

GRIPPING LONG STORIES OF ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS INSIDE!

The **GEM** ^{2d}



The
**HOUSEMASTER'S
PERIL!**

THE MASKED MAN WHO SOUGHT THE LIFE OF A ST. JIM'S HOUSEMASTER!

The HOUSEMASTER'S PERIL!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Clinging desperately to the ivy, Kerr worked his way foot by foot nearer to the bound form of Mr. Tailton. It was only a matter of seconds before the masked man above would cut the rope suspending the School House master! Tense with anxiety, the juniors below watched the scene.

CHAPTER 1.

The Message of Mystery!

"**B**AI JOVE!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's uttered that exclamation in a tone of considerable astonishment. He was gazing through his famous monocle upon one of the stonework pillars at the entrance gates.

"How vewy wemarkable!" murmured the swell of the School House. "Bai Jove! I wathah think this is some silly joke!"

He continued staring at the gatepost for some moments, and then strolled thoughtfully across the quad in the direction of the School House. It was early morning, and D'Arcy happened to be first down. But now other juniors were appearing.

D'Arcy's chums of Study No. 6—
THE GEN LIBRARI.—No. 1512.

Blake, Herries, and Digby—appeared on the School House steps. Arthur Augustus regarded them rather absently, with a thoughtful frown upon his brow.

"Hallo, Gussy! You're an early bird!" said Jack Blake cheerfully. "Have you caught any worms?"
"Yaas—I mean, no, you ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Blake chuckled, and Digby nodded approvingly at the blue sky.

"Well, it's a jolly fine Monday morning!" he said. "Let's hope it sets an example to the rest of the week."
"Yes, it's a ripping morning!" agreed Blake. "What do you think, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus nodded absently. "Yaas, wathah! It is most mysterious!" he said.

Blake stared. "Mysterious?" he repeated. "Going dotty, or what?"

"No; I'm not goin' dotty!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "I merely said that it is vewy mysterious—vewy wemarkable, in fact!"

"You silly josses!" said Blake. "How can the morning be mysterious and remarkable? Who ever heard of a mysterious morning?"

"Mornin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I nevah said anything about the mornin'. I was weferwin' to the notice on the gatepost!"

"Oh, so there's a notice on the gatepost?" said Blake. "Who put it there?"
"I have not the faintest ideah. It is vewy stwange, deah boy."

Herries started walking across the quad.

"It's no good asking Gussy about the notice," he said. "Let's go and have a squint for ourselves."

"Good egg!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 crossed over to the entrance gates. D'Arcy's thoughtful manner told the others that the notice, whatever it was, was something unusual.

"There it is, deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus pointed to a half-sheet of notepaper which was fastened to the stonework by a couple of small rusty nails.

"What's it say on it?" asked Digby.

They crowded round. The words upon the paper were written in pencil, and in a scrawling hand which none of the juniors recognised.

"I am here!" ran the notice. "There is one in this school who will understand.—G. M."

Blake turned an astonished face towards his chums.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated.

"What the dickens does it mean?"



A GRIPPING STORY OF SCHOOL FUN AND THRILLING ADVENTURE, FEATURING TOM MERRY & CO. AND A MADMAN WITH THE LUST FOR REVENGE.

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asked Herries. "Who's here? And who will understand?"

"Can't make it out," replied Blake. "As Gussy intelligently remarked, it's jolly mysterious."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Digby. "It's some fatheaded joke of somebody's! I shouldn't be surprised if Lowther stuck it up."

Arthur Augustus shook his head sagely.

"Wot!" he said. "That is not Lowthah's witin'!"

"I don't say it is," replied Digby. "He might have got some other ass to write it."

"But what for?" demanded Blake. "There's nothing funny in it." Lowther wouldn't do a thing like that."

Smith minor and Kerruish of the Fourth strolled up.

"What's the excitement?" asked Smith minor. "You chaps seem to be jolly interested in that gatepost."

"It's a mysterious notice, deah boy," explained D'Arcy. "Pway wead it, and give us your opinion."

Smith minor and Kerruish scanned the notice, and their opinion was that it was a joke of the New House juniors.

"Rats!" said Digby. "It's Lowther's doing!"

"Well, Lowther's just come out of the School House, so we'll ask him," remarked Blake. "Hi, Lowther!"

Monty Lowther of the Shell looked across the quad. His two chums, Tom Merry and Manners, were with him, and they looked also.

"What's the row?" asked Tom Merry, as Lowther's name was shouted.

"Blessed if I know!" replied the humorist of the Shell. "But, as I seem to be in demand, we'd better go across and see."

And the Terrible Three strolled to the gates.

"You're the chap I want!" said Digby, grasping Lowther's sleeve. "Just squint at that piece of paper!"

Monty Lowther looked at it, and read the words.

"Very artistic!" he said pleasantly. "I must say your writing has improved, Digby, though I'm blown if I can see why you should display it all over the giddy quad!"

There was a general chuckle, and Digby glared.

"That's not my writing, you ass!" he said warmly.

"Oh, isn't it?" said Lowther. "Sorry! I thought you were proud of the thing, and—"

"Oh, shut up!" interrupted Digby. "We want to know if you wrote that, Lowther!"

"I'm not guilty!" said Lowther. "What is it, anyhow? Who's 'G. M.'?"

"We haven't the faintest idea," replied D'Arcy. "Digby thought that pewpaws your were playin' a joke."

"Not me!" said Lowther promptly. "When I play a joke, I play a decent one!"

"Opinions differ," said Blake. "To my mind, this seems just about your way."

"My mark will be planted on your nose in half a tick!" retorted Lowther. "Have you Fourth Form asses bunged it up for some silly reason of your own?"

"Wathah not, deah boy," replied D'Arcy. "I was the first to see it. I was in the quad, as a matter of fact, and strolled across here by

chance. Then I saw that piece of papah stawin' me in the face."

"Looks to me as if it was put up by somebody in the night," said Tom Merry, eyeing the piece of paper critically. "It's outside the gates, you see."

Monty Lowther re-read the words.

"I am here," he quoted. "Where? I can't see anybody here except you chaps. So, if this is true, one of you chaps must have shoved it up on the post!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "That only means that the writer's here, in the neighbourhood. My hat, I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"The solution," replied Blake. "This notice must be for Cutts, or perhaps Levison. It's from a giddy bookmaker, and 'G. M.' are his initials."

"Bai Jove!"

"Sounds probable," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "The chap's put it in this way so that nobody else will understand it."

"Hallo! Cutts has just come out of the School House!" exclaimed Manners. "Let's ask him, and see what he has to say."

"Good wheeze!"

And in one voice the little crowd of juniors shouted across the quadrangle.

CHAPTER 2.

A Stranger Within the Gates!

GERALD CUTTS, the black sheep of the Fifth, looked across to the entrance gates and frowned.

"What on earth are those kids yelling at me for?" he muttered.

For a moment he took no notice; then, as his name was repeated continuously, he strode across the quad to the juniors. Cutts was not on the best of terms with Tom Merry & Co., for his idea of enjoyment did not coincide with

"I am here! There is one in the school who will understand! —G. M." Such is the cryptic notice which appears on the St. Jim's gatepost one morning. To everyone in the school it is a complete mystery. But had Mr. Railton, the School House master, only known, it is a warning to him of deadly danger!

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The Terrible Three watched his face closely, but it only expressed impatience.

"Who's it got to do with me?" asked Cutts sharply. "I suppose there's a joke somewhere."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No joke about it," he replied. "We only thought that it might be addressed to you, Cutts."

Cutts stared.

"Me?" he said. "Why should it be addressed to me?"

"Because we think it's from a bookie," replied Tom Merry blandly. "You have dealings with those gentlemen, Cutts, and we thought that one of 'em was getting a bit nasty with you. Do you know anybody with 'G. M.' for his initials?"

Cutts turned red.

"You cheeky young ass!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "The thing's got nothing to do with me."

"Quite sure?" asked Monty Lowther.

"You're a bit of a liar, you know, Cutts!"

"You young sweep!" roared Cutts, striding forward towards Lowther. "If you dare say that—"

"Oh, climb off it!" interrupted Lowther. "You had better not touch me, Cutts! There's a good few of us here, remember, and if you lay your dirty hands on me you will find yourself used as a broom, and that wouldn't improve your nice appearance."

Cutts choked back his wrath, for he knew that the juniors would certainly make things warm for him if he became violent. So, with a furious frown, he strode off, amid a general chuckle.

Other juniors were out in the quad now, and Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, Lumley Lumley, Crooke, Levison, and others marched across to the gates to see what the excitement was about.

Very soon quite a crowd had collected, and many conjectures were made concerning the notice.

"I wathah think it is from a bookie," said Arthur Augustus. "Nobody else would wite a mysterious message like that. Pewpaws it is for you, Levison! Pewpaws somebody from the Gween Man is afath you!"

"Rot!" said Levison of the Fourth. "It's nothing to do with me. I believe those New House bookies have done it for a jape. They'll come out here presently and start cackling at the excitement they have caused."

"Their cackles would soon change to howls if it is their work," said Tom Merry grimly.

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the quad about a quarter of an hour before bed-time in order to get a few minutes' fresh air. The night was keen and dark, and the lights of the New House gleamed out on the other side of the quad.

"That you, Tom Merry?" asked a voice, in a whisper, from the darkness.

The Terrible Three were discussing football, and the affair of the notice was forgotten for the time. But as they walked about the quad three figures suddenly appeared from beneath one of the old elms.

"Yes," replied the captain of the Shell. "What's up, Figgy? What's the giddy whisper for?"

Figgins & Co. loomed up out of the gloom.

"Shush!" said Fatty Wynn mysteriously.

"What do you want us to shush for?" asked Monty Lowther humorously. "I only believe in shushing when there's a good reason to shush!"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Figgins. "We've seen something! We were standing under the elm-trees, talking, when a black form slipped round behind the gym."

"The ghost of St. Jim's!" chuckled Lowther irresistibly. "Have you been having too much supper, Figgy?"

Figgins snorted.

"Why the dickens don't you shove a muzzle on that fathead?" he said, glaring at Tom Merry in the darkness.

"When he's in one of these moods he ought to be put into a strait-waistcoat and bunged into a padded room!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"What's all this about a black form?" he asked.

"We saw it go behind the gym," said Kerr.

"One of the chaps, I expect," remarked Manners. "Nothing mysterious in a chap walking behind the gym, Figgy. Very likely it was a School House chap, with a parcel of grub. When he saw you chaps in the quad he naturally knew it was dangerous to show himself."

"My only hat!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "He's right, Figgy. I say, what asses we were to wait! We've lost a feed now!"

Fatty Wynn seemed quite upset.

"Well, I don't believe it was one of the chaps," said Figgins. "We had a good view of him for a moment, and I'm pretty sure it was a man. Are you game to come with us and make investigations?"

"Rather!" said the Terrible Three, in one voice.

And the six juniors stepped quietly across the quad in the direction of the gymnasium. The Terrible Three were rather sceptical, and Tom Merry had a momentary suspicion that it was a jape, and that they were being led into a trap.

"I say, pax, you know!" he murmured. "This isn't a jape, I suppose, Figgy?"

"Of course not," said Figgins.

They crept round the corner of the gym and stood looking into the darkness in the direction of the woodshed.

"Nobody here," whispered Manners. All was silent and still. Then Kerr suddenly grasped Tom Merry's arm.

"Look!" he whispered.

They all looked, and they caught a momentary glimpse of a form moving beside the woodshed.

"My hat! There's somebody there, right enough!" murmured Tom Merry. "Perhaps it's Levison," suggested

Manners. "He might be having a cigarette before going to bed."

"Well, let's see."

The juniors crept forward cautiously. Then suddenly the form dashed into view and scudded towards the Head's garden. And the juniors saw at once that it was the form of a man.

"After him!" roared Figgins.

"Don't let him get away!"

The juniors rushed away in pursuit of the stranger. He arrived at the hedge dividing the Head's garden from the quad, and then doubled back with extraordinary agility, considering his bulk, for he was a big man.

He ran right into the juniors, and for a second there was an exciting scuffle. The stranger struggled, and showed that he was possessed of tremendous strength. Then, without any apparent reason, he became quiet, and fell back on to the ground.

"Don't hurt me!" he panted. "I ain't done no 'arm!"

"What were you doing in here?" demanded Figgins suspiciously.

"Nothing, sir—absolutely nothing," declared the man; and while the juniors stared at him he kept up a continuous mutter, which could not be understood.

Kerr produced a little electric lamp from his pocket and flashed the light upon the prisoner.

He was a heavily-built man, attired in a shabby, weather-stained suit. His chin was scrubby, and his eyes had a strange, wild look about them, that made the juniors feel uncomfortable.

Tom Merry was just going to open his mouth to speak when a tall form strode up. It was Kildare, the popular captain of the school.

"What are you juniors doing here?" he said sternly. "It's bed-time, and—Great Scott! Who on earth's that fellow?"

Kildare stared down at the stranger, who was sitting in the quad, surrounded by the juniors. He was looking straight before him, and muttering continuously.

"Who is it?" repeated Kildare.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry. "He was skulking around the woodshed, and we collared him. Looks to me as if he was up to no good."

Kildare stared at the stranger.

"Don't sit there!" he ordered sharply. "Get up and give an account of yourself!"

The man scrambled to his feet, and Kerr kept his electric light directed upon him.

"What are you doing in these grounds?" demanded Kildare. "It's private property, and—"

"I know, sir," interrupted the man, turning his wild eyes upon Kildare. "I wasn't doing no harm, sir. I came in the gates, hoping as I could find something to eat. I aren't go to the house, though, and when I went to the gates again they was locked. So I thought I'd wait till all was quiet, and then climb over the wall. I didn't mean no harm, sir!"

The stranger's voice trailed away into a mutter, until no sound was coming from his lips, although the latter continued forming words. Kildare regarded the man curiously for a moment.

"Well, he doesn't look like a burglar," he said critically. "Where do you live?" he added, turning to the man.

"Live?" repeated the man, uttering a strange laugh. "On the road, sir! I haven't tasted food since last night, and I thought that I might get a bite by coming here."

"Well, you should have asked

properly for food, instead of skulking about the grounds," said Kildare sharply. "Here's a shilling for you," he added generously. "You'll find some shops open in the village if you hurry."

The man took the coin and dropped it into his pocket without a word. Then he seemed to realise what had occurred.

"Thank you, sir!" he said hoarsely.

Fatty Wynn felt in his pocket and produced a bulky package. He gazed at it rather sadly for a moment, hesitated, and then held it forward.

"Here's a bag of sandwiches," he said good-naturedly. "They'll do to munch on the way to the village. It's rotten to be hungry."

The stranger took the bag eagerly, and commenced operations without delay. He followed Kildare quietly across the quad to the gates, and waited silently while Taggles unlocked them.

As soon as they were open he walked straight out, mumbling continuously to himself. He did not say a word audibly, but disappeared into the gloom without even looking round.

"Nice goings on," grumbled Taggles, relocking the gate. "If I'd known that feller was in the grounds I'd have had him out, and quick, too!"

"Well, he's out now," said Kildare; and Taggles went back to his lodge, rather ill-tempered at having been disturbed.

"Jolly queer bird!" said Figgins. "He seemed to be a little bit off his rocker. Still, he was harmless enough."

"What do you think about it, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

"I think it's high time you youngsters were in bed," said Kildare grimly. "Off you go, Figgins! I'll explain matters to Monty."

Figgins & Co. hurried off, and the Terrible Three followed Kildare to the School House.

And the juniors in the Shell dormitory had another subject for conversation before going to sleep for the night.

## CHAPTER 3.

### Another Warning!

"MY only Aunt Jane!" It was Bernard Glyn of the Shell who thus expressed himself.

He uttered the words in a tone of great surprise—and he certainly had good cause to feel astonished.

It was Tuesday morning, and Bernard Glyn had been punting a football about in the quad, waiting until the other fellows came out to join him. He had given the footer a hearty kick, and it had rolled out of the gates into the road.

Having recovered it, Glyn kicked it back into the quad. Then he followed leisurely. But as he came opposite to the gates he noticed something on one of the stone pillars.

For a second he thought it was the notice that had caused so much interest the previous morning. Then he remembered that it had been taken down and placed in the junior Common-room.

Another notice was nailed to the post.

Bernard Glyn uttered a gasp of astonishment. He saw that this notice was written on a similar piece of paper, and in the same handwriting. It ran:

"The time is near. Ten years is a long time, but I remember. To escape me is impossible.—G. M."

Bernard Glyn stood before the notice,

gaping with astonishment. "An exclamation of sheer surprise left his lips. "What can it mean!" he murmured. "Great Scott! This is getting a bit thick!"

He looked round, and saw Figgins & Co. had come out into the quad from the New House.

"I say, you chaps!" bawled Glyn.

"What's up?" shouted Figgins.

"Come here!"

Glyn's tone was urgent, and Figgins & Co. crossed to the gates at a run.

"Wonder if it's another giddy notice!" said Kerr.

"My hat, it is!" ejaculated Figgins, as the trio halted at the gates.

Bernard Glyn looked at them curiously.

"Just quiet at that pillar," he said. "There's another notice up there. Read it!"

Figgins & Co. read it.

"What the dickens can it mean?" said Figgins in a puzzled voice. "It's quite plain that the notice has been showed up there by an outsider. But who?" It's beginning to look a bit queer."

"It's so jolly melodramatic!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "To escape me is impossible! Sounds like a bit out of a detective story."

"Whether there's anything in it or not, I'm going to find out the truth," said Kerr, the keen Scottish junior, with determination. "Anything mysterious like this interests me, and I shan't be satisfied until I have ferreted out the giddy facts."

Bernard Glyn left Figgins & Co. standing at the gates and hurried into the School House. In the entrance hall he met Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three. Glyn's face was flushed, and he looked excited.

"Anything up?" asked Manners.

"Yes," replied Glyn quickly. "There's another blessed notice on the gatepost!"

"Another notice!"

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

"It's a fact," said Glyn. "And it sounds awfully dramatic, too! Come out and have a look for yourselves."

"Yas, watah!"

And the juniors streamed out into the quad and hurried across to Figgins & Co. They all read the notice eagerly, and then stared at one another with astonished looks.

"Well, this takes the biscuit!"

"It runs off with the giddy currant bun!" declared Monty Lowther. "Who the dickens writes the things? It can't be a joke, because there's nothing funny in it."

Tom Merry & Co. were very puzzled. And while they stood there discussing the matter Mr. Railton approached from the School House. He seemed rather surprised to see so many boys collected at the gates.

"I wish to speak to you, Merry," said the Housemaster, looking round. "A man entered the grounds last night—Is there anything the matter here?" he asked, suddenly breaking off.

"It's this notice, sir," replied Blake, pointing to the paper.

Mr. Railton looked.

"I heard something about a notice yesterday," he said, stepping forward in order to get a closer view.

"Yes, sir; but this is another notice!" And written in the same hand-writing, too!"

Mr. Railton read the notice through, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and then read it again.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "This is most curious! Are you sure it is not the work of some humorously minded

junior, Merry, who thinks it funny to create a mystery?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's not been done by any of the chaps, sir," he replied. "We took a lot of pains yesterday to find out the joker, but it's still a mystery."

"G. M.," murmured the Housemaster thoughtfully. "Can you tell me the contents of yesterday's notice, boys?" he added aloud.

"Yes, sir," replied Blake. "It simply read 'I am here. There is one in this school who understands.' And now this morning we find this, sir!"

Mr. Railton looked at the notice again, and then took it down.

"I will show it to Dr. Holmes," he said, putting it in his pocket. "And now, about that man who was here last night, Merry. Kildare has told me that you and some other juniors found a stranger lurking by the woodshed."

"That's right, sir. He seemed to be a little bit dotty."

"You do not think he meant mischief?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Manners. "He was simply a tramp looking for something to eat. He came in when the gates were open, and then Taggles locked 'em. So the chap couldn't get out again without rousing Taggles."

"He seemed quite harmless, sir," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton asked one or two more questions, and then departed, leaving the juniors in little groups, discussing the situation.

"Well, I don't know what to make of it, for one!" exclaimed Figgins to his two chums. "I wonder if we shall find any more notices nailed up?"

"Shouldn't be surprised," answered Kerr thoughtfully. "The chap who's responsible is either off his rocker, or has got a fixed motive. I wonder—"

Kerr broke off absently.

"Well," said Figgins, "you wonder what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"That must tax your brain a terrific lot," said Fatty Wynn sarcastically. "How can you wonder nothing, you ass? What were you going to say?"

"It seems mighty curious to me that that tramp chap should be lurking about last night," replied Kerr. "We biffed him over, you know, and he was as strong as a giddy ox. Now, a chap who's been without food for hours, and who's a tramp on the road, isn't usually strong, is he?"

