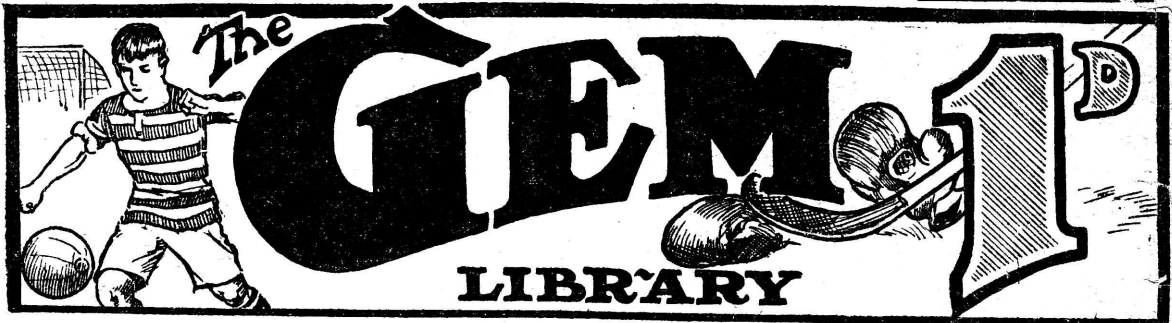
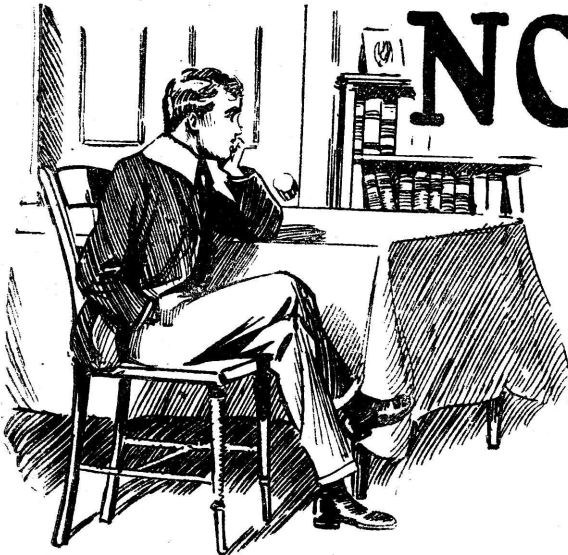


Every

Thursday



Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem!



NO CLASS!

A Splendid, Long,
Complete School Tale of
the Juniors of St. Jim's.

BY

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

A Question of Class.

JOE sat at his desk in the Third Form-room at St. Jim's. Joe was alone in the great room. The rows of desks were untenanted; the forms were empty. The Third Form of St. Jim's were out of doors in the bright winter sunlight, and their merry voices could be heard floating in through the open window of the class-room.

Merry enough they sounded, but they did not wake an echo in Joe's heart. Joe was not in a merry mood.

He sat at the desk with his head leaning on his hand, thinking. There was a deep shadow upon Joe's rugged face, and a heavy shadow on his heart. St. Jim's was a pleasant place to many of its inhabitants, a tolerable place to all. But to the little stranger who had recently entered its gates, St. Jim's was not pleasant.

Joe Frayne was alone!

The kind friends who had taken him under their protection were in a higher Form. Tom Merry belonged to the Shell, and in the nature of things the Shell did not come much into contact with the Third. Blake and D'Arcy were in the Fourth. But in the Third Frayne knew nobody.

Nobody in the Third was inclined to know him.

The little ragamuffin, rescued from the streets of London by the kindness of Tom Merry, brought to the great school which was like a new world to him, was quite alone—he was with the other fellows, but not of them.

The lad heaved a heavy sigh as he sat at the desk.

"No class!" he murmured aloud. "No class! That's wot they call me—no class! I s'pose they're right, too—I ain't no class! It ain't likely that I'm goin' to grow up classy in Blucher's Buildings, with a convict for a father! Not art!"

"Joe!"

It was a clear, ringing voice that came like a musical cadence through the empty silence of the Form-room.

Joe started and looked up eagerly.

Tom Merry, of the Shell, was looking in at the door.

Tom Merry's face was bright and cheerful and his eyes were sparkling. He was evidently keenly enjoying the sharp winter afternoon. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, the first half-holiday since Tom Merry's return to school. Tom Merry had been through some dark days himself of late, and at one time it had looked as if he would have to bid adieu to the old school for ever. But adversity had not hardened Tom Merry's heart, as is so often the case. It had left him with a keen sympathy for any fellow who was down, and a determination never to neglect an opportunity of helping a lame dog over a stile.

"Hallo, Joe!"

"Ullo, Master Merry!" said Joe, working up a grin to hide the disconsolate expression of his face. "Ow good of you to look in on me!"

"What are you doing here, Joe?"

"Doin', Master Tom?" said Joe cautiously.

"Yes. Why aren't you out?"

"Out, Master Tom?"

"Yes. Are you detained?"

"D-d-detained?"

Tom Merry laughed. That was evidently a new word in Joe's vocabulary.

"I mean, have you been kept in by your Form-master?" he asked.

"Oh, no, sir."

"Mr. Selby hasn't been down on you?"

"Not more'n usual," said Joe, with renewed caution. "I don't think 'e likes me in 'is class, Master Tom. But he ain't been wuss'n usual this mornin'."

Tom Merry came into the Form-room, and sat on Joe's desk. His handsome, cheerful face was a little concerned now.

"Look here, Joe, you don't want to quarrel with me, do you?" he asked.

Joe looked utterly dismayed.

"Quarrel with you, Master Tom?" he gasped.

"Yes. If you don't, stop calling me Master Tom and sir, I don't like it," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "I'm Merry to you, the same as to the other fellows. Don't you understand that we're all on an equal footing here?"

A LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF TOM MERRY AGAIN NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 155 (New Series.)

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Joe shook his head.
 "I'll do as you like, Master Tom——"
 "There you go again!"
 "Crikey! It's 'ard to get hout of it," said Joe. "You see, you'll always be Master Tom to me, wotever I call you. here ain't nobody like you in the world, sir!"
 "My dear kid, that's all rot!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Mind, you're to call me Merry in future, I want you to."
 "Yes, sir—I mean Master Tom—I—I—mean Merry, sir,"ammered Joe.
 Tom Merry laughed again.
 "You must get into the habit, Joe. It makes me feel an ass to be called 'sir' by a chap at the school, you know. We don't all the prefects sir. Now, if you're not detained by your Form-master, why haven't you gone out?"
 Joe was silent.
 "Trouble with the other fellows?" asked Tom.
 "N-n-not exactly, sir."
 "Have you been getting into a row?"
 "N-n-no, sir."
 "The truth, Joe."
 "Ye-es, sir."
 "Merry!"
 "I—I mean Merry, sir."
 Tom Merry held up a forefinger in admonition.
 "Always the truth, Joe. Mind that. If I catch you telling me any whoppers, I shall give you a thick ear. Savvy?"
 Joe grinned. This was the language he could understand.
 "Yes, sir—Merry!"
 "Now, why have you stayed in, when it's a half holiday and splendid weather?"
 Joe did not answer.
 "Go ahead, kid. I'm waiting!"
 "Well, it's only a lark, I suppose," said Joe reluctantly. "But some of the young gentlemen are going for me!"
 Tom Merry's brows contracted.
 "Going for you, are they? Can't you take your own part?"
 "I'd stand up to any one of them, sir," said Joe. "But Mr. Selby caught me fighting Jameson, sir, and he says I'm not to fight. He says it's one of the low ways I've brought with me from my slum, Master Tom."
 "The cad!" muttered Tom Merry.
 "What did you say, sir?"
 "Never mind. Look here, Joe, who are the chaps who are rag for you?"
 "I—I won't tell you, Master Tom. I don't want to drag you into it. I'm trouble enough for you already, without that."
 "Stuff! Tell me at once!"
 Joe never disobeyed an order of Tom Merry's. To the street arab, brought up without any knowledge of truth or honourable dealing, lying and even stealing came as if by nature. He had only one gleam of light in his great darkness—his affection for Tom Merry. Tom Merry was his guide. What Tom Merry said was right, was right. What Tom Merry said was wrong, was wrong! That was the way Joe reasoned it out—and that good and honest affection might be the salvation of Joe, as with the people of old who walked in darkness, and had seen a great light.
 "They was 'Obbs, sir, and Picke and Fane."
 "Not young Wally?"
 "No, sir."
 "I thought Wally wouldn't have a hand in ragging you, kid," said Tom Merry. "Look here, you are rather a little shrimp of a chap, but I think you could stand up to Hobbs, or Picke, or Fane, couldn't you?"
 Joe doubled up his fists.
 "You watch me, sir, that's all!" he said.
 Tom Merry smiled.
 "Then you shall jolly well do it," he said. "I'll see that you take them on one at a time, and——"
 "But Mr. Selby said I wasn't——"
 "Never mind Mr. Selby now——"
 "Yes, sir. But you told me always to obey my master, sir!"
 "Certainly, Joe. Always obey your master," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Only don't argue, old chap. Do as I tell you, and shut up!"
 "Ye-es, Master Tom," said Joe, looking sorely puzzled. "There was a tramp of footsteps in the passage."
 "I'll bet the young scoundrel's hiding in the Form-room," said a voice, which Tom Merry recognised as that of Hobbs of the Third. "No good of waiting for him in the quad. any longer, anyway."
 "We'll soon have him out if he's here, Hobby."
 "Come on, then!"
 Three fags ran into the Form-room.
 They had evidently got tired of waiting for the new junior in the quad, and they had come to look for him.
 "Here he is!" shouted Fane.
 "Collar the cad!"
 Tom Merry had slipped off Joe's desk, and stepped back for

a moment. The three ragers did not see him as they rushed towards Joe.
 Joe leaped to his feet.
 "Ands off!" he shouted.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Collar him!"
 And the next moment Joe was struggling in the grasp of the three fags. They dragged him away from the desk, and rolled him on the open floor, Joe struggling and fighting furiously.
 "Down him!" gasped Fane. "Oh! Ow! Who's that?"
 A strong grasp on the collar dragged Fane from his victim. Tom Merry's strong right hand had closed upon him, and he was dragged up as easily as if he had been a baby. Tom Merry grasped Hobbs by the collar with his left hand, and jerked him off at the same moment. The two fags gasped and wriggled in the powerful grasp of the Shell fellow.
 "Ow!" gasped Hobbs.
 "Groo!" gurgled Fane.
 And Joe, finding himself left with only one foe to tackle, promptly rolled him over and sat upon him, pinning him to the floor, and Picke struggled in vain to shake off the tough little ragamuffin.
 Tom Merry, grasping Fane and Hobbs tightly by the collar, brought their heads together with a crack, and there was a simultaneous yell.
 "Ow!"
 "Yow!"

CHAPTER 2.

Fair Play.

TOM MERRY, with a calm and cheerful face, like a fellow performing a bounden duty, knocked Fane's and Hobbs's heads together twice, thrice, and four times. And at each crack the two unhappy fags let out a dismal howl.
 Then he dropped them on the floor, and they sat there rubbing their heads, and scowling furiously.
 "Get this low beast off me!" panted Picke.
 "Not 'arf!" grinned Joe.
 Tom Merry smiled.
 "Get off him, Joe!"
 "Yes, sir!"
 Joe left his victim panting. The three fags rose to their feet, regarding Tom Merry and his protege with evil glances.
 Tom Merry gave them a severe look.
 "You came here to rag Joe, didn't you?" he demanded.
 Fane gritted his teeth.
 "Yes, we did," he exclaimed angrily, "and we'll do it, too, some other time, if you stop us now, you Shell cad!"
 "What are you ragging him for?" asked Tom Merry quietly.
 "Because he's a rotten outsider!" said Fane.
 "He's no class!" said Picke.
 "Dirty little toad!" said Hobbs.
 Tom Merry compressed his lips.
 "The cad don't know his own name!" said Hobbs viciously.
 "He don't even know who his father was!"
 "Ow am I to know?" demanded Joe. "The chap who died was my father, so I s'posed. Anyway, he used to send me hout to beg. Then comes old Frayne, and it seems as he was my father—leastways, he used to wallop me with his belt, so I s'pose he was. I don't see that it matters nohow!"
 The three fags sniffed.
 "Nice language for St. Jim's!" said Hobbs.
 "Oh, ripping!" said Fane. "We ought to be proud of having that brat in the Third Form, I don't think!"
 "Rotten little toad!" said Picke.
 "Joe hasn't had much luck," said Tom Merry. "Don't you chaps think you might stand by him, and help him a little, and give him a chance?"
 "We ain't going to be dictated to by a Shell rotter!" said Fane.
 "No fear!"
 "Not much!"
 "So you're going to rag Joe, are you?" demanded Tom Merry, with a glitter in his eyes.
 "Yes, we are!" said Fane defiantly. "We're jolly well going to rag him every day, if we like! We'll rag Frayne till we get rid of him—if his name's Frayne, which he doesn't know any more than I do!"
 "I don't suppose he's got a name!" sneered Hobbs.
 "Wot's in a name?" said Joe simply. "I don't know that that matters, Master 'Obbs! We can't all belong to the aristocracy, like you do!"
 Hobbs turned red.
 "None of your low cheek!" he exclaimed.
 "Crikey! I——"
 "Look here," said Tom Merry, "you seem to be determined to go for Joe, in any case, whether he's right or wrong. If you're going for him, you'll do it one at a time!"
 "We'll do it as we like!"

"Tom Merry!"

"Tom Merry!"

It was a ringing call from the corridor.

"All right!" called back Tom Merry. "I'm here!"

"Bai Jove! You're keepin' us waitin', deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, looking in at the doorway.

The swell of St. Jim's was clad with his usual elegance. He adjusted his eyeglass, and looked in amazement at Tom Merry and the group of dusty fags.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I trust you are not keepin' us waitin' while you have a wov with the fags!" he exclaimed.

"My dear ass——"

"I decline to be called an ass, Tom Mewwy! I——"

"What's the row here?" asked Jack Blake.

"You are intewwuptin me, Blake!"

"I know that, Gussy. What's the row, Tom Merry?" asked Blake, coming into the Form-room. He was followed by the rest of the party. There were Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's chums in the Shell, and Digby and Herries of the Fourth, and Kangaroo. They all came in, dressed for going out, and looking cheerful.

Tom Merry explained.

"These kids are going to rag Joe——"

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as a caddish action!"

"Horribly caddish!" yawned Monty Lowther. "What can you expect of these Third Form Kaffirs, though?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bump the little bounders!" said Kangaroo.

"Good egg!"

Fane and Hobbs and Picke looked alarmed. They cast longing glances towards the door, but the chums of the School House were blocking up the doorway. There was no escape that way for the ragers.

"I've got a better idea than that," said Tom Merry. "Joe is going to take them on one at a time, and lick them."

"Good!"

"Are you ready, Joe?"

Joe Frayne grinned.

"Wotto!" he said.

"Are you ready, Fane? You seem to be the leader, and you can begin!" said Tom Merry.

Fane sniffed.

"I'm not going to fight that little ragamuffin!" he said.

"Why not?"

"He's not fit for me to touch!"

"You were touchin' him just now, and you were quite willing to touch him so long as you were three to one," said Tom Merry scornfully. "You can fight him, Fane, or you can take a lickin' from me! Take your choice."

Fane hesitated.

But Tom Merry was in deadly earnest, and his look showed it. He made a step towards the leader of the Third-Form ragers, and Fane backed away.

"Of course, I'm not afraid of the kid," he said. "I'll fight him!"

"Go ahead, then!"

"Step up, Joe, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy encouragingly. "Fire away, my lad, and I'll look aftah you!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Joe cheerfully.

All Joe's despondency had vanished in the presence of Tom Merry & Co. And probably the prospect of a fight appealed to the unruly instincts of the street arab. Joe had done a great deal of rough-and-tumble fighting in his time.

Tom Merry had given the lad a few boxing lessons since his coming to St. Jim's. Joe was naturally quick and intelligent, and he had picked up knowledge wonderfully.

He stood up to Fane with his hands up, his eyes quick and alert.

"Time, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Go it!"

"Pile in!"

Fane swaggered towards the street lad. Fane intended to squash him at the first charge, and put him into his place once and for all.

But it did not work out exactly as Fane had intended.

His attack was wild and whirling, but Joe met it standing like a rock, and although he received a great deal of punishment, he gave back more than he received.

A lightning upper cut sent Fane reeling, and he crashed down on the floor with a bump that rang through the Form-room.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Well hit!" roared the juniors.

Joe grinned a little breathlessly. He waited for his opponent to rise again. But Fane seemed in no hurry to do so.

"Get up!" exclaimed Blake.

"We're waiting for you, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Jump up, Fane!"

Fane staggered to his feet.

"I'm done!" he said savagely, caressing his jaw. "I—I'm not going on. I'm not going to fight a filthy street arab."

"You'll give him best, then?" said Tom Merry sternly.

"Oh, I don't care! I give him best!" snarled Fane.

"Get out, then! Now, Hobbs, your turn!"

"I think Picke wants to take him on next," said Hobbs, with a sickly smile.

But this was at once vigorously denied by Picke. As a matter of fact, after seeing the way Joe had handled Fane, Picke was very much alarmed at the prospect of having to encounter him at all, and certainly didn't want to tackle him next.

"Your turn, Hobbs!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Look here——"

"Come on!" said Joe, prancing up to Hobbs.

Hobbs had no choice but to defend himself. He put up his hands, and faced Joe, attacking the little outcast fiercely.

Joe received a good many hard knocks, but he did not seem to care for them. Joe had had a good many hard knocks in his time. So long as he succeeded in hitting his opponent, Joe seemed satisfied.

And he certainly did succeed in that. Hobbs was knocked right and left, with Joe's fists hammering on his face all the time.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The young boundah's as keen as mustard. Bai Jove!"

"Go it!" shouted the juniors.

Crash!

Hobbs dropped heavily on the floor, and declined to rise when called upon to do so. The chums patted Joe on the back.

"Good for you!" said Monty Lowther. "Blessed if I knew you could put up your fists like that! You're a giddy little champion!"

"Pile in, kid!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pile in, deah boy!"

"Your turn, Picke!"

"I—I say," stammered Picke, "I—I don't know that I want to touch the chap, you know! He ain't such a bad sort! I don't want to hurt him!"

"You don't want him to hurt you, you mean!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as a wottah, Picke!"

"You—you see——"

"Put up your dooks!" howled Joe, prancing towards Picke.

"Put 'em up! I'm a-go'in' to slog you! Put 'em hup, I say!"

"You must either fight or apologise, Picke," said Arthur Augustus, with a very stately manner. "I have no doubt my young friend would be prepared to accept a suitable apology."

The juniors grinned. Arthur Augustus was always very stately when he mounted the high horse. Picke grinned in a sickly way.

"I—I don't mind if I do!" he murmured.

"Put up yer dooks!" roared Joe.

"I—I apologise!" stammered Picke. "I'm sorry!"

"Come off, Joe! It's all over."

"Ain't I going to lick him?" demanded Joe, looking considerably aggrieved.

"Ha, ha! No."

"Jest as you say, Master Tom. But——"

"Exactly. Shut up, Joe!"

"Yes, Master Tom."

"As for you three young rotters," said Tom Merry, looking severely at the three sulky fags, "just you remember that Joe's a better chap than any of you, and let him alone! If there's any more ragging, you'll hear of it!"

The fags snorted. In spite of that warning, there was pretty certainly some more ragging to come. Joe was not out of the wood yet. Arthur Augustus slipped his arm through that of the little ragamuffin.

"Come on, deah boy," he remarked.

Joe stared at him.

"Come where, sir?" he asked.

"With me, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus marched Joe Frayne out of the Third Form-room, followed by Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 3

Wally on the Warpath!

JOE walked along beside Arthur Augustus D'Arcy like a fellow in a dream. Although his greatest admiration and affection were for Tom Merry, he had been still more deeply impressed by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in many ways, and he so evidently regarded Gussy as a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, that it was amusing to Gussy himself.

To be walked along, in the sight of all St. Jim's, with his arm linked in Gussy's, seemed like a dream to Joe.

The chums of the School House followed, grinning.

They liked the way Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had taken Joe under his wing. D'Arcy's manner of doing it was all his own. D'Arcy knew that Joe was a good little chap, and he was determined that Joe should succeed at St. Jim's. If D'Arcy took him up, no one else could possibly have any excuse for dropping him. That was the way Arthur Augustus looked at it. Arthur Augustus would have smiled with genuine amusement at the

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT THURS. "THE TURNCOAT OF THE FOURTH."

idea that anything that was good enough for him was not good enough for anybody.

D'Arcy's idea was to show the school that Joe was all right: the proof of that was that he could be seen walking arm-in-arm with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The three dusty fags in the Form-room looked savagely after the departing juniors. Fane, Hobbs, and Picke had had a rough time. They had no desire to meet Joe Frayne on equal terms any more. But their desire to rag him was greatly increased.

"Never mind; let him wait till we get him in the dorm, to-night," said Picke darkly.

Hobbs gritted his teeth.

"We'll make him squirm!" he agreed.

"Those chaps can't stand by him, then. Rotten cheek, interfering with us in our own Form-room," said Fane wrathfully.

"Yes, and what a regular little cad that street arab is, too, chumming up with the Fourth and the Shell against his own Form!"

"Oh, what could you expect of him?"

"Quite right: he's rotten all through!"

"Hallo! What are you chaps mumbling about? Have you been dusting up the floor with one another?" demanded a cheerful voice.

Wally came into the Form-room.

Wally—otherwise Walter Adolphus D'Arcy—the younger brother of the great Arthur Augustus—was the acknowledged cock of the Third. There were many Fourth-Formers who did not care to stand up to Wally, and had he been inclined to bully, he would certainly have had a wide field for the exercise of that peculiar pleasure. But Wally D'Arcy was the last fellow in the world to bully. Besides, as he sometimes remarked, he had plenty to do in keeping his chum Jameson from bullying fellows. Jameson had been cock of the Third before D'Arcy minor arrived on the scene, and brought him down from his high estate after a mighty battle that was still remembered in the Third.

Fane, Picke, and Hobbs looked doubtfully at D'Arcy minor. They never knew quite how to take him. Wally had a hot temper, and was given to taking sides hastily, and hitting out when he was contradicted. But he had never been known to do anything caddish, and there was a lingering suspicion in Fane's mind that the persecution of the new boy was a little caddish.

Wally looked, grinning, at the three.

"Lost your voices?" he asked.

"No," growled Fane.

"Then what's been the matter here?"

"Fourth-Form cads and beastly Shellfish," said Hobbs.

Wally's eyes sparkled.

"They've been here rowing?"

"Yes."

"My hat! That means a Form row!" said Wally. "We're not going to have Upper Form fellows swanking in our Form-room, not if we know it."

"Quite right!" said Hobbs.

"But what were they doing?"

"Interfering with us," said Picke. "We were talking to young Mudlark—"

"Do you mean Frayne?"

"I don't believe his name's Frayne at all. I know jolly well that he's a rotten beggar's kid, and that he doesn't know who his father is. My opinion is that he's belonged to different people in turn, and as fast as one was sent to prison he was taken up by another, and sent out to beg."

