate if you didn't and scrag you."

"What I says is this 'ere—"

But what Gosling had to say was lost on the juniors, who passed on to the gates. A face was looking through the bars, and two hands were gripping them and shaking them violently.

"Open this gate!"

The juniors looked curiously at the stranger. He was a lad about their own age, dressed in Etons, and wearing a cap. His face was not bad-looking, but the eyes were very keen and quick, and the glance incessantly shifting.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "And whom may you happen to be when you're at home?"

The boy outside the gates looked at him.

"Why don't you open this confounded gate?" he shouted.

"I'm not the giddy porter!"

"I want to come in!"

"We haven't the keys," said Harry Wharton. "What do you want here? You don't belong to this school."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I've not seen you before."

"Nothing surprising in that," snapped the other, "as I'm a new boy, only joining to-day. I came down here by myself, and now I can't get into the beastly school. What's the matter here?"

"Oh!" said Harry, comprehending.

"You're a new boy?"

"Haven't I told you so?"

"Well, you might be a little more polite about it," said Harry sharply.

"It's not our fault you can't get in."

"Why doesn't somebody open the gate, then?"

"Better ring up the porter," said Bob Cherry, grinning.

"I've been ringing for five minutes or more!"

"Truly, my worthy friend, the ringfulness has been terrific!"

The new boy's quick, keen eyes fastened on Hurree Janset Ram Singh as he spoke.

"Hallo! What are you getting at? Can't you talk English?"

Hurree Singh flushed under his dusky skin.

"I can speak the English language excellently," he replied. "I can also box in the English manner, and if you do not retain the civil tongue in the esteemed head, I shall castigate you with severity."

"Can't you open the gate, some of you?"

"What's your name, young shaver?" asked Bob Cherry curiously.

"I'm anxious to be introduced to such a nice-mannered young gentleman."

"None of your gammon!" said the new boy. "My name's Levison—Ernest Levison. I want to get into this confounded school!"

"I'll get the key from the porter," said Hazeldene.

"And buck up about it, please!" said Levison.

The new boy's manner was not pleasing, but the juniors did not wish to leave him outside the gates. He looked tired, and he was probably hungry. Hazeldene walked over to the window of Gosling's lodge.

"It's a new kid," he said.

"New rats!" said the Greyfriars porter, with a sniff.

"I tell you it's a new kid, and if you don't let him in you'll be reported to the Head," said Hazeldene sharply.

"Hand over the keys!"

The porter looked at him doggedly. Gosling had taken advantage of his freedom that day to drink deeply. It was a habit he had, and which he kept carefully concealed from the Head, who blissfully believed his porter to be a teetotaler. Gosling had drunk enough to be obstinate and ill-tempered.

"I ain't expecting nobody till this evening," he said.

"Will you give me the keys?"

"No, I won't!"

Harry Wharton looked at Hazeldene as he came back. He saw that the junior's hands were empty.

"Where are the keys?"

"He won't give them to me."

Harry Wharton's face set grimly.

"Won't he? We'll see about that!"

The captain of the Remove strode across to the window of the lodge.

Gosling gave him a defiant leer as he came up. Harry Wharton looked him straight in the eyes.

"Give me the keys," said Harry quietly.

Gosling hesitated.

"Do you hear me?"

"Clunk! The keys rattled as the porter, with a sullen scowl, threw them from the window. Harry picked them up and went down to the gates.

"You've got them?" asked Hazeldene curiously.

"Yes."

Harry unlocked the gate. The new boy came in and the gate was shut again. There was no sign of anyone belonging to Greyfriars on the road.

Levison looked at the juniors suspiciously.

"What's the matter here?" he asked.

"Why wouldn't the porter open the gates?"

"He's been drinking," said Harry quietly, as he relocked the gate.

## PEN PALS

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## PEN PALS COUPON

19-12-36

"My hat, don't they keep better order here?"

"Than what?" demanded Nugent sharply.

"Letting the porter get tipsy."

"The Head's away."

"Then he has no business to be away to-day," said Levison. "He ought to be here. The school reopens to-day, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then why isn't the Head here?"

"There's been a breakdown on the line, and the Head and all the masters, and all the fellows excepting ourselves, are hung up somewhere between here and London," Nugent explained.

The new boy sniffed.

There was something so extremely annoying about his sniff and manner generally, that Harry Wharton quietly took him by the shoulder with a grip that was like iron when Levison tried to shake it off.

"You're passing comments on this place pretty freely," said Harry. "Don't you think it would be wise to say less? You're in great danger of getting a ducking in the fountain."

"Better give him one, anyway, to celebrate his arrival," said Bob Cherry. "I'll lend a hand."

"Here, none of your games!" exclaimed the new boy, in alarm. "I didn't mean any offence, either, only—"

"Then don't have so much to say," said Harry Wharton. "Hece, Cherry, chuck these keys in to Gossy, will you? Let's get back to the kitchen."