"My hat, no!" said Figgins.

"Rather not!" agreed Fatty Wynn emphatically. "Why, even if I miss a single meal I feel horribly weak for days!"

"Oh, rats!" said Kerr. "You're nobody to judge by, Fatty. One of your meals would last another chap a week. It's no wonder you feel starved if you miss one."

Figgins chuckled, and Kerr went on.

"That chap's eyes, too," he said. "Didn't you notice how wild they looked?"

"That's easily explained," said Wynn promptly.

"How?"

"Why, the poor chap was nearly off his rocker with hunger!" answered Wynn. "Nothing else would give a chap that wild-eyed look."

"Oh, shut up, you giddy porpoise!" exclaimed Kerr impatiently. "If you can't talk about anything else but grub you'd better ring off! My opinion is that the chap was not quite right in the head. And it struck me as being possible that he might have written those notices."

Figgins and Fatty Wynn stared.

"Rot!" said Figgins.



Creeping forward cautiously, the juniors suddenly saw the stranger dashing towards the Head's garden. "After him!" exclaimed Figgins. "Don't let him get away!"

"Well, perhaps it is; but you never know!" said Kerr sagely. "Personally, I mean to keep my eyes open and get to the bottom of the business."

But it seemed as though the business had no bottom, for nobody could suggest any explanation. The day passed, and the affair of the warning notices was still a mystery.

During the in Study No. 6 Blake propounded a scheme which had occurred to him.

"Why shouldn't we take a rise out of the Shell bounders?" he suggested, as he piled into a plate of steak-and-kidney pie. "It's about time we did something, just to show them that we're leaders of the School House!"

"Have you got an ideah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy. "Because if you haven't I suggest that you welinquish the weins in my favah. I pwide myself that I could lead this studay to victwry—"

"Oh, rats, Gussy!" interrupted Blake. "I'm leader, and I'm going to remain leader. You can go and eat coke!"

"I uttally wufuse to go and eat coke!"

"Then eat your tea, ass!"

"I decline to be chawacterised as an ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus stiffly. "Eat your tea and shut up!" roared Blake.

"I shall not shut up until you have wetwacted your wotten appellations!" said D'Arcy indignantly.

"What's he talking about?" asked Digby.

"Sounded like rotten apples!" remarked Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How can Blake retract his rotten apples, Gussy?" asked Digby.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glared.

"Pway do not be so widge, Digby!" he said. "I nevah said anythin' about witten apples! I said wotten appellations! disagreeable names, you ignowant duffahs! I am a perfectly twactable chapp as a wule, but I uttally wufuse to sit here—"

"You can stand up, Gussy!" suggested Digby.

"I uttally wufuse to sit here and be called names!" proceeded D'Arcy haughtily. "Therefore, unless you wender an instant apology, Blake, I shall be compelled to wise and wetiah from the woom!"

"Oh lor!" groaned Blake. "Why were we saddled with this chunk of fat-headedness!"

"Echo answers why!" said Herries.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"I decline to sit at the same table with a wottah who wufers to me as a chunk of fat-headedness!" he said firmly. "I—Owl! Gwooh! Weally, Blake! Welease me at once!"

Blake grinned as he forced the swell of the School House back into his chair.

"Rats, Adolphus!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "We're not going to have you clear off in a huff. I've got a wheete to suggest. In fact, I've been waiting to suggest it for a long time, only you've been jawing so much!"

"I uttally—"

"Piffet! Sit still!"

"I wufuse—"

"Sit still!" roared Blake. "If you cause any more commotion, Gussy, we'll open the door and sling you into the Passageway!"

"On your neck!" added Digby.

Arthur Augustus calmed down. Nothing would cause him to calm down so quickly as a threat to rag him and soil his elegant attire.

"You boundahs!" he ejaculated. "I

"Will you sit still and be quiet?" demanded Blake threateningly.

"I uttally wufuse. I—I mean, yaas, deah boy!"

"Good!"

And D'Arcy was left alone. He glared round indignantly for a few moments; but as his chums seemed to be oblivious of the glare he transferred his gaze to his teacup and glared into that.

Meanwhile, Blake explained his wheeze.

## CHAPTER 4.

### The Fake Message!

"IT'S not much," began Blake modestly. "Still, I think we can give the Terrible Three and those other Shell chaps a jolly good smack in the eye!"

"What's the good of that?" asked Herries. "You can't call a smack in the eye a wheeze! It's nothing more than a rag!"

"I don't mean literally, you ass!" said Blake. "We'll give the whole Shell a smack in the eye, as it were. Now, my idea is this! Let's write a blood-curdling notice and sign it 'G. M.', the same as those two which have been nailed to the gatepost!"

"Rotten!" said Digby.

"Idiotic!" agreed Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Utally widic!" Blake glared.

"Well, that's a nice way to greet a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Why can't you wait until I have finished? That's only the beginning of the wheeze!"

"Oh!"

"Get the rest off your chest, then."

"That's what I'm going to do, you chumps! The notice will have to be worded carefully—something to the effect that ructions are going to happen after lights-out. Then I'll dress up in some of the Junior Dramatic Society's duds, and steal into the Shell dormitory after lights-out. You chaps will be just behind—and if we don't make the Shell sit up I shall be surprised! They'll all shiver with fright when they see my giddy wheete!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, do you think it's worth working?" asked Blake.

"Yes, it's jolly good," said Digby. "At first I thought you meant to shove the notice up only. There'd be no sense in that. Let's write the giddy notice, then!"

"Good egg!"

And the juniors hurried over the rest of their tea. Then a corner of the table was cleared, and Blake got out an exercise book and tore a sheet out of it.

"Now, lemme see!" he murmured, biting the end of a pencil. "How shall we start?"

"Beware!" said Digby solemnly.

"Eh? Beware of what?"

"That's the beginning of the notice, you ass!"

"Oh!" said Blake. "Well, that's not bad, though it's not exactly original. I'll shove it down and see how it looks!"

And Blake drafted out the blood-curdling notice. After much scratching-out and substitution it read thus:

"BEWARE! The hour has come! A horrible end awaits my victim to-night! Let one person in this great building close his eyes before midnight, and I strike swift, and certain! So let the ONE to whom this warning is addressed take heed!"

"G. M."

Blake read it aloud.

"Sounds awfully villainous!" remarked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah; but wouldn't it be bettah to mention Tom Mewwy's name in its deah boys?" asked D'Arcy.

"No fear!" said Blake. "Everybody would know it was a jape then. As it is, all the chaps will be wondering who the particular one is!"

"Right-ho! Write it out properly, and we'll sneak out and shove it on the gatepost," said Digby. "We must pretend to know nothing about it."

Blake rewrote the notice in ink on a plain scrap of notepaper. When it was done, it certainly seemed genuine, for Blake disguised his own handwriting completely, and wrote in the same scrawly hand as the two original notices.

"Well, that'll do," he said, regarding it critically. "But we mustn't forget that this is only a jape. The real mystery still requires unravelling, and it's up to us to get at the truth. I hear that Kerr is engaged on the case, as they say in detective stories. Well, School House is Cock House, and we mustn't let Kerr find out the secret before we do. There's the honour of the House to think of."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy. "There is no need to wowwy, howevah. I have made up my mind to devote all my spare time to 'fawwetin' out the twuth."

"Good old Gus!" chuckled Blake. "I can see you doing the 'fawwetin' bizney successfully—I don't think!"

"Weally, Blake, I am just the chap for the job," protested Arthur Augustus. "It only weequahs tact and judgment, and a little detective skill."

"That's all, Gussy; but as you don't possess a mite of either, you had better stand down," said Blake genially. "You're all right in your place, you know, but once you get out of it, there's no telling what ructions you'll cause. Your place is to remain an ornament to the School House—kind of fashion-plate, as it were, for the chaps to look at and admire."

D'Arcy glared at Blake through his monocle.

"I pwotest against this howwibly personal chawacterisation!" he exclaimed warmly. "I uttally decline to be called a fashion-plate! I pwide myself—"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy, for goodness' sake!"

"Yes, let's go and stick this notice up!"

"Good!"

And Blake, Herries, and Digby trooped out of the study, leaving the lofty Arthur Augustus glaring wrathfully at the open doorway.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "The wude boundahs!"

He hesitated for a moment, then followed his chums out of the study, and caught up with them in the quad, which was dark and deserted.

"Blake, you wottah!"

"Sh'eh!" whispered Blake warningly. "Do you want to give the whole giddy game away?"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus realised the necessity for silence. As it happened, the quad was absolutely bare, and not a soul saw the Fourth Formers fixing up the piece of paper. The gates were not locked yet, although they would be very shortly, and Blake was anxious lest the paper should be unnoticed.

But in ten minutes' time, while the chums of Study No. 6 were talking in the entrance-hall, Crooke of the Shell rushed in.

"I say," he ejaculated. "There's

another giddy notice on the gatepost! Have you chaps seen it?"

"Another notice!" exclaimed Blako innocently.

"Bai Jove!"

"You're kidding," said Digby doubtfully.

"I'm not!" exclaimed Crooke, in excitement. "Go and look for yourselves, if you don't believe me!"

Blake & Co. rushed out, and in a short time a whole crowd of juniors were collected about the gates, most of them looking rather excited. The wording of the notice was certainly rather startling.

The paper was taken down and passed from hand to hand. At last Tom Merry got hold of it. Blake looked over his shoulder.

"What on earth can it mean?" asked Blake wonderingly.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry. "Somehow, this doesn't seem like the other notices! Can you see any difference, Blake? The paper doesn't seem the same, and I wouldn't swear that this is written by the same hand."

Blake scoffed.

"Rats!" he said promptly. "What on earth makes you think that, Tom Merry? Why, anybody can see that it's genuine!"

Blake's tone was positive, and Tom Merry gave him a quick look. Then the captain of the Shell transferred his gaze to the paper again. It struck him as being very peculiar that the notice should have been nailed up during the evening, for both the others had been found in the morning. And there was something about the handwriting which was just a trifle familiar. Tom Merry held up the paper to the light above the gateway. Then his eyes gleamed a little, and he passed the notice on to Manners.

"Better not take any notice of it," he said carelessly. "I expect it's some fat-headed jape or other."

"Jape!" said Blake. "It doesn't sound like a jape, anyhow."

"Better take the thing to Mr. Railton," suggested Bernard Glyn.

"Wathah not, deah boy," said D'Arcy quickly.

"Why not?" asked Tom Merry.

"Because Railton won't understand, for one thing," put in Blake quickly, before Arthur Augustus could reply. "He'd have prefects shoved into the dormitories, or something like that. If the chap comes, we can deal with him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And he'll get it hot, too—jolly hot!" said Tom Merry grimly, but with a twinkle in his eye.

And when the juniors had dispersed, and Blake & Co. were once more in their study, Herries looked rather uneasy.

"I say," he said. "I'm not so sure about this jape panning out successfully, after all. If the Shell bouncers have jumped to it, they'll give us a jolly warm time when we appear."

"Rats!" said Blake promptly. "When I'm dressed up they won't know me from Bill Sikes. It'll be great fun watching the chaps dive under the bedclothes. My hat, I'll give 'em a fright!"

"If you want to give 'em a really good fright," said Dig, "you'd better not dress up at all."

"You fathead!"

Blake & Co. settled down to their prep, feeling quite satisfied with the progress of the jape. Could they have been in the Shell passage at that moment, they would not have been so cheerful.



Magician (boastfully): "I'll pay one pound to anyone who can tell me something I can't do!"

Voice from Audience: "Get your hair cut!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. White, Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot, Berks.

In Tom Merry's study the Terrible Three were chuckling.

"It's simply a jape of those Fourth Form kids," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "I suspected it all along, but then I got positive evidence on the subject."

Tom Merry handed the well-thumbed notice to his chums.

"Hold up to the light," he said. Manners and Lowther did so, and the former uttered an exclamation.

"Why, this is a piece of your note-paper, Tommy," he said, in surprise.

"Exactly!" chuckled the captain of the Shell. "I spotted the watermark almost at once. Now, it's a bit too improbable to think that this mysterious 'G. M.' uses the same kind of paper as I do. This morning I gave Blake a double sheet of my note-paper, with some jottings on it. What more need I say?"

"Nothing," learned counsel," said Monty Lowther. "The evidence is complete. We have proved positively and assuredly that the notice is a bogus one, and that it emanated from the portals of the famous apartment known at Study No. 6. The object of this notice is obviously a dark and terrible jape. What shall the punishment be?"

"Death!" said Manners solemnly.

"That's it," went on Lowther. "We'll collar Blake & Co. at their own game, and have them publicly slaughtered. Now, I suggest something lingering, with molten lead or boiling oil in it."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Well, we'll be prepared for them, anyhow," he said. "I don't say we'll boil them in oil, but we'll give 'em a hot time! Fancy those kids thinking that they could diddle us!"

"Preposterous idea!" scoffed Monty Lowther. "After lights-out, I expect Blake and the others will put in an appearance, with the sweet intention of frightening our giddy lives out."

"It would be too bad altogether to disappoint them," said Manners concernedly. "So we'll put our heads together and prepare a counter jape. Then we'll go round and give the tip to all the other chaps!"

And the Terrible Three sat down round the fire to think out a counter jape.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Not According to Programme.

ALL was quiet in the Fourth Form dormitory.

Kildare had just left, after turning the lights out, bidding the juniors "Goodnight!" The silence lasted precisely until Kildare's footsteps had died away down the corridor, then Jack Blake sat up in bed.

"All serene!" he murmured softly. "You chaps ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake & Co. slipped out of bed, and quietly pulled some things on. The other juniors looked on interestedly, for many of them did not know of the intended jape.

"What's the idea?" asked Levison.

"Go and eat coke!" answered Digby bluntly. "You're not in this, Levison, so you'd better go to sleep!"

"It's too cold to get up, anyhow," said Levison, with a sniff. "I'm blessed if I'd turn out just to play a silly kid's jape!"

"What's the wheeze, any'ow?" asked Harry Hammond, the Cockney school-boy. "What game are you chaps goin' to play?"

"It's a wippin' jape against the Shell, deah boy," answered D'Arcy, who was Hammond's chum. "I twixed to tell you before suppah, but Kangawoo and Dane were neah by, so I could not."

"I thought you seemed sort o' worried," said Hammond. "Well, they ain't in here now, so let's 'ave the partielars."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

And while he finished his dressing he briefly outlined the scheme.

"Blake's going into the Shell dormitory," he concluded; "but we shall be just inside the door to watch the fun and to lend a hand if necessary."

"You won't be very safe if the Shell chaps tumble to the bloomin' wheeze," said Hammond. "Best let me an' one or two others come along with you."

"Good idea!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I'll go, too."

"Sure, an' it's meself that'll be another!" said Reilly.

"That'll be seven," said Blake. "Can't let any more come, or we shall give the giddy show away!"

So several of the juniors who would like to have gone were denied the privilege.

While Blake was struggling into a large black cloak in the Fourth Form dormitory, the Shell dormitory presented quite an active appearance. The Terrible Three were busily making preparations for Blake & Co.'s visit.

Bernard Glyn stood close against the door, listening for the first sound of the expected japers. The whole Shell knew of the facts, and everyone was awake. They intended giving Blake & Co. a considerable surprise when they arrived, just to show them that it was like their check to jape the Shell.

"Look out!" whispered Glyn suddenly. "I can hear somebody out in the passage."

"My hat!"

"Jump into bed—quick!" hissed Tom Merry. "Glyn, you stand behind that curtain against the door, and, when they are all in, slip forward and lock it. We don't want the bouncers to escape!"

"Right-ho!" murmured the Lancashire lad.

He slipped behind the curtain, and the dormitory was all still and quiet. For a whole minute nothing occurred, and the juniors began to think that

Bernard Glyn had been mistaken. Then a slight sound came from the door, and everyone held their breath.

Blake & Co. crept into the Shell dormitory as silently as shadows, until somebody happened to tread on D'Arcy's toe.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped audibly.

"Shut up, you frabjous chump!" hissed Blake, making more row than D'Arcy. "You'll give the whole giddy show away!"

"I uttably decline to be called a frabjous chump!"

"Gag him, for goodness' sake!" whispered Blake.

The Shell fellows lay in their beds, grinning into the darkness, for they had heard everything quite distinctly. The dormitory door was closed, but not latched, and Hammond and Lumley-Lumley stood close against it.

Blake suddenly strode forward into the centre of the dormitory with a heavy, solid tread. Then he paused so that his dim form would be seen by some of the juniors, outlined against the windows. He heard several beds creak, and then a quavering voice broke the silence:

"Who—who's that?"

The voice belonged to Monty Lowther, and sounded full of terror.

Blake grinned in the darkness.

"I have come here to kill the treacherous wretch whom I have sworn to—kill!" he said, in a solemn, villainous voice. "Let him stand forth—Oh, my only Aunt Maria!"

Blake staggered back a pace and gasped. For, without any warning, a dozen electric torches had flashed out from a dozen beds, and Blake blinked dazedly at the dazzling lights. He was standing in a brilliantly illuminated spot, and his "disguise" looked extremely quaint in the glare.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A low murmur of laughter came from the Shell fellows.

"Look at the giddy avenger!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Let him stand forth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake stared round in alarm. He wore a large cloak and a wide-brimmed hat, and carried a huge, old pistol, which had given up work years ago, and which was useless except as an ornament. In the darkness, Blake made an imposing, awesome figure—but in the full light he looked quite funny.

"Rescue!" he yelled suddenly.

"Too late!" chuckled Lowther. "Rescue is not within your reach. You are our prisoner, and we are about to slaughter you!"

"Wats!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly. "Wally wound, you chaps—wally wound! Study No. 6 for evah!"

The Fourth Formers made a dash for their leader, but Blake waved them back.

"We shall be beaten in a tick if we stay here!" he said quickly. "Let's clear out while we've got the chance!"

The lights suddenly left Blake, and all focused themselves upon the door. Bernard Glyn was revealed, turning the key in the lock. He held it up and grinned.

"Looked in, my beauties!" he chuckled.

"So the wally wound business isn't any good," grinned Monty Lowther. "Collar the bouncers!"

Half the Shell sprang from their beds, and in less than fifteen seconds a terrific

tussle was in progress in the middle of the dormitory.

Then suddenly a loud knocking sounded on the door.

Silence fell instantly.

"Open this door!" ordered a voice sharply.

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Kildare!"

"Open this door, you young rascals!" repeated Kildare sternly. "What is the meaning of all this uproar? How dare you lock the door?"

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "We're fairly caught!"

"Copped proper!" said Hammond.

"Slip under the beds, you asses!" whispered Tom Merry. "We'll dodge back between the sheets, and Kildare won't know you're in here at all!"

"Good egg!"

"How about the door?" asked Bernard Glyn.

"You unlock it when the lights are all out," said Tom quickly. "Your bed is the nearest, and Kildare will think the door's been unlocked all the time!"

"Perhaps!" muttered Manners doubtfully.

"You cheeky young rascals!" exclaimed Kildare angrily. "How much longer are you going to keep me waiting?"

The Shell fellows dodged back to bed, and the Fourth Formers slipped quickly underneath the beds. Then Glyn silently inserted the key into the lock and turned it. A second later he was in bed.

Kildare, outside, was becoming quite angry.

He grasped the handle and turned it.

"Will you open—My hat!"

The door suddenly opened, and he sprawled into the dormitory on his hands and knees. He had thought the door was locked, and was taken quite by surprise.

A suspicious sound of chuckling sounded from several of the beds, and Kildare sprang to his feet. He was unhurt, but his dignity had suffered. It was hardly the thing for the captain of St. Jim's to sprawl headlong in the Shell dormitory, to the amusement if the fellows.

"You young sweeps!" he exclaimed warmly. "What was the meaning of the uproar in this dormitory a minute ago?"

Silence.

Kildare stepped across to the electric light switch and turned it on. Then in the bright light he turned to the beds again. And something suddenly attracted his attention at the foot of Skimpole's bed.

It was a foot!

Kildare smiled grimly, and strode forward. Next moment, he dragged forcibly at the foot, and there was a sudden howl:

"Ow! Bai Jove, who has collared my foot! Wleasae me, you uttah wottah!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove, I had no idea it was you, Kildare!" gasped Arthur Augustus, sitting up and blinking. "Pway forgive me for callin' you an uttah wottah!"

Kildare forced back a smile.

"What are you doing in this dormitory, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"I—I—Weally, Kildare, I am all in a flutlah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, groping for his monocle. "It's all wight, deah boy—there's no need to get watty."

Answer my question, D'Arcy!" said Kildare sharply. "What are you doing in this dormitory?"