And Hobbs and Fane grinned as if this were very funny.

"Hard cheese on the poor little beggar, then!" said Wally.

Fane snorted.

"What does he want to come here for, then?"

"What did you come for?"

"Me?" said Fane, starting.

"Nice grammar, I must say! I like your cheek in ragging that chap. He'd have said me, and you'd have howled out at once that he should have said I."

"Look here, young D'Arcy—"

"I'm locking. You came here—what for?"

"To be educated, I suppose," said Fane, looking puzzled.

Wally nodded.

"Exactly. So did young Frayne. Well, then, it was jolly decent of him, and shows there's something in him, and so why can't you let him alone?"

"Rats! What does a fellow of his class want here?"

"I've just told you!"

"Look here, D'Arcy minor, if you're going to chum up with that rotten, no-class ragamuffin, you'll jolly well get out by the rest of the Form!" howled Picke.

Wally laughed.

"My dear chap, you can cut me if you like," he said. "I've been thinking whether I oughtn't to cut you, anyway!"

"You rotter—"

"What's that?" Wally pushed back his cuffs, and advanced towards Picke. Picke promptly dodged behind a desk.

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"Hold on! I—"

"Rotter, I think you said?"

"I—I—"

"Come out from behind that desk!" roared Wally.

"Sha'n't!"

"Will you come out?"

"N-no! Look here, I don't want a row with you."

"You should have thought of that a little earlier," said Wally.

"I don't allow anybody to call me a rotter!"

"I—I—"

Wally ran round the desk.

Picke dodged out, and ran round Fane, and then round Hobbs, but neither of them showed any desire to shelter him. Wally's left-handers were well known in the Third. Fane and Hobbs didn't want to stop one of them.

"Yow!" roared Picke, as Wally caught him by the shoulders and swung him round.

"Now, then—"

"Lemme alone!"

"Put up your hands."

"I w-w-on't."

Wally proceeded to tap Picke on the nose, the chin, and the chest. Picke had to put up his hands to defend himself. Then Wally sailed in. His knuckles came like lightning all over Picke's countenance, and Picke staggered backwards, yelling.

"Yow! Nuff! I give in!"

"Am I a rotter?" demanded Wally truculently.

"Yes! No!"

Tap, tap, tap, came Wally's knuckles on Picke's features. The unhappy fag sat down with a bump on the Form-room floor.

"Now, then, am I a rotter?"

"Ow, yow! Now—I mean no!"

"Am I a nice, handsome, gentle chap?" demanded D'Arcy minor, flourishing his fists over the dazed and breathless Picke.

"Yow! Yes!"

"Do you admire me very much?"

"Yoch! Yes."

"Very much indeed?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Good!" said Wally, dropping his fists, and changing his ferocious frown for a cheerful grin. "Then I'll let you off, Picky."

"Yow!"

"So you're going to back up that ragamuffin, Frayne, young D'Arcy?" demanded Fane, who had a great deal more pluck than Picke.

Wally turned upon him.

"Who says so?" he demanded, belligerently.

"Well, I suppose you are, from—"

"I'll trouble you not to suppose things about me," said Wally, in a very warlike way. "I'll get you to take that back, Fane."

"Look here—"

"Put 'em up, then!"

"Hang you! I—"

"Put 'em up!"

Wally advanced upon Fane. Fane put up his fists fiercely. But they did not serve him well. In a minute, or less, he had been hammered out of breath, and was lying beside Picke, who deemed it prudent to remain on the floor.

"Shame!" exclaimed Hobbs.

Wally looked at him.

"Do you want some, too?" he asked.

"N-n-o."

"Were you speaking to me?"

"N-n-no!"

"Whom were you speaking to?"

"Well, I—I—"

"Just passing remarks generally, I suppose?" suggested Wally genially.

"Ye-e-es," stammered Hobbs.

"I can't allow that in the Form-room," said Wally. "Put 'em up!"

"Eh?"

"Put 'em up!"

"But—"

"Here goes!"

Hobbs had to "put them up," for Wally was hitting out. One of the Third Form scamp's famous left-handers laid him on the floor. He stayed there. Wally grinned at the trio.

"That's enough for you," he remarked. "Don't you cheek your uncle again, that's all. I can't stand cheek from fags."

And Wally walked out of the Form-room, whistling. The dusty trio sat on the floor and looked at one another.

"What does the beast mean?" gasped Picke. "He slogged me for going for Frayne, and he slogged you for supposing he was Frayne's friend. What does he mean?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"He's a beast!"

"Yes, a rank rotter!"



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy surveyed Joe critically through his monocle. "Bal Jove, my clothes do look wathah big for you, deah boy!" he exclaimed. (See page 17.)

"Let's go and collar the cad and rag him!"

"Some other time!" groaned Fane.

And it was extremely probable that that "other time" would be very long in coming. Wally was not a particularly promising subject for a ragging.

CHAPTER 4.

Wally's Special Chum.

TOM MERRY & CO. walked out into the quadrangle. It was a cold afternoon, but the sun was shining brightly. Most of the fellows had turned out for footer, and several games were going on in different parts of the playing-fields. Joe turned a curious eye upon the players. He had never played football, and he was very keen to learn the game. But it was not likely that there would be room for him in the Third Form footer team. The other fellows would not have stood him there.

Bernard Glyn of the Shell came strolling over to meet the chums. Glyn glanced at Joe, and gave him a cheerful nod. Glyn was the son of a millionaire, and known in the school as the inventor of fearful and wonderful contrivances that cost him large sums of money, and generally caused trouble.

"You fellows coming with me?" he asked.

Tom Merry paused.

The chums had intended to have a run out that afternoon, and to have tea at Glyn's place, which was close to St. Jim's. Glyn's sister Edith was very popular with the juniors, to say nothing of the masters at St. Jim's. Tom Merry had looked into the Third Form-room for Joe, and taken him out; and it occurred to him, a little late, that Joe was not precisely the person to be taken to Glyn's.

Tom Merry was not in the least tainted with snobbishness. But Joe had not yet learned the rudiments of manners.

He was a good-hearted little chap, and for that reason could be trusted to do nothing really bad.

But the little graces of manner which distinguished D'Arcy, for instance, were quite unknown to the waif of the slums.

Joe was given to eating bacon with his fingers, guzzling his tea with a reverberating noise, shuffling his feet at table, and various other little manners and customs of which Tom Merry hoped to cure him in time, but which were certain to take a long time to eradicate.

Glyn looked at him with a grin. He understood what was passing in the Shell fellow's mind.

"We shall have a ripping tea, and a run back in dad's car," he said.

"Good! We're coming then!" said Blake.

Joe turned red. The little street arab was very keen, almost

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unnaturally keen at reading the thoughts and feelings of others. His early way of life had made him so. He tugged at Tom Merry's sleeve.

"Master Tom!" he whispered.

Tom Merry looked down at him.

"Yes, Joe?"

"Look 'ere, you don't want me; lemme be off," said Joe.

"I—I shall be in the way. I don't mind, Master Tom."

"Stuff, Joe!"

"I hope you'll all come," said Glyn, affecting not to hear Joe's stage whisper. "My dad particularly wants to see your young friend Joe, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry brightened up.

"Does he really, Glyn?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I mentioned Joe to him, and he wants to meet him."

Joe looked sharply at Glyn.

"You ain't gammoning?" he asked.

Bernard Glyn laughed.

"No; I'm not gammoning, young 'un!" he replied.

"You mustn't ask questions like that, Joe," said Tom Merry.

"It's like doubting a chap's word, you know."

"Well, 'e might be gammoning, sir."

"Bai Jove!"

"But I'm sorry, sir," said Joe, realising that he had put his foot in it, though he did not know exactly how.

"All right, Joe."

"We'll come by all means," said Kangaroo. "Come on!"

"Look 'ere, young gents," said Joe, "I ain't fit to go, and you'd better leave me 'ere. That's straight."

"Come on, deah boy!"

"But, sir—"

"Shut up, Joe!"

"Yes, Master Tom."

And Joe walked away, with his arm still linked in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's. A youth with his hands in his pockets, whistling shrilly, came out of the School House and ran after them.

"Gussy, old son—"

Arthur Augustus turned round, and fixed his eyeglass upon his cheerful minor.

"Weally, Wally—" he began.

"Oh, no jaw, Gus!" said Wally. "Where are you going?"

"I am goin' to visit Glyn's place, Wally," said D'Arcy major, with a great deal of dignity. "Pway do not stand with your hands in your pockets when you are addressin' your oldah bwothah!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, you young wascal—"

"I'm coming with you," said Wally. "I've nothing particular to do this afternoon."

"I am afraid I could not take you out to tea in that collar, Wally," said Arthur Augustus icily.

Wally passed a grimy hand over his collar, thereby far from improving it.

"What's the matter with my collar?" he demanded.

"It is howwibly soiled."

"Rats!"

"You diswepful young boundah—"

"Look here, I'm coming! You've got my special chum with you," said Wally, looking aggrieved. "What do you mean by walking him off without me?"

Joe gave Wally a look of astonishment.

D'Arcy minor had not spoken six words to him since he had entered the Third Form at St. Jim's, so he was naturally surprised to hear that he was Wally's best chum.

As a matter of fact, Wally had invented that chumminess on the spur of the moment. He wanted to go to Glyn's to tea.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "In that case, deah boy—"

"Exactly. I'm coming."

"I leave it to Glyn."

"I make it spades," said Bernard, laughing. "I mean Wally can come if he likes. The more the merrier."

"But look at his collah!"

"Oh, never mind his collah!"

"And his hands!"

"I washed them twice this morning," said Wally. "I suppose a chap's hands are bound to get soiled knocking down fags."

"I twust you have not been fightin', Wally?"

Wally chuckled.

"Well, I have—three chaps. They were speaking disrespectfully of my special chum, Frayne!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't stand that, you know."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy beamed.

"Bai Jove, Wally! Have you been standing' up for my young friend?"

"Of course I have! Don't I always do as you tell me, and try to guess your wishes in advance?" demanded Wally.

Arthur Augustus regarded him very doubtfully through his

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eyeglass. That was what Wally ought to do, according to D'Arcy's ideas; but he had never known Wally to do it.

"Well—" he began.

"Just so," said Wally. "I'm coming."

"Undah the cires—"

"Don't let's be late for tea."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Wally."

"Just so. Come on!"

"You young wascal—"

"This way!" said Wally. He slipped his arm into Joe's disengaged arm, and marched on with him. Arthur Augustus gave him several doubtful glances, but finally seemed to come to the conclusion that it was all right, for he said no more, and the juniors walked down the lane to Glyn's place in high good humour.

CHAPTER 5.

Real Friendship.

"BOW-WOW! Yap-p-p-p!"

A ragged-looking mongrel dog came bounding after the juniors as they left the gates of St. Jim's, and walked down the lane. Wally paused for a moment to give a shrill whistle. Pongo came running up, prancing round his master in great spirits.

Arthur Augustus dropped Joe's arm, and backed away quickly, in fear that the dirty paws of Pongo might leave marks upon his immaculate trousers.

"Wally, dwive that howwid beast away at once!" he exclaimed.

"Rats!"

"You—you howwid young boundah! Why, even Hewwies has had diswewtion enough to leave his howwid bulldog at home!"

"Rats!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Bosh!"

"Hewwies, deah boy—"

"Rubbish!"

"I cannot vewy well thwash you on the way to a tea-party, Hewwies!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I weward you as a beast, howevah!"

"Stuff!"

D'Arcy walked on with his nose in the air. Wally, without paying any attention to his major's indignation, was fondling Pongo. As a matter of fact, the scamp of the Third had left Pongo out of sight until the juniors were fairly committed to taking him to Glyn House. Pongo was not popular with anybody but Wally.

"Good old Pongo!" grinned Wally. "Good old doggie! Come on!"

"My word!" said Digby. "You're not going to take that rotten mongrel to Glyn's, surely, young D'Arcy?"

Young D'Arcy snorted.

"Glyn doesn't object," he replied.

Bernard Glyn laughed.

"Oh, I don't mind!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wally, you are imposin' upon Glyn's politeness—"

"So are you, Gussy!"

"I—I—I—"

"I'm sure Pongo's a nicer chap than my major, any day," said Wally, looking round for support. "Don't you fellows think so?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Indignation choked the swell of St. Jim's. He marched on speechlessly. Wally grinned, and caressed the shaggy mongrel. Joe also had a word for Pongo. Joe was fond of dogs, and knew a great deal about them. Pongo seemed to take to Joe, too.

Wally regarded Joe with an approving eye. He had taken

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Joe up as a chum simply for the purpose of insinuating himself into the tea-party. But Pongo's liking for the waif seemed to indicate that there might be something in the hero of Blucher's Buildings, after all.

Tom Merry & Co. walked on, looking very nice in their clean collars and silk hats and neat ties; while the two fags brought up the rear with Pongo, looking a great deal less tidy, but certainly quite as cheerful.

"Fond of dogs?" asked Wally, looking at Joe Frayne.

Joe nodded eagerly.

"Yes, Master Wally."

Wally snorted.

"What are you calling me Master Wally for?" he demanded.

"Stop it! None of your larks!"

"B-b-but—"

"I'm D'Arcy minor."

"Master Jameson said I was to call him Master Jameson."

Wally breathed hard through his nose. Curly Gibson and Jameson were his special friends in the Third Form. Wally had not been in the slightest degree inclined to throw them over for Joe. But there was one thing Wally wouldn't stand from his dearest friend, and that was snobbishness.

"I'll speak to Jameson about that!" he exclaimed. "If I hear you call him Master Jameson, I'll dot you on the boko! Savvy?"

"Yes, Master Wally."

"And you'll get a dot on the boko if you call me Master Wally again."

"Yes, Master Wally."

Biff!

Wally's left came out like lightning, and Joe sat in the road. He sat there with his hand to his nose, gasping.

Tom Merry & Co. stopped and looked round. They stared at the sight of Joe sitting in the road and holding his nose; while Wally, with his hands in his pockets, regarded him grinning.

"Ow!" said Joe.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter there?" exclaimed Kangaroo. "You two young larrikins quarrelling already?"

"Not at all."

"Then what have you punched Joe for?" asked Tom Merry.

"I'm educating him."

Joe scrambled to his feet.

"It's—it's orlright!" he gasped. "Master Wally—ow!"

Biff!

Joe sat down again.

"Bai Jove! Wally, you young wascal—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll learn in time," said Wally. "Ain't I taken him on as a friend, and can't I dot him on the boko for playing the giddy goat if I like?"

"Gweat Scott!"

Joe scrambled to his feet again, taking care to keep out of arm's length of Wally. His nose was very red, but he was grinning good-temperedly.

"I don't mind," he said. "It's all right, Master Tom—I mean, sir, Merry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors walked on again. They felt they could safely leave Joe in Wally's hands. It was under somewhat peculiar circumstances that Wally had come to take Joe up, but Wally was a fellow of his word. If he said Joe was his friend, Joe was his friend, and that was an end of it. And Wally, in the Third Form himself, would be of more use to Joe than any fellow in a higher Form could have been. Wally grinned cheerfully at the waif.

"They're my left-handers," he explained.

"Oh, are they?" said Joe.

"Yes, I'll teach you the trick if you like, in the gym. Jameson can't pick it up; he's too clumsy. Mind, Jameson, not Master Jameson!"

"I'll remember, Mas—ahem—D'Arcy minor!"

Wally chuckled.

"Only just in time!" he grinned. "You've had a narrow escape. Mind your eye!"

"Yes, Mas—D'Arcy minor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They walked on. In spite of Joe's somewhat rough experience at the hands of D'Arcy minor, he liked that frank and breezy young person, and he understood clearly enough that life in the Third Form would be much more tolerable if Wally were his friend.

"Do you like dogs?" Wally went on.

"Yes, rather, M-m-m-D'Arcy minor."

"What breed would you think Pongo was?"

Joe looked very dubiously at the mongrel. It would have puzzled a professional breeder to tell what Pongo was.

"Bit of a collie in him, I think," said Joe.

"Good!"

"Bit of a terrier, too, p'raps."

"Quite right."

"Jolly good dog, anyway," said Joe, rubbing his fingers on the mongrel's shaggy head. "He knows something, that dorg do."

Wally looked distinctly pleased.

"Well, you're a decent sort," he said. "Any chap who is fond of dogs is bound to have some good in him. I know that."

"Thanky, M-m-m—D'Arcy minor."

"The chaps are saying your name ain't Frayne," went on Wally. "Is it?"

Joe's face clouded.

"I don't rightly know," he said.

"But I suppose you've seen the governor?"

"I've belonged to different people," said Joe. "I don't rightly know that Mother Sal was my mother, either. My belief is, she took me to 'beg with."

Wally gave a commiserating whistle.

"Where did you get the name Frayne?" he asked.

"It was my father's name, if he was my father; but I never 'eard of 'im till he come out of—"

Joe paused in time. Tom Merry had cautioned him never to give away, at St. Jim's, the fact that his father, real or supposed, had been a convict in Portland Prison. That fact could only more deeply prejudice the fellows against him, and Joe had a right to hold his tongue about his own affairs if he liked.

"Out of where?" asked Wally.

"Never mind."

"Why don't you answer?"

"Because I don't," said Joe.

Wally's hand clenched for a moment.

"I'm not used to that sort of talk," he said. "I don't want to know your blessed secrets! But I want a civil answer."

"I don't mean to be uncivil, sir!" exclaimed Joe eagerly.

"But—"

Wally burst into a laugh.

"Well, never mind; it's all right!" he exclaimed. "I don't want to know anything about it. You're Joe Frayne here, that's all. Don't call me 'sir' again, or I'll biff you!"

"Yes, sir," said Joe involuntarily.

Then he jumped back, just in time to escape a drive.

"Come here!" roared Wally.

"Oh, sir—"

"That's twice! I'll—"

"Crikey! I'm sorry. I take it back!" gasped Joe.

Wally dropped his hands.

"Well, mind you don't let it happen again!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "I'm treating you like a friend! It's a trouble, but I mean to stick to it!"

And Joe nearly said, "Thank you, sir," but stopped himself in time and said:

"Thank you, D'Arcy minor."

CHAPTER 6.

Tea for Joe.

EDITH GLYN looked down the garden path as the crowd of juniors came in. The girl's clear, bright eyes discerned the figure of the little London waif at once. Bernard Glyn had told his people about Tom Merry's protégé, and they had insisted upon his bringing the little fellow to Glyn House, Edith's kind heart at once going out in sympathy to Joe Frayne. She knew, more clearly than her young brother did, what Joe's early life must have been like, and what a struggle must lie before him at a school like St. Jim's. And she knew, too, how much kindness must mean to a fellow in his peculiar position. Nor did she forget the fact that he had been received on a friendly footing at a millionaire's house would have a great effect with the more snobbish of the fellows, and it was the snobs that Joe had most to fear.

The boys greeted Edith quite affectionately. She reminded them of Cousin Ethel in many ways. She was ten years older than Ethel, but still a girl, and had a bright and frank way that was very charming to the boys.

"This is Joe, Edie," said Bernard Glyn, presenting the only one of the party with whom Edie was not previously acquainted—"Joe Frayne, of the Third, D'Arcy's minor's special chum. My sister, Joe."

Joe's rugged little face went crimson. He had not been accustomed to the ceremony of introduction, and the girl—a big woman to him—looked so beautiful, and so clean, and so well-dressed, that the little fellow was simply frightened. He stood mumbling, blinking at Edith with big, round eyes.

Edith knew how to put him at his ease, however, as well as it could be done. She took his hand, and led him into the house.

"I'm very glad to meet you, Joe!" she said, in a low and pleasant voice. "It is very kind of you to visit us so soon."

Joe could only mumble.

"So you are Wally's special friend?" said Edith.

Joe found his voice.

"So 'e says," he replied. "E's punched my nose twice."

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"Oh!"

"E's all right."

"Pure friendship," explained Wally, who was never put out of countenance by any happening whatever. "You see, I'm standing by Joe, and treating him like a friend. I'm punching him into shape, ain't I, Joe?"

"Yes, Master Wally."

Biff! Edith Glyn gave a little shriek as Joe sat down suddenly at her feet.

"Wally! How could you!"

"You feahful young wuffian——"

Wally chuckled.

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"You see, it's all done in kindness, Miss Edith," explained Wally. "I'm teaching Joe, ain't I, Joe?"

"Yes, D'Arcy minor."

"Every time he calls me 'sir' or 'Master Wally' I biff him," said Wally. "It's the only way, ain't it, Joe?"

"Yes, D'Arcy minor."

"Weally, Wally——"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!"

Miss Glyn laughed. Joe was rubbing his nose as he rose, but showing no sign of ill-humour.

"Perhaps your method is a little drastic, Wally," she suggested.

Wally shook his head.

"Not at all, Miss Glyn. It's the only way. Joe doesn't mind. He knows it's for his good. As Tennyson says, 'I must be cruel only to be kind.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are you fellows cackling at?" demanded Wally, turning a wrathful glare upon the chums of the School House.

"Ha, ha! I thought it was Shakespeare said that!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"I don't see that it makes much difference who said it!" grunted Wally.

"Of course not," said Edith. "Tea is ready."

That announcement was like oil upon the troubled waters. The juniors went in to tea. Tea at Glyn House was a function any boy might have been glad to attend. Miss Glyn knew what boys liked, and she always had plenty of it on such occasions. It was generally conceded at St. Jim's that Bernard Glyn was jolly lucky to have such a sister. His father, too, was a most genial old gentleman—at all events, at his own table—though it was suspected that he could be crusty at times.

There were cakes and biscuits, and candied fruits galere, to say nothing of more solid fare, such as eggs and ham, and bread-and-butter and watercress.

The juniors had sat down to tea with good appetites. The keen winter air had made them hungry, and they were fully prepared to do any amount of justice to Bernard Glyn's spread.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cast one or two uneasy glances towards his minor.

D'Arcy minor's soiled collar and soiled fingers sent cold shocks to the heart of the swell of St. Jim's whenever he observed them. Wally's untidiness was the chief worry of Arthur Augustus's life.

But it was soon apparent that Wally would not get much attention at the Glyn tea-table. Joe Frayne was certain to be the cynosure of all eyes. Mr. Glyn had received him politely. But the old gentleman could not help regarding the boy with some curiosity, and feeling a little uneasy as he regarded him.

Joe was thawing under the effect of the kindness he received from all quarters.

As his confidence returned he became more like his old and natural self.

He helped himself to cake, and ate it by gnawing small chunks off a large chunk, while the juniors looked uncomfortable.

Then he stirred his tea, and took a gulp—and as the tea happened to be very hot, there was an explosion at once.

Joe dropped the cup into the saucer, and there was a crash, and a stream of hot tea shot across the knees of Manners, who was sitting next to him.

Manners gave a loud yelp.

The next moment he was distorting his features terribly in attempting to reduce them to their accustomed calm. Manners was a quiet fellow, and he rather took a pride in never being disturbed by anything. But that hot tea across his legs had disturbed him, with a vengeance.

