

A Thrilling Christmas Mystery of St. Jim's—Inside.



The **GHOST**
of ST. JIM'S!

2
DRAPED IN MONK'S ROBES AND COWL, WITH GLARING EYES AND GLOWING FACE,
THE SPECTRE HAUNTS THE PASSAGES OF ST. JIM'S!

The GHOST of ST. JIM'S!



In a flash Tom Merry rushed after the unknown figure. His hands grasped at the heavy robe and clutched it tight. "Come on, you fellows!" he shouted. "I've got him!"

CHAPTER 1.

Laying the Ghost!

"G ROO-OOGH! It's cold!" Tom Merry sat up in bed. It certainly was cold. Outside, the winter wind was whistling among the leafless branches of the old elms in the quadrangle. In the Shell dormitory in the School House all was darkness and silence. Faintly, through the high windows, came a glimmer of starlight.

Tom Merry pulled the blankets round him as he sat up in bed and blinked sleepily up and down the dormitory. He was wondering what had awakened him. "You awake, Lowther?" he called out softly.

No reply.

"You awake, Manners?"

A slight snore.

Tom Merry gave another look round the shadowy dormitory. Something had awakened him, he knew that; and the thought came into his mind that it might mean a raid from the Fourth Formers. The serenity of slumber in the junior dormitories was sometimes disturbed in that manner.

Tom Merry shivered a little as he gazed into the gloom—not only with cold. There had been talk in the Junior Common-room that evening of the
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ghost that was said to haunt the ancient buildings of St. Jim's, and it came back into Tom Merry's mind now. Of course, he did not believe in ghosts, but, in the shadowy dormitory, at this hour of midnight, somehow the thing seemed different. And he knew that he had heard something.

"M-my hat!" muttered Tom Merry suddenly.

A pale, phosphorescent light gleamed in the darkness of the dormitory. Tom Merry stared at it, transfixed.

Dimly, in the pale, ghostly glimmer, he made out a dark form, enveloped in a robe, such as the monks of old had worn when St. Jim's was a monastic establishment.

Tom Merry made out the face—dim and pale, with wildly staring eyes.

For some moments the junior gazed at the awesome figure, spellbound.

Tom Merry was no coward, but the horrible-looking apparition, starting out of the darkness so suddenly, almost froze the blood in his veins for the moment.

The right hand of the figure was raised, pointing at him with a solemn gesture. Tom shrank back a little, fearful of the contact of an icy finger. His eyes were almost starting from his head.

From the mysterious figure came a low, thrilling voice.

"Tremble!"

But Tom Merry did not tremble. He gave a sudden gasp of relief.

For the voice that proceeded from the ghostly figure was accompanied by something that was certainly not ghostly; nothing more or less than a scent of onions! It was impossible, of course, to suppose that a ghost had been eating onions—but Tom Merry remembered that Levison of the Fourth had been frying onions for his supper in his study. The whole passage had known, in fact; the knowledge had been unavoidable.

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

He knew now that it was not the ghost of St. Jim's that stood before him, but a junior playing a foolish and dangerous trick—a trick that might have had serious consequences if played upon a person with weak nerves.

Tom Merry did not move; but he groped softly behind him for his pillow.

His grasp tightened upon it; and then, with a sudden bound, he leaped from the bed straight at the awesome figure, smiting.

"Biff, biff, biff!"

"Yaroooh!" roared the ghost. "Oh crumbs! Ow!"

It was the voice of Levison of the

TOM MERRY & CO. FIND THEMSELVES IN THE THICK OF MYSTERY AND THRILLS WHEN THEY SET OUT TO LAY THE GHOST!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Fourth. The practical joker was tangled in the monkish robes, and he could not escape. He rolled on the floor, and the pillow descended upon him again and again in mighty swipes.

Biff, biff, biff!

The whole dormitory was awake now. Levison's wild yells could be heard far and wide. Fellows started up in the beds on all sides, and there was a babel of voices.

"What's the matter?"

"Who is it?"

"What the dickens——"

"Great Scott!"

Monty Lowther jumped out of bed and struck a match.

Kangaroo followed his example.

The light of the matches gleamed upon an unhappy practical joker rolling on the floor, tangled in a dark robe, and yelling under the mighty swipes of the pillow.

"It's all right!" panted Tom Merry. "It's the ghost—and I'm laying it!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Nothing like good swipes with a pillow to lay a ghost!" said Tom, belabouring the yelling and wriggling Fourth Former with all the strength of his arms.

"Ow! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who is it?"

"The ghost, I tell you! He told me to tremble, and he breathed fire onions over me. I'm not trembling, though—I'm lathering him instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow, ow! Help! I'm Levison! Leave off!"

"Rats! You're not Levison—you're a ghost, and I'm going to lay you!" said Tom Merry.

And the pillow descended again.

"Yarrah!"

"Good egg!" chuckled Kangaroo. "If a fellow plays ghost, he must expect to be laid. But you'll lay him out for good if you keep on much longer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Yarrah! You know I'm not a ghost, you beast! I'm Levison of the Fourth! Ow—yah—oh!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"I say, you'll have the prefects here if you keep on," grinned Lowther. "The silly ass is making enough row to wake the House."

"I just heard a door open," said Bernard Glyn.

Levison wriggled out of the robe at last, and picked himself up and fled. Tom Merry rushed after him, still swiping with the pillow, and a final swipe sent Levison whizzing through the open door, and he bumped in the passage outside.

He picked himself up and ran, and Tom Merry turned back into the dormitory.

"I don't think that cad will play ghost again in a hurry," he said breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"He's left his rig behind him!" grinned Kangaroo. "That's the monk's robe out of the school museum—he must have boned it. And look at that!"

It was a cardboard mask, with glass eyes, and rubbed with phosphorus, which Levison had evidently worn over his face when he came into the dormitory. The pillow had swiped it off.

"Cave!" exclaimed Manners.

There was a gleam of light in the passage and a sound of footsteps.

The juniors dived back into bed at once, and assumed an innocent appearance of sleep. They knew it was Knox of the Sixth who was coming—they could already hear him grumbling to himself as he came. And Knox, the bully of the Sixth, was the most unpopular prefect in the School House—with a special "down" on Tom Merry & Co.

Knox strode into the doorway, and held up an electric lamp, and glared into the dormitory. His face was dark and frowning. The noise in the Shell dormitory had awakened him. It was Knox's turn to look after the Shell that week, and he had come. He had brought a cane with him, with the firm intention of indemnifying himself for his trouble by making things warm for juniors.

He snorted as he saw the row of quiet faces, with closed eyes, on the white pillows. The Shell fellows seemed to be sleeping the sleep of the just.

"Don't pretend to be asleep, you young sweeps," said Knox angrily. "Who's been making that fearful row?"

No reply—only a sound of steady breathing—varied by a slight snore from

Who is behind the ghost that haunts St. Jim's? Suspicion falls upon Ernest Levison when he is caught playing ghost. But can the cad of the Fourth be guilty of brutal violence and attempted robbery?

Monty Lowther. Knox strode in growling. He caught his feet in the monkish robe on the floor, and stumbled. Tom Merry had kicked the cardboard mask under the bed, but there was no time to conceal the robe.

"Who brought this here?" roared Knox as he nearly fell.

Silence!

"You young rotters! You think I believe you're asleep?" howled the prefect. "Merry, I suppose you're at the bottom of this! Do you hear me?"

Apparently Tom Merry did not hear, for he breathed on gently, his eyes closed.

Knox glared, and raised the cane in his right hand, and brought it down with a sounding thwack across the shoulders of the captain of the Shell.

"Yarrah! Oh crumbs! Yah!"

Tom Merry woke up then!

CHAPTER 2.

A Blow in the Dark!

"OH, you're awake now, are you?" grinned Knox.

Tom Merry sat up in bed and glared at the prefect.

"You rotter!" he roared. "Ow! You beastly bully!"

Knox chuckled.

"I want to know what the row was about here," he said. "What's this rag on the floor? That's been taken from the school museum. Has one of you young rascals been playing ghost—what?"

"No, hang you!"

"Then what was the row?"

"A silly ass came here playing ghost, and I swiped him with my pillow," said Tom Merry, "and if you touch me with that cane again, Knox, I'll swipe you."

"Who was it?"

"Find out!"

That was not a very respectful reply to make to a prefect of the Sixth, but Tom Merry's shoulders were smarting with the lash of the cane, and he was reckless.

Knox scowled, and the cane rose in the air again.

"Do you want some more?" he demanded.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed dangerously.

"Keep that cane away," he said. "You'll be sorry for it if you touch me again!"

He grasped his pillow, and Monty Lowther and Manners and Kangaroo did the same. Glyn and Dane followed their example. The juniors were quite ready to turn out and pile on the bully of the Sixth, at a word from Tom Merry, and risk the consequences. Knox realised it, and he lowered the cane again. Any punishment administered to the Shell fellows afterwards would not compensate him for being ragged and run out of the dormitory by a crowd of angry fellows.

"You'll take a hundred lines for impertinence," said Knox. "I'll take this robe away with me to be returned to the museum, and report the matter to your Form-master. And if there's any more row in the dormitory, I'll send Mr. Linton up to see you." And Knox retired.

"Levison ought to be ragged bald-headed for playing such a rotten trick," said Monty Lowther when the prefect's footsteps had died away. "A chap with weak nerves might have been frightened into a fit. I think Levison ought to have a lesson."

"Well, I swiped him pretty well," said Tom Merry.

"Hallo, who is that getting up?" called out Glyn.

"I am," said Lowther cheerfully.

"What for?"

"I'm going to see Levison."

"Oh, you'll run into Knox."

"Oh, blow Knox! One good turn deserves another, and I'm going to see how Levison likes being woke up by a ghost," said Lowther.

And he chuckled and quitted the dormitory.

It was pitch-dark in the passage outside.

Knox had gone back to his room, and his light was out; and the School House was plunged into darkness and silence.

Lowther made his way cautiously along on tiptoe in the direction of the Fourth Form dormitory.

Suddenly he paused.

He was close to the head of the stairs, when from the darkness and silence below he heard a faint sound.

Lowther drew a quick, deep breath, and stopped, peering down into the darkness of the great staircase.

"Levison!" muttered Lowther. "He hasn't gone back to bed, the rotter! He's going to play some more tricks, I suppose. I'll give him tricks!"

Making no sound in his socks, Lowther crept down the stairs, feeling his way in the darkness along the banisters.

He could see nothing in the blackness, but he knew that he was near the unseen person who had moved in the darkness.

A low sound of breathing came to his ears, and he held his own breath.

He had reached the first landing, and he was close to the unseen lurker in the dark. But the sound of breathing suddenly stopped, and Lowther groped in vain for the fellow he knew was there.

"Levison, you rotter!" he muttered. "I know you're there. Where are you?"

There was no reply.

Lowther groped round in vain. But suddenly his hand came into contact with a form, and he made a grasp at it. "I've got you!"

There was a quick gasp, and the form eluded him.

Lowther sprang after it, and collided with the wall, and staggered back with a cry.

"You rotter!" he howled. "Wait till I get a light!"

He fumbled in his pockets for a matchbox.

Scratch!

He heard a sharp, hissing breath, and even as the match scratched, a fist lashed out of the darkness, and caught him full between the eyes.

The lighted match dropped to the floor, and the matchbox followed it, and Lowther staggered back.

Crash!

Before the dazed junior could think of guarding himself, a fearful blow caught him on the forehead, and he fell like a log.

One gasp of pain escaped him, and he fell helplessly on the landing, and lay there—stunned!

There was a faint sound of retreating footsteps, but Lowther did not hear it.

Silence followed.

CHAPTER 3.

A Startling Discovery!

BOOM! It was the stroke of one from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry started out of a doze he had fallen into.

He had intended to remain awake till Lowther came back; but Lowther did not come, and Tom had dozed off.

But he was only half-asleep, and the boom of the hour of one made him wide-awake again. He sat up quickly in bed.

"Lowther!"

There was no reply.

"You fellows awake? Has Lowther come back?"

"Hallo!" murmured Manners sleepily. "What's that?"

"Has Monty come back?"

"Haven't heard him!"

"He's been gone more than half an hour," said Tom Merry uneasily.

He turned out of bed and groped for Lowther's bed in the darkness. It was empty. Tom uttered a startled exclamation.

"He's not here!"

"Where on earth can he be?" said Manners, wide awake now. "He can't have stayed all this time in the Fourth Form dorm!"

"Perhaps they've caught him and kept him there," suggested Kangaroo.

"I'm going to see," said Tom Merry, slipping on his clothes hurriedly in the dark. "He may have tumbled downstairs, for all we know. I wish he hadn't gone!"

"I'm coming, too," said Manners quietly.

"They may be ragging him in the Fourth Form dorm," said Kangaroo. "I'll come along."

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The three juniors dressed quickly, and left the dormitory, and hurried down the gloomy passage.

The Fourth Form dormitory was silent when they reached it. There was evidently no ragging going on there. Tom Merry opened the door and looked in. All was dark within.

"He's not here!" muttered Kangaroo.

"I'll ask Blake if he's been here."

Tom Merry struck a match, the light flickered in the Fourth Form dormitory, and Manners shook Jack Blake by the shoulder.

Blake sat up and blinked at the three Shell fellows in sleepy astonishment.

"Hallo, what on earth's the matter?" he demanded.

"Where's Lowther?"

"Lowther! Isn't he in bed?"

"No. He came bare half an hour ago."

"That he jolly well didn't!" said Blake promptly. "I should have heard him if he came here. What on earth makes you think he came here?"

"Are you sure he didn't?"

"Of course I am!"

Tom Merry set his lips. It was pretty clear that something had happened to Monty Lowther now. The match went out.

"Bai Jove!" said a voice from the darkness, the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "What are you Shell fellows doin' here? Is it a wag, you wottahs?"

Lowther left the dorm half an hour ago to come here, and he hasn't come back," said Tom.

"Bai Jove!"

"Something must have happened to him," said Manners.

Blake scrambled out of bed, and found a candle-end and lighted it. The faces of the Shell fellows were pale in the flickering light. Most of the Fourth Formers were awake now, and sitting up in bed, with wondering and inquiring looks.

Levison was awake with the rest. His eyes gleamed spitefully at Tom Merry. He was still aching from the licking he had received in the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry turned to him.

"Do you know where Lowther is?" he demanded.

"No, I don't!" snarled Levison.

"And I don't care!"

"Has he been here?"

"Not that I know of."

"You haven't seen him?"

"No, I haven't!"

"How should Levison know anything about him?" asked Herries of the Fourth.

"Levison came to our dorm playing ghost," Tom Merry explained. "I swiped him with my pillow, and Knox heard the row and came up. Then Lowther left the dorm to come here to give Levison a turn."

"Oh, did he?" sneered Levison.

"Well, he hasn't been here. I dare say the silly ass has fallen downstairs. Serve him right if he has."

"I say, this is jolly serious!" said Blake.

"If Lowther's fallen downstairs he must have hurt himself, or he'd have come back, or called out, anyway. We'd better look for him."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

"We're going to look for him," said Tom Merry.

"We'll come with you. I've got a torch here. We shall have to risk being spotted."

"Right-ho!"

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy hurriedly pulled on their trousers.

There was a buzz of voices from bed to

bed. Only Levison looked quite indifferent, evidently not caring in the least what might have happened to Monty Lowther.

The anxious juniors quitted the dormitory, the electric torch in Blake's hand cutting through the darkness. They proceeded the whole length of the dormitory passage, but there was no sign of Monty Lowther there. They stopped at the head of the stairs, and the light of the torch gleamed down. There was no sound from below.

"He can't have gone downstairs," said Tom Merry in a low voice, "unless—"

"Unless he fell!" muttered Manners.

"Let's look!"

"Hark!" exclaimed Blake.

From the darkness of the stairs came a low sound. It was a faint groan.

Tom Merry dashed down the stairs, Blake hurrying after him with the torch. On the lower landing, Tom Merry spotted a still form, stretched there in the darkness. He uttered a cry.

"I've found him!"

"Bai Jove!"

Blake flashed the light upon the motionless form.

Monty Lowther lay before them. There was a black bruise and a streak of red on his forehead. He was still partly unconscious, but he groaned again as the juniors gathered round with scared faces and stared down at him. Tom Merry knelt by his side.

"Monty, old man!" he whispered huskily.

Lowther's eyes opened wildly.

"The coward! He hit me in the dark!" he muttered. "Oh, my head! He must have had a stick or something!"

Tom Merry's face set sternly.

"Who did it, Monty?"

"Levison."

Lowther muttered the name, and then his eyes closed again. He was unconscious once more.

"Let's get him to the dorm," said Tom Merry. "We can deal with Levison afterwards."

"Oh, the awful wottah!" muttered D'Arcy.

"The villain!" said Blake between his teeth.

"That brute couldn't have been made with a fist," said Kangaroo.

"Help me," said Tom Merry.

They raised the unconscious Shell fellow in their arms and carried him up the stairs and along the passage to the Shell dormitory.

There was a buzz of amazed voices as they came in.

"What's happened to Lowther?"

"Is he hurt?"

"Great Scott!"

Monty Lowther was laid on his bed, and Tom Merry, his face white and set, bathed his forehead in cold water.

Lowther's eyes opened again. He put his hand up to his head and groaned.

"I say, we'd better call somebody," said Blake uneasily. "Lowther's had a rotten, nasty knock. A doctor ought to see him."

Lowther made a gesture of dissent.

"No, mum's the word," he muttered. "But you're hurt, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I shall be all right soon. It's only a bruise."

"Levison ought to be sacked from the school!" said Blake wrathfully. "I suppose you're sure it was Levison?"

"Who else could it have been?" said Lowther. "I didn't see him in the dark, of course. But it must have been Levison. I had gone down after him,

you see. I heard him on the stairs when I was going to your dorm."

"We'll make him smart for this!" said Blake between his teeth. "But I think this matter ought to be reported. The Housemaster ought to deal with it."

"Care!" Knox strode into the dormitory. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, followed him in, his face dark and frowning. It was too late to extinguish the light. The juniors were fairly caught.

"There has been a disturbance here to-night already, sir," said Knox. "I think you had better deal with them."

"Quite so, Knox," said the Form-master. "Now, what—?" The words died on Mr. Linton's lips as he caught sight of Monty Lowther's white face and the black bruise on his forehead, and the smear of blood where Tom Merry had been bathing his face.

"Good heavens, Lowther, who did this? What does this mean?"

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Linton Makes Inquiries!

MR. LINTON came quickly towards Lowther's bed.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "How did Lowther receive this injury?"

"My hat!" muttered Knox, as astonished as the Form-master. "This is pretty thick."

"I got a knock, sir," faltered Lowther.

"You have been struck a heavy and brutal blow, Lowther," said Mr. Linton. "Who did this?"

"It—it was done in the dark, sir."

"In this dormitory?"

"N-no, sir."

"Then what were you doing out of the dormitory in the middle of the night?"

There was no help for it. Tom Merry explained. Mr. Linton listened with a grave and stern brow.

"Then you were going to the Fourth Form dormitory to see Levison when this happened, Lowther?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Was it Levison who struck you down?"

"I—I couldn't see him in the dark, sir."

"I will see Levison at once. You Shell boys may go to bed. The Fourth Form boys will follow me."

Mr. Linton strode from the dormitory, his dressing-gown rustling. The Fourth Formers followed him in silence. There was a troublesome time ahead for the cad of the Fourth, and they knew it, but they were not sorry for Levison.

Mr. Linton rustled into the Fourth Form dormitory and turned on the electric light. All the fellows there were awake.

"Levison!" said the master of the Shell sternly.

Levison looked at him.

"You played ghost in the Shell dormitory to-night?"

"I suppose they've sneaked about me," said Levison bitterly. "Yes, I did."

"And when Lowther followed you here you struck him down on the stairs?"

Levison looked astonished. If he was not really surprised his acting was very clever.

"I, sir? Certainly not! I didn't know Lowther had followed me."

Mr. Linton looked at him hard.

"Where did you go when you left the Shell dormitory, Levison?"

"I came back here, sir."

"You did not meet Lowther on the lower landing?"

"I did not go downstairs at all."