"Right you are," said Bob Cherry, taking the keys.

The juniors turned towards the house again. Bob Cherry, as he passed the lodge, made a deft shot with the keys, and landed them on Gosling's chest. The porter gave a startled yell, and disappeared from the window. He had been tilting his chair backwards, and the sudden shock had sent him over.

The next moment he was brandishing his fist from the window. Bob Cherry kissed his hand in return as the Removites walked on to the house.

### Something Like a Feed!

**B**ILLY BUNTER looked up with a fat shining countenance as the Removites entered the kitchen again. Bunter was in a glow of heat and satisfaction, and the bacon and eggs were up to a turn.

"Is it all right?" he asked. "Don't say it was the Head."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No, it wasn't the Head, Bunter; it's all right. It's only a new kid—chap named Levison."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere in the Close," said Bob Cherry. "He seems to be a flippant, suspicious sort of brute. He can stay there till he gets more civil. I say, Bunter, you've turned out those eggs and bacon in ripping style!"

"I'm glad you like them," said Billy Bunter modestly. "There's one thing about me, I can cook—"

"And eat what you cook," said Nugent. "I don't know which you're greatest at."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"This is ripping!" said Wharton. "We're roughing it here, but I rather think this is better than a study feed."

"Ha, ha! Yes, there's enough crockery, too, and we never have enough crockery in the study."

"Do say nothing of knives and forks," said Billy Bunter. "They were locked up in the drawer, and I had to open it

with the chopper. I'm afraid the lock is a little bit damaged, but I dare say that can be put to rights. There's a knife and fork for everybody. What do you think of that?"

"Ripping!"

"And plenty of clean plates. No turning your dinner plate upside down for the pudding," said Billy Bunter. "I wish the breakdown on the line would last for a week or two. I should get along first-rate in this style."

"Ha, ha! It's ripping, and no mistake."

Bob Cherry looked at the basin of eggs, which were half-beaten, and then at the custard powder.

"You haven't made the custard yet, Bunter."

"That takes next to no time," said the chef. "It will be all right. I've had a snack, so I'm not very hungry now. I'll serve you fellows first."

"Good!"

"I only hope the custard will be enough to go round," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, it won't be a very large helping, you know, but there will be a good plentiful each," said Bunter. "You must fill up first with bacon and eggs, and a jolly good feed, too, in my opinion, especially the way they're cooked."

"Right you are!"

Harroo-Jamset Ram Singh was looking thoughtfully at the two jars of powder. He was not a great eater himself, but he liked to see others happy. He thought that the addition of the liquorice powder to the custard would make it larger without doing it any harm. He was unaware of the fact that it was used for medicinal purposes.

It was no use speaking to Bunter about it. He knew the chef would not have it in the custard. So Harroo Singh simply waited till Billy Bunter was busily engaged in serving the eggs and bacon, and then quietly mixed the two powders in one jar and unobtrusively removed the one that had contained the liquorice powder.

Bacon was not one of the articles of diet that the Indian juniors could partake of. He cheerfully feasted on bread and bananas, while the English juniors revelled in a solid feed.

"Plenty more," said Billy Bunter, looking up and down the long table.

"Another egg, Wharton?"

"Thanks, yes."

"A rasher for you, Cherry?"

"Certainly!"

"Can I help you, Desmond?"

"Sure you can, Bunter darling."

They were all helped at last, and still there was a liberal supply on the dish. Then Billy Bunter fell to. He had had a good many snacks during the cooking, but Billy Bunter always had room for more.

For fellows who were roughing it, the Removites were doing uncommonly well. They enjoyed that feed in the school kitchen as they had seldom enjoyed a study treat. There was a shade of thoughtfulness lingering on Harry Wharton's brow, however.

"I wonder what that new chap is doing, Nugent?" he remarked, as he finished his third egg.

"Oh, never mind him!" said Nugent. "If he can't take the trouble to be civil, I don't see why we should bother our heads about him."

# The TYRANT HEAD!



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"I dare say he's hungry after his journey."

"Let him find his way here, then. He can have some grub."

Harry Wharton rose.

"I think I may as well fetch him in," he remarked. "After all, he's a new chap, and will feel a bit out of place, especially arriving at the school in such curious circumstances."

Nugent nodded.

"Fetch him in, by all means, Harry, if you like."

Harry Wharton coloured a little.

"It's not so long since I was new here myself," he said. "I wasn't the easiest fellow to get on with myself, then, but there was a chap here who stood by me like a true friend."

Frank Nugent laughed.

"None of your blamey, Harry. Fetch the stranger in, and we'll kill the fatted calf for him. Somebody hold Bunter while I get the carving-knife."

Harry laughed, and left the kitchen. Billy Bunter was mixing the custard, quite unconscious of the latest addition to his supplies. Wharton ascended the stairs, and in the hall above he came on the new boy.

