

Complete Stories for All and Every Story a Gem!

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The Waif of St. Jim's

A Splendid,
Long, Complete Tale
of TOM MERRY & CO.

... By ...

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Letter for Joe.

THE waif of St. Jim's came out of the Third Form-room, and walked down the passage with a cheerful smile upon his face. It was a rugged little face, was Joe Frayne's, and it bore the signs of the hard life the little waif had been through in his earlier years, before Tom Merry had rescued him from the slums and brought him to St. Jim's. But Joe's heart was light, and those signs of earlier sufferings were fading away—in a short time bade fair to cease to exist.

And Joe was looking very cheerful now.

He had had a kind word from his Form-master, and a kind word from Mr. Selby meant something—he had few to spare. Joe was making progress with his work—the work that had seemed like an impassable barrier when he first came to St. Jim's. Some glimmering of meaning was dawning upon him when he looked at the pages of "Virgil," and that opened a new and wonderful world to Joe. Mr. Selby had been pleased to commend him, keeping him a few minutes behind the Form for that purpose, when the class was dismissed. And Joe Frayne seemed to be walking on air as he came down the Form-room passage.

There was a buzz of voices in the hall, and Joe knew that a good many of the Third were waiting there.

But he did not care

He feared nothing at that moment. Had he not a true and faithful friend in the Third Form—D'Arcy minor,

generally known as Wally? And Jameson, and Gibson, too, had finally declared for him—they were his friends, too. The fact that Joe's father was more than suspected of being a well-known convict, had not, as the waif had expected, been his ruin at St. Jim's. It seemed to make many of the fellows sorry for him, and certainly it had made his friends stick closer. His enemies in the Form made the most of it, but Joe Frayne was learning not to care for them.

Joe glanced at the group of juniors. They were gathered before the letter-rack; but as he came along, they turned round and stared rudely at him. Joe recognised many of his old enemies in the group—Picke, and Fane, and Hobbs, and Colley. He gave them a careless glance, and was passing on, when they called to him.

"Frayne!"

"Letter for you!"

Joe paused.

He had not expected a letter—there was no one to write to the waif of St. Jim's. There was no one he had known in his old life in London from whom he would care to hear a word from.

That there was a letter for him surprised him; that he should have his attention drawn to it by Hobbs & Co. was a greater surprise. He had been far from expecting a good-natured action from them.

"Thank you kindly," said Joe.

Hobbs grinned.

"Oh, we spotted it at once, and meant to tell you," he

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said. "It's a ripping letter, to judge by the writing—I don't think!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Joe glanced at them quietly, and then he looked up for the letter. A square, coarse envelope was stuck in the rack, dirty and crumpled, with grubby finger-marks over it. In a large, sprawling hand was the address: "J. Frayne, Skool Ouse, St. Jaim's Kollegit Skool, Sussex."

The orthography of Joe's unknown correspondent was peculiar, and naturally provoked a smile, but it seemed to be the cause of a veritable triumph to Hobbs & Co. They grinned and chuckled over it gleefully.

Joe flushed as he took down the letter.

He did not know the writing, but it was clear that the letter was from someone who had known him when he was a denizen of Blucher's Buildings.

"Open it, my son," said Fane. "We want to see whether there's the same variety of spelling inside."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's from your governor, I suppose?" Hobbs remarked. "It may be the happy news that he's just been let out of prison."

"Wrong!" said Picke. "Frayne's father isn't in prison—the police are still looking for him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He hasn't been seen since he tried to burgle Greyfriars School!" said Picke. "I read all about it in the papers. It's a jolly good thing for St. Jim's to have a famous name like Frayne represented here!"

The Third roared.

Joe's face was crimson. He took the letter in his hand and walked slowly away with it. But the fags were not disposed to let him escape easily, and most of them were curious, too, to see what was in the letter. They hoped to be able to badger Joe into letting them see it.

"Give us a view," said Fane imploringly. "Let's see the orthography and the diction. It's bound to be interesting, and I've no doubt there'll be a Latin quotation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Arma virumque cano—arms and the burglar I sing," grinned Hobbs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's have a look, Frayne."

"Read it out."

"We want to hear from your governor, you know."

Joe made no reply. He went out into the quadrangle with his letter. There was a blaze of spring sunshine there, and the quad. looked very green and cheerful. From the playing-fields came a roar of voices, and the merry sound of bat meeting ball. The Fourth and the Shell were already there at practice, and in the distance Joe caught a glimpse of Tom Merry, of the Shell, batting against the bowling of Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth, with Figgins keeping wicket. But Joe did not give a second glance at the cricket-ground.

He wanted a quiet spot where he could look at his letter.

It was a new experience, getting a letter, but that was not all. Had it been from some old acquaintance in the slums, who had found out his address, Joe would not have minded. Life at St. Jim's was not making him snobbish. He would gladly have extended a helping hand to any old acquaintance, so far as he was able. But a nervous dread was tugging at the heart of the little waif.

Only one man, so far as he knew, from his old life, knew that he was at St. Jim's—the drunken, brutal tramp who was called the Weasel. That ruffian had seen him at the school and extorted money from him, and finally disgraced him before all the fellows. After that he could do no more injury, and he was kicked out by the juniors, and had not been seen since. Was this a letter from him, renewing his demands, since he could no longer come in safety to the school? If so, Joe's mind was already made up. He would not even answer it. But was the letter from another? Had the Weasel, as he had threatened, seen Bill Frayne, and told him that his son was at St. Jim's? Was this letter from Joe's father—the hunted criminal?

The green trees, the sunny quad., the grey old buildings of St. Jim's, seemed to swim round the little waif as he thought of it.

What if Frayne should come?

True, the man could not show himself in public without risking arrest. He was a ticket-of-leave man, and wanted for not reporting himself to the police. He could not report himself without being arrested for his attempted burglary at Greyfriars School.

Villain and ruffian Bill Frayne undoubtedly was, but he was Joe's father.

Was he his father? Joe had been told so, that was all he knew. He had belonged to Bill Frayne—but he had belonged to more than one man in his young life, and been sent out to beg under threat of thrashings. He had long had a secret hope that he was no relation of Bill Frayne's. But

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he was only too miserably conscious that the wish was, probably, father to the thought.

With gloomy and foreboding thoughts in his mind, Joe was scarcely conscious of the half-dozen fags following closely in his footsteps. His tormentors were determined not to let him escape. The fact that Joe was gaining more and more the esteem and regard of the Form, exasperated the juniors who had set themselves against him, and made them more resolved to humble him. Hobbs & Co. had something of the spirit of the old Pagan persecutors.

Joe stopped at a bench under the old elms near the School House, and sat wearily down. The brightness was all gone from his face now. As he sat down, the fags gathered round him. It was as if to suit them that Joe had chosen a secluded spot. The little waif looked at them as if suddenly becoming conscious of their presence.

"Wot do you want?" he asked.

The fags grinned.

"Won't you read out the letter, Frayne?"

"No, I won't!"

"Give us a sample of the spelling."

"Oh, go away and lemme alone," said Joe.

"Rats!"

"Show us the letter."

"Read out something from your governor."

"You might let a chap alone, Master 'Obbs," said Joe patiently. "I ain't done nothin' to you. Lemme alone, I say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Won't you give us a free sample?" implored Picke.

"No, I won't!"

"Just a sentence from your dear father—just to say whether he's been arrested or not," grinned Hobbs.

And the fags yelled with laughter.

Joe gave Hobbs one look, and then he crumpled the letter in his left hand, and clenched his right hand. The fist shot out and caught Hobbs fairly on the nose—a rather prominent nose, favourably placed by Nature for stopping a fist.

"Oh!" gasped Hobbs.

And the next moment he was rolling on the ground.

Joe cast a fierce glance round at his tormentors.

"Now come on, any of you!" he exclaimed savagely.

CHAPTER 2.

Wally Takes a Hand.

HOBBS staggered to his feet.

His nose was crimson, and already swelling, and the force of the blow had brought the water to his eyes.

He was simply stuttering with rage.

"You—you guttersnipe!" he panted. "You beggar! Punch my nose, will you, you burglar's son! You young convict!"

"It ain't my fault if my father's a convict," said Joe. "I didn't bring him up, I suppose, and it ain't decent to chuck it in my face. But if you can't let a chap alone, come on, Master 'Obbs. I'm ready for yer."

He had thrust the letter into his pocket, and he had his hands up.

Hobbs rubbed his nose, and sneered.

"Do you think I'm going to fight you?" he said. "Think I'd lay hands in fair fight on a slum convict? No fear!"

"You're afraid, Master 'Obbs, that's what's the matter with you."

Hobbs crimsoned. That was exactly what was the matter with him, and he knew it, and he was afraid that the other fags realised it, too.

"You young ruffian!" he snarled. "You're not decent enough to lick—but we'll rag you, bald-headed! Collar him!"

"Good egg!"

"Hands off!" yelled Joe, stepping back. "Hands off, I say! I shall hit out!"

"Collar the cad!"

"Get the letter!"

"We'll read it out in the Form-room, and then paste it on the wall!" grinned Picke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fags were closing round Joe in a circle. But the lad, with his fists up and his eyes gleaming, looked so dangerous that they hesitated to rush at him, six to one as they were.

"Hand over the letter," said one, "and we'll let you go."

"We won't!" roared Hobbs.

"Yes, we will, Hobbs! You shut up!"

"Hand over the letter, Frayne!"

"The letter's mine," said Joe. "It's mean to read another chap's letter—rotten mean! Master Tom says so." Fane turned red.

"Don't Master Tom us, you young cad!" he exclaimed. "Do you think we care twopence for any Shell bounders, and what they think?"

"Oh, that cad sucks up to the Fourth and the Shell," said Picke. "He can't stick to his own Form, like a decent chap."

"You don't gimme much chance," said Joe.

"Oh, don't jaw at us, young Frayne. Hand over that letter and you can clear out as soon as you like."

"I won't!"

"Then we'll take it."

Joe did not reply to that, but his fists clenched harder. The hard glitter in his eyes showed the fags plainly enough that they would not get the letter so long as he could strike a blow, and they knew from former encounters how tough he was.

But for very shame's sake they could not draw back now. Fane, who had more pluck than the rest, led the rush onward.

"Collar him! Down with the slum cad! Oh!"

Fane's words were stopped by a heavy drive on the jaw, and Fane dropped on the ground as if he had been shot.

But the others were rushing on.

Colley fell across Fane, feeling as if a mule had kicked him under the jaw; but the others were hammering at Joe at close quarters now.

The waif of St. Jim's backed away, defending himself as well as he could against the heavy odds.

Fane and Colley scrambled up and rushed to the attack again, and stumbled over Hobbs, who had just been knocked down. Hobbs was hurt, perhaps; or perhaps believed discretion to be the better form of valour. At all events, he remained where he had fallen on the ground.

But the other five were pressing Joe hard. He backed against a big elm, still fighting. From the cricket-ground in the distance the shouts were ringing:

"Well hit, Tom Merry!"

"Bravo!"

Joe did not hear. All his thoughts now were of the five cruel faces before him—the five pairs of hands that were hammering away at him.

A heavy blow from Fane came through his guard, and crashed him back against the trunk of the elm.

The waif slid down into a sitting posture, and before he could recover the raggers were upon him.

"Got him!" yelled Picke.

He rolled on Joe, and Fane and Colley seized the waif by the arms, and the others grasped him anywhere, and even Hobbs rallied now and lent a hand.

Joe still struggled hard, but it was evidently useless. He was held too tightly to have a chance of getting away.

"Now," panted Fane, "are you going to give us the letter?"

"No!" yelled Joe.

"Give it to me, you young fool!"

"I won't!"

"Take it out of his pocket, Hobbs!" said Fane.

Possibly Fane did not care to do that himself. But Hobbs had no objection. He groped in Joe's pocket for the letter.

Joe made a desperate effort to tear himself loose. But it was in vain, and Hobbs dragged out the letter and held it up.

"There you are, Fane!" he gasped.

Fane held out his hand for the letter, and then drew it back.

"You read it out, Hobbs?" he said.

"Right-ho!" said Hobbs.

"Gimme my letter!" shrieked Joe.

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cad to read my letter! Gimme it!"

"Keep him quiet! He'll wake the blessed place!"

"I— Oh— Groo!" gurgled Joe, as a handkerchief was stuffed into his open mouth. "Groo! Oh— Yah! O-o-o-o-oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hobbs thrust his thumb into the envelope, and slit it open. He dragged out a rough sheet of paper, upon which words were scrawled in pencil.

Joe made a tremendous effort, and his captors rocked for a moment, but they pinned him down again.

"Read it out, Hobby!" shouted Fane.

"What-ho!"

"Ow!" gasped Joe. "Elp!"

There was a sound of rapid footsteps, and a fist smote Hobbs under the jaw as he was beginning to read. Hobbs sprawled on the ground, and the fellow who had knocked him down stooped and picked up the letter.

It was Wally, of the Third—D'Arcy minor.

His eyes fairly blazed at the fags.

"You cads!" he shouted. "Let him alone! Get up, Joe!"

"Mind your own bizney, D'Arcy minor!" said Fane undauntedly. "We're going to make the cad show us his letter!"

"You're not! Let him go!"

"Ow!" groaned Hobbs, sitting up and rubbing his aching jaw. "Ow! Oh! Ah!"

"Let Joe alone, I tell you!"

"Rats!"

Wally said no more. He grasped Fane by the shoulders and tore him away from Joe with a terrific wrench. Fane was flung staggering away, and he fell at full length. The other fellows released Joe instinctively.

"Get up, Joe!"

Joe staggered to his feet.

"Now, if you chaps want any more trouble, just come on!" said Wally cheerfully. "Joe and I could wipe up the ground with the lot of you, and you know it! And we're quite ready to do it, my sons! Come on—one at a time, or all at once—and I should prefer to start with Hobbs! Come on, Hobbs! I'll see if I can add to the beauty of your nose, Hobbs! Do come on!"

But Hobbs declined. He thrust his hands into his pockets and walked away, and the other raggers followed him. Ragging Joe Frayne was one matter, but ragging Wally, the terror of the Third Form, was quite another. The raggers stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

"Hurray!" said Wally. "Are you much hurt, Joe?"

"Oh, no, Master Wally!"

"Here's your letter."

"Thank you! They were going to read it."

"Cads!" said Wally. "Did you put up a good fight?"

"I did my best!"

"Good! Then I won't lick you!"

Joe grinned and looked at his letter. Wally put his hands in his pockets, and whistled while he waited. But his whistle suddenly died away, and he started towards Joe with a sharp exclamation:

"Joe, old chap, what's the matter?"

Joe made no reply. He had reeled back against the tree, with his face white as death, his eyes staring wildly at the letter clenched tightly in his hands.

CHAPTER 3.