"Was anyone awake here when you came in?"

"I don't think so, sir. I came in very quietly."

Mr. Linton looked round at the startled faces of the Fourth Formers.

"Did any boy here hear Levison when he came in?" he asked.

"I 'eard 'im, sir," said Harry Hammond, the Cockney junior of St. Jim's.

"Very good! When was it?"

"Just after the row, sir," said Hammond. "I 'eard that, too—a row in the Shell dormitory. I 'eard Levison come back just arter."

"That proves what I say, sir," said

"He might, sir," admitted Hammond.

"Was any other boy here awake?"

There was no reply.

"Someone," said Mr. Linton sternly, "met Lowther on the lower landing and struck him a brutal blow. The suspicion is against you, Levison."

"I—I didn't do it, sir! I didn't know Lowther had left his dormitory," stammered Levison. "How could I know? Perhaps he fell in the dark and knocked his head, and thought somebody hit him."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Linton sharply.

"However, I shall investigate. You boys may go to bed now—and mind there is no further disturbance to-night."

Blake & Co. turned in.

Mr. Linton put out the light and left the dormitory, followed by Knox. They



The lighted match dropped from Lowther's hand as he staggered back from a blow full between the eyes. Before the dazed junior could guard himself, the mysterious figure brought the stick crashing down on his forehead, and Lowther fell like a log.

Levison, with a breath of relief. "Hammond heard me come in, you see."

"You are quite sure, Hammond?"

asked Mr. Linton, with a quick look at the Cockney schoolboy. "You are not saying this to shield Levison?"

Hammond grinned. He was on the worst possible terms with Levison, and all the Form knew it.

"No, sir; Levison ain't no friend of mine."

"Did you leave the dormitory again, Levison?"

"No, sir."

"Did you remain awake, Hammond?"

"No, sir; I dropped to sleep just arter I 'eard Levison come back."

"Then he might have left the dormitory again without your knowing it?"

descended to the next floor below, and Mr. Linton opened the door of the Fifth Form dormitory. All was dark and silent there.

Cutts of the Fifth woke up as the light was switched on.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's the row?"

"Wake up!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, and his sharp voice woke up all the Fifth quickly enough. "I want to know if any boy here has been outside this dormitory since lights out?"

"Not that I know of, sir," said Cutts.

And the rest of the Fifth said the same.

Mr. Linton looked sharply round the dormitory, in search of some sign of a

fellow having been out of bed, but there was nothing unusual to be seen.

"Very well," he said. "I am sorry to have disturbed you. Good-night!"

He turned out the light and left the dormitory with Knox, without any explanation of his surprising nocturnal visit. The Form-master and the prefect visited each of the dormitories in the School House in turn. But there was nothing to be discovered. So far as could be ascertained, no member of the Third or the Second had been out of bed.

"It must have been Levison!" Mr. Linton exclaimed, when his round of visits was over. "However, we shall see. The matter will be investigated by the Housemaster to-morrow. There is nothing to do but to return to bed now."

"Very well, sir," said Knox.

And the prefect and the master parted.

In the School House dormitories there was a buzz of excited talk. Most of all excitement reigned in the Fourth Form dormitory. There the fellows had little doubt that it was Levison who had been on the landing when Lowther received that cowardly blow from an unseen hand.

"It was Levison, of course!" said Blake. "He left the dorm again after Hammond heard him return, and laid for Lowther in the dark."

"How could I, when I didn't know Lowther had come out of bed at all, you fool?" Levison demanded savagely.

"Well, if you didn't do it intirely, who did?" Reilly wanted to know.

"How should I know? Some other chap was out of his dorm, and he hit Lowther, I suppose."

"Even if another chap was out of his dorm, and ran into Lowther in the dark, there was no reason why he should hit him like that," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"Well, I didn't do it, and I don't know who did!"

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"You can tell that yarn to Mr. Railton in the morning!" said Blake savagely. "You'll get the boot over this, and serve you jolly well right!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison growled, and settled himself down to sleep. The talk in the dormitory died away, and the juniors slumbered. But in the Shell dormitory Monty Lowther did not sleep. His head was aching terribly, and slumber refused to visit his eyes. When the pale winter dawn glimmered in at the windows Lowther was still awake, and he was very white and haggard.

CHAPTER 5.

Condemned on Suspicion

THAT morning there was great excitement in the School House at St. Jim's.

The story of what had happened in the night was all over the House, and soon all over the school.

New House fellows came over in a crowd to see Lowther, and to ask about what had happened.

And among all the fellows there was only one opinion—Levison had done it.

No one else could be supposed to have a motive for striking down Lowther in that savage way. Levison had fled from the Shell dormitory in a fury, after the licking he had received there—Lowther had run into him in the dark—and Levison had struck him down. The fellows had no doubt about it.

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Mr. Linton had reported this matter to Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, and after breakfast all the fellows concerned were called into the Housemaster's study and questioned.

Levison asserted his innocence, but the keen eyes of the Housemaster rested upon him very doubtfully.

There was only one point in Levison's favour, and that was the evidence of Hammond that he had come back to bed directly after the row in the Shell dormitory.

That one point in Levison's favour told very strongly. It made it clear that if he were the fellow who had attacked Lowther, he must have left the Fourth Form dormitory a second time for the purpose. And how did he know that Lowther was out of bed at all?

But for Hammond's evidence, Levison would have been condemned out of hand, and Mr. Railton told him so.

"As it is," said the Housemaster sternly, "I must give you the benefit of the doubt, so far, Levison. Hammond appears to be certain of the time you returned to bed."

"Quite certain, sir," said Hammond. "The matter, therefore, must remain in abeyance while further investigations are made," said Mr. Railton.

So the matter ended for the time—that is, it ended so far as the Housemaster was concerned. But the juniors had quite made up their minds about it.

Mr. Railton, quite aware of the state of their feelings, and of the probable outcome, had strictly forbidden any raggings of the cad of the Fourth, and for that reason alone Levison was not touched.

But the juniors made their opinion of him quite plain.

He was avoided like one plague-stricken.

Even Mellish, his chum, avoided him.

Not a word was said to him by any fellows in the House, and Levison found himself sent to Coventry by common consent.

It was in vain that he furiously protested his innocence.

No one believed him, and no one would listen to him or answer his frantic asseverations.

He was cut by the House.

Curiously enough, the one person in the School House who did not feel quite sure of Levison's guilt was the Cockney schoolboy, whom the cad of the Fourth had injured beyond forgiveness.

In the Form-room that morning Levison received dark looks on all sides, and the fellows left a clear space on either side of him. Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, looked at him in a peculiar way, and was very dry in his manner when he addressed him. Little Mr. Latham shared the common opinion, and he was shocked beyond words at what had happened.

When the Fourth came out after morning lessons, Levison came up to Hammond. He was looking very pale and troubled. More than once Levison had found out that the way of the transgressor was hard. He realised it more than ever now. If he had been a boy of an honourable character his word might have been taken. But no one who knew him would have taken his word for a moment.

"I say, Hammond—" he began.

"Allo!" said Hammond shortly.

"It was jolly good of you to speak up for me as you did," said Levison awkwardly. "I don't know why you did it."

"I spoke up 'cause wot I said was true," said Hammond.

"Yes, yes, of course; but—but are you sure you went to sleep again after I'd come back to bed?"

Hammond stared at him.

"Course I'm sure!" he said.

"If you hadn't gone to sleep you'd be able to bear witness that I never left the dorm again after coming back," Levison hinted. "Look here, Hammond, I stayed in bed, honour bright. I don't know who hit Lowther. Couldn't you—"

He paused.

Hammond's eyes glittered.

"Couldn't I what?" he demanded.

"Couldn't you remember that—that you didn't quite go to sleep—"

"Couldn't I tell bloomin' lies for you, you mean?" broke out Hammond. "No, I couldn't, Levison. And I think you did it, too! Go and eat coke!"

And Hammond swung away.

"Pwaw don't speak to that wotah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, joining Hammond. "The whole House has decided to leave the beast severely alone. Come on; we've got time before dinnah to twot down to Mr. Wiggs' about your new suit."

"Right-ho!" said Hammond cheerfully. "I'll get the tin to pay his little bill."

And the two juniors went up to Hammond's study. Hammond shared Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage with Bates and Smith minor. Bates and Smith minor had not liked the Cockney schoolboy when he first came to St. Jim's, but they had got used to him now. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's friendship had done much for Hammond, for the swell of St. Jim's would never forget how the Cockney had once saved his cousin, Ethel Cleveland, from drowning.

Smith minor and Bates were both in the study, writing lines, when Arthur Augustus and his Cockney chum came in. Hammond crossed to his desk in the corner, a handsome mahogany desk, which was much envied by some of the fellows. The Cockney schoolboy, though he dropped his b's with unfailing persistence, and spoke with a Cockney twang that horrified some of the St. Jim's fellows, had all the advantages that unlimited pocket-money could purchase. He frequently had a sum of money in his possession that made even rich fellows open their eyes—his "whack," as he described it, in the profits of his father's business—Hammond's High-Class Hats.

Hammond took a key from his watch-chain and slid it into the keyhole of a drawer inside the desk, and then uttered an exclamation.

"Allo! Wot's the matter 'ere?"

"What's up, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

"Something's wrong with the lock; the key won't go in."

Hammond bent over the desk with a puzzled look. Then he glanced round at Smith minor and Bates.

"You blokes been playin' a game with this 'ere desk?" he asked.

"Oh, blow your desk!" said Smith minor, who was busy with lines.

"Well, somebody's been bustin' the lock some'ow," said Hammond indignantly. "I don't like tricks bein' played on my desk. I've got my money in that there drawer, and now I can't git at it."

"Pwaw let me twy, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"'Ere you are!"

Hammond handed him the key, and D'Arcy essayed to insert it in the lock of the money-drawer. But it would not

go in. The keyhole was jammed. The swell of St. Jim's shook his head.

"One of Levison's wotten twicks, perhaps," he said. "Somebody has been forcin' somethin' into the keyhole, deah boy. You will have to get a locksmith to open it."

"Then I shan't be able to pay Mr. Wiggs!" growled Hammond.

"Nevah mind; I can lend you four-pounds-ten. Come along!"

"Orl right," said D'Arcy and Hammond left the study, leaving the money drawer still unopened.

CHAPTER 6.

A Precious Pair!

CUTTS of the Fifth was lounging in the doorway of the School House when Hammond and D'Arcy came back from their walk to Rylcombe. Arthur Augustus was looking a little flustered. There was deep snow in the fields along the lane, and the two juniors had fallen in with some Grammar School fellows, with the result that D'Arcy's beautiful silk topper had been used a target of Arthur Augustus hurried up to Study No. 6 to brush his topper, and Hammond lingered in the Hall, whistling. Cutts gave them a friendly nod.

Hammond stared at him coolly. He did not like Gerald Cutts, and he made no secret of it. He had been very much taken with the dandy of the Fifth when he first came to St. Jim's, but he had soon learned too much about Cutts to like him.

"I've been looking for you, Hammond," said the Fifth Former genially. "Ave you?" said Hammond.

"I want a little jaw with you about something that will interest you. Will you drop into my study after dinner?"

"Thanks, no!"

"I can put you on to something good," said Cutts, with an effort to keep good tempered.

"A dead cert for the Welsher Handicap?" grinned Hammond. "Or a dead sure snip for the Mug Catchers' Plate?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Well, I ain't comin'," said Hammond. "Thank you, all the same."

"You can bring D'Arcy with you if you like," said Cutts.

"Oh, is it somethin' you wouldn't mind 'im knowin'?"

"Yes, certainly. Now, be a good chup, and come."

Hammond hesitated a moment, and then nodded.

"Orl right! But I'm goin' to bring D'Arcy. That's understood."

"All serene!" said Cutts, and he nodded and strode away.

When the juniors came out of the School House dining-room, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was making for the quadrangle, when Hammond stopped him.

"I want you to come with me," he said.

"Cutts' study."

Arthur Augustus' aristocratic face became grave at once. He jammed his famous monocle into his eye, and regarded Hammond severely.

"Weally, Hammond, I am wathah surprised at you. You know that wathah Cutts isn't the wight kind of person to meet!"

"Yes, I knowed that; but he wants us to come for somethin'." All serene if you come with me, you know," said Hammond.

NO SALE!



"He says he doesn't make penny bags, your ladyship."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Kitchiner, 379, Holmestade Road, South Norwood, London, S.E.25.

"Yaas, I suppose I shall be able to look aftah you all wight," said D'Arcy innocently. D'Arcy had a fatherly way of looking after his chums. "But Cutts isn't weally a wespocketable chap, you know. He smokes and gambles, and he is suspected of dwinkin'. Howevah, if you've said you'll go, we'll go, deah boy."

And they went. Cutts and Prye of the Fifth were in the study when they arrived there. Cutts was looking as debonaire as ever, but Prye had a pale and harassed face. Prye was Cutts' companion in most of his shady adventures, but he did not have the same luck as Cutts.

Cutts' luck was phenomenal. He very seldom came a cropper, and when he did, he had a wonderful gift for wriggling out of a scrape, generally at the expense of somebody else. Cutts' people were rich, and he could afford to go the pace, as he called it; but with Prye it was different. Prye did not have a large allowance, and he found it very difficult to keep up to the pace set by his chum.

Like most foolish fellows who take to gambling, he was always hoping for a stroke of luck that would set him fairly on his feet, but that stroke of luck never seemed to come. Every fresh plunge, instead, seemed to land him deeper in difficulties.

Prye's look was quite enough to show fellows who knew him that the geegoes had been more unreliable than ever of late.

"Come in, you chaps!" said Cutts agreeably, and the chaps came in.

Cutts could be very agreeable when he liked, and notice from the dandy of the Fifth was very flattering to mere Fourth Formers. In spite of his prejudice against Cutts, Arthur Augustus felt his severity melt a little.

"Shut the door, Prye," said Cutts. "Now, I'm glad you chaps have come. I can put you on to a good thing, something you oughtn't to miss."

"If it's anythin' to do with wages, we don't want to have anythin' to do with it," said Arthur Augustus.

"No fear!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Races!" said Cutts, raising his eyebrows in surprise. "Surely you don't think I should propose anything of the kind?"

"Oh!"

"It's a matter of football," said Cutts. "The fact is it's a little sweep."

"A little sweep?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Bai Jove! Do you mean a chimney-sweep?" asked Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

Cutts laughed.

"No; a sweepstake, you know."

D'Arcy was on his guard at once.

"That's gamblin'," he said.

"Not at all, nothing of the kind. It's a sort of lottery, you know," Cutts explained. "You simply take tickets, and—"

"And the winning ticket gets the prize," said Prye.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"It's gamblin'," he replied.

"Course it is," said Hammond.

"You're the only juniors we're letting into it," said Cutts, his eyes beginning to gleam. "You ought to be glad to get into a Fifth Form sweep!"

"Wate!"

"Now, look here—" said Cutts persuasively.

"Wubbish!"

"You cheeky cub!" exclaimed Cutts, losing his temper at last.

"You beastly gamblin' wascal!" retorted D'Arcy undauntedly. "Come on, Hammond! I know it was somethin' of the sort. I wefuse to remain a moment longah in the company of that wack outsidah!"

"Eat, 'ear!" said Hammond.

"So you say no!" said Cutts.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wot-ho!" said Hammond.

Cutts made an angry step towards them.

"You cheeky cads—"

"You wotthah!"

"I've a jolly good mind—"

"You have a jolly bad mind in my opinion," said Arthur Augustus, "and a jolly bad chawatchal, too, you wotthah!"

That was too much for Cutts. He made a spring at the juniors, and Prye, equally exasperated, followed him up. D'Arcy and Hammond hit out manfully, but they were no match for the two big seniors, and there were two sudden and heavy bumps in the passage, and then Cutts' study door slammed.

"Ow! Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, as he sat on the floor. "Ow! Ow!"

"Critkey!" murmured Hammond.

D'Arcy jumped up.

"Come on, deah boy; we'll wush in and give them a fearful thwashin'!"

Hammond caught him by the arm.

"We can't!" he grinned. "We should only get chucked out again. Come on, D'Arcy, let's get out of this!"

And Hammond succeeded in dragging his indignant chum away.

In Cutts' study the black sheep of the Fifth was gritting his teeth. Prye's face was gloomier than ever.

"Well, that's no go!" said Cutts savagely. "We might have managed young Hammond by himself, but D'Arcy was bound to cut up rusty, hang him!"

"But what's going to be done?" said Prye, with a black look. "Look here, Cutts, I'm in awfully deep water! What's going to be done?"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't ask me. I'm not your banker, I suppose?"

"You helped to get me into this," said Prye gloomily. "Without you, I don't suppose I should ever have betted on races at all."

Cutts sneered.

"Put it on me, of course," he said.

"It's always the same, if a fellow has

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bad luck. If you'd won, you'd be chirpy enough."

"It's a serious matter. I owe three times as much as I could pay, if I could get time—and I can't get time. Something's got to be done, Cutts, or I shall get the order of the boot from here!"

"Well, I can't do anything."

"Something's got to be done," repeated Prye doggedly. "We're in this together, Cutts. If it all comes out, and I get sacked, you'll get it in the neck as well as me!"

"You mean that you'll give me away—what?"

"Why shouldn't I, if you won't help me?"

"I can't help you!" said Cutts savagely. "I've been hit as hard as you have. I've overrun my allowance, and borrowed money I can't pay till next term. As for rounding on me, that wouldn't do you any good. I'm as deep in the mud as you are in the mire. If you're found out and sacked, and you accuse me of being in the same boat, do you think your word would be taken against mine? You can put that out of your head, even if it would do you any good—which it wouldn't. Keep a stiff upper lip, and things may come round."

"They won't come round for me."

"Well, it's not my fault," said Cutts, with a yawn.

And Prye gave him a bitter look and quitted the study.

CHAPTER 7.

A Warning for Levison!

"O W!" Monty Lowther made that remark for the fiftieth time that day, as the Terrible Three of the Shell sat down to the tea-table in their study.

He pressed his hand to the big lump on his forehead as he spoke lugubriously.

A big black bruise showed up under the dark hair, and it was likely to be a long time before it disappeared. It had left Lowther with a bad headache, which had eased off a little by the evening, but was far from gone.

Mr. Linton had been very easy with Lowther in the Form-room that day. He was excused from work. He was, in fact, in no state for work. He was feeling, as he expressed it, utterly rotten.

Tom Merry and Manners looked sympathetic.

"It's beastly!" said Manners. "Levison ought to be sacked. There's no two ways about it. He ought to go."

"Or to be ragged!" said Tom.

"Well, he is getting it in the neck," said Lowther glumly. "He's out by the House. That can't be pleasant for him."

"He ought to have something with boiling oil in it!" growled Manners. "He would have been sacked but for that ass Hammond."

"Well, Hammond was bound to say what he knew. It was really decent of him to speak up for Levison, considering the way Levison has treated him."

"Ye-es. But we know it was Levison who baffled you, Monty."

"I suppose it was."

"It's a pity you didn't see him," said Tom Merry. "If you'd just managed to get a glimpse of the beast, it would have been all right."

"He hit me just as I was striking a match," said Lowther.

"Oh, course," he knew you'd recognise him in the light."

Lowther nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes. But why should he have minded if I saw him?" he asked.

"Why? Well, I—I don't know," said Tom Merry, rather taken aback by the question.

"Queer that he should have baffled you like that, really for nothing," said Manners.

"Well, yes, I suppose it was. I don't see who else it could have been. Still, as I didn't actually see him, I can't swear to it. On the whole, I'm glad he hasn't been punished for it. I'd rather make quite sure first."

"Well, I feel sure enough," said Manners. "But after what Railton said, we can't very well rag him."

"What he's getting is rough enough, if he's innocent," said Tom Merry. "But he's only got himself to thank for it. If he wasn't such an Ananias, we could take his word."

"That's so."

"He won't play ghost again in a hurry, anyway," said Manners. "Hallo! What's that? Come in!"

Jack Blake of the Fourth entered the study with some excitement in his face.

"That's the news?" yawned Manners. "I've found something out."

"About what happened last night?" the Terrible Three inquired eagerly.