"Ow!" grunted Joe.

"Scalded, Manners?" asked Glyn, sympathetically.

"Not at all," mumbled Manners. "J-j-just a sp-splash."

"You clumsy young ass!" said D'Arcy minor.

"Wally, deah boy——"

"Ow was I to 'elp it?" said Joe. "The tea was 'ot!"

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Glyn.

"I'm so sorry, Manners," said Edith, softly.

Manners worked up an heroic smile.

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"Not at all, Miss Glyn. It's all right."

"Which I'm sorry," said Joe. "It was a haccident. The tea was 'ot."

"Shut up, Joe."

"Yes, M-m-m, D'Arcy minor."

Tom Merry passed cake to Joe, and whispered to him.

"Don't be an ass! Can't you try your tea before you gulp it? Watch me, and do as I do."

Joe faltered.

"Yes, Master Tom," he murmured.

"You'll be all right, Joe."

"Yes, Master Tom."

And from the moment Joe Frayne watched Tom Merry, with a dog-like fidelity, and with an evident determination to do as Tom Merry did.

CHAPTER 7.

Joe Does as He is Told!

"TAKE, Tom?"

"Yes, please."

"I'll 'ave some of that cake," said Joe.

"May I fill your cup again, Tom?"

"Please!"

"Me too!" said Joe.

Tom Merry turned pink, and then smiled. Joe was determined, evidently, to take his words literally, and do just as he did.

Joe had the cake and the tea, though he needed neither.

Tom Merry ate all his cake, and Joe ate all his. He drank all his tea, and Joe did the same. He passed up his cup to be refilled. Joe's cup followed it.

The juniors had caught on to the fact by this time, that Joe Frayne was watching Tom Merry, to do as he did, and there was a general grin round the table.

Joe did not observe it.

But if he had observed it, it would have made no difference to him.

His business was to do whatever Tom Merry told him, and that was what he was doing now, with all his heart and soul.

"Will you try an apple, Tom?"

"Please!"

"Me too, miss," said Joe.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "This is getting as good as a comedy, Manners, old man."

Manners grunted. There was a very clingy and clammy feeling about his trouser knees, and he was not in a mood to see anything comic in that tea.

The apple was placed upon Joe's plate.

Joe was not in any doubt what to do with it. He took it in his hand and commenced to gnaw at it like a rat at a beam.

Faces like iron surrounded the table. Nobody noticed anything. Everybody made it a point to notice nothing.

But the grinding of Joe's teeth into the apple was audible the length and breadth of the room.

It suddenly occurred to Joe that Tom Merry was not gnawing his apple. Tom Merry, much to Joe's amazement, used a knife and fork.

"Crikey!" murmured Joe.

He put the remains of the apple down into his plate.

Then he took up knife and fork and essayed to follow Tom Merry's example. Between his keen watching of Tom Merry and his cutting at the apple Joe presented a very interesting study.

"Oh, good!" murmured Digby.

D'Arcy frowned at him.

"Pway don't pass remarks, Digby, deah boy," he said.

Dig gave him a ferocious look.

"Who's passing remarks?" he demanded.

"You are, deah boy."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Dig——"

"Fathead!"

"Dig——"

"Chump!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his monocle upon Digby.

"If there were not a lady present I should immediately wise and give you a feahful thwashin', Dig," he murmured.

"Fathead!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Frabjous ass!"

Arthur Augustus simply choked.

It was impossible to go for Digby in the presence of Miss Glyn, so the swell of St. Jim's had to bottle up his wrath.

Meanwhile, Joe Frayne was carrying out his programme of doing everything exactly as Tom Merry did.

Tea fortunately finished, and Miss Glyn, who was an excellent pianist, sat down upon the music stool. The juniors liked singing to Edith's accompaniment, and she had often taken some of them through their practice. Manners, who was in the choir, owed a great deal to Edith in that respect, and D'Arcy

had taken some of his tenor solos to Glyn House for practice, an infliction that the young lady bore with great fortitude.

"The car will be round in an hour," said Mr. Glyn.

"Time for a little music," said Edith, with a smile.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You sing, Tom?"

"A little," said Tom Merry.

"And you, Joe?"

"A little, miss," said Joe.

He said that because Tom Merry had said it.

"Tom Merry sings 'On the Ball,'" said Herries. "Give us a decent footer song, Tommy, and none of your blessed caterwauling about a moon in a garden."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I have a copy of the song here," said Edith.

And she touched the keys.

Tom Merry sang the famous football song with a strong clear voice, the juniors joining in the chorus with great gusto. Their combined voices rang through Glyn House as they roared out:

"On the ball, on the ball!

Loud and clear it rings like a trumpet call!

Hear the shouts that rise and roll:

Buck up there! Look out in goal!

On the ball! On the ball!"

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther as they finished, "It is on the bawl, and no mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Joe!"

"Buck up, Frayne!"

"What are you giving us?"

"What's yours?"

Joe coloured.

Tom Merry had sung, and he had been told to do everything that Tom Merry did, so he evidently had to sing.

But what to sing was the question. The fact that he had no voice Joe quite overlooked. In the region Joe came from, having no voice was no bar to singing. But the song! He did not know the football song, and he had some doubts as to whether the ditties that had been popular in Blucher's Buildings would be any use at Glyn House.

But he evidently had to sing.

"Go it, Joe!"

"Buck up, deah boy."

"Do you know this?"

"Or this?"

"Or that?"

The juniors were all keen to make Joe sing. They wanted to back the poor little chap up, and make him feel like one of themselves.

"Werry well, gents," said Joe. "I'll sing, if miss will play. I ain't got no music."

"Never mind that."

"I couldn't sing from it if I 'ad, neither."

"Bai Jove!"

"Cause why, I can't read it."

"I daresay I could vamp an accompaniment," said Edith, with a smile. "Whistle a few bars, Joe, and let me hear it."

"Suttlingly, miss."

Joe was an adept at whistling, at least. That was an accomplishment much cultivated in Blucher's Buildings.

He whistled a few catchy bars, and Edith's slim fingers glided on the piano keys. She caught it up at once.

"Crikey!" said Joe, "ain't she clever!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! You are quite wight in admidin' Miss Glyn. She is weally awfly beastly clevah, you know."

"Now then, Joe!"

"Miss Glyn's ready for you."

"Go it, kid."

"On the ball!"

"Righto, young gents; 'ere goes."

And Joe sang.

His voice, like the bagpipe playing of the celebrated Macfergus Clonglocketty Angus MacClan, was wild as the breeze, and wandered around into several keys.

But Joe stuck to his guns.

And the song he sang ran something like this:

"My old man 'as done a bunk!

Tooral-laddy! tooral-laddy!

My old man 'as done a bunk!

Tooral-laddy, oh!

'E's a terror when he's hout!

You should see 'im on the battor!

See 'im knock the pleece about!

Tooral-laddy, oh!"

The juniors listened and roared.

Miss Glyn was laughing as she played. Certainly she had never heard a song like that before.

"There's another verse," said Joe.

"My word!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Go it, Joe!" roared Monty Lowther, the humorous.

"Orlright, sir!"

"Pile it on!"

"Play up!"

"My old man's a regler guy!

Tooral-laddy, tooral-laddy;

When the young man lodger's by,

Tooral-laddy-oh!

One evening I——"

"Back pedal!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Chuck it, Joe!"

"Suttlingly, sir!"

Joe "chucked it."

The juniors were almost in convulsions. But they inwardly determined to be a little more careful about asking Joe to sing in company again.

CHAPTER 8.

Ragged.

TOM MERRY & CO. came out of Glyn House to mount into Mr. Glyn's great car—the family car, which was big enough to hold the whole crowd of them. Joe surveyed the magnificent vehicle in great admiration.

"Crikey!" was all he could say.

"What a wippin' cah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I congratulate you, Glyn, deah boy. I will drive to St. Jim's, if you like."

Bernard Glyn chuckled.

"Thanks, but I jolly well don't like," he answered. "The governor would cut up rough if you smashed the car, and besides, think of the bother of having to attend a lot of inquests. It would interfere with the footer."

"Weally, Glyn."

"Tumble in."

"You are intewwuptin' me, Kangaroo!"

"Go hon! Tumble in!"

The juniors had taken leave of their kind entertainers. They crowded into the car, and the chauffeur tooted it down the long broad drive, and out of the park gates into the lane.

It was getting dark now, and the snow on the trees and the hedges glimmered up white through the dusk.

"We've had a ripping time," said Tom Merry. "Thanks, again, Glyn."

"Oh, rot!" said the Liverpool lad.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Crikey! It was orlright," said Joe Frayne. "I got some of the apples in me pockets!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

Joe turned out the apples with a great deal of satisfaction. The juniors looked at them, and burst into a roar. Tom Merry tried to keep serious.

"Oh, Joe!"

Joe's face fell.

"Wot 'ave I done, Master Tom?" he asked.

"You shouldn't have done that."

"B-b-but missy told me to take all I wanted, Master Tom."

"Yes, but——"

"But I won't never do it no more," said Joe.

"Anyway, we've got the apples," said Kangaroo, cheerfully.

"Hand 'em over!"

"Certainly, Master Noble."

Biff!

Joe suddenly disappeared among the legs in the bottom of the car. Wally smiled serenely, and rubbed his knuckles.

"You've got a jolly bony chin!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Look 'ere——" exclaimed Joe, struggling to his feet.

"I ain't——"

"Yes, you are."

"I tell you——"

"Rats! Ain't I standing your friend?" demanded Wally.

"I'm bringing you up the way, you should go. Bring a chid up the way it's inclined, and it will not depart therefrom. Gimmo another apple!"

"Wally, deah boy——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus."

"You uttah young rascal——"

"Apples this way. As Joe has boned them, we may as well eat them," said Wally cheerfully. And he did.

The car buzzed along to St. Jim's, and rolled in at the wide gates. Fellows gathered round from all sides to look at Glyn's governor's car. It was a handsome turn-out, and many of the Saints envied Glyn heartily enough.

Joe could be seen sitting in the car in the midst of Tom Merry & Co., and there was astonishment in many faces that looked at him. Fane and Hobbs and Pickle of the Third could not contain their disgust. They had never been asked to ride in Glyn's governor's car.

"Look at that!" exclaimed Fane.

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"That outsider!"

"That cad!"

"He's been to Glyn's place," said Mellish of the Fourth, who had fished in vain, for a whole term, for an invitation to Glyn's place. "Disgusting!"

"Rotten!" said Crooke of the Shell.

"Makes me sick!" said Mellish.

"Fancy taking up that utter little waster in this way!"

"Young Rags in a motor-car!"

"I'll wager he's never ridden even in a motor-bus before."

"Oh, it's rotten," said Jameson of the Third. "And there's Wally sitting next to him. I won't speak to Wally if Wally speaks to him."

"Same here!" exclaimed Curly Gibson.

"It's caddish of him."

"Beastly!"

"Mean!"

"Wally, you worm, get out of that!"

Wally grinned at his old friends in the Third, and the car rushed on up to the School House. A group of juniors from the New House came to watch the chums alight. Figgins & Co., of the New House, were on good terms with Tom Merry & Co.—excepting when they happened to be spoiling for a fight. They happened to be spoiling for a fight now.

"Yah!" exclaimed Figgins & Co., with one voice. "School House worms!"

D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass, and looked at the New House crowd as he stepped from the car.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "What are these impertinent wasters doin' on the respectable side of the quadwangle?"

"Yah!"

"Where did you get that chivy?"

"Get your hair cut!"

The swell of St. Jim's turned pink.

"It's up to us to clear these wascals away, deah boys!" he exclaimed.

"What-ho!"

"Go for 'em!"

"Pile in!"

"Lam the bounders!"

The School House juniors poured from the car. With a rush they went for the New House fellows. Glyn waved his hand to the chauffeur.

"You can cut!" he exclaimed.

And the chauffeur grinned and departed with the big car. Before it was clear of the gates, School House and New House juniors were mingled in a wild and whirling combat.

But the odds were upon the side of Tom Merry & Co., and Figgins and his comrades were swept back across the quadrangle, disputing every foot of the way.

Joe Frayne was left standing where he had alighted from the car.

The little waif was astonished, and did not know what to do. The suddenness of the conflict had taken him by surprise, and without directions from Tom Merry, he did not know whether he ought to take part in the row.

The rush of the tussle swept away towards the New House, leaving Joe near the School House steps, alone, and looking after the combatants.

There was a shout from the fags of the Third, who had followed the car up to the house. Fane and Hobbs and Picke saw their opportunity.

"There's the cad!"

"Now's the time!"

"Go for him!"

And Joe suddenly found himself assailed by his old foes. But there were not only three of them now; a crowd of the Third Form had joined in, and Joe Frayne was surrounded by fags eager to rag him.

He backed away in alarm, putting up his fists, but he only backed into fresh foes.

A circle of grinning and merciless faces was round him.

"Ere, you chuck it!" he exclaimed. "I ain't done nothin'. You lemme alone."

"Collar him!" shouted Hobbs.

And Joe was promptly collared.

The lad hit out then, and hit hard, and Hobbs rolled over with an aching jaw, and Fane dropped with a bump. But then Joe was down, with five or six fags sprawling over him. Joe put up a good fight, but—

"Ow! 'Elp!" gasped Joe.

Then he was down.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus is Very Kind

HOBBS staggered to his feet.

His jaw was aching as if a hammer had smitten him there, and his eyes were blazing with fury.

"Got him?" he gasped. "Hold the young cad! Pile on him!"

"We've got him!"

"Here the beast is!"

"Bump him!" hissed Hobbs, nursing his jaw with one hand.

"Bump the cad! Knock the stuffing out of him! Bump him hard!"

"Good egg!"

"Go for the cad!"

"Bump him!"

Joe was seized in a dozen pairs of hands, the lad was helpless to resist, and rough shoves and punches soon stopped his feeble struggling.

Up he went, to come down again with a bump!

"Oh!" gasped Joe.

It was a hard, savage bumping—not the semi-serious bumping the juniors usually bestowed upon one another. Hobbs & Co. meant business. Every bone in Joe's body was jarred by the impact on the hard ground.

He set his teeth hard to bear the pain.

"Bump him!"

"Give him another!"

"Smash the young cad!"

"Slum cad! Yah!"

"Rotten outsider! Bump him!"

"Give him another. Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ere, you leggo!" panted Joe. "This ain't fair play, this ain't! You play the game, you blokes, can't yer? Ow! Leggo! You lemme alone!"

Bump!

Bump!

"Ow! 'Elp!"

"Go it, kids!"

"Hurray!"

"Rag him!"

"Bump the bounder!"

Bump! Bump!

"Ow! Oh! Yow! 'Elp!"

Joe struggled furiously.

He succeeded in getting his hands free for a moment, and he hit out blindly and desperately at his tormentors.

Fane gave a fearful yell as Joe's fist crashed into his eye, and Jameson reeled back with a drive under the jaw that made him feel as if his head were coming off.

With a shout of rage the fags closed in upon the "outsider" again.

Joe was grasped, and bumped, and bumped again, harder than ever!

He was not calling for help now.

He was past that! He was almost fainting from the rough ill-usage, and many of the fags, in their angry excitement, did not realise how severely they were handling him.

But help was at hand for Joe.

The New House juniors had been driven back into their own house, and there the appearance of an angry prefect on the scene had sent the School House fellows scuttling away—victorious, but in a hurry!

Tom Merry & Co. came marching home, as it were, just in time to see the fags wreaking their wrath upon the waif of Blucher's Buildings.

They did not stop to speak.

They simply rushed in upon the fags, knocking them to right and left.

There were twice or thrice their number of the fags, but the Third-Formers were not likely to make a stand against the heroes of the Fourth and the Shell.

Yelling and panting, the fags broke away and fled, rubbing ears and noses as they went, knocked out at the first charge by Tom Merry & Co.

Tom Merry bent over Joe.

The lad had fallen to the ground when his tormentors released him, and he was still lying there, gasping in pain.

Tom Merry raised him up. The Shell fellow's face was very concerned.

"I didn't know this was going on, Joe, lad," he said. "Are you much hurt?"

Joe tried bravely to keep back his tears.

"No, sir," he said. "I—I—I'm orlright."

"Come in, kid."

Tom Merry half-led, half-carried Joe into his own study.

There the lad was placed in the armchair, before the fire, and for some time he sat very quiet, too exhausted to speak.

Tom Merry's brow was very dark.

He realised what a hard row Joe would have to hoe, so to speak,

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 155.

READ THE TALE OF COUSIN ETHEL and the CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S in the "EMPIRE" LIBRARY, 1^d. EVERY WEDNESDAY.

to get on at all in the Third Form at St. Jim's, and he doubted whether it had been wise, after all, to bring the little waif to the school.

But there was Wally—he, at least, would be a friend to Joe in the Third. Tom Merry looked round: he had not come to the study. As a matter of fact, Wally was, at that moment, in the midst of a heated argument with Jameson and Gibson in the Third Form-room.

Joe sat up, and tried to smile, after a time.

"It's—it's orlright, sir," he said.

"Feel better, Joe?"

"Yes, sir, much better. I'm all right."

"You do not look all wight, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass, and surveying the outcast of the Third. "You are in a vewy waggid state!"

Joe looked down disconsolately at his clothes.

Those clothes, which had been provided for him by the kindness of his friends, were certainly in a terrible state.

The rough usage he had received from the fags had hurt him considerably, but it had had a still worse effect upon his clothes.

His jacket was split clean up the back, his waistcoat had every button gone, his trousers were torn and rent in several places.

He looked a wreck, as far as clothing went. Even his boots looked ruined.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said.

"It wasn't your fault, Joe," said Tom Merry.

"I can't go about like this, sir, and I hain't got no other clothes," said Joe. "I know I'm too much trouble to you in hevery way, Master Tom."

"Stuff!"

"It's all wight, deah boy!" said Augustus D'Arcy. "I have a wathah libewal wardwobe myself, you know, and I can easily spare a suit of clothes."

"It would leave you about three dozen, wouldn't it, Gussy?" Monty Lowther remarked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "If you've anything that would fit Joe, Gussy, you can shove it on him. Better not let his Form-master see him in this state if it can be helped. Old Selby isn't a reasonable man."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Run along with Gussy, Joe, and he'll rig you out!"

"Yes, sir," said Joe.

He followed the swell of St. Jim's from the study. Arthur Augustus threw open the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. The room was dark and empty. Blake and Herries and Digby were downstairs.

Arthur Augustus lighted the gas.

"Wemain heah, deah boy, while I fetch the things!" he said.

"Suttingly, sir!"

Joe waited. The swell of St. Jim's re-entered the study in a few minutes. Joe looked curiously at the great quantity of clothes he brought. D'Arcy was very well provided with clothes, and when he discarded a suit, it was often in as good condition as anything that was being worn in the School House.

There was no doubt that, as far as condition went, D'Arcy's things were quite good enough; but the fit was another matter.

Joe was more than a head shorter than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and was smaller in proportion all over.

Arthur Augustus, with his monocle screwed tightly into his eye, surveyed the fag carefully, and selected the least large of the clothes.

"Get into those, deah boy!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir!" said Joe obediently.

He quickly changed his torn and ragged attire for D'Arcy's clothes.

The clothes were elegant and beautifully cut, and of first-class material. But they were a good many sizes too large for Joe.

The sleeves of the jacket came down over his finger-tips with a good many inches to spare, and the tail of the jacket brushed against the back of his knees. The trousers trailed on the floor under his feet. The waistcoat came down half-way to the knees.

"Woll up your twousahs, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"I do not, as a wule, appwove of a new boy wollin' up his twousahs, but undah the exceptional circs. of the case I think it will be all wight."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

But even with the trousers rolled up at the bottom, Joe's appearance was decidedly baggy.

D'Arcy surveyed him through his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove! They do look wathah big for you, deah boy!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

"But they're better than nothin'."

"Yes, sir."

"You can keep them on for the pwsent, Joe, and I will hays my tailah ovah here to-mowwow to wig you out awfesh."

"Yes, sir."

And Joe departed from Study No. 6, very proud of his new clothes, but feeling very airy and spacy in them.

CHAPTER 9.

Another Change!

"PHEW!"

"My word!"

"Look!"

"Regardez!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Joe stopped.

He was going downstairs in his new clothes, when a crowd of juniors in the passage caught sight of him.

Their greeting was hilarious.

Joe turned very red.

"Crikey!" he muttered.

"Here he is!" roared Gore, of the Shell. "Here he is in his grandfather's duds!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at the togs!"

"Oh, the bags!"

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

Joe stopped on the stairs. He didn't care to venture into that crowd. The juniors were doubled up with merriment.

There were a good many Third-Form fags among them, and their looks were more hostile than amused. But all were roaring.

Picke and Fane and Mellish and Croke rushed up the stairs, and hustled Joe down into the passage.

"Here he is!" roared Croke. "Here's the giddy convict's son!"

"Oh, rats, Croke!" exclaimed Clifton Dane. "Who said his father was a convict?"

"Well, he's a burglar or something, isn't he, Frayne?"

"Mind your own bizness!" said Joe.

Croke turned on him savagely.

"By George! I'll—"

"You won't touch him!" said Clifton Dane.

"Who'll stop me?"

"I will!"

Croke gave the Canadian junior a fierce look, and then receded a little. He was bigger than Clifton Dane, but he was not of the stuff of which heroes are made.

"As for a chap's father who ought to be a convict, what about your own, Croke?" asked the Canadian icily.

Croke turned crimson.

"What do you mean?" he roared.

Dane shrugged his shoulders.

"You know very well what I mean!" he said.

"I don't. My father's a gentleman!" howled Croke.

"Yes, a speculating gentleman!" said Clifton Dane. "We all know how Tom Merry's money was lost in a speculation, and we all know who induced a confiding old lady to trust the money into a rotten concern."

"If you mean—"

"Oh, hang it, we all know it! You were bragging about your father having brought off a big coup, before we knew that Tom Merry's money had all been lost in the same concern," said the Canadian quietly. "I wouldn't have said a word; but if you throw Joe's father in his face, and without knowing anything about him, either, it's only fair to give you the same back—and now you've got it."

"My father's a gentleman—"

"There's a good many gentlemen like him doing time, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh had turned against Croke. Croke was given to swanking about his father's vast business dealings, and his gigantic speculations which always turned out well for him. They did not always turn out so well for others, as in the case of Tom Merry's fortune.

Croke slunk away, with a red face, muttering savagely. Joe would gladly have escaped, but the fellows were all round him, and they were not disposed to let those clothes get away so easily.

"My hat! We ought to photograph him like this!" exclaimed Gore. "It's ripping!"

"There's room for two of you in those bags, Joseph."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lovely object, ain't he?" said Picke, with a sneer.

"Oh, ripping!" grinned Fane. "Credit to the Form, I must say, dressing up in a Fourth-Former's old clothes."

"Yah!"

"Booh!"

"But I 'ad not no choice, sir," said Joe. "I was tore to pieces, and Master D'Arcy was kind enough to gimme these togs."

"Yah!"