Levison was standing looking out of the hall window, his hands in his pockets, and a fatherly distasteful expression on his face. He was alone at that great school, and he could hear the merry voices of the juniors below.

He looked round at Harry Wharton's step.

"Hallo!"

"I've come up for you," said Harry. "We're having a feed in the kitchen, you know, as nobody has turned up. Are you hungry?"

"I should say so!"

"Come down with me, then."

The new boy looked at him suspiciously.

"No larks?" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I'm up to your little games!" said Levison emphatically. "You want to get me down in the kitchen to play some lark on me. I suppose?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Harry quietly. He didn't like the distrustfulness of the new boy. "I came to fetch you because I thought you were probably hungry after your journey."

The new boy winked in a way that made Harry's temper rise.

"No gammon, you know," said Levison.

Harry Wharton turned on his heel.

"You can come or not, as you like, and be hanged to you!" he said, and he descended the stairs again.

"Oh, I'll come!" said Levison. And he followed Harry Wharton down to the kitchen.

Levison looked round him quickly and suspiciously as he entered the kitchen. It was evident that, in spite of Harry's

assurance, he was uneasy lest the Greyfriars juniors should be planning some trick upon him; though, as a matter of fact, nothing was farther from their thoughts.

Billy Bunter looked up from his occupation.

"Hallo, you new kid! There's plenty of grub on the table, and I did the cooking, so it's all right. Fall to!"

"Thank you," said Levison slowly.

Nugent pushed over a clean plate, and Bob Cherry found a knife and fork.

Harry helped the newcomer liberally to bacon and eggs.

"Thank you," said Levison again.

He took up knife and fork, and looked at the food on his plate. It looked tempting enough, and Levison was hungry. Then he looked up and caught Bob Cherry's eye.

"I say, there's nothing wrong with it, is there?" he asked.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"It's first class," he replied. "We're not giving it away because it's no good. There's nothing charitable about us."

## A TREAT NOT TO BE MISSED!

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"It's all right!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "What the dickens do you think is the matter with it?"

"Oh, all right!" said Levison. "I know chaps in a school like this often play games on newcomers, and I'm not going to be taken in, that's all."

"You've been taken in," said Nugent, "and you'll soon be kicked out if you don't improve your manners!"

The new boy looked at Nugent and then at his plate again. He fell to without another word, and cleared the plate in record time, and glanced towards the dish. Billy Bunter, flattered and somewhat mollified by the testimony to the excellence of his cooking, helped him again very liberally.

"The custard's done, you chaps," said Bunter. "It hasn't worked out exactly as it should, to look at—I fancy there was something a little wrong with the powder—but it tastes ripping—I've tried it. Are you ready?"

"Rather!" said half a dozen voices.

"Then shove along your plates!"

Billy Bunter ladled out the custard with a liberal hand. There was more of it than had been expected, and each of the juniors had a liberal helping. Levison, his lingering doubts removed at last, came in for the last helping, and ate it with great gusto. It was a very pleasant finish to a good feed. The boiled apples were not quite done, perhaps, but the digestion of juniors is equal to almost anything. The feed was pronounced an absolute success, and Billy Bunter beamed.

There was rather a peculiar flavour to that custard, but the juniors put it down to Billy Bunter's liberal use of spices.

"Well, this is ripping!" said Bob Cherry, stretching himself back in a deep armchair which belonged of right to the cook of Greyfriars. "It seems to me that the folk who work down here have a better time of it than we have upstairs in the class-rooms."

"I've often thought so," said Billy Bunter seriously. "There's the cook, for example. She can always have something nice to eat whenever she wants it, and as much as she likes, too!"

"Which must be glorious," said Nugent.

"Well, I should say so, Nugent; though I don't believe you are speaking seriously. I've often thought that my constitution is being injured by the time I have to wait between meals."

"This is rippingful, so long as the rightful persons of this quarter do not returnally come upon us," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Then we shall receive the orderfulness of the boot and the cold shoulder."

"And, sure, we shall be lucky if it's no worse than that!" grinned Micky Desmond.

"Zat is correct," Adolphe Meunier remarked. "But when ze housekeeper return viz herself, ve explain—and apologise, and zat put ze mattair right."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I fancy it will want more than an apology to soothe the housekeeper, when she sees the inroad we've made," he remarked. "But we couldn't be expected to famish in the midst of plenty."

"I only hope they won't return yet," said Bob Cherry. "I feel quite comfy as I am."

Hurree Singh raised his dusky hand.

"Hark!"

There was the sound of a heavy footfall on the stair. The juniors started, and listened with painful eagerness. The footsteps sounded clearly, and they were coming towards the kitchen.

(Who is coming to the kitchen? Is it the Head? Look out for next week's amusing chapters of this grand yarn. Order your GEM early.)

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