Blake shook his head.

"No; about what's going to happen to-night, I fancy."

"Well, that sounds a bit mysterious," said Tom Merry. "Are you setting up as a giddy prophet?"

"Levison was playing ghost last night," said Blake, unheeding. "He had the old monk's robe that's kept in the school museum."

"Yes. Knox took it away from the dorm; Levison left it behind him."

"Well, it's gone again."

"What?"

"I've just been in the museum," said Blake quietly. "I wondered whether Levison might be up to his tricks again, and I looked for the old robe. It would be just like him to keep up the game, you know. Well, I looked in the cabinet where the robe is kept, and it isn't there. Knox put it back this morning, and it's gone again."

"Sure?"

"Yes. I looked carefully for it, and it's gone."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"That means that the cad is up to his tricks again!" he said.

"Of course it does," said Blake. "He's been looking pretty blue all day over being sent to Coventry, and I suppose he thinks he'll give us a scare to-night to make it even. He must be a silly ass to think he can frighten us now that we know who the ghost is; but my idea is to nip it in the bud."

"I'm fed-up with him, for one! I'm going to see him and talk to him like a Dutch uncle! You fellows care to come along?"

"What ho!"

"Come on, then!"

The Terrible Three promptly left their tea-table, and followed Blake down the passage. The news that Levison was up to his tricks again, after the harm he had already done, had an exasperating effect upon them. They marched into Levison's study, with grim looks, prepared to call him to prompt account. But the cad of the Fourth was not there. His study-mates, Lumley-Lumley, Blenkinsop, and Mellish, were having tea, but there was no sign of Levison in the study.

"Hallo!" said Lumley-Lumley. "What's the giddy trouble?"

"We're looking for Levison," said Tom Merry abruptly. "He's up to his tricks again. Do you know where he is?"

"We don't allow him in here, I guess!" said Lumley. "We agreed to boot him out whenever he comes here!"

"Good egg! But where is he?"

"I guess you'll find him with Cutts. I spotted him going to the Fifth Form passage. He's very thick with Cutts of the Fifth."

"H'm!" said Blake.

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "He's up to his tricks again. We're not afraid of Cutts."

"I'll call Dig and Herries, in case there's trouble," said Blake.

And six juniors made their way to Gerald Cutts' study in the Fifth Form passage.

It was not common for juniors to be on visiting terms with the Fifth, but Levison was an exception. Levison performed many little services for Cutts, such as smuggling cigarettes into the school and taking messages to places where Cutts did not care to be seen if he could help it.

Tom Merry knocked at the door and opened it. Cutts and Prye were there, having their tea, and Levison was with them.

Cutts gave the juniors a dark look. He was on the worst possible terms with Tom Merry & Co.

"What do you fags want?" he demanded.

"We want Levison."

"Well, Levison's having tea with me, so you can wait! Clear out!"

"We can't wait!" said Tom Merry quietly. "What we've got to say to Levison can be said here, and it won't take long!"

"If you want to be kicked out—" began Cutts.

"If you can kick out six of us, you're welcome to start!" said the captain of the Shell.

Cutts looked at him as if he would eat him, but he decided, apparently, that he was not equal to the task of ejecting six sturdy juniors by force, for he did not rise.

"What do you want with me?" growled Levison. "I want to have nothing to do with you—hang you!"

"Same here!" said Blake. "But we've got to have a heart-to-heart talk with you! You played ghost last night, dressed up in the old monk's robe out of the school museum!"

"That's an old story!"

"And you're planning to do the same to-night!"

Levison stared at him.

"What's put that into your head?" he demanded.

"Isn't it true?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, it isn't."

"Then what have you taken the monk's robe from the museum for?"

"Rats! I haven't done anything of the sort!"

"And that cardboard mask you wore last night," said Tom Merry—"I kicked it under my bed last night, but I remember now, I looked for it to burn this morning, and it was gone. You've taken it back!"

"I haven't seen it since I wore it last night."

"One of the maids may have swept it away," said Prye.

"Well, that's possible," admitted Tom Merry. "But one of the maids hasn't swept the monk's robe out of the museum. Levison's taken that, to play his rotten tricks again!"

"I haven't!" shouted Levison.

"You'd better say what you've done with it, and have it put back," said Prye. "In the cire, it's a fool's trick to play, Levison!"

Levison glared at the Fifth Former.

"I tell you I don't know anything

about it!" he exclaimed. "I suppose somebody has taken it and means to put it on me."

"Well, we came to give you a warning," said Tom Merry. "Mr. Railton has ordered us to let you alone for what happened last night. But if you begin again to-night, you'll get such a ragging you'll think that life isn't worth living!"

Levison scowled sulkily. "I've said that I don't know anything about it, and I don't!" he said. "That's all I've got to say, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"There's the door!" said Cutts. "Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake. But there was evidently nothing more to be done, and the juniors quitted the study.

"It must have been Levison!" said Blake savagely, as they went down the passage. "Perhaps he'll put it back, now that he knows we know; but I'll sleep with one eye open to-night, and if he plays any tricks—"

"We'll pulverise him!" said Herries. "And I'll keep an eye open in the Shell dorm," said Tom Merry.

And with that the matter dropped.

CHAPTER 8.

A Lock in the Dark!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was sitting at the study table in Study No. 5, with a pen in his hand, and a wise expression upon his face.

Harry Hammond was on the other side of the table.

The two strangely assorted chums were working together.

Hammond, since he had been at St. Jim's, had learned much, and at a very rapid pace, but he was still far from being suited to take his place in the Fourth Form on a level with the other fellows.

And D'Arcy, in the kindness of his heart, frequently spent an hour or two coaching the junior from Bethnal Green.

But the coaching was interrupted now. There was a knock at the door of the study, and Mr. Keyser, the locksmith from Rylcombe, presented himself.

Hammond rose to his feet. "It's the locksmith to see my desk," he said. "Come in, Mr. Keyser! 'Ere you are!"

Mr. Keyser came into the study.

Hammond opened the lid of his desk, and pointed out the drawer in which he kept his money.

"Some bloke has been monkeyin' with it," he explained. "I can't get the key into it. I want you to open it."

"Yes, sir," said the locksmith.

He examined the lock carefully, and then turned a somewhat peculiar look upon Hammond.

"You keep money in this drawer?" he asked.

"Yes. 'Bout thirty quid," said Hammond, surprised by the question. "Why?"

"It is not a safe place, I should think," said Mr. Keyser. "Someone has been trying to force the lock."

"Oh crickey!" said Hammond.

"Bai Jove!"

"I shall have to remove the lock and replace it," said Mr. Keyser. "And I should recommend you to put your money in a safe place, Master Hammond. That damage to the lock was done by someone trying to pick it."

WHO TOLD HER THAT?



"Isn't it wonderful how these garage people know just where to put a pump to get petrol!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Rowe, 15, Woodlands Avenue, Preston, Lancs.

"Quite sure?" asked Hammond incredulously.

"I know something about locks, sir." "Yes, I suppose so; but it beats me. Smith minor or Bates wouldn't want to touch my spondulics—I know that," said Hammond. "Owver, I'll look arter it all right."

Mr. Keyser removed the lock, and took it away with him, and the two juniors stared at one another as the study door closed.

"Bai Jove, that's queeah!" Arthur Augustus remarked.

"Jolly queer!" said Hammond. "E must 'ave been mistaken. Nobody in the 'Ouse would want to git at my money, I s'pose."

"Wathah not! I hope not, anyway. But it looks vewy queeah. You had betterh lock the money up somewhere quite safe," said D'Arcy uneasily. "It looks wathah wotten."

"But there ain't a thief in this 'ere study."

"Someone might have come in from some othah study, deah boy. I suppose Mr. Keyser knows what he's talkin' about. As a matiah of fact, old man, you have too much money about," said Arthur Augustus. "It's wathah bad form to have a lot of money."

Hammond grinned.

"Well, I'll pay you the four-pun-ten I owe you, and then I shall 'ave less," he said. "Wot am I to do with the rest now? I ain't got anythin' else with a safe key to it, and I don't want to carry nearly thirty quid in my trousers pocket."

"Tom Mewwy has a safe place where he keeps the club funds locked up," said Arthur Augustus. "Ask him to put it there till your lock's mended."

"Good hegg!"

Hammond paused a moment uneasily. "I sye!" he said abruptly. "Better not say anythin' about vot Mr. Keyser said. Smith and Bates would be awfully rattly if they 'eard it. They'd think that they was suspected of monkeyin' with my desk."

"Wight-ho! A still tongue shows a wise head, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus approvingly. "But let's take the money to Tom Mewwy's study."

"Or right!"

Hammond carelessly crumpled up four five-pound notes, and nine one-

pound notes in his hand, and left the study. Levison came along the passage, returning from his visit to Cutts of the Fifth.

He stared curiously at the banknotes protruding from Hammond's hand.

"My hat! Where did you get all that tin from?" he said, in surprise.

"Mind your own business!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "You are being cut by the House, and you have no wight to speak to us."

"Oh, rats!" said Levison.

"Vewly, you wottah—"

"Levison went into his study and slammed the door."

"Bai Jove! I've a jolly good mind to go aftah him, and give him a feeful thwashin' you know," D'Arcy exclaimed wrathfully.

"Kim on!" said Hammond. "I want to get the spondulics put away!"

"Oh, vewy well!"

The two juniors proceeded to Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three were at work at their preparation. Monty Lowther giving an occasional grunt as the bruise on his forehead gave him a twinge of pain.

"Hallo! Are you giving fivers away?" asked Tom Merry, laughing, as Hammond laid the money on the table.

"I want you to lock it up fer me, if you'll be so kind," said Hammond. "The lock in my desk is out of order, and I want it kept safe."

"Count it first, then."

"There's twenty-nine quid." "I'll lock it up for you with pleasure," said Tom Merry, rising and opening his desk. "I've got a safe place here for the club funds. They don't amount to as much as that, though. Here you are, shove it in!"

There was a secret drawer in Tom Merry's desk, where he kept the footer club money. It was not a very deep secret, as a matter of fact, and would not have eluded a careful search. But there was a lock on the drawer, and it was quite safe enough for Tom Merry's purpose.

Hammond dropped the money carelessly into the drawer, and Tom Merry locked it up.

"Safe as houses!" he said cheerfully.

"Thanks!"

"Oh, don't mensh!"

Arthur Augustus and his Cockney chum left the study.

"Just time for a spwint wound the quad before bed-time," said D'Arcy, looking at his watch.

"I'm on!"

And they walked out into the quadrangle.

There had been a fall of snow that afternoon, and the quadrangle of St. Jim's gleamed white under the murky sky. The leafless old elms held out snow-rigged branches like the white arms of ghosts.

"Not much chance for footer to-morrow," Hammond remarked.

"Wathah not!"

"All the time, it's a good wheeze to keep in form. I'll race you round the quad and back to the School 'Ouse," said Hammond.

"Done!"

They ran quickly down the snowy path, their feet making no sound on the velvety white powdering. Hammond, who was a little ahead, suddenly stopped as they came along in the dark shadows of the school wall.

"Old on!" he muttered.

"What's the matiah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, sinking his voice because Hammond had spoken in a cautious tone.

"Listen!"

Through the silence of the night came the sound of a voice. It was husky and low, but the juniors knew the tones of Albert Prye of the Fifth Form.

"To-morrow, without fail. I give you my word, Marks."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

They could not see Prye, but the direction of his voice told them where he was. He was at the school wall, talking over it to someone who was standing in the road outside.

As the wall was high, Prye must have climbed upon it to talk to the man standing below in the road.

A growing voice was heard to reply to the Fifth Form.

"That's what you said yesterday, Master Prye. I ain't—"

"Come on!" muttered Arthur Augustus hurriedly. "We don't want to listen to them, Hammond. It doesn't concern us."

"Or!" right!" said Hammond.

The two juniors ran on. Prye was speaking again, but they did not hear what he said. D'Arcy and Hammond finished their run round the quadrangle, and returned to the School House.

They did not speak of what they had heard. But they could not help thinking of it—and wondering what was the meaning of that strange interview between Prye of the Fifth and the unseen and unknown Mr. Marks.

CHAPTER 9.

The Mystery of the Night!

JACK BLAKE of the Fourth had fully made up his mind, when the juniors went to bed that night, that he would sleep with one eye open.

That Levison had taken the monkish robe from the school museum, with the intention of playing ghost again, Blake was certain.

And he intended to keep watch, and catch the cad of the Fourth in the act, and then and there to administer a lesson to him which would cure Levison of the desire to play ghost again in the future.

Unfortunately, though Blake's intentions were excellent, the performance did not quite come up to the intention. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

The juniors went to bed at half-past nine, and for a quarter of an hour or so there was the usual buzz of talk, during which Jack Blake found it easy enough to keep awake.

But when the voices died away, and the Fourth Formers dropped off to sleep one by one, Blake found his self-imposed task a little more difficult.

He heard ten o'clock strike in a drowsy way, and roused himself to keep awake.

Half-past ten found him nodding very sleepily.

When eleven o'clock boomed off from the clock tower, Blake's ears were deaf to it. He was fast asleep.

All was dark and silent in the dormitory.

Midnight boomed out.

Jack Blake stirred uneasily in his sleep.

He was dreaming that he was sitting up in bed, awake and watchful, and that Levison was stepping out of bed, clad in the ghostly garb of the old monk who was supposed to haunt the School House at Christmastide.

So vivid was the dream that Blake

made a sleepy clutch at the dream figure—and the movement woke him.

For some seconds he lay in bed, trying to gather his confused thoughts into order, slowly realising that it was only a dream, and that there was nothing stirring in the room.

"My hat!" he murmured. "I believe I dropped off to sleep, after all! I wonder what the giddy time is!"

He roused himself into broad wakefulness. Now that he was awake, he would keep awake, and watch—until he fell asleep again. He raised his head and glanced drowsily up and down the dormitory.

A chill draught caught his face.

The window at the end of the room was open at the top, as usual; but Blake knew that it was not from the window that that chill draught came.

In a moment all his faculties were alert.

The door was open.

In the intense darkness he could not see it—but he was sure of it. The door of the dormitory was open—and what he had intended to watch for had happened while he slept. Blake sat up in bed, his eyes gleaming.

He strained his ears to listen.

There was a faint rustling sound in the silence of the dormitory. It came from the direction of Levison's bed. There were one or two beds between Blake's and Levison's; and beyond Levison's there was Hammond's, and half a dozen more. But Blake was pretty certain that it was Levison who was moving. Who else could it be?

"The rotter!" murmured Blake. "I was right, after all—I knew it! And this time I'll catch him!"

He groped silently beside his bed for the matches he had placed there in readiness.

The faint rustle continued.

Then it ceased.

Blake found the matchbox—and as his hand closed on it, he heard a slight sound in the direction of the door.

It had closed.

Scratch!

The match flared out.

Blake held up the match, his eyes alert—he remembered what had happened to Monty Lowther on the dark landing, and he was prepared for anything.

But nothing was stirring in the dormitory.

"The rotter! He's gone out!" Blake muttered.

He jumped out of bed, found a candle-end he had placed ready on a chair, and lighted it. His movements awoke the fellows in the next beds.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's sleepy voice. "What's the woe, dear boy?"

"Levison again!" said Blake.

"Oh, the wotah!"

"We'll catch him this time," said Blake. "I just heard the door close, so he must have gone out."

"Or come in," said Herries.

"Yes—I'll soon see."

Blake stepped towards Levison's bed. Levison was there.

His eyes were closed, and his face was calm and peaceful, as if in the deepest slumber. Half a dozen juniors gathered round his bed, gazing at him in the candle-light. They did not believe for a moment that he was asleep.

"The wotah!" said D'Arcy. "He's only shammin', of course!"

"Looks like the real thing," said Herries dubiously.

"Touch the end of his nose with the

candle," suggested Digby; "that'll show whether he's shamming or not."

"Yass, wotah!"

Levison's eyes opened.

"Hallo!" he said.

"I knew you were awake," said Blake scornfully.

"Awake! I'm awake now," said Levison in surprise. "You woke me up, I suppose. What's the little game?"

"Where have you been?"

"Dotty?" asked Levison. "I've just woke up!"

"You've been out of the dorm!"

"I haven't!"

"I heard the door close not two minutes ago."

Levison grunted.

"Well, I didn't close it. Perhaps one of the Shell fellows has been here?"

"Rals!"

"Yass, wats to that, you wotah!" asked Blake. "Where's that giddy robe?" asked Blake. "If you've been playing ghost again, you've had that on."

"I tell you I haven't been out of bed!" said Levison impatiently. "I suppose you've been dreaming, or it's a case of nerves."

"Allo! Wot's the game?" came a sleepy voice from Hammond's bed, as the Cockney schoolboy woke up, and blinked in the candlelight.

"Some more of Levison's tricks!" said Blake angrily. "He's been up and about, and he won't admit it. I heard him close the door."

"You didn't!" said Levison. "I haven't been out of bed. And I defy you to find the monk's robe here. I haven't had it!"

"We'll look," said Blake grimly; "and if we find it in the dorm, we'll give you the biggest licking you've ever had in your natural!"

"You're welcome to, if you find it."

The Fourth Formers were all awake now. A dozen fellows joined in the search, but the monk's robe was not discovered. Neither was the cardboard mask to be seen. If Levison had been playing the ghost again, he had evidently left his disguise outside the dormitory.

"Sure you didn't dream it, dear boy!" asked Arthur Augustus, beginning to be a little doubtful.

Blake snorted.

"Of course I didn't, fathead!"

"I wufese to be called a fathead—" "Somebody shut the door. I know that. When I woke up, it was open—I felt the draught—and then I heard it close."

"Well, we shall know to-morrow if Levison has been playing tricks in the other dormitories," said Herries. "I'm going back to bed now."

And Herries turned in—and the other fellows followed his example, Blake feeling very puzzled and dissatisfied. He had intended to catch Levison in the act—but once again it had been impossible to find direct proof against the cad of the Fourth.

The Fourth Formers were soon fast asleep, and they did not wake up again till rising-bell clanged out in the misty winter morning.

Blake yawned and rolled out of bed.

"Groogh! It's cold!" he ejaculated.

"Orribly cold!" remarked Hammond,

as he turned out. The juniors dressed themselves, and Hammond turned back his pillow for his watch and chain, which he always placed there overnight. A puzzled expression came over his face as he moved the bolster, and then searched through the bed.

"Lost anythin', deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, who was ready to go down.

"I ain't lost anythin'," said Hammond; "something's been taken away."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I suppose it's a lark," said Hammond; "something's been taken away, what has taken my watch and chain is perfectly requested to 'and it over."

"Your watch and chain?" said Blake. "Yes. I put 'em under my pillow as usual last night, and now they're gone."

"Oh, you'll find them in your bed," said Reilly.

"I've looked."

"Look again, then."

Hammond looked again, stripping the bed in his search. But there was no sign of the watch and chain. The articles were evidently missing, and all eyes in the dormitory, with common accord, turned to Levison.

CHAPTER 10.

Dark Suspicion!

LEVISON had been watching Hammond, with a sneer upon his lips.

But as the looks of the Fourth Formers turned grimly upon him, he started a little, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"Well, do you think I've stolen Hammond's watch and chain now?" he asked bitterly.

"Stolen isn't the word," said Jack Blake. "I don't think you've stolen it, but I think you've taken it. Another of your little jokes, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about it."

"I want that there watch and chain!" said Hammond. "That watch cost ten quid, and I ain't losin' it!"

"Better find it, then," said Levison. "I haven't seen anything of it."

"You was up in the night."

"I wasn't!"

"We all know you were," said Blake. "Somebody was, and it could only have been you. You'd better tell Hammond at once what you've done with his watch and chain, or you'll be accused of stealing it."

"Oh, I expect that, anyway!" said Levison savagely. "I suppose the Cockney has hidden it, and is putting this on to me to get me into trouble, as you're all down on me already. It's a lie to say I touched Lowther, and it's another lie to say that I touched the outsider's watch and chain!"

"Rot!"

"Gammon!"

"Sare, and you'd better own up!"

"Hand it over, you silly ass!"

"I've said that I don't know anything about it," said Levison, "and I've got nothing more to say. Go and hang yourselves!"