"Rotter!"
 "Hallo! what's the row here?" demanded Wally, coming upon the scene, and pushing Picke and Hobbs unceremoniously out of the way. "My only Aunt Jane! How did you get into those clothes, Joe?"

"Master D'Arcy lent 'em to me, sir—ow!"
 Biff!
 Joe sat on the lowest stair. Wally rubbed his knuckles. Picke chuckled with satisfaction.

"Oh! You're against the rotter, too, now, are you, young D'Arcy?" he exclaimed.
 Wally turned upon him.
 "Who are you calling a rotter?" he demanded.
 "That ruffian!"

"That chap's my friend," said Wally. "I'll thank you not to call him names, unless you want a thick ear, Picky."
 "Oh!"
 "I'm educating him," said Wally. "I biff him whenever he calls anybody sir. That's the start. See?"

"He's jolly well going to call me sir!" said Jameson, fiercely.
 "Oh, come off, Jimmy!"
 "I tell you—"

"Don't begin being a snob, my son," said Wally. "Your dad wouldn't know you when you went home to the family grocery for the vacation."

There was a roar of laughter at Jameson's expense. Jameson stood speechless. Wally turned to Joe again.

"It was just like Gussy to bung those duds on you!" he exclaimed. "Just like you to take 'em, too. Fathead!"

"Oh, M-m-m-m—D'Arcy minor."
 "Come with me, and I'll lend you some of mine."

"Thank you, s-s-s-s—D'Arcy minor."
 "Yah!" roared the Third, as Wally walked away with the new junior. "Rags! Old clothes! Rags! Yah! Yah!"

Wally grinned.
 "Let 'em yell!" he said. "It lets off steam. I shall have to do some hammering in the dorm, to-night. Never mind; let 'em yell!"

And they did yell.
 Wally took Joe up to the dorm, and made him change into some articles of attire more suited to his size than the garb of Arthur Augustus.

When the lad had obediently changed, Wally surveyed him with considerable satisfaction.

"You look all right now!" he exclaimed.
 "Thankee—Master—D'Arcy minor."

"Careful! Now come down with me, and don't leave me. I'm keeping you under my wing for the present. Savvy?"

"Yes, D'Arcy minor."

Arthur Augustus met them as they came downstairs. The swell of St. Jim's surveyed Joe through his monocle.

"Well, pewpaws the fit is a little bettah, though the cut is not so good," he remarked. "I am glad to see you takin' an intwest in my young friend like this, Wally."

"Rats!"
 "It is wathah good of you."

"More rats!"
 "Weally, Wally—!"

"Bosh!"
 And Wally walked away, whistling.

CHAPTER 10. The Biter Bit.

JAMESON, and nearly all the rest of the Form, looked forward eagerly, keenly, to bedtime, that night.

The Third Form were on the warpath.

Wally, usually the acknowledged leader of the Form, monarch of all he surveyed in the Form-room, was likely to find a fierce rebellion going on that evening.

Wally was rather given to being high-handed, and to hitting out when he was opposed. But never had any conduct of Wally's provoked such resentment as his chumming up with the new junior—the outcast of the Third.

It was too rotten of D'Arcy minor—that was the general opinion.

"The question was—were the Third going to stand it? That was the question that Jameson asked fiercely in the Form-room.

The reply was a general negative.

"The beast's going to be ragged!" said Fane. "We're going to rag him till he's sick of St. Jim's, and goes back to the work-house he belongs to."

"And Wally's not going to stop us!"

"No fear!"

"Not half!"

"We're going to rag the cad, and bump Wally for his check!" said Curly Gibson.

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurray!"

The whole of the Third Form yelled approval.

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Wally came into the Form-room while the din was proceeding. He gave the Third-Formers an inquiring stare.

"Well, what are you yapping about now?" he demanded.

"Mind your own bizney!"

"Find out!"

"You'll see to-night!" said Jameson, darkly.

Wally snorted.

"If there's any rot to-night, some of you fellows will get it in the neck, that's all!" he replied.

"Yah!"

"Rats!"

Wally's eyes blazed.

"Who's captain of this Form!" he shouted, clenching his fists.

"Boo!"

"Yah!"

"We're going to have another election!" exclaimed Jameson.

"Somebody else is going to put up for Form-captain."

"Chap about your size, I suppose?" suggested Wally, with biting sarcasm.

Jameson turned rather red.

"That's for the fellows to decide," he replied.

"This what you call chummy?" asked Wally.

Jameson gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"I ain't chumming with a fellow who sides with gutter-snipes," he replied. "I stand by the Form, and the Form will stand by me."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the fags, applauding this sentiment heartily.

"We don't want to hurt your new friend," went on Jameson, victoriously. "Let him go back to the workhouse, that's all."

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, go and eat coke," said Wally. "You ain't fit to chum with him, that's what's the matter with you. Bah! You ain't fit to chum up with my dog Pongo!"

"What!" roared the Third.

"As for a new Form-captain, you can jolly well do as you like," said Wally. "Do you think I want to be captain of a set of howling fags, anyway?"

The Third could only glare. As a matter of fact, Wally had been very keen to be Form-captain, at the time, but it suited him to forget that, just now.

"Form-captain!" went on Wally, with a sniff. "What do you blessed fags want with a Form-captain at all? You're only imitating the Fourth and the Shell."

There was a yell of wrath.

"Collar the cad!"

"Bump him!"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "You couldn't bump one-half of me! Pooh! Look here, if you get a new Form-captain, he'd better be a chap who can use his hands; for I promise you that I'll hammer him black and blue as soon as he's elected."

"Yah!"

"If it's you, Jimmy, you'd better look after your boxing."

"Bosh!" said Jameson, uneasily.

"If you're the man, Curly—!"

"I'm not!" said Curly Gibson, promptly.

"Oh, let's bump the swanking beast!" exclaimed Fane.

"I tell you—"

"Cave!"

"Shush!"

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, entered the Form-room. The clamour among the Third died away at once. Mr. Selby was a very ill-tempered master, and much given to caning and to the rapping of knuckles.

He glanced over the Form with a frown. Mr. Selby had dined with the Head, and Mr. Selby had indigestion. He was subject to indigestion. Indigestion always had a very embittering effect upon the master of the Third.

It led him to look upon the darker side of things, and to imagine all sorts of offence where none was meant, and to suspect disrespect and carelessness where they did not exist.

Mr. Selby's nose was red, and a red nose on Mr. Selby was always a danger-signal to the Third Form.

The Form-master had come to take the Third in evening preparation, and he was evidently in a mood to visit the least transgression—very heavily.

"Take your places, boys!" he snapped.

The fags took their places at the desks.

The Third Form had to do their prep. in the Form-room, under the eye of a master; not having the privilege of the higher Forms, of doing it at their leisure in their studies. Mr. Selby glanced over the form.

"Where is Frayne?" he exclaimed, harshly.

Joe came in as he asked the question. Mr. Selby's eye turned upon him balefully.

Mr. Selby didn't like Joe. Undoubtedly the little waif was a trouble to him, and Mr. Selby did not like trouble. The boy was so much behind the others in every department of knowledge, that the Head had asked Mr. Selby as a special favour to take him separately in hand. Mr. Selby could not refuse the

Head, from whom he had received many favours, and expected many more.

But he did not like the extra work. He was disgusted, too, by some of Joe's ways, and irritated by his ungrammatical speech, not being a sufficiently kind-hearted man to reflect upon the fact that the poor lad had had no chance of learning anything better.

Mr. Selby knew how his Form regarded their new Form-fellow, and he was not slow to let them see that he looked upon Joe in the same light, as an intruder and an outsider.

"You are late, Frayne," he said, harshly.

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir."

"Go to your place!"

"Yes, sir."

Joe's manner was so respectful, or rather, humble, that even the bad-tempered Form-master could say no more to him.

Joe took his place with the rest.

Hobbs was sitting on one side of him, and Picke on the other. The two young rascals exchanged glances, and Hobbs almost went into an explosion of mirth as Picke produced a pin, and showed it to him behind Joe's back.

Picke suddenly stretched his hand behind Joe, and stuck the pin into him. Then he slid his hand into his pocket, and sat looking quite innocent.

There was a fearful yell from Joe, and he leaped to his feet.

Mr. Selby glanced at him angrily.

"Frayne!"

"Ow!"

"Frayne! How dare you?"

"Yow!"

"Boy!" thundered the master of the Third.

"Yow! Sorry, sir! I beg your pardon, sir! Something stung me, sir!"

"Nonsense, Frayne! Take fifty lines!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!" said poor Joe.

"And sit down instantly."

"Yes, sir!"

Joe sat down. The weary preparation—wary enough, with a bad-tempered, impatient master and careless pupils—dragged on. Picke leaned a little behind Joe when he thought that a sufficient time had elapsed to make the matter safe.

He was about to drive the pin cruelly into Joe again, when Wally leaned over from the desk behind, caught his wrist, turned it by main force, and jerked his hand so sharply, that the pin stuck into his own shoulder.

Picke uttered an agonised yell.

Wally grinned, and dropped back into his seat instantly, Mr. Selby strode towards the class, and fixed his eyes upon the unhappy Picke.

"Picke! You seem to consider it humorous to imitate Frayne in disturbing the class. Stand out here immediately!"

"Oh, sir—"

"Instantly!"

Picke stood out before the class. Mr. Selby's cane whistled in the air.

"Hold out your hand, Picke! Now the other! Now the other again! Now, go back to your place, and learn to be a little more orderly during preparation."

Picke sank into his seat, twisting up horrible faces as he squeezed his hands under his arms. Picke's peculiar sense of humour did not find any further expression during the hour and a half devoted to preparation by the Third Form.

CHAPTER 11.

Trouble in the Dormitory!

"BED," said Wally, with a yawn.

He had been sitting in a corner of the junior common-room with Joe. He was helping Joe to read the latest number of the *MARVEL*. Joe's abilities were hardly cultivated, so far, to the extent of reading even a simple story with ease, and Mr. Selby was quite right in thinking that he was not in a fit state to enter the Third Form at St. Jim's. Mr. Selby had accepted him under protest, and was in hopes that something would happen to relieve him of the troublesome little waif.

The Third Form, as a rule, congregated in their Form-room, and did not patronise the junior common-room. There they were under the shadow of the Fourth and the Shell, while in their own Form room they were monarchs of all they surveyed. But on this particular evening Wally had chosen to pass his last hour before bed in the common-room. He knew very well that things would be made warm both for himself and for his protégé in the Form-room. Even at that moment he knew Jameson & Co. would be plotting "ructions" for the dorm. that night. But the danger of the dormitory could not be avoided.

"Yes, sir. I—I mean D'Arcy minor," said Joe.

"Come on," said Wally.

"Yes."

"Good-night, Joe!" called out Tom Merry.

"Good-night, Master Tom!"

Wally piloted his protégé out of the room. Why he had taken up the lad Wally hardly knew, but now that he had taken

him up, wild horses would not have dragged away Wally from the plain path of his duty to his friend.

"Don't take all your things off to-night," he whispered.

Joe stared at him.

"Master Tom said I was always to take off everything, and put on my pyjamas," he said.

"Yes, as a rule. I suppose you weren't in the habit of sleeping in your clothes before you came here, were you?"

"I never had nothing else to sleep in."

"Well, never mind that," said Wally. "To-night you're to keep on your things, and put on your pyjamas over them, because there will be trouble in the dorm."

"Oh, I see," said Joe.

"You may get a ragging to-night, you see."

"Yes—D'Arcy minor."

"I shall stand by you, and they'll have to rag me, too," said Wally. "Mind, if you're touched, you're to hit out. Whenever a chap goes for you go for him, and hit your hardest. That's the way to get on in the world."

"Yes, D'Arcy minor."

They met the Third Form on the stairs, marching up to bed under the eye of Knox the prefect. The fags gave both Joe and Wally savage looks, and there were murmurs of what was to happen later.

It was pretty certain that Knox heard some of the murmurs, and understood them; but Knox took no notice. Knox did not intend to notice anything. He had been roughly handled by the Terrible Three on one occasion for bullying Joe. From that moment he had intensely disliked the little waif. Whatever happened to Joe, there was certainly not likely to be any interference from the prefect.

The Third Form tumbled into bed with unusual quietness and order. That alone should have warned Knox that something unusual was toward. But the prefect seemed to be aware of nothing. He put out the light, and left the dormitory.

For some minutes there was silence. Wally did not hope, however, that the Third had given up their plans. He knew that they were only waiting for the prefect to get clear before they started.

Five minutes elapsed.

Then there was a sound as of someone moving.

Jameson's voice was heard in the gloom of the dormitory.

"Tumble up, you fellows."

"What-ho!"

"You bet!"

A match scratched out, and a candle-end was lighted. Two or three more candles were quickly produced, and lighted up, and a bicycle-lantern added its illumination to the scene.

Jameson was out of bed with Gibson and Picke and Fane and Hobbs and Higgs, and a dozen more of the Third Form. Most of the other fellows were sitting up in bed to look on at the expected fun.

Wally sat up in bed in his turn.

"What's the little game, Jimmy?" he demanded.

Jameson snorted.

"Mind your own bizney," he replied.

"Is this going to be your giddy new election for Form-captain?"

"No, it isn't."

"We're going to put that new cad through it," said Fane.

"That's the programme."

"He's going through it, rather."

"And if you interfere, young D'Arcy, you'll get it in the neck."

"So put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"We mean bizney."

Wally made no reply. He simply stepped out of bed, and drew on his trousers. The fags watched him with angry and uneasy glances.

"Well, what are you going to do?" demanded Hobbs.

"I'm going to stick to Frayne."

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Rotter!"

"If you'll walk along here one at a time, I'll make you eat all those pretty names," said Wally genially.

The fags did not accept the invitation.

"Have that street arab out!" roared Gibson.

"Have him out!"

"Yank him out!"

"Hurray!"

There was a rush towards Joe Frayne's bed. The little waif of the London streets was sitting up there, looking at the fags with dilated eyes.

"Ere, you lemme alone!" he said. "Wot 'ave I done?"

"Have him out!"

"Kick him out!"

Wally ran to the new junior's aid as he was dragged out of bed.

"Put 'em up, Joe!" he shouted.

"Wot to!" said Joe.

"Hit out, my son!"

"I'm on, Master Wally," said Joe.

They stood shoulder to shoulder, and they did hit out. Two or three of the fags dropped at their feet, and the rest surged fiercely back.

"Wally, chuck it!" shouted Jameson.

"Rats!"

"You'll get hurt!"

"More rats!"

"Rush 'em!" yelled Picke, from the rear.

"Down with the cads!"

Jameson gritted his teeth.

"Collar young D'Arcy!" he shouted. "We'll tie him up to his bed, and then we can rag the young pickpocket as much as we like."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Sock it to 'em!" shouted Wally.

He hit out right and left as the fags rushed furiously upon him. But the odds were too great.

Fighting desperately, Wally was borne back over the bed, and a dozen fags sprawled over him there, and held him down by sheer weight.

Joe fought hard to help his chum, but Gibson and Fane and Hobbs had hold of him, and he was dragged away. The little waif was bumped down, and the fags sat on him to keep him there, while the rest were dealing with Wally.

Wally was raging.

In spite of his struggles he had no chance against the overwhelming enemy, and he was held down firmly on the bed, spread-eagled there, and some of the fags proceeded to tie his ankles and wrists to the bedposts.

Jameson grinned, twisted up Wally's own handkerchief, and tied up one of his wrists. Curly tied the other to the head of the bed. Two lengths of whipcord secured his ankles to the foot of the bed.

The knots once secured, the fags released him. He was helpless now, and could only glare at his captors.

They gathered round the bed laughing and jeering.

"You rotters!" raged Wally. "I'll smash you one—two—three at a time, if you like! You cowards—rats—rotter's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll make you smart for this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll be sorry to-morrow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, not quite so much row!" exclaimed Jameson. "We shall have a prefect here."

"Oh, Knox won't come and stop us from ragging that slum cad," said Picke, with a grin.

"Selby might come in if there's too much row. Easy does it. We can put the slummer through it without raising Cain in this way," said Hobbs.

"Good!"

"Come on! Collar the guttersnipe!"

"Let him alone!" roared Wally.

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Collar the slum cad!"

And, leaving Wally raging and threatening, but quite helpless in his bonds, the fags surrounded the hapless Joe.

CHAPTER 12.

Put Through It.

JOE was lying on the floor of the dormitory, gasping for breath. He had done his best to get loose to go to the aid of his friend; but in vain. He was pinned down by numbers. As soon as Wally was secured, the fags were able to give all their attention to the waif of Blucher's Buildings.

Joe was dragged to his feet, still being held by several pairs of hands. He was blinking helplessly at his captors.

"Old 'ard, young gents," he said. "I ain't done nothin', you know. No offence, young gents. 'Old 'ard."

The appeal was quite lost on the fags. As a matter of fact, the bad English in which it was couched only made them feel the worse disposed towards poor Joe.

"Collar the cad!"

"Bump him!"

"Squash him!"

Jameson pushed the too eager fags back.

"Hold on," he said. "Bumping won't meet the case, my sons. He's going to be put through it properly."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

"In the first place," said Jameson, "form a circle round the beast, so that he can't bolt. Bring him near Wally's bed, so that Wally can look on. It's a shame for Wally to be left out of the proceedings. He's Form-captain, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha."

The fags yelled with laughter as they hustled Joe Frayne over towards the bed where Wally was spread-eagled and tied down.

Wally's eyes were gleaming with rage.

Never had he been treated with such disrespect in his career in the Third Form at St. Jim's; and the leaders against him were his own two chums.

Wally simply wriggled with the desire to get at his enemies, and treat them to a fine assortment of his famous left-handers, but he could not get loose.

He could only lie, and wriggle, and glare, and promise the Third Form generally all sorts of dire things in the near future.

Of which the Third took no notice. Wally, for the time being, was a negligible quantity.

Joe was planted beside Wally's bed, with the fags standing round ready to grasp him at the first attempt he might make to bolt.

But Joe did not make the attempt.

He knew that he had to go through with the thing now, and he was mustering up his courage to stand it.

The fags formed up round him in a grinning circle, and Joe looked from face to face in the vain hope of finding a gleam of sympathy.

But he found none.

In the dormitory he had no friend save the lad who was spread-eagled on the bed and could not help him.

"Now, then," said Jameson, wagging an accusing forefinger at Joe. "Now then, you unspeakable young toad."

"Don't you go calling me names," said Joe.

"Oh, listen to the beautiful language!" said Fane.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What ripping English!"

"What a tone!"

"What an accent!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unspeakable young toad!" pursued Jameson, who seemed rather pleased with his own mental fertility in inventing that expression. "Unspeakable young toad! What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nuffin!" said Joe.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I ain't got nuffin' to say," said Joe. "Wot are you a goin' for me for? You wouldn't dare to do it if Master Tom was 'ere."

There was a howl from the Third.

"Oh, bump him!" shouted Picke.

"Squash him!"

"Duck him!"

Jameson held up his hand.

"Hold on! Now, you unspeakable young toad, understand this—we don't allow the Fourth or the Shell to interfere with us in this dorm. They're nothing—nobody."

"Hear, hear."

"What have you got to say for yourself? How dare you come to a respectable school, and mix with the sons of gentlemen?" demanded Jameson. "Do you consider that you are the sort of person to mix with gentlemen?"

"I ain't," said Joe.

"Oh! Well, he admits it!" grinned Hobbs.

"I don't admit nuffin'," said Joe. "I sez I ain't mixing with gentlemen. Gentlemen wouldn't treat a pore lad like this."

"What!"

"The only gentleman 'ere," said Joe sturdily, "is Master Wally—D'Arcy minor."

The Third glared at Joe.

"Well," said Jameson, "for cool cheek this chap takes the bun. What do you know about gentleman anyway, you unspeakable young toad?"

"I ain't likely to learn much 'ere, any way," said Joe.

"Bump him!"

"Jump on him!"

"Hold on! Frayne—if your name's Frayne—by the way, is your name Frayne?"

"I dessay!"

"He doesn't know! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow am I to know?" said Joe.

"What was your father's name?"

"I've belonged to three or four," said Joe. "Old Bill Frayne was my father, I believe. But I used to be sent out by Sam Rags, before Bill come out of—"

He stopped.

"Out of what?"

"Never mind."

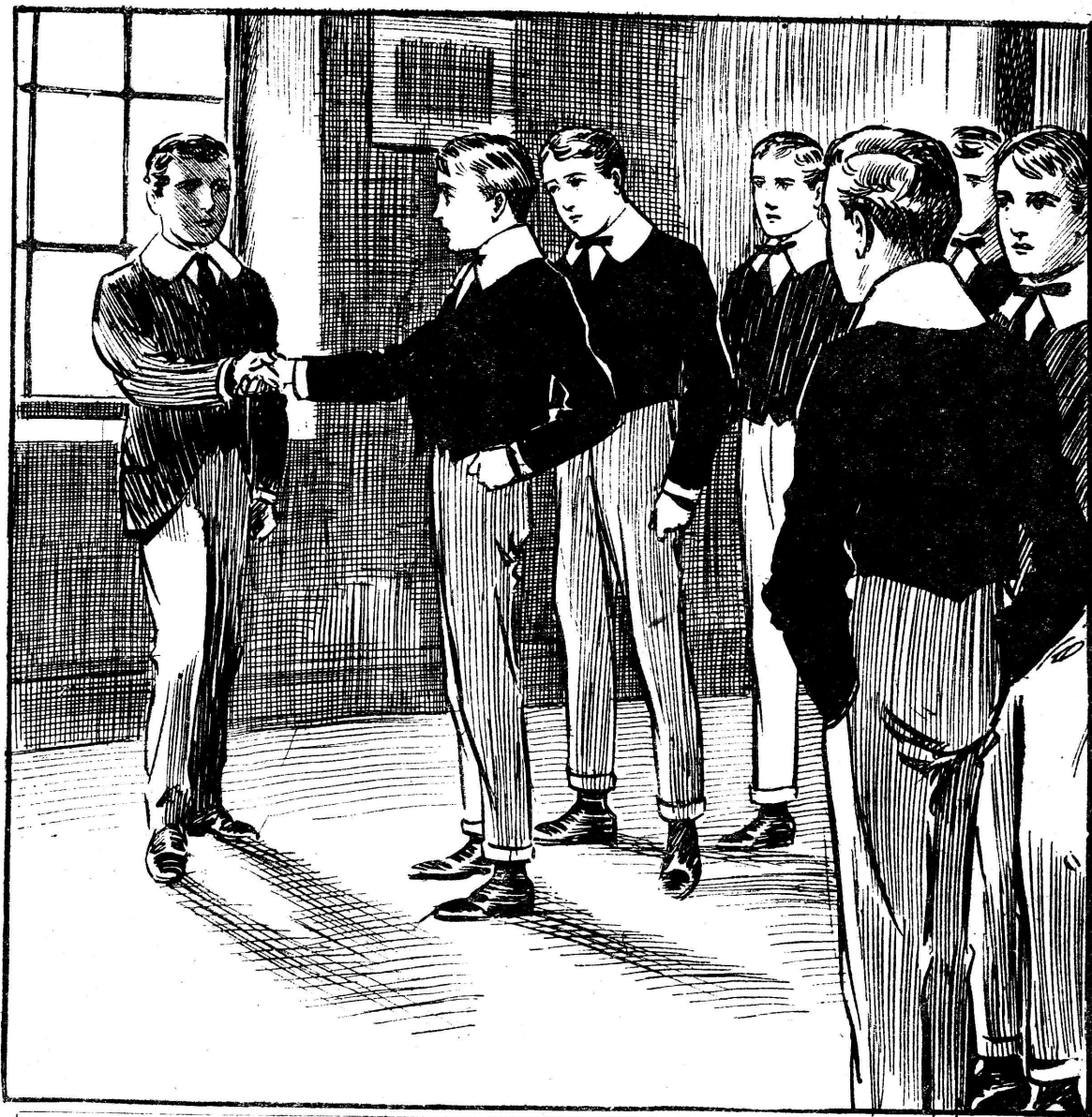
"Were you going to say prison?"