"It's all wight!" said Arthur Augustus, rising to his feet. "I—I was

just playin' a jape on the Shell wottahs, you know!"

Kildare smiled.

"You young rascal!" he exclaimed. "That's not good enough for me. You're not the only Fourth Former in this room, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Kildare, I am—I—I mean—"

Kildare looked under Tom Merry's bed.

"Come out of that, Blake!" he ordered. "And all the rest of you had better come out, too! If you don't show yourselves immediately I will give you all five hundred lines."

The Fourth Formers japers appeared with surprising alacrity, and stood meekly before the prefect.

"It's all right, Kildare, old chap," said Blake. "We were only playing a joke—"

"That's enough, Blake!" interrupted Kildare sharply. "You should wait until daylight to play your jokes. This is a time when you should be in bed and asleep. Why didn't you open the door when I knocked?"

"We—we thought you might not find us," said Blake meekly.

"Well, I have found you—and you will all take a hundred lines!" said Kildare. "Now go back to bed—sharp! And don't let me hear another sound to-night!"

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

And the would-be japers trooped out. Tom Merry & Co. looked after them with joyful grins.

"That's what you call a proper finish to a fizzled-out jape," remarked Monty Lowther. "You've treated 'em in the right way, Kildare, old man; they deserve all they got!"

"And you'll deserve all you get!" said Kildare grimly. "Every boy in this room will take a hundred lines!"

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Monty Lowther blankly.

"But I say, Kildare, that's not fair!" protested Tom Merry. "A lot of the chaps were lying in bed all the time—Crooke, Skimpole, and a lot of others!"

And Tom Merry mentioned the names of the boys who had taken no part in the tussle. Kildare listened, and then nodded.

"All right," he said shortly, "I'll take your word, Merry. Only those boys who were concerned in the disturbance will write the imposition. Now go to sleep, and let me hear no more of you."

Kildare switched off the light and left.

Well, this is a bit of all right!" grumbled Manners. "Got to write a hundred giddy lines, just because those Fourth Form rotters try to jape us!"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Awful!" growled Bernard Glyn.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, go to sleep!" he said lightly.

"Blake & Co. are properly diddled, so that's something to be thankful for!"

And the fellows snuggled down and were very soon sound asleep—with the exception of Tom Merry. Somehow the disturbance had unsettled him, and although he closed his eyes, sleep would not come.

## CHAPTER 6.

### An Alarm in the Night!

TOM MERRY sat up in bed.

Over half an hour had passed since Kildare had departed, and even Tom Merry had just dozed off. But he was far from asleep, and had been aroused instantly when a loud

creak had sounded from a loose board out in the corridor.

"Well, I'm blessed," murmured Tom Merry, rubbing his eyes. "There's somebody out in the passage! It must be those Fourth Form asses come back again!"

He listened intently, and thought he heard the sound of a cautious footstep proceeding down the corridor. But there was no sound of whispering.

"There's someone there, as sure as fate," murmured the captain of the Shell. "Yet I can't hear voices. My hat, it might not be Blake & Co. at all!"

Tom felt startled for a moment. The hour was late, and the whole House was asleep except, perhaps, one or two of the masters. And Tom Merry knew that none of the masters would creep down the corridor in such a stealthy, silent manner.

"My only aunt!" muttered Tom Merry. "It seems jolly suspicious, I must say."

He slipped out of bed and bent over Monty Lowther. He shook his chum's shoulder gently, and Lowther sat up with a growl.

"Grooh! 'Tain't rising bell, you ass," he grumbled.

"Wake up, Monty!"  
"Oh, it's you, Tom? What the dickens do you mean by rousing me at this unearthly hour?"

"I just heard stealthy footsteps out in the corridor!" said Tom quickly.

"My hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, now fully awake. "It must be Blake & Co."

"I don't think so," interrupted Tom Merry quickly. "It sounded awfully mysterious, Monty. It might be a—burglar!"

"Great Scott!"

Lowther hopped out of bed and commenced slipping some clothes. And while he was thus engaged, Tom Merry awoke Manners, who didn't seem at all pleased. But he followed his chums' example, and got dressed.

"A lot of rot, I call it!" he growled. "You must have dreamed it, Tommy."

"I tell you I heard footsteps, you ass!"

"Imagination!"

"I heard the boards creaking!"

"Fancy!"

"Look here," said Tom Merry warmly, "if you don't want to come, you can get back to bed again! I believe there's somebody prowling about the House, although whether it's a burglar or not, I can't say. It might be Cutts or Levison. Anyhow, I'm going to see."

"All right, then," said Manners. "Lead on."

And the Terrible Three crept silently to the door, and emerged into the passage. For a few moments they stood there listening. But all was quiet. They carried electric torches, and Tom Merry flashed his light up and down the passage, but nothing was revealed.

"Must have been your fancy, after all," said Manners.

"Rats! The chap's gone downstairs or in some other corridor," whispered Tom Merry. "Anyhow, I'm going to have a jolly good look before I go back to bed."

His chums said nothing, but they both thought that Tom had either been dreaming or that he had imagined the sounds. But they would not leave him to make the search himself.

They passed down the Fourth Form corridor; but here again all was quiet.

"We'll just see if they're in bed," murmured Tom Merry.

And he opened the door of the Fourth

Form dormitory and flashed his light along the rows of beds. Then he switched it out again and gently closed the door.

"They're all there," he whispered.

"Levison as well?"

"Yes."

"Then that proves you were mistaken," said Lowther. "Even if Cutts was out of bed, he wouldn't pass the Shell dormitory to get out."

"That doesn't prove that I heard nothing," replied the Shell captain. "It merely proves that it couldn't have been Cutts."

"Look here, Tommy, think it out properly," said Manners. "Are you absolutely sure you heard something?"

"Absolutely positive!" said Tom Merry earnestly. "I didn't dream it, or fancy it. Somebody crept past the Shell dormitory; and he was obviously doing his best to make his footsteps silent."

Manners and Lowther shivered a little, for the passage was cold, and it was not exactly a pleasant undertaking to be searching through the silent School House for an unknown, unseen prowler.

"Well, it's jolly queer; that's all I say!" remarked Manners.

"It's awfully queer," agreed Tom Merry. "Let's go downstairs and see if there's any sign of anybody there."

The Terrible Three crept forward silently, and were very soon descending the stairs like shadows. It was a creepy business altogether, for the darkness was thick everywhere, and the windows dimly showed the night sky without.

Suddenly Tom Merry paused and caught his breath in. His chums came to a stop at the same moment, for they, too, had seen something.

In the Hall below the dim outline of a window could be seen, and something black had suddenly passed before it.

The three juniors stood rooted to the stairs.

"Great Scott!" breathed Manners cautiously.

"What was it?" asked Lowther through his teeth.

"I don't know," replied Tom Merry steadily; "but we'll soon see. Flash your lights on—now!"

Instantly the three shafts of electric light shot down into the Hall.

Then the Terrible Three uttered a simultaneous gasp.

The Hall was absolutely empty!

In the reflected light of the lamps the faces of the three Shell fellows were pale and drawn. They felt startled.

"My hat!" muttered Monty Lowther. "There's nothing there!"

But Tom Merry uttered a short exclamation of satisfaction.

"Come on!" he said quickly. "There must be someone, and we've got him, whoever he is!"

"What do you mean?" panted Manners. "There's nobody there!"

"Didn't you see?"

"See what?"

"The door of the Common-room close to," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "The chap must have heard us on the stairs, and before we could switch on our lights he dodged into the Common-room. But he wasn't sloppy enough. I just saw the door close."

"Oh!" murmured Manners.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Lowther. "We—we'll go down and rout him out and see who he is. I reckon the three of us will be equal to the job."

"Rather!"

They descended the remaining stairs and crossed to the Common-room door with quick strides. They knew that the intruder could not have made his escape, for the windows of the Common-room were high up, and there had not been sufficient time for any man, no matter how active, to climb up and open the window.

Tom Merry opened the door. The three lights gleamed into the room.

For a second the Terrible Three caught a glimpse of a strange figure. It was a man dressed in black, with a mask over his face. Through two little



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holes his eyes gleamed fiercely in the brilliant lights.

Then, almost before the juniors had recovered their breath after the first surprise, the weird stranger rushed forward.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Merry loudly.

"Collar the rotter!" gasped Manners. The stranger rushed at the blocked doorway like a charging bull. The Terrible Three stood their ground manfully, but the attack was too fierce for them.

A fist caught Monty Lowther in the chest, and he staggered back and rolled over with a roar. At the same time Tom Merry flung himself at the intruder.

The man gave a snarl, and Tom Merry was pushed out of the way as though he had been a feather.

"Great Scott!" gasped Manners. The strange figure passed him before he could do anything, and the next second the man was darting up the stairs.

"After him!" roared Lowther. The juniors raced up the stairs, yelling loudly and causing a considerable commotion.

"There he goes!" panted Manners. They could just see the fugitive rushing along the corridor. They were not far behind, and they heard, rather than saw, a heavy collision as the man bumped into somebody. Then Kildare's voice made itself heard.

"Hold him, Kildare!" bellowed Tom Merry frantically. "He's a burglar! Hold him!"

They raced up at top speed, but when they arrived at the spot they found the prefect picking himself up from the floor.

"He's gone down the back stairs!" panted Kildare. "Who on earth is he?"

"A rotten burglar!" shouted Manners. "Come on!"

But Kildare led the way. He descended the stairs four at a time, with the juniors tumbling after him, and in one of the back passages they overtook their quarry, who had been stopped by a locked door.

The passage was dimly lighted by two windows, and it was impossible to see more than the indistinct shape of the intruder.

"You'd better give in quietly!" exclaimed Kildare, in a grim voice.

The man did not utter a word, but, with a fierce mutter of fury, he flung himself forward. The next second he was fighting with mad ferocity. The Terrible Three clung to him like limpets, and Kildare had all his work cut out to escape the madly aimed blows.

But between the four of them they at last succeeded in holding the man at bay.

"Got you, you rotter!" gasped Tom Merry triumphantly.

"Rip that mask off his head, Kildare, and let's have a squint at his chivvy!" panted Monty Lowther.

But before Kildare could raise his hand to perform the operation another form appeared.

Then Mr. Railton's voice sounded in the passage, stern and angry.

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful uproar?" demanded the Housemaster sharply. "Boys, I am amazed! How dare you—"

"It's all right, sir!" panted Kildare.

"Kildare!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "Upon my soul—"

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Tom Merry managed to get one arm free, for, at the moment the prisoner stood quiet, breathing hoarsely. Tom Merry pressed the switch of his electric torch, and the light gleamed along the passage.

It showed Mr. Railton standing there, attired in dressing-gown and slippers, and obviously very much perturbed.

Then a startling thing happened.

As the light flashed upon Mr. Railton the prisoner uttered a roar of fury which sounded almost demoniacal. He commenced struggling with amazing strength, and Tom Merry was obliged to drop the torch. But, with a wild cry, the man succeeded in getting free. Then he simply flung himself at Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster was taken utterly by surprise. He had been in the act of hastening forward to assist in the struggle, and the man crashed into him with tremendous force.

Like a ninepin Mr. Railton was bowled over on to the passage floor. Then, with a low snarl, horribly brutal in its ferocity, the strange man leapt upon the prostrate master.

"Good heavens!" shouted Kildare. "The man must be mad!"

He and the Terrible Three grasped the intruder by his arms, legs, and head, and between the four of them they managed to drag him away. Mr. Railton scrambled to his feet.

"You've not got me—by thunder, you've not got me!" exclaimed the man, in a harsh voice.

With an almost superhuman effort he wrenched himself away from the grasp of his captors.

Then, with one bound, he was at the nearest window. Without pausing a second he hurled himself forward.

There was a splintering crash, followed by a dull thud, and a scuffle of feet on the pathway.

Then all was still.

The man had thrown himself completely through the window, wrecking framework and glass in the mad action.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Kerr Makes Inquiries.

"H E'S gone!" "Great Scott!" "He's smashed the window to smithereens!"

Mr. Railton stepped briskly to the window and looked out into the night. But all was silent—the man had vanished as though he had been a shadow.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Housemaster. "This is a most extraordinary affair! The man seemed to be mad! He could scarcely have got through this jagged glass without doing himself injury."

Kildare looked at the smashed framework.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "The chap threw himself through the glass with such terrific force that there wasn't time for him to be cut. And, besides, his face was protected a little by the mask."

"Mask?" repeated Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir. Didn't you see it?"

"No; it was too dark to see anything distinctly."

"Well, the fellow wore a black mask so that he could not be recognised," said Kildare.

"Do you mean it is most extraordinary?" said Mr. Railton. "Who was the man, and what was he doing here?"

"I don't know, sir. I heard an uproar; and came out of my room just in time to be knocked down by the stranger," answered Kildare. "These juniors were chasing him."

Mr. Railton turned to the Terrible Three.

"Tell me all you know, boys," he said curiously.

"We don't know much more than you do, sir," said Tom Merry. "I heard somebody pass the Shell dormitory; so I woke Manners and Lowther, and we went out to make investigations. After searching for ten minutes or so, we found that chap. He was in the entrance hall, and he dodged into the Common-room."

"And did you attempt to capture him?"

"Rather, sir! But he's got the strength of a giddy lion! He knocked us flying, and darted upstairs. We followed, yelling out, and Kildare came out just as the chap was about to descend the back stairs. We pounced on him in this passage and you know the rest, sir."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Yes, yes," he said thoughtfully, staring into the night. "It is utterly useless searching for him, for he must have got clear away by this time. Burglary was his object, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"Couldn't be anything else, sir," Kildare stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"What puzzles me is the way in which the chap flew at you, sir," he said. "The very instant Tom Merry flashed his light upon you, the man tore himself away from us. One might think that he had come to the school especially to harm you."

Mr. Railton laughed grimly. "Nonsense, Kildare!" he said. "I do not know a soul who owes me a grudge, and certainly not a grudge of this description! Why, the man seemed quite capable of killing me!"

"It's a mystery," said Tom Merry. "Thank goodness we were here to protect you, sir!"

"Yes, it was indeed fortunate, Merry," said Mr. Railton feelingly. "But it was no less fortunate that you chanced to hear him. He might have ransacked the place, and got clear away!"

"Well, we only did a little, sir," said Manners. "It's rotten that the beast escaped! But we weren't prepared for such terrific strength."

"It's very late," said the School House master, "and you boys ought to be in bed. Run up, and get between the sheets without loss of time. You are quite all right, I suppose—no injuries?"

"No, sir."

"Only a bruise or two, sir."

"That's all right, then! Off you go."

"Good-night, sir!"

The Terrible Three hurried up the stairs to the Shell dormitory, talking excitedly about the night's amazing happening. They found several juniors awake, roused by the noise of the chase.

But Tom Merry and his chums only gave a very brief account of the affair. Full details would have to wait until the morning.

And when the morning came the excitement was considerable. The Terrible Three found themselves besieged with questioners as they were dressing. Then, when they descended to the quad to have a breath of air before breakfast, crowds of New House fellows



Bernard Glyn uttered a gasp of astonishment as he saw another notice fixed to the gatepost. "The time is near," ran the message. "Ten years is a long time, but I remember. To escape me is impossible.—G. M." "Great Scott!" muttered Glyn. "This is getting a bit thick!"

asked for details, for news of the affair had already crossed the quad.

The Terrible Three had already told full details to all the members of the Shell, so now there were plenty of fellows willing to relate the story afresh to eager listeners. And there were plenty of listeners, seniors included.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were standing at the bottom of the School House steps, discussing the all-important subject, when Wally D'Arcy of the Third rushed up, his face red with excitement.

There were a crowd of juniors gathered round the Terrible Three, and Wally bumped into them forcibly.

"Look out, you young boulder!" yelled Rook of the Fourth. "What the dickens do you mean by clumping on my foot?"

"Sorry!" gasped Wally.

"Wally, I am surprised at you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy frigidly, gazing at his minor through his monocle. "Have you gone off your wackah—"

"Oh, don't you start, Gussy!" interrupted Wally breathlessly. "I say, you chaps, have you seen it yet?"

"Seen what?"

"The notice on the gatepost!" exclaimed the scamp of the Third excitedly. "There's a new one up this morning—the third!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared at Wally suspiciously. All the others had stopped their talk, too.

"There was one up last night," chuckled Blake. "That was the third." "Oh, that was a mouldy jape!" sniffed Wally. "The one up there now is genuine, like the other two. And it's written by the chap who broke into the School House."

"My hat!"

"How do you know?"

"Look here, Wally! If this is a wotten joke—"

"It's not, you fathead!" shouted Wally. "If you don't believe me, go and see for yourselves!"

Everybody had been so excited that they had not thought of looking for a fresh notice on the gatepost. The adventure of the night had driven the other matter completely from their heads for the time being.

There was a general rush for the gates, and there, stuck up in the same place, as usual, was the third notice from the mysterious "G. M." Everybody saw at once that it was genuine, and that it was not another "forged" notice like Blake's.

"What does it say?"

"Let's have a squint!"

"Don't shove! Stand clear!"

"Bai Jove! Who's that stamplin' on my foot?"

The juniors crowded round the gatepost in an excited mass. Figgins & Co. were to the forefront, and Figgins' lanky form rose above all the rest.

"My hat, this looks melodramatic!" he exclaimed. "Just listen: 'I have failed once, but I shall not fail again.—G. M.' That means he's going to make another giddy attempt to nick the silver plate."

"The chap must be up the pole!" declared Manners.

"Completely off his rocker!" agreed Bates of the Fourth. "Fancy giving us warning of what he's going to do!"

"It's queer—jolly queer," said Kerr thoughtfully.

The crowd dispersed from the gateway and gathered in little groups, discussing the strange happenings. It was now fairly conclusive that the man who had broken in was the writer of the notices; but that only made the affair more mysterious still.

During breakfast P.-c. Crump strode majestically into the gates, having come in answer to a telephone call from the Head.

Dr. Holmes gave the constable all the information he could concerning the mysterious visitant, and showed him the three notices, Tom Merry having handed over the third to Mr. Railton. P.-c. Crump assured the Head that he would keep a very strict watch upon the school during the next few nights, and gave it as his opinion that the sounder was as good as caught. For P.-c. Crump had a very excellent opinion of his own detective skill, which was perhaps as well, for nobody else had.

During morning lessons the juniors were a little inattentive in the classrooms, for they were busily making conjectures with regard to the curious circumstances surrounding the previous night's visitor to the School House. Lines were distributed liberally by the various Form-masters, but they seemed to have no effect.

After lessons the same subject was continued by juniors and seniors alike. Figgins & Co. were talking to the Terrible Three, all House rivalry being forgotten for the time.

Kerr did not say much, but his face wore a very thoughtful expression. When there was a lull in the conversation, he tapped Tom Merry on the arm.

"Just a few questions," he remarked. "Fire away!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Are you starting the Sexton Blake bizney, Kerr?"

"Well, I want to make sure of my facts before I decide on any plan of action," answered Kerr. "Now, it's pretty sure that the author of those notices is the fellow whom you nearly collared last night."

"Pretty sure, be blowed!" said Monty Lowther. "It's absolutely certain!"

"Very well, then, it's certain," said Kerr. "Now, doesn't it strike you that he broke into the School House for some reason other than burglary?"

"But there isn't any other reason," said Manners.

"Well, I think there is," went on Kerr quietly. "The first notice said that 'G. M.' had arrived, and that someone in the school would understand. The second notice was to the effect that 'G. M.' had been waiting ten years, and that the time was near."

"The time for what was near?" asked Manners.

"I can't say exactly, but it seems to me that the chap broke into the School House for the purpose of doing somebody bodily harm. In fact, everything points to it being a case of revenge. 'G. M.' is at St. Jim's for the purpose of—murder!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors stared at Kerr aghast.

"I say, old man, that's a bit thick, you know," protested Figgins.

"Awfully thick," said Tom Merry. "Whether it's thick or not, I believe it's the truth," went on Kerr. "Of course, I may be wrong—I jolly well hope I am—but it looks awfully suspicious. Anyhow, I mean to make it my business to investigate the affair."

"Good old Sexton Blake!"

"I'll bet you'll be a detective when you grow up, Kerr," said Figgins.

Kerr smiled.

"That's a long way off," he replied. "I thought you wanted to ask some giddy questions?" said Monty Lowther.

"So I do. It's about the chap you nearly collared last night. Was he strong?"

"Strong!" repeated Lowther, with a sniff. "My dear chap, he was as weak as a rat. It only took four of us to hold him, and then he broke away. I expect half a dozen chaps could manage him between them. Oh, no, he wasn't strong!"

"That means to say he was as strong as an ox," remarked Kerr. "Was he a big chap?"

"Yes, a bit bulky."

"Tall?"

"Fairly tall, about six foot."