Gussy Knows He is Right.

"W EALLY, Tom Mewwy—"

"My dear Gussy—"

"Undah the circs.—"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy—"

"I do!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "And many of 'em!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the elegant junior who was the ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's and the glass of fashion in the School House, pushed back his spotless white cuffs.

"I am sowwy, Tom Mewwy—"

"Don't apologise, old chap!" said Tom Merry, with a smile. "I know you can't help being an ass!"

"You uttah chump—"

"Same to you, and many of them!"

"I am sowwy!" repeated D'Arcy deliberately. "But, undah the circs, I am afraid I have no resource but to give you a feahful thwashin', Tom Mewwy! Will you have the extweme goodness to step out into the quad, so that I can thwash you?"

"Not at all!"

"Weally—"

"Go and lie down for a bit, Gussy, and sleep it off!"

The swell of St. Jim's gazed at Tom Merry with scornful eyes. He jammed his eyeglass into his right eye, and gazed at him again.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were standing in the doorway of the School House, in cricketing clothes. Tom Merry had a bat under his arm and a healthy flush in his cheeks, and his blue eyes were very bright. A picture of healthy British boyhood, was Tom Merry, of the Shell.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been pointing out things to him. It had pleased D'Arcy to commend Tom Merry's batting.

Any batsman who could stand up against half a dozen overs from Fatty Wynn, of the New House, was all right. D'Arcy admitted that. What D'Arcy contended was that as Tom Merry had been footer captain of the junior eleven in the winter, it was only right and proper that a Fourth Form chap should be cricket captain for the summer.

Blake and Figgins, of the Fourth, fully agreed with D'Arcy on that point. There was one minor point upon which they disagreed—Blake thought that it was absurd of Figgins to want to be cricket captain, and Figgins thought

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that it was absurd of Blake. D'Arcy thought that it was absurd of both of them. In the opinion of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, there was really only one fellow whose claims could be considered, and that fellow, of course, was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself.

This seemed so clear to D'Arcy that he marvelled at the dulness of other fellows in not being able to see it; in fact, he couldn't help suspecting that they were only pretending. He had always found Tom Merry a sensible sort of chap, and yet Tom Merry utterly failed to see this!

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked at D'Arcy, and D'Arcy looked at them. The Terrible Three were grinning, and D'Arcy was frowning.

"I have requested you, Tom Mewwy, to step out of the House, so that I can thwash you!" said the swell of St. Jim's in measured tones.

Tom Merry laughed. "No fear!" he said. "I twust you will not wefuse, Tom Mewwy."

"But I do! I'm quite comfy here!" "But I cannot thwash you in a public place like this, where we may be intewwupted by a mastah or a pwefect at any moment," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Mr. Wailton may come out of his studay any minute."

"Exactly!" "Pway step wound the chapel with me!" "Rats!"

"I shall begin to think that you are afwaid, Tom Mewwy!" Tom Merry nodded with perfect coolness.

"That's just it," he explained; "I'm in fear and trembling! You don't notice me tremble, because it's internal—but I'm really more afraid than if I were trembling outwardly. Inwardly, I'm quivering like a giddy jelly!"

"You uttah ass—!" "As a matter of fact, I'm too terrified to move, and if you want to thwash me, you'll have to thwash me here," said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther. D'Arcy glared at them indignantly.

"I wegard you as thwee silly asses!" he exclaimed. "Thank you! You're only one silly ass, but you're as silly as three," said Monty Lowther, "so that really makes it even!"

"Weally, Lowthah—" "Ha, ha, ha!" "I insist upon your steppin' wound the chapel with me, Tom Mewwy; othahwise, I shall bwand you as a coward!"

"Bwand away!" "Ha, ha, ha!" "You fwabjous ass—" "Hear, hear!" "You uttah wottah—" "Hurrah!"

"Unless you are simply pwetendin' to be a silly ass, you know vewy well that I ought to be cwicket captain this season!"

"Bravo!" "You—you—" "Wind yourself up, and put a new record on," suggested Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The swell of St. Jim's was speechless with wrath. The chums of the Shell made a motion to depart. D'Arcy stepped forward.

"Tom Mewwy, you feahful boundah, I am goin' to lick you!" "Help!" said Tom Merry faintly.

"I wegard you—" "Help!" Tom Merry threw one arm round Lowther's neck, and the other round Manners' neck, and clung to them for support.

He might have been overcome with terror; but D'Arcy was not taken in. The fellows about were roaring with laughter, and the swell of St. Jim's was crimson with indignation.

"Help me away!" moaned Tom Merry. "Help me away, before he slays me with the terror of his glance."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Cling to me, old chap, and close your eyes," said Monty Lowther kindly.

"This way," said Manners gently. And they led Tom Merry upstairs, the hero of the Shell clinging to them like a man of ninety-five at least.

There was a roar of laughter from the fellows in the hall. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came out of his study, and stared at the Terrible Three in amazement.

"What on earth are you fellows doing?" he exclaimed. "Helping Tom Merry away," said Manners stoutly. "He's frightened."

"Frightened?" "The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 166. Come to London To See the Coronation."

"Yes. Gussy has struck terror to his soul." "You young dufter! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, clinging to his chums, disappeared up the staircase. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood looking after the Terrible Three, his brows wrinkled over his eyeglass in speechless indignation.

"Faith, and it's a terror ye are, Gussy!" roared Reilly of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Weally, deah boys—" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his nose very high in the air, walked out of the School House. Outside, in the sunny quad, two juniors of the Fourth Form were engaged in a warm argument. They were Jack Blake of the School House, and Figgins of the New House—rival leaders of the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Now, Figg, don't be a silly ass!" Blake was saying, in an imploring tone.

"Well, don't you be a frabjous dummy, then!" said Figgins.

"Weally, deah boys, I twust you are not wowin'," said D'Arcy pacifically.

Both turned to look at him. "I'm not rowing," said Blake. "I'm only explaining to Figgins—" "I'm not rowing," said Figgins. "I'm only explaining to Blake—"

"Weally, you know—" "Figgins has a rotten idea that a New House chap ought to be junior cricket captain—"

"Of course," said Figgins, "as for your silly idea that a School House chap ought to be captain, I can only say that it's worthy of your dotty brain."

"I considah that Blake is wight," said D'Arcy. "Ass!"

"Of course I am," said Blake. "It naturally belongs to the School House. I agree with Figgins that a Fourth-Form chap ought to have it, that's all. I'm the man!"

"Weally, Blake—" "I'm glad you agree with me there, Gussy."

"But I don't, deah boy. What is wanted as juniah cwicket captain, is a fellow of tact and judgment, and I was thinkin' of acceptin' the post."

"You?" roared Blake and Figgins together. "Yaas, wathah!" "Ass!"

"Weally, deah boys—" "Fathead!" "Weally—" "Chump!"

"I wefuse to entah into a discuss. cawwied on in such terms," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he walked away with his nose higher in the air than ever. And Blake and Figgins resumed their argument.

CHAPTER 4. Black News!

"BAI Jove!" D'Arcy paused under the old elm trees, as he came in sight of two fags of the Third—his younger brother, Wally, and Joe Frayne. Joe stood with the letter in his hand, his face as white as chalk, and Wally was staring at him. Wally was puzzled and alarmed. D'Arcy stopped, and jammed his eyeglass yet more tightly into his eye.

"Joe, deah boy—" he exclaimed. "Joe did not answer. He turned a dazed glance upon the swell of St. Jim's. His hand closed more tightly upon the letter he held.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah with him, Wally?" Wally gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"Blessed if I know!" he replied. "Some of the Third have just been ragging him, and I came up and chipped in. I think Joe's had bad news in that letter."

"Bai Jove! I'm sowwy, Joe!" "It—it—it's all right, Master D'Arcy!" stammered Joe.

"Bad news, deah boy?" "No—yes!" "My dear chap," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kindly, "I don't want to pwy into your affairs, and I'm sure Wally doesn't want to, either."

"Not much!" said Wally. "But I feel vewy concerned about you, and I'm sure Wally does, too."

"You bet!" said Wally. "That is a howwibly vulgah expression, Wally."

"Rats!" "Weally, Wally—" "See this week's number of 'THE BOYS' HERALD,' 1d.

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"What's in the letter, Joe?" asked Wally. "If it's bad news, you can tell us, I suppose?"

"That is what I was about to say, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "If there is anything w'ong, I twust we shall be able to help you."

Joe shook his head.

"It—it's all right, Master D'Arcy."

"Look here," said D'Arcy seriously, "if that lettah is fwom that howwid boundah called the Weasel, you're bound to tell us, Joe, so that we can deal with him."

"It isn't, Master D'Arcy."

"It isn't fwom the Weasel, Joe—honah bwight?"

"Honour bright, Master D'Arcy."

"Vewy well. Of course, it would be wotten bad form to inqiah into your pivate affaahs, and I shall certainly not do so," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I shall not allow my minah to do anythin' of the sort, eithah."

Wally snorted.

"Your minor doesn't want to do it," he said. "But if he did, you jolly well couldn't stop him, Gussy, my son!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Wally——"

"More rats!"

"You diswespectful young boundah! I wegard you as a disgrace to the family, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Your collah is not clean!"

"Blow my collar!"

"Blowin' your collah would not blow the dust off, Wally, and I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to be cackled at by my minah!" said D'Arcy, with great indignation. "You do not seem to have any ideah of the wespact due fwom a minah to his eldah bwothah, Wally. You seem to have no more wespact for your eldahs, than Hewwies's bulldog has for a fellow's twousahs!"

"My only Aunt Jane," said Wally, "you're like the little brook—you go on for ever!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Oh, I'm off!"

"Wally, I ordah you, as your majah, to stop while I cowwect your howwid mannaahs!"

Wally did not seem to hear. He walked away whistling. The swell of St. Jim's looked round for Joe, but he had gone. There was evidently nothing left for it but for D'Arcy to lepart as well, and that he proceeded to do.

Joe had gone quietly, while Arthur Augustus was lecturing his brother. Kind as both D'Arcy and Wally were to him, Joe wanted to be alone just then. He did not want to show anyone the letter; he wanted to think it over, to decide what to do.

He went quietly away, and stopped when he was on the quiet little green behind the chapel. There he sank on a seat under a tree, and took the letter out of his pocket.

He read it with breathless anxiety again. The scrawling, ill-spelt epistle ran:

"Deer Joe,—I am cummin to see you. I have 'eard from a friend where you are, and I know you will be glad to see your father again. I shall be down at the skool on Tuesday night, and I shall expeck you at the same place where you met the Weasel. I ain't going to do you any 'arm in the skool; I only want to see you afore I go away. I'm goin to Canada.—Your loving father,
B. FRAYNE."

Joe's lips trembled.

The ruffian, the Weasel, had evidently told Bill Frayne of his discovery of Joe at St. Jim's. That had set the convict on the track.

What did he want to see Joe for?

That the man was telling the truth, that he really wanted to see Joe before he made his departure for Canada, the little waf could not believe.

That was too good to be true!

But what did Bill Frayne want? To extort money, perhaps, under threats of disgracing him at the school. But he could hardly disgrace him more than the Weasel had already done. There was nothing more to tell.

What did he want?

If Joe refused him money, he would not dare to come to St. Jim's, either—the police were looking for him. He could not venture to be seen in public. Joe felt that the man must have hesitated, even, before he ventured to write this letter. The postmark on the envelope was Rylcombe, the village near the school; Bill Frayne was evidently close at hand. Joe guessed that he had been hanging about the school in the hope of meeting him. Joe had been keeping carefully within bounds of late, in case he should meet the Weasel again; and Bill Frayne had had no chance of seeing him. He had been driven to writing a letter. Joe turned sick at heart at the thought of what might have happened if the fags had read it. They would have been delighted with the chance of betraying Joe's father to the police.

Not that Bill Frayne did not deserve all that the authorities had in store for him. He was a ruffian whose cruel marks were yet on Joe's body—whether he was Joe's father or not, he seemed to be a brute without any redeeming quality.

But however wicked he might be, it was not his son's place to judge him. It was not his son's place to wish to see him punished.

Why was he coming?

That was the question that was beating like a hammer in Joe's heart and brain. Why was the man coming to St. Jim's?

What if he should be found, and arrested? Arrested, perhaps, close to the school! The college ringing with it, the papers full of the news—convict arrested near the famous public school where his son was a pupil! Joe turned sick at the thought. Could even Dr. Holmes, kind and good as he was, suffer him to remain in the school after causing such a terrible disgrace to St. Jim's?

Joe groaned aloud at the thought.

He crumpled the letter in his hand, and thrust it into his pocket.

One thing was certain—he must meet the man! Meet him, and beg of him to go away—to cause no more misery to one whose life he had already made miserable enough. And if he wanted anything that Joe could not give honestly, to refuse him, and take the consequences, whatever they were. That was the determination of the waf of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

Looking for Joe.

"JOE! Joe! Where's that blessed bounder Joe?"

Wally was calling everywhere. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came downstairs, and stopped his minor by tapping him on the shoulder.

"Are you inqwin' for Joe, Wally?"

Wally sniffed.

"Well, as I'm yelling for him at the top of my voice, very likely I am," he replied.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Have you seen him?"

"Yaas, wathah! He passed my study a short time ago, goin' towards the box-wooms."

"Good!"

Wally tore upstairs. He raced along the Fourth Form passage, and arrived at the lower box-room. He kicked the door open, and ran in. The room was in darkness.

"Joe!" he shouted. "You're not here, surely, in the dark? Joe!"

There was a sound in the gloomy room. A shadow crossed the glimmering square of the window.

"Joe!"

"Yes, Master Wally?" said a faint and uneasy voice.

"Hallo," said Wally, "so it's you, Joe!" He groped in the dark, and caught the waf of St. Jim's by the arm.

"Joe, you young ass, come on!"

"I—I——"

"What have you got the window open for?"

"I—I——"

"Jolly queer idea," said Wally, "taking an airing by the open window in the dark! But come on! Selby's just taking the Third at prep, and you know what he's like when a chap's late!"

"I—I——"

"Oh, chuck your blessed I—I——!" said Wally, impatiently, dragging his chum towards the door. "Come on, and don't play the giddy goat!"

Joe resisted a little, but Wally took no notice. He dragged Joe away from the banisters, and rushed him downstairs.

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NEXT
WEEK:

"THE RIVAL SCHOOLS."

Joe was unable to make a stop till they reached the stairs. There he clutched at the banisters, and clung.

Wally stopped, panting breathlessly.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "We've got only a minute to get in to prep. Selby will be like a wild bull. Come on, kid! What the dickens is the matter with you?"

"Master Wally—"

"Come on, you ass!"

"I—I want to miss prep.," said Joe, faltering.

Wally stared at him blankly.

"Miss prep.!" he gasped.