"Find out."

"Or the workhouse?"

Joe set his lips.

"My hat!" said Hobbs, "what a splendid specimen to have at St. Jim's. The young beggar has been sent out to beg, you see, by whatever relation happened to be out of prison at the time. Who was your mother, you young toad?"



"I'm sorry," exclaimed Jameson. "You're a real decent sort, Frayne. We've treated you like beasts, and I'm sorry, for one. Give us your flipper!" (See page 18.)

"I don't know."
 "Never had one, perhaps?" Higgs suggested.
 "There was ole Sal, at Blucher's Buildings," said Joe. "She called 'erself my mother, but I ain't sure of that, nohow."
 "What do you fellows think?" said Jameson, looking round.
 "Is this the kind of chap to associate with us at St. Jim's?"
 "No fear!"
 "Booh!"
 "The Head must have been off his rocker to let him into the school," said Curly Gibson.
 "I'm blessed if I can understand it."
 "Oh, it was Tom Merry's rich uncle who worked that, somehow."
 "Like his cheek!"
 "Yes, rather."
 "Fancy planting that guttersnipe on us!"
 "The cheek—rather."
 "And making a School-House chap of him, too," exclaimed Fane angrily. "That's the worst of it!"
 "Yes, rather."

But here Jameson turned on his own supporter. Jameson was a New House fellow, and he had succeeded in changing into the School House dormitory that night, for the special purpose of

ragging Joe Frayne. It was a risky proceeding for Jameson, as he had of course done it without asking his House-master, who would have allowed nothing of the sort. The School House fellow who had taken his place in the New House for the night ran an equal risk, if Mr. Ratcliff should happen to spot him. Jameson was the only New House fellow there, but he was not inclined to have his House alluded to disparagingly.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "You can shut up on that, Fane, unless you want a prize thick ear to show round in the morning."

"Rats!" said Fane.

Jameson doubled up his fists.

"Then I'll jolly well——"

"Order!"

"No House rows now!"

"Stop it!"

Jameson was pushed back in one direction and Fane in another.

"Well, anyway, the chap's more fit for the School House than the New House," Jameson exclaimed. "But that's neither here nor there. The question is, how we're going to get rid of him out of St. Jim's."

"Hear, hear."

"Now, you young toad, are you willing to go?"
 Joe stared.
 "Go—where? To bed?"
 "Ha, ha! No! Back to the workhouse."
 "I ain't never been to the workus."
 "Well, back to your slum, wherever it is—I'm not particular," said Jameson with a grin. "Are you willing to leave St. Jim's and go back there?"
 "If Master Tom says so."
 "Tom Merry has nothing whatever to do with it."
 "Rot!" said Joe.
 "What!"
 "Rot!"
 Jameson's face was scarlet.
 "My hat! I sha'n't be able to keep my hands off him long," he exclaimed. "Look here, young shaver, we don't want you at St. Jim's."
 "I know that," said Joe, doggedly.
 "Are you willing to leave?"
 "Not unless Master Tom says so."
 "Otherwise, you won't go?"
 "No, I won't."
 "You're going to stick here, eh, whether we like you or not?"
 "I ain't doin' no 'arm."
 "That's not the question. We can't stand you. Are you going to leave?"
 "No, I ain't."
 "Now, I warn you that we won't have you in the Third," said Jameson. "If you won't go, we're going to rag you till you do go. Savvy that?"
 "I understand."
 "Now will you go?"
 "No!"
 "Nuff said," exclaimed Hobbs. "Rag the rotter!"
 "Hurray! Rag him!"
 "Right!" said Jameson. "He shall run the gauntlet first, the young rotter. Form up, there!"
 And the Third Form lined up gleefully for Joe Frayne to run the gauntlet.

CHAPTER 13.

Cave!

JOE FRAYNE stood undecided, dogged, defiant. He hardly knew what was expected of him, as he stood there, with lowering brows, and watched the fags form up in a double line.

Jameson beckoned to him.
 "Come on, toad."
 "Wot do you want?"
 "You're to run the gauntlet."
 "Wot's that?"
 "Ha, ha ha!"
 Jameson grinned, and laboriously explained.
 "You're to run between these two lines," he said. "Every chap will get a kick at you. The sooner you get through the better for you. See?"
 Joe's face set doggedly.
 "I won't!" he replied.
 "Don't do it, Joe," shouted Wally, from his bed.
 "I won't, Master Wally."
 Jameson chuckled.
 "Won't you?" he said. "We'll soon see about that. Take hold of him and start him."

Four or five fellows laid hands upon Joe Frayne. Joe struggled fiercely.
 The fags, standing in line, grinned anticipatively. Every fellow had taken up some weapon—pillow or bolster or stocking or stuffed sock—and all were waiting eagerly for the chance of "getting in a lick" at the little wail.
 Joe, struggling, was propelled towards the fags. They hurled him in, and then the blows began to descend.
 Joe had no choice about running after that. Running through was the easiest way of escaping the showers of blows.
 He staggered blindly forward.

The arms rose and fell. Blows showered upon the lad, and he reeled to right and left as he dashed onward through the lines.

"Go it!"
 "Lay it on!"
 "Lemme get at him!"
 "Go for the cad!"
 Joe staggered and ran, and ran and reeled, till he reached the end of the line, and there he rolled over, and sank exhausted on the floor.

The fags closed round him again. He lay and gasped.
 "Make him run back!" exclaimed Hobbs.

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Jameson shook his head.
 "Stand him up!" he said.
 Joe was dragged to his feet.
 "Now, then," said Jameson, "how do you like it?"
 "Oh!"
 "Answer me, you young toad."
 "Oh! Ow! I don't like it!" gasped Joe.
 "Had enough?"
 "Ow! Yes."
 "You wouldn't like it over again?"
 "Ow! No!"
 "Then will you get out of St. Jim's, if we let you off?" asked Jameson.
 "No, I won't!"
 There was a howl of rage from the fags.
 "Bump the cad!"
 "Bump him for his cheek!"
 "Hold on," said Jameson, "Bumping's too good for him. Now, Frayne, if your name's Frayne, look here. We've had enough of you."
 "I've 'ad enough of you for that matter," said Joe doggedly.
 "I wouldn't stay 'ere, only for Master Tom. I think you're a set of beasts."
 "My hat!"
 "The cheeky blackguard!"
 "You've been calling me a lot of names," said Joe.
 "That's different, you young sweep."
 "So you're going to stop, eh?" said Jameson, with a grin.
 "Well, well, we'll see if there's a further lesson we can give you."
 "Let him alone!" roared Wally.
 "Shut up, young D'Arcy."
 "I'll smash you to-morrow, Jameson, you New-House waster."
 "Rats!"
 "You wait till I get you in the gym, to-morrow, Curly."
 "Rats!"
 "You don't dare to let me loose!" bellowed Wally.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Now, then, if Wally's done, we'll get on," said Jameson.
 "Do shut up, Wally. You talk like a gramophone, or like your blessed major."
 "Jameson, you cad—"

"Dry up, old chap. Now, look here, we'll give this chap a ducking next," said Jameson. "We'll duck him with the water in the jugs. I should think that will bring him to his senses, if he's got any."

"Hear, hear!"
 "You savvy, Frayne? If you don't promise to get out of St. Jim's, we're going to souce you with cold water. What do you say?"

"Nuffin'!"
 "Will you go?"
 "No!"
 "Then you're booked for a ducking."

Jameson and several more of the fags grasped the water jugs from the washstands. Joe, held by several of the fellows, could not get away.

He shivered as his tormentors came upon him again.
 It was a cold night, and the prospect of a drenching in cold water was the reverse of pleasant. There was danger to the health, too, though the fags were too excited to think of that; and so, indeed, was Joe.

"Now then, young workhouse—"
 "Lemme alone!"
 "Give it him!" sang out Gibson.
 "Hurray!"
 "Here goes!"
 Swoosh!

The fags who were holding Joe let go, and started away, as the water swooshed. Some of them were not quick enough, and they yelled as they were splashed.

"Ow!" gasped Joe, catching his breath. "Y-o-o-a-ow!"
 He was drenched from head to foot, and standing in a pool of water. There was a yell from D'Arcy minor.

"You cowards!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 The handle of the door turned. The fags, in their excitement, had forgotten that the din in the dormitory must attract attention. Even if Knox, the prefect, did not choose to come, one of the masters might.

At the sound of the turning handle there was a hurried alarm.
 "Cave!"

With wonderful quickness the fags knocked over the candle ends, and the dormitory was plunged into darkness.

Then, as the door opened, the fags stumbled and tumbled into bed, dragging the bedclothes over them, leaving Joe standing as they had left him, dazed and bewildered, in the midst of dripping water.

CHAPTER 14.

Honour Bright.

DARKNESS reigned in the Third-Form dormitory in the School House, as the newcomer entered. He paused on the threshold.

"Boys! I know you are awake. I saw a light under the door, and heard a most disgraceful disturbance!"

It was the rasping voice of Mr. Selby, the master of the Third. The fags chilled with dismay. It was not Knox—not even Kildare—but their own Form-master; and they could guess the mood he would be in when the light should reveal what had been going forward.

They lay silent and palpitating.

"Very well," said Mr. Selby. "You choose to remain silent. You affect to be asleep. We will see!"

He fumbled for the switch of the electric light, and turned it on. The dormitory was flooded with light in a moment.

Fags were industriously snoring, with a great appearance of slumber. But nothing could disguise the fact that Wally was spread-eagled upon his bed, and tied there, and that Joe Frayne was shivering in his pyjamas, drenched to the skin.

Mr. Selby's eyes seemed to be starting from his head as he looked upon the scene.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

Joe's teeth were chattering. He went to his washstand for his towel and began to mop his head dry.

"Frayne!" thundered the Form-master. "What is the meaning of this?"

"I—I—I'm wet, sir."

"I can see you are wet, Frayne. What are you doing out of your bed at this hour?"

Joe did not reply.

Mr. Selby glared at him, and then turned to D'Arcy minor. Wally had made a desperate effort to get loose from his bonds, but in vain. He had to lie there and meet the angry gaze of the Third Form-master.

"D'Arcy minor! What does this mean?"

"I'm tied, sir."

"Who tied you?"

"I was tied, sir."

"Is this what you call a rag?" said Mr. Selby. "I presume that is the case. You have turned the dormitory into a bear-garden."

"Yes, sir."

"D'Arcy minor, I presume you were tied there by someone?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Was it Frayne?"

"Frayne, sir? Oh no, sir."

"Then who was it?"

"Could you let them undo me, sir?" said Wally suavely.

"Gibson, untie D'Arcy minor at once!" snapped the Form-master.

"Yes, sir," said Curly.

Mr. Selby turned towards Frayne again. The waif was mopping himself dry as well as he could. He certainly looked a somewhat miserable object, and Mr. Selby's glance at him was angry and contemptuous.

"You seem to be the centre of all this, Frayne, as you have been the cause and centre of nearly all the trouble in the Form since you came here," he exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"You have been ducked, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who by?"

Joe was silent.

Above all things, Tom Merry had impressed upon him that he must never, under any circumstances, play the sneak or tell-tale. And Joe would have been cut in pieces before he would have disregarded a wish of Tom Merry's.

Mr. Selby raised his voice.

"Did you hear my question, Frayne?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then answer it."

Joe was silent.

Mr. Selby's narrow eyes glittered. He could hardly believe that the new junior meant to disregard his order. He would not have been surprised at it in Wally D'Arcy; but that this new boy—this slum denizen—this guttersnipe—should venture to disregard his authority—was astounding. It was also somewhat gratifying to the Form-master—it gratified his unjustifiable dislike for the new boy—it made him feel that his snobbish aversion was well-founded, and that in persecuting poor Joe he would be merely upholding his proper authority as Form-master.

"Frayne!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir."

"I have asked you to name the persons responsible for this ragging!"

"Yes, sir."

"Please do so at once."

The Third Form hung breathless. All the Form, as a matter of fact, had taken part in the ragging, with very few exceptions—that is to say, all the Form that occupied the School House dormitory. The New House portion of the Third Form, of course, had been out of it, though they had been equally active in ragging Joe in the quadrangle on a previous occasion.

Mr. Selby's eyes glittered like emeralds. There was a peculiar green, unpleasant light in his eyes when he was very spiteful, and it was gleaming there now.

"Now, Frayne," he said impressively, "I can see that there has been a most disgraceful ragging scene here. I call upon you to give me the names of the parties concerned. The ring-leaders will be severely caned in the Form-room to-morrow morning, and the rest of the offenders will be deprived of two half-holidays."

The fags gasped. The punishment was a severe one—if it reached the offenders. And it certainly would reach them if Joe gave their names. If the Form received that punishment through Joe there was no doubt that their dislike of him would be turned into the bitterest hatred. Mr. Selby must have known that. But perhaps it did not ill-suit with his wishes that it should be so. He waited for Joe's reply.

The waif was silent. There was revenge, if he had wanted it, within his grasp. He had only to say that Jameson and Gibson and Hobbs were the ring-leaders and they would be booked for a severe caning. He had only to say that the others had all, with the exception of Wally, taken part in the ragging to get them gated for two halves. And the Third Form had little doubt that he would do so.

Why should he spare them? They had not spared him. What allegiance did he owe to the Form that had treated him like an outcast and a pariah? Surely he would speak! It was no light matter to disobey the Form-master.

But Joe Frayne was still silent.

"I am waiting for your reply, Frayne," said Mr. Selby in ominous tones.

"I ain't got nuffin' to say, sir."

"Will you give me the names I demand?"

"It would be sneaking, sir, wouldn't it?"

"Boy, do you dare to argue with me?" thundered Mr. Selby. "I order you to give me the names at once!"

"I can't, sir."

"You—can't—Frayne?"

"Master Tom told me never to sneak, sir."

"Frayne!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Get to bed," gasped Mr. Selby. "I shall repeat my question to you in the Form-room to-morrow morning. If you do not give me a satisfactory answer, I shall cane you more severely than I have ever caned any boy before."

"Yes, sir," said Joe quietly.

He tumbled into bed, half dried. Mr. Selby turned off the light and left the dormitory, closing the door with a concussion that showed how angry he was.

Jameson gave a long whistle.

"My hat!" exclaimed Wally. "There'll be a row now—and all the fault of you silly asses! Serve you right!"

"That rotten outsider will sneak, of course!" sneered Pickle.

"Hold your tongue," said Jameson.

Pickle snorted. This was a surprise from his own leader.

"What do you mean, Jameson?" he exclaimed.

"He hasn't sneaked yet," said Jameson. "He could have told Mr. Selby there was a New House fellow in here, but he didn't. I should have been licked."

"Serve you right!" said Wally.

"Oh, go to sleep!"

There was no more disturbance in the Third-Form dormitory in the School House that night.

CHAPTER 15.

True Blue!

TOM MERRY met Joe as he came down the next morning. Tom Merry had been a little anxious about his protégé, though he had trusted to Wally to look after him in the Third Form dormitory.

"How did you get on last night, Joe?" he asked.

"Oh, it was alright, Master Merry," said Joe sturdily.

"Did they rag you?"

"It really didn't amount to nuffin', Master Tom."

"We were going to give you a look in," said Tom Merry, "but that beast Knox was on the watch, and we got fifty lines each for just putting our noses outside the dorm. door. I suppose young Wally stood by you?"

"Yes; he's a corf-drop, 'e is!" said Joe.

"Good!"

Joe did not confide the affair of Mr. Selby to Tom Merry. He knew it would only worry the hero of the Shell, and that Tom could not help him. Tom could only have advised him not to sneak, and upon that Joe Frayne was already determined.

The waif went into the Form-room that morning with the

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

rest of the fellows. The New House portion of the Form had heard the story already, and the whole of the Third was in a curious and anxious frame of mind.

That the wail of the shuns would have firmness enough and sense of honour enough to withstand the anger of the Form-master rather than sneak was hardly to be expected. After his treatment at the hands of the Third, too, it would have been folly to expect such devotion on his part.

Yet he had, so far, refused to reply, and so the Third could not be sure. And the fellows who were faced with the certainty of a caning if Joe opened his lips were very anxious to know how the affair was to turn out.

Mr. Selby came into the Form-room looking decidedly sour. He was still suffering from indigestion, which a hearty breakfast of eggs and bacon, taken without any exercise, did not improve. Mr. Selby's nose was red and his eyes were watery. There was no doubt that if Mr. Selby did any caning that morning the cane would be well laid on.

And that he would do some caning was certain. Either the ringleaders in the ragging would be caned or Joe would be caned for refusing to betray them. One or the other was certain to happen.

"Oh, it's rotten!" growled Hobbs; "We're in for it, Jimmy."

"I don't know," said Jameson.

Hobbs sniffed scornfully.

"You don't think that young cad will hold his tongue, do you?"

"I don't know," repeated Jameson.

"Do you think he's likely to stand a licking for our sakes?"

"He wouldn't speak last night."

"That was because he knew we'd rag him again after Selby had gone down," said Hobbs. "He'll give us away now fast enough."

Jameson nodded.

"I suppose you're right," he said.

"Of course I am. Why doesn't Selby come to the point, I wonder, the beast!"

"Leaving it till after lessons, I suppose."

"May have forgotten it!" whispered Fane.

"Catch Selby forgetting!"

It was soon clear that the Form-master was leaving the matter till after classes. He made no reference whatever to the scene in the dormitory during the morning. Joe began to hope that it had all blown over. He did not know Mr. Selby yet so well as the rest of the Third Form knew him.

Last lesson over, and the time for dismissal arrived, the Third Form waited. Mr. Selby did not dismiss them. He was evidently coming to business now. He stood before the waiting class, surveying the silent juniors with an unpleasantly gleaming eye.

"Last night," said Mr. Selby, "there was a disgraceful scene in the Third Form dormitory in the School House. Some, or all, of the School House boys in this Form were concerned in it."

He paused. There was a deep silence in the class-room. Joe furtively licked the palms of his hands and rubbed them together, to be ready for what was coming.

"There was a ragging," said Mr. Selby, "of which Frayne appears to have been the victim. Whether I approve of this boy being placed in my Form does not matter. Scenes of disorder cannot be allowed in the dormitory. I call upon Frayne to give me the names of the offenders. I shall severely cane the ringleaders and punish the rest with detention. Frayne, stand up!"

Joe stood up in his place.

"I asked you last night, Frayne, for the names of the offenders in the ragging incident," said Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir," said Joe quietly.

"You refused to give the names?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Kindly give me the names now?"

Joe was silent.

"Do you refuse to give the names, Frayne?"

"It would be sneaking, sir."

"Do you refuse to give the names, Frayne?" asked Mr. Selby, in a cold, steely voice, as if Joe had not spoken.

"Yes, sir," said Joe desperately.

"Very well, Frayne," said Mr. Selby, compressing his lips. "Stand out before the class."

Joe came out. He shivered a little, and held his hands tightly clenched. He knew that he had to "go through" it now, but he tried to keep his courage up.

"My hat!" muttered Jameson. "He's going to stick it, after all."

Mr. Selby surveyed Frayne with an icy glance.

"I shall cane you and then question you again, Frayne," he said. "If you then refuse to answer, I shall cane you a second time. Hold out your hand!"

"Yes, sir."

Joe Frayne held out his hand. He winced as the cane came THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 155.

down with a spiteful swish. His face went pale with the pain of the cut.

But he did not falter. Thrice again the cane rose and fell with more and more force, and Joe's little face was twisted with pain. But he did not speak.

Mr. Selby paused. The Third Form were motionless, silent.

"Will you give me the names now, Frayne?"

"I can't, sir," said Joe through his trembling lips; "not if you were to cut me to pieces, sir."

Mr. Selby snapped his teeth.

"I shall not ask you again, Frayne, but I shall punish you severely for your disobedience," he said.

"Yes, sir," said poor Joe; "jest as you like, sir."

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Selby.

The Third Form gazed in spellbound silence while Joe was caned. They seemed fascinated by the sight. It was a terrible caning. In spite of Joe's nerve, in spite of all his courage, a cry of pain was wrung from him by the lashes of the cane. His face was deadly white now, his lips set over his teeth. He bore his punishment like a Spartan.

Mr. Selby ceased at last. Even the spiteful and hard-hearted man felt a glimmer of admiration for the lad's courage.

"The class is dismissed," he said harshly, and strode from the Form-room.

Joe put his hands under his arms and squeezed them silently. The pain was too great for words. Wally was at the wail's side in a moment. There were tears in Wally's eyes, though there were no tears in Joe's.

"You're splendid, kid!" said Wally, with a shake in his voice. "Just splendid! Those cads aren't fit to clean your boots. Oh, you're splendid!"

The door opened, and the Terrible Three came in. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had called in for Joe. They looked at him in surprise, and Tom Merry ran forward with an exclamation.

"What's the matter, Joe? You're hurt!"

"It's orlright, Master Tom," said Joe; "I'm orlright. I've been caned, that's all."

"Joe, what have you been doing?"

"He's been a giddy hero!" exclaimed Wally, with a glare at the fags. "He wouldn't give the names of the rotters who ragged him last night, and Selby has been taking it out of him—the beast!"

"Oh, Joe!"

"You told me I wasn't never to sneak, Master Tom."

"Joe, you're a little hero! Oh, Joe!"

"I ain't," said Joe. "You told me——"

"Are you hurt much, Joe?"

"Oh, it's orlright!"

"Sickening fuss to make of the little cad," murmured Pickle. Snack!

It was the back of Jameson's hand smiting Pickle across the mouth that made the sound.

Pickle staggered back, and sat on the floor. He glared at Jameson in fury and surprise.

"What do you mean by that?" he roared.

Jameson glared at him.

"Hold your caddish tongue!" he exclaimed. "Joe Frayne's decent all through, and I'm standing up for him from this minute."

"Me, too!" said Curly Gibson, ungrammatically but emphatically.

Jameson walked over to Joe. He held out his hand.

"I'm sorry," he exclaimed. "You're a real decent sort, Frayne. We've treated you like beasts, and I'm sorry for one. Give us your flipper."

Joe grinned faintly and winced as Jameson took his hand. His hand was aching yet. But he did not mind the pain as one by one the Third Form came up and shook hands with him.