And he walked out of the dormitory.

"I suppose you're quite sure you put the watch and chain there, Hammond?" said Blake.

"Course I am! I do the same every night."

"Yaas, and I saw Hammond put them there last night, now that I come to think of it," said Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah it quite well."

"That settles it. They've been taken away," said Blake.

"It's just one of Levison's wotten

jokes—like the wotten joke Mellish played when he collared my fivah and hid it in my Sunday toppah," said Arthur Augustus.

"P'raps Mellish 'ave done this 'ere?" said Hammond, turning a suspicious eye upon Percy Mellish.

"Rot!" said Mellish savagely. "You all know it was Levison!"

"Yaas, I feel pretty sure of that," said Arthur Augustus. "If he doesn't give it up, we'll have to report the matter to the Housemastah. Suppose you give him till dinnah-time to return the watch?"

"Ovi right," said Hammond.

And when the juniors went down, Hammond looked for Levison, to deliver that ultimatum. He found the cad of the Fourth in the quadrangle, looking savage and unquiet. Levison met him with a glare of bitter animosity.

"Well, have you found your rotten watch?" he snapped.

"It ain't a rotten watch, and I ain't found it," said Hammond quietly. "I want you to 'and it back to me."

"Go and eat cake!"

"I'll leave it till dinner-time, as D'Arcy says so," said the Cockney schoolboy. "If you don't 'and it back by then I shall 'ave to speak to Mr. Railton about it."

"You can speak to everybody in the School House about it for all I care! I don't know anything about your watch."

"Be sensible," urged Hammond. "You can't keep it."

Levison's eyes blazed.

"So you think I've stolen it!" he exclaimed.



Tom Merry dashed down the stairs, Blake hurrying after him with the torch. On the lower landing was a still form, stretched there in the darkness. "I've found him!" exclaimed Tom. "It's Lowther!"

"Wot am I to think if you don't 'and it back!" Hammond demanded.

"I tell you I was fast asleep all night, excepting when those fools woke me up, and I wasn't out of bed till I turned out at rising-bell."

"Gammion!"

"You East End rotter!" said Levison, clenching his fists. "You're planting this on me because I've always been down on you."

"You can sive wot you like, but if you don't 'and back that there watch afore dinner-time, I goes to Mr. Railton," said Hammond, and he turned his back on Levison.

"Go and be hanged!"

Levison sat sullenly by himself during morning lessons. The looks of his Form-fellows showed that they were more down on him than ever. Figgins & Co. of the New House shared the feelings of the School House fellows.

Levison's face was dark and sullen.

If he was wrongly suspected he had only himself to thank for it. His tortuous nature, as full of trickery as a monkey's, was well known to all the juniors. It was his own fault that his word could not be taken upon any matter. But that reflection did not bring the hapless cad of the Fourth much comfort.

After morning lessons, Levison went out sullenly into the quadrangle by himself. His former chum, Mellish, was giving him a wide berth. Percy Mellish had no desire whatever to share the misfortunes of his former comrade.

But Levison was not left alone. Blake & Co. came out, and as they came towards him, Levison edged away towards Cutts and Prye of the Fifth, who were in the quad. He felt safer near his friends in the Fifth.

"Hallo! You in trouble again?" said Cutts, not very civilly. "What's the row now?"

Levison gritted his teeth savagely.

"Somebody's taken Hammond's watch and chain last night, or else he's hidden them," he said. "The fellows are putting it down to me."

"And didn't you?" asked Prye.

"No; of course I didn't!"

"Rats!" said Blake, hearing the words as he came up. "Look here, Levison, time's up now. Are you going to hand over Hammond's watch?"

"I don't know anything about it!"

"You stick to that?"

"Of course I do."

"All serene! You'll have to go to the Housemaster, Hammond," said Blake.

"Mr. Railton will jolly soon make Levison shut out!"

"Hold on!" said Prye. "Are you kids quite sure about this?"

"Quite sure. And we don't want any help from the Fifth!" said Blake bluntly.

"You don't want to make a mistake," said Prye. "It's a pretty serious accusation you're bringing against Levison, and you'll put your foot in it badly if the watch turns out not to be missing, after all. Has Hammond looked for it?"

"Of course I have!" said Hammond.

"It was took from under my pillow last night."

"I'd look a bit farther if I were you before I told the Housemaster about it," said Prye. "You would look pretty silly if it turned out that you left it in your study, after all."

"Tain't possible!" said Hammond.

"I shouldn't leave it about, should I? I shouldn't take off a watch and chain in the study. 'Sides, I'm careful of it, because it's got my desk key on it—"

My 'at!" he added, as a sudden thought struck him. "P'raps that's wot it was took for—to get the key!"

"What should anybody want the key for?" asked Blake.

"It's the key of the money drawer in my desk," explained Hammond. "I always keep it on my watchchain for safety. It's a little gold key."

"You ass, you ought to have looked to see if your money was safe as soon as you came down this morning!" said Blake.

"The money's safe enough," said Hammond. "Somebody was monkeyin' with the lock of the drawer yesterday, or the day afore, and I 'ad a locksmith to take the lock off and mend it. The money's locked up safe enough in Tom Merry's desk now. If the bloke took the watch and chain to get at the key, 'e must 'ave 'ad a surprise when 'e went to my desk. There was nothin' for him!"

"Well, I'd advise you to look a bit farther for your watch before you make a fuss about it," said Prye. "Least said soonest mended!"

And Prye walked away with Cutts. "Something in what Prye says," remarked Digby. "May as well look in the study, to make sure."

"I'm sure already," said Hammond. "But we'll look, if you like. Anything for a quiet life."

The juniors proceeded to Study No. 5 at once. There was a general exclamation as they entered the study. For there, on the table lay the watch and chain.

"Crikey!" exclaimed Hammond, in astonishment.

"G'wast Scott?"

"That's it!" asked Blake.

"Yes. That's the article."

"And the key—"

"It's 'ere all right."

Levison, who had followed the juniors to the study, burst into a scolding laugh.

"Now perhaps you'll have the decency to say you're sorry!" he exclaimed.

"Hammond left it here last night when he went to bed."

"Wats!"

"I didn't," said Hammond steadily.

"I put it under my pillow. Somebody took it, and left it 'ere on the study table. A lark, I suppose. I don't see the fun in a lark of that kind, Levison. It looks to me as if the fellow wot did it wanted my key, and not the watch and chain at all!"

"You think I want to steal your filthy money, you rotten cad!" exclaimed Levison passionately.

"I know somebody was monkeying with the lock in my desk when the money was there," said Hammond quietly. "I know Mr. Keyser told me that the damage was done by somebody trying to force the lock. Now the same somebody 'ave took my watch and chain—"

—not because he wanted it, for 'ere it is—and I reckon 'e wanted that there key. That's my opinion. And if you want to know what I think, I think it was you, Levison!"

Levison clenched his hands.

"And we all think the same," said Jack Blake.

"Yass, wotnah!"

"Hang you!" said Levison. "I don't know anything about it. I am not a thief. You're all down on me, and you believe anything that Cockney cad says against me. Go and eat coke. All of you!"

And he strode furiously away.

But Levison's passionate denials carried no weight. After that incident there were few fellows who doubted that the cad of the Fourth had had dishonest designs upon the money in

Hammond's desk, and that he had only been misled by the accident of Hammond having transferred it to Tom Merry's keeping. And from that hour Levison was shunned more than ever.

CHAPTER 11.

Innocent or Guilty?

"MY hat!"

Tom Merry halted suddenly as a strange sound fell upon his ears.

It was a sob!

Tom was entering the box-room to look for his fencing foils, which were kept there. It was evening, and there was no light in the box-room. Then that miserable sound broke upon his ears in the darkness of the room.

His first idea was that it was some fag of the Third or Second who had been ill-used by a bully and had retired to the box-room to "blub" over his injuries. And if it was some victim of Gore or Crooke of the Shell, Tom Merry would have something to say in the matter.

He advanced into the room and switched on the light. In the flood of light he caught sight of a pale and tear-stained face with burning eyes.

The Shell fellow uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Levison!"

It was Levison of the Fourth. Tom Merry was simply flabbergasted. No one had ever known that hard-grained, cynical cad of the Fourth to blub. Even when he had been flogged he had not blubbed.

Tom Merry looked at him blankly.

Levison, who had been sitting upon an empty trunk in the darkness, his head bowed on his hands, sprang to his feet, with a cry, as the light gleamed out.

"What do you want?" he asked passionately. "Can't you let me alone?"

"I didn't know you were here!" said Tom Merry quietly.

"Well, now you know and you can go and tell all the House that you found me blubbing!" said Levison fiercely.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't want to do that," he said quietly. "I came here for my foils, and then I heard you. What's the matter?"

"None of your business."

"Well, no, that's so," agreed Tom Merry. "But I'm sorry if there's anything wrong."

"Liar!" said Levison bitterly. "You'd be jolly glad to see me kicked out of the school—you know you would!"

"I don't know that I should be sorry," said Tom. "After what you did to Lowther—"

"I did nothing to him!"

Tom was silent.

"It's the same with all of you. You're all down on me. You all think now that I wanted to steal Hammond's beastly money. I swear I never touched his watch and chain—I never thought about his key. I wasn't out of bed last night. If Blake heard somebody moving about the dorm it was somebody else. But nobody will believe me."

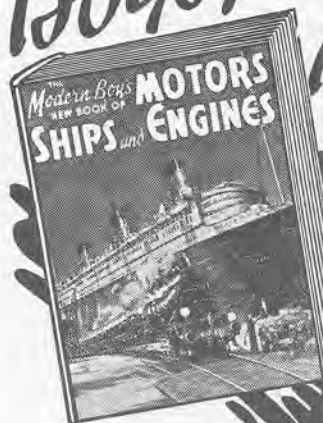
Tom Merry looked at him curiously. Levison was so false that it was difficult to believe anything he said. But there was a ring of passionate sincerity in his voice now, or so it seemed to Tom Merry.

"I'm sent to Coventry," went on Levison bitterly; "even my own pals won't speak to me. And I've done nothing!"

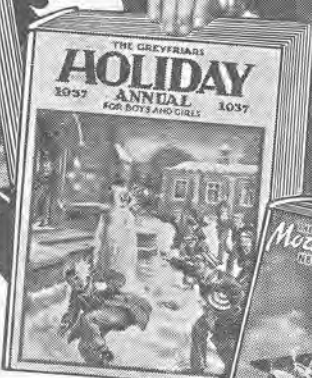
"It's jolly hard to believe that," said

(Continued on page 14.)

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Tom slowly. "You see, Levison, we all know you don't tell the truth."

"I'm telling the truth now."

"I'd like to believe you. I know this is pretty hard on you if you're speaking the truth for once, but—"

"What should I want to hurt Lowther for? I've got nothing against him. And do you think I'd try to steal Hammond's money?"

"Somebody tried to."

"Somebody—and, of course, that somebody was me!" said Levison, with bitter emphasis. "Give a dog a bad name and hang him! Is that what you call fair play?"

Tom Merry hesitated. In spite of his dislike and contempt for the outsider of the Fourth, Levison's words made a deep impression upon him.

"But if it wasn't you, who was it?" he asked doubtfully.

Levison made an angry gesture.

"How should I know? You think I've taken that robe from the museum to play ghost again. It's no good my saying I didn't. Do you think I should be fool enough to do it, after what's happened? Somebody else has taken it. But you put it down to me, of course."

"But who the dickens is that somebody else, then?" said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"I don't know. But why can't you wait for proof before you're down on a chap? I suppose every fellow is entitled to justice, isn't he? If there's a rotten thing done you all jump to the conclusion that I did it."

"That's your own fault. But—but—Blessed if I don't think you are telling the truth now," said Tom Merry honestly. "Only you're so jolly deep—there's no telling. But look here, Levison, I'll look into this. If somebody else is planning to play ghost we may be able to catch him at it, and clear you. And about Hammond's key. I'm afraid that can't be cleared up."

"Why not?" said Levison. "If somebody has been trying to get at that Cockney cad's money, he may try again."

"Well, that's possible," Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully. "But it's looked up in my pocket now, and I've got the key in my pocket."

"You'll be suspecting me of trying to pick your pockets soon," said Levison bitterly. "I've got an idea of what's happening, but of course, you wouldn't believe a word of it if I told you."

"Tell me, all the same."

"Hammond says his desk was tampered with the night before last. That was the night Lowther ran into somebody in the dark and was knocked down. Hammond't he have run into the chap who'd been at Hammond's desk, perhaps just coming back to his dorm."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, but there's nothing to prove that that chap wasn't you, Levison!"

"Then the next day," went on Levison, unheeding, "the whole House knew that I'd been playing ghost in the old monk's robe. The robe was taken from the museum again. Can you guess why?"

"Dressed if I can."

"I've thought it all out. The chap who was near Hammond's money intended to have another try, but in case he was spotted he meant to put on the robe and mask that I had used; then, if he was seen, he would be taken for me, as all you fellows have made up your minds about me."

"By Jove, that's possible, of course!"

"If anybody really came into the

Fourth Form dorm last night, I believe it was the chap, very likely, got up as a ghost in case he was seen. He got Hammond's watch and chain, for the sake of the key. Then he found that Hammond's money wasn't in the desk at all, and he left the watch and chain on the study table. They weren't any use to him, as it wouldn't be safe to sell them. It was the money he wanted. And it must be some chap who's desperately hard up; and if that's the case, he will have another try. It will be easy enough for him to find out that you are keeping the money for Hammond, if he doesn't know it already."

Tom Merry whistled.

"You mean that he'll have a try at getting my desk key next?" he asked.

"That's what I think, and if he's got up as the ghost of the monk, you'll think it is I, if you spot him at all," said Levison bitterly.

"If you'd run straight, fellows wouldn't suspect you more than anybody else," said Tom Merry. "But there's certainly something in what you say. If the money should be taken, and the chap got up as a ghost should be unspotted, I'm afraid you will get it in the neck."

"Without having anything to do with it," said Levison.

"Ah! Perhaps!"

"Oh, you don't believe me, of course! Well, I'll tell you that I'm going to do," said Levison sagely. "I'm going to stay awake to-night, and look for that chap who's going to play ghost and try for Hammond's money. And if I come on him, I'll put such a mark on him, that he'll be known afterwards."

"You'd better keep in bed," said Tom Merry dryly. "That's the easiest way to keep out of trouble, considering how the fellows suspect you already. You can leave it to us to hunt for the ghost."

"And you'll sleep like logs, and the money will be stolen, and it will be marked down to me," said Levison. "I'm going to keep watch to-night. My belief is that somebody will come to the Shell dorm to get your key. That chap, whoever he is, is a bungler at picking locks. He tried on Hammond's and failed. He will want the key, and he will have to come to your dorm for it. It's a chance of catching him."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"I'll arrange for us to keep watch to-night in turns," he said. "You can leave it in our hands, Levison."

"I can't trust it to you. If the money's taken, I know I shall be sacked from the school on suspicion. I'm going to keep watch myself."

And Levison left the box-room before Tom Merry could reply.

The Shell fellow picked up his bells and switched on the light, and returned in a thoughtful mood to his study.

"Where on earth have you been?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry explained.

Lowther whistled, and Manners shook his head dogmatically.

"All rot," he said. "That talk about



Many juniors and seniors crowded behind Mr. Railton, as he was in darkness, but the electric light from the passage disclosed the gleaming from the face! The

keeping watch is an excuse for being out of bed, in case he's found out. If anybody comes to the Shell dorm for that key it will be Levison."

"Well, if anybody comes, we're going to catch him," said Tom Merry. "You fellows won't mind taking turns at keeping watch? I'll ask Kangy and Clifton Dane, too."

"Right-ho! We can do that, but if we catch anybody, I'll bet you a Sunday topper to a white mouse that it turns out to be Levison."

"Well, we shall see what we shall see," said Tom Merry oracularly.

And, as that was certainly true, Manners did not contest the statement.

CHAPTER 12.

An Empty Capture!

KANGAROO and Clifton Dane willingly agreed to take turns at keeping awake that night, when Tom Merry consulted them on the matter.

Both of them shared Manners' opinion that if anybody was caught it would turn out to be Levison; but they agreed that it was only fair to give the cad of the Fourth a chance. If he was innocent, the present state of affairs was certainly very hard upon him.

"You see, my innocent Tommy, he's been pulling your simple old leg," Kangaroo remarked. "All that yarn is simply in case he's found out. We all know Levison."

"He's a giddy Ananias, and he never



He unlocked the study door and threw it open. The room disclosed a figure in a monk's robe, a phosphorescent light and a "ghost" was run down at last!

tells the truth except by accident," Clifton Dane observed.

"But it may be one of the accidents this time," suggested Tom Merry, laughing. "Somehow or other, he impressed me that he was straight this time."

"That was because you are a simple old bird. He was pulling your leg."

"Well, we shall see."

"It may even be only one of his rotten tricks to keep us awake all night, while he's mooring in the Fourth Form down," said Kangaroo, with a sniff. "He will have the laugh of us to-morrow, if that happened."

"Let him! Anyway, the monk's clobber wasn't taken out of the museum for nothing. Somebody means to play ghost," said Tom Merry. "Whoever it is, we're going to catch him and put an end to his silly tricks."

And the Shell fellows went to bed that night with their plans arranged.

Monty Lowther stayed awake from half-past five till ten, and then he called Manners, who sat up in bed and nonchalantly kept his eyes open till eleven o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower.

At eleven o'clock Manners called Kangaroo, and Noble yawned and sat up.

"Seen any ghosts?" he inquired.

"Not yet; it's your turn to keep awake."

"Oh, all right!"

Manners dozed off, and Kangaroo propped himself up with pillows and bolster, and blinked into the darkness of

the dormitory till half-past eleven, but nothing happened to reward the vigilance of the Cornstalk. When the half-hour chimed out, Kangaroo tossed a boot upon Clifton Dane's bed, and the Canadian junior awoke with a start.

"Groogh! What's that?" "My boot," said Kangaroo laconically.

"You silly ass!"

"Time to keep watch."

"Ow!" Clifton Dane sat up and rubbed his eyes. "All right! Warmer time?"

"Half-past eleven. Call Tom Merry at twelve."

"Groogh! Right-ho! Groogh!"

The Canadian junior remained awake till midnight boomed out. The School House was silent. Outside the dormitory windows the old trees creaked in the wind, and the snow was softly falling.

Clifton Dane stepped out of bed and shook Tom Merry by the shoulder.

Tom's eyes opened at once.

"Twelve," said Dane.

"Your turn."

"Right-ho!"

The Canadian junior rolled into bed again, and was asleep in two minutes. Tom Merry sat up shivering in the cold. It was a bitter winter night. He drew the bedclothes round his shoulders and rubbed his eyes. From up and down the dormitory came the sound of deep and steady breathing. Tom Merry was the only fellow awake in the long, lofty room.

His turn to keep watch was till half-past twelve, when he was to call Lowther to take his second turn.

With a manifold effort he kept his heavy eyes open.

There was a faint glimmer of starlight in the high windows of the dormitory, just sufficient to enable Tom Merry to make out the dim form of beds ranged in a row.

His eyes were turned in the direction of the door. He could not see the door in the gloom, but if it should be opened he would hear the faintest sound in the stillness.

It came back into his mind, as he sat there watchful, how Levison had come to the dormitory a couple of nights ago in the guise of the ghostly monk of St. Jim's. The remembrance of that fearless sight sent a shiver through him.

Suddenly there was a faint creak in the stillness, and a keener draught of cold air chilled his face. His heart beat hard. He knew that the dormitory door had opened.

The watch had not been kept in vain.

Tom Merry sat quite still, huddled in the bedclothes, scarcely breathing. In the silence there was a faint rustling sound.

Dimly a figure draped in an ample robe loomed up in the gloom.

There was no trace of a phosphorescent light on the figure, as on the occasion when Levison had played ghost.

It was black, shadowy, hardly visible in the darkness, and eerie and weird in the silence and stealthiness of its movements.

Convinced as he was that it was some rascal playing ghost, Tom Merry could not help a cold thrill passing through him.