"Yes, Master Wally."

"You silly young ass!" said Wally scornfully. "Why, old Selby would be like a raging lion! You remember what he was like when you missed evening prep. before. Don't be a duffer! Come on!"

"I—I must! I—"

"Rats!"

"But I tell you—"

Wally did not answer—he did not even listen. He dragged Joe away from the banisters, and rushed him downstairs.

They reached the lower passage, and Wally tore on to the Third Form-room, and reached the door in a breathless state.

But the door was closed, and the voice of Mr. Selby could be heard within.

"Late!" gasped Wally.

"Lemme go!"

"May be able to dodge in, yet, if old Selby's in a good temper."

"But, I say—"

Wally threw open the Form-room door, and ran in with Joe. Mr. Selby's coldly keen eye was upon them at once.

"Frayne! D'Arcy minor!"

"Ye-es, sir?" stammered Wally.

"You are late! You will take twenty lines, and you will do the same, Frayne!"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Now go to your places."

The fags went to their places. There was no escape for Joe, now. Wally had released him, but he could not quit the Form-room under the master's eye.

He sat down in his place, with a deep gloom upon his rugged little face. The heart of the waif of St. Jim's was heavy. He had wanted to hurry out of the school as soon as darkness fell, but there was no chance of that now. Wally had meant well in forcing him to turn up for prep., but Joe could not help wondering whether Bill Frayne was waiting in the shadow of the school wall, and whether he would grow impatient, and if so, what he would do.

But there was no help for it now.

Third Form preparation in the evening lasted an hour and a half, and was always conducted in the presence of a master. The Fourth Form and the Shell had a chance of "cutting prep.," if they chose to risk it—not so the fags. The Third Form had to turn up in the Form-room for it, and Mr. Selby was not likely to fail to note down any absence.

Joe went through it, now, like one in a dream.

How he got through he hardly knew. But he was conscious of the fact that the Third were dismissed, when Wally came behind his form and jerked him up.

"Come on, kid!" said Wally. "Time's up! Gone to sleep?"

"N-n-no," stammered Joe.

"Wake up, then!"

"I—I—I'm coming."

Joe followed Wally out of the Form-room. In the passage Wally turned upon him and stared at him.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"N-n-nothing."

"Glad I fetched you into the room for prep.—eh?"

"Yes—no."

"Your paws would be jolly well smarting now, if I hadn't," said Wally. "Look here, I'm getting up a good tea this evening, with Jimmy and Curly. We've got herrings, and cake, and bloater-paste. You turn up in the Form-room in a quarter of an hour, and we'll feed you to the chin."

Wally hurried away, without waiting for a reply.

Joe went quietly to the staircase.

Ten minutes later Wally was looking for his chum. The feed was ready in the Form-room. Jameson was finishing cooking the herrings, and the smell of them was keenly appetising—to a fag, at least.

"Anybody seen Frayne?" demanded Wally of all the fags he met in the passage.

"Missed anything?" asked Picke, with a sneer.

Wally glared at him.

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Come to London
To See the Coronation.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Oh, I thought you might have missed a watch, or something, as you're inquiring for Frayne," sneered Picke.

And Picke's friends sniggered gaily.

"I haven't missed anything," said Wally, "and I'm not going to miss you, Picke."

Picke backed away, but not in time to escape Wally's left-hander. He sat down with a bump on the linoleum, and Wally hurried on in search of Joe.

He ran up to the Fourth Form passage, and looked into Study No. 6. Blake, and Herries, and Digby, and D'Arcy were there, all talking cricket. D'Arcy turned his eye-glass upon his minor as the latter burst in unceremoniously.

"Weally, Wally, that is not the way to entah a gentleman's quarters!" he exclaimed.

"Seen Joe?"

"Certainly not! Undah the circs.—"

But Wally was gone, slamming the door after him. He hurried along to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

"Joe here?" he asked, putting his head in at the door.

The Terrible Three were at a late tea. They looked round cheerfully enough at Wally, and Monty Lowther held up a cake.

"No," said Tom Merry, "I haven't seen Joe."

"Cake, Wally?" asked Lowther, with a grin.

"No, thanks; I'm looking for Joe."

"But—"

Wally banged the door and fled. He was getting really anxious about Joe. He ran off to the box-room, where he had found the waif of St. Jim's just before prep.

The room was very dark, and the cold wind told that the window was open. Wally ran into the room, stumbling in the dark.

"Joe!" he shouted. "Joe!"

There was no reply, save the dull echoes of his voice. Wally groped in his pocket for a match, and fortunately found one, and lighted the gas.

Joe was not there. Wally ran to the window. Outside, in the faint glimmer of the starlight, he saw the rain-pipe that ran beside the window to the ground, and he knew that the window was open for.

Joe was gone!

Where was he gone? Was it another mysterious excursion outside the walls of St. Jim's? Wally remembered the letter Joe had received.

He was deeply uneasy.

But it was useless to follow down the rain-pipe—he did not know where Joe had gone. But he did not leave the box-room. He sat on the window-seat in the darkness, and waited, with grim countenance. He meant to have an explanation with Joe as soon as the waif of St. Jim's came in.

In the Third Form-room the herrings were done, and Jameson and Curly Gibson were waiting impatiently for Wally. They did not wait long. They were hungry, and the herrings were tempting. They had their tea, and as Wally and Joe weren't there, Jameson and Gibson ate their shares of the repast. Nothing was left. But even by that time Wally had not returned.

CHAPTER 6.

Joe Frayne's Father.

"FATHER!"

A low, trembling voice uttered the word, from the darkness that enshrouded the spot.

Joe, the little waif of the slums, was crouching on the school wall, under the thick shadow of the old oak and looking down into the darkness of the road outside.

Was the man there whom he had come to see? Had he lost patience and gone? There seemed to be a blacker shadow in the gloom of the tree.

"Father!"

That sacred word—the tenderest but one of the language—came in trembling tones from the lips of the little waif.

"Father, are you there?"

"Joe!"

It was a deep, husky voice that came back, and Joe's heart beat painfully.

The man was there!

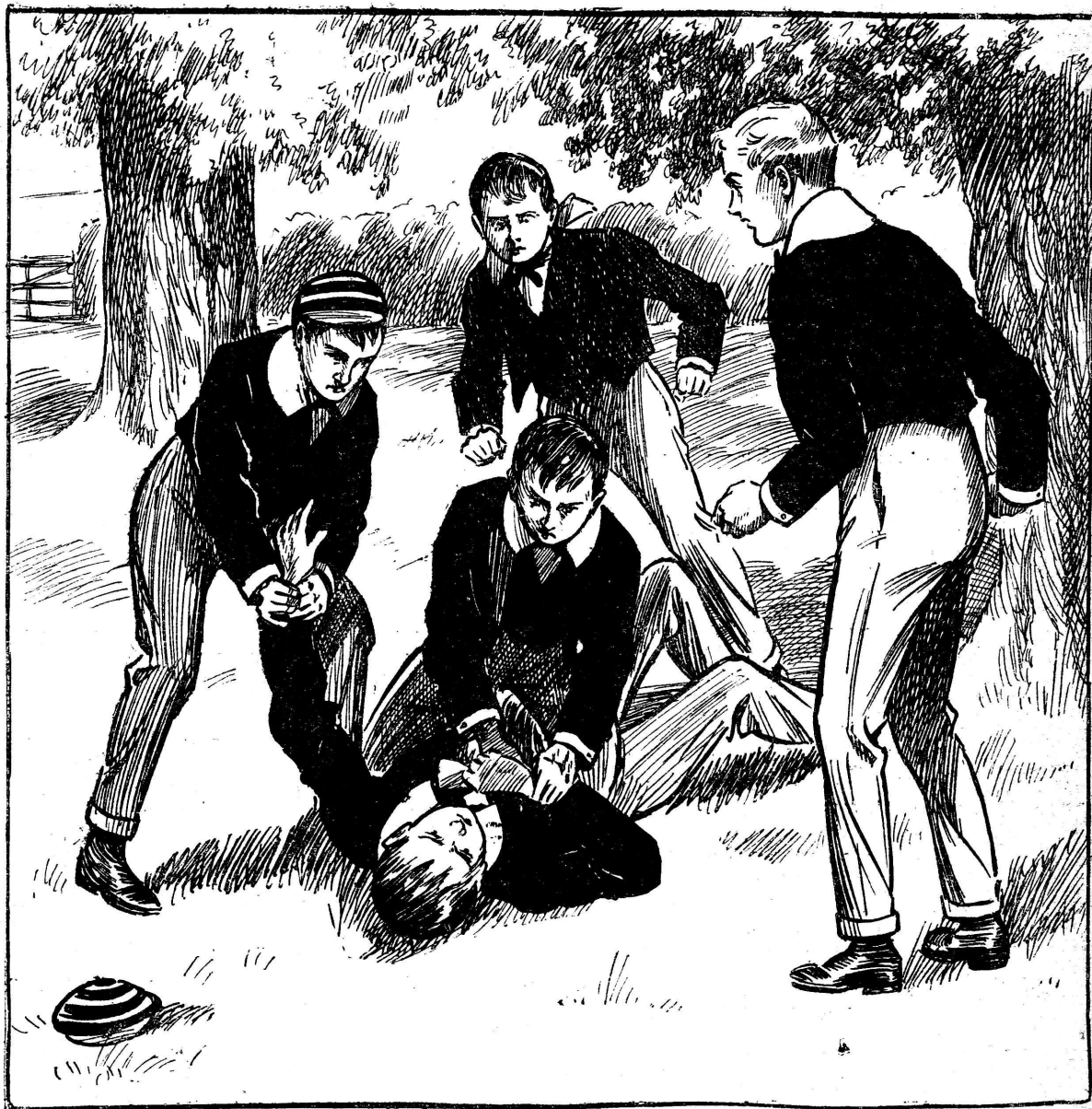
Joe slipped down from the wall and stood in the road. The black shadow loomed up now more bulkily than before, and he made out dimly the form of a man.

Joe trembled.

This was the man—this was Frayne—this was the ruffian under whose cruel blows he had so often shivered and shrunk. This was the man who, since he had come out of prison, had made Joe's life a misery till Tom Merry rescued him, and had since then been a black terror to the waif.

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A heavy blow from Fane came through Joe's guard, and the little waif crashed to the ground. Before he could recover the ragers were upon him. "Got him!" yelled Picke. (See page 3.)

Joe looked at him in the gloom.

"It's you, father."

"Yes, Joe, my boy."

"What have you come here, for?"

The ruffian chuckled hoarsely.

"To see my boy," he replied. "Ain't a father allowed to see his boy—the pride of his 'eart—especially when they're making a gentleman of him? You do me proud, Joe! To think of old Bill Frayne's boy being took to a big school to be made a gentleman of! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet, father; they may hear you."

"I forgot, Joe! We'd better move a bit further off."

"Cross the road; we can step into the wood on the other side. I know where we can get through the fence."

"Good enough, Joe."

They moved in the darkness, Joe leading his father with a hand on his sleeve. In a few minutes they stood under the trees.

"Safe 'ere, Joe?"

"Quite safe."

"Good! The cops are looking for me now, but they don't know I'm 'ere," said Bill Frayne. "They don't know I've got my boy at a swell school, you see."

"How did you know, father?"

"The Weasel told me."

"I thought he would," said Joe heavily. "But what do you want? You don't want to see me, father. What is it you want?"

"Can't a kid's own father see him if he wants to?" asked Frayne. "How do you know I ain't fond of you, Joe—my own flesh and blood?"

"You didn't seem so at Blucher's Buildings, father."

"Maybe I had too much to drink sometimes."

"Drunk or sober, you walloped me all the same," said Joe bitterly.

"Well, I was brought up 'ard myself," said Frayne. "My father used to welt me with his belt—I could show you the marks now. He took part of my ear orf with the buckle once. But never mind that, Joe. That's all hover."

"Yes, yes, it's all over now—I don't bear no malice," said Joe. "I've got some money, too, father. Master Tom's uncle gives me pocket-money. The Weasel had most of it, but I've got a pound now, and you can 'ave it."

"I don't want your money, Joe."

"You don't want it?"

"No."

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"THE RIVAL SCHOOLS."

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"Then wot 'ave you come for?"

It was a question that might have sent a thrill of shame to any man's heart. Joe asked it in all innocence. He could not imagine any reason why Bill Frayne should want to see him, unless it was to get something from him.

"I wanted to see you, Joe."

"To see me!" Joe repeated.

"Yes."

"But what for?"

"You ain't old enough to understand a father's 'cart," said Frayne. "You don't know! I did lick you when I came out of chokey, Joe, but you don't know what I went through there—enough to make any man savage, I think."

Joe's face softened.

"I never thought of that, father."

"But arter you left me, Joe, I thought a lot about it. I remembered that you was my son, and I was sorry."

"Father!"

"And I wanted to see you agin, Joe. When the Weasel told me you was 'ere, I jumped with joy, I did. Why, Joe, he told me because he thought I would come arter you, to get you into trouble. But that wasn't my sort. I came to see you, Joe, and I've been 'anging round the school to see you, but I ain't 'ad a chance, so I wrote. Now I've seen you, I can go away."

"Father!"

"Only I want to see 'ow you are fixed, before I go to Canady," said Bill Frayne.

Joe's heart beat.

"You are going to Canada, father?"

"England ain't safe for me," said Bill Frayne, in a hoarse whisper. "The cops are arter me; but I've got some money, and I can get away from Liverpool. I wanted to say good-bye to you afore I went, Joe, and to see 'ow you was fixed up 'ere. I want to see where you live—your room, you know, and the rest of it."

"I don't have a room," said Joe. "I learn my lessons in the Form-room, and sleep in the dormitory with the rest of the Form. They don't have studies to themselves below the Fourth Form at St. Jim's."

"But I want to see the place," said Frayne eagerly.

"S'pose I was to come in? Of course, the boys would all wonder—"

Joe caught his breath.

"Of course they would!"

"But s'pose I come in when they're in bed, then?" said Frayne. "You could let me in, Joe, just to see the place, 'ow you are fixed up."

Joe hesitated.

It seemed little enough for his father to ask, and surely such a wish could only be dictated by paternal affection. Joe felt a doubt; but he was ashamed of the doubt, and strove to crush it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had told him it was rotten to doubt a fellow's word, and Joe had learned his lesson. Alas! D'Arcy had never had to do with a man like Bill Frayne!

"Is that all you want, father?"

"That's all, Joe."

"Just to look at the place where I live, before you go away?"

"Afore I goes to Canady, Joe—yes."

Joe drew a deep breath.

"I'll do that for you, father. There can't be no harm in it surely."