"What were his eyes like?"

"Horrible!" said Lowther.

"That's so," said Manners. "They were wild with fury, and seemed to gleam like burning coals."

"Points of diabolical light would sound better," remarked Monty Lowther reflectively. "More effective, you know."

"His eyes glistened and scintillated with diabolical illumination, as though reflecting vivid lightning from the very heavens themselves!" How's that for literary power?"

The juniors chuckled.

"Makes me feel bad to listen to it," said Tom Merry. "I wish you wouldn't joke on these serious matters, Monty."

Any more questions, Kerr?"

Kerr shook his head.

"No more," he replied.

"Of course, you've got the whole solution to the mystery now?" asked Lowther in matter-of-fact tones. "It's no good being a detective unless you can detect."

Figgins looked at Monty Lowther, and then tapped his own head.

"It runs in the family," he remarked gravely. "Water on the brain, I expect."

Monty Lowther stared.

"Well, I've always known you were a

bit dotty," he remarked, "but I never thought you'd own up to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins turned red.

"You silly ass!" he exclaimed. "I mean you!"

"How could you mean me when you tapped your own napper?"

The Terrible Three chuckled, and Figgins & Co. departed, their lank chief a little discomfited at the recollection of his little joke upon his own head.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Attacked!

KERR was very thoughtful after dinner. It was a half-holiday, and the New House juniors were playing a practice match that afternoon.

But Kerr was not included in the team. He had told Figgins that he wished to think over the mystery he had decided to solve. And with this object in view he sallied out, and walked down the lane towards Rylcombe.

The day was fine, and the sun shining. Kerr crossed the little stile and wandered along the footpath through the woods. Here all was quiet.

"One thing seems practically certain," Kerr told himself. "The surprising thing is that nobody else seems to have connected the two incidents. Yet I wouldn't mind betting a quid that the

### SOME EXCUSE!

Householder: "Don't you know better than to come begging with your hands in your pockets?"  
Tramp: "Well, sir, I'm in need of a pair of braces!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M. Rose, 672, Chorley Road, Westthoughton, nr. Bolton, Lancs.

chap we found in the quad the other night was the mysterious 'G. M.' Everything points to it!"

Kerr walked on slowly, and finally seated himself on a dry log of wood against some thick bushes.

"Everything points to it," he repeated to himself. "The description of the man in the black mask tallies exactly with the man in the quad. His eyes were unusually wild-looking. He was tall and bulky, and he possessed terrific strength. It's certain, too, that he's responsible for the dramatic notices on the gatepost. Therefore, the man in the quad, the man who broke into the School House, and the writer of the notices, are one and the same person!"

Kerr's reasoning was sound, and there was little doubt that he was correct in his surmises. But he was still a little uncertain regarding the reason for the man's strange proceedings.

Why had he written the notices? Did he imagine that somebody in the school understood them, and would, accordingly, be alarmed at their purport?

Why had he broken into St. Jim's? Could it be robbery? Kerr shook his head.

"No, it's not robbery," he told himself firmly. "It's my belief the man is off his chump, and that he's deadly dangerous. He was in the School House last night for the express purpose of doing someone harm. But who—could it be?"

Kerr could not solve that part of the problem, and he sat there looking before him with thoughtful, half-closed eyes.

Then suddenly he started, and his eyes opened wide.

A figure was approaching through the wood, and Kerr, after one careless glance, saw, with a start of recognition, that the man approaching him was the very man who filled his thoughts!

It was the man who had been in the quad—it was "G. M.!"

"Great Scott!" muttered Kerr breathlessly.

He looked again to make sure. Yes, there could be no mistake. The man was big, and shabbily dressed. He turned his face towards the junior, and Kerr had no further doubt. For a moment he thought that he had been seen; but the man turned his face away again, and went on with his task.

He was collecting sticks, and already he had a big armful. Kerr quietly slipped through the bushes, and dropped into a ditch on the other side. Fortunately it contained no water, and Kerr lay perfectly still, watching through the weeds.

The stranger wandered about for another few minutes, adding to his load. Then, having evidently collected sufficient for his needs, he set off briskly down the path and headed straight for the meadows.

"My hat!" exclaimed Kerr, staring after him. "He's making for the ruins!"

There could be little doubt upon that point. Across the meadows, and at the top of a grassy hill, stood the ruins of the old castle. The juniors of St. Jim's had had many an adventure among the old vaults and passages, and they knew the ruins almost by heart.

Kerr left his place of concealment after the man had disappeared behind a little coppice. Kerr ran across the intervening space quickly, and soon found concealment again—which was lucky, for the stranger turned and looked round several times. But he was evidently satisfied that he was unobserved.

The castle stood quite by itself, and the surrounding meadows were usually deserted.

When the man had gone another two hundred yards, Kerr managed to follow without betraying his presence. And so, in a very short time, the castle was reached.

Kerr did not approach the ruins, but crouched behind a tree, watching. And he saw his quarry disappear among the great ivy-covered masses of masonry.

"Come down into the vaults," thought Kerr.

But although he had tracked the man to the castle, he had nothing whatever to prove that he was the man who had broken into St. Jim's. It was impossible to prove conclusively who the man had been.

But Kerr was positive that his deduction was right, and the only way to get proof would be to catch the man in the very act. Then the black mask could be removed, and the stranger's identity proved.

Kerr did not wait long. It was soon evident that the man was not coming up from his hiding-place again, so the junior slipped away, and returned thoughtfully to St. Jim's.

He had not obtained sufficient evidence yet by a long way, for there was nothing criminal in staying in the old ruins, but the afternoon had been well spent.

Kerr did not say anything to his chums when he met them. After prep, when all was quiet, would be the best time to have a chat.

The other juniors were growing rather tired of the subject which was uppermost in everybody's mind. Discussion had almost given out, for the subject was exhausted. It was impossible to guess the

truth, and many juniors were anxious for something else to happen.

The Head, too, was feeling concerned. Try as he would, he could not find an explanation for the mysterious notices and the visit of the masked man.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton had a long talk about the matter, and assured themselves that nothing further could be done. P.-c. Crump would remain in the vicinity of the school during the night, and his very presence there would probably keep the stranger from breaking in again.

On the previous night he had made his entrance at a little window in the back, which a servant had carelessly left open. The Head meant to make sure that all was secure before he went to sleep to-night.

Mr. Railton took a walk down to the village during the evening. He started just before supper-time, and walked sharply, for the night was cold. Dark clouds drifted across the sky, and the lane was very gloomy.

He reached the village, and completed his business. Then he started back for St. Jim's. He did not notice the figure of a big man detach itself from the hedge as he left the lighted village street.

The man crept after the Housemaster with stealthy footsteps, and the darkness made him quite invisible. The woods bordered the road on either hand.

Mr. Railton stepped out briskly. Suddenly he paused, for, from behind, he thought he heard the sound of a footfall.

He glanced round, and stared into the darkness.

"Fancy, I suppose," he thought. But he felt strangely uneasy as he continued his way up the gloomy lane. He decided to test the thing, and again stopped abruptly.

But not a sound was to be heard. "I'm nervous," he murmured, with a half laugh. "This will never do! Yet I am almost sure I heard something!" He walked on again, and once more paused.

This time a footstep sounded quite distinctly, followed by the rolling of a loose stone.

The Housemaster set his teeth. "I was not mistaking" he muttered. "Somebody is following me. A tramp, I expect—or perhaps the explanation is more simple. Perhaps one of the juniors—"

Before he could think further a quick patter of running steps sounded, and Mr. Railton saw a dim figure before him, looming up large against the background of trees.

"Who is that?" asked the Housemaster sharply.

A low, brutal laugh sounded in the darkness.

"Who is it, I say?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, clenching his fists.

The form came nearer.

"It is the man who has sworn to have revenge!" hissed a voice that quivered with triumphant fury. "It is Gerald Munro!"

"Gerald Munro!" Mr. Railton repeated the name in a tone of puzzled surprise. Dimly, in the back of his mind, he remembered having heard the name before. He gazed at the dim figure before him with a frown.

"Look here, my man," he said sharply. "I do not want any nonsense! If you do not go about your business, I—"

"Ah! My business!" exclaimed the stranger, in a curious tone. "That is just it, you bound! My business! I mean to set about it at once—before you

can escape me again. Last night you had assistance, but now you are alone and at my mercy!"

Mr. Railton caught his breath in quickly.

The man before him was the fellow who had entered the School House the previous night. And he had displayed the most astonishing strength. Rylcombe Lane was deserted. Mr. Railton was, indeed, at the stranger's mercy.

But the Housemaster clenched his fists tighter. He was in a dangerous position, and he knew it.

"I do not understand you," he said quietly. "What is the reason for all this melodramatic rubbish? Do you wish to rob me?"

The other laughed harshly.

"No," he exclaimed, "I don't want money! Do you think I would touch your money? Bah! It's you I want—you, you treacherous dog!"

And the man thrust a hand forward and laid it on Mr. Railton's shoulder. The fingers closed tightly, and the grip was painful. The Housemaster tried to shake off the grip.

"Release me, you scoundrel!" he said, jerking himself away. "If you touch me again—"

But the stranger interrupted Mr. Railton's sentence with a snarl of fury. At the same moment he jumped forward and lunged with his right fist.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Railton.

He dodged and just managed to evade the blow, which, if delivered, would have laid him flat. Next second the pair were grappling desperately, and they swayed from side to side of the gloomy road.

Mr. Railton felt at once that he was no match for his assailant. The man was possessed of the strength of a lion. His grip was like iron, and the Housemaster knew that he would be beaten.

For several moments no word was spoken, and only the gasping of the two struggling men could be heard. Then Mr. Railton managed to get an arm free, and he sent home a terrific blow into the other's face.

The blow sounded with a dull smack, and Gerald Munro—for that was evidently the stranger's name—uttered a roar of pain.

"Hang you!" he snarled. "I'll finish you for that!"

He wrenched himself away, stepped back, then lunged at Mr. Railton with all his tremendous strength.

Thud!

His fist struck the Housemaster's forehead with awful violence.

Mr. Railton uttered a gasping cry and staggered back. Then he collapsed into a heap in the roadway and lay still.

He was knocked senseless.

His assailant stood over him, panting hard and muttering rapidly to himself. Then a chuckle escaped his lips—a low, triumphant chuckle, horrible to listen to.

"I have got him!" he murmured exultantly. "He is in my power!"

Then, as he stood over the insensible

master, the sound of heavy footsteps made themselves heard, approaching rapidly.

"Who's there?" shouted a gruff voice.

"Who's that there now?"

It was the voice of P.-c. Crump.

Munro stood still, and his teeth snapped together. He crouched low down, as though waiting to spring. From his pocket he took a short, thick piece of wood, which he had been unable to get at in the struggle with Mr. Railton.

The constable's footsteps were now quite close.

"Could ha' sworn I 'eard something!" muttered Crump. "Sounded like a fight, or— My heye! Who's that a-standin' there?"

He had suddenly caught sight of Munro, crouching down. And before Crump could come nearer the stranger acted. Like a panther he sprang forward, his piece of wood upraised.

"Good heavens!"

P.-c. Crump jumped aside, but he was a fraction of a second too late. The weapon descended and crashed on the side of his head. The constable gave one cry and fell into the roadway.

With a horrible chuckle, Gerald Munro stepped over to Mr. Railton. He lifted the Housemaster as though he had been a child, and slung him on his back.

Then he walked to the hedge with his load, pushed a way through, and disappeared into the dim recesses of the wood.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Missing!

DR. HOLMES glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece of his study, and then took out his watch.

Both timepieces bore evidence that the hour was just eleven-thirty.

"Dear me, this is most unusual!" murmured the Head. "I have never known Mr. Railton stay out so late before. I confess I am beginning to feel a little uneasy."

The door opened, and Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came in.

The Head looked at him inquiringly. But Mr. Linton shook his head.

"He has not come in, sir," he said gravely. "Really, I am at a loss to account for his long absence."

"It is most alarming," said Dr. (Continued on the next page.)

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Holmes. "I hope nothing has happened, Mr. Linton."

"I do not see how anything could have happened, sir," said Mr. Linton. "Mr. Raitlon is not a man who usually stays out late."

The Head nodded.

"Quite so, Mr. Linton?" he said. "I do not see how he could have been detained in the village, as I understand he went down to make a purchase."

"He told me that he would be back in half an hour, sir," said the Form-master. "But that was hours ago. What can have caused him to stay? All the shops close before nine. Do you think it possible that he has gone on to the Grammar School?"

Dr. Holmes shook his head doubtfully.

"It is possible, of course," he replied, "but I think it is extremely improbable. I arranged with Mr. Raitlon to look into some papers immediately after supper, and it is not like him to overlook such matters. No, Mr. Linton, I fear that it is something serious."

Mr. Linton looked startled.

"Surely you do not think that an accident has occurred?" he said.

"Really, I do not know what to think."

The Head paced up and down for a few moments, then glanced at the clock again.

"Twenty-five minutes to twelve!" he exclaimed. "Dear me, it is most extraordinary! We must do something, Mr. Linton."

"But what can we do, sir?" asked the master of the Shell.

"Please get your overcoat on, Mr. Linton, and meet me in the quadrangle in a few minutes' time. I intend to walk down the lane to Ryelcombe. Perhaps we shall discover something to allay our anxiety."

"Very good, sir!"

And Mr. Linton left the study. A few minutes later he met the Head in the quad, and they walked to the masters' gate.

St. Jim's was black and silent; scarcely a light showed in any of the windows. The New House inmates were all in bed, including Mr. Ratcliff. The Head had thought of awakening Mr. Ratcliff, but realised that the circumstances hardly warranted such a step. For, in all probability, he thought, Mr. Raitlon would turn up shortly with a perfectly ordinary explanation for his long absence.

The Head unlocked the small wicket gate with his key. Then the pair walked sharply down the lane towards Ryelcombe.

But suddenly he paused.

"Listen!" he murmured. "I think I hear footsteps!"

There was certainly the sound of footsteps, and they were getting nearer. But they were uneven, and every now and again the feet of the walker slithered along the road, as though their owner were staggering drunkenly.

"Upon my soul!" murmured the Head, aghast.

"Can—can it be Mr. Raitlon?" asked Mr. Linton, in an awed voice.

"Who else would be coming to the school?" asked the Head. "But it is very curious. Does it not strike you that his footsteps sound—er—sound a little unsteady?"

Before Mr. Linton could answer, the footsteps came to a stop.

"Oh, my head!" exclaimed a voice, quite audibly, and in a tone of dull agony. "Strike a light, I copped it that time! Fair an' square, an' no bloomin' mistake!"

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The Head started.

"Crump!" he exclaimed. "Surely that is Crump's voice!"

"It is, indeed, sir!" said Mr. Linton. "Bless my soul! Something must have happened to him," said the Head quickly.

They walked forward, and then saw the figure of P.-c. Crump before them.

"Allo! Who's that?" asked Crump suspiciously. "Mind, I'm a hoffer of the law—"

"It is all right, Crump. It is I—Dr. Holmes!" exclaimed the Head. "Are you hurt in any way?"

Crump gazed at the two masters in relief, and gingerly laid a hand upon his head.

"Urt, sir?" he repeated. "Urt? Why, it's a wonder I ain't dead! If it hadn't been for my helmet I should have been knocked out for good, an' no mistake!"

"Good gracious, Crump, you cannot be serious!"

"I am, sir!"

And Crump staggered a little. Dr. Holmes sniffed the atmosphere suspiciously.

"Have you—have you been—or—drinking, Crump?" he asked.

P.-c. Crump uttered a groan.

"Drinkin'?" he repeated. "I wish it wasn't nothing worse! No, sir, it ain't nothin' like that. I've 'ad a knock on the 'ead, and somehow I can't see straight, an' my head's as dizzy as dizzy!"

"Any idea of the time, sir?"

"It's nearly twelve o'clock," said Mr. Linton.

Crump gasped.

"Nearly twelve!" he ejaculated. "My heve! Then I must have bin lyin' beside the road for over two hours—two hours, sir—insensible!"

Crump took his electric lamp from his belt and switched it on. Then he handed it to Dr. Holmes and asked him to examine his head. The Head did so, and uttered an exclamation of horror.

A dark and ugly bruise marred the right temple of Crump's head, and the skin was broken, though very little blood had appeared. The constable's helmet was dented in.

"But for my helmet, I should have bin killed!" said Crump.

"But how, in the name of misfortune, did you get this blow?" asked the Head.

"Mr. Linton and I are out in search of Mr. Raitlon. He went out before nine, and has not yet returned. Have you seen anything of him, Crump?"

The constable gave a start.

"Why, perhaps the chap who knocked me down—"

Then Crump paused breathlessly.

"Well, Crump, go on!" said the Head.

"Yes, sir. You see, it was this 'ere way," explained Crump. "I was walking along the lane when I 'eard voices, an' they was raised, so to speak. I thought it was a row, an' hurried along to investigate."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, I got to the spot, an' in the gloom I seed a form standing in

the road, kinder crouching, like. An' close beside him was another form, stretched in the road!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "Mr. Raitlon?"

"Mebbe, sir, though I ain't sure," said Crump. "Before I could step forward, the crouchin' feller simply chucked himself at me, an' give me a terrific whack on the 'ead! I went down like a ninopin, an' didn't come to myself until a few minutes ago."

The Head and Mr. Linton exchanged startled glances.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "There is little doubt that Mr. Raitlon has been brutally attacked and robbed. The scoundrel was at his villainous work when you appeared upon the scene, Crump."

The policeman nodded.



"I have come here to kill the treacherous wretch whom I saw stand forth— Oh, my only Aunt Maria!" Blake brand a dozen beds, and his disguise looked quaint in the

"That's about the size of it, sir," he replied.

"How far are we from the spot?"

"Why, only two minutes' walk, sir!"

"When you came to yourself, did you look round?" asked the Head anxiously.

"I mean, did you see any sign of Mr. Raitlon?"

"No, sir; I was that dazed at first that I hardly knew wot I was a-doin'."

I just walked up the road, 'olding my head, an' wonderin' if it was whole."

Dr. Holmes' face was pale.

"Then we shall, in all probability, find Mr. Raitlon's unconscious form at the spot where the attack occurred," he said quickly.

"Good heavens, Mr. Linton, this is a most distressing business. I fear that Mr. Raitlon is—badly injured!"

"There can be no other explanation," said Mr. Linton, feeling as though a cold hand was clutching at his heart.

"Some desperate tramp, probably, set upon him and—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Head. "Pray lead us to the spot, Crump. Every moment is of value!"

Crump pulled himself together, and drew a little flask from an inner pocket, which he had just remembered. It contained something stronger than milk, and a couple of sips made Crump feel much steadier. Then, gingerly placing his helmet on his head, he led the way down the lane.

"This 'ere's the spot," he said, stopping suddenly and flashing his lamp to and fro. "Just 'ere. Why, look—you can see the marks in the road, where the struggle took place!"

"Yes, yes; quite so!" ejaculated Dr. Holmes. "But where is Mr. Railton?"

"That is quite true!" exclaimed the Head eagerly. "That is certainly a plausible suggestion, Crump. We will hurry to Rylcombe and make inquiries, and, at the same time, have your head attended to."

And they set off at a brisk walk.

But when they arrived at Dr. Short's, that worthy gentleman, after being roused from bed, assured the Head that he had seen nothing of Mr. Railton.

"Then I fear that something awful has occurred," said the Head of St. Jim's, in a hoarse voice.

Dr. Short was briefly told the facts, and he looked extremely grave. He bandaged Crump's head, and said that the bruise was an extremely nasty one, and that Crump had better get to bed at once.

The constable certainly looked bad, and he took the doctor's advice.

And the Head and Mr. Linton returned to St. Jim's.

There they learned that Mr. Railton was still missing.

That night Dr. Holmes did not get a wink of sleep. He was too worried, too anxious. The disappearance of the Housemaster was simply appalling if Crump's story was correct—which it obviously was.

Mr. Railton had been knocked senseless by some desperate scoundrel. But what had become of him?

What did it mean? What could be the explanation?

The Head shrank from giving his suspicions more concrete form.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Consternation at St. Jim's!

**T**OM MERRY, Manners, and Monty Lowther were up and out in the quad first thing in the morning.

As it happened, they were the first juniors out of either House, and they rushed across the quad to the gates.

For they were pretty certain that another notice would be attached to the gatepost, in the usual place. But they were wrong—the pillar was bare.

"Well, this is what I call too much of a good thing!" grumbled Monty Lowther. "We scrambled out of our nice little cots especially to be the first to read the fresh blood-curdler, and there isn't anything here!"

"Well, there's a reason for it, I suppose," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Yesterday morning's notice said that he'd failed once, but he wouldn't fail again."