The Terrible Three looked on, surprised at first, but very pleased. Joe had, all unconsciously, done well for himself. He had proved that he was real grit; and the fellows who had escaped punishment because Joe would not betray them could not stand against him now for very shame's sake. Even those who were not inclined to make friends with him felt themselves bound to follow the rest, so keen was the enthusiasm in the Form for the lad who only the day before had been an outcast.

"Oh, crikey!" said Joe. "This is orlright, this is!"

Jameson raised his hand.

"Three cheers for Joe Frayne, the best sportsman in the Third Form!" he shouted.

And they were given with a will.

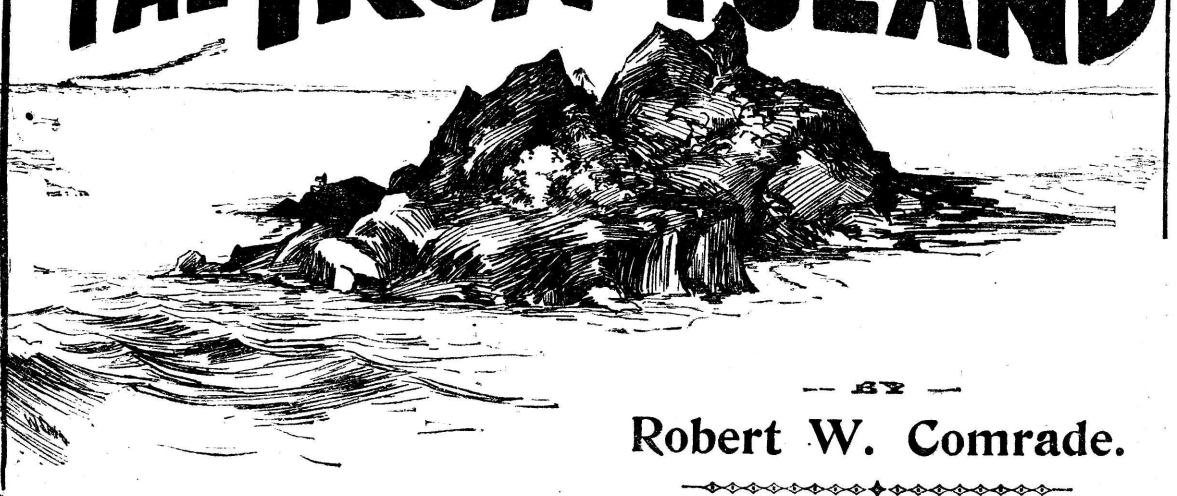
"Hip, hip, huray!"

And very pleasantly indeed they rang in the ears of the lad who had, until that morning, been condemned by the whole Form as No Class!

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's next week, entitled "The Turncoat of the Fourth!" by Martin Clifford. Order your "GEM" Library in advance. Price 1d.)

A Powerful Adventure Story!

THE IRON ISLAND



— BY —
Robert W. Comrade.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RE-WITTEN.

Philip Graydon is a young Englishman, who for eight years was marooned on an uncharted island in the Pacific—the Iron Island—by a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron, of which he was once a member. A lucky chance brings to his aid Dolores de las Mercedes, a beautiful Parisian actress, who has incurred the displeasure of the French Government. Graydon escapes from the Iron Island, and lands in England with Dolores. As Frank Kingston and Miss O'Brien, the two begin a secret campaign against the pernicious Brotherhood. With amazing ingenuity, and remaining himself wholly unsuspected, Kingston brings about the ruin of Don Sebastian, Detective-Inspector Caine, Sir Robert Gissing, and Colonel Marsden, all Inner Councillors of the Brotherhood.

By means of his submarine, Kingston destroys the Night Hawk, the Brotherhood's yacht, which attempted to hold up the liner Colston.

Gaining the liner disguised as a seaman, Kingston leaves Tim, a lad he has rescued from the Night Hawk, on board, and then sets out for England on his yacht the Coronet.

Dr. Anderson, a member of the Brotherhood on the Colston, suspecting that Tim knows who blew up the Night Hawk, takes the lad to the Brotherhood's council-chamber, on arrival in England. Kingston, learning that Tim is to be tortured if he does not speak, mesmerises Lord Mount-Fannell, and compels him to bring the lad to him.

Kingston is next visited by Carson Gray, a detective, who informs him that he has discovered that he is the man who destroyed the Night Hawk.

(Read on from here).

Kingston Obtains the Help of Two Detectives.

Carson Gray sat in his chair, looking at Kingston in genuine surprise. He did not know what to make of this very peculiar individual. So the clothes had been left on deck for his special benefit!

"You raced to England in your yacht," he exclaimed deliberately, "and watched the passengers disembark from the Colston, afterwards following Dr. Anderson and Tim Curtis—"

"And you," interjected Kingston coolly, "were a few dozen yards behind me, very creditably disguised as an old man. My dear Mr. Carson Gray, you surely don't imagine I was ignorant of your presence? You followed the three of us to London, and waited for several hours outside this hotel. I have been expecting you all the morning, as a matter of fact, for the traces I left were fairly clear to a clever detective, such as yourself."

And Frank Kingston unconcernedly bent forward and poked the fire into a blaze. He pretended not to see his visitor's amazement and anger; for it was certainly exasperating for Gray to find that the man he had traced knew all about it, and had actually been expecting him.

Suddenly the detective laughed.

"Upon my soul, Mr. Kingston," he said, "you have given me a bigger surprise this morning than I've had for months! Really, you would make a first-class investigator. Here have I been priding myself on having tracked you down in a masterful manner, and arrive, only to find that you know I was following the clues you left. And I thought you were without brains, if you'll excuse my saying so!"

"Most people in London are of the same opinion as yourself," drawled Kingston. "Needless to say, my foppish manners are only a blind. Perhaps you would like to hear an explanation of my seemingly strange conduct?"

"I should, Mr. Kingston, very much," replied Carson Gray.

He saw now that the man before him was a very clever one indeed—quite the opposite to what he appeared. Gray was getting interested, for he could tell that he had no criminal to deal with here.

"You will regard what I am about to tell you as strictly confidential, of course?" said Kingston, looking at the other keenly.

"Of course," agreed Carson Gray. "What you tell me, Mr. Kingston, will go no further. I think you can rely on my discretion."

"I will tell you, anyway," replied the other.

Frank Kingston had decided to tell the detective everything, right from the very beginning. He felt he could rely on Gray to keep what he heard to himself, and, in an emergency, his assistance might prove invaluable. Gray would be able to give Kingston many hints connected with London and the police, which the latter had had no opportunity of finding out for himself.

In quite different tones now, Kingston told his companion all the facts concerning the Brotherhood. How he had been an exile on the Iron Island; how he had escaped, with Dolores' aid; and how he had carried on his campaign. He reserved nothing, even telling Gray how he had treated the various Inner Councillors and to what splendid advantage Dolores and Fraser had assisted him in his good work.

"As well as the matter being a personal one," he concluded, "I am wiping out the Brotherhood for the good of the community at large. I feel it my duty to do so, and to punish every member according to his crime. The police, if they knew everything, would treat them all alike, which would, in some cases—such as that of Sir Robert Gissing—be rank injustice. No, Mr. Gray; I take a keen pleasure in fighting the scoundrelly society with my own hands. It gives me something to do—something to keep the blood coursing through my veins. You are the only outsider I have told the facts to, and I feel sure you will agree with me that I am doing that which is right."

Carson Gray took a deep breath. Kingston's narrative had worked him up considerably, and he was looking at the one-time exile with frank admiration in his eyes. The enormous power of the man could be felt at that moment, and Gray realised the full enormity of the wrong which had been

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NEXT

"THE TURNCOAT OF THE FOURTH"

Another Splendid, Long, Complete

done him. He realised, too, that a better way of punishing his enemies could not have been discovered.

"Agree with you, Mr. Kingston?" he cried heartily. "I not only agree with you, but I will give you a hand at any moment you are in need. I would let any case I happened to be on fall to the ground rather than miss the opportunity of assisting you. This Brotherhood must be a marvellous organisation, for I, with all my experience, have never even heard of it."

"Yet it is the largest society in the world," answered Kingston. "I am glad I have told you everything, Gray, for, as I said, the matter is one of public duty now. My campaign will go on unaltered, but, in an emergency, I shall have somebody to rely on—somebody who will give willing assistance."

"Would it not be better to have the protection and help of the police?" asked Carson Gray. "Somehow, Kingston, I admire you as I do no other man. The story you have told me is both wonderful and extraordinary. I believe every word of it—every word you have uttered. Something seems to tell me that it is the truth—something that I cannot define. It's not an hour since I entered this room, yet your whole personality has, to me, undergone a vast change. I used to think you a fool, now, having heard your story, I can only hope that some day I may be half as clever as yourself!"

The detective was absolutely enthusiastic, and his admiration for Kingston would not be hidden. Who, knowing all, would not admire that wonderful man; the man who was pitting himself against a thousand—who was, slowly but surely, wrecking the greatest criminal organisation in the world?

"Come, come, Gray!" he said. "I am not so marvellous as all that. The Iron Island has made me what I am, and sometimes, now it is all over, I feel glad I spent that eight years on its shores. The Brotherhood of Iron, in marooning me there, sealed its own doom. It is the irony of fate that I should be the man destined to do this work."

"A better man would be impossible to find," declared Carson Gray.

"You said, just now, something about the police. To take them into my confidence as well as yourself would be giving the whole game away. All the fun would be gone, for the authorities would pounce down on the Brotherhood at once."

"Of course," agreed the detective. "I should certainly never advise you to tell Scotland Yard in general, but there is another way. A certain gentleman I am very intimate with could be told the story in the strictest confidence—unofficially—and when he had heard all he would not wish to take the job out of your hands, Kingston. I am sure of that, and you would feel that the authorities were on your side although, as a matter of fact, the official police would know no more about you than they do now. Don't you see the force of my argument?"

For over half an hour the two men sat talking the matter over, and finally agreed to do as Carson Gray suggested. Nothing but good could ever come of it. The matter was not being made public, for although two comparative outsiders were to share Kingston's secret, they would both be ready and willing to give assistance whenever necessary without asking a single awkward question.

"He is straightforwardness itself," declared the detective, rising. "You will find that he will keep your secret as solemnly and sacredly as I shall myself. Your work is a magnificent undertaking, yet you will go unrewarded."

"No, Gray, you are wrong there. My reward will be as great as I could wish for. I shall know that the men I expel from the Brotherhood are no longer able to prey upon their fellow-creatures as they are doing now. That in itself will be a great reward for my labours."

Out in the hall Carson came face to face with Tim Curtis. The lad was looking a different being now, attired in page-boy's uniform, and with his hair dyed to a dark brown. Previously it had been light, and the alteration it made to Tim's appearance was surprising. He gazed at the detective half in surprise and half in fear.

"Lummy!" he ejaculated.

"It's all right, Tim!" Kingston reassured him. "Mr. Gray is acquainted with everything, and is going to help us in the work against the Brotherhood."

Tim looked relieved.

"I thought 'e was agin us, sir," he grinned. "My, I never thought I'd work for you, Mister Gray. I've allus wanted to 'ave a 'tec for a master—"

"You will find, Tim," smiled Carson Gray, "that Mr. Kingston is a much cleverer detective than myself, for, no matter what you say, he is a detective, although working in private."

"Before leaving for Scotland Yard," exclaimed Kingston a moment later, as they stood in the corridor outside, "I should like to introduce you to Miss O'Brien. She has

helped me wonderfully in my work, and deserves by far the greater amount of credit."

"I should be delighted to make her acquaintance," declared Gray.

And when, fifteen minutes later, the two took their departure, the detective was greatly impressed by Dolores' thoughtful concern, and genuine interest in Kingston's work.

"By Jove!" he said, as they walked down the Strand. "Miss O'Brien is quite different to what I expected. I had no idea she was such a pretty girl, Kingston. But she is so womanly, so thoughtful and considerate. I can well imagine her being a valuable ally!"

"Without her aid I should now have been dead," said his companion quietly, "and the Brotherhood of Iron would have been stronger than ever, with no one to work against it. You can judge, Gray, how much I owe her."

They travelled to Scotland Yard by hansom and went straight to the Criminal Investigation Department. After a few minutes waiting a detective escorted them to a private apartment—the study of the high official they had come to see.

The interview was a long one, for it was well over an hour before the visitors rose to depart.

"Then it is settled?" exclaimed Carson Gray.

"As far as I am concerned, yes," replied the other. "I can quite confidently leave the matter in Mr. Kingston's able hands. I agree with you fully, Mr. Gray. The affair is one which had better not be interfered with. I am powerless, anyway, for, officially, I know nothing. Mr. Kingston has proved quite conclusively that he is capable of dealing with the Brotherhood. The work he has already accomplished in so little time is magnificent, and in any emergency he can always rely on police assistance."

"That is very good of you!" exclaimed Kingston. "I think, however, that in most cases I can manage for myself. With Mr. Gray here to give an extra hand, and my own assistants, I am confident we shall prove more than a match for the Brotherhood of Iron."

The high official wrote a few words on the back of a card, blotted it, and handed it to Kingston.

"It will be very useful," he said. "If, at any time, you find yourself stopped by the police, or want police assistance at a moment's notice, just show any constable this little card. You will find the effect really surprising."

Kingston took the slip of pasteboard.

"Are these initials and few words sufficient—"

"Quite sufficient. Any policeman in the United Kingdom will not dare to disobey you in the face of that. I am glad you have told me your story, Mr. Kingston, for it gives me the greatest pleasure in the world to extend to you all the help I can."

"Well," laughed Kingston, "with both private and official detectives on my side there does not seem much chance for the members of the Inner Council. Several have already been dealt with, but the bulk remain free and unsuspecting. The battle will be fast and furious now, and for the good of my fellow-countrymen and for my own pleasure I will exert every ounce of energy within me for the good cause."

"And the next man will be—"

"Dr. Charles Anderson," replied Kingston grimly. "I ought by right to be on his trail at this very moment. Fraser is even now seeking out information."

"It is incredible to suppose that Dr. Anderson is a member of this terrible Brotherhood!" exclaimed the high official. "I have known him for years as a distinguished specialist, and have always looked upon him as a clever and upright member of the medical profession."

"Nevertheless, he is at present engaged upon a particularly revolting murder—the climax may arrive within the next two days. It is imperative, therefore, that I should be off at once."

"You mean to save Sir Christopher Rowe's life?"

"I shall if it is within the power of human possibility. In this work I spend quite half my time in disguise, changing one almost immediately for another. Really, at times, I almost forget what it is like to be myself."

And when Kingston took his departure for the Hotel Cyril a few minutes later, he left behind him the two cleverest detectives in England; but who, without any hesitation, declared their own powers and ingenuity to be altogether inferior to those possessed by this most remarkably singular individual.

At Dead of Night.

Dolores was quite in agreement with Kingston that it had been a wise plan to reveal everything to the high official at Scotland Yard and to Carson Gray. Kingston could continue his work just the same, and have the satisfaction of knowing that in an emergency there were friends ready and willing to assist.

"Yes, Dolores, I am glad the matter is done with," remarked Frank Kingston, as he stretched his feet out to the cheerful blaze of the fire—they were both sitting in Dolores' drawing-room that same afternoon. "I have just been talking to Fraser, who has been out making inquiries."

"You mean concerning Anderson and his patient?" asked Dolores interestedly. She looked very beautiful just now, attired in the latest of fashions, and her old self again. She had been so long disguised as "Miss Beck" that it was a great relief to put aside all powder and paint.

"Exactly!" replied Kingston. "As far as I can make out, the case stands like this at present: Sir Christopher Rowe's age is about eighty-three, and he is an infirm invalid, unable to leave his room. He lives quite alone, except for an old butler, at Northgate Towers, near Esher. The house stands by itself, and has been the seat of the Rowe's for centuries. To-day, so Crawford says, Anderson has gone down, and will remain until the job is over. Sir Christopher regards him as his best friend, and will be delighted to have the doctor by his side."

"Then, if the old gentleman's life is to be saved," said Dolores, "you will have to act immediately?"

"Immediately, Dolores. I intend taking the first step to-night. I have no pre-arranged plan, but am just going down to Esher to see how the land lies. I don't know yet what I shall do, but you may be sure I shall not waste my time."

"You will not run into danger, will you?" she asked anxiously. "For if once Anderson suspected your presence he would have no hesitation in keeping your mouth shut by killing you."

"You are right, Dolores. The precious doctor, in spite of his reputation for gentleness, and his pleasant manners, is as cold-blooded as Don Sebastian himself. He would extend no mercy to an enemy."

"When do you propose going, Mr. Kingston?"

"Well, as the Towers is quite by itself, I suppose it would be safe to arrive about ten or half-past. Nobody would be about at that time."

"You are going alone?"

"I shall travel to within a mile of the house in the car, and instruct Fraser to pass along the same road two hours later to pick me up. I cannot say what I shall do, for I do not know myself yet."

Kingston had no idea as to how Anderson proposed killing the old invalid, but as he was the medical man—and a renowned one—there would be no difficulty with the certificate. When the nephew arrived, his uncle would be buried, and the considerable fortune in Anderson's hands; the bulk of it passing eventually into the coffers of the Brotherhood of Iron.

It was in Kingston's hands now, whether Sir Christopher lived or died. He could not accuse Anderson openly, because there was not a single proof. His intention was to obtain them as soon as possible, save Sir Christopher's life, and expose his would-be murderer to the world, without appearing himself at all.

The time was nearly half-past nine when Kingston's motor-car swung into the Strand with Fraser at the wheel. Among all the thousands of lights the state of the weather was difficult to decide, beyond the fact that it was not raining.

Fraser drove straight to Putney, over the heath, through Kingston-upon-Thames, to Esher. Northgate Towers stood quite by itself a mile from the main road. At the spot where the by-road branched off Fraser pulled up.

"Come straight back in two hours, Fraser," directed his master. "I expect I shall be here, but if not, go away again for another hour. The car must not stand about in the road."

"It would attract attention, sir, wouldn't it?" said Fraser, as he slipped his clutch in and sent the big landaulette smoothly forward. Two minutes later Kingston was standing in the road alone. The darkness was intense, and a cold, damp mist gave promise of rain to come.

Without delay Kingston turned down the lane, and stepped out briskly. Despite the gloomy surroundings and the uncertainty of his mission, he was really enjoying himself. He was on the trail, hotfoot after the enemy, and to Kingston that was genuine pleasure.

Although he denied the suggestion, it was quite true that he was, in a sense, a detective; a detective who was doing his work for the mere pleasure of doing it. He got no reward, except the personal satisfaction of knowing that he had rendered the country a public service.

The only other dwelling between the main road and the Towers was a tiny labourer's cottage, and its inmates had been abed long since. To Kingston the walk was but a few steps. With that peculiar gait of his he covered the ground in a surprisingly little time. He nearly walked right past the house in the darkness, for it was surrounded by trees and evergreens, and the gates, standing back from the road, were

dingy and weather-beaten. Evidently Sir Christopher was a bit of a miser.

No lights showed anywhere, and for a moment Kingston paused. What should he do? A few yards from the main gate could be seen a little wicket-gate, evidently leading into a shrubbery. Without hesitation, Kingston quietly vaulted over and made his way between the trees.

It was amazing how he walked so silently; anybody standing twenty yards away would have been unaware of his presence. The shrubbery was a long one, and it extended right down the left side of the garden to an orchard at the rear.

An ordinary man would hardly have seen which way to go, for the darkness under the trees was almost absolute. Kingston's eyesight, however, was wonderful, and he had no difficulty at all in finding his way. Not that he could see in the dark; no man can do that. But what an ordinary man would call darkness, Kingston would consider only partial darkness.

"Ah!"

He could see the back of the house now, and it extended for quite a long way. The building was one of those very old mansions, low and straggling, with jutting gables and ivy-covered turrets. The Rowe's had always taken a pride in their old home, which was one of the few really ancient, well-preserved relics of the Middle Ages.

From one of the long, slanting upper windows a soft light gleamed, and below it, almost on the ground floor, a red blind, brightly illuminated, clearly showed that either Anderson or the butler were still up.

Kingston stood there among the trees, thinking, wondering what was going on within that grim-looking building. The cold wind seemed to have no effect on him. It cut bitterly through the trees, causing the twigs to wave about like live things.

Certainly not an inviting position, or inviting surroundings. To the average man the experience would have been unpleasant, for the night was dismal, the loneliness complete. This man, however, was too busy with his thoughts to worry about his surroundings. He was thinking what to do next.

"I certainly shall not go away again," he told himself. "Having seen the building and those lighted windows, my sole desire now is to explore the interior. And, by Jove, if it's at all possible, I mean to do it. The question is, how and where to get in?"

Before he could decide that he would have to examine the windows, etc., from closer quarters. Before him, separated by a low hedge, was what had at one time been a lawn. Of late years it had been allowed to go wild, and the grass was long and untidy.

With a light spring Kingston was over the hedge. He ran swiftly across the grass until he came to a gravel path. On this he walked particularly silently, for he had taken the precaution to don rubber-soled boots before starting out. The flower-beds under the windows were smothered in weeds and rotten vegetation. After Sir Christopher had been confined to the house he had let everything outside go to ruin.

The window immediately in front of Kingston was a large one, with wooden shutters. These latter were rotten, and in disrepair, both sagging considerably. Kingston soon had them open, making no noise whatever in the operation.

The window itself proved child's play to open, for it was fitted with one of those antiquated old catches which one sees very often in country houses and cottages. Evidently the inmates of Northgate Towers feared no visit from burglars.

"Well, I'm in," thought Kingston, as he stepped into the darkness of the room; "and unless I'm very careful I shall get myself into a mess. I've got unscrupulous men to deal with, so I shall have to keep my wits about me. If possible, however, I intend to find out by what foul means Anderson reckons to kill the old gentleman. Once I get to know that I shall be able to lay my plans accordingly. As it is, I'm in the dark—in more senses than one, too."

He crept slowly across the room, knowing not what was before him. The light which entered the window was so slight as to be useless. By what he could feel, he was in a well-furnished room, for his feet sank softly into the depths of a rich carpet, while every now and again he would come across a table and a chair.

It was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution, for one slip might mean discovery, and although he could easily escape, the mischief would be done, for Anderson would be strictly on his guard afterwards, and probably hasten his plans to their climax.

At last the opposite wall was reached, and by that time Kingston's eyes had become accustomed to the darkness. He could now faintly distinguish certain objects in the room.

The door was the next thing to find, and for a moment he stood still, looking about him searchingly. Finally he made out, in contrast to the light wallpaper of the apartment, a dark patch, which was evidently the portal.

"By Jove!" he thought, with a smile. "I'd no idea it

was such a task to find one's way about in a strange house. It's a new experience, anyhow."

He found the door, opened it, and passed out of the room. Outside the light was stronger, and he saw he was in a long, broad corridor. Three windows admitted the light, and each was draped with long, heavy curtains.

Kingston wasn't quite certain as to which way to turn, for the exact position of the room with the red blind was a question. The next moment, before he could decide either way, he found himself standing rigid and alert, listening intently. His every nerve was on the stretch, and he looked up the corridor expectantly.