"Of course not, Joe. How can there be any 'arm in a kid doing as his father tells 'im?" said Frayne. "Besides, it will be only for a minute. When I'm in Canady, I want to be able to remember 'ow my boy was living when I left. I sha'n't never come back again, Joe. I sha'n't ever be safe agin in England. It's chokey for life if they catch me."

"Oh!"

"That's wot it means, Joe, and I'm off to-night for good."

"To-night?"

"Yes. I'm tramping to Liverpool," said Frayne. "You won't never see you father again, but you'll try not to think too 'ard of 'im. I was brought up hard."

Joe felt a choking in his throat.

"I—I couldn't bear malice agin you, father," he said. "You used me bad, but it's all over now. I'll do as you like."

"You're a good boy, Joe. You'll grow up to be a better man than your dad."

"Come here at, say, twelve o'clock," said Joe; "the whole place will be asleep then. I'll give you the griffin from the top of the wall, and help you up, and show you round. Is that all right?"

"That's all right, Joe."

"Then I'll get back now."

"Don't forget, Joe—midnight, under the wall where I met you."

"That's it, father."

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Come to London To see the Coronation:

Joe went back to the school wall, and climbed over it. He returned to the School House like one in a dream. His heart was light. He had seen his father, and Frayne had been the very reverse of what he had expected. Instead of violence and threats, he had found repentance—affection—a farewell! His father was not so black as he had thought him—two good reasons why the waif of St. Jim's should rejoice.

Joe's heart was light as he climbed into the box-room. He clambered through the window, and shut it behind him. He was crossing the shadowy room towards the door, when a voice came out of the gloom, and he started.

"Joe!"

"Wally!"

CHAPTER 7.

Joe Explains.

WALLY was quite invisible in the darkness of the box-room. But his hand was on Joe's shoulder, and the waif of St. Jim's stopped, his heart beating.

"Master Wally!" he murmured.

"Joe, you young rascal!"

"Master Wally! I—I—"

"You've been out?" said Wally.

"Yes."

"Out of the school?"

"Yes," muttered Joe.

"What for?"

"I—I had to go."

"To meet somebody, I suppose?" demanded Wally angrily.

"You're beginning your old tricks again, you young sweep."

"No, no!" Joe exclaimed eagerly. "It isn't the Weasel, Master Wally. It's all right. It's a friend."

"What kind of a friend?"

"I—I can't tell you exactly, but—but it's all right, Master Wally. I—I was afraid it wouldn't be, but it is—it's all right."

Wally was heard to sniff in the darkness.

"Look here," he said, "I missed you after prep., and guessed you were gone. I've been waiting here for you for dog's ages."

"I'm sorry."

"I should jolly well think so. Look here, you've missed tea in the Form-room, and what's worse than that, you've made me miss it. There were herrings," said Wally wrathfully, "and bloater paste."

"Oh, dear!" said Joe. But it is to be feared that he was not thinking very much about the loss of the herrings and the bloater paste.

"Ain't you hungry?" demanded Wally.

"Ye-es."

"So am I. What are we going to do?" grumbled the hero of the Third.

"I've got some money."

"The tuckshop's closed."

"Oh, dear!" said Joe again.

"I've a jolly good mind to punch your head," said Wally, "and I'll jolly well do it, too, if you don't make the matter clear. I've had enough of your blessed mystification. Besides, I can see how it is. That letter you had this morning was to fix up an appointment with somebody."

"Ye-es."

"And you've met the chap now?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

Joe trembled.

"I'd rather not tell you, Master Wally," said the waif of St. Jim's. "I—I'd rather not tell you. You—you see—"

"You've got to tell me," said Wally. "I've told you that I've had enough of your blessed mysteries. You seem to live in 'em. It isn't respectable."

"Oh, Master Wally!"

"Decent people don't have secrets or go about in a mysterious way," said Wally. "Only bounders have secrets. I licked you for it the other day. Do you want another round or two to-morrow?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then explain."

Joe hesitated.

"You—you'll keep it a secret, Master Wally, if I do?" he faltered.

"I suppose so."

"It's jolly serious," said Joe. "It doesn't matter about me, but it's somebody else. I know I can trust you if you won't jaw."

"Of course you can," said Wally indignantly. "Besides, you've got to tell me, anyway. I promise, honour bright."

"Then I'll tell you, Master Wally."

"Good! Who was it you went out to see?"

"My father!" said Joe, in a low and unsteady voice. Wally started violently.

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CHAPTER 8

Wally Makes Himself at Home.

"Your father?" he breathed.

"Yes."

"But—but I don't catch on," faltered Wally, quite taken aback. "Isn't your father a—a—a—" Wally paused. He did not like to say the word.

Joe smiled bitterly in the darkness.

"A convict," he said. "Yes, you may as well say it out. My father's a burglar and a convict—a ticket-of-leave man."

"The police are looking for him since the silly ass tried to break into Greyfriars School," said Wally.

"That's right."

"Then how dare he come here?" Wally exclaimed. "It's a chap's duty to give information to the police, so that he can be arrested."

"Not my own father, Wally."

"Well, I suppose not, as far as you're concerned," said Wally. "But I—"

"You've promised."

"My only Aunt Jane! That settles it for me!" said Wally, with a breath of relief. "I can't say a word, of course. Look here, was it your father that wrote that letter to you?"

"Yes."

"It was awfully risky, under the circumstances."

"I know it was."

"What did he do it for—money?"

"No; he wanted to see me before he went away."

"Did he?" said Wally doubtfully. "What did he want to see you for?"

"I—I don't know—because I'm his son, I suppose," said Joe uneasily.

Wally snorted.

"From what I hear of your father he doesn't strike me as being a very affectionate parent," he said. "Tom Merry took you away from him when he was welping you with a strap, didn't he?"

"Well, yes."

"Did he ever treat you decently while you were with him?"

"N-no."

"Yet he wants to run all this fearful risk to say goodbye to you?"

"I—I suppose he feels it a bit, now he's going to Canada, and won't see me never no more," said poor Joe.

"H'm!" said Wally.

"Don't you believe him, Master Wally?" asked Joe, making a mental resolve not to tell the unbelieving fag anything about the proposed visit of Bill Frayne that night. It was no use having an argument with Wally on that subject, too.

"Blessed if I do!" said Wally. "Of course, I don't want to say anything against a chap's governor. A chap's governor is a chap's governor, and he's sacred—you can't get away from that. But this case is different—he's a brute, and he's always treated you badly, and so I can't help thinking that he's got an axe to grind, especially as you're not sure that he's your governor at all."

Joe was silent.

"Well, come and let's get something to eat," said Wally. "Look here, suppose we ask Tom Merry his opinion about it?"

"I—I don't want to mention it to anybody."

"You ought to ask Tom Merry, as he's a sort of guardian to you, and I should like an older chap's opinion myself."

"I don't mind, then."

"Besides, we may be able to get some tea in Tom Merry's study," said Wally. "I know they have been having a feed, and I think there's very likely something left. They had jam and cake, I know."

Joe grinned.

"All right, Master Wally; I'll come."

"Come on, then," said Wally.

He led the way from the box-room to the Shell passage. The door of Tom Merry's study was wide open, and the light streamed out and voices could be heard. Clearest of all were the aristocratic tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, raised a trifle above their accustomed pitch.

"Oh, rats! There's my blessed major!" said Wally, with a grunt.

Joe plucked at his sleeve.

"P'raps we'd better leave it a bit," he whispered.

Wally dragged him on.

"Impossible, kid!"

"But why?"

"I'm hungry."

"But, I say—"

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

And Wally dragged the waf of St. Jim's into Tom Merry's study before he had time to say anything further.

"WALLY, you Shell boundahs—"

Tom Merry held up his hand. He held it up for silence, but silence was the last thing that was likely to be obtainable in his study just then.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had finished their prep., which was fortunate, for they would not have had much chance of getting anything done otherwise. For the chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth were paying them a visit, and as they were all talking at once, work was quite out of the question. The Terrible Three were doing their fair share of talk also, and the noise in the study was growing audible to the very end of the Shell passage.

"Of all the chumps—," said Blake.

"Fatheads, I should say!" Digby remarked.

"Blessed asses!" said Herries, after a moment's reflection, to be sure of hitting upon the correct expression.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry waved his hand in the air. He might have waved it for hours without its having any effect upon the conversational powers of the chums of the Fourth. They were in earnest, and D'Arcy in particular was in possession of a very fine flow of language.

"Order!" said Monty Lowther, yawning, and stretching out his long legs. "Chuck it, you juniors!"

"Juniahs!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Yes; you fags!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Order!"

"You fwabjous chump—"

"I like Gussy chiefly for his nice manners," said Monty Lowther. "When he visits a chap in his study he's so nice and particular about the expressions he uses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," said Blake, "enough talking—"

"More than enough," said Tom Merry blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nuff said!" roared Blake. "The question is, are you going to step out gracefully and leave the cricket captaincy in its proper place, the Fourth?"

"That's the question, Tom Mewwy."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I've explained to you—"

"Yaas, wathah, and I—"

"We've all explained—"

"You have!" said Manners. "You'd argue the hind-legs off a giddy mule. Why don't you go and explain things to somebody else, or else shut yourselves up in your own study and explain to one another?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Stop that row in there!" bawled Gore from along the passage. Gore was in the next study, trying to work. "How can I get anything done when you're jawing away like a whole set of rotten gramophones?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Is that a conundrum, Gore?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you Shell chaps—" roared Herries.

"I don't want you chaps to think you're unwelcome," yawned Lowther, "but would you mind telling us at what time you've ordered your carriages?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

It was at this moment that Wally dragged Joe Frayne into the study.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Any grub going?" asked Wally.

"No," said Lowther, "it's gone."

"Oh, don't be funny! Look here, we haven't had tea," said Wally. "Besides, Joe has something important to tell you."

Joe flushed.

"Bai Jove! If Joe is in any need of advice I'm quite willin' to point out to him the wight and pwopah thing to do."

"Go hon!" said Wally.

"Weally, you young wascal—"

"But we're hungry now," said Wally. "Suppose you Fourth-Form chaps clear out while Tom Merry gives us some tea?"

The Fourth-Formers stared blankly at the hero of the Third. They were undecided whether to laugh or whether to bump Wally on the carpet.

"That is hardly a respectful way of addressin' your eldahs, Wally," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy reprovingly.

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

"You young boundah—"

"Oh, I'll get along!" said Blake, with a sniff. "I've

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explained how the matter stands to you Shell bounders. If you don't like to look at it in a sensible way, Tom Merry, there will be an election."

"But I am looking at it in a sensible way," said Tom Merry. "That's the trouble."

"Oh, rats!"

And Blake tramped out of the study, followed by Herries and Digby. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remained behind.

He screwed his monocle into his eye, and looked earnestly at Joe.

"My deah kid," he remarked, "I do not wish to appeah undy inquisitive, but I feel that I am the pwopah person to advise you if you are in need of advice. What a chap wequires at such a time is a fellah of tact and judgment."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"You have come here to get Tom Mewwy's advice?"

"Yes, Master D'Arcy. I'll be glad to tell you about it, too, if you care to listen," said Joe Frayne.

"Vewy good, deah boy. I shall be vewy pleased to give you the benefit of my age and experiewce."

"Grub first," said Wally.

"Wally, I wefuse to allow you to use that disgustin' word. Why cannot you say suppah or food or pwovisions, or somethin' respectable, at all events?"

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me—"

"Bosh, then!"

"Undah the circs.—"

"I don't know about grub," said Tom Merry. "I believe there's some jam—"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy—"

"Exactly. And there's some cake—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And bread-and-butter, of course," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Get them out of the cupboard, Monty, and let them begin."

"Good!" said Wally. "I'll help myself if you don't mind. Lowther is a vewy handsome chap, but he can't move for nuts."

"You cheeky young rascal—"

"Oh, deah; don't you begin like Gus!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"It's like being among a set of gramophones all going at once," Wally remarked. "Never mind, so long as the grub is good."

And Wally threw open the cupboard door, and began to drag out the provisions.

"Mind!" roared Manners. "Don't shove the blessed jam-pot on my blessed foolscap, you blessed idiot."

"Move your blessed foolscap then, you blessed ass, off the blessed table, if you don't want the blessed jam on the blessed thing."

"You young ass—"

Words failed Manners. Wally helped himself and Joe to bread-and-butter and jam, and grinned genially at the chums of the Shell, and his indignant major, as he began to eat. The Terrible Three watched him silently. They were equal to most things, and were seldom taken aback. But they had acknowledged long ago that they were not quite equal to dealing with Wally of the Third.

"Well, this is jolly good prog," said Wally.

"What a howwid word, Wally!"

"Well, grub, then," said Wally.

"That is almost as bad, you young wuffian."

"There's no satisfying some people," said Wally. "Most chaps would feel proud of having a nice minor like me."

"I should certainly be unable to compwehend their fwame of mind, then."

"You see—"

"I wegard you as a feahful young wuffian. Your collah is howwidly soiled, and your hands are far fwom clean. I considah—"

"When Gussy's finished, if he ever is, Joe's going to tell you about something that's happened," said Wally. "He wants to have your opinion. But if Gussy wishes to hold the floor, of course, Joe will have to wait."

D'Arcy turned crimson, and the chums of the Shell chuckled.

"I have finished, you young wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Hurrah!"

"Go ahead, Joe," said Tom Merry, laughing. "What's happened?"

And the waif of St. Jim's explained.

CHAPTER 9.

Quite Clear to D'Arcy.

JOE blurted out the story with a red face and a confused tongue. Once it had not seemed to the waif of St. Jim's so disgraceful as it seemed now. When he had been a denizen of Blucher's Buildings, in London, the associate of beggars and thieves, he had looked upon Bill Frayne's profession as a matter of course. His father was not unlike the fathers of other boys he knew. But the new surroundings at St. Jim's had made a far-reaching difference. Joe coloured and faltered now as he spoke.

The Terrible Three and D'Arcy listened in silence.

Joe finished, his voice dying away.

"I don't like to tell you," he said. "I know how 'orrid it is. I know how good it is of you to speak to me at all."

"Rats!" said Wally.

"Yaas, wathah! I agwee with Wally in sayin' wats, for once," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "My deah boy, it is not for us to visit the sins of the fathahs on the children. That is not the place of anybody on earth, my deah kid."

"It's rough on you, Joe," said Tom Merry. "We're sorry. I dare say your father would have been a better man, too, if he'd had a chance."

"Yes, sir," said Joe eagerly; "and he ain't so bad at 'eart, sir. He's going to Canada, and he's come down 'ere to say good-bye to me fust."

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as weally wippin'," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is aw'fly decent of Fwayne, you chaps."

The Terrible Three were silent.

It was so decent of Frayne that, knowing as much as they did about the man, they were astonished, and could not help feeling doubtful, as Wally did.

But D'Arcy had no doubts.