"My hat!" ejaculated Manners excitedly. "I wonder if that means that the chap has been successful in clearing off with the school valuables? If he has done so he wouldn't trouble to shove up the information."

The Terrible Three stared at one another.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "We should have heard something of it if it was so. Crump would have been up—"

"Great Scott!" interrupted Monty Lowther.

"What's the matter?"

"Why, Crump's coming up the road!" Tom Merry and Manners stared down the road towards Rylcombe. P.-c. Crump was approaching.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"What are you blessed for?" asked Kangaroo, who had just come up with Glyn and Dane. "Where's the giddy notice?"

"There isn't one this morning."

"Isn't one? Well, what a rotten sell!" "Isn't you understand?" said Manners excitedly. "G. M.'s been successful, so he hasn't put up another paper. He's broken in, and ransacked the school!"

"My only Aunt Matilda!" gasped Bernard Glyn.

"I say, draw it mild, Manners!" protested Tom Merry. "That's only a suspicion, yet you're telling it to Glyn as though it was a fact."

"It must be a fact, you ass!" retorted Manners. "Why, Crump's coming up the road now—coming in answer to a phone call, I expect."

The juniors looked at Crump's approaching form with interest. "I thought Crump was going to guard the school?" said Kangaroo.

"A fat lot of guarding he did, I'll bet!" sniffed Manners. "The burglar diddled him as easy as winking, I expect."

The constable arrived at the gates, and looked at the juniors eagerly. He had managed to knock his helmet into shape, but his face was pale.

"Hallo! You look a bit off colour, Crumpy!" said Tom Merry.

"An' I, feel it, Master Merry," said Crump. "But—"

"Half a minute, Crumpy!" said Manners. "Have you come up here in response to a telephone call?"

"No, I ain't had no telephone call," said Crump.

"That's enough, Manners. You're squashed," chuckled Lowther.

Manners glared.

"I want you to tell me something, young gentlemen," said the constable quickly. "I want to ask a question."

"Fire away!"

"Let it rip!"

"Well, is Mr. Railton in the school?" asked Crump eagerly.

The juniors looked surprised.

"Is Mr. Railton here?" repeated Monty Lowther. "Of course he is! Where do you think he'd be? In Tim-bucloo?"

P.-c. Crump's eyes opened wider.

"Mr. Railton's 'ere!" he exclaimed.

"That's good 'earing, an' no mistake! I thought perhaps 'e hadn't come back."

"Come back!" repeated Tom Merry in a puzzled tone. "What's up with you, Crumpy? Come back from where?"

Crump's elation suddenly fizzled out.

"Have you seen 'im this morning?" he asked.

"No, of course not; but he'll be down soon."

"Oh! Then he's still missing!"

"Missing! Who's missing?"

"Mr. Railton," said P.-c. Crump.

"Mr. Railton!" shouted Tom Merry.

The juniors stared in amazement.

Crump, in a few words, told them what had occurred the previous evening.

Tom Merry & Co. listened with consternation in their faces. Mr. Railton missing! It was a terrible revelation.

Crump went on his way to the Head's house, and the juniors gathered in an excited group talking over this latest and most startling piece of information.

The news got about like wildfire, and

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sworn to kill!" said Blake in a villainous voice. "Let him with a gasp as a dozen electric torches flashed out from a flare. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Shell fellows.

Dear me! I fear that something terrible has occurred!"

Crump flashed his light about from side to side of the road; but there was no trace of the missing Housemaster. The trio walked slowly down the road, and the light flashed constantly, but the result was nil. No trace of Mr. Railton could be discovered.

He had completely disappeared.

"It is extraordinary!" exclaimed the Head at last.

"Unaccountable!" declared Mr. Linton huskily.

"Well, he ain't in the lane, sir," said Crump. "Of course, it's possible that he's gone down to the village."

"To the village, Crump? What on earth for?"

Crump pointed to his head.

"Well, if he was knocked on the 'ead, like me," he replied, "he might have come to an hour ago and thought it as well to hurry down to the doctor's."

in a very short time the whole school was discussing the subject.

Mr. Railton had vanished. He had last been seen at the feet of a desperate scoundrel who had murderously attacked P.-C. Crump.

The juniors—of the School House especially—talked over the news with serious, anxious faces. Not a laugh or a chuckle was heard that morning at breakfast. Every face was grave. Even the noisy fags of the Third and Second were hushed into silence, for Mr. Railton was the most popular master at St. Jim's.

In the New House the consternation was almost as great. Figgins & Co. whispered together at the breakfast table, Fatty Wynn even forgetting to eat his breakfast.

"Of course, this explains everything," murmured Kerr. "The chap who attacked Crump—and who's obviously done something to Railton—is G. M. Those notices were addressed to Railton."

"Of course!" said Figgins. "What asses we were not to tumble to it! It was G. M. who broke into the School House the night before last. He went for Mr. Railton, you know, and was only dragged off by sheer force. Then he actually wrote a notice, saying that he had failed, and we didn't guess!"

Kerr was silent. He was telling himself that he had been very blame-worthy for not going to the Head and telling of the man whom he had followed to the ruined castle, for Kerr was positive that the man had been G. M. and that he was the author of all the mischief.

Yet Kerr was not to be blamed for saying nothing. The mere fact that the man had gone to the castle was no proof of guilt. Even if he was produced now, nobody would recognise him, and therefore he could not be arrested.

For nobody had seen the man who had broken into the School House. His features had been masked. And P.-C. Crump had not seen the man who had attacked him. The darkness had been too thick.

So, although Kerr was certain of the facts in his own mind, he had nothing to substantiate his suspicions yet. Before many hours were gone he meant to have the proofs. He was eager to get to work, for he felt sure that he would be able to solve the mystery of Mr. Railton's disappearance.

But there were lessons to do. The thought caused Kerr to worry a lot, and to wish all lessons to Jericho.

After prayers in Big Hall, Dr. Holmes made a speech, telling the school of the unfortunate state of affairs. He said that the police would do their best to trace the missing master, whom, he feared, had been the victim of foul play.

The fellows were silent as they filed out. When they collected in the quad, however, their tongues were let loose.

"What's the good of leaving the thing to Crump?" Tom Merry said to a little crowd of juniors, which included Figgins & Co. "Crump's hurt, for one thing, and, anyhow, I don't think much of him as a detective. He'll never do much to get at the truth."

"That's what I say," said Kerr thoughtfully. "It's a jolly serious matter, and we ought to make up search parties."

"My hat! That's a good wheeze!" "Yes. But how about lessons?"

"Oh, blow lessons!" growled Kerr.

"That's all very well," said Jack Blake. "We can't go off without saying

a word. That would be playing truant, and we should have the very dickens to pay afterwards."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pewwaps the pwsent situation wawwants a deputatation to the Head."

"What the dickens for, ass?" "I decline to be called an ass!"

"Well, donkey, then!" "I uttably wefuse to be chawwactiwised—"

"What's the deputatation for?" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—" "Yes; get it off your chest, Gussy!"

"The deputatation to the Head would be for the purposes of asking him to grant a holiday," said Arthur Augustus, looking round through his eyeglasses.

"You see, deah boys, the situation wawwants exceptional measuhs. I wopose we go to the Head and ask him if we can make up search parties to go and look for poor Mr. Waitton. The ideah is that, instead of mornin' lessons—"

"We spend the morning in searching the countryside?" asked Blake.

"Yaas; that's it, deah boy!" The juniors looked eager.

"Sounds all right, Gussy. In fact, I consider it the Head's duty to grant the request," said Tom Merry; "but I'm afraid he won't see the matter in the right light."

"That's what I think," said Kerr. "Still, I'm game to go and ask."

"Rats!" said Blake. "It'll be no good. You seem to forget that the Head's worried. If you go, you'll simply get fired out of the study with a hundred lines to do!"

But Arthur Augustus shook his head. "I am wathah inclined to think that he would listen to us," he said. "He is wowed, no doubt, but if we put it to him tactfully he'll considah it."

"Then you'd better not do the job," said Monty Lowther. "If tact is required, you're the very chap to stand down."

D'Arcy gazed at Lowther frigidly.

"Weally, Lowthah, I must be allowed to wemark that you show a wewgettable lack of taste," he said. "Jokin' at a time like this is weally wotten!"

"Quite so, Gussy; but I wasn't joking," said Lowther blandly.

"Weally, you boundah—" "Oh, dry up!" said Kerr impatiently.

"Who's going?" "I'm weady, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

"An' me!" said Hammond of the Fourth.

"Who else?" asked Kerr.

"Oh, I'll go, if you like!" said Tom Merry. "All the same, I don't believe it'll be any good. The Head won't listen, as Blake says. The Head'll think that the police are the best chaps to do the searching—which is absolutely wrong, of course!"

Manners and Lowther stated their willingness to make up the number to six, and other offers were declined. A deputatation of six would be quite large enough. As Blake said, it wouldn't do to overrun the Head's study, like so many rabbits.

Bernard Glyn glanced at his watch. "You'd better hurry if you're going," he said. "It's nearly time for lessons now."

"Huwwy up, deah boys!" "We're ready, Gussy!"

And the deputatation, feeling rather nervous, made their way to the Head's study. Tom Merry having been declared the spokesman.

## CHAPTER 11.

### The Clue!

**TAP!** Tom Merry knocked rather hesitatingly on the Head's door. "Come in!" called Dr.

Holmes. The six juniors filed in—Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Kerr, Hammond, Manners, and Lowther. The Head had been pacing his study, and Mr. Linton stood by the window. Both headmaster and Form-master looked pale and worried.

"Well, boys, what do you want?" asked Dr. Holmes, looking at them rather sharply. "I think you know that I am intensely worried, and that any ordinary matter must wait."

"Yes, sir; but—but we thought—that is—I mean to say, all the juniors think—"

And Tom Merry paused nervously. "Really, Merry, I am surprised at all of you for coming to me at such a trying time as this," said the Head severely. "Please leave the study at once!"

"Weally, sir, we have a suggestion to make," said Arthur Augustus quickly. "Tom Mewwy seems nervous, so I will lay the mattah before you."

"Shut up, Gussy!" hissed Monty Lowther.

"I wefuse to shut up, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy stiffly.

Lowther turned a beautiful red. "I must insist—" began Dr. Holmes.

"Pway be patient, sir!" interrupted Arthur Augustus eagerly. "We are here for a weally important purpose—we wewwant the whole juniah school, sir. We are all frightwully upset about poor Mr. Waitton's disappearance, and we think that he has met with foul play frowm that howwid wottah who signs himself G. M. I And we considah it our duty to come to you to offah our services."

The Head looked at D'Arcy keenly. "To offer your services, D'Arcy?" he repeated. "I am afraid I do not understand."

"It's this way, sir," said Tom Merry, before Arthur Augustus could reply. "Nobody knows where Mr. Railton is—he might be lying, bound and gagged, in a ditch not half a mile away! Well, we think that, instead of doing lessons this morning, we ought to be allowed to make up search parties, and go about the countryside looking for Mr. Railton."

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"We all want to find Mr. Railton," went on Tom Merry eagerly. "In fact, we shan't be able to work until we know something definite."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We want your permish to form search parties, sir. It is practically impos for us to sit in class, for our minds will nevah settle down to work!"

"We want to look for Mr. Railton, sir."

"And I'm pretty sure that we shall succeed in finding him, sir!" said Kerr quickly.

"Yaas, wathah!" "Sye the word, sir, an' we'll be off!" said Hammond.

The Head frowned a little as he gazed out of the window. Then he crossed over to Mr. Linton, and spoke in a low voice for a few moments. Mr. Linton nodded once or twice.

"Well, boys, I have thought over what

(Continued on page 12.)

# 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.



**H**ALLO, chums! I had a brief note from a reader this morning, in which all he says is: "The Gem New Year stories have been great so far. Keep it up!" Short and sweet—what? I thank the reader for his few well-chosen words, and I can honestly assure him and all other readers that the old paper will "keep it up." It has been doing so now for nearly thirty years. That's why it's still going strong. Time is the big test of any publication, and no one can deny that the oldest school story paper in the world has stood the test well. The Gem hits the high spots next Wednesday with a grand yarn of boxing, fun, and adventure. It is called:

## "THE FIGHTING PREFECT!"

George Darrell figures in the title role, and it's a great show he puts up with his fists. It all starts because an old St. Jim's boy, now a boxer, determines to keep his vow, made on leaving the school, to come back and lick "Ratty," the New House master. Many schoolboys have no doubt made the same vow, only to forget about it in later life. But not so Herbert Stoker, once of the Fifth Form at St. Jim's!

Stoker's after Ratty's gore with a vengeance, and the sour-tempered Housemaster is in a blue funk when he learns from the old boy what's coming to him. The exciting events which arise from this amazing situation, telling how Darrell is called upon to save Mr. Rattiff from a licking, and how, later, the prefect, discovered in a delinquency by the master, is faced with expulsion,

make a powerful story every reader will enjoy to the very last word.

## "THE FADDIST FORM-MASTER!"

Masters play a prominent part in both next week's yarns, for in the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. a new master comes to Greyfriars to take the place of Mr. Quelch, who is ill. The Remove, who have the reputation of being the most unruly Form at Greyfriars, are ready to give the new master a chance to settle down, but they little know that he is a food faddist and health crank! However, the Remove is the last Form to have the weird ideas of a faddist Form-master imposed on them!

Make sure, chums, that you don't miss these two tiptop yarns in next week's number. Remember to order your GEM early.

## "THE NO-SURRENDER SCHOOLBOYS!"

Something else you want to make sure of not missing is this week's grand free gift number of the "Magnet." In it you will find another splendid photograph postcard as well as an exciting, cover-to-cover yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., the stay-in strikers of Greyfriars. Barricaded in the tuckshop, the chums of the Remove are determined to defy Mr. Hacker, the temporary tyrannical Head, until Dr. Locke returns to the school to restore order.

## PEN PALS COUPON 6-2-37

## PEN PALS

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

Miss R. Carter, Runwick, Runwell Road, Wickford, Essex; girl correspondents; age 16-20; films, books, sport, dogs.

Miss O. Box, 146, Uppminster Road, Rainham, Essex; girl correspondents in Ontario; hockey, swimming, tennis, stamps.

F. Mee, 9, Tavistock Crescent, Westbourne Park, London, W.11; stamps; British Colonies preferred.

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L. Burgess, 619, Home Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; age 14; stamps, science; England and Australia.

Pop round to your newsagent to-day and ask for this great issue of the "Magnet."

## IN REPLY TO YOURS.

Miss Spector, London, N.W.6.—Thanks very much for your letter. I was pleased to hear that the GEM brightened you up when you were ill. I hope you are now fully recovered.

"GEM Reader," Northampton.—Glad to know that you have started reading the old paper, preferring it to "another twopenny weekly." I have made a note of your suggestion. A story of the reformation of Ernest Levison will no doubt appear in due course.

Misses S. Ebdon and J. Watson, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.—So you have both "fallen for" Tom Merry & Co.? Well, naturally, I admire your choice. They're cheerful characters who have won thousands of admirers of the fair sex. I will put your suggestion to Martin Clifford.

The Secretary, Vincent's Old Boys' Club, London, W.1.—Please convey to your forty members my thanks for their letter and good wishes. I am sorry I cannot accede to their request for the revival of the "Nelson Lee." A month may seem a long time to wait for the next St. Frank's yarn in the "Schoolboys' Own Library," but in length each story is more than the equal of three weekly yarns. The early adventures of Nipper & Co. were published in the "Nelson Lee" in 1933.

Chin-chin till next Wednesday, chums!

## THE EDITOR.

Miss D. Valentine, 201, West Street, Fareham, Hants; girl correspondents; age 21-25; painting, mandoline, badminton, ships.

Miss N. Watson, 152A, Wellington Street, Launceston, Tasmania; girl correspondents; age 16-18; sports, stamps; Egypt, China, Switzerland, India.

Miss T. Walker, 101, Cartington Terrace, North Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne, 6; girl correspondents; age 16-18; films, autographs; Sweden, Egypt, Hungary, Turkey.

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S. Levinoff, 1225, Bernard Avenue, W., Apt. 15, Outremont, Montreal, Canada; stamps, scouting.

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W. Behncke, 99, Hatfield Street Gardens, Cape Town, South Africa; age 16-17; stamps, acting, photography.

P. D'Arcy, S.A.T.S. "General Botha," Simonstown, Cape Province, South Africa; age 18; pen pals anywhere.

T. Handley, Box 568, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada; age 16-18; stamps; Australia, New Zealand, South Africa.

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you suggest. I am very pleased to find you so anxious to do all within your power," said the Head kindly. "It shows a splendid spirit! But—"

And Dr. Holmes paused, the juniors hanging on his words.

"But if I grant your request," he went on, "I shall expect you to take up the search seriously. There must be no practical joking of any kind, there must be no shirking. Every boy must spend his time in searching for Mr. Railton. I think, at a time like this, I can trust you!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Rather, sir!"

"Bai Jove, of course, sir!"

"Then I will instruct Kildare to let the school know of my decision," said the Head. "As you say, work is practically impossible while we are in this state of uncertainty. Until Mr. Railton's fate is known we are all gravely anxious. And there is the added possibility that Mr. Railton is, as Merry suggests, helpless in some deserted spot quite near by. So the more searchers there are, the greater the probability that Mr. Railton will soon be amongst us again."

There was a little crowd of juniors awaiting the deputation which filed out of the Head's study a minute later.

"Well," asked Blake eagerly.

"What's the verdict?" said Figgins.

"It's all right, dear boys," replied D'Arcy. "The Head has given us permission to form parties. We are to set off at once to do our very best to find Mr. Railton."

"Good!"

"My hat, the Head's a brick!"

"Rather!"

The juniors were pleased at the prospect of helping in the search for the missing Housemaster, but there was no demonstration. The news was taken quietly.

In fact, nearly everybody spoke in subdued voices, as though they were afraid to speak loudly. To laugh and joke was out of the question, with Mr. Railton's fate hanging in the balance, as it were.

In a very short time the prefects knew of the Head's decision, and search parties were rapidly formed and sent off. There was no settled system. Several fellows simply got together, and set off into the country at random.

Tom Merry & Co. were together—the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. joined them. At such a time House rivalry was at a standstill. It was a case of all pulling together.

"Well, where shall we go?" said Blake, as the party walked sharply out of the gates. "There's no telling where Mr. Railton is. It's simply a matter of chance whether we go to the left or to the right."

"There's no chance about it," said Kerr. "There's only one place to go!"

"Bai Jove, where's that, dear boy?"

"Why, to the spot where the struggle took place," replied Kerr. "Possibly we shall find a clue. Of course, we don't know for certain that Mr. Railton's assailant was G. M., but it's pretty safe to assume it."

"It must have been him," said Tom Merry.

"Well, I mean to make certain, if I possibly can," said Kerr. "If I find a clue we may be able to get on the track at once."

Kerr had spoken to Crump a little earlier, and had been told the exact spot where the struggle had taken place. The

little party of juniors arrived there, and gazed searchingly at the road.

"This is the spot," said Kerr keenly. "Stand aside there, you chaps—don't stamp about more than you can help!"

The Scottish junior looked about him with sharp eyes. But the road was hard, and there was scarcely a trace of anything beyond the ordinary wheeltracks of vehicles.

"I say, this is a bit theatrical, you know," said Manners. "It's all rot, Kerr! How the dickens can you find anything here? The plain facts are that Mr. Railton was attacked, that Crump came up at the precise moment, and got a whack on the napper, and that Mr. Railton has been missing ever since!"

And Manners bent down absently and picked a little object up from the road. "We'd better be going on," he said impatiently.

"Faa, wathah!"

Kerr stooped forward quickly and grasped Manners' hand as he was in the act of tossing the little object over the hedge. Manners looked at Kerr curiously.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Did you pick this up just now?" asked Kerr, gazing at a black button.

"Yes."

"Where was it; the exact spot?"

"Not at my feet," said Manners.

"What's the idea?"

Kerr didn't answer; he was too busy examining the button.

"He's a jolly deep chap," said Figgins. "You wait, my sons."

And they did not have to wait long.

Kerr suddenly uttered a murmur of satisfaction. His eyes gleamed, and he held the button so that all could see.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "And Manners nearly chuckled it away!"

"Well, it's only an old button," said Manners.

Kerr smiled grimly.

"It's a clue," he said.

"A clue!"

"Yes; and a jolly important clue, too!" said Kerr. "Without this I should have had to guess things—now I know for certain. I know who the man was who attacked Mr. Railton, and I'm pretty sure I know where to search for him!"

The juniors stared.

"Weally, Kerr, that's a twifle thick!" protested Arthur Augustus. "I uttably fail to see—"

"Whether you fail to see it or not, Gussy, it's true," said Kerr. "This button practically proves the man's identity."