Around the bend had come the sound of a footfall. It was ever so faint, but none the less audible. Quite coolly Kingston stepped noiselessly to one of the windows, and concealed himself behind the curtains. He felt no excitement whatever, only interest and curiosity. Who was it approaching? Anderson?

Kingston watched from behind a fold expectantly. He was anticipating the appearance of a man, a natural human being, and even his iron nerve was startled for a moment at the apparition which suddenly came before his eyes. It was so unexpected, so unusual, and so ghastly, that for a second he started back in amazement.

The Secret Passage.

For it was no man—it was an object which would have sent the average person white with fear and terror—a spirit from another world—a horrible, nightmare-like apparition, awful to behold.

At the bottom of the corridor another passage ran at right angles, and it was across this broad opening that the thing walked. It appeared to be unreal, intangible, and glided along as silently as a shadow. Its head was that of a skeleton, with the ghastly, staring eyes and grinning teeth. Across its shoulders a white, filmy substance revealed the bony outline, and for a moment the silent onlooker was taken aback.

But only for a moment. In a flash the whole terrible truth dawned upon him, and the instant the thing vanished from sight he was galvanised into action.

Pausing for a moment to get his revolver ready, he took half a dozen swift steps forward, arriving at the corner about ten seconds after the object had passed from sight. Slowly, cautiously, he crept round the bend—then received another surprise.

The thing had vanished—vanished utterly and completely. The long corridor before him was absolutely clear and deserted. At the far end a large window faced him, and the passage was straight, with no openings or recesses. Where had the apparition disappeared to?

Kingston's thoughts were many. He had realised everything in an instant, and knew that Sir Christopher Rowe's life hung on a thread—knew that the old man was to be murdered that very night. And how did he know this? It was very simple.

He was convinced the "ghost" was none other than Anderson or the butler, and the way in which the murder was to be carried out revealed itself in an instant. Sir Christopher's heart was weak, and his nerves weaker—any sudden shock would mean heart failure—and Kingston saw that Anderson relied on the fright the old gentleman would receive to finish him off.

"It will do it, too!" thought Kingston grimly. "With the old chap's nerves in such a state as they are he will be scared to death when he sees that ghastly object. But Anderson must be stopped. How? In a moment it will be too late."

These thoughts had not occupied more than a tenth part of a second. Kingston searched swiftly for the opening of a secret panel, but the task was hopeless. He was quite sure that when the phantom had disappeared so swiftly he had entered a secret passage—presumably one which led to Sir Christopher's bed-room.

It was a matter of life and death. It was impossible to follow, so there was only one thing to do—only one way to bring back that awful object. Kingston deliberately hammered the panelling of the corridor with his revolver-butt. The blows were no light ones, and must have been heard.

"That's all I can do," thought Kingston. "If Anderson doesn't come back now, I'm afraid I've had my trouble for nothing. But he is hastening the end early—there is over a week yet. And the cunning! Jove, but Anderson doesn't mean to leave anything to chance! Although he is murdering his patient, no matter how many doctors examined the body afterwards, they would only state that the old fellow had died from heart failure, which had been expected for some time."

Kingston stood there waiting, wondering if his action would bring any result. He was standing in deep shadow against

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the end window, with the heavy curtain completely hiding his figure.

Suddenly he held his breath. A hurried footstep had sounded near him, followed by a sharp click. One of the panels of the opposite wall slid back and revealed a dark cavity. Making a deal of noise now, the "ghost" blundered into the corridor.

"Simpson!" he called sharply. "Simpson! Confound the man, it must have been he who knocked! Yet I left him in the smoking-room. What on earth can he have been doing! Simpson!"

Anderson, seeming, at close quarters, solid enough, hurried angrily down the corridor. The instant his back was turned Kingston slipped noiselessly out of his hiding-place and stepped across the passage. The panel still stood open, revealing a dark cavity beyond.

Without hesitating to think of the risk, Kingston stepped into the secret passage, at the same time producing a tiny electric torch, which, although small, gave a surprisingly brilliant light. He directed the shaft on to the back of the panel, snapped it to, and jammed a wooden match in the catch, making entrance from the corridor outside impossible.

"Now," he thought, "to find out where the old gentleman's room is. It's touch and go, but, by Jove, now I am here I don't mean to go away empty-handed!"

He flashed his light ahead, and saw in front a flight of stairs. They were solid and well-preserved, though coated with the dust of years. Numerous footmarks proved conclusively that he was on the right track. As silently as a shadow Kingston made his way upwards. The flight was not a long one, for after ascending about twenty stairs, he saw before him a long passage, with dark panelling on either side.

Calculating the distance to the end, where the passage evidently gave an abrupt turn, he switched off the light, deeming it safer to walk in the darkness. He stood for a moment listening, but everything was as silent as the grave itself, and in that musty passage, surrounded by utter darkness, the experience was far from pleasant.

Not that this applied to Frank Kingston. He, as a matter of fact, was enjoying himself. The adventure had a spice of danger and novelty about it which he just liked. He knew that the old house was probably honeycombed with secret passages, and that either Anderson or Simpson, the butler, might appear at any moment from some unexpected quarter.

It did not worry him, however, for he was more than a match for the two of them. He reached the corner without adventure, and found that the passage ended abruptly in a flight of stairs similar to those he had ascended. These, however, led downwards. The thick dust lying undisturbed clearly showed that this portion of the passage, at any rate, was never used. Nevertheless, for curiosity's sake, Kingston continued his way. In the darkness he had not noticed where the footsteps had terminated.

At the bottom of the stairs Kingston paused momentarily, and a tiny gleam came into his eyes. Not five yards in front of him a tiny beam of light could be seen, while quite distinctly the sound of voices engaged in conversation struck Kingston's ears.

"A bit of luck," he told himself. "I've hit on the smoking-room, and the precious pair are evidently in there together."

Noiselessly he crept along to the spot where a crack in the panelling allowed the light from the room beyond to enter the passage. The crack was narrow, and Kingston could only see a small portion of the smoking-room. And standing in that portion was Anderson, his ghastly disguise half removed. He was looking angry and puzzled.

"If you didn't do it, who did?" were the first words Kingston heard. "You say you've been in this room all the time. Haven't you left it for anything?"

"Sure, sir!" answered the butler, a common member of the Brotherhood. "I ain't heard any knocks myself, an' it's fair puzzlin' as to who did it."

"Somebody must have done it, Simpson. It couldn't have done itself. There is practically no wind, and the noise I heard was certainly not that of a banging door. It sounded exactly as if somebody in the corridor had knocked twice in quick succession on the panelling with a walking-stick, or something equally as hard."

"It has upset things, ain't it, sir?"

"It has upset my plans considerably, Simpson, for I certainly shall not make the attempt now until I have searched the house. Somebody has entered—that I am certain of. Of course, there is a chance it is a dog or a cat— Ah, confound it, the old fellow's awakened!"

An old-fashioned, wire-operated bell had started jangling in the room, and Anderson impatiently divested himself of the remaining "phantom" clothing. However absurd they looked in the bright lamplight, there was no denying they formed a ghastly and terrifying spectacle in the darkness. In



Kingston stepped behind a curtain as he heard a light footstep approaching. The next second even his iron ~~rod~~ was shaken. (See page 22.)

a minute the doctor was his usual kindly-looking self, attired in immaculate frock-coat and gold-rimmed glasses. He looked every inch a gentleman, and it was not surprising that Sir Christopher trusted him as such.

"I shall have to hurry," he exclaimed. "Rowe is in darkness, and it is time he had his medicine. Confounded nuisance, this interruption! The work might have been over and done with by now."

"You won't do it to-night at all, then, sir?"

"No, Simpson; it's impossible. To-morrow night, however, I shall give him a sleeping draught, and appear just when the effect has worn off and he is awaking, half dazed. And I think, after all, that it had better be at midnight. If I appear as his clock is striking twelve the deception will be all the more realistic. So perhaps it is as well I didn't make the attempt to-night."

The doctor hurried out of the room and banged the door. Kingston, in the passage outside, was smiling quietly to himself. The game was playing into his hands nicely. The murderers never guessed that their own weapons, as it were, were being used against them.

As silently as a kitten the eavesdropper crept away and mounted the stair. He used his torch again now, examining

the footprints in the dust. Just here his own were the only ones recently made, but a little further along the upper passage a whole trail of them ended abruptly. Kingston looked at the panelling carefully.

"This must be Sir Christopher's room," thought Kingston. "Ah, yes, there's the opening panel!" as he saw a tiny catch smothered in dust and grime. He extinguished his light and waited, standing perfectly still, listening intently.

Suddenly the absolute silence was broken by a cough, followed by the sound of somebody putting coal on the fire. Evidently Dr. Anderson had not entered the room yet. He did so a moment later, however, for a door opened, and at the same time a little hole in the panelling showed light.

Kingston applied his eye to it, and found he commanded a clear view of the interior of the room. Just within the range of his vision to the left sat the aged baronet. He was a bent old man, with pure white whiskers and moustache, and reclined on an easy-chair before a rather dull fire. He was fully dressed, and wore a dressing-gown over his clothing.

"Ah, doctor," he said, in a wheezy voice, "I'm glad you've come. It's getting about bed-time, isn't it?"

"Just about, Sir Christopher. As you were asleep, though, I thought it a pity to awaken you. Would you care to look

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NEXT THURSDAY.

"THE TURNGOAT OF THE FOURTH."

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at the evening paper before you get undressed? The boy brought it an hour ago."

"Ah, yes, doctor. I had forgotten that. Where is it?"

Despite his age and infirmity the baronet still took an active interest in everyday affairs, even to the length of reading the London evening papers. He hated his bed, for he had an idea that it made his case look more serious. For this reason he rose early and retired late, though he never left his own room.

Kingston, after another moment, realized that he was only taking unnecessary risks by remaining in the Towers. He had gained invaluable information during his short stay, and as he walked back along the passage his keen brain was busily thinking of the next move.

He took the match out of the panel catch, and, after examining the mechanism for a moment, snapped the door to quietly. To get back to the window was the work of a few seconds, for once Kingston had gone over certain ground he never forgot his way.

With a soft laugh he ran across the lawn, re-entered the shrubbery, and again found himself on the public road—safe, unsuspected, and with his object more than attained.

"Jove," he told himself, "I never expected to come away with full information as to when the murder was to be committed! Now I know for certain, however, I can arrange everything to fit in."

During his wait for Fraser he stamped up and down the road to keep his blood in circulation. He had not been so long as he expected, so had to wait patiently for Fraser's return. His thoughts were busy, and the time passed rapidly. Several other cars whizzed along the road before his own drove up.

"Finished sooner than I anticipated, Fraser," said Kingston, as he clambered into the tonneau. "I've succeeded in my object splendidly, and know all friend Anderson's plans."

"And he don't know you've bin 'er heard it all, sir?"

"Never dreams it, Fraser. But I'll tell you everything when we get home; it won't do to stop here. It is getting late, so let her rip for all she's worth till we get to the Cyril. To-morrow looks like being a strenuous day, and I intend having a good night's rest as a preliminary."

Mr. Archibald Willis.

What Frank Kingston considered a good night's rest, an ordinary individual would call a very poor one. Despite the fact that he did not slip between the sheets until nearly two o'clock, he was in the middle of his breakfast by eight the next morning.

The first thing he did after completing the repast was to cross the corridor and hand his card to Dolores' French maid, Louise, and seek an interview.

Dolores was looking in the best of health and spirits that morning, and was delighted to see Kingston, for she knew he had come to let her know the latest news. Nor was she disappointed, for he told her everything—everything that had happened the night before.

"But even now I don't see how you are going to complete your task, Mr. Kingston," she said. "For, after all, one of your main objects is to encompass the ruin of Dr. Anderson."

"Precisely. And by the time I have done, Dolores, the scoundrel will be richly rewarded for his sins. But I must not forget Sir Christopher. I honestly believe, placed in a first class doctor's hands, that the old chap will live on for another ten years. He is not much over eighty, and Anderson has been dosing him with concoctions which do him far more harm than good."

"But how are you going to save him to-night? The time is so terribly limited!" exclaimed Dolores, looking at her companion with her beautiful eyes alight with interest and inquiry. "What can you do in one short day? Do you mean to put the doctor off in some way—make him postpone his plan for a day or two?"

"No, Dolores, I am going to interfere with nothing. But if, by a few minutes after midnight to-night, Anderson has scored, then I will retire from the fight a beaten man."

Dolores smiled.

"You would not say that unless you were certain of success, Mr. Kingston," she exclaimed. "I am longing to hear what you are going to do. It seems inquisitive, I know—"

"Inquisitive?" cried Kingston. "Why, you know, Dolores, that I wouldn't carry out a plan without letting you know beforehand what it was. Everything is capable of improvement, and I value your suggestions more than anybody's. A woman's wit has got many a man out of a tight corner."

Kingston told her his plans for the day and for the foiling of Dr. Anderson's foul plot. When he had done she sat for a moment thinking. Then she looked at him and smiled.

"There are no improvements to suggest," she said. "The

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manner in which you are going to attain your end is, I think, the only possible way. It is more than risky, too. If Anderson is suspicious while you are in the house he will have no hesitation in killing you."

"If the unlikely event did occur, Dolores, I am afraid Anderson would come off decidedly second best in a tussle. Without boasting, I think I may say I am a match for two ordinary men. The Iron Island has given me this strength, and I am using it against the enemies of honesty. Until the whole Brotherhood is wiped out I shall not be contented. But, to return to the point, there is very little likelihood of Anderson smelling a rat. You may be sure I shall give him no opportunity of discovering my identity."

"And the first thing you do is to interview Carson Gray, the detective?"

"The very first thing, Dolores. And I am afraid I must be going. Don't worry at all, for, in comparison to the Night Hawk job, this one is practically safe. In all probability I shall call to-morrow morning about this time, and tell you how the affair ended. I don't anticipate any hitch, but there is always a chance of one."

Soon after Kingston was seated in a taxi, being bowled swiftly to Great Portland Street. He found the well-known detective at home, and was warmly welcomed. The two understood one another perfectly by now, and Carson Gray, although clever himself, knew, and admitted, that Kingston was the better man.

"I've come, Gray, because I want your assistance," drawled Kingston, as he sat down before the fire. "You see, I am taking you at your word—"

"My dear chap, I'm delighted to be of service to you!" cried Carson Gray. "It's a pleasure I seldom get to work with a man such as yourself."

"Really, Gray, I cannot allow you to pay me compliments," smiled the visitor. "I have come to ask you to do something I cannot do myself—namely, to run round and interview Messrs. Harris and Harris, the solicitors who are acting for Sir Christopher Rowe. My taxi is at your service outside."

Carson Gray looked surprised.

"To interview Sir Christopher's solicitor?" he said. "What matter is it you want me to discuss? I know Messrs. Harris and Harris well; they are a very old-established firm, and, I think, thoroughly respectable."

"It is a very simple matter. All I want you to do is to get them to show you a copy of Sir Christopher's will, which document is in their hands."

And Kingston explained his requirements fully. The detective agreed to do as Kingston wanted, and hurried down to the waiting taxi. He knew he could rely on the solicitors granting his request, for he had often had dealings with them previously. In less than half an hour he was back in his own consulting-room, where his visitor waited.

"You have been successful?" asked Kingston.

"Quite. I saw the younger Mr. Harris, and he let me see the will without question. Gad, Kingston, but Anderson is playing for no low stakes! The fortune is even bigger than I supposed. And to think he is such a scoundrel!"

"I am afraid thinking is of little use," smiled Kingston. "It is action now—brisk action—or Sir Christopher Rowe dies to-night at twelve."

The two men remained talking together for a further twenty minutes, then Kingston rose to go, all his plans being settled. Carson Gray wrung his hand warmly.

"You are going down to Esher now?"

"At once—as soon as ever I can get disguised. I want to be back in London before evening to meet you. Your help to-night is imperative. I can absolutely count on you?"

"Absolutely, Kingston. I am willing and eager to assist you. The only part I object to is my getting all the credit for the job. It is your planning, every bit. I shall come in merely at the finish, after all the work is done."

"You must get the credit for it; I cannot be brought into the business at all. The Brotherhood must think you know nothing of them—nothing whatever. Now, I really shall have to say good-bye. There is much to accomplish, and not overmuch time at our disposal."

In another minute Kingston was bound en route for the Cyril, and in his hand he carried a parcel. He met Tim as he was passing through into his own room at the hotel.

"Hallo, Tim. Quite settled down now, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Only the work's too easy—there ain't nothin' to do," said the lad. "When am I goin' to 'elp you, sir? Ain't there nothin' I could do agin the Brother'ood?"

"I dare say there will be plenty of work later on, Tim. Just now, though, there's nothing I could give you at all. Thanks to your information, I think Dr. Anderson will get a little surprise to-night. Don't look disappointed, young 'un, there will be plenty more opportunities."

"I 'ope they won't be long, sir, 'cos I'm just dyin' to do somethin' excitin'!"

Kingston smiled at Tim's eagerness, and passed on. At the expiration of thirty minutes he himself had vanished, and in his stead stood a middle-aged man in rather dingy frock-coat and silk hat. He looked, as he intended he should, like a solicitor's clerk. The parcel, being undone, revealed a neat black bag, with the initials "H. & H." stamped on its side.

"I think that's all," thought Kingston, surveying himself critically in the glass. "If Anderson sees any likeness in my present self to that naive young fool, Frank Kingston, I shall be very considerably surprised."

He walked down the wide staircase, and nobody took the slightest notice of him. Reaching the street, he took a bus for Waterloo Station, arriving at his destination in nice time to catch his train.

It was getting on towards one o'clock as he stepped out of the train at Esher, and an ordinary four-wheeler took him lumbering to Northgate Towers. As he turned in at the gate he took a good look round, his keen eyes taking in every item of the surroundings.

Simpson, the butler, was at the door before Kingston had time to knock, and looked at the visitor in suspicious curiosity as he clambered clumsily to the ground.

"Don't go, my man," said Kingston in a high, asthmatic voice to the cabby. "I shall require your carriage to return to the station very shortly."

He grasped his bag a little more tightly, and mounted the wide steps which led to the imposing front door, Simpson surveying him meanwhile with no inviting looks. Kingston stood for a moment fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, finally producing a business card. He looked at it closely, as though short-sighted, then handed it to the waiting butler.

"Ah—er—good-morning," he said, looking at Simpson over the top of his glasses. "Be good enough to take this card to Sir Christopher. My name is Mr. Archibald Willis, and I represent Messrs. Harris & Harris, solicitors. The business I have called upon is most urgent, so kindly make all the haste you can."

"Will you please step inside, sir?" said the butler respectfully, although a momentary flash of alarm had entered his countenance.

"Ah—er—quite so!" replied Mr. Archibald Willis. "Thank you—thank you!"

He stepped gingerly into the hall, and followed Simpson into one of the reception-rooms. A small fire burned in the grate, causing the room to be only partially heated.

"I sha'n't be a minute, sir," Simpson hurried out, leaving the visitor sitting uneasily on the edge of a chair. The butler rushed up the stairs noiselessly, and on the first landing met Dr. Anderson, who had heard the arrival of the growler.

"Well," he said sharply, "who is it?"

"The lawyer's clerk, sir," answered Simpson, in a low voice. "Here's the card he landed in. Says his name's Archibald Willis."

Anderson glanced at it with a frown, and uttered a curse under his breath. His expression was one of alarm and anger, and he screwed the card up and threw it into a corner.

"Hang it," he exclaimed, "the fellow must have come about that nephew! He can't possibly see the old man. Stay here, Simpson; I will go and speak to him, and send him off."

The doctor walked slowly down the staircase, coughing gently on the way. As he entered the room into which Kingston had been shown, he was smiling in his best professional manner, looking every inch the staid, respectable, West End specialist he pretended to be.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr. Willis!" he cried genially, shaking hands heartily. "I'm afraid you've had your journey from London for nothing. It is most annoying, of course, but it cannot be helped."

"For nothing?" echoed Kingston. "Really, that's very awkward, sir. Surely I can see Sir Christopher for a few moments—just a few moments?"

"Not for one, Mr. Willis. I am his physician, and must tell you—greatly as I regret having to—that Sir Christopher is very much worse to-day."

"But the matter I have come on is of the utmost importance, sir," said Kingston, squinting over his spectacles excitedly, "and if there is any likelihood of the poor gentleman—er—well, expiring, it is absolutely necessary I should see him—absolutely necessary."

"I can only repeat, Mr. Willis, the impossibility of granting your request. As Sir Christopher's physician, I cannot allow him to be disturbed."

Kingston, acting his part to perfection, rose to his feet, and walked excitedly up and down, while Anderson stood politely, but firmly, before the door.

"I will let your firm know the earliest possible moment he can be interviewed," continued the doctor quietly. "That is the best I—"

"But I must see him to-day!" cried Kingston. "Good gracious, it is a matter of thousands of pounds! For your

own sake, doctor, alter your decision. I shall not keep Sir Christopher for many minutes. Pardon me, but you are Dr. Anderson, are you not?"

"That is my name, certainly; but, really, Mr. Willis, I must ask you to cease your requests for this interview."

"It will mean the loss of thousands if the old gentleman dies without signing the paper I have with me," muttered "Mr. Archibald Willis," in an excited voice. "Perhaps I can wait and see him later? Think of the money you will lose, doctor, think of the money you will lose!"

Dr. Anderson started. What was the man saying? The Inner Councillor had, up till this second, taken it for granted that the business was something concerning the nephew from Australia, of whom Sir Christopher must be kept in strict ignorance. Seemingly, however, there was some misunderstanding.

"I don't think I quite understand you, Mr. Willis," said the specialist quickly. "You mentioned something about my losing thousands of pounds?"

"Yes, sir, that's it," replied Kingston, chuckling inwardly at the alteration in Anderson's tone. "That's it exactly! If I do not get Sir Christopher's signed authority to sell all the shares in the Satara Diamond Mine to-morrow at the very latest, it will mean the loss of tens of thousands! Sir Christopher holds hundreds of shares in the mine, and in a couple of days they will be utterly worthless. How terribly unfortunate I cannot see him—how terribly unfortunate!"

Kingston raised his arms as if resigned to the inevitable, and sank into his chair, there fumbling with the handle of his black bag. He had enjoyed the conversation, knowing all the time Anderson's trend of thought. The alteration in his expression when he heard the real—or supposedly real—reason of Kingston's visit, was considerable. He realised, all of a sudden, that unless the lawyer's clerk did see Sir Christopher, and obtain the signed authority, it would mean that the loss would be his own.

Of course, Frank Kingston had planned it in this manner purposely, so that now, after utterly refusing the interview, the doctor was eager for it to take place—eager for "Archibald Willis" to see the old gentleman. He questioned the visitor closely, and the more he questioned, the more he decided he would have to let the man interview the baronet.

"The matter on which you have come is certainly very urgent," he said thoughtfully. "And it is something of a calamity that Sir Christopher is so ill at present. Is there no other possible way? Is it imperative that you should obtain this signature?"