The figure was advancing slowly towards his bed, and there was no sound save the slight rustle made by the old monkish robe.

It stopped beside the bed, and Tom Merry sought to see the face; but the face was covered. For a moment he caught a glimpse of two eyes, and that was all. There was a sudden start from the figure as if the unknown had suddenly perceived that the Shell fellow was sitting up in bed, and therefore realized that watch was being kept.

The figure sprang away just as Tom Merry grasped at it.

The Shell fellow leaped from the bed. "Wake up!" he shouted.

He plunged through the darkness towards the dark figure. It had vanished in the gloom, but Tom Merry rushed in the direction of the door. He knew that the ghostly visitor would make it that direction.

In the darkness his hands came in contact with the figure, and he grasped at the heavy robe and clutched it tight.

"Come on, you fellows!" he shouted.

"I've got him!"

"Hold him!"

"I'll get a light!"

"Stick to him!"

Half the Shell were awake, and tumbling in frantic haste out of bed.

Tom Merry had both hands on the monkish robe, grasping it fast. But suddenly the dragging at the robe ceased, and he felt it hang heavily on his hands. He realised in an instant what had happened. The figure had slipped out of the robe, leaving it in his clutches, and fled without it.

There was a quick sound as the door shut.

The ghostly visitor was gone, leaving his garb in the hands of the captain of the Shell.

An electric torch flashed out, lighting up the darkness of the dormitory. Monty Lowther held it up.

It revealed Tom Merry, panting and furious, with the rustling robe in his hands, but the unknown rascal who had worn it had got away.

"He's gone!" said Tom Merry. "He slipped out of this! But he can't have gone far! Follow me! After the cad!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry tore open the door, and ran out into the passage. He heard a sound in the darkness ahead, and dashed on furiously. He did not intend to let the rascal escape if he could help it.

Close by the door of the Fourth Form dormitory, some distance down the passage, he collided with a form in the darkness and gasped at once.

"Come on!" he shouted. "I've got him!"

Kangaroo rushed up with the torch, the show of the Shell fellows at his heels. "Rest a light here! Let's see who it is!"

The light gleamed on the face of the fellow who was struggling in the powerful grasp of Tom Merry.

Then there was a general shout:

"Levison!"

CHAPTER 13.

Only Levison!

LEVISON blinked with scared eyes, in the light.

"He's passed me!" he said. "I—I thought I'd got him when I got hold of you, Tom Merry!"

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"What!"

"I tell you he passed me! Come on, and we may get him yet!"

Tom Merry looked at him sternly.

"Who passed you?" he demanded.

"I don't know—somebody in the dark, running from your dorm."

"It's pretty plain now," said Tom Merry. "I was close after him, and I followed you here, Levison. You may as well own up!"



Tommy: "Mummy, what happens to a motor-car when it is too old to run?"

Mother: "Someone sells it to your father!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Bradley, 106, Summerhill Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

"Yes, you!"

Levison gave a cry:

"Oh, you fool—you fool! I tell you he's clearing off while you're wasting time. I haven't been in your dorm."

"Rats!"

"Klar!"

"Give him a chance!" said Kangaroo.

"If there's another fellow out of bed, we can find him. Which way did you say he went, Levison?"

"Down the stairs!" panted Levison.

"I've been keeping watch in the passage ever since eleven o'clock. Somebody passed me in the dark, going towards your dorm. I was leaning on the wall, dozing a bit, I think. But I heard him, and I waited here for him to come back, but he rushed past and shoved me out of the way. Then Tom Merry collared me, and I thought it was the rotter himself turning back!"

"Too thin!" said Manners. "Still, we may as well look on the stairs—give the rotter every chance!"

"Good egg!"

The Shell fellows crowded down the stairs, Levison going with them. They searched the stairs and the passages, but they searched in vain. There was no sign of anyone to be seen.

"Nobody's out of his dorm," said Kangaroo, "and the sooner we get back the better, before we're spotted ourselves!"

"He's hiding somewhere!" said Levison.

"We'll go right through with it," said Tom Merry quietly. "We'll visit every one of the junior dormitories, the same as Linton did on Monday night, and see whether there's anybody out of bed."

"You'll find somebody out," said Levison. "He can't have got upstairs again without our spotting him."

"We shall see!"

As quietly as they could—for they did not want to bring a master or a prefect on the scene—the Shell fellows made the round of visits.

In the Fourth Form dormitory only Levison's bed was found vacant. Blake & Co. turned out promptly to join them as soon as they heard what was on.

In the Third Form dorm, Wally D'Arcy was awakened and questioned, and he sleepily told the searchers to go and eat coke. All the Third were in their beds. The same was the case with the Second Form.

Levison's face was pale and troubled when the juniors gathered in the passage again.

"Well, what have you got to say now?" asked Tom Merry grimly.

Levison stammered:

"I—I don't know! I know that I was keeping watch, and that somebody passed me in the dark and ran downstairs!"

"Then who was it? Nobody could get upstairs again without our spotting him, and all the fellows are in their places."

"It's gammon, of course!" said Hammond.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I'm telling you the truth!" said Levison wildly. "I swear it! And

there's only one possible way out of it. It must be that—that—"

"Well, what?"

"It wasn't a junior at all," said Levison. "It must be a senior."

"There was a scolding laugh in response.

"Yes; I fancy I can see Kildare playing 'ghost'!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Or old Darrell or Langton!"

"You said—"

"Or Cutts," said Manners. "Draw it mild, Levison! We all know jolly well that it wasn't a senior!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's all rot," he said. "A fellow in the Fifth or the Sixth wouldn't be silly as enough to play ghost like a fag!"

"It must have been!" persisted Levison. "Besides, he wasn't simply playing ghost. He came to your dorm to get the desk key. You imbecile, didn't I warn you to keep watch to-night? And do you think that I'd have done that if I meant to come to your dorm?"

"Something in that, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, only some more trickery, as usual!" said Lowther.

Levison panted.

"It was a Fifth Form or a Sixth Form chap—it must have been!" he exclaimed. "You ought to make sure!"

"Shall we rout out the Sixth and ask them?" asked Blake sarcastically.

"I can imagine the kind of reception we should get."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's more likely a Fifth Form chap!" said Levison. "The Fifth Form dorm is on the next floor below. He ran downstairs, and landed there. And that would account for Lowther meeting him on the landing on Monday night, instead of up here. He was going back to his own dorm."

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, we can't go to the Fifth Form dormitory investigating," said Tom Merry. "They'd only chuck us out, and report us to the Housemaster to-morrow for being out of bed. And it's not worth while. It was Levison all the time, and he's only trying to make fools of us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison gritted his teeth. Again he was suffering the fate of the habitual liar; nothing that he said would be believed without corroborative evidence, and there was no corroborative evidence to support him now.

"You're fastening it on me, and letting the real chap get away!" he said bitterly.

"Wats!"

"Rot!"

"You're the real chap!"

"Chuck it!"

"Let's get back to bed," said Lowther. "It's jolly cold here. We're found Levison out for certain this time, and I vote that to-morrow we give him the ragging of his life for playing this rotten trick again, and lying afterwards."

"Hear, hear!"

There was no dissenting voices to that suggestion. The Shell fellows went back to their dormitories. Levison lingered in the passage as Blake & Co. went towards the door of the Fourth Form dormitory.

Blake turned his head.

"Aren't you going to bed?" he demanded.

"No!" said Levison savagely. "I'm going to find that chap, whoever he was, and prove to all you fools that you're making a bungle of it."

"You're going to play some more rotten tricks, you mean!" said Herries, with a sniff. "I say, you chaps, shove him in bed, and tie him there if he won't stay quiet. I'm fed up with the trouble he's giving us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison backed away.

"Hands off!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"I tell you—"

"Rats!" said Jack Blake. "You're going back to bed. We're all fed up, fed right up to the chin! Come in!"

"I won't!"

"Then we'll jolly well make you!"

The juniors made a rush at Levison. The cad of the Fourth turned and fled along the passage at top speed, and vanished round the first corner.

Blake halted with an exclamation of anger.

"Wun him down, deah boys!"

exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hold on!" said Blake. "We can't run him down in the dark. Let the beast stay out if he wants to. We'll make him sit up for this to-morrow. I'm going back to bed."

And Blake went. And the other fellows decided that, upon the whole, they couldn't do better than follow his example. And they did!

CHAPTER 14.

A Chase in the Dark!

"BAI Jove, what's that?"

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed as he uttered the exclamation.

The dormitory door had opened, and heavy footsteps came into the room. There was a sound of someone sinking upon a bed, and a faint groan.

"Is that you, Levison?"

Another groan.

"Groat Sweet!"

D'Arcy jumped out of bed, and lighted a candle.

Levison lay upon the bed, groaning. There was a red smear across his forehead, and a bruise growing blue.

Arthur Augustus ran towards him.

"You ass! Have you fallen downstairs?"

(Continued on page 18.)

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal.
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, chums! Here we are once again! Four weeks have elapsed since I was last in the chair on this page. As a matter of fact, the last three numbers have been so crowded that my chat was squeezed right out. I could not get a word in edgewise! I should like to have said quite a lot about our last issues, especially the Christmas ones, for I am sure all readers will agree that they contained great yarns. Personally, I enjoyed every word of them, and readers who have written to me have said the same.

But before I go on further I should like to express the sincere wishes of the GEM staff and the authors and artists who contribute to the old paper. As this is our Christmas week number, we take this opportunity of

WISHING "GEM" READERS ALL OVER THE WORLD A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

That's a wish that cannot be beaten, and neither can the number in which it appears. When a reader wrote to me the other day, he said he hoped that the GEM would contain a thrilling ghost story at Christmas. Well, you have it in your hands now—one of the best ghost stories Martin Clifford has ever written.

During the weeks that my "Chat" had perforce to be omitted, I have been, nevertheless, in touch with many readers. My mail is larger than ever, and I have sent out scores of replies to letters.

By the way, I have had several inquiries from readers wanting to know why their "Pen Pal" notices have not yet appeared. As I have said before, there is a long waiting-list. Normally, no notice could be published in the GEM before the lapse of four weeks, since the paper goes to press a month in advance. But, owing to the extent of the waiting-list, readers must wait a bit longer than that. I'm publishing the "Pen Pal" notices as rapidly as possible, and I ask readers to be patient. All notices will appear in due course.

READERS SINCE FIRST NUMBER.

In a recent issue I said that I should like to hear from readers who read the first number of GEM. Well, since then I have heard from several readers. Roy Wedgewood, of Middlesbrough, tells me his mother read No. 1 of the GEM when it was published in March, 1907—and is still a reader to-day. That's a fine record! Your mother is right, Roy. The GEM originally appeared on a Thursday, but the publishing day was changed to Wednesday on September 21st, 1912.

T. W. Court, of Bristol, has read the GEM—with the exception of the four War years—from the first issue. In addition, he has taken the "Magnet," too, since its inception. But a remarkable thing about his long association with these two companion papers is the fact that he has bought them at the same shop over all those years.

I would like to publish fully Mr. Court's letter, but I am afraid I haven't the space. However, I will quote some of it. He writes: "From the first number you set yourself a very high standard, and that has always been maintained. No parent could object to his child reading either the GEM or the 'Magnet.' They are the most wholesome of any books published. In these days of gangsters, crooks, 'G' men, and other sensational characters, it is a welcome relief to turn to the healthy British adventures of the chums of St. Jim's and Greyfriars."

Congratulations, Reader Court, and thank you for your interesting letter. In reply to your query, the GEM was published nearly a year before the "Magnet." When the latter appeared in February, 1908, the GEM started again at No. 1. The first two issues of the GEM, old series, did not contain stories of the chums of St. Jim's.

Another reader whom I have to congratulate on taking both the companion papers since they first started is Miss—or should it be Mrs.—H. O'Neill, of Newcastle. She also read the few St. Jim's stories which appeared in "Pluck" in November, 1906, before the GEM was born. Many thanks for your letter, Reader O'Neill, and your good wishes.

I have had several letters from other readers who have taken the GEM for over twenty years, and I wish to thank them also for writing. My space is running short, and, as is my custom, I should like to say a few words about next Wednesday's stories.

"THE FUNK OF THE FOURTH!"

is the title of the St. Jim's yarn, and it deals with the coming of a new boy, Cecil Cavendish. You will gather from the title that he is soon in bad odour with his new schoolfellows. Not only is he a funk, but he is a snob, and there is not a junior in the school whom he can call a friend. For a new boy who is expected, by reason of his aristocratic connections, to be sought after and a popular idol, such an unhappy position

is a bad setback. How to live down his bad start is a problem to Cavendish, until Ernest Levison puts a scheme into his head—a scheme by which the new boy completely changes the attitude of Tom Merry & Co. towards him. But to Cavendish's other delinquencies is added that of being a cheat!

I can assure all readers that they will hate to put down this story, once they have started reading it.

"A CHALLENGE TO GREYFRIARS!"

Our old favourites of Greyfriars are still going strong, and their early adventures are more popular than ever. In next week's story, Harry Wharton & Co. have some foreign visitors—French schoolboys who are in England for a holiday. Through Adolphe Meunier, the French boy of the Renoué, they challenge Greyfriars to a cricket match. Needless to say, there is a good deal of fun and excitement with the boys from La Belle France, and I shall leave Frank Richards to tell you about it next Wednesday.

Chin, chin, chums! All the best for Christmas!

P.S.—Just let me remind you that the "Magnet" contains a great yarn of the chums of Greyfriars, who are spending Christmas on a cruise. Don't miss reading "The Man From the Sea!"—in the "Magnet," on sale Thursday.

PEN PALS.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Brighton: age 14-16; films, sports, swimming, horse-music.

A. E. Harris, 95, Nottingham Road, Leyton, Essex: age 14-17; overseas.

George Chilton, 193, Warstone Lane, Birmingham, 18; pen pals.

Miss K. Toombs, 76, Russell Rd., Wimbledon, London, S.W.19; girl correspondents; age 19 up; Hollywood and Rhodesia.

J. Stunt, 42, Buckingham Rd., Edgware, Middlesex; pen pals in U.S.A. and South Africa.

Desmond McCook, "Bernagh," Antrim Road, Whitehead, Belfast, Ireland: age 13-16; boxing.

Michael Hinton, 74, Granville Rd., Sevenoaks, Kent; age 12-15; world affairs, story writing.

Ken Harper, 370, Stratford Road, Shirley, near Birmingham; members for the Inland and Abroad Society.

M. Hinton, 74, Granville Rd., Sevenoaks, Kent; age 13-17; overseas; commerce, arbitration.

John Downing, 10, Haves Lane, West Wickham, Kent; age 12-15; overseas; stamps.

Chris Wardle, 32, Huntly Rd., Woodton, Peterborough, Northants; age 14-16; stamps, sports.

Zane Meekler, 77, Bowery, New York City, U.S.A.; age 17-18; journalism, stamps; Africa, the East.

(More notices on page 23.)

THE EDITOR.
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PEN PALS COUPON
29-12-36

Levison did not reply. He lay on his bed, and pressed his hand to his forehead. The Fourth Formers, disturbed for the second time that night, gathered round him, looking at him in wonder. "What's happened, Levison?" asked Blake. "Have you had a tumble?" "No," groaned Levison. "Then what is it?" "He hit me with a stick!" "He! Who?"

"The same chap who hit Lowtler, I suppose," groaned Levison. "Oh, it hurts! All the fault of you fellows. If you'd stood by me—"

"Do you mean to say you've been knocked down as Lowtler was the other night?" asked Blake incredulously.

"Look at my forehead."

"He has had a fearful blow, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"Looks like it; but—"

"Tell us what happened," said Blake quietly.

Levison panted.

"I've been in Tom Merry's study—"

"Tom Merry's study!" exclaimed Blake. "What on earth have you been there for?"

"Can't you understand? I tell you there is somebody who is after Hammond's money, and he went to the Shell dorm to steal Tom Merry's key. I knew it, and you ought to have known it," said Levison savagely. "I thought that as he couldn't get the key he might try to break in the desk, so I waited in Tom Merry's study to catch him if he came."

"And did he come?"

"Somebody came in the dark, and just as I was striking a match he spotted me, and knocked me down and ran."

"Did you see who it was?"

He had the cardboard mask on his face, the one that I made when I played ghost," groaned Levison. "I couldn't see his face."

The juniors exchanged startled glances.

They would not have believed a word of Levison's strange tale but for the hideous bruise and cut on his forehead.

But was it possible that he had inflicted that injury himself in order to give colour to his story?

The endless duplicity of his nature, his love for tortuous scheming, made it only too possible.

"Don't you believe me!" shrieked Levison.

Blake shook his head.

"I can't—quite."

"How do you think I got this bruise then? Do you think I did it myself?"

"I shouldn't wonder!"

"Oh!"

Words failed Levison.

He threw off his clothes and rolled into bed, and lay silent, refusing to speak another word.

Some of the juniors questioned him further; but he would not open his lips, only an occasional groan of pain escaping him.

"I say, this 'ere looks as if it ain't gammon!" said Hammond at last.

"E's really 'urt, you know."

"It looks wathah a bad knock."

"I think I'll go and 'ave a look in Tom Merry's study," said Hammond.

"If any bloke is after the spontotics, we may find him there."

"I don't believe it."

"No 'arm in lookin'!"

"I'll come with you, dear boy," said D'Arcy.

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"Waste of time," said Blake. "Go, if you like. I'm going to bed."

Arthur Augustus and Hammond left the dormitory and descended the stairs to the Shell passage.

Tom Merry's study was dark and silent.

Hammond switched on the electric light.

The study presented its usual aspect. The desk was locked, and showed no sign of having been tampered with.

The two juniors exchanged doubtful glances.

"Must have been lying, as usual!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"I s'pose so. But that whack on the 'ead—"

"Levison is awfully deep," said D'Arcy. "I shouldn't wonder if he did it himself. It doesn't look as if anybody had been here."

"No, it don't, fur a fact."

Hammond turned out the light again, and they quitted the study.

Silently, in their socks, they crept back towards the Fourth Form dormitory.

Hammond suddenly stopped and caught D'Arcy by the arm.

"Listen!" he muttered.

In the blackness ahead of them, on the stairs, they heard a sound.

D'Arcy uttered an involuntary ejaculation.

"Bai Jove! There's somebody up!"

"Hush!"

A sound of a retreating footstep, and then silence. Hammond ran forward in the darkness and stumbled on the stairs. He picked himself up and ran on.

There was a sound ahead of him, in the passage where opened the door of the Fifth Form dormitory.

"Come on, D'Arcy!"

"I'm after you, dear boy!"

Hammond ran on, and turned on the switch of the electric light in the passage. In a twinkling the long passage was flooded with light.

The two juniors glanced round them quickly.

There was no one in sight.

Near them was the door of the Fifth Form dormitory, but there was no one but themselves in the passage. Hammond pointed to the door.

"I 'eard 'im runnin'!" he muttered.

"E dodged in there!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Whoever he is, he's dodged into the Fifth Form dorm," said Hammond.

"Let's go in."

"They'll make a wow if we do."

"I don't care!"

"Oh, all right!"

Hammond opened the door and looked in. The dormitory was dark and still. Hammond found the switch of the electric light and turned it on. The dormitory was lighted up, and several of the Fifth Formers awoke.

Cutts sat up in bed and blinked at the intruders.

"You fags—what do you want here?" he exclaimed, in anger and amazement.

"We're looking for somebody wot's dodged in 'ere," said Hammond. "It might be a burglar, for all we know!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" growled Cutts.

"We was arter him, and 'e ran down this 'ere passage, and 'e didn't 'ave time to get to the end afore I turned on the light," said Hammond.

"Get out of this dorm!" said Cutts.

"I'll report this to the Housemaster to-morrow!"

"But I tell you—"

"Get out, or I'll come and chuck you out!"

"Weally, Cutts—"

Gerald Cutts put one leg out of bed.

The two juniors withdrew from the dormitory and closed the door.

"Nothin' doin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "Let's get back!"

They returned to their own quarters. They found most of the Fourth Formers still awake. There was a groan from Levison's bed.

"Well, found anything out?" asked Blake, with a yawn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There were exclamations of interest at once.

"Well, what was it?"