"But how?" asked Tom Merry.

"Because it's the particular type of button which is always used for morning coats," replied Kerr.

"Yes; but that doesn't prove anything," said Manners.

"Yes, it does; because the man was wearing an old morning coat."

"How do you know?"

"He must have been, or this button would not be here," said Kerr.

"But how can you be certain that Mr. Railton's assailant was wearing a morning coat?" asked Tom Merry.

"Because I saw him yesterday in it!" said Kerr calmly.

"You saw him!"

"Yes."

"Great Scott!"

"It's a fact," went on Kerr. "I saw G. M. wearing a morning coat yesterday afternoon. He was in the wood, picking up sticks, but he didn't see me."

"Yaa, dear boy, but how do you know it was G. M.?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Kerr rapidly told his chums of his suspicions. He had intended telling

Figgins and Fatty Wynn the previous evening, but an opportunity had not occurred.

"The man I saw," he concluded, "was big, heavy, and tall. He was the man we found in the quad that night. I've suspected all along that he was the chap who wrote the notices, and now I'm certain. He was wearing a morning coat, and he went to the ruined castle. What further proof do we want? Here, on the very spot of the struggle, we find a morning-coat button! It shows quite plainly that I'm on the right track."

"And he went to the ruined castle?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yes," said Kerr. "He's evidently been there all along. Now, just look at the facts. Mr. Railton has disappeared, and his assailant is known to be living in the vaults of the castle. There's only one thing to conclude!"

"The man who has been taken there!" gasped Blake.

"Exactly!" said Kerr quietly.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Found—But Not Rescued!

TOM MERRY & CO. gazed at Kerr excitedly.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"Great Scott!" said Arthur

Augustus D'Arcy.

"You've hit it, Kerr!" exclaimed Figgins. "What a deep chap you are! Well, what are we going to do now?"

"We're going to the castle to investigate," said Kerr. "And if I'm not mistaken we shall find Mr. Railton there, a prisoner."

"But why—why should he be a prisoner?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I can't tell you that," said Kerr. "But it's my opinion this G. M. chap is a bit off his rocker. The only thing I fear is that he's done real damage to Mr. Railton; and that's why I want to get to the castle without losing a minute."

And Kerr walked sharply down the road. Without hesitating, the others followed him, realising that the Scottish junior was on the right track, and that there was a distinct probability of finding the lost Housemaster.

They walked through the woods quickly, and passed two or three parties who were searching there. But the juniors did not waste time—they made straight for the ruined castle.

As it happened, no other party was searching in that direction, and Tom Merry & Co. found, when they arrived at the old ruins, that they were alone. Far away parties of boys could be seen, but in the immediate vicinity of the castle there was nobody but themselves.

Once in the ruins, Kerr called a halt.

"Now, if the chap's here at all, it's pretty certain he's down in the vaults," said the Scots junior. "We can't all go down, because we should make too much noise. So I suggest that Figg and Fatty and I go."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"Piffle!" exclaimed Blake.

"I quite agree, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I waive an objection to Figgins & Co. doing this bizney on their own. For one thing, they are hardly capable of undahtakin' such a dangerous mission. For another, it is only right that the School House should be repwented."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Figgins warmly.

"We're out of it, my son," interrupted Manners.

"No, I'm not!" said Figgins.

"Look here——"  
Kerr uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Oh, don't start rowing!" he said sharply. "Perhaps, after all, I had better go into the vaults alone."  
"Rather not!" said Tom Merry quickly. "Why, you might get bashed on the head. I suggest that Blake and I go with you; then the three studies will be represented."

"Good idea!" said Blake heartily. And the other juniors agreed without further comment.

Kerr, Tom Merry, and Blake silently made their entrance down a flight of broken stone steps. Down below in the old vaults all was pitchy black. The three juniors stood listening for a moment; but no sound reached their ears save that of their own breathing.

"I say, we can't go on in the dark," murmured Blake. "We might fall into a giddy hole. Or perhaps the man himself is lying in wait for us in the dark."

"It's all right," whispered Kerr. "I've got an electric torch here which I brought in case of emergencies."

"Good man!" breathed Tom Merry.

Kerr flashed his light on. Although the torch was a fairly weak one, the light seemed almost brilliant in the old passage. In any case, it was quite sufficient to illuminate the juniors' way.

They crept on like shadows. They were all alert and ready for any emergency. It was quite possible, of course, that they would find the vaults deserted. But, on the other hand, there was a distinct chance that their search would be successful.

They paused again, and listened intently.

Not a sound.

"Looks to me as if——"

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Kerr, giving Blake a nudge.

Blake subsided, though it went against the grain to obey a New House junior.

The trio crept on, their faces grave and set. They knew quite well that they might run into danger at any moment. But they did not hesitate. They had come here to search for Mr. Railton, and search they would.

It was eerie and chilly down in those underground passages, and the vaults loomed vague and gloomy on all sides. Each one was entered, but no trace of the missing Housemaster was discovered.

Then, just as the juniors were beginning to feel disheartened, Kerr suddenly switched the light out and stood perfectly still.

"Listen!" he muttered.

The others held their breath and listened.

And, quite distinct in the heavy, damp air of the vaults, a low sound made itself apparent. It sounded extremely weird, and Tom Merry, and Blake felt their hearts beat faster.

"My hat, what is it?" muttered Blake.

"Blessed if I know," said Tom Merry.

"That row's made by somebody snoring," whispered Kerr.

"Snoring!"

"My only topper!"

Tom Merry and Blake felt greatly relieved. And now, having been told, they recognised the sound. Could it be possible that the snore was coming from Mr. Railton?

"By jingo, we're on the track right enough!" whispered Blake excitedly. "Come on! Let's go ahead and make investigations."

Kerr switched his light on again, and the three juniors moved slowly forward. They were standing in one of the vaults, and the sounds were emanating from an

inner vault on the far side. The old door stood ajar, and the trio padded up to it with bated breath.

Kerr gave the door a gentle push, and it swung open with surprising ease. The light from the torch gleamed into the vault.

And there, stretched full length on his side, lay the big man. He was lying on a heap of old straw, and on his face was the black mask. Close beside him was a box, on which two half-burnt candles were stuck.

And, propped up against the wall, sat Mr. Railton. The Housemaster looked pale and haggard; but he was awake, and looked at the juniors with eagerness and relief.

"Thank goodness we've found you, sir!" whispered Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"Not a sound!" he breathed. "This soundrel is possessed of amazing

to where Mr. Railton lay. Tom Merry had his knife out, and with a quick jerk he cut through the rope which bound Mr. Railton's wrists. Then he bent down to perform the same operation upon the other ropes.

But at that second Gerald Munro gave a deep breath and turned over. Then he sat up with surprising abruptness, and glared across the vault with wild, staring eyes.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

A terrible roar of fury broke from the masked man. With one bound he was on his feet.

"Run, boys, run!" gasped Mr. Railton.

And Tom Merry, Blake, and Kerr ran!

They scuttled out of the vault like rabbits, and Kerr switched off his light. Only just in time, for Munro had



With an almost superhuman effort, the masked man wrenched himself away from the grasp of his captors. Then with one bound he was at the nearest window, and, without pausing a second, hurled himself through it!

strength. He is, I fear, insane, and would not hesitate to kill me if he thought he was being thwarted. He has been threatening to kill me ever since I have been in his power, but for some mad reason, known only to himself, he has delayed the fatal hour. How many of you are there?"

"Three, sir," whispered Blake.

Mr. Railton cast a fearful glance at the sleeping man.

"Then go—go at once!" he ordered sharply. "You would stand no chance whatever in a fight. You would, indeed, suffer injury, if not worse!"

"But we can't go, sir," protested Kerr.

"Rather not, sir," said Tom Merry. "We're not going to leave you at the mercy of this rotter!"

"But, boys, I insist——"

"Sorry, sir, it's impossible," said Tom Merry quietly.

And the three juniors crept forward

grasped Blake's shoulder. But he stumbled on a loose stone, and, with a gasp, Blake wrenched himself away from that terrible grip, and rushed after his chums. In a moment he had caught them up, and they heard the man blundering after them.

But in the darkness he could not catch them up. And at last, panting hard, the three juniors reached the steps, where daylight streamed down from above.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I thought the brute was going to get us then!"

"I say, I feel an awful funk for running away!" gasped Blake.

"Rot!" exclaimed Kerr sharply. "It would have been madness to stay! The fellow's doty, and he would have knocked us all senseless in two ticks. Look at the way he got away from us at school!"

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Tom Merry and Blake nodded. As Kerr had said, they had not acted cowardly in escaping, for it would have been sheer madness to stop in that vault. Mr. Railton would have been no better off, and they themselves would most certainly have been captured or injured. The juniors had, indeed, shown great presence of mind in escaping before it was too late.

At the top of the steps their chums met them. The trio were looking flushed and excited.

"Well!" demanded Figgins quickly. "What's the result, deah boys?" asked D'Arcy.

"He's there!" panted Tom Merry. "There was a shout:"

"Who's there?"

"The chap who collared Mr. Railton!" replied Kerr calmly. "He's there, and we only just escaped in time."

"But Mr. Railton, deah boy—what of him?"

"He's there, too; bound up and helpless, but unhurt."

"Huwhah!" yelled D'Arcy excitedly. "Bai Jove, that's wippin'! I feel twemendously welieved, deah boys!"

The other juniors showed their delight, but Kerr held up his hand for silence, and rapidly explained what had occurred.

"Mr. Railton's in a position of great danger," he finished up. "We've simply got to rescue him. It'll be a risky bizney, but there's no help for it. If we go in force we can hold the chap, and I suppose you fellows are willing to lend a hand?"

"Of course!"

"Yaas, watah!"

"We'll lend all the hands we've got!"

"And leet, too!" added Monty Lower grimly.

Kerr looked round quickly. "It's no good relying upon fists," he said quickly. "We must have something more substantial."

"There are plenty of old sticks lying against the outer wall," said Tom Merry. "There's not a second to lose, so we'd better make haste!"

With one accord Tom Merry & Co. rushed among the old chunks of masonry until they reached the crumbling wall which surrounded the castle. Here they found plenty of sticks—thick, heavy ones—which would prove quite capable of dealing stunning blows. "All ready!" asked Kerr.

"Yes."

"Pway wait a moment, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wish to find a thick stick. You see, I shall lead the way, and it will be necessary for me to be propwally armed. Bai Jove, when I meet the wotah I shall administer a most feahful cwack upon his nappah!"

"You might receive a terrific crack on your own napper, Gussy," said Tom Merry grimly. "You'd better be in the background, my son."

"Oh, come on!" said Figgins impatiently.

But as the juniors commenced to make their way back Herries suddenly stopped and pointed upwards at the old ivy-covered tower.

"Great Scot!" he gasped. "Look there!"

His chums all stopped dead and gazed upwards. And the sight which met their eyes caused them to catch their breath. Their hearts nearly stopped beating.

For standing by the parapet of the tower was Gerald Munro, the black mask still covering his face. And in his arms, above his head, was the bound

and helpless form of Mr. Railton, held as though he were a mere feather-weight.

## CHAPTER 13. In Deadly Peril!

THE juniors stared upwards with a strangely sick feeling. Their faces were chalky white, and for the moment they were struck dumb with horror.

For Mr. Railton's position was an appalling one. His captor stood against the parapet of the tower seventy feet above the ground. Directly beneath were the hard stone cobbles, and a fall would have meant instant death!

Tom Merry could see that Mr. Railton held himself perfectly rigid and still, while his face was deathly pale. He realised his awful peril, and had sense enough to remain still.

"Good heavens!" breathed Blake, in an awed voice.

"Don't talk!" muttered Kerr.

"Wait—wait!"

And for a whole minute the juniors waited. Then, to their intense relief, Munro lowered Mr. Railton.

A great sigh arose from all the juniors. For the time being, at least, the tension was relaxed.

"The villain! The howwible scoundwell!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "How did he get up there?"

"It doesn't matter how he got there. He is there, and Mr. Railton with him!" said Digby grimly. "He must have rushed up the old stairs at the other end of the vaults."

"What's he doing now?" asked Manners.

It was impossible to say. The madman—for it was quite obvious that Munro was out of his senses—was bending over Mr. Railton, and the juniors could hear him talking and chuckling.

A minute later he again lifted the Housemaster, and swung him roughly over the parapet. For one awful moment the juniors thought that he was going to fling his victim to eternity.

Then they saw that Mr. Railton was held by a rope. The Housemaster dangled helplessly three feet from the summit of the tower, suspended there by a thin rope, which was apparently fastened to an unseen projection. Munro stood looking down at the juniors, and in his hand he held a glittering knife.

The juniors watched with bated breath.

"So you thought that you could rob me of my victim!" shouted the man loudly. "I am going to kill him! Kill him, you understand? In five minutes' time by my watch I shall cut through the rope and allow the dog to drop to his death!"

"You scoundrel!" shouted Tom Merry hoarsely.

"Let's wush forward and ovahpowah the wotah!" shouted D'Arcy.

"If any single one of you moves from his present position I shall cut the rope instantly!" shouted Munro. "Stand still, every one of you!"

The juniors stood rooted to the ground.

A single movement, and my victim will meet his death without a second's loss of time!" shouted the man. "For five minutes I will allow you to watch your master danger between life and death. Then I shall cut the rope!"

The juniors stood sick and horrified. "Do not move, boys!" shouted Mr. Railton, his voice perfectly steady.

"But we must do something, sir!" shouted Blake frantically.

"It is impossible, Blake!"

And the juniors realised that the Housemaster was right—at least, all of them except one did. And that one was Kerr. With wonderful presence of mind, the Scottish junior had ducked behind the old wall a minute earlier while Munro looked momentarily away.

The ruse was successful. Munro did not notice that Kerr was missing. He watched the other juniors closely, ready to use his knife at the first sign of movement.

But Kerr was not within his vision. Kerr was crouching behind the wall unseen. Tom Merry and Blake were aware of the fact, and a gleam of hope entered their eyes. But they did not betray their knowledge by looking towards Kerr.

There were four minutes in which to act. It was a terribly short space of time. But Kerr set his teeth, and determined to risk his life, if necessary, in order to save the Housemaster from death.

He had already formed a plan. Moving stealthily but swiftly, he glided along the wall, unseen by Munro, and in less than half a minute he was almost at the man's rear.

Then, stepping silently, he crossed the open space to the wall of the tower. He was within view of all the juniors, and although their hearts beat rapidly, and they pretended not to see him, if Munro became aware of Kerr's movements, Mr. Railton's end would be swift and sudden.

Kerr was crouching against the side wall of the tower, and he edged his way round until he stood immediately beneath Mr. Railton. The tower jutted out at the top, so it was impossible for Munro to see the junior unless he leaned well over the parapet and looked directly downwards. But, having no suspicion of the truth, Munro did not do this.

The old tower was covered with ivy from base to summit. It was old, and the roots were tough, and firmly fixed to the wall. Nevertheless, it was a risky business that Kerr proceeded to undertake.

He swung himself upwards. The juniors watched him with bated breath.

Would he succeed?

How could he aid Mr. Railton, even if he did reach him?

It was a terribly trying time. The juniors stood like statues, and Gerald Munro kept his eyes upon them, ready to cut the rope at the least sign of an advance.

"One minute left!" he shouted, with a chuckle of mirth. "In one minute's time this treacherous hound will fall to his doom!"

Kerr heard the words distinctly, and he climbed now with reckless haste.

"Can I do it?" he muttered to himself. "One minute! My hat, I shall have to be jolly slipper!"

Up he went, foot by foot. The ivy held firm, and, clinging with feet, knees, and hands, the junior fought his way upwards. A slip would have meant a terrible fall; but Kerr was not thinking of slips. His sole thoughts were for Mr. Railton.

Still he went upwards, and at last Tom Merry uttered a low sigh of thankfulness.

For Kerr was clinging to the ivy directly alongside Mr. Railton. Munro, from above, had no idea of the

junior's close proximity. The wind, rustling in the ivy, had prevented him from hearing the noise of Kerr's efforts.

Kerr, to his intense delight, found that the rope by which Mr. Railton was hanging was quite separate from the one which bound him. It had been added afterwards, and was simply fastened round Mr. Railton's waist.

In a second Kerr had his knife out, and, clinging to the ivy with one hand only, he leaned over the Housemaster and cut the ropes which bound his hands and feet.

"Now, sir, you can cling to the ivy!" breathed Kerr huskily. "When that rotter cuts the rope you won't fall!"

Mr. Railton took a firm grip of the sturdy branches.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured fervently. "My boy, I cannot—"

"Don't talk, please, sir!" murmured Kerr.

A little colour had come back into Mr. Railton's cheeks, and even as he took a firmer grip of the ivy a sound of laughter came from above.

"The five minutes is up!" shouted Munro's voice. "Watch! You will see your precious master dashed headlong to the ground!"

"I don't think!" murmured Kerr, beneath his breath.

There was a sharp tug at the rope, and then the cut end of it fell down and landed upon Mr. Railton's shoulders.

A shout of triumph rose in a roar from the juniors below, and they rushed forward. Mr. Railton and his brave rescuer were clinging to the ivy unharmed!

And above them, looking downwards with a demoniacal light in his eyes, was Gerald Munro. A string of furious exclamations left his lips; then he suddenly darted back from the parapet.

"Quick, sir! He's going to drop something on us!" gasped Kerr.

The Housemaster nodded, and commenced descending rapidly. The ivy creaked and groaned under the strain, but it held firm, and suddenly from above something whizzed between Kerr and Mr. Railton. It was a big stone.

The pair were barely fifteen feet from the ground now, and they simply scrambled downwards with tremendous haste.

And suddenly, with a rending tear, the whole mass of ivy gave way at the roots. Kerr and Mr. Railton gave cries of alarm as they were pitched headlong downwards.

Next second they struck the cobbles forcibly, and rolled over. The broken ivy fell upon them in a great pile, and completely hid them from view.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Mr. Railton Explains.

"GWEAT Scott!"

"They've fallen!"

"The ivy's busted!"

The juniors rushed forward to the spot, forgetting all about Munro in the excitement. Tom Merry had been about to lead a party to the tower, but now he stopped and hurried to the pile of ivy with the others.

A leg protruded, and a moment later Kerr crawled out backwards.

"My only aunt!" he gasped.

"Are you hurt?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Only a giddy bruise or two," said Kerr. "Let's get Mr. Railton out."

But the Housemaster appeared without any aid. He was not injured, but



"Wouldn't it be easier to cut it?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Crook, 1, Lincoln Street, Barton Hill, Bristol 5.

the fall had shaken him considerably. Both he and Kerr were very lucky to escape so lightly, for had the ivy given way higher up the result would have been serious.

"My boys, I hardly know what to say!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, passing a hand over his brow. "I have been through an awful experience, and I never hoped that I should be saved, for help seemed impossible."

Manners shouted out with great abruptness.

"Look!" he yelled. "The rotter's escaped!"

The juniors turned and saw that Manners was right. In the excitement of the moment they had overlooked Gerald Munro. The man had taken the opportunity, and had descended from the tower.

And now he was running across the meadows as fast as his legs would carry him. He had torn the black mask off.

"After him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Don't let the wuffian escape!"

"Yes, boys, you must make every effort to capture the man," said Mr. Railton quickly, recovering rapidly. "He is dangerous, and will probably do a lot of harm if left at large."

Without waiting another second, Tom Merry rushed off, and the other juniors streamed after him, Kerr amongst them, for the Scottish junior meant to be in at the death.

The Housemaster, too, made an effort to run with his rescuers, but he found it too much for him. In his bruised and weak condition, it was almost impossible to run, so he hurried after the running juniors as fast as possible.

He had been through a terrible experience, and it was a wonder that he had not collapsed through sheer reaction.

Tom Merry led the runners, and he found himself forging well ahead of all

the rest. In front of him Gerald Munro ran with great, leaping strides.

But the man was bulky, and he would be unable to keep up the pace for long. Even now he was going perceptibly slower, and he staggered a little. He glanced over his shoulder from time to time, and seemed to realise that, if caught, he would never fight his way to liberty again.

Tom Merry was as fresh as paint. He ran easily, and slowly but surely overtook the fleeing man. Close behind him were Manners, Lowther, Blake, Figgins, and the others. In the rear Fatty Wynn puffed along nobly.

"Back up, dear boys!" Arthur Augustus panted. "Catch the wottah!"

At last the wood was reached. The escaping man had hoped to elude his pursuers here, but they were too close behind him. One glance in his rear told him that he could not hope to dodge so many.

So he went straight on, crashing through the undergrowth with great force.

Then he suddenly uttered a shout of dismay.

Before him were half a dozen more juniors. They were Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, Lumley-Lumley, and others, searching for Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry caught sight of them through the trees.