His face was beaming cheerfully, and he was evidently delighted at this proof of one touch of decency left in an old and hardened criminal.

He patted Joe affectionately on the shoulder.

"Your governah is not such a bad sort, kid," he said. "You wemembah what Shakespeare says about sermons in things and good in stones."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Sermons in stones, you ass, and good in everything."

"I fail to see much difference. But, as I was sayin', there is some good in evewy chap, if it is only bwrought to light."

"I shouldn't have thought of looking for much good in Bill Frayne," Manners remarked.

"That's where you make your mistake, deah boy," said D'Arcy loftily. "When you have had my experiewce—"

"Eh?"

"When you are as experiewced as I am—"

"My hat!"

"When you have weached my experiewce and knowledge of the world," repeated D'Arcy, with emphasis, "you will compwehend that it is quite impos. for any chap to be all bad. Nobody is so black as he is painted, as a mattah of fact, and nobody at all is all black."

"Yes; Rugger footballers are sometimes," said Lowther.

"Eh?"

"Haven't you heard of the All Blacks?"

"You uttah ass!"

"Don't be funny, Lowther, old man," said Wally imploringly. "Life's short, and what's the use of turning it into a misery?"

"Why, you young—"

"Cheese it, old man—cheese it," said Wally, shaking his finger—a rather jammy one—at Lowther. "Ring off, before somebody rises up with a chopper some day and stops your being funny for good."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"About this matter," said Tom Merry pacifically. "You say your father didn't want any money, Joe?"

"No, Master Tom."

"He never asked you for any?" Manners asked.

"No."

"Did he know you had any?" asked Lowther.

"I told him I had a pound, and wanted him to take it," said Joe.

"Didn't he take it?"

"No, sir."

"He refused the pound?" asked Wally, in surprise.

"Yes, Master Wally."

Wally rubbed his chin thoughtfully—thereby transferring to it a considerable portion of the jam he had collected upon his fingers.

"Well, I'm blessed if I catch on to this, that's all!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wally, it seems quite plain to me," said Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah now that Shakespeare also says,

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CHAPTER 10.

No Go!

"There is some soul of goodness in things evil, would men observingly distil it out." I am a gweat believah in Shakespeare—he w'ote a lot of clevah things, that I could nevah have w'ritten myself."

"Go hon," said Monty Lowther.

"It is a fact, Lowthah."

"Well, I don't savvy," said Wally. "My belief is that the man's on the make, though I don't see how, so far. Sorry, Joe, but that's my belief."

Joe coloured painfully. D'Arcy gave his minor a reproving glance.

"Wally, you are a young wuffian!" he exclaimed. "It is all perfectly cleah to me. The man has been a wogue and a wascal, but on decidin' to go abroad, he thought of his only son, whom he would nevah see again. Natuwallly he felt that he could not go without seein' him."

"Thank you, Master D'Arcy," said Joe, with tears in his eyes. "That's how I feel about it myself, sir."

"It's all cleah enough to me, deah boy. I am shocked and disgusted to find that Wally is cynical at his age. It's howwid!"

"I'm not cynical, you ass," said Wally, flushing. "Only I don't believe that Frayne has turned over a new leaf."

"It is quite likely; in fact, quite certain, Wally. The fathah's heart yearns for his boy, in spite of a life of cwime," said D'Arcy. "I've often wead of such things in books. It ifrequently happens in novels."

"Not often in real life, though."

"Oh, you are a young wuffian!"

Joe turned an anxious glance upon Tom Merry.

"What do you think, Master Tom?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I don't know what to think, Joe, and that's the truth," he said honestly. "I hope it's as Gussy believes; and I don't see what Frayne has to gain by telling lies."

"It's perfectly clear—"

"Suppose you let us see the letter," said Lowther.

"Oh, yes; I've got it 'ere!"

Joe felt in his pocket.

He drew his hand out empty.

"Haven't you got it about you, young 'un?"

Joe changed colour.

"I must 'ave—'ave dropped it," he muttered. "It's gone!"

"In another pocket, perhaps," said Tom Merry.

Joe shook his head.

"I put it in that pocket, sir," he said.

"Well, try the other pockets, you young clump," said Wally.

Joe went through his other pockets, but the result was the same. The letter was gone.

"I've lost it," he said.

"Young ass!" said Wally.

"Weally, Wally—"

"I suppose you dropped it climbing in or out of the box-room window," said Wally. "We'll go and look for it, if you like. I've got an electric lamp; it's Glyn's really, but I've borrowed it."

"Better," said Tom Merry. "If one of the fags finds it, he might read it, and that would make fresh trouble."

"I'll go," said Joe.

He left the study with Wally. The Terrible Three and the swell of the Fourth looked at one another dubiously.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Monty Lowther.

"The chap was an utter ruffian, and I don't believe in him for a second."

"But why should he come down here and stuff Joe up for nothing?" asked Tom Merry.

"That's a giddy mystery."

"It was jolly risky for him, too," said Manners.

"I know—it's a mystery."

D'Arcy rose to his feet. He adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and surveyed the Terrible Three with considerable scorn.

"I wegard you as uttah asses!" he said, in measured tones.

"It is all perfectly cleah to me."

"Oh, rats!"

"The man was a wuffian and a wascal, but he has wepented. Wascols often do wepnt—there is Goah, for instance."

"Gore wasn't a burglar."

"Well, no, but he was a bully, and a liah—and a liah isn't much bettah than a burglah, as a mattah of fact. Goah wepented."

"He keeps on having lapses, though," grinned Lowther.

"Pewwaps; but he wepents ewery time, I believe. It's the same with Bill Fwayne. It is all perfectly cleah to me. He has wepented, and he is goin' to Canada to—"

"To have relapses," said Lowther.

"No, you ass; to lead a new and a bettah life, as they do in the last chapters of novels," said D'Arcy. "I wegard you thwee as cynical beasts! It is all perfectly cleah to me."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strode from the Shell study.

WALLY tramped along the passage to the box-room, with a frowning brow. Joe was looking deeply troubled, and that was the only reason why Wally did not "go" for him. Wally was of opinion that Joe had been a careless ass, but he would not say so, under the circumstances—Joe was worried enough.

"My only Aunt Jane!" Wally muttered suddenly.

Joe turned to him.

"There's somebody in the box-room," said Wally.

"Oh!"

"Quiet!"

Wally stepped on with noiseless feet. Joe followed him with equal caution. The sounds of voices came from the half-open door of the box-room, and they recognised the tones of the fags. Hobbs & Co. were in the room.

"I saw them come out of here," Hobbs's voice was saying, and the words came quite clearly along the quiet passage. "They had been up to something—breaking bounds, most likely."

"The window was shut, Hobby," said Fane.

"Well, they'd shut it after them, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"It's been opened though," said Picke, with a chuckle.

"How do you know?"

"The dust is wiped off it where they took hold. Look here! You can see the finger-marks in the dust."

"My hat, Picke's right!"

"I wonder what they went out for?" said Colley. "Wally wouldn't go with Frayne to meet any of his criminal friends."

"Hallo! Look here!"

"What is it?"

"Look!"

Wally had reached the door of the box-room. He could not see to what the excited exclamations of the fags referred. But he could guess. The fags had the light full on, and if the note had been dropped in the box-room they could not fail to see it. They had found Joe's letter.

Joe understood it, too. He pressed Wally's arm tightly in his hand.

"They've found it, Master Wally," he whispered.

"Right!"

"I must have dropped it, getting into the window."

"Yes, you ass!"

"They—they've got it," faltered Joe. "I—I say, Master Wally, what shall we do?"

Wally snorted.

"Do? Get it away, of course! Come on!"

Wally ran to the box-room. There was a rush of the fags to close and lock the door the instant they heard footsteps. But Wally had his foot in the opening already.

"It's Wally!" roared Fane.

"Get out!"

"You can't come in!"

Wally shoved hard on the door. Seven or eight fags were in the room, and they were all pressing from the inside. Wally's foot was crushed between the door and the jamb, and had not his boot been thick and strong he would certainly have been hurt.

"Get your hoof out, Wally!" shouted Fane.

"Rats! I'm coming in!"

"You're not!"

"No admittance except on business," grinned Colley. "And you've got no business here, D'Arcy minor!"

"Let me in!"

"No fear!"

"Kick his ankle, some of you!" said Hobbs. "He'll jolly soon get his hoof out then!"

"Oh, don't be a cad!" said Fane.

"Stamp on his toes, then!"

"Open this door!" roared Wally.

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Outside, D'Arcy minor!"

Wally shoved hard at the door.

"Back up, Joe!" he gasped.

"Yes, Master Wally!" panted Joe.

The two comrades exerted themselves frantically at the shoving of the door. If the fags within succeeded in getting it shut they could turn the key in the lock, and then there would be no chance of recovering the letter.

"Shove away, Joe!"

"Yes, Master Wally!"

"Not so much 'Master Wally,' and more beef!" growled Wally, exerting himself frantically at the door.

"Keep your hoof against it, Picke," said Fane's voice inside. "You've got that letter, Hobby, haven't you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, we can keep the door shut while you read it out."

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"Good egg!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Don't you read that letter!" shouted Joe. "It's mean! Don't be cads! Gimme my letter!"
 "He's afraid of us hearing what his people have been up to!" grinned Colley. "Listen for the latest news from Portland and Pentonville."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Wally and Joe made one more tremendous effort to push open the door. But it was lined with feet inside, and the feet held it firm. And, as they struggled and shoved in vain, Hobbs's voice was heard reading out the letter.
 From beginning to end he read it.
 Joe groaned, and receded from the door.
 "It's all up, Master Wally!"
 Wally snorted.
 "Never mind! You can lick Hobbs when he comes out."
 Joe shook his head.
 Licking Hobbs would be small comfort to him. The letter was read out now, and the Third Form knew that his father—Bill Frayne, the outcast, who was wanted by the police for the attempted burglary at Greyfriars—was in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's.
 Joe plunged his hands deep into his pockets and tramped away. Wally waited in the passage for the fags to come out of the box-room, and there was a very grim expression upon Wally's face.
 Inside the box-room the fags were chuckling gleefully.
 "His father!" said Hobbs.
 "The convict!"
 "The ticket-of-leave man!"
 "The police are looking for him now!" said Colley.
 Fane pushed the door shut. There was no pressure from outside now. There was a very cautious expression upon Fane's face.
 "Look here," he said, in a low voice—"look here, this is jolly serious. The man must be dotty to write to young Frayne, and young Frayne must be dotty to keep his letters. Do you know what this means?"
 "It means that Frayne pere is hanging about the school to see his precious son," said Hobbs. "Nothing else, that I know of."
 "He's seen him by this time."
 "True!"
 "The police want to see Frayne major," said Fane; "and it's our jolly duty to send them information where he may be found."
 "Phew!"
 "That's my idea," said Fane firmly. "The man's a criminal; and, for all we know, he may be intending to burgle St. Jim's, just as he did Greyfriars."
 "My hat!"
 "It's jolly well likely!" said Picke.
 "Perhaps his son is going to help him?" Hobbs suggested.
 "I shouldn't wonder."
 Fane frowned.
 "Well, no, it's no good being too rough on the kid," he said. "I don't believe young Frayne's that sort. But the old chap may intend to burgle without consulting him. There are thousands of pounds' worth of plate in the safe in the library—there have been attempts to burgle it before."
 "Yes, rather!"
 "The police ought to have that letter," Hobbs remarked.
 "And they're going to!" said Fane. "My idea is that it should be sent to them at once, in case old Frayne begins any of his little games to-night."
 "How are you going to get it there? We don't want to show up in the matter ourselves," Hobbs said rather nervously.
 "No fear!"
 The fags quitted the box-room.
 Wally was waiting in the passage. Wally said not a word. But he rushed at the Third-Formers, hitting out right and left; and, with howls and yells, they scattered and ran. But Fane had Joe's letter safely in his possession.

CHAPTER 11.
D'Arcy Means to Help.

WHEN Joe Frayne turned up in the Third Form-room that evening the fags looked at him very curiously. They expected him to cut up rusty, as they expressed it, over the loss of his letter, and over the fact that it had been read out aloud.
 But he did not.
 He did not say a word to Hobbs & Co. on the subject. He knew that it was useless. He knew that, whatever he said or did, it would not undo the fact that they had read the letter, and that they would not give it up for the asking. To say

anything more on the subject was to make it more notorious than ever.
 It was already the talk of the Third Form-room. Joe did not want it to become the talk of St. Jim's if he could help it.
 Joe was deeply troubled in his mind, and that fact showed very plainly in his pale, harassed face.
 What to do he did not know.
 That his letter had been sent to the police he never suspected. All he was afraid of was the fact becoming known that his father was near St. Jim's.
 That Frayne ought to be arrested, that he was a criminal, and should be in prison, was perfectly true.
 But Joe could not be expected to see it in that light.
 The man, criminal or not, was his father; and, to Joe, that fact made him sacred.
 How was he to warn Bill Frayne?
 He would not see his father again till the latter came to keep the appointment at midnight to keep Joe to his promise of showing him his quarters in the school. By then it might be too late to warn him of his danger.
 But Joe had to run the risk.
 He could only wait, with what patience he could muster, for the time of the appointment to arrive, and hope that the chatter of the Third Form-room would not get further till Bill Frayne had come and gone.
 But it was a weight upon his mind, and it showed in his looks—as was very apparent to the fags when they watched him.
 Hobbs chuckled over it very much.
 "Young Sikes is feeling anxious for his noble parent," he confided to Fane. "He's in a state of stew over it, not knowing whether the old gentleman will be arrested or not. Jolly, ain't it?"
 "Well, wouldn't you be anxious in his place?" said Fane, somewhat unexpectedly. "Don't be a pig, Hobby!"
 Hobbs looked sulky.
 "I suppose a blessed burglar ought to be put in prison?" he growled.
 "Yes, and I've had the letter sent to the police-station," replied Fane. "Now we can feel sorry for young Frayne, I should think."
 "Well, you're a rum beggar!" said Hobbs, staring.
 "Oh, rats!"
 Fane might feel sorry for Joe Frayne, but that did not make him sorry for what he had done. He considered that he had done his duty. Perhaps he had; but he had a secret feeling inwardly that he ought never to have known the contents of Joe's letter in the first place.
 "Looks as if he's got something on his mind, don't he?" Hobbs remarked to Picke, a much more sympathetic listener than Fane, a little later, jerking his thumb towards Joe, who was standing staring gloomily into the Form-room fire.
 Picke chuckled.
 "He does, Hobby. And he'll have something more on his mind when his pa's arrested. I say, young Frayne."
 Joe looked round.
 "Yes, Master Picke," he said heavily.
 "Your governor fond of the broad-arrow pattern in clothes?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the fags.
 Joe did not reply.
 He walked quietly out of the Form-room, leaving the fags laughing. The outcast of the Third went down the passage with a heavy heart.
 "They're all against me," he murmured. "I was a fool to think it would ever be any different, I suppose. They'll all be glad if father's taken by the police—and what will the 'Ead say? Won't it be bad for Master Tom?"
 That was Joe's most anxious thought.
 The Head had been very kind. He had allowed Joe to come to St. Jim's. The fees paid by Tom Merry's uncle for the waif were a very small consideration. The Head had been kind, and had borne patiently more than one awkward result of Joe's being at the old school. But could he bear this—if a criminal were arrested in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's, and publicly known to be the father of one of the fellows there! Would not that be asking too much of him.
 Yet it is only fair to say that Joe thought much less of his own prospects than of the danger to his father.
 The last words Bill Frayne had spoken to him had been kind, and they were still in Joe's heart. The fact that his father had taken the trouble and the risk to come and say good-bye to him before going to Canada, moved him strangely.
 A light touch fell on Joe's shoulder as he reached the end of the passage, and he stopped and looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
 "I've been lookin' for you, deah boy," said D'Arcy.
 "Yes, Master D'Arcy," said Joe.
 "Pway sit down," said Arthur Augustus, drawing Joe into

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a window-seat. "I wegard what those Shell boundahs said to you as all wot, Joe, deah boy. They have no faith in human nature, you know. It is a most common thing for a cwiminal to wepent and turn ovah a new leaf."