"Get it off your chest!"

"What's happened?"

Hammond explained. Levison sat up in bed to listen. His eyes were gleaming, under the hand that he held pressed to his forehead.

"Now do you believe me?" he said savagely. "You all know that I've been in bed here while Hammond was chasing this chap into the Fifth Form dorm!"

Blake whistled.

"Looks like it," he agreed.

"Cutts wouldn't let us look for him in the dorm," said Hammond. "Looks to me as if it's one of the Fifth!"

"Just as I said!" exclaimed Levison.

"Yaas. And Cutts was verry watty," said D'Arcy sagely. "I wonder if it was Cutts? He is an awful wottah, you know!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Digby.

"Cutts wouldn't steal. He's not quite rotten enough for that. But it certainly looks as if somebody was after the cash. And if it wasn't Levison—"

"Do you think I can be in two places at once?" sneered Levison.

"It wasn't Levison I chased along the passage," said Hammond. "It was somebody wot dodged into the Fifth Form dorm."

"Then he must still be there," said Herries excitedly.

"I s'pose so."

"Let's go and have him out."

"Rats!" said Blake. "We don't want a Form fight with the Fifth. If he's dodged into that dorm, it's because he's one of the Fifth, and we couldn't tell which one it was."

"Yaas; that's quite true."

"I'm blessed if I quite know what to make of it," said Hammond. "But I'm beginning to think that there's something in what Levison says. Somebody arter my money that I've got locked up in Tom Merry's desk. And as he can't get 'old of the key, he was goin' to try to do without it."

"Then he may try again," said Blake.

"Hardly likely, after nearly being caught," said Herries. "Not much good keeping any more watch to-night."

"Wathah not!"

"I don't know," said Hammond slowly. "He might leave it another couple of hours till all is quiet again. There's plenty of time before rising-bell, and he won't expect us to be on the watch all night. And if he's desperately hard up for money, he may not be able to leave it till another time."

"Sides that, I shall 'ave the money put in a safer place to-morrow."

"Then you think—"

"I think that I've got an idea, since I know the bloke dodged into the Fifth Form dorm," said Hammond quietly. "You fellows go back to bed. I'm goin' down."

He was dressing himself rapidly as he spoke.

"I'm comin' with you, then, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Just as you like, D'Arcy."

"I'm going to bed," yawned Blake.

The candle was blown out, and the

juniors turned in; but Hammond and his aristocratic chum, fully dressed, and in rubber shoes, quitted the dormitory.

CHAPTER 15.

Trapped!

HAMMOND listened intently in the passage. All was silent.

The marauder—if marauder there had been—had evidently gone back to bed, giving up his design for that night, or perhaps waiting for another opportunity before the late winter dawn.

Arthur Augustus' teeth chattered a little. It was very cold in the dormitory passage.

"I say, deah boy, what's the wheeze?" he asked, a little repenting of his determination. "Have you weally got an ideah, you know?"

"Yes, D'Arcy."

"Then get it off your chest, deah boy, and I'll give you my opinion on it," said Arthur Augustus. "It's wathah parky here, and weally I would much wathah be in bed, if there is nothin' doin'."

Hammond spoke in a low, cautious voice.

"I'll tell you now," he said. "Arter we get downstairs we ain't to speak again, in case the bloke spots us."

"Wight you are!"

"Whoever it was I was arter dodged into the Fifth," whispered Hammond. "That looks as if it was a Fifth Form chap."

"Yaas; that's wight!"

"You remember last night, when we were takin' a trot round the quad, we heard Prye of the Fifth talkin' over the wall to somebody?"

"Yaas; somebody he called Marks."

"Marks was dunning 'im for money," said Hammond.

"Yaas, I pwesume so, from what they were sayin'. But weally that is no hisney of ours, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus somewhat severely. "Pwey has a wight to be dunned for money if he dosiahs."

Hammond chuckled.

"I fancy he doesn't desire it," he said. "Cutts and Prye wanted to get me into a sweepstake, you remember. They're 'ard 'it over their gamblin', and 'ard up. Marks, whoever he is, was dunnin' Prye. Now we fud a chap from the Fifth monkeyin' arter my money. Looks to me as if we might put our finger on the spot now."

"Bai Jove!"

"It's some rotter wot's been gamblin' and got into debt that's arter my quids. I'll lay you it's either Cutts or Prye—or both," said Hammond, "and that's wot we're goin' to find out. Levison is a rotter; but if he's innocent this time, he ought to be cleared."

"I quite agree to that."

"Then we're going to see. My idea is that the bloke is so desperately 'ard up that he mayn't dare to put it off to a safer time. 'Sides that, he knows I may put the money somewhere else safer. 'E'll be at it agin to-night. There's four or five hours to daylight yet. P'raps about an hour afore dawn he'll be down in Tom Merry's study agin."

"Bai Jove!"

"And if the cash is taken, he knows the chances are it'll be put down to Levison, in the cires."

"What an awful wotiah!"

"Well, Levison brought it on 'imself, first by playin' ghost, and then by bein' such an awful liar," said Hammond.

"But wot we want to git at is the truth. We're goin' to catch the bloke if he comes monkeyin' around agin to-night."

"But weally, deah boy, he seems to be a wathah despewate chawwactah," said the swell of St. Jim's uneasily. "I weally don't care about waitin' in the study in the dark, and gettin' a feahful cwack on the head like poor old Lowthah."

"We're not goin' to wait in the study."

"Where then, deah boy?"

"In the next study—Gore's. We can keep the door an inch or two open and listen. We shall hear him if he comes. And if he goes into Tom Merry's study—"

"Good! Then we can waise the alarm—"

"No fear! He's a slippery customer, and he'd belt again and give us the slip. I'm goin' to put Tom Merry's key on the outside of the door. If we hear him go into the study, we'll turn the key on him!"

"Bai Jove! What a wipping ideah!"

"And then he'll be fair caught!"

grinned Hammond.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

Come on, deah boy!"

"Not a sound!" whispered Hammond.

"Wight-ho!"

The two juniors crept down the stairs silently in their rubber shoes. The School House was very still.

They reached the Shell passage, and Hammond quickly transferred the key of Tom Merry's study door to the outside of the lock.

Then they crept into Gore's study, which was next to Tom Merry's.

Hammond placed the door about an inch ajar, and stationed himself close to it to watch and listen.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy blinked round the study, and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he discerned Gore's armchair, and promptly sat down in it.

"I shall keep watch bettah sittin' down," he murmured.

Hammond grinned in the darkness. "Right you are!" he said. "No 'arin you go off to sleep, D'Arcy. I'll wake you up if I 'ear anythin'!"

"Wats! I'm not goin' to sleep!"

"We mustn't speak 'ere."

"I was about to make the same remark, Hammond," said D'Arcy severely. "Weally, it is wathah incantrancy of you to talk so much. The slightest remark may put the wascal on his guard if he comes along the passage and hears us. I should recommend not sayin' a single word!"

"Yes, D'Arcy."

"A still tongue shows a wise head, Hammond," said D'Arcy sagely. "Speech is silvah, and silence is golden, you know!"

"Yes."

"Hadn't you bettah sit down, deah boy? You will get wathah tired standin' up."

"That's all right."

"Very well; only mind you don't talk."

Hammond grunted.

"It is impos to be too cautious in a case like this," continued D'Arcy. "One syllable may betway us."

Hammond made no remark.

"I shall not go to sleep," pursued Arthur Augustus, a little drowsily. "I feel wathah sleepy, but I shall make a point of it to keep wide awake. If you should nod off, Hammond, you can wely on me to keep wide awake."

Hammond began to wish that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would go to sleep. He



"Show a light here!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the Shell fellows rushed up. "Let's see who it is!" The light gleamed on the face of the fellow who was struggling in Tom Merry's grasp. There was a shout: "It's Levison!"

was greatly attached to his noble chum, but certainly Arthur Augustus was not exactly the most useful person in the world for keeping watch when silence was required.

"Wely on me," repeated Arthur Augustus, still more drowsily; "and wemembah, Hammond, deah boy, not a word—not a single syllable."

"Yes."

"Awfully quiet, isn't it? There doesn't seem to be a sound in the House, deah boy. If you should speak, the wotah would be certain to heah you. Nothin' like bein' thoroughly cautious."

Fortunately, D'Arcy nodded off to sleep at this point, or he would have continued impressing upon Hammond the necessity of silence until dawn.

Hammond drew a breath of relief as soon as the regular breathing of the junior in the armchair warned him that D'Arcy was safe in slumber.

He did not doze himself.

He would not sit down in case he should be tempted to nod off; but kept his post by the slightly open door, watchful, wakeful, with every sense on the alert.

Two o'clock boomed out from the clock tower.

Silence followed.

Arthur Augustus slept on as peacefully in George Gore's armchair as if he had been in his own bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

Hammond watched and waited.

Three o'clock.

Then another long period of watching.

In spite of himself, Hammond felt his eyes heavy with sleep, and his thoughts beginning to wander a little.

But in his early days he had been accustomed to long hours of work and

wakefulness, and he was more fitted for his task than the noble swell of the Fourth.

Half-past three.

Hammond began to wonder whether it was all for nothing. The temptation to snatch a few winks of sleep was strong. But he resisted it. And he had his reward.

All drowsiness vanished from his eyelids as he heard a soft and stealthy sound in the passage.

He braced up, his eyes gleaming, his heart thumping.

Someone was coming along the Shell passage, with slow, soft, and cautious footsteps.

It was the marauder at last—Levison or another!

Not Levison, certainly—for Levison knew that Hammond and D'Arcy were keeping watch. Not Levison—and, therefore, evidently another. It was to be Hammond, the Cockney schoolboy, who was to be the means of proving the innocence of the cad of the Fourth, who had persecuted him ever since he came to St. Jim's.

The stealthy footsteps passed Gore's study.

Hammond listened intently.

He heard Tom Merry's study door softly opened—he heard it softly shut again. The unknown was in Tom Merry's study.

Hammond drew a deep breath.

"Caught!" he muttered.

He pulled the door farther open and crept into the passage. From under the door of Tom Merry's study came a faint beam of light. Whoever was there needed a light for the work he had come to do, evidently—but he did not venture to switch on the electric light. That

pale and flickering light was shed by a candle. Hammond stood outside the door and listened. He heard low sounds of movement in the study—and suddenly an ominous creak.

He grimed a little. He knew what that meant. The rascal, having failed to obtain Tom Merry's key to the desk, had been driven to his only resource—forcing it open. The creak was the sound of the opening desk.

Crack again, and again.

"That's the money drawer!" murmured Hammond. "I don't 'ardly think 'e'll be able to deny wot he was arter now."

And his fingers closed on the key, and turned it in the lock with a sharp, sudden click.

CHAPTER 16.

The Thief Exposed!

CLICK!

In the stillness, the click of the turning key, faint as it was, had all the startling sharpness of a pistol shot.

It was followed by a sudden husky exclamation in the study, and the immediate extinction of the light there.

The next moment a hand tried the door from inside—the handle turned, but the locked door, of course, did not open.

Then there was another exclamation of rage and despair.

The rascal was trapped—and he knew it.

There was no hope for him. Locked in the study, he could not escape—and the broken desk would be a conclusive proof of what he had come there for.

Hammond stepped back from the door and calmly turned on the electric light in the passage. Then he ran into Gore's study and called D'Arcy.

"Gussy, wake up—"

"Bai Jove!" The swell of St. Jim's started up and rubbed his eyes. "Bai Jove, deah boy, I believe I nodded off for a moment."

"Yes, and a good many moments," said Hammond. "I've caught him!"

"Gwest Scott!"

"He's locked in Tom Merry's study. Buzz off and call the fellows. I'm goin' to watch 'ere till they come!"

"Wight-ho! What luck!"

Arthur Augustus, fully awakened now, rushed away.

Within Tom Merry's study, the handle was being frantically tried again. The imprisoned rascal was almost beside himself. Hammond heard next a sound of a chisel scratching on the lock inside. The rascal was trying to force it—but the door lock was strong and stout, and it was not likely to yield easily. And in less than two minutes, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was back—with a crowd of fellows at his heels.

He had shouted into the Fourth Form and Shell dormitories the news that the unknown rascal had been trapped; and Tom Merry & Co. had turned out in force to see the result. They did not care now if the House was awakened. If there had been an attempt to break open Tom Merry's desk and steal Hammond's money, it was a matter that the House-master would have to deal with.

The grinding sound of the chisel on the lock could be heard by all the juniors as they swarmed into the Shell passage.

"Faith, and he's there!" exclaimed Reilly. "And here's Levison, be jabbers!"

Levison was in the crowd of half-dressed juniors. His eyes were blazing

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with excitement—the bruise on his forehead showed up dark on his white face. "Yaas, wathah—it can't be Levison, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the end of the Fourth. "Levison, I am quite satisfied now that it isn't you!"

"Go hon!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"But who is it, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"One of the Fifth, I reckon," said Hammond. "But we'll soon see. He's a giddy prisoner now in that there study, and he can't get away."

"What is all this? What does this mean?" It was the deep voice of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

Mr. Railton, in his dressing-gown, strode upon the scene. The excited voices of the juniors had awakened him; as, indeed, they had awakened nearly everybody else in the House.

"What are you boys out of bed for?" the Housemaster asked sternly. "Levison—have you received an injury? What does all this mean?"

"We've caught the bloke, sir!" said Hammond.

"What?"

Hammond breathlessly explained.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Is it possible? But perhaps this boy, whoever he is, may have gone into Tom Merry's study for some innocent purpose. We shall see."

"He can't 'ave broken open Tom Merry's desk for an innocent purpose, I s'pose, sir," said Hammond, with a chuckle.

"No; that, of course, is impossible."

"I 'eard 'im break it open. And if he was doin' no 'arm there, 'e'd 'ave called out to be let out afore this, I reckon."

"We shall see!"

Mr. Railton strode to the study door and unlocked it. The juniors—many seniors among them now—crowded behind him as he threw the door open. The study was in darkness; but the electric light from the passage streamed in—and disclosed a figure there—a figure wrapped in a monk's robe, a phosphorescent light gleaming from its face. The figure sprang back with a low, inarticulate cry at the sight of the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton switched on the light at once. The wretched, detected rascal made a wild spring towards the door. He could never have got through the crowd outside—but he did not even reach them. Mr. Railton's strong hand closed on him and swung him back.

The Housemaster dragged the cardboard mask—the same that Levison had used when playing ghost—from the face of his prisoner.

Then his features were revealed. And from all who saw him there came a shout:

"Prye!"

"Prye of the Fifth!"

"Great Scott!"

"Yaas, wathah; it's Prye, the wascal!"

Prye's face was haggard. Mr. Railton's eyes searched the pallid face, the wild eyes, for a moment, and then turned to the smashed desk—the money-drawer open, the banknotes and silver scattered on the desk, where the thief had dropped them in his alarm and consternation at hearing the key click in the lock.

His eyes fell, too, upon a thick stick that lay upon the table, and it was not



"One more verse of 'Land of Hope and Glory' ought to do it!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Hemsley, 15, Pixton Villas, Forest Row, Sussex.

necessary to ask with what weapon, and by whose hand, Monty Lowther had received the injury that had been attributed to Levison.

"Prye!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

Prye gasped speechlessly.

"Have you anything to say?" demanded the Housemaster.

Prye struggled for words, but he had nothing to say. What could he say? He had been caught in the very act.

"Rascal!" said the Housemaster, in deep tones of indignation. "So it is you! This was your object—the theft of money! It was you who struck down Lowther. And, taking advantage of Levison's folly, you allowed your own base action to be attributed to him."

Prye did not speak; he could not. Only a groan of despair came from his lips.

Cuts of the Fifth was in the crowd in the passage, and his face had gone very white at the sight of his chum. He understood, and he backed away very quickly and disappeared. He did not want to catch Albert Prye's eye just then; he did not know what wild words the wretched Fifth Former might have uttered.

But Prye was not thinking of him—he was hardly thinking at all; his faculties were dazed and confused by his overwhelming ruin.

He had twice struck, cruelly and brutally, in the dark to save himself from recognition, and Monty Lowther and Levison bore the marks of his cowardly blows. But there was nothing that could save him now.

"Come!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

With a firm hand on Prye's shoulder, he led him from the study.

Prye went without a word.

The School House fellows returned to bed in a state of the wildest excitement, and there was little more sleep in the House that night.

CHAPTER 17.

The Culprit Runs Away!

THE next morning there was a fresh, startling discovery for the School House.

Prye of the Fifth was gone. Quite certain of being expelled, the wretched victim of his own folly fled

before the dawn, and St. Jim's was destined to see him no more.

He had been left in his dormitory, but in the morning a rope of sheets was found hanging from the dormitory window, and Prye was not to be found. Nobody else in the Fifth appeared to know anything about it, but some of the fellows were pretty certain that Cuts had helped his friend to escape—whether from friendship, or from fear of being dragged into Prye's disgrace, was an open question.

At all events, Prye was gone, and by his flight to his home he had saved himself from the disgrace of public expulsion from the school.

"It's all the bettah, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

"He was an awful wotiah, but he's got it in the neck, and no mistake. I'm glad he's gone."

"And Levison was telling the truth all the time," said Monty Lowther. "That's the most wonderful part of the whole bisney."

Levison was called into the Housemaster's study; but if he expected any expression of regret on Mr. Railton's part, he was disappointed.

Mr. Railton spoke to him sharply and sternly.

"You have had a narrow escape, Levison," he said. "You can see that for yourself. But for the fact that Prye was caught in the act, his wickedness and dishonour might have been laid to your charge, and you would have suffered his fate."

"I know it, sir," said Levison. "I hope another get something more like justice any other time."

"It is entirely your own fault, Levison. I hope this incident will prove a warning to you. Had you been known to be a boy of honourable character your word would have been sufficient to dispel suspicion, the evidence being entirely circumstantial. I hope you will take warning by this and amend your conduct in the future."

And with that Mr. Railton dismissed him.

But Levison was not quite without better feelings, for that morning he sought out Hammond, and spoke to him with something like good feeling and gratitude.

"I'm sorry I've been down on you, Hammond," he said awkwardly. "You've treated me well—better than I deserved, I suppose."

"Much bettah!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"And I'm much obliged," said Levison; "and—there's my hand, if you choose to take it, Hammond."

Hammond took it heartily enough.

"It's ort right," he said. "No 'arm done. And there's my fist, too. All serene!"

And Levison walked away, feeling more shamefaced than he had ever felt in his life before.

Arthur Augustus turned his famous eyeglass approvingly upon Hammond.

"Vewy wight, and pwopah!" he remarked. "Levison has said that he's covey for havin' treated you like a cad, and an apology from one gentleman to another is quite suffish. My deah boy, it's all wight!"

And Hammond grinned and agreed that it was all wight.

(Next Wednesday: "THE FUNK OF THE FOURTH!"—telling of a newcomer who made a bad start at St. Jim's and tried to retrieve it by a deception. Look out for this gripping story.)

AFTER THE FEAST COMES THE RECKONING! THEN IT IS THAT THE CHUMS OF THE REMOVE HAVE A ROUGH TIME OF IT!

ROUGHING IT AT GREYFRIARS!

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Returning to Greyfriars from holiday, Harry Wharton & Co. find the school deserted. They learn from Gosling, the porter, that the Head and masters and fellows are held up owing to a breakdown on the line from London.

The chums of the Remove, who have come by a branch line not affected by the breakdown, are hungry after their journey, and they invade the school kitchen to forage for their own food. A meal is cooked by Hunter, and the juniors greatly enjoy it.

Ernest Levison, a new boy, whose suspicious nature makes him disliked by Harry Wharton & Co., also joins in the feast. But, unbeknown to the juniors, Hurree Singh has added liquorice powder to the custard so as to make it sufficient to go round. The Indian junior is ignorant of the fact that liquorice powder is used for medicinal purposes!

The juniors are contemplating what the Head would say if he returned and found them in the school kitchen, when footsteps are heard on the stairs!

(Now read on.)

Gosling Does His Duty!

"WHO can it be?" asked Bob Cherry. "It doesn't sound like Gosling, and there's nobody else within the walls of Greyfriars that I know of."