"If I do not, Dr. Anderson, I am very much afraid there will be no hope of recovering the lost time. By to-morrow afternoon the shares will have become worthless. The information we have received is a secret, but reliable."

The tale was, of course, an invented one, but as there was no means of Anderson verifying Kingston's statement, there could hardly be a hitch. Sir Christopher really did possess a huge number of shares in the Satara Diamond Mine, but in reality they were firm and steady—perfectly safe and trustworthy.

"I have just left Sir Christopher!" exclaimed Anderson, a worried frown on his forehead, "and I really think it is impossible for you to see him. When I first saw you I had no idea the matter was so urgent. It certainly seems a pity. However, if you will wait a moment I will run up and see if the old gentleman is better; he is subject to sudden fits of weakness."

The specialist turned, and hurried up the stairs, leaving Frank Kingston perched on the edge of a chair, wearing a look of worried uneasiness on his features. He tapped his foot up and down for a moment, then produced a handkerchief, and commenced rubbing his spectacles. It was quite possible Simpson was watching him from some point unseen, and, anyhow, there was no sense in taking chances. For the present he was Mr. Archibald Willis, and would have to be that gentleman outwardly until his task was completed.

Anderson was soon back. He had not, of course, really been to his patient, but had stood for a minute on the top of the stairs thinking. He wore a smile now, and rubbed his hands together quietly.

"I have seen Sir Christopher," he exclaimed, "and was really surprised myself to see how much better he is. I am giving him some new medicine this week, and no doubt that accounts for the rapidity with which he has recovered."

"Then I can see him?" said Kingston, rising eagerly. "I can see him?"

"Taking into consideration the urgency of the matter, I think I can stretch a point for once, and grant you an interview. But it must be short. My patient's heart is very weak, and although he appears at times healthy and robust, he is, in reality, extremely weak, and any sudden excitement might mean heart failure."

"I shall complete my business with the greatest possible expedition," said Mr. Archibald Willis, rising and grasping his black bag. "If you will lead the way, sir, I will follow. I shall only keep Sir Christopher a few minutes. Needless to say, I am very pleased at this sudden change in your patient's condition, for, after all, the loss would have been yours rather than his."

He followed Anderson slowly up the stairs, acting so superbly that his companion never had the remotest suspicion that he was not all he professed to be.

This portion of the old house had been modernised, and looked quite light and cheerful, as Kingston walked along the landing. Further along, however, Anderson led the way into the ancient portion of the house. Sir Christopher was a man with old-fashioned ideas, and insisted on occupying a room in the oldest quarter of the mansion. The walls here were panelled in dark oak, and the doors as solid, almost, as those of strong rooms.

Anderson turned the handle gently, and motioned to Kingston to follow him in. The latter rose on tip-toe, and crept into the room. For a moment he stood inside, blinking, apparently seeing nothing, owing to his short-sightedness.

As a matter of fact, those wonderful eyes were taking note of every detail, and Kingston was memorising the positions of everything in the whole large room. A large bay window looked out upon the lawn and kitchen-gardens, but at present heavy curtains were drawn across them, making the room appear dark and shadowy.

Opposite the window, in a wide, open grate, a cheerful fire blazed and crackled, and before the fire, seated in a massive, old-fashioned easy-chair, was Sir Christopher Rowe. By his side, on a little table, lay a review; evidently he had been reading.

As the door opened, he turned slightly, and looked with surprise at the two men. His gaze rested on Kingston for a short time, then he glanced at Anderson inquiringly.

"Who is this gentleman?" he asked slowly.

"He is Mr. Archibald Willis, Sir Christopher," replied the doctor gravely, "and he belongs to the firm of Harris & Harris, solicitors. I thought I had better bring him straight up, as the matter upon which he has called is more than urgent."

The Interview.

Sir Christopher gave the visitor another searching glance.

"Harris & Harris?" he wheezed. "I have had no communication with my lawyers for a long time. For what reason do you pay me this visit, Mr.—er—Willis?"

"The matter is one which cropped up quite suddenly, Sir Christopher, necessitating an immediate interview with yourself."

Kingston opened his black bag and seated himself nervously against the little table. Anderson, with a genial, professional smile, left the room, for the business about to be discussed was nothing to do with him. The very second the door closed Kingston became active and alert.

The first thing he did was to jump to his feet and shift a screen round so that, in the unlikely event of Simpson being in the secret passage, the baronet and the little table would be hidden from view.

"No, don't move it!" began Sir Christopher.

"The draught, sir," answered Kingston. "You will find it far more comfortable with the screen where I have just placed it—far more comfortable. Now, these papers here; I want you to glance through them."

He bustled about quickly, placed the bag on the table, and produced a sheet of paper. The old man was looking at him in some surprise, for he was acting in a totally different manner to that which he had affected on entering.

"As Dr. Anderson just remarked, the matter I have called upon, sir, is most urgent," began the visitor, seating himself by the table; "most urgent, and unless it had been so, my employers would have hesitated before sending me down without advising you beforehand."

"Dear me, I trust it is nothing serious!"

"Not at present, Sir Christopher. It concerns your shares in the Satara Diamond Mine." And Kingston, while he talked, laid the sheet of paper before the baronet, motioning him to fix his spectacles.

Sir Christopher gazed at the other in surprise, for while he was performing this pantomime he was continuing his tale about the shares.

Kingston was doing this because he was practically certain that Anderson was outside the door listening, so it was necessary to keep up the pretence without a moment's interruption. The situation was decidedly novel, and Sir Christopher at first failed to grasp the meaning of Kingston's very strange behaviour.

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"Really, sir," he began, in an irritable wheeze, "I cannot understand—"

"You will in a moment, sir," answered Kingston quickly. "If you will kindly read this paper, everything will be clear." He laid his finger on the sheet significantly, and gazed at the old gentleman with piercing eyes. "You will see, at the bottom, the place where it is necessary for you to sign."

This last was for Anderson's benefit, and while the baronet, puzzled beyond measure, fixed his spectacles, Kingston talked on incessantly. Sir Christopher, despite his weakness and infirmity, was nevertheless in full possession of his senses, sharp and quick-witted. He saw immediately what Mr. Archibald Willis was driving at, and although he could not understand his strange actions, he picked up the paper and held it to the light. The words on it were typewritten and startling:

"Take no notice whatever of what I am saying; read on. I am speaking to you like this because Anderson is outside the door listening, and he must know nothing of this matter. You trust in him; you have made your will in his favour. But your confidence is misplaced; he is a scoundrel, and even now is plotting to encompass your death. Your nephew, Arthur Rowe, is alive; is on his way to England from Australia. Anderson means to kill you immediately, before you can alter your will. I know this, and have proof of it. My name is not Willis, and I am in disguise. Don't fail to heed this warning, and be prepared to receive me to-night, at 11.30. I shall enter this room by means of a secret panel."

Sir Christopher's hand clutched the paper convulsively, and he stared at Kingston as if in a dream. The latter was in the midst of a long explanation concerning the shares. He was watching the old man's face closely, taking note of the fast-changing expressions.

Sir Christopher endeavoured to rise to his feet, both surprise and anger expressed on his wrinkled countenance. But before he could utter a sound Kingston grasped him by the arm tightly.

"Every word on that document is true, Sir Christopher," he said tensely. "I have the absolute proof of it, and warn you that if you ignore it the result will be a terrible loss—a terrible loss which can never be made up."

The sentence had two meanings—one for Anderson, outside, and the other for Sir Christopher. The full significance of it impressed itself on the latter's mind. He sat back in his chair in bewildered amazement.

"But I have always trusted—" he began slowly.

"Quite so, sir. You have always trusted in them," interjected Kingston before it was too late. "But these shares will certainly be worthless unless you sell out to-morrow. If you will sign this authority I will immediately depart. I fear I am somewhat of a nuisance disturbing you when—"

"Not at all, Mr. Willis," said the baronet wheezily. "If you will reach me that pen I will sign the paper. I was under the impression that the Satara shares were perfectly safe. Dear me! One never knows what to do nowadays."

Although he spoke so calmly, it was plain to see he was greatly agitated, torn between two desires; whether to believe in this man—this utter stranger—or whether to call Anderson and have him thrown from the house. But somehow, although his faith in the doctor had been immovable, Kingston's eyes and manner forced him to alter his opinion. Something told him that his visitor was telling the truth.

So he wrote on the paper:

"I am bewildered, and cannot fully realise the extent of your statement. I will, however, await developments, and expect you to-night, as you say."

He laid the pen down, and handed the sheet to Kingston with a nod. The latter glanced through it swiftly.

"There you are, Mr. Willis; I think that's all you want."

"That's all, sir, thank you; that's all! Gracious, but the time is getting on! I shall have to hurry to the station to catch my train!"

Kingston rose to his feet, bustling about, arranging papers in his bag. All the time, however, he was looking at his companion seriously, wondering whether it would be wise to say a word.

Finally, he grasped his bag and made towards the door.

"Needless to say, Sir Christopher," he exclaimed, "I am gratified at the course you have decided to pursue. It is the best possible way out of the difficulty; the best possible way!"

"We shall see, Mr. Willis!" exclaimed the baronet.

"Yes, sir, we shall undoubtedly do that. Good-day, sir!"

"Good-day!"

Kingston set his bag down for a moment to button his coat, opened the door, and passed out into the corridor. It was deserted, and Kingston walked noisily to the end, coughing loudly. At the head of the stairs he met Dr.

Anderson, who was smiling genially. He had heard everything, and had been entirely deceived.

"You have had a satisfactory interview?" he queried, turning and descending the stairs before Kingston. The latter paused irresolutely, seeing, out of the corner of his eye, the builer standing in the hall.

"Yes, thank you, quite satisfactory," replied Kingston. "Quite. I have the signed paper in my bag— Oh, what a nuisance, I have left it in Sir Christopher's room. One moment, please!"

He turned and hurried up the stairs again. The instant he turned the corner, into the ancient corridor, he ran swiftly to the end. He knew the coast was clear now, and that for ten seconds he could speak to Sir Christopher alone. He opened the door quietly and crossed over to the big chair.

"Sir Christopher," he exclaimed tensely, "one word! Anderson is plotting to murder you. Trust in me, and I will save you. Don't give him any sign; pretend you believe in him the same as ever. I shall be here again to-night. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said the baronet, bewildered, "but—"

"I cannot stop. All I ask is, be careful. Anderson will offer you a sleeping-draught to-night—don't drink it!"

He turned round, grabbed his bag, and left the room. At the top of the stairs he met the doctor, who had been coming to meet him. Altogether Kingston had not been gone thirty seconds.

"Annoying," he muttered—"very annoying. I don't know what made me forget it. But Sir Christopher seems much better, doctor."

"Yes, it is very strange how he changes. One hour he will be nearly prostrated, and the next as vigorous as myself. You cannot judge his condition from his present manner. Before night he will be weak and half unconscious."

Kingston knew, of course, that Anderson was bluffing him, for although Sir Christopher's heart was in a precarious condition, he was in full possession of his wits, and could think as clearly as anybody. The inactivity, in fact, jarred on him continuously.

"I'm very glad, Dr. Anderson, that I have not had my journey for nothing, as you first feared. It would have been a great pity, a very great pity. I will hurry back to London immediately, so that my employers may sell these shares without delay."

"It will not be too late?" queried Anderson anxiously.

"Oh, no, sir; there is all to-morrow!"

The four-wheeler was still waiting outside, and in a few moments Kingston clambered in and set out for the station. He lay back among the cushions now, and smiled quietly to himself.

"Jove," he mused, "but the precious doctor has been diddled first-rate! I am positive he heard the whole conversation, though he saw nothing. He is under the impression that I am a meek lawyer's assistant. Well, if everything passes off to-night as smoothly as this, Anderson is as good as in the hands of the police. Sir Christopher acted splendidly, for I scarcely hoped to find him so quick-witted and open to conviction. He is greatly impressed by the whole business, and will certainly remain on the alert."

The cab arrived at Esher in ample time to catch the train, and Kingston, on arriving in London, went direct to the Cyril and removed his disguise. Having done that, he leisurely partook of tea, spent a quarter of an hour in the smoking-room, chatting to several acquaintances, then stepped into a taxi and drove to Great Portland Street.

Carson Gray was in his consulting-room, awaiting Kingston's arrival, and wondered more than ever when he saw his visitor stroll languidly in, attired in the very latest of West End fashions, with a set smile of inanity on his features. His eyes were sleepy and dull.

"By Jove, Kingston," cried the great detective, "I cannot help admiring the wonderful way in which you act! You look a perfect fool from head to foot. It's marvellous how you keep up the deception; for a man of your activity and quick-wittedness I should say it was terribly irksome."

Frank Kingston seated himself in an easy-chair, and smiled.

"No," he said, "I don't find it irksome in the least. I'm lazy by nature, I suppose. Either that, or I have become so used to it that it comes natural. But whatever personality I am in, I always make myself comfortable. For the time I drop anything else and become another man. But all this is by the way; I have news to tell you."

"Ah, concerning your visit to Northgate Towers?"

"Exactly."

"You were successful in your mission?"

"Very, my dear Gray. I have carried out the programme so far without a single hitch. Anderson was completely spoofed, and Sir Christopher, far from spoiling the whole game, entered into it immediately. He was greatly impressed."

And Kingston told his companion the whole story. He

did not say a word about his own clever acting, but Carson Gray knew very well what the task had been—knew that none but an exceptionally clever man could have deceived the astute Dr. Charles Anderson.

"And when do we start on the next and final move?" asked the detective, snipping the end off a particularly black-looking cigar. "I am leaving everything in your hands, Kingston. This is your job, and I'm simply following your directions."

"Well, what is the time now? Ah, I see a Bradshaw over yonder! Throw it over, will you? Thanks!"

Kingston was silent for a moment as he turned the pages of the time-table. After a moment he closed it with a bang, and laid it on the table.

"On second thoughts," he said, "we won't go by train at all. My car is in perfect order, so there is no reason why Fraser shouldn't run us down, and pick us up again after everything is happily over."

"The same as you did yourself last night?"

"Precisely! I will arrange it so that the car is here in an hour and a half's time. That will give us ample time to get prepared. You know everything that has to be done?"

"Everything. If the plan works smoothly and without a hitch, I see no reason to worry. Our friend the doctor is as good as caught. The web is almost completed, and by midnight he will be immovably entangled in the meshes."

Soon after Kingston took his departure, entered the waiting taxi, and was driven to his club. There he stayed for some thirty minutes, chatting idly with some other young men, and generally strengthening the impression that he was a fool.

"Now," he thought, as he emerged into the street once more—"now for some real work. It certainly does make me tired talking to a group of indolent dandies such as those I have just left. By Jove, people must think I'm a fool if I'm like those!"

At the Cyril, as he entered the spacious hall, he encountered Dolores and her maid, Louise, just about to depart. They were leaving for the theatre. Kingston raised his hat, bowed, and passed on up the magnificent staircase.

"Fraser," he said, as soon as he was in his own suite of rooms, "get the car ready, and be at Mr. Carson Gray's rooms in Great Portland Street in forty minutes from now. I will meet you there."

"Very good, sir."

"Tim may go with you if he likes, but, of course, it will only be for the ride. There is no work for him."

"He'll be on like a bird, sir, even if there ain't nothin' for him to do."

For the second time that day Kingston proceeded to disguise himself. This time, however, it was a very simple one, consisting chiefly of a false nose, a beard, and a wig. Having fixed them to his satisfaction, he viewed himself in the glass for a moment, then slipped the whole disguise off, and became himself in a tenth of a second.

"That'll do splendidly," he told himself. "Now to provide myself with a necessary little article, although I expect it will prove unnecessary in this case."

He opened a drawer of his desk, and grasped a small, six-chambered revolver. Although Kingston relied on his own great strength to defend himself with, it was always wise to carry a firearm, for, at a distance, he would be as helpless as the weakest man alive.

"Now," he thought, donning a light mackintosh and stuffing the disguise into a side pocket, "there's just time to pop into the restaurant and have a cup of coffee, and arrive at Gray's place simultaneously with Fraser. It's the last move in this particular game, and I think, for Anderson, it will be checkmate."

Saving Sir Christopher Rowe.

"The landaulette has just driven up, Gray. Everything ready?"

It was Frank Kingston who spoke. He was standing in the detective's room, having arrived a few moments before. Carson Gray was struggling into an overcoat.

"Yes," he said, "I'm ready, if you are."

"Then come along."

The two men left the house. Standing against the kerb, throbbing gently, was Kingston's big landaulette, with Fraser at the wheel. By his side sat Tim Curtis, who was going, as he described it, "jest for the blessed fun of it!"

The journey to Esher was taken moderately, for there was plenty of time, and to spare. Neither of the men displayed any outward sign of excitement, but Gray was feeling the influence of the chase, for he was a born tracker of men, and the most pleasant moments of his life were when he was getting to the climax of an interesting case.

Nothing, however, could make Kingston excited. He took everything quietly and calmly, and it was his very calmness and audacity which made him such a formidable foe. He

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could keep his head at a moment when any other man would fail to do so. Carson Gray's nerve was considerable, but Kingston's was of iron, steady as a rock.

With a soft application of the brakes, the car pulled up at the spot on the main road where the by-lane leading to the Towers branched off. To-night the weather was better, the stars shining brilliantly, and the atmosphere practically undisturbed.

"We shall have to go cautiously," said Kingston, as they stepped out down the narrow road, after having seen the car continue its way. "And if by chance we hear anybody, I shall have to seek refuge in the hedge. You are ostensibly by yourself."

"It is hardly likely we shall meet anybody on this lonely road," replied the detective. "Still, it is best to be prepared."

He was right, however, for they arrived at the Towers without having passed a living soul. Kingston glanced at his watch, reading the dial plainly by the faint starlight.

"Couldn't have been a better time," he said. "Now, all you have to do is to keep Anderson engaged with you for fifteen minutes. After that, make for the window I told you of, and watch for the ghost. You can easily follow it into the secret passage, for I told you the way to open the panel this morning."

The two parted, Kingston making stealthily through the shrubbery, and Carson Gray noisily opening the gate and crunching on the gravel drive. He pulled the bell-knob vigorously, and could hear the old-fashioned bell inside jangling in response.

He had not long to wait before there was an answer to his ring. The hall, which had been in total darkness, now became illuminated, and footsteps could be heard. Carson Gray smiled to himself. Evidently no visitors had been expected at that time of night. A shooting of bolts, and the door swung open, revealing Simpson. The butler peered into the darkness.

"You seem to lock up fairly early," remarked Gray, notwithstanding the fact that the hour was past eleven. "Has Sir Christopher retired yet?"

"Retired, sir! Sir Christopher's ill in bed, an' there's no one 'ere, except me an' the doctor."

"Dear me! That's sad news!" exclaimed Gray, as if in surprise. "Ill in bed! I trust it is nothing serious, my man. But let me see the doctor, will you?"

The detective walked inside, and followed Simpson to the cosy little smoking-room. The butler, although endeavouring to keep calm, was more or less agitated, for in half an hour it would be time to commence operations.

"Take a seat, will you, sir?" he said. "I'll fetch Dr. Anderson—"

"Dr. Anderson!" repeated Gray. "Do you mean the West End specialist?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have heard of him, but never met him. Sir Christopher evidently means being attended by a thoroughly reliable man."

The butler left, being somewhat reassured by Gray's words. They had been uttered, of course, to give the scoundrels confidence. Gray was not left alone long, and when Anderson appeared, the visitor explained that he was a friend of Sir Christopher's, and that he had been abroad some years. The reason for his lateness was plausible enough, for he made out he could hire no cab at that time of night, so decided to walk the distance—knowing that Sir Christopher never retired until late—losing himself on the way. Promising to call round in the morning, as it was impossible to see the baronet then, he took his departure, having detained the doctor a full twenty minutes.

Meanwhile, Kingston was doing his work without fear of interruption. Having been over the ground already, it was easy enough to enter the house. Without one mistake he arrived at the secret panel, opened it, and entered the narrow passage-way. Up the stairs he went until he found himself opposite the panel opening into Sir Christopher's room. He paused

a moment, and flashed his electric torch on the catch. And had anybody been there, he would not have seen Kingston at all, for the latter's face was set in such a manner that his features were entirely different. Yet he wore no disguise."

Click!

The panel slid back, and Kingston stepped into the room. It was practically in darkness, for a shaded lamp on a side table was the only illumination beside the flicker of the fire. Sir Christopher's eyes were weak, and he could not stand the glare of a strong light. This suited Kingston's plans exactly.

The old man was sitting in his easy-chair, wide awake and alert, evidently on the look-out. He started forward now, gazing at Kingston in expectation. The latter closed the panel, and stepped forward.

"You are not the same man—" began the baronet.

"I am the same," murmured Kingston quickly. "Only I have removed my disguise. The coast is clear now, Sir Christopher, but there is not much time at my disposal. If your life is to be spared, you must do as I say without question. Anderson intended murdering you at twelve o'clock!"

"I cannot believe it!" exclaimed the other agitatedly. "I cannot believe that Anderson is such a man! I have trusted him for years, and he has been my sole adviser. Who are you, and how did you get into my house?"

"I have no time to answer, except in this manner: You have a weak heart, Sir Christopher?"

"A very weak heart, I fear."

"And if you received some sudden shock or fright it would probably kill you?"

Sir Christopher was plainly puzzled.

"Yes," he answered. "I think the shock would prove too much. My nerves are terribly out of order, and I start at the slightest sound."

"Then I will answer your former questions by giving you proof that what I say is true. Anderson means to enter this room dressed in ghastly attire, which would have assuredly given you a terrible fright. He is coming at midnight, and that, in itself, will prove the truth of my assertions. I am doing this, Sir Christopher, to save your life, and to hand over to justice one of the most plausible scoundrels the world has ever seen. Will you let me give you this proof?"

Sir Christopher looked at Kingston curiously. His mind was somewhat excited, and all this mystery was beginning to tell on him. He nodded.

"How can I do otherwise? If, as you say, Dr. Anderson is a scoundrel, then I shall have to thank you—"

"Please excuse me," interjected Kingston. "Every moment makes the risk greater. I may tell you that Mr. Carson Gray, the famous detective, is the man who has found Anderson out. He is here to-night, and holds a warrant for Anderson's arrest. You see, Sir Christopher, everything is planned, and our prey cannot escape."

"Dear me!" ejaculated the old gentleman. "I had no idea you were a detective. If Mr. Gray is concerned with this most extraordinary occurrence, I suppose I must take it for granted that the doctor has been imposing upon me. Yet it seems unbelievable. All the years I have known him—"

"I am right in supposing, sir, that you are able to walk?"

"I am weak, but not helpless," answered the other. "Do you want me to rise? I am beginning to get interested. My faith in Anderson is dying, and I am recollecting many little things which have happened in the past which make me see the doctor in a different light."

"I want you to enter this room for a short while, Sir Christopher," said Kingston, opening the door of the tiny dressing-room, almost a cupboard. "I see there is an easy-chair in which you can recline whilst you are waiting. I will assist you, if you will allow me."

Kingston helped Sir Christopher to rise to his feet, for, notwithstanding his brain activity, his body was weak and ailing.

(To be continued.)

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The Editor