"Yes," said Joe.

"Novels are supposed to be the miwwor of weal life," said D'Arcy. "Well, I know it fwrequently happens in novels, particulahly in the last chaptahs. I wegard your fathah's case as a case in point. The old gentleman has been touched by the pwospect of leavin' you for evah, and he has wepent."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Master D'Arcy," said Joe eagerly. "I think so myself. But Wally——"

"Wally is a wuff young wascal."

"And Master Tom——"

"Tom Mewwy is all wight, but he has vewy little expewience and knowledge of human nature," said D'Arcy, with a lofty air of wisdom. "What you want to decide a mattah like this, is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"I congwatulate you, Joe, on this change for the bettah in your fathah," said D'Arcy seriously. "I suppose it is impos. for you to see him again, and it is a gweat pitay, because I think it might have the effect of confirmin' him in his good wewolutions."

Joe looked eager.

The waif of St. Jim's was anxious to have somebody to confide in. He shrank, naturally, from telling Wally or Tom Merry that he was admitting his father to the school that night. They were unbelieving scoffers, so far as Bill Frayne was concerned, and Joe did not want to tell them more. But he was weighed down with his secret, and his heart yearned for a sympathetic listener. He had found one in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You— you really think that, Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then perhaps——" Joe hesitated.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and looked at the waif of St. Jim's.

"Yaas, Joe?" he asked.

"I—I should like to tell you something, Master D'Arcy," Joe said slowly. "Of course, you won't say a word?"

"Of course not, deah boy."

"I'm goin' to see my fathah again."

"Bal Jove!"

"He wants to see me, Master D'Arcy."

"Naturally, undah the circs.," said D'Arcy, with a nod. "I suppose you are goin' to see him to say good-bye before he departs for evah?"

"Ye-es."

"Vewy good—vewy pwopah and wight."

"He wants to see how and where I'm living before he goes," said Joe, in a hurried whisper. "He thinks it will make him feel more easy in his mind after he's gone."

Arthur Augustus was deeply touched.

"That is aw'f'ly decent of him," he said.

"Yes, I think so, too, and I'm glad," said Joe. "But I know the—the others wouldn't believe in it."

"But he can't come here," said D'Arcy. "He won't be able to do it, Joe. He can't come here, you know; he is in dangah of bein' awwested."

Joe hesitated.

"Pway confide in me, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a wave of his hand. "I am your fwriend in this mattah, wight through."

"He is coming here," said Joe, in a low voice, and with a hurried glance up and down the passage.

D'Arcy started.

"Bal Jove!"

"It's a secret, of course."

"But when is he comin'?"

"To-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"But—but how?"

"You see, he can't come in the daytime," said Joe. "He must come at night, or not at all. It wouldn't be safe otherwise."

"I suppose not."

"He wants to see how I'm fixed before he goes," said Joe.

"I couldn't refuse him, though I know it's a fearful risk."

"Yaas, wathah! I don't vewy well see how you could, deah boy," assented Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"So I've promised to let him come."

"Vewy good."

"I'm going to let him in, and just show him round," said Joe Frayne hurriedly. "I suppose it will be all right, Master D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy laid his hand upon Joe's shoulder.

"It is quite wight, Joe, deah boy. I quite appwove of your conduct. But how are you goin' to let him in?"

"I'm going to meet him at the wall, and bring him here," said Joe.

"It's aw'f'ly wisky."

"But he wanted it."

"Quite wight. Look heah, deah boy," said D'Arcy generously. "I'll help you. I wegard you as actin' in quite a pwopah spiwit in this mattah, and I am goin' to give you my assistance. It would be aw'f'ly wotten for you to get up all alone in the middle of the night. I will get up, too."

"But——"

"I don't mind at all. I will keep on some of my things, so it will be all wight," said D'Arcy. "What time are you meetin' the chap?"

"At twelve."

"Vewy good. At a quartah to twelve I will be waitin' for you outside the door of the Third-Form dormitoway."

"But——"

"It's all wight, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "I don't mind it in the least. And now let us separate. We don't want to give an impresson that we are discussin' secwets, you know. We shall have to be aw'f'ly cautious."

And Arthur Augustus patted Joe encouragingly on the shoulder and walked away. He left the waif of St. Jim's in a dubious frame of mind. Joe was glad to have a sympathiser, and he was glad not to have to move about alone at midnight. But he had not so much confidence in D'Arcy's tact and judgment as the elegant junior himself had.

CHAPTER 12.

Keeping the Secret!

JACK BLAKE stared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when the Fourth-Form were turning in that night. The swell of St. Jim's was putting on his pyjamas—and beautiful pyjamas they were. He was putting them on over his beautiful underclothing, and that was what made Jack Blake stare. As a rule, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was most fastidious in these matters.

"Gussy!" Blake rapped out.

Arthur Augustus started. Whenever D'Arcy was keeping a secret, he was going to be being startled very easily.

"Yaas, deah boy," he said.

"Gone off your rocker?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'."

"Sure you're not dotty?" asked Blake, with great solicitude.

"Weally, you ass——"

"Then what are you goin' to bed in your clothes for?"

"I am not goin' to bed in my clothes. I suppose I need not remove my few wemainin' garments unless I choose?" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Certainly not; but wherefore this thushness?"

"I wewuse to entah into a widiculous discush," said D'Arcy.

"But why——"

"Good-night, deah boy."

"I suppose you're not getting up to-night to break bounds, are you?" Blake inquired.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You're not going down to the Green Man to play a little game of poker?"

"You uttah ass——"

"Then if you're not going to get up, what are you keeping some of your things on for?" Blake demanded.

"I decline to be catechised," said Arthur Augustus, stepping into bed. "Good-night, you fellows!"

"Oh, he's off his chump, that's all!" said Digby. "What's the good of expecting Gussy to give a reason for anything he does!"

"Weally, Dig——"

"What has he got a pair of shoes out of his box for?" demanded Herries. "What will you want with felt slippers, Gussy?"

D'Arcy turned red, and reached out of bed to push the felt slippers under, so that they would be out of sight.

"Weally, Hewwies——" he murmured.

"Well, my haf!" said Blake.

D'Arcy laid his head on the pillow. He affected not to hear the further comments passed by his chums.

The Fourth Form turned in, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came to see lights out.

When he was gone, D'Arcy's voice was heard in low tones:

"Blake! I say, Blake, deah boy!"

"Yes?" said Blake.

"Pway, don't shout."

"Well, what is it?"

"Will you lend me your electwic lamp?"

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NEXT WEEK:

"THE RIVAL SCHOOLS."

Blake sat up in bed.
 "Lend you what!" he exclaimed.
 "Your little electric lamp—the one you cawwy in your pocket, you know."
 "What do you want an electric lamp for?"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Are you getting up to-night?"
 "I decline to be questioned, deah boy."
 "You're breaking 'bounders."
 "Nothin' of the sort."
 "Then do you mean to say that you're going to get up, simply to wander round the house with an electric lamp?"
 Blake demanded.
 "Certainly not!"
 "Then what do you mean to say?"
 "Nothin'."
 Blake snorted.
 "If it wasn't too much trouble to get out of bed, I'd jolly well give you a thick ear!" he exclaimed. "Of all the silly asses—"

"Weally, Blake—"
 "Will you tell me what you want the torch for?"
 "No, I won't!"
 "In that case—"
 "If you wufuse to lend it to me, Blake, I shall wegard it as a vevy unwiendly pwoceedin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly.
 Blake chuckled.
 "My dear ass, you can have it and welcome."
 "Thank you vevy much, deah boy! Where is it?"
 "In my jacket-pocket."
 "Thanks, old fellow!"
 "You're welcome to use it as long as you like," said Blake. "Don't consider it in the least, as far as that goes. The only thing is, that it's exhausted, you know, and wants re-filling. It won't show any light. But you're welcome to the loan of it. I haven't the least objection to your using it."

There was a chuckle from several beds in the darkness. Arthur Augustus was silent for a few moments, apparently while he was realising the force of Blake's remarks. Then his voice was heard again.

"Blake, I wegard you as an uttah ass!"
 "Go hon!"
 "And a silly fathead."
 "Hear, hear!"
 "And a fwabjous chump!"
 "Hurrah!"

"I wufuse to use your wotten electric lamp undah any cirs. whatevah. I decline to touch the wotten thing."
 "Don't do that, Gussy. Use it by all means—you're quite welcome to use it."

"You uttah duffah!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway, don't cackle, deah boys. I want to go to sleep."

"Mind you don't oversleep yourself," said Blake. "I don't know what time you mean to get up, but if you go to sleep, I don't suppose you'll wake till morning."
 "Bai Jove!"

Blake chuckled.
 "Of course, if you don't intend to get up in the middle of the night for anything, Gussy, that won't hurt."

"Weally, Blake—"
 "Why don't you explain what the little game is?" Blake demanded.

"Wats!"
 "Confide in your uncle," said Digby, indignantly.
 "Pway don't be an ass, Dig, deah boy!"

There was silence in the dormitory. Blake stepped quietly out of bed, and bent over Digby and whispered:
 "Gussy's getting up to-night."

"Yes, rather!"
 "I suppose it's some jape. He's having his noble leg pulled, either by the Shell bounders, or by Figgins & Co., over in the New House."
 "I suppose so."

"We're not going to let him be done."
 "No fear!"

"I'm staying awake," said Blake. "If Gussy gets up I'll call you, and we'll be on in the scene, whatever it is."
 "What-ho!" murmured

Digby.
 D'Arcy's voice was heard again.

"Blake!"
 "Hallo?" said Blake, as he climbed back into bed.
 "You were talking to Dig?"

"Yes, I believe I was."
 "What were you saying?"
 "I decline to tell you, deah boy, as you refuse to borrow my electric lamp," said Blake courteously. "One good turn deserves another."

"Blake, you ass—"
 "Good-night!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Give the chaps a chance, Gussy! They want to go to sleep, and how can they do it with you running on like a gramophone?"

"Weally—"
 "Hush!"
 "Blake—"
 "Shush!"
 "You uttah—"
 "Hist!"

And Arthur Augustus relapsed, at last, into indignant silence.

CHAPTER 13.
Wally Wants to Know.

JOE FRAYNE did not sleep that night. He was too uneasy and excited to think of it. But he turned in, in the ordinary way, with the rest of the Third Form. He intended to be up again at a late hour, but he was a little more careful than D'Arcy to keep up appearances. There was nothing in his manner to indicate to the fags of the Third that he meant to leave his bed before the rising-bell sounded in the morning.

But Joe's head lay sleepless on the pillow. The thought of his father was continually in his mind, and the later the hour grew, and the closer the time came for keeping the appointment with Bill Frayne, the more excited and unquiet the lad felt.

After all, he reflected, there was nothing to be uneasy

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Wally ran to the window. Outside in the faint glimmer of the starlight he saw the rainpipe that ran from the window to the ground, and he knew what the window was open for. Joe was gone! (See page 6.)

about. He would admit his father to the school, and in ten minutes he would be gone. Then he would creep back to bed, with the knowledge that he had done all that he could to perform his duty to his father before he parted with him for ever.

What was there to be so deeply troubled in his mind about?

He hardly knew.

But troubled and excited he was, and his heart was beating painfully, and more than once he found himself starting and listening to the slightest sounds.

There was one other in the dormitory who did not sleep, and that was Wally. Wally was anxious about his friend.

Wally woke up in fits and starts. The thought of Bill Frayne was in his mind, and with that there was a thought

—a dark suspicion—that the man's presence near St. Jim's meant mischief.

The story of Frayne's repentance did not impose upon Wally for a moment. He was only puzzled to know what the man wanted at St. Jim's.

What did he want?

Not money from his son—such money as his son could give him. He had refused that. Had he some lawless plan in view, in which Joe could be of assistance to him—either ignorantly or by force? Wally suspected it.

But Wally was but a lad, and though the suspicion was in his mind, it was not strong enough to make him think of watching the night instead of sleeping.

But it was heavy enough on his consciousness to cause him to sleep uneasily, and to wake more than he slept.

It was in a fit of wakefulness that Wally lay and listened to three-quarters chiming out from the tower.

A quarter to twelve!

Nearly midnight!

Wally moved drowsily in his bed, and as he did so, he became aware of a sound of someone else moving in the dormitory.

The thought of Bill Frayne was like a weight on his mind, and Wally started up in bed immediately, with every nerve quivering.

He tried to penetrate the darkness of the room with his eyes.

"Who's that?" he called out.

There was no reply.

But a faint sound from the direction of the door warned Wally that it had been opened and shut with great caution. Wally jumped out of bed.

He struck a match and looked quickly round the dormitory. His heart was beating fast, and he hardly knew what he expected to see. He saw nothing for a moment; but as his glance turned upon Joe's bed, by the last glimmer of the match, he saw that the bed was empty.

Joe was gone!

The match went out.

Wally threw it down and ran to the door. He opened it quietly, and as he did so he heard a sound of voices.

"Joe, deah boy, I'm here, you see."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, what's that?"

Wally could see them dimly in the gloom of the corridor. He went out of the dorm., shivering in his pyjamas.

"Joe, what are you doing out here?"

"I—I—"

"Come back to bed!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" said Wally. "You ought to have more sense than to be out of bed yourself at this time!"

"You disrespectful young wascal—"

"Rats! Come in, Joe!"

"I—I can't, Master Wally!"

"Why can't you?"