"Rescue, St. Jim's!" he roared hoarsely.

The shout was heard, and Bernard Glyn turned.

"Stop him!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Collar him!"

"Ya a s, wathah! Collah the boundah!"

The little crowd of fellows saw Gerald Munro suddenly dodge to the left, and they understood.

"My hat! Tom Merry and the others are chasing that chap!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley. "I guess we'd better lend a hand!"

"Rather!"

And the half-dozen juniors rushed to intercept Munro. The man saw that he was beaten, and he glanced swiftly round for a weapon. His gaze rested upon a great log of wood, and he picked it up.

But before he could raise it to strike, the juniors were upon him with a rush. Over he went like a ninepin. For a second he lay on the ground, panting hard, then he made a last effort.

But it was useless. Tom Merry & Co. streamed up, and jumped upon their captive. In less than a minute Munro was simply jammed down under the weight of a dozen fellows—to move was almost impossible.

"Got him!" gasped Kerr triumphantly.

"Yaas, wathah! We've collahed the fawfulful wuffian!"

"Who is it?" asked Glyn excitedly.

"The chap who nearly killed Mr. Railton!" answered Tom Merry grimly.

"We've rescued him!"

"Who—Mr. Railton?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

In a moment the news was general, and the excitement was intense. Kerr looked at Munro's face, and then rose to his feet.

"I say, the chap's absolutely done up!" he said. "Get off him, you fellows!"

The juniors rose and looked at the man. He lay on his back, gasping.

(Continued on page 23.)

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# HARRY WHARTON & CO.'S MIDNIGHT SEARCH IN THE WOODS PUTS THEM ON THE TRAIL OF LEVISON'S KIDNAPPERS!

## THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOLBOY!

### WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

Ignoring the warning of Harry Wharton & Co. that two footpads are lurking in Friardale Wood, Ernest Levison, the new boy of the Greyfriars Remove, takes the short cut through the wood to the village. He is bound on an errand for Carberry, the bully of the Sixth.

Levison fails to return to Greyfriars that night, and the matter is reported to Dr. Locke. He instructs Mr. Quelch, in company with Wingate and Carberry, to make a search for the missing junior. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co., who have already had one encounter with the footpads, decide to investigate on their own. They break bounds just before Mr. Quelch and the two seniors set out, and take the footpath through the wood. The juniors are half-way to the village when they find a packet of cigarettes where the trampled grass shows evidence of a struggle.

(Now read on.)

### The Search for Levison!

THE chums of the Remove stared at the packet of cigarettes blankly. They had hoped to find some trace of Levison, but they had not looked for anything of this kind.

"Do you think it was Levison dropped them here?" asked Nugent slowly.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"But surely the young ass doesn't smoke!"

"I don't think so; but you have forgotten that he was going to the village for Carberry. He smokes in his study, as we all know perfectly well."

Nugent gave a whistle.

"I see. He was fetching cigarettes for Carberry from Friardale?"

"Yes, I believe so; and that's why Carberry gave him a pass; and that's why he's anxious about what's happened to Levison, too."

"Looks as if there had been a bit of a struggle here," said Bob Cherry, flashing the light on the trampled grass.

"Yes, you're right!"

"The rightfulness is great. The grass has been trampled downfully. I said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Somebody has been struggling here, and it is supposed that it was the esteemed Levison.'"

"Not much doubt about that."

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful. He believed he had found a clue to Levison in the packet of cigarettes; but where was the junior?

"Perhaps he was attacked here, and bolted," suggested Bob Cherry. "They might have pounced on him, as they did on Billy Bunter; but he's a bit cuter than the Owl. He might have got away and bolted."

"And scuttled back to the village," said Nugent.

"But then he's had time to get to the school by road," said Harry Wharton.

"He may have been scared."

"He could have reported to the police-fuhabits at the station, and obtained the protectfulness to return to the honourable school," said Hurree Singh,

"or he might have hired the cabful vehicle at the railway station, and returned to the college carriagefully."

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### By Frank Richards.

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

"But he didn't," said Wharton. "I don't believe he got back to the village at all, or he would have done one or the other, or sent word to the school somehow."

"Carberry suggested—"

"Carberry is afraid to think that anything has happened to him, and the wish is father to the thought with him. He's scared lest it comes out that Levison was to bring him cigarettes from Friardale."

"I suppose so."

"Let's get on, anyway, and see if there's any trace of Levison farther along the path."

"Good! If we linger here, we shall soon have Quelch spotting us."

"What about that packet of cigarettes, Harry? Oughtn't we to leave it where we found it, as a clue to Mr. Quelch, if he notices it?"

Wharton hesitated.

**Fifty pounds is the sum the kid-nappers of Ernest Levison hope to get for their prisoner. But all they do get is a number of bumps and bruises—from the chums of the Remove!**

"We don't want to get Carberry into a row," he said. "He's a bully and a cad, but if the truth came out in this matter he would be expelled from Greyfriars."

"Good riddance, too!"

"Yes, in one way; but we don't want to have a hand in bringing disgrace on a fellow," said Harry quietly. "You know what it means to be expelled from school. After all, Quelch will see the grass trampled here, and that will be clue enough for him."

"Something in that."

Harry slipped the packet of cigarettes into his pocket.

"Come on!" he said.

The juniors pressed on. They scanned the path and the bordering wood carefully as they went forward, but there was no sign of Levison.

"There's the road!" said Bob Cherry. They were at the end of the footpath. The torchlight shone on the little gate that opened on the Friardale Road. The juniors halted.

"Put out that light, Bob. We don't want it now, and Quelch will be along soon."

Bob Cherry switched off the torch.

"What's to be done now?" said Nugent. "If Levison is in the village, or—"

He paused.

"I don't think he's in the village," said Harry Wharton. "I think it stands

to reason that if he were there he would have contrived to send word to the school somehow."

"Well, one would think so."

"He's still in the wood. You know what happened to Hazeldene's sister; when she met those rotters, Melchior and Parengro, who belonged to the same gang. They kidnapped her."

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "And they've kidnapped Levison!"

"I don't see any reason why they should kidnap Levison," said Harry Wharton; "but kidnaped he certainly is, unless worse has happened. We shall know more when we find him."

"When we find him!" said Nugent. "But how are we to find him? It's close upon eleven now, Harry."

"I know. But I'm not going back to Greyfriars until I've found Levison."

"It will mean a fearful row if they find we are missing!"

"I don't care!"

"Well, I don't, for that matter, and I'm as curious as you are," said Nugent. "But what can we do? We've searched all along the footpath."

"We must find him!" said Harry determinedly.

"Look out!" muttered Bob Cherry suddenly. "There's a light in the wood!"

"It's Quelch."

A bright light was showing in the gloomy depths of the footpath. It was coming towards the juniors as they stood at the gate, and it evidently belonged to the other search-party that had followed them from Greyfriars.

"Get into cover!" muttered Harry Wharton. "If they were to see us—"

"They won't see us."

The Removites plunged amongst the trees. The light came by, and Mr. Quelch, Carberry, and Wingate passed within a dozen paces of the hidden juniors. They were talking, and their words came clearly to the juniors in the stillness of the wood.

"The only thing is to go to the police," said Mr. Quelch. "That tramping of the grass looks very much as if there had been a struggle there."

"It seems certain to my mind, sir," said Wingate.

"Suppose we inquire in Friardale first, sir," said Carberry, who was looking very white. "If he hasn't been there, we could go to the police station."

"That is so, Carberry."

The three passed on. The light was extinguished when they passed the gate, and the Removites heard their steps die away in the night towards the village.

"The chums came out of the trees. They are going to hunt for him in the village," said Bob Cherry. "We're not wanted there, anyway."

"Carberry looked in a blue funk," said Nugent. "He knows what it might mean to him. I'm rather glad we kept the cigarettes dark now."

"The quality of mercifulness is not strained,—as your poet Shakespeare remarks," said Hurree Singh. "It drops fully falls like gentle rain from heaven, and blesses him that gives and him that receives thankfully."

"Let's get back into the wood," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "The coast is clear now."

"Right-ho!"

# THERE ARE THRILLS THROUGHOUT THIS GRIPPING YARN OF THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS!



The chums of Greyfriars stole quietly forward and looked past the bend into the hollow beyond. Lying on a blanket on the ground was a boy. It was Levison! A few paces from him Black Seth was seated on a log. The kidnapper had been tracked to his hiding-place at last!

Bob Cherry switched on the torch again, and the Greyfriars chums plunged into the gloomy wood once more.

## The Nabob on the Track!

THE hearts of the juniors were beating faster as they returned along the footpath in the quest which they knew might prove to be one of peril. But they did not hesitate for one moment to follow their leader.

It was not long before they reached the spot where the packet of cigarettes had been found. The torchlight shone on the trampled grass.

Harry Wharton scanned the ground closely.

"Show the light here, Bob."

Bob came towards him.

"What is it?"

"If Levison has been taken away, he must have left the footpath at this spot or near it. There ought to be some traces left."

"Nothing that will tell us much, I expect. We can't follow a trail like a Red Indian hunter," said Bob Cherry. "We can try," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"If I may make the suggestion—"

"What is it, Inky?"

"I think I can followfully find the track of the rascally rotters if they have left one," said the nabob modestly. "You will remember that my boyhood was passed in India, and I was often with the shikarees at the hunt of the deer and the cheetah, and I have even been on a tiger-hunt on the back of an elephant. The shikarees taught me muchfully, and I think I could findfully pick up the track if it is there."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton.

"Come and try, Inky!"

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry. "I'll show you the light."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh bent over the trampled grass. His suggestion came as a surprise and a relief to the juniors.

The nabob was so modest about his attainments that it had not crossed Harry's mind that he might be of use here. But he realised that if there was one of the juniors who might be able to follow a foot-track through the wood, that one was Hurree Singh.

The nabob examined the grass, and moved on, without raising his head, into the trees beside the footpath.

"They went this way," asked Bob Cherry.

The nabob nodded.

"The grass is yet crushed by their bootful feet," he replied. "There were certainly two of the rotters, but I do not see any trace of the footsteps of the esteemed Levison."

"He must have been with them if they kidnapped him."

"The esteemed Levison has left foot-marks in the grass there on the path, but not under the trees," said the nabob. "Here are only the footprints of two pairs of very large and nailful boots."

"They must be the two ruffians who were attacking Bunter when we came upon them," said Nugent.

"No doubt about that," said Bob Cherry. "But if Levison was not with them when they left the path—"

"They may have been carrying him," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"I didn't think of that."

"The probability is great," said the nabob. "If they made him a prisoner

he would not go quietly, and they would remove him carryfully."

Hurree Singh followed the track into the wood, with his eyes close to the ground, and Bob Cherry by his side holding the torch.

Wharton and Nugent followed them. The wood from the path looked almost impenetrable, with masses of tangled undergrowth among the great trees. But as the juniors advanced into it, they found that a rough, unmarked track wound amongst the trees, with no obstruction save the boughs and ferns that had to be pushed back as they passed.

Here and there Hurree Singh found a fresh trace of the footprints. Suddenly he came to a halt.

"What is it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Look there!"

Before them lay a mass of bushes through which the footpads had evidently passed. On the brambles could be seen fragments of light grey cloth, torn from an overcoat in the rough passage through.

Harry Wharton understood.

Levison had been carrying a light overcoat on his arm when he left the school. He had doubtless donned it in the village on his return, and was wearing it as he came through the wood. The fragments clinging to the brambles showed that he had gone this way, and the fact that no traces had been found of his footprints proved that he had been carried.

"That point was settled."

"Let's get on!" said Harry.

They plunged through the bushes. Suddenly the nabob grasped Bob Cherry's hand, and switched out the torch he was holding. The juniors stopped in the midst of the clinging brambles.

"What the—!" began the astonished Bob.

But a dusky hand was pressed on his lips, and the nabob murmured:

"Silence!"

"What is it?" whispered Harry.

"Someone is near at hand in the wood."

"You heard something?"

"Yes."

The juniors remained breathlessly silent, listening. Round them was darkness-black as pitch. Through the darkness came the sound of cracking bushes.

There was someone close to them.

The noise suddenly stopped, but in the deep silence a sound of hurried breathing came to their ears.

They were almost trembling now—not with fear, but with excitement. Who was their near neighbour in the darkness? Did he know that they were there?

Through the silence came the sound of a rough, savage voice.

"I can see yer! You may as well show the light ag'in!"

Harry drew a quick breath.

It was the voice of one of the ruffians who had stopped Billy Bunter in the footpath. He knew it again quite well.

"It's one of them," he whispered, "and he is alone."

"And he knows we are here."

"He knows someone is here. He cannot have seen us, but he has caught a glimpse of the light. It's pretty certain that these scoundrels have a hiding-place somewhere in the wood."

"I can hear yer!" came the rough voice again. "Will you show that light?"

"Switch on the light, Bob!"

Bob Cherry started.

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"But surely he will—"

"He will come towards the light," whispered Harry, "and then we shall have him. We are four to one, and if we are careful he cannot escape. Then we can force him to tell us what has become of Levison."

Bob Cherry chuckled silently. "I didn't think of that. It's a good wheeze!"

"Switch on the torch, then." The bright beam from the torch suddenly cut through the darkness. Bob Cherry set it on the ground, and the juniors plunged back into cover.

There they waited, grasping their sticks, with bated breath and fast-beating hearts.

There was a grunt in the darkness and a sound of parting twigs, and a dark, evil face glowered through the brambles.

The gipsy came slowly towards the torch as it gleamed on the ground, his black eyes darting suspicious glances like those of a wild animal to right and left.

"Give it him!" muttered Harry Wharton.

The chums rushed into the light, with their sticks brandished.

The gipsy sprang back, with a gasping exclamation. But the chums of Greyfriars were all round him now.

He dodged the descending cudgels, receiving only one blow, and that on his arm, and then with a curse he turned to run. He had evidently not expected to find so many foes, and perhaps not such determined ones.

Harry Wharton sprang right at him, and fastened a fierce grip on his collar and dragged him to the ground.

The gipsy went down with the boy clinging to him, but the next moment he returned grip for grip, and Harry gasped in the powerful grasp of the ruffian.

"Help!" His chums hardly needed calling. They were already piling themselves on the gipsy, and his grip on Harry relaxed as he had to counter fresh foes.

He was a powerful ruffian, but the boys were four to one. They would not have hesitated to use their sticks with effect if they had been needed. But the odds were great enough.

The ruffian, struggling furiously, was pinned to the ground under the weight of the juniors, and his savage struggles gradually ceased.

With Harry's knee planted on his ribs as he lay on his side, and Bob Cherry sitting on his legs, and Nugent and Hurree Singh gripping a wrist each, the gipsy had little chance of freeing himself.

He lay with his dark face upturned, his black eyes glittering with rage.

### Kidnapped!

**H**ARRY WHARTON fixed his eyes on the savage face. The gipsy was silent, his lips drawn back in a fierce snarl.

Harry came straight to the point. "Where is the chap you kidnapped on the footpath?"

There was no reply. "We are here searching for him," said Harry Wharton. "If you tell us where he is, and he has not been harmed, we will let you go free."

Still the gipsy was silent. "Where is he?"

"Find out!"

"I tell you that if we find him unharmed you shall be released. Otherwise we shall hand you over to the police."

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"Hang you!"

"You will not tell us?"

"No!"

The man spat out the word with the savageness of a spiteful cat.

"You will tell us," said Harry Wharton. "You are in our hands now, and if you do not tell us where to find Levison, we shall thrash you with a stick."

The gipsy's eyes glittered, but he did not reply.

"Very well," said Harry, between his teeth. "We will see. You cowardly hound, do you think we shall deal lightly with you when you have kidnapped one of our schoolfellows? You shall see."

"The thrashfulness would be a wheezy good idea," said the nabob.

"And he shall have it if he doesn't speak."

Harry Wharton unbuckled the gipsy's belt.

The man began to struggle again, but a knee grinding into his ribs soon reduced him to gasping quiescence.

The belt was fastened securely round his wrists, and then his neckerchief was dragged off, and his ankles were tightly bound with it.

Then the juniors could safely release him. They rose to their feet, breathing hard from their exertions, and stood round the captured ruffian.

"Now," said Harry Wharton in a quiet voice, "you are going to tell us where Levison is."

The gipsy gritted his teeth "Not a word, hang you!"

"Then you will take the consequences."

The cord fastened round the neck and twistily tightened into the knotfulness is a method used in India," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"I think a stick well laid on will have the necessary effect," said Wharton with a slight smile.

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry, grasping the ruffian and rolling him over with his face in the grass. "Sit on his legs, Nugent."

"Certainly!" said Nugent.

"Let me alone!"

"I'll sit on his head," said Bob Cherry. "If he chokes he's only got himself to thank!"

"Gerroff!"

"Not this evening!"

Bob Cherry coolly planted himself on the gipsy's head, and Nugent sat on his legs. The man wriggled and writhed under them in vain. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh twirled in the air the thick stick he carried.

"Shall I bestow the thrashfulness upon the esteemed rotter, my worthy chums?" asked the nabob.

Wharton nodded.

"Yes"

Slash! The stick came down with a terrific swipe across the gipsy. He gave a gasping yell, which Bob Cherry drowned by jamming his face down harder into the thick grass.

"You mustn't make that noise here, you know," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head.

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"If that's your native language I can't understand it."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Give him another, Inky. His gr-r-r-r-ring is getting on my nerves!"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh looked inquiringly at Wharton, who nodded his head. The stick descended in a second slash on the ruffian, and another muffled yell rang out.

"Now let him speak, Bob."

"Right-ho!"

Bob got off the gipsy's head and the ruffian rolled over. He turned upwards a face grimed with dirt, and blazing with rage and hate.

"You young swabs!"

"Will you tell us where Levison is now?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No!"

"Then you shall have a dozen more, and we will see the effect. Roll him over again and don't let him loose till he has had a dozen."

"Right you are."

"Hold on!" gasped the ruffian, weakening before the evident determination of the juniors.

"Will you answer my question then?"

"I—I don't know where he is."

"You were with the other scoundrel in kidnapping him."

"Ye-es."

"Then where is he?"

"I—I don't know."

Harry Wharton bent over the gipsy. "Have you harmed him?"

"No," gasped the man. "I swear he isn't hurt, except for a little tap on the head, nothing much. He would struggle."

"I believe you. Then where is he?"

"He is with Black Seth."

"Is that the man who was with you today when we met you on the footpath?"

"Yes."

"You left Levison with him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Two hours ago," muttered the gipsy. "I've been to the village. I left the boy with Black Seth."

"Why did you make him a prisoner?"

"It was Seth's doing. I was against it."

"Where did you leave your companion?"

"In the wood."

"Ah, you were returning to him when you saw our light in the wood?" said Harry Wharton quickly.

The ruffian was silent.

"Answer me! Were you going to rejoin him when you came upon us here?" demanded Harry sharply.

"Yes," muttered the man.

"I thought so. You know where he is. Tell us where we shall find him!"

"Seth would half-kill you if you—"

"That is our business. We are no more afraid of him than we are of you!" said Harry Wharton contemptuously.

"Where shall we find him?"

"I was to meet him at the stream," said the gipsy, slowly and unwillingly.

"And if you let him know I told you, he will have his revenge on me."

"We shall tell him nothing!"

"I know that stream," said Nugent, who had been at Greyfriars longer than any of the others, and knew every foot almost of the woods around the old school.

"It's a good place to look for officers. There's an earth cave in the bank, and it's just the place these ruffians might hide Levison in, if they know of it."

"Is that the place?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes," muttered the gipsy. "Then we are on the track. If this man has not lied, we shall find Levison now."

"I have not lied," muttered the gipsy. "That is what we have to prove now."

"Let me go!"

"If you have told the truth you shall go," said Harry Wharton. "Until we are sure on that point you remain a prisoner."

Bob Cherry gave a low whistle. "We can't take him along with us,"

Harry. He would give us too much trouble."

"I know that, Bob! I wasn't thinking of that."

"If we take him to the police station in Friardale—"

"No time for that. We can leave him here. We can bind him to a tree to make him secure. If he has told us the truth, we will release him afterwards."

"Is might get released by calling."

"Not if we gag him."

"Good! You think of everything!"

The gipsy began to struggle as he was dragged to a tree; but, bound as he was, his struggles amounted to little. There was no rope to be had, and the piece of whipcord that Bob Cherry produced from his pocket did not seem as if it would go far towards binding the powerful ruffian to the tree.

But Harry Wharton was equal to the occasion. He had selected a slender tree, but quite stout enough to resist the efforts of the strongest man to break the trunk. The gipsy's hands were unfastened, and his arms passed round the tree. Then his wrists were fastened together with the belt, on the other side of it.