"Better look," said Hazeldene.

He stepped to the door and looked out, and several of the other juniors followed. Hazeldene uttered an exclamation.

"It's Gosling!"

Bob Cherry gave a growl of disgust. "And he's been drinking again."

The cause of the school porter's peculiarly slow progress was seen as soon as they set eyes upon him. The school porter was coming along clinging to the wall, afraid to let go of it in case he should roll over on the linoleum. He picked up each foot and set it down again with great care. He looked up with fishy eyes and saw the juniors looking at him from the wide doorway of the kitchen.

"Allo!" he growled. "So you're 'ere'!"

"Here we are," said Bob Cherry. "What do you want? You're not coming in here."

The porter stopped, holding to the wall, and fixed a glassy stare upon Bob. He had evidently been consuming much more liquor than was good for him, feeling secure in doing so owing to the Head's delay in returning.

"Ain't I coming in there?" said Gosling. "And why ain't I coming in there? What I says is this 'ere—I'm the portec of this collegio. I am!"

"You wouldn't be for long," said Harry Wharton, "if Dr. Locke could see you now."

"Wot I says is this 'ere," repeated Gosling. "As the portec of this school, it's my dooty to see what you young THE GEN LIBRARY—No. 1.506.

By Frank Richards.

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

himps is doing of in the absence of author—author—authorities."

He got the word out at last and wagged his head solemnly at the juniors. Harry Wharton turned back into the kitchen with a gesture of disgust.

Gosling felt his way along the passage to the kitchen door. The juniors there did not move to let him pass. They had no mind to have him in their company. But Gosling's fuddled brain was filled with the idea of the importance of his duty in looking after the juniors, and he was determined to come in.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he remarked, steadying himself by holding to the doorpost and staring glassily at the juniors. "I'm coming in to keep an eye on you young himps."

"You're not!" said Nugent. "Get out!"

"I'm not getting bout. I'm coming in!"

And Gosling lurched heavily forward. No one was inclined to have the porter

When Harry Wharton & Co. suffer violent internal pains they have visions of food poisoning. They had yet to learn that the custard they had eaten contained liquorice powder!

fall on him. The juniors crowded back, and Gosling reeled forward and rolled on the kitchen floor. He sat up, looking bewildered, and gazed round at the juniors with lack-lustre eyes.

"If you think I'm intox—intox—tipsy," he jerked out, "you're mistaken. I'm as sober as a judge."

"Get out!"

"I won't get out. It's my dooty to look after you."

"Well, then, stay there!" said Bob Cherry.

"I won't stay 'ere!" said Gosling, with the contradictory obstinacy of intoxication. "I certainly shall not stay 'ere'!"

"Oh, do as you like!"

"I shan't do anything of the kind!" Gosling slowly rose to his feet. He clutched at a chair to steady himself, and Hazeldene pushed it with his foot. The porter rolled on the floor, made an effort to rise, and then went off to sleep. The juniors stood round regarding him with mingled amusement and disgust, and his snores filled the kitchen with far from musical noise.

Sudden Pains!

"THE drunkenfulness of the honourable beast is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Rand Singh, looking down at the slumbering Gosling. "It would be an excellent jokefulness to duck him in the cold-waterful bath."

"It would be no joke to try to carry him upstairs," grinned Bob Cherry. "Here he is, and here he'll stop. Something ought to be done to him, though. Has anybody got any crayons?"

"Crayons?" said Harry Wharton. "What on earth for?"

"I think we might cover up his ruddy complexion," explained Bob. "Nothing but an earthquake would wake him now, so it would be easy enough."

Hurree Singh grinned. "That is a wheezy good idea, my worthy chum. If we can find some crayons we may be able to turn the esteemed beast into a thing of beauty and a joy for ever."

"Good wheeze," said Nugent. "I don't see why soot wouldn't do as well as crayons, though."

"So it would," said Bob Cherry. "Get a capful of soot out of the chimney, will you, Hurree Singh?"

"Certainly," said the nabob, picking up a cap and starting towards the chimney.

"I say, whose cap is that?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yours," said the nabob, beaming. "Surely you did not think that I was going to use my own capful headgear for this purpose, my worthy Cherry?"

"Ass! The shovel will do."

"Oh, very wellfoul."

The shovel was soon laden with soot and carried towards the sleeping, unconscious Gosling. Bob Cherry poured a little water on it and mixed it up into a thin paste, and then, using a rag as a brush, painted the face of the school porter.

Gosling did not even open his eyes once. He lay unconscious while Bob Cherry blacked his face and turned him into a good imitation of a nigger.

The juniors stood round laughing.

Gosling's aspect, when his face was blacked, was certainly something new and strange, and decidedly comical. But Bob Cherry was not satisfied yet.

"Got any whitening?" he asked, looking round.

"We could find some, I expect," said Nugent. "But I really think he looks beautiful as he is."

"Behold, he is black but comely," purred the nabob.

"Yes, but a couple of white circles round his eyes would improve him," said Bob Cherry, cocking his head on one side to get a good view of his victim.

"Ha, ha! So they would."

"What do you think, Wharton? I know you have a rather artistic eye. As an artist, would you say pure black, or a couple of white circles in relief?"

Harry Wharton laughed. "The white circles, by all means," he replied.

"Then find some whitening, some of

HARRY WHARTON & CO. IN ANOTHER AMUSING—AND PAINFUL!—ADVENTURE IN THEIR EARLY SCHOOLDAYS AT GREYFRIARS.



Wriggling with internal pains, the nine suffering juniors stood in a row before Dr. Mackenzie. "If you please, sir, we're dying!" gasped Billy Bunter. "We've all got ptomaine poisoning, and we may drop down dead any minute!"

you," said Bob Cherry, rubbing in a little extra oint on Gosling's fat cheeks.

Billy Bunter soon found some whitening, and the white circles were added round the eyes. The effect was startling. The white circles gave the black face a peculiarly owl-like appearance. Nobody would ever have recognised this strange-looking object as Gosling, the porter of Greyfriars.

"There, I think he will do," said Bob Cherry, rising. "If any of you fellows can suggest any improvement, I'll add it."

"Ha, ha! He'll do."

"You think that's the best we can do for him?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then we'll let it go at that," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose we shall have to leave him here. Still, as we've done with these quarters it doesn't matter. Let him have his snooze out. When he wakes up and looks in the glass, he'll have a shock, and it may be a temperance lesson to him. Now, what shall we do to amuse ourselves?"

"Let us pay a roundful visit to all the Upper Fourth Form studies and wreck them," suggested the nabob thoughtfully. "That would be a surprising pleasure to Temple, Dabney & Co. when they returned to the honourable school."

"That's rather a good idea," said Nugent. "We won't wreck the lot, but we may as well make a surprise or two ready for Temple and Dabney."

"Come on, then!" said Harry Wharton. "Hallo, you new chap! What's the matter with you?"

Ernest Levison seemed to be twisting uncomfortably, as if he had a pain somewhere in his internal regions.

"Oh, nothing!" he said.

"Something disagreed with you?" asked Nugent.

"I—I think so. I felt a sharp pain then!" gasped Levison. "Something

like a dagger and something like a red-hot needle."

"My hat, it must have been a regular twister, then. I've never swallowed any daggers or red-hot needles that I can remember, but they can't be nice."

"I believe it was something I've been eating."

"Have you been scoffing any tinned beef? If you have you've very likely got ptomaine poisoning," said Bob Cherry sympathetically.

Levison grunted.

"I haven't. I've eaten nothing but what you gave me here."

"Well, there was nothing wrong with that," said Billy Bunter promptly. "I cooked it myself."

"Well, it's curious I should have the pain and none of you others," said Levison. "I might have known you would play some little game on me."

"You're a suspicious rotter!" said Harry Wharton in his direct way.

"There has been no game played on you."

"I know what I feel like. Ow!"

"Oh, rats!"

The Greyfriars juniors went upstairs. Levison followed them more slowly. The school porter still lay extended upon the floor, snoring.

At the top of the stairs Hazeldene stopped and pressed his hand to his stomach, with a sudden gasp of breath. Wharton glanced at him.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing! I thought I felt a pain."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Have you got pains, too?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I say, as a matter of fact, I had a sort of stitch just then. There couldn't have been anything wrong with the bacon, could there?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent. "There was something wrong with something, or there's something wrong with me. I've just had a pain."

"What was it like?"

"A good deal like what Levison described—something like a needle and something like a red-hot dagger."

"Wrong! What Levison had was a dagger and a red-hot needle."

"Well, I can't see much difference there."

"Ow!"

"Hallo, you're grunting yourself now! What's the matter with you?"

"I—I had a pain like a pair of burning pincers—"

"My hat! Sure it wasn't like a red-hot dagger?"

"Well, it might have been. I—"

"Ow!"

"The painfulness of my worthy chums seems to be terrific," said Hurree Singh. "Meanwhile, the Headful sahib may return momentarily, and the wretchedness of the honourable studies of the Upper Fourth is not yet done."

"Rats! I've got a pain."

"So have I."

"Go and wreck the beastly studies yourself!"

"Ach! I feels him meinself!" grunted Fritz Hoffman. "I know not if it is to same pain, or some oder pain, but he is ferry painful. I feels him in vat you English calls te pread-pasket."

"Ciel!"

"Hallo, Froggy! Why are you twisting about?"

"I have ze pain!" groaned Adolphe Meunier. "I have ze fearful pain. Parbleu, it is frightful! I have ze horrible pain in ze region you call ze tummy."

"Ow!"

"Ow!"

"Ach!"

"Mon Dieu!"

Harry Wharton looked serious. He was feeling a strange pain himself, and it really looked as if something were the matter. Hardly one of the Greyfriars juniors seemed to have escaped.

Hoffman was sitting on the floor, glaring straight before him. Meunier was clinging to the banisters in the hall. Bob Cherry was tightening his lips to endure it, and Nugent looked very pale. Hazeldene groaned aloud. Billy Bunter, as white as a sheet, was sitting down on a stair in dumb suffering. Micky Desmond was walking up and down very quickly, as if trying to walk it off. "There's something wrong," said Harry Wharton.

"Only just found that out?" sneered Levison. "You don't seem to be feeling it yourself. I suppose you played this trick on the lot of us?"

"There has been no trick played that I know of."

"Then what is the matter with us all?"

"I haven't the faintest idea!"

Levison's sneer grew more pronounced. He was evidently in a suspicious mood, and his temper, none too good, was not improved by the inward pain he felt.

"Rats!" he exclaimed. "There's something wrong with all of us, and nothing wrong with you. You're at the bottom of it."

Harry Wharton clenched his fists.

"I tell you I am not! I know nothing about it."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"As a matter of fact, I do feel the pain myself," said Harry quietly. "I'm not making a row about it, that's all. I think there's something wrong, and it looks to me like ptomaine poisoning, or something of that sort."

"There was a general chorus of 'Oh's!'"

"Bacon might give you something of that sort," said Harry. "That's the only explanation I can think of."

Billy Bunter looked up.

"The bacon was all right," he said huskily. "I cooked it myself. And I ate six rashers, so I ought to know."

"Anyway, one thing's jolly certain!" exclaimed Harry Wharton decidedly. "We ought to see a doctor."

"Yes, that's certain," said Bob Cherry. "Whatever it is, we ought to see a doctor about it. It might be serious."

"It feels serious!" groaned Nugent.

"The seriousness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Have you got it, too, Inky?"

"I have a terrific twistfulness in the inwardness of the interior works!" groaned the dusky junior. "It may be a sign that the dreadful termination of the existence is nigh. I feel thusly, my worthy chums."

"Oh, rats! You're not going to kick the bucket yet!" said Bob Cherry. "I feel just now as though I wouldn't mind dying, though, myself. Ow!"

"Ow-ow!" gasped Billy Bunter.

"Ow!"

"Oh, come on!" said Harry. "We'll get down to the village and see the doctor."

And he threw open the school door, and the juniors, in various attitudes of suffering, staggered out into the dusky Close.

A Dismal Drive!

HARRY WHARTON walked straight on, quietly repressing any audible sign of the strange pain he inwardly felt. Harry was made of sterner stuff than the other fellows. Before Billy Bunter had taken half a dozen steps he collapsed and sat down in the gravel on the path.

Hazeldene sat down a yard away, and then Fritz Hoffman rolled in the grass. Adolphe Meunier speedily joined him

there. Harry Wharton stopped, and looked round.

"Oh, come on!" he said.

"I c-c-can't!" groaned Billy Bunter.

"I'm dying! I say, Wharton, I'm sorry I sold your cricket bat that time! I—I say, Cherry, I beg your pardon!"

"What for?"

"I was going to sell your pocket-knife with the three blades and the saw and file to stand a feed—"

"You young bandit!"

"Now I'm dying, I'm sorry I was going to sell it! I'm sorry for all the wrong things I've done! I haven't done many. Now I'm dying, it's a great comfort to look back on my noble actions—"

"Bosh!"

"Really, Cherry—"

"Look here, make an effort and come along!" said Harry Wharton. "Don't talk that silly rot about dying, Bunter, or I shall punch your head!"

"I say, Wharton, I feel I can't get along," said Hazeldene.

"It's only a short walk."

"I couldn't do it!"

"Sure, and couldn't ye get the doother here?" asked Micky Desmond.

"There's a telephone in the Head's study."

"The Head's study is pretty certain to be locked up while he's away."

"I know it is," said Nugent.

"Then what's to be done? I can't walk."

Harry Wharton thought for a few moments.

"Look here, what about borrowing the gardener's pony and cart?" he said.

"I can get into the stable, and you know I can drive. It's the only conveyance that can be had. You chaps stay here while I get it out, and I'll drive you into the village."

"Good!"

"I shan't be long."

Harry Wharton walked quickly away. Bob Cherry was at his side in a moment.

"I'll come and help you, Harry."

"You're not fit."

"I'm as fit as you are, I expect."

"So am I," said Nugent, joining them. "We can manage it. Poor old Hurree Singh is doubled up. He's not so strong as us, you know. Let's get the horse out first. I say, Harry, have you any idea what's the matter with us?"

Harry shook his head.

"Not unless it's ptomaine poisoning, Nugent."

"Then it may be dangerous!"

"Well, it would be only a slight attack. We should feel worse than we do, I expect, if it were dangerous."

"I don't think I could feel much worse than I do."

"Well, the sooner we get to Dr. Mackenzie the better," said Harry Wharton. "Here's the pony. He'll have a lot to pull, but he's fit enough."

It did not take the juniors long to harness the horse in the cart, which belonged to Mumble, the Head's gardener. Then they led the pony out and round to the School House.

The juniors they had left there were lying on the grass, utterly overcome.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Jump in!"

Billy Bunter groaned.

"Don't be cruel, Wharton! Fancy talking about jumping now! I couldn't jump an inch to save my life!"

"Well, scramble in, then!"

"I can't move!"

"We shall have to sling him in," said Bob Cherry. "You cut into the porter's lodge and get the key for the gate, Nugent."

"Right you are!"

Nugent hurried off. Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton assisted the juniors into the cart.

Wharton took the reins and drove down to the gates. By that time Nugent had the gates open, and the cart passed through. Nugent shut the gate and locked it.

"Bring the key along!" called out Harry Wharton. "We've got to get in when we come back, you know."

"Right-ho!"

Nugent climbed into the cart. Harry Wharton shook the reins, and the pony broke into a trot. The cart, with its load of suffering humanity, rolled off towards the village. It was a short drive to the local doctor's. Dr. Mackenzie's house was on the outskirts of the village towards Greyfriars.

The cart soon reached the gate, and Bob Cherry jumped down and opened it, and Harry drove the cart in. The next moment Bob was thumping at the knocker.

"Knock! Bang! Knock! Crash! The door was opened by a startled maid-servant."

"Is Dr. Mackenzie at home?" gasped Bob.

"Yes."

"Tell him we're all dying of ptomaine poisoning, and want to see him at once!"

The amazed maid fled. The juniors tumbled out of the cart and poured into the house.

The Sufferers!

NINE suffering juniors, wriggling with internal pains, stood in a row in Dr. Mackenzie's consulting-room, and the doctor adjusted his glasses and stared at them curiously.

"If you please, sir, we're dying!" said Billy Bunter. "We've all got ptomaine poisoning, and we may drop down dead any minute!"

"Indeed!" said the medical man. "Is that the usual result of ptomaine poisoning, Master Bunter?"

"I really don't know, sir."

"Then don't make assertions on things you know nothing about!" said the doctor. "What makes you think you have ptomaine poisoning?"

"We've got fearful pains—"

"Like red-hot daggers—"

"And something like a burning carving-knife—"

"Ach! I feel fery pad—"

"Mon Dieu, I am suffering terribly!"

"The sufferfulness of your honourable servant is terrific!"

"Begorra, it's dying I am intirely!"

"What have you been eating?"

"Bacon and eggs."

"Bacon and eggs wouldn't hurt you. Was there anything wrong with the bacon?"

"Nothing, sir!" said Billy Bunter promptly. "I cooked it myself, and I ate six rashers, and it was simply ripping!"

"I did not eat the bacon," said Harree Janset Ram Singh; "but I ate of the eggs, and, as far as they were concerned, everything was gardenfully lovely!"

The doctor turned to him quickly.

"You did not take any of the bacon?"

"None, sir, as I—"

"Then it cannot have been the bacon, as I presume that you are feeling the same pains as the others?"

"Yes, honoured medical sahib, but a little worseful than the others, I think."

"Rats!" groaned Billy Bunter. "You haven't got them worse than I have! I'm slowly dying by inches!"

"You couldn't expect to die quickly by inches," murmured Bob Cherry.

"Don't be heartless, Cherry! When the grass is growing green on my grave, you will think—"

"I shall think of the seven-and-six you owe me!"

"Really, Cherry—"

"You did not feel this pain until after you had eaten?" asked the medical man.

"No, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Was it immediately after?"

"No, sir; some time afterwards."

"Were the eggs fresh and good?"

"Ripping, sir!" said Billy Bunter. "I ate nine of them, so I ought to know!"

"Did you eat anything else besides the eggs and bacon?"

"Bread, sir."

"The bread was all right," said Billy Bunter, "so was the butter. I had nine slices, and so I can answer for the bread-and-butter."

"Did you have anything after the meal?"

"Boiled apples and custard, sir."

"The apples were rather underdone," said Bob Cherry. "But I've eaten underdone apples many a time and they never made me feel like this."

"Ach! It is terrible!"

"Ciel! It is frightful!"

"Begorra, I'm dying intirely!"

"Let me see. Was the custard properly made?"

"I made it myself," said Billy Bunter, "and I ate as much as anybody, excepting Levison. It was a good custard."

"I know what's the matter," said Levison sulkily.

"Indeed!" said the doctor dryly.

"Then you may as well tell me, and save the trouble of inquiring."

"Somebody has been playing a trick."

"What kind of trick?"

"Putting something in the food."

"Who has done it?"

"Wharton, I believe. He was very anxious for me to come down and join in the feed, and very likely he's putting on those symptoms. He doesn't feel it as much as we do, or he wouldn't be so quiet about it."

Harry Wharton flushed with anger. The doctor looked at him.

"Is there anything in this lad's statement, Wharton?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir. So far as I know, a trick has not been played; and if it has, I know nothing whatever about it. As for my being anxious to have Levison down to the feed, that was only because I knew he was hungry, and there was nothing for him otherwise."

"How is that?"

"There has been a breakdown on the railway, and the Head and the masters have not returned. There is no one at the school, excepting the porter."

"Oh, I see! Then you have been cooking the food yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"I cooked it, sir," said Billy Bunter. "I can answer for the cooking all right. I've cooked for years, and nobody's ever found fault with my cooking."

"You may have mixed some foreign ingredients in the custard," said Dr. Mackenzie. "Was there anything of a foreign nature close at hand?"

"There were Hoffman and Meunier, sir."

"Eh?"

"Hoffman and Meunier were the only two foreigners present."

"Pish! I mean was there any material of a deleterious nature near at hand which might have got mixed into the custard by mistake?"

A curious look came over the dusky

face of Herree Janset Ram Singh. The others did not notice it for a moment.