"I—I can't!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Wally, I insist upon your leavin' Fwayne to do as he likes!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "He is actin' in a vewy wight and pwopah mannah, and he has my complete approval!"

"And that is enough, of course?" Wally said sarcastically.

"I twust so!" replied Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Wally—"

"Rats!"

"Pway wait a minute for me, Fwayne, while I give Wally a feahful thwashin!"

"Do be quiet!" murmured Joe. "The game's up if we're heard, and—remember how I stand, Master D'Arcy."

"Quite wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, cooling down. "It's all sewene; I'll be vewy quiet indeed! Wun on, and leave Wally to me! I'll explain to him."

"But—"

"It's all wight; I won't say too much!"

"Very well, Master D'Arcy!"

Wally made a grasp at Joe, but the waif of St. Jim's eluded him, and ran down the passage. Wally was following, when Arthur Augustus grasped him by the shoulder.

"Pway stop, Wally—"

Wally paused, breathing hard.

"Where has Joe gone?" he demanded.

"Downstairs."

"I mean, what for?"

"It's all wight, Wally!"

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass; and what I mean is that it is all wight!" said D'Arcy. "I quite approve of Joe's action, and that is all wight. You had bettah go back to bed, and—"

"I'm jolly well not going to do anything of the sort, you ass!"

"As your majah, I command you—"

"And as a silly ass, you can go and eat coke!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"What is Joe up to? What are you helping him for? What is the little game, anyway?" demanded the exasperated Wally.

"It is impos. to explain, as I am undah a pwomise to Joe; but you can take my word for it that it is all wight."

"Is it a jape?"

"No," replied D'Arcy, with dignity; "it is not a jape!"

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"Then what is it?"

"Joe is performin' a filial dutay."

Wally jumped.

"What! Something to do with his father?"

"I wefuse to explain furthah!"

"You chump!" breathed Wally. "Do you mean to say he is going out to meet that man at this time of night?"

"I decline to be called a chump!"

Wally grasped his major by the shoulder, and shook him in a decidedly disrespectful manner.

"Look here, you fathead—"

"I wefuse—"

"Is Joe's father hanging about the school now?"

"I decline—"

Wally released his major. There was evidently no information to be got out of the swell of St. Jim's. Wally left him, and rushed in the direction Joe had taken. D'Arcy called after him cautiously:

"Wally! Come back! You young wascal!"

His voice died away.

Wally ran on. At the end of the passage dim figures loomed up, and Wally grasped one of them, with a sharp exclamation:

"Now then, Joe, you young sweep!"

"Let go!" said a voice.

But it was not Joe's voice. It belonged to Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form.

CHAPTER 14.

In His True Colours.

JOE listened intently as he crept down the stairs.

There seemed to be no sound in the great building. At that hour not a light gleamed from a window at St. Jim's, unless it was a lamp burning in some room where a student was still applying himself to his task.

St. Jim's was asleep.

Joe crept down the stairs, and reached the small window opening from the hall upon the quad., and felt for the fastening.

A glimmer of strange light came through the stained glass.

There was starlight in the quadrangle, and dim reflections fell into the House. Joe unfastened the window with a trembling hand. It opened easily and silently.

A gust of cool air on his face calmed and revived him. He climbed out into the quad., and closed the lattice softly.

Then he ran for the school wall. He knew the way in the dark—could have followed it blindfolded, if necessary.

He reached the wall, and in a moment or two more he was clinging to it, and peering over into the dimness of the road.

"Are you there?"

His voice shook as he asked the question. A black shadow detached itself from the wall, and came eagerly along towards Joe.

"Here I am!"

It was Bill Frayne's voice.

Joe's heart beat.

"It's hardly twelve, father."

"I've been waiting ten minutes," said Bill Frayne. "Lend me a 'and in! A policeman passed me five minutes ago. I was in the shadow, and he didn't see me."

"Oh, that's only the local bobby of Rylecombe!" said Joe.

"He wouldn't be dangerous."

"It was a plain-clothes man."

"Then how did you—"

"Know? Do you think I don't know a plain-clothes man when I see him?" said Frayne savagely. "They've got wind of my being down here somehow, I suppose—the dickens knows how—I don't! That man doesn't belong to this district—he may have come over from Wayland, perhaps. But I shall be gone to-night—burn them! Help me in!"

"Wouldn't it be safer."

"Help me in!"

"All right, father!"

Joe gave the man a hand up to the wall. Frayne was a heavy man, and he breathed hard as he reached a place beside Joe. The two of them crouched there in the thick shadow of the tree as the sound of footsteps came along the lane.

Frayne's hand closed on Joe's shoulder hard.

"Hush!"

His voice was barely audible. The footsteps came along. Dimly the crouching pair saw a burly figure stride by. The passer did not look up. But there was something in his appearance and his gait which Joe could not mistake. The man was a plain-clothes constable.

Frayne breathed hard.

"That was a narrow shave!" he murmured, when the steps had died away in the direction of the school gates.

"Do you think he was looking for you, father?"

"Of course!"

Frayne dropped down inside the school wall. Joe followed, very troubled in his mind. If pursuit was so close as this, it was madness for Frayne to linger a moment where he was; yet, he had evidently not abandoned his intention of seeing the interior of the School House of St. Jim's.

And yet, at the same time, his manner was anything but that of an affectionate parent. Joe was sorely puzzled.

"Which way?" murmured Frayne.

"There's the School House."

"Lead on, then!"

Joe led the way in silence.

They reached the window on the ground floor, which he had left unfastened. Joe pushed it open from the outside, and Frayne's eyes glittered.

"Good!" he murmured.

"This way!" said Joe.

Joe climbed in. The ruffian followed, and stepped down quietly inside the house. Then he drew on felt shoes over his boots.

Joe saw him, in the dim light from the window, bend his head to listen. No sound came from the House. Joe wondered where D'Arcy and Wally were, and what they were doing. In the darkness he could see nothing.

The burglar could see nothing, and hear nothing. He seemed to be satisfied, and he raised his head and came nearer to Joe.

"You've done that well, kid!" he murmured. "You couldn't have managed it better if I had trained you to it!"

"Come on, father! You want to see——"

"Wait a moment!"

Joe paused.

"Look 'ere, Joe," said the man, in a whisper, "there ain't much time to waste; it ain't safe for me to stay here!"

"You'll be safe in Canada, father."

The man chuckled softly.

"I'm not going to Canada!"

Joe drew a quick, deep breath of dismay.

"You're not going?" he faltered.

"No!"

"Then you were—were——"

"That was a yarn," said Frayne. "I had to tell you something to get in 'ere! Look 'ere, Joe, will you come with me? You're a likely lad for my business, and I'll do you fair and square if you like to come in with me? We'll go shares, and you shall have a 'and in all the jobs. What do you say?"

Joe gasped.

"D-d-do you mean—become a thief?"

"I mean do as you were born and brought up to do!" said Frayne surlily. "What chance have you got of getting on in a place like this? You wasn't born for it? You'll have to come to my business sooner or later."

"Never!"

"Don't be a young fool! Listen to what I say—you must come to it. Make up your mind now!"

"I shall never come to it! I'll starve first—and I won't steal! If you came here to say that to me——"

"Wot else?" said the burglar savagely. "Do you think I care whether you're comfortable here or not, you young 'ound? Do you think what I said was anything but a dodge to get into the school?"

"Father!"

"I'm 'ere to crack the crib," said Bill Frayne, and his grasp closed like iron on the boy he had deceived. "You're going to 'elp me!"

"Never!"

Joe strove to drag himself away from the man's grasp. But fingers like iron were upon his throat now.

"You'll show me where the safe is?" said Frayne, in a low, hissing voice. "You 'ear me?"

Joe could not speak. But he made a movement of denial.

"You young fool! You'll lead the way, or——"

Frayne did not finish the sentence. But the iron grip on Joe's throat tightened, and the boy knew only too clearly the terrible threat that was implied.

CHAPTER 15.

Fairly Caught.

JOE did not move. He was powerless in the grasp of the ruffian. He knew he could not escape. He knew he could not even call for help so long as that iron grasp was upon his throat. But his resolution never wavered. He would die before he would help this man to rob his benefactors.

Frayne bent over the boy.

"You 'ear me? Ned your head if you understand."

Joe nodded.

"You'll help me?"

Joe shook his head.

"You'll help me—you hear? You—— Ah! Oh! What's that?"

"That" was a rush of feet, which broke suddenly from the silence, and in a second more the ruffian and his prisoner were whirled apart. Hands were laid upon the burglar, and he was dragged down before he knew what was happening.

"Pile on him!"

It was Jack Blake's voice. And the voice of the swell of St. Jim's replied:

"Yaas, wathah!"

And they piled on him.

Bill Frayne was taken so utterly by surprise, that he seemed incapable, for some moments, of a struggle. But he recovered himself quickly, and began to fight with silent but savage force for his freedom.

"Oh, you young hound!" he muttered. "You've sold me!"

Joe gave a cry.

"I haven't! I——"

"Collah the bwute!"

"Pile on him!"

"Help!"

Blake and Digby, Wally and D'Arcy were fastening upon the ruffian. Frayne was down, and the juniors were on top of him. Blake had seized the ruffian's wrists, and in spite of all his struggles, the ruffian was unable to get them loose. The junior knew only too well that he was seeking to get hold of a weapon.

The shouts of the juniors rang through the building.

"Help!"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy," cried Joe, "don't—don't! Let him go! He's my father!"

"But he was lyin' to you, Joe!"

"He's my father!"

"He came in here to wob the coll., Joe."

"He's my father!"

"He was twyin' to force you to become a thief!"

"He's my father!"

"Bai Jove! Suppose we let him go, you fellows. It's awf'ly wuff on Joe to have his governah sent to pwison."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Lend a hand, you ass!"

"But——"

"Yell for help!"

"Weally——"

"Help! Help!"

"What is this disturbance?"

It was the voice of Mr. Railton, the master of the School House. The House-master came hurrying upon the scene with his trousers and boots on, and a candle in his hand.

"Burglars, sir!" gasped Blake.

"Frayne, the cracksmen, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton thrust the candlestick into D'Arcy's hand, and ran into the tussle. The master of the School House was an athlete, and far more powerful than the cracksmen. Without the assistance of the juniors, he was able to overcome the resistance of the burglar, and in a few minutes Bill Frayne was panting and helpless in his grasp.

By that time most of the School House had been aroused, and fellows were flocking up from all sides. There was no lack of assistance if the House-master had needed it. But he did not need it.

Frayne was a prisoner.

"Who is it, sir?" Kildare asked.

"A burglar."

"It's Frayne's father!" ran a whisper through the crowd of boys.

And glances were cast upon Joe—many of them glances of pity—some of horror. Frayne's father—breaking into the school to rob it!

Joe stood pale and trembling.

The worst had happened. His father, owing to his own treachery, was an arrested prisoner—the convict cell waited for him! There was no escape, and no mercy!

Fully he deserved it! But Joe was not thinking of that! He was not there to judge his father!

"Frayne's father!"

"Frayne the burglar!"

"The chap who tried to break into Greyfriars—it was in the papers."

"He'll go to prison now."

"Yes, rather."

"Kindly hold this ruffian, Kildare and Darrel," said Mr. Railton, who was breathing heavily. "I believe he has a weapon, and I wish to search him."

"Certainly, sir."

The two sturdy Sixth-Formers grasped the ruffian, and held him fast by the arms while the House-master searched for his weapons. A jemmy and a revolver were turned out of his pockets, and the House-master smiled grimly.

"So you would have used those, you scoundrel!" he said. "The world will be well rid of you for the next ten years."

Frayne ground his teeth.

"That brat has sold me," he muttered.

Joe started forward.

"I never did, father."

Mr. Railton started.

"Frayne!"

"He's my father, sir," said Joe miserably. "He pretended that he wanted to come and say good-bye to me before he went to Canada. When he got in—"

"You let him in?"

"Yes, sir."

"You let this dangerous character into the house?" exclaimed the House-master sternly.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Why?"

"He—he said he wanted to see my quarters here, before he went away, and—"

"It's a lie," said the burglar. "We was hand in glove all the time. He let me in to rob the safe, and he was goin' to come with me arter I done it."

Joe gave a cry.

"Father!"

"And that's the truth," said Frayne.

Jack Blake burst out hotly:

"You utter scoundrel! It's a horrible lie! We heard it all, sir. Gussy knew that Joe was letting his father in to see the school—he believed in the villain's being repentant, just as Joe did. We knew there was something on, and got up. We were all close here when Joe let the villain in, and we heard all that was said. He was going to throttle Joe for refusing to show him where the safe was. Look at the marks on the kid's throat, sir."

Mr. Railton looked. There was no mistaking the marks of cruel fingers on the boy's throat—deep, black bruised marks. But even otherwise, Mr. Railton would never have dreamed of doubting the evidence of Jack Blake and his comrades.

"I understand," he said quietly. "You have acted in a foolish manner, Frayne—very foolish and reckless. You had no right to admit this man to the school without permission, whatever he may have told you."

"I—I know it, sir."

"Under the circumstances, I excuse you. But it is very fortunate for you that you have these witnesses to the truth," said Mr. Railton. "I tell you frankly that otherwise I should have been forced to the belief that you were acting as the burglar's confederate."

"Oh, sir!"

"As it is," said Mr. Railton, "will you kindly take that scoundrel to my study, Kildare, while I telephone for the police?"

"Yes, sir."

Joe started forward with a cry.

"Can't you let him go, sir?"

Mr. Railton gave him a stern glance.

"Let him go! What do you mean?"

"He's my father."

The House-master's face softened somewhat, but it was still determined. There was no possibility of acceding to Joe's wish, and Joe himself knew it only too well.

"What you ask is impossible, Frayne. The man must face the consequences of his own acts. Besides," went on Mr. Railton, "it will be better for you to be rid of such a father. If only for the sake of preventing him from shadowing your life, Frayne, I would do my best to get him the longest term possible."

"But sir—"

"If he is sent to prison now for ten years, you will be a man when he comes out, and able to take care of yourself, I hope," said Mr. Railton. "I hope he will be kept in prison for longer than that—the longer the better."

Mr. Railton waved his hand to the stairs.

"You juniors can go back to bed!" he exclaimed.

Unwillingly enough, the boys returned to their dormitories. There was little chance of more sleep that night.

Joe lingered.

Bill Frayne cast a haggard look at the boy. He knew now that Joe had not betrayed him—as he had suspected at first.

But betrayed or not, he was a prisoner, and the convict prison was waiting for him—the long, long term of years.

"I—I say, guv'nor," he muttered, "I—I've got something to tell you."

Mr. Railton paused.

"It can wait till I have telephoned," he said. "Keep him

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in my study, Kildare and Darrel—you too, Rushden, in case you are needed, and don't let him go for a moment."

"Rather not, sir."