The ruffian was powerless to resist. He muttered savage threats while the juniors were securing him, to which the boys turned a deaf ear. There was little doubt that he was secure. Harry examined the fastening of his wrists, and it was strong enough.

"You have only yourself to thank for your position," Wharton remarked. "If you escape going to prison you will be fortunate."

"Hang you!"

"Anybody got a piece of twine?"

"I have a short lengthfulness of the twineful string," said Hurree Singh, taking it from his pocket.

"Thanks! I'll fasten the gag in so that he can't get rid of it!"

Harry stuffed his handkerchief in the ruffian's mouth by way of a gag, and secured it there with the twine round the back of his head. There was no danger

now of the gipsy giving a warning to his comrade.

Bob Cherry picked up the torch.

"Better switch that off," said Nugent.

"I know this wood like a book, and I can find my way quite easily to the earth cave on the stream."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "Put it out, Bob."

The torch was switched off. In silence the boys moved on through the dense darkness of the wood, with hope high in their hearts now. They felt that they were nearing the end of the midnight quest, and the knowledge that they were going to face a dangerous ruffian did not make them hesitate.

#### At Close Quarters!

**T**HERE was a glimmer of silver light through the dense gloom of the wood. The juniors sighted it at the same moment, and stopped. Nugent, who was in the lead, glanced back.

"It's the stream."

The stream it was, the shallow, rippling Wraye, that wound through the heart of the dense wood, overhung by trees, and deeply shaded even in the daytime. Now the darkness of the night was upon it, but here and there on the stream's surface glimmered the reflection of a star. It was the starry glimmer on the water that had caught the eyes of the chums of Greyfriars.

"Then we are getting close," muttered Harry Wharton.

"Yes. The cave is along the stream on this side, under the thickets there. We shall have to wade in the water to get into it."

"Never mind that."

"We could drop in from above," said Nugent, in a low voice; "but not without giving the alarm if there's anyone there. The cave is just a hollow in the bank, sort of roofed over by vegetation. I have dropped through it once, but it was by accident. I was exploring."

"I fancy we'll go by way of the stream," murmured Bob Cherry. "We don't want to fall on the head of Black Seth."

"Ratherfully not!" said the nabob. "It does not matter so much about his esteemed head as about our honourable limbs, which might be brokenfully busted."

"Exactly! I wasn't thinking of his esteemed head, you may be sure!" Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Tuck your trousers up," said Harry Wharton. "Do you know how deep the water is towards the hollow, Nugent?"

"Not more than a foot."

"That won't hurt us."

"Of course, we don't know that the ruffian is there," Nugent remarked. "If he's hiding about here at all, that's the likeliest place, and I rather think that that fellow spoke the truth."

"I think so, too."

"Blessed if I can get on to his reason for kidnapping Levison, all the same," said Bob Cherry. "He can't be mad enough to think of holding him to ransom, can he?"

"He might. It's been done before."

"There's a disappointment in store for him, if that's his game," said Nugent. "Mind, he mustn't get away. We're here to rescue Levison, but we want to take that scoundrel to the police station as well."

"Yes, rather!"

"The rutherfulness is great!"

"Lead on, Nugent. You know the way."

"Right-ho! Follow your uncle!" said Nugent cheerfully.

The spirits of the juniors had risen very much since they had learned that no harm had come to Levison. He was a prisoner, and whether they rescued him or not, his life was not likely to be in danger. And the juniors regarded the rescue now as a matter of almost certainty. The danger they cared little for.

Nugent led the way cautiously along the bank of the stream.

The glimmering of the stars through



With fast-beating hearts, Harry Wharton & Co. crouched in cover as the gipsy approached. The man came slowly towards the torch on the ground, darting suspicious glances to right and left. "Now, give it to him!" muttered Wharton.

the boughs above showed the juniors some light now, and it was very welcome, for they could not venture to switch on the torch without risk of giving the alarm to the gipsy.

The bank was high and abrupt here, the stream flowing at a level of six or seven feet below, the slope being thickly clad in bush and bracken.

In flood-time the stream rose to a higher level, and then the hollows of the banks were filled with water, and only tenanted by otters and rats; but now the stream was at low level, and the caves were dry.

The juniors descended the bank, pushing their way through the clinging vegetation, and plunged through the rushes into the water.

In a depth of about a foot of water, they continued their way along the stream. The starlight was clearer here, and showed them their way.

Nugent stopped at a spot where a black mass of thicket rose on the steep bank, seeming as impenetrable as the side of a hill.

He did not venture to speak, but held up his hand to his followers.

Harry Wharton sniffed slightly.

There was a scent of damp vegetation in the air, but clearer than that came the well-known smell of tobacco.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

Someone was smoking, and probably within a dozen yards of the spot where the juniors were standing; and it could only be one person.

The quarry was at hand.

"Quiet!" whispered Nugent. "Not a sound!"

"Right! Where is the opening?"

"I'll show you."

Nugent bent down and groped among the thick reeds and overhanging creepers; he suddenly disappeared into the black wall of vegetation.

Harry Wharton stared for a moment, and then followed closely upon his track; and found that the creepers hung down here like a massive curtain over a dark opening in the earthy bank.

He passed under the mass, still dragging his feet through the water, and felt Nugent's hand touch him in the darkness.

Black as pitch was the darkness under the screen of vegetation, but ahead of the boys was a glimmer of light.

Mingled with the scent of tobacco was the smell of burning oil, and the juniors guessed that the glimmer came from an oil-lamp.

"He's here!" muttered Nugent, scarcely audible, with his lips close to Harry's ear.

Harry pressed his arm. Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh came through the thick screen, and the four chums stood together in the darkness, watching the glimmer of light in the hollow of the bank.

As their eyes became more used to the darkness they saw that before them opened a wide gap in the earth, the roof of which was formed of thick, tangled creepers and the roots of trees extending over the hollow.

The water ended just within the hollow; and the chums, wading on silently, drew their soaking feet from the chilly stream.

The glimmer came from beyond a bend in the hollow, a shoulder of earth looming up where the cave extended farther into the bank.

Grasping their sticks firmly, the chums of Greyfriars stole quietly forward and looked past the bend into the hollow beyond.

The ground here was higher and quite dry.

A lamp, slung from a thick stick jammed into the earthy wall, shed a glimmering light in the cave, the rays shining weirdly on the leafy screen that formed the roof overhead.

On the ground were spread several blankets and some coats, showing that the cave was used as a camping place for the footpads.

On one of the blankets lay a boy asleep.

The juniors stared as they saw him and exchanged glances of satisfaction.

It was Levison!

He was fast asleep, and his face—turned towards the lamp—showed white and haggard, and there was a streak of dull red on the forehead.

The "tap" the gipsy had spoken of as all Levison's hurts had evidently been a somewhat severe one; but the injury did not prevent the weary junior from sleeping, nor did the fact that his feet were bound and his wrists loosely shackled with a cord. The gipsies clearly meant to run no risks with their prisoner escaping.

A few paces from Levison the gipsy was seated on a log, with his back against the earthy wall of the hollow. It was the man the juniors had seen that afternoon, when Billy Bunter had been stopped on the footpath; it was the man they had expected to see, and they knew him again at the first glance.

The kidnapper had been tracked to his hiding-place at last!

He had not the slightest suspicion that enemies were at hand, for he smoked placidly. It was pretty clear that he was waiting for the return of his companion.

Harry Wharton had noticed that the pockets of the gipsy they had captured were stuffed with packets, and he had guessed that the ruffian had been purchasing food in the village—probably with the money taken from Levison.

The water squelched in Nugent's shoes as he moved, and the gipsy looked round. The chums drew back from sight, and the ruffian called out:

"Is that you, Simon?"

His voice awoke Levison; the junior started up with a scared expression on his face and stared wildly at the gipsy.

"Where am I? Where—?"

The ruffian chuckled.

"You're with me, kid," he said. "Did you think you were in school again—eh?"

Levison shivered.

"I—I was dreaming. I thought I was back at Greyfriars."

"You won't see Greyfriars again in a hurry."

"I suppose I shall see it about the same time as you see the inside of a prison cell," said Levison, whose danger apparently had not made him less bitter of tongue.

The gipsy scowled; his hand groped for a moment towards the stick that was leaning against the wall, but he did not take it in his hand.

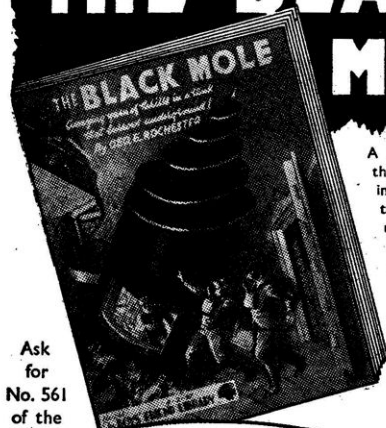
"Hold your tongue!" he growled.

"You would be more sensible to let me go," said Levison. "You must be mad to think of getting any money for my release. My father would never pay it."

"We shall see." Head gets your letter, if you have the insolence to send it, he will place it in the hands of the police."

"Does he wish to see you again, d'you

# THE BLACK MOLE



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think?" said the gipsy in a low, sneering voice, his black eyes glittering.

"Yes, I suppose so."  
"Well, if he sends fifty quid to the place I tell him of, I shall send him directions where to find you when I've left this quarter. If he doesn't, you'll lie here till the water-rats eat the flesh from your bones."

"You would never dare—"  
The ruffian gave a short laugh.  
"That would be safer for me, young fellow, as you've been at the trouble of telling me that you've noted my face, and could denounce me anywhere," he sneered. "Maybe, if you live, you'll learn to keep a wiser tongue."

He turned towards the opening of the hollow again.

"Simon, is that you?"  
The gipsy had heard some sound, and imagined that it was his confederate returning. He seemed surprised at receiving no answer, and he stepped towards the bend in the hollow. A moment more and he was upon the Greyfriars chums.

But they were ready for him.  
As he caught sight of them and started back, with a wild oath on his lips, the four juniors sprang at him like tigers.

He was borne backwards by the rush, and went with a crash to the ground.

They piled on him furiously.

"Got the brute!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Hold him!"

"Give him socks!"

The gipsy was struggling madly.

So great was his strength that he hurled off the juniors and sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing, panting for breath.

He made a spring towards the spot where his bludgeon stood, and had he been able to take it in his hand it might have gone hard with the juniors.

But he had no chance of that.

Harry Wharton's stick descended with a crash on the arm outstretched to take the weapon, and Black Seth's hand dropped to his side as he yelled with pain.

"At him!" panted Harry.

And the juniors sprang to the attack again.

The gipsy made a desperate rush towards the opening of the hollow, but they were before him.

He sprang back into the cave, stumbled over Levison, and reeled; and then the grasp of the Greyfriars juniors was upon him again.

Again he tore himself loose and made a wild spring towards the top of the hollow, where the tangled roots and creepers sprang in the cave.

His grasp closed upon a stout root there, and he drew himself up.

"Don't let him get away!" gasped Bob Cherry, springing after the gipsy.

The next moment he reeled back, as a blow struck him on the chest. Harry Wharton narrowly escaped a kick as he sprang forward. He dodged in time; and then the gipsy dragged himself by a herculean effort through the tangled vegetation and disappeared above.

The juniors started after him in dismay.

"The rotter!" panted Bob Cherry. "I say, Wharton, give us a bunk up; I'll be after him in a jiffy!"

Wharton shook his head.

"But he'll get away."

"We can't help it," said Harry. "If we clamber out, we could never get hold of him again now. He's gone!"

The crashing of thickets had been heard for a few moments and had died into silence again. The ruffian was

evidently fleeing at top speed. Black Seth was gone—and the juniors, disappointed, gave up the idea of pursuit.

# Levison's Gratitude!

LEVISON had watched the Greyfriars chums with staring eyes during the brief, but grim, conflict. He seemed to be hardly able to believe the evidence of his eyes. When the desperate gipsy was gone, the juniors turned to him.

"Well, we've found you, old chap," said Bob Cherry cordially, as he stooped to unfasten the cord with which Levison was bound.

"I—I—"  
"Rather takes you off your balance, I suppose?" said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "You didn't expect to see us here?"

"No, I didn't!" said Levison.

"The unexpectedness is only equalled by the joyfulness of the meeting," beamed Hurree Singh. "I am truly glad to set the eyefulness of my glance upon the esteemed countenance of the honourable Levison once more."

"We're jolly glad to see you," said Nugent. "We were afraid some serious harm had happened to you. Use my knife, Bob. You can't untie those knots."

"Right you are!"

Bob Cherry cut the prisoner loose. Levison rose to his feet, blinking uncertainly at the chums of the Remove.

"What are you chaps doing out of school at this time of night?" he asked.

"I should think you could see," replied Bob Cherry. "We came here to find you."

"You left Greyfriars on purpose to find me?"

"Yes."

Levison was silent. He rubbed his wrists where they had been chafed by the cords. There was a curious expression on his face.

"We parted on ill-terms," said Harry Wharton. "I'm sorry I struck you, Levison. I lost my temper—"

"You don't want to fight me to-morrow?"

"No."

"You need not have minded. I don't box half so well as you do, and you are bigger than I am, too."

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

He made no reply to Levison's remark; but Bob Cherry was not so patient. He broke out angrily.

"What do you mean, Levison? Harry Wharton could knock you out in half a round if he liked. He doesn't want to fight you because of what's happened to-night."

"Oh, all right!" said Levison. "Keep your wool on, Cherry. There's nothing to get ratty about that I can see. If Wharton doesn't want to fight me, I don't want to fight him, and really I don't care much either way. How did you find me here?"

"We took a lot more trouble than you were worth—that's how!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"The troublefulness was great, and the worthfulness is very small," observed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I look upon the esteemed beast with contemptuousness."

"Did you find me here by accident?"

"Yes, of course," said Bob Cherry.

"It's a common custom of ours to go wading in streams and fighting gipsies in the middle of the night!"

Levison was silent.

"Let's get back to Greyfriars," went

on Bob Cherry. "We've rescued you, but I'm blessed if I think you were worth the trouble now."

"The gipsy beat had my watch and money," said Levison, looking round. "You've let him get away—and he's taken them with him, I suppose."

"Could we help it?"

"You were four to one. But don't think I'm grumbling. Only, it was a valuable watch, and—"

"If your head didn't look as if it had been bashed enough, Levison, I should get it into chancery," said Bob Cherry. "Come along, and shut up!"

"Well, it was your fault," said Levison. "You can't get out of that, anyway."

Harry Wharton stared at him.

"How do you make that out?" he demanded.

"You knew the danger I was going into, and you ought—"

"We warned you."

"I thought you were rotting," said Levison. "You played a trick on me when I first came to Greyfriars, some of you, by putting some stuff into my grub, and I thought you were pulling my leg again. If you had—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's get going."

"If there is no shutfulness there will be some thickcarefulness," said the nabob. "I have not the Jobful patience."

The chums of the Remove quitted the hollow. Levison followed them in silence. Not one of them addressed a word to him again. They had not expected—or wanted—gratitude for what they had done. But this kind of return from the fellow they had rescued could not fail to "put their backs up," as Bob Cherry expressed it.

"We'll keep our word to that rotter who told us where to find the cad," said Harry Wharton. "We can let him loose as we go back. This will be a surprise at Greyfriars."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"You're right. I don't suppose we've been missed, and it will be an eye-opener for them when we stroll in with the giddy rescued prisoner."

# Back to Greyfriars.

BOB CHERRY was right.

It was an "eye-opener," as he called it, for Greyfriars. The ringing of the bell at half-past one in the morning brought Gosling out of his bed in the worst of tempers. The Head had been too anxious to retire, but Gosling, the porter, was not particularly anxious. He had been sleeping soundly when the pealing of the bell startled him from his slumbers. The porter came, growling, down to the gate.

Gosling nearly fell down when his lamp showed him the grinning faces of the chums of the Remove through the bars of the gate.

"We've come back home, old son," said Bob Cherry.

"My heve!" gasped Gosling. "What I says is this 'ere—you ought to be in bed, and—"

"We've brought home the missing heir—I mean—our long-lost brother," said Bob Cherry. "Look at him! Isn't he a beauty?"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Levison.

Gosling, in blank amazement, opened the gate. The ringing of the bell had been heard by half Greyfriars. The Head, in the vague hope that it might

he news of the missing junior, had opened the door and was staring out into the Close, with the light from the Hall streaming out behind him.

Mr. Quetch was at his side, and Wingate had come out into the Hall, too, with Carberry. The searchers had returned unsuccessful to the school, quite oblivious of the fact that other—and more successful—searchers were still on the track.

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Locke fairly gasped as the thums of the Remove came into the light of the door with Levison in their midst.

The juniors raised their caps respectfully.

"Wharton! Cherry! What does this mean!" said the Head decidedly.

"We've found him, sir."

"Levison!"

"I have been knocked down and kidnapped by ruffian gipsies, sir," said Levison. "These fellows found me, and they say they came out on purpose."

"I hope you will forgive us for breaking bounds at night, sir, in the circumstances," said Harry Wharton respectfully. "We felt that as Levison was a member of our Form, we ought to find him."

him—and we thought we could do it. I hope you will forgive us, sir."

In the circumstances, Wharton, I can scarcely refuse to do so," said the Head. "You took a very serious step, but thank goodness you have brought this boy back to safety to the school. Go to bed now, all of you, and I will hear your story in the morning."

The Removes, tired out, but extremely satisfied with themselves, went upstairs. Mr. Wingate and Carberry followed them; and the captain of Greyfriars, patted Harry Wharton on the shoulder.

"Bravo, kid!" he said. "Bravo, all of you!"

And Wingate went into his room. Carberry was scowling.

"You ought to be licked for your cheek," he said. "If I were the Head I'd lick you!"

"Thank you!" said Harry. "But you're not the Head; you're only a prefect, anyway. By the way, I think something that belongs to you. I think Levison dropped it when the gipsies kidnapped him. I thought you wouldn't like me to give it to you before the Head."

"We've got the rotter, sir," said Kerr, with shining eyes.

"Yes, my boy, and I'm very glad," said the Housemaster quietly, turning to the others. "Boys," he added.

"Kerr saved me from a terrible death a short time ago, and words cannot express my gratitude for his courage. His action was splendid!"

"Oh, I say, sir, draw it mild!" protested Kerr.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I am speaking the truth, Kerr," he said.

**"THE NO-SURRENDER SCHOOLBOYS!"**

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"I owe you my life, and I shall never be able to repay you for your great service!"

And the Housemaster told Crump and the other juniors what Kerr had done. Kerr found himself blushing confusedly, for he was a modest fellow. But he would have to put up with a lot more of it before the affair was forgotten.

"But who is the man, sir?" asked Tom Merry. "What's the cause of his terrible ferocity towards you?"

Carberry gasped as Harry handed him the packet of cigarettes. Without a word he thrust it into his pocket and strode away.

The thums of the Remove chuckled as they went on to their dormitory.

"Well, I'm jolly tired," said Bob Cherry, as he began to undress. "And I suppose all of you are the same. I hope they won't go on all night long in the morning. I shall go to bed. It's the last time I shall go out in the middle of the night to look for lost asses."

"We should have got into a fair row if we hadn't brought Levison back with us," grumbled Nagent.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I fancy so," he said. "But all's well that ends well."

"That is quite correct!" purred Nabob of Banpur. "As your English proverb says: 'Nothing succeeds like the success of a fool.' My worthy thums."

(Harry Wharton & Co. are in the thick of excitement again next week. Look out for "THE FADDIST FORM-ALISTER!"—a truly story telling of a food crank who takes over the Remove.)

## The Housemaster's Peril!

(Continued from page 21.)

heavily. There was no doubt about the matter—he was quite exhausted.

"Where's Crump?" asked Blake.

"Somewhere near by," answered Kangaroo.

"Sure I saw him not a minute ago," said Reilly. "I'll fetch him."

"Good man!" said Blake. Reilly hurried off, and in three minutes returned, with P. C. Crump.

Blake was looking eager, and he looked heavily upon Munro. "He's a bit of a rascal," he exclaimed, snapping a pair of handcuffs on the man's wrists. "My hero! I'd like to pay you out for that there whack you gave me last night!"

"Hang you!" snarled Munro.

"You ought to consider yourself lucky that they don't hang you!" said Monty Lowther. "You jolly well deserve to be hanged!"

"Yass, wathah!"

Munro was dragged to his feet, and he stood glaring round him furiously. Every face was grim and stern; the juniors felt no compassion for the man. He seemed perfectly sane now, and the wild light was hardly apparent in his eyes.

But suddenly it appeared there—and a flash of fury escaped his lips. Mr. Railton had suddenly appeared through the trees, and he approached.

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