"No, sir!" said Billy Bunter with emphasis. "The custard powder was in a jar, and I was very careful about it. The eggs were all right."

"It is possible—"

"You don't know anything about it, Jampot, if you think there was anything wrong with the custard," said Billy Bunter obstinately. "I'm not going to have people say that my custard made them ill."

"But I think—"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Inky! The custard was all right."

"Let Hurree Singh speak," said Dr. Mackenzie. "What is it, Hurree Singh? Do you know of anything wrong with the materials of the custard?"

"No, sir; but there was a slight lack of materials for the honourable custard, and I thought the admixture of a

sensations we have experienced in our honourable inward regions," said the nabob. "I merely mention the circumstance in order to place you in possession of the complete factfulness of the case, honoured medicated sahib!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter brandished a fat fist in the face of the astonished Hindu.

"You black villain!"

"What?"

"You howling lunatic!" roared Hazeldene.

"Eh?"

"You poisonous assassin!" shrieked Nugent.

"But—"

"Ach! Tat accounts for to pain! I tink—"

"Ciel! All is explained! I zink—"

"Dear me!" said the doctor, wiping tears of merriment from his cheeks.

"All is explained now, and you need



The red glow from the fire fell full upon Gosling's black face, with the white circles round the eyes. Mr. Quelch gave him one terrified look and fled. "Help! Help!" yelled the Remove master. "Wharrer marrer?" muttered the porter.

quantity of liquorice powder would make up for it."

"Of what?" asked the doctor.

"Liquorice powder, sir."

"Ha, ha! That accounts—"

"But it wasn't put in!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I should think not!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly.

"But the liquorice powder was put in the custard all the same," said the nabob. "I wished the ludicrous custard to be sufficient for everyone, and when the worthy Bunter had turned his esteemed head I placed the liquorice powder in the jar that contained the custard powder, and mixed them together fully."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Dr. Mackenzie.

"I cannot think that the admixturefulness can have caused the painful

not be alarmed. There is nothing in the nature of ptomaine poisoning the matter with you. You have had an overdose of— Ha, ha, ha! It will not hurt you much."

"Won't it?" groaned Billy Bunter. "Owl! Wow! I've given Wharton's cricket bat to anybody who'd suffocate that nigger!"

"Really, my worthy chums—"

"You silly fathead!"

"I fail to perceive the causefulness of the angerful countenances of my esteemed chums. If the medicated sahib would explain—"

"It is, as a matter of fact, an overdose of medicine," explained the medical sahib. "It was a ludicrous mistake to make."

"I don't believe it was a mistake!"

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growled Levison. "The confounded nigger did it on purpose!"

"Nonsense! Hurree Singh has suffered as much as anybody."

"That is very trueful," said the nabob ruefully. "I really and truly consider that I have even suffered morefully."

"Rot! It was a trick."

"I assure you, my worthy friend, on the word of an honest Injun, that it was not a trickful jape."

"Rot!"

"If you doubt my wordful assurance—"

"I jolly well do!" said Levison with emphasis.

"Then I can only consider it in the light of an insultfulness to the honoured dignity of a Nabob of Bhanipur," said the Indian junior, "and I shall forthwith proceed to castigate you with the extreme severity."

"Here, sheer off!"

"The sheer-off-fulness is impossible in the honourable circumstances," said the nabob, squaring up to the new boy of Greyfriars. "Pray defend yourself fistfully, or you will be knocked downfully to the carpet in the twinkling of the lamb's tail!"

"Come, stop that!" exclaimed the doctor, laughing. "You must not fight in my consulting-room, Hurree Singh."

The nabob ceased his attack at once, much to Levison's relief. Hurree Singh turned to the doctor.

"I humbly beg to apologise to the honoured medicated sahib for the thoughtlessness of the forgetfulness," he said. "I have profaned his esteemed consulting-room with the rudeness of the fistfuls."

"Never mind."

"But I assure the honourable doctorful sahib that no disrespect was intended, or conveyed."

"That's all right," said Dr. Mackenzie. "Now, my lads, there is nothing the matter with you that will not soon pass off—"

"Ow!" groaned Billy Bunter.

"So you may as well return to the school. I should advise you to be a little more careful—ha, ha, ha!—in the selection of materials the next time you make a custard."

"It was that ass Inky!"

"The goodness of the intention is a balance to the unfortunateness of the unpleasant result. I—"

"Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The juniors, relieved in their minds, and somewhat relieved in their bodies for the pains were growing less keen—climbed into the cart and drove off to Greyfriars. Only Levison was sulkily silent. The idea was still in his mind that he had been the victim of an intentional trick, and it was evidently useless to argue him out of it. And no one felt inclined to take the trouble of doing so.

A Strange Arrival!

"DEAR me! What ever is the matter here?"

It was Dr. Locke, the august Head of Greyfriars, who spoke. He was standing outside the gates of Greyfriars, and with him were several of the masters and a horde of returning boys.

The evening was setting in and the delayed school had at last appeared before the gates of Greyfriars. But though Mr. Quelch had been ringing the bell for a good five minutes the gates were not opened.

"This is really remarkable," said the Head. "Where can Gosling possibly

be? I wired to him after the breakdown to not expect me till this evening."

"Probably he thought we should arrive later than this," said Mr. Quelch, "and he may have gone out."

"That would be against my positive orders. There is no one else at all at Greyfriars and he has no right to go out," said the Head, frowning.

Mr. Quelch coloured slightly.

"He may have done so, however. He certainly does not appear to hear the bell."

"Please ring once more, and as loudly as you can," said the puzzled Head. "I really do not understand this at all."

Mr. Quelch rang again, loud and long. They could hear the bell clanging away from the interior, but there was neither sound nor sight of the porter. Gosling was evidently absent from his post.

"Dear me! This is very annoying!"

It was extremely annoying. The Head felt that the position was ridiculous. The boys of Greyfriars were crowded outside the gates like sheep seeking shelter, and already they were grumbling at the failure of the masters to gain entrance.

"Shall I climb over the gate?" asked Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars.

The Head shook his head.

"I am afraid it would be dangerous, Wingate. Fortunately, I have a key to the wicket gate and can get in that way, and open the gates myself. I cannot imagine what has happened to Gosling. I shall speak to him very severely."

The Head felt in his pockets and at last produced a key, and went along to the little gate usually used by masters during the term when the great gates were closed. He opened the gate and went in.

"As I may not be able to find Gosling, you had all better come in this way," he said. "I really fear that Gosling has taken advantage of this delay. Mr. Quelch, to leave the school and go out on some business of his own."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"It looks like it, sir."

"I shall speak to him very severely."

The grinning boys filed in at the little gate. The quadrangle was growing very dusky, and the school, with not a single window lighted, loomed up a black mass before them over the dim elms.

Dr. Locke waited till all the boys were in and then locked the gate again. Then he led the way towards the School House.

"There is certainly no one in the lodge," said Mr. Quelch. "I have looked. Gosling is absent. No one appears to be in the house."

"The windows are all dark—"

"There's a light in the kitchen window," said Dabney of the Upper Fourth. "I can see it, sir."

"H'm! Is the light on?"

"No; it seems to be a red glow from the fire, sir."

The Head looked puzzled.

"Gosling has no right to light a fire in the kitchen," he said. "And it would be curious for him to be down there without the light on. This must be looked into. But first we must get into the House."

The Head opened the great door with a key and entered. He switched on the electric light and looked round. Not a sound was to be heard in the great building.

"Will you look in the kitchen, Mr. Quelch, and ascertain—"

"Certainly, sir!"

The master of the Remove went to the

kitchen stairs and descended into the gloom. A ruddy glow came from the open door of the kitchen, showing that the fire had not yet died out. Mr. Quelch entered the kitchen. The room was in darkness, save for the ruddy glow of the fire, which was burning red and very low in the grate.

The Remove-master stumbled over something on the floor and uttered an exclamation. The Form-master was no coward, but his heart jumped in his mouth. For he knew that it was a human body he had stumbled over.

"Ah!"

It was Gosling, dead or disabled by burglars? It was an unpleasant thought. Mr. Quelch shuddered and looked quickly round. Then he stooped and touched the face of the prostrate form.

"Wharrer marrer? G-r-r-r!"

Mr. Quelch gave a jump.

"Dear me!"

The fallen form scrambled up. Gosling had been rudely disturbed, and he had awakened in a semi-sober state. He scrambled up savagely and glared at the Form-master, whom he did not recognise in the gloom.

The red glow of the fire fell full upon his black face, with the white circles round the eyes. Mr. Quelch gave him one terrified look and fled.

"Help! Help!"

"Wharrer marrer—"

"Help!"

The Remove-master bounded up the kitchen stairs. But his cry had been heard and Wingate came rushing down to his aid. He met Mr. Quelch halfway on the stairs, and crashed heavily into him.

"Oh! Help! Ow!"

The Form-master rolled down the stairs, and Wingate rolled with him. They sprawled on the linoleum at the bottom, and, as they did so, a shadowy figure whisked past them and ran upstairs. It was Gosling, who was more frightened in his fuddled state than Mr. Quelch could possibly be.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Wingate. "I heard you calling and ran down—"

"It was an accident," said Mr. Quelch, picking himself up and rubbing his bones ruefully. "But—did you see that terrible-looking negro—"

"That what, sir?"

"A ferocious-looking negro who was in the kitchen. I greatly fear that he has murdered Gosling, and—"

"Help!"

It was a shrill cry from the top of the stairs. Wingate dashed up, and the Remove master followed more slowly.

They found the Head standing in the glare of the electric light, as pale as death, leaning helplessly against the wall.

"What is the matter, sir?"

Dr. Locke gasped for breath.

"A fearful-looking ruffian has just raced past me!" he panted. "He came from the kitchen stairs. A horrible-looking negro—"

"It was the one I saw!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "A most terrible-looking ruffian, with savage eyes—"

"His eyes were fearful. They were large and seemed wide open, and to have white rims," said the Head, shuddering. "I fear something terrible has happened here."

"I was thinking that Gosling—"

"The poor fellow may have been attacked and murdered."

"We'll soon capture this chap, whoever he is," said Wingate determinedly. "I'll go after him, sir, with some of the Sixth—"

"No, no, Wingate! The danger—"

"If he's a murderous ruffian, sir,

there's more danger in letting him go loose," said Wingate. "I'll take a dozen Sixth Formers and hunt for him."

"That is true. Take some weapons then, Wingate. Pokers or cricket stumps."

"Right-ho, sir."

"See that the younger boys are safe in a class-room, Mr. Quelch," said the Head. "You will select your companions, Wingate. Some of the masters may take part."

The younger masters of Greyfriars were only too eager to do so. So were the Sixth, and the search-party was soon formed. The lower Forms would gladly have joined in the hunt, but that was not permitted. The Remove, much to their discontent, were marshalled into their Form-room and detained there, and the same was done with the rest of the lower Forms.

The strange object seen by the Head had escaped into the Close, and it was there that the search-party hunted for him. There was a sudden yell from Wingate, who was looking under the eaves. The others rushed towards him.

"Did you see him?" asked Elliott of the Sixth.

"Yes. He was dodging through the trees."

"Which way did he go?"

"Towards the gates, I think. Come on!"

The searchers ran swiftly on. "What was he like?" asked Mason.

"I caught only a glimpse; he was a negro, with very curious-looking eyes," said Wingate. "He was gone in a second, though."

"There he is!" shouted a Sixth Former.

"Where?"

"He's just dodged into the porter's lodge."

"Come on!" exclaimed Wingate.

"He's cornered now!"

There was a sound of a slamming door and a rattling chain. Wingate ran up to the door of the porter's lodge and banged against it. But it did not budge.

"He's cornered now!"

The searchers gathered breathless, outside the porter's lodge. The unknown desperado was not captured yet, but it was something to have run him down and cornered him. In the porter's lodge, at least, he could do no damage. The place was evidently otherwise unoccupied.

"We've got him," said Wingate, as he gave up the useless attack on the door. "It's only a question of getting in and collaring him now."

"Perhaps we had better send for the police—" began Mr. Quelch.

"Make us look asses, sir, not being able to deal with a single man without help," urged the captain of Greyfriars.

The Remove-master hesitated.

"But how do you propose to get at him, Wingate?"

"I dare say he will give in now he knows he's got no chance, sir. We can get in at the window otherwise."

"He may be armed."

"Well, I have a poker—"

"I cannot allow— Dear me, what is that?"

"That" was the clang of the great gates swinging open. A pony and cart came in, the latter crowded with juniors, and there was a general exclamation of amazement.

Clearing Up the Mystery!

WHARTON!
Mr. Quelch rapped out the name in utter astonishment as he recognised the youthful driver of the cart.

Harry Wharton was equally astonished. He had not guessed that the school had returned, of course, and, after the visit to Dr. Mackenzie's, he had expected to find Greyfriars as he had left it.

Instead of that he found the School House blazing with lights from the class-room windows, and an excited crowd of masters and Sixth Formers gathered in front of the porter's lodge. He drew the pony to a halt, and the juniors clambered out of the cart. Mr. Quelch came towards them.

"How did you open the gates, Wharton? Have you just returned to school?"

"We came in the afternoon, sir," said Harry, touching his cap respectfully. "Glad to see you again after the holiday, sir!"

"Thank you, Wharton! But you will kindly explain yourself. The Head and the rest of the school returning from Victoria were stopped by a breakdown on the line—"

"Gosling told us about it, sir."

"Then you have seen Gosling?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"He was asleep when we went out, sir."

"Where have you been with Mimble's pony and cart?" asked the Remove-master severely.

"We were taken ill, sir—"

"Taken ill?" repeated the Form-master.

"We were without food, and Gosling could do nothing for us, so we cooked grub for ourselves in the kitchen—"

"Ah, then it was you who lighted the fire?"

"We had to, sir. We were fearfully hungry! We didn't mind roughing it."

though," said Harry, his face breaking into a smile. "We have had a jolly good time, sir, and we liked it. Only we ate something that disagreed with us, and we thought we had ptomaine poisoning, and we had to go to the doctor's."

"I see! That was careless of you, but I suppose, in the circumstances, you cannot be blamed for foraging for yourselves."

"We have been here four hours or more, sir."

"You could not be expected to go hungry all that time," agreed the Form-master. "But I do not understand—"

"The hungerfulness was terrific, honoured sahib—"

"Ah! It was notings to te pain after!"

"Ciel! I zink—"

"I tisk—"

"Please allow me to speak!" said Mr. Quelch. "While you were here, boys, did you see anything of a powerful and ferocious-looking negro?"

The Remove-master stared.

"A negro, sir?" ejaculated Harry Wharton, in amazement.

"Yes; a black ruffian, whom I surprised in the kitchen on my return, and who has now locked himself up in the porter's lodge."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"He wasn't here when we were here, sir. I can't understand it. We locked the gates when we left, too."

"Jinky was the only nigger here—" began Billy Bunter.

"My worthy chum, if you apply the niggerish similitude to me, I shall be compelled to castigate you severely!"

"There wasn't anybody here but ourselves and Gosling, sir," said Bob Cherry, "and this new fellow, Levison. We saw nobody else."

"Have you been long absent at the doctor's?"

"Less than an hour, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked puzzled.

"Then I cannot understand it. When I entered the kitchen in the dark, I stumbled over a savage-looking negro,

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who has now locked himself in Gosling's lodge. I am very much afraid something has happened to Gosling, as he did not answer our ringings, and is not in his lodge. Where did you see him last?"

"He was in the kitchen when we left, sir, asleep."

"A strange place for Gosling to go to sleep in," said Mr. Quelch, in astonishment. "You are sure of what you say, Wharton?"

"Quite," said Harry, who did not feel called upon to mention that the school porter had been intoxicated. That could be left for Mr. Quelch to find out for himself.

"Then I am afraid more than ever that something has happened to him, as the negro was in the kitchen. Has he answered you, Wingate?"

The captain of Greyfriars was approaching, looking very puzzled. He shook his head in reply to the Form-master's question.

"No, sir. I've called out to him to surrender, and he doesn't answer; but I can hear somebody mumbling in the lodge, and it sounds like Gosling's voice."

"Gosling! Can he be in there?"

"It sounds like him, sir."

The amazed Form-master hastened to the lodge; again and knocked at the door. The boys followed him. Harry Wharton and his chums with the rest.

"Listen to me!" called out Mr. Quelch through the keyhole. "You cannot possibly escape now, you ruffian, so I advise you to surrender!"

"What I says is this 'ere—"

It was a mumbling voice within, and Mr. Quelch started. The tones were unmistakably those of Gosling.

"Gosling! Are you there?"

"What I says is this 'ere—that I won't be plagued by them boys! It's my dooty to look after them in the absence of the 'Ead!"

"He has been drinking!" murmured Mr. Quelch, agast. "What can this possibly mean? Are you sure the negro really entered the lodge?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Gosling! Can you open the door?"

"I shall not open the door!—Wot I says is this 'ere—that a porter's lodge is a Henglishman's castle, and I will not hopen the door!"

Wingate grinned.

"It's pretty plain what he was doing while he was waiting for us to arrive, sir," he said in a low voice. "It's curious that we hear nothing of the negro. I am certain he is in there. Suppose we try the window?"

"It's open," said Mason.

"Let me look in first," said the Remove-master.

He strode to the window to look into the dusky lodge, and then started back with a cry.

A black face, with white circles round the eyes, loomed up suddenly before him, and the strange-looking eyes glared at him, and there was a distinct odour of spirits.

Mr. Quelch started back.

"Good gracious! Surrender immediately, my man, or you will be dealt with very severely!" You hear me?"

Bob Cherry gave a roar that drowned the mumbling reply of the man in the lodge.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mr. Quelch turned upon him wrathfully.

"Cherry! How dare you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cherry—"

"Excuse me, sir!" gasped Bob. "I really couldn't help it, sir! Ha, ha, ha! Don't you see, sir—can't you see who it is?"

"Who is it? What do you mean, Cherry?"

"It's Gosling, sir!"

Mr. Quelch gave quite a jump.

"Gosling!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere!" mumbled the strange-looking figure at the window. "It's my dooty to look after them boys in the habsence of the 'Ead! I looks after them when they're a-gorging of themselves in the kitchen. It's my dooty. If anybody says I'm tipsy, I repudiate the suggestion with scorn!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Remove-master.

Mr. Quelch was utterly amazed. There was no doubting that the voice was the voice of Gosling; but the face was—

"So it was Gosling all the time," said Wingate. "The ruffian has been drinking, and got his face covered with soot somehow."

"Dear me!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Did you know Gosling was in this—this state, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry demurely. "I remember noticing that he had some soot on his face before we left him in the kitchen."

"The kitchen was terrific, and the worthy Cherry had—Ow! Don't tread on my foot, Cherry, as the hurtfulness in my toes is great!"

"I think I understand!" said Mr. Quelch, his face involuntarily breaking into a grin. "You all deserve to be caned; but if the trick was played through a natural disgust for the state of the wretched fellow, I can hold you excused. Perhaps it will be a lesson to him, if Dr. Locke allows him to remain at Greyfriars. You may go in, boys. I will explain matters to the Head."

Gosling leaned out of the window and addressed the crowd as they turned away. His unconsciousness of the appearance of his face added to the absurdity of the scene. He wagged his head solemnly at Mr. Quelch.

"Wot I says is this 'ere!" he remarked, with great gravity. "It's my dooty to look after the boys in the habsence of the 'Ead! When the 'Ead comes back I shall tell him that I have been scandalously treated! This lodge is a-turning round and round, and I shall insist on having it fixed in a proper and comfortable manner, suitable for a gentleman to live in! If any man present says that I'm intoxicated, I hurls back the insinuation with scorn! Wot I says is this 'ere—"

But the rest of the valuable remarks of Gosling were lost. A little later the Remove-master was in the dormitory, and the chums, completely recovered by that time from the internal twinges, related

their experiences to their interested and envious Form-fellows; and long after lights out the Remove were listening to the story of how Harry Wharton and his chums had been "roughing it."

(More fun and excitement with the chums of the Remove next week. Don't miss reading "A CHALLENGE TO GREYFRIARS! IN WHICH HARRY WHARTON & Co. accept the cricket challenge of a team of French schoolboys.")

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