The three seniors marched the burglar into the House-master's study. Joe followed him in, and they did not say him nay. They understood the misery that was in the boy's heart, and they respected his sorrow.

CHAPTER 16.

Great News.

MR. RAILTON returned in a few minutes. He had his dressing-gown on now, and a muffer round his neck.

Bill Frayne was sitting in the study, and the three seniors were still holding him. The burglar's glances were wandering round the study, like those of a cornered rat seeking an avenue of escape. His glances rested on the window for a moment. But the strong grasp upon him made it impossible for him to attempt a dash for liberty. He looked at Mr. Railton as the House-master came in.

"Well?" said the master of the School House crisply.

"You wanted to speak to me?"

"Have you telephoned, sir?"

"Yes."

Frayne's face grew more grim and lined.

"Then the police are comin', sir?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"What have you to say?" the House-master asked sharply.

Frayne glanced at Joe.

"Look at that boy," he said. "You seem to be thinking a lot about him; you want to send me to prison to keep me away from 'im."

"Certainly. I hope you will get the longest possible sentence. Nothing is too bad for a man who seeks to lead a lad into crime."

"Look 'ere—"

"The fact that he is your son only makes the matter the worse," said the House-master sternly. "There is no excuse for you. You need not ask for anything at my hands. I should be harder upon you as Frayne's father, than if you were a stranger to him."

"You think he'd be better off without me for a father?"

"I suppose so."

"You care whether it is so or not?"

"Naturally, as I take an interest in the lad," said Mr. Railton wonderingly. "But what do you mean? You cannot alter the fact."

"Suppose I ain't his father."

"But you are."

"But suppose I ain't," persisted Frayne. "What then?"

"I should be glad to hear it. But you are lying—you are his father!" said the master of the School House.

"I ain't!"

"What!"

"Joe belonged to me," said the ruffian. "He belonged to others in his turn. Mother Sal wasn't his mother; slum-brats like Joe don't have no people. He ain't my son."

"Is that true, Joe?"

Joe shook his head.

"I don't know, sir. I hope it's true; I've hoped it ever since I came to school, sir. I never cared before then. But he's such a liar, you can't believe him."

"I hope it is true, certainly," said Mr. Railton. "But, as you say, it is impossible to take the word of such a man."

"I can prove it!" exclaimed Frayne eagerly.

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I do not believe you."

"But there's proof—proof!" cried Frayne, eager now that he imagined there was a chance of softening the heart of the House-master. "I'll prove it! Joe ain't my son any more than he is yours."

"How can you prove it?"

"Joe's thirteen years old, I reckon—"

Mr. Railton glanced at Joe.

"He might be anything from twelve to fourteen," he said.

"But in any case, what does that prove?"

"Sixteen years ago I was sent to Portland Prison, and I stayed there seven years at a stretch," said Frayne. "You can prove it by looking out the records."

Mr. Railton started.

"If what you say is true, you certainly cannot be Joe's father," he said. "But—"

"The records will prove it."

"I shall certainly have the matter inquired into, and if the fact can be established that you are not Frayne's father, no one will be more pleased than I," said Mr. Railton.

"I'll swear it's true."

"You may save your breath. If it is true, I shall discover

it to be so—and I may say that I think it very probable. But it makes no difference to you. You do not hope, I suppose, that I shall not hand you over to the police, because you have made this statement to me."

"Let me go, and take my chance," said Frayne huskily. "They're arter me already. They are watching the school, I believe. Give me a chance."

"You must be mad to ask it."

"I've told you the truth about the boy——"

"Be it so; but it is not in my power to release you—and you are too dangerous a character to be let loose."

Frayne did not reply.

His head sank on his breast, and he seemed to have sunk utterly and abjectly under the weight of despair.

But the wily ruffian was playing a part. For five or six minutes he remained so, and unconsciously Kildare and Darrel relaxed their hold upon him. Rushden was standing with his back to the door in case of an attempt to escape. Joe had left the study, ordered back to bed by Mr. Railton. Suddenly Bill Frayne woke from his lethargy, with a sudden tremendous wrench that tore him from the grasp of the two Sixth-Formers.

He leaped to his feet, hurling Kildare and Darrel back.

Mr. Railton reached forward—Rushden came on—Kildare and Darrel closed upon the ruffian again. But Frayne had a single second, and he made the most of it. With a desperate bound he hurled himself at the window.

Crash!

Smash! Clink!

Fragments of broken glass and sash clinked down into the quad., and among them went the burglar.

Frayne rolled on the ground, bruised, cut, bleeding, gasping.

But only for a second did he remain there.

Then he was upon his feet, and running for life.

Mr. Railton sprang to the window, and leaped out into the quadrangle. The sound of the burglar's footsteps rang clearly through the silent night. The House-master ran at top speed in pursuit.

But fear lent the ruffian wings. He ran desperately on, and leaped up at the school wall, caught it in his hands, and dragged himself breathlessly over.

Mr. Railton set his teeth, and leaped at the wall. He was climbing over in another moment, and the sounds of a desperate struggle reached his ears. He looked down into the darkness of the road.

Bill Frayne was struggling furiously in the grasp of a plain-clothes constable and two other policemen, who seemed to have appeared from nowhere.

His resistance lasted only a few moments.

The handcuffs clinked on his wrists, and the grasp of three stalwart constables held him a helpless prisoner.

Mr. Railton looked down into the road.

"You have him?" he exclaimed.

The plain-clothes man looked up.

"Yes, sir. Has he robbed the school?"

"He has attempted to do so. We had him, but he broke away," said the House-master. "You are very lucky upon the spot."

"Yes, sir. We had a letter sent to us, and we've been watching the school ever since," said the constable. "We've got him now. We needn't trouble you any more to-night, sir. We'll take him to the station now."

And Bill Frayne walked heavily away, with handcuffs upon his wrists, and a strong grasp upon either arm.

There was no escape for him now.

CHAPTER 17.

The Cloud Lifts.

JOE FRAYNE was the cynosure of all eyes in the morning.

The son of the burglar who had attempted to rob the school was naturally a notable character.

And if it made Joe appear a kind of distinguished person in the eyes of the very young fags, the majority of fellows at St. Jim's felt that it would not "do."

Gore of the Shell remarked that a line would have to be drawn somewhere, and Mellish of the Fourth backed him up.

But more decent fellows than Mellish or Gore felt, too, that Joe could not remain at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry felt it, miserably enough.

"It won't do," he said to Manners and Lowther. "Joe will never get over this. He can't live down a thing like that."

And the chums of the Shell concurred. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had to admit that it was beastly awkward.

In the midst of the rejoicing of Joe's enemies, and the sorrow of his friends, came a startling announcement.

It was made by the Head, to the whole school assembled in hall.

The boys, wondering why they were called together—Hobbs & Co. hoping to hear that it was to see Frayne expelled—gathered in hall, and interest was breathless as Dr. Holmes rustled in.

The Head's words were brief.

"I have called the school together to hear a most important statement," he said. "There is a boy here who is supposed to have an unfortunate connection with the ruffian who broke into the school last night. I need not say that I refer to Frayne of the Third Form.

There was a breathless hush.

"It has now been proved, by the man's own confession, and by undeniable proofs, that Frayne is not the son of that criminal," went on the Head. "So far as is known, there is no relationship at all between them—and Frayne of the Third is certainly not his son, as has been supposed. The ruffian allowed the unfortunate lad to remain in that belief, for his own base ends—ends which, I am glad to say, have been frustrated. I am making this announcement publicly in order that no one may remain ignorant of the fact that Frayne is not the son of Frayne the burglar, and in order"—here the Head's voice took on a deeper and sterner note—"in order that no one may pretend to be ignorant of this fact having been established."

And the school were dismissed.

There were crowds of congratulating fellows round Joe Frayne as he walked out of the school hall.

Wally linked arms with him on one side, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the other. Tom Merry's face was like the midday sun with sheer delight. Blake and Dig and Kangaroo were slapping Joe on the back till he was aching. Piggins and Kerr and Fatty Wynn shook his hand till it seemed surprising that he had any fingers left. Crowds of fellows slapped, and thumped, and congratulated him, and Joe was breathless with delight and fatigue.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "You fellows will wemembah that I told you so all along——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, it's splendid!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'm so glad, Joe—so jolly glad!"

"Yes, and so am I, Master Tom," said Joe brightly. "It's ripping!"

"Ripping!" said Wally. "It's spiffing! Stunning!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"I've got a suggestion to make," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "This is a great occasion——"

"Hear, hear!"

"It ought to be celebrated in a fitting manner——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, and the most fitting manner——"

"If you fellows care to give a concert, to celebratw the occasion, I don't mind contwibutin' some tenor solos," said D'Arcy.

"Why turn a festive occasion into a time of grief and mourning?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass——"

"If Gussy has done talking rot," said Fatty Wynn, with a withering look at the swell of St. Jim's, "I'll go on! I was going to remark that Mrs. Taggles has a fresh lot of jam-tarts in to-day, just as if she had anticipated that there would be something to celebrate——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wynn——"

"Who says jam-tarts?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

And with one voice the crowd of juniors responded:

"Jam-tarts!"

And Joe Frayne, happy and beaming, was marched off to the school tuckshop in the midst of a wildly enthusiastic crowd—and the destructive wrath of Achilles, of which old Homer sings, was a mere nothing compared with the destructive attack of the St. Jim's juniors upon the jam-tarts.

THE END.

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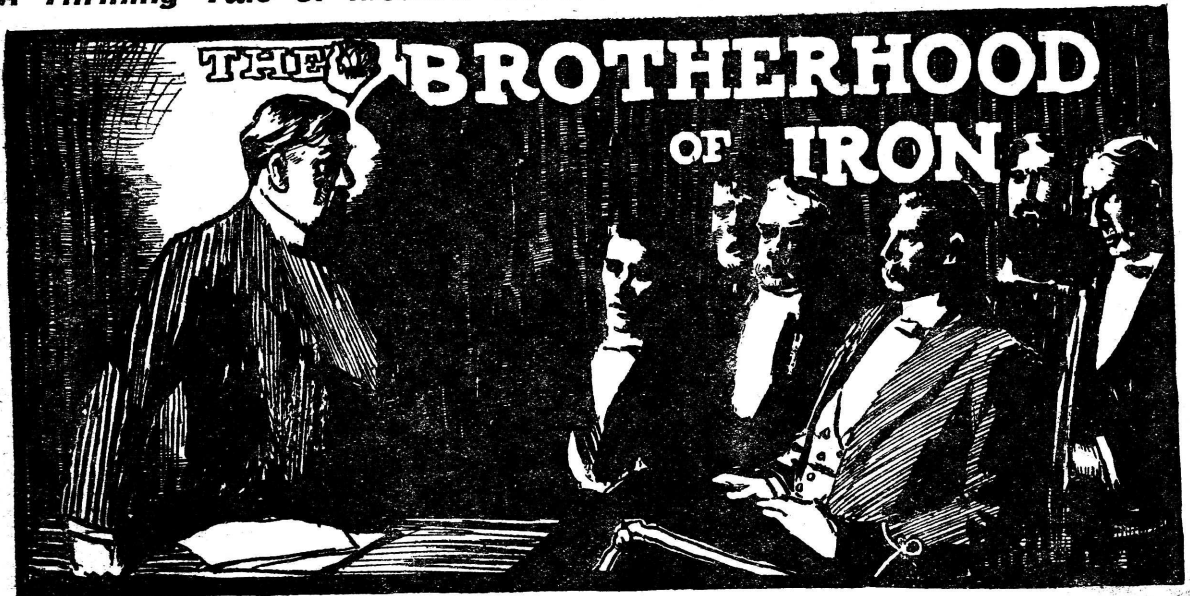
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NEXT WEEK:

"THE RIVAL SCHOOLS."

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure.



By **ROBERT W. COMRADE.**

INTRODUCTION.

Frank Kingston, a young Englishman, is engaged on a secret campaign against a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron. His aim being to ruin the society by ruining the members of the Inner Council. He has the assistance of Miss O'Brien, an accomplished young lady, Professor Graham Polgrave, a clever scientist and inventor, Carson Gray, a detective, Fraser, his man, and a lad named Tim.

Kingston has brought eight prominent members to book, and is proceeding to ruin the ninth—a certain Dr. Julius Zeetman, who is in charge of the Grange Private Lunatic Asylum. He learns that many of its inmates are not lunatics, but perfectly sane people. Under the pretence of being a lunatic, Kingston, with Miss O'Brien as his nurse, obtains admission to the asylum, and is given rooms in a far corner of the building. The same night Kingston decides to rescue one of the sane inmates of the asylum, and, leaving his room by means of the skylight, he reaches the ground with the aid of a rope ladder.

(Now go on with the story.)

Frank Kingston's First Rescue.

Frank Kingston stood for a moment on the weed-covered flower-bed, with his back to the wall. He seemed to be quite alone, and try as he would, he could not discover the signs of another presence. Only the moan of the wind round the corners of the house and the rustle of the trees could be heard.

"Yet the thing must be in the grounds somewhere," Kingston told himself. "This part of the garden is well clear of the house, so it might be a good plan to create a slight commotion, thus drawing the attention of my mysterious companion."

To think with Kingston was to act, and he put his idea into execution without the delay of a moment. Then he stood perfectly still in the centre of the pathway. A crackle of bushes was heard, and a huge, clumsy object lurched into view, approaching him swiftly.

Kingston smiled quietly.

"I thought that would fetch him," he murmured, under his breath. "Well, my friend, you won't have quite such an easy time of it on this occasion."

He glanced down at his hand for a second. It held a small stiletto, altogether too frail to do any serious injury. What then, could it be for? Kingston knew, and the knowledge

caused him to stand his ground as though he were in no danger whatever.

On the unknown monster came, until, with a snarl, it hurled itself straight at its prey. Kingston stepped aside with one of his seemingly leisurely but nevertheless lightning-like movements, and his assailant blundered past. Before it could turn, quick as were its actions, Kingston had acted.

The needle-pointed stiletto flashed upwards, then struck the thing fairly between the shoulders. Kingston felt his hand encounter a mass of rough, tangled fur; then he took three swift steps backwards and waited.

His strange opponent probably never felt the sharp point as it entered its skin, but twirled round and prepared itself for another attack, its hideous face being quite visible in the semi-darkness. Then a strange thing happened. Almost before it could take a step forward it suddenly became as rigid as a statue, and a growl which it had been about to utter was cut short. It wavered for a moment; then toppled with a crash to the earth, its limbs precisely in the same position as though they were held rigid and fast.

"Splendid!" thought Kingston. "Upon my soul, I was half sceptical as to whether it would work! I owe the professor an apology for that."

He stepped forward and knelt down beside the motionless form. The reason for its sudden collapse is very easy to explain, for it had been caused by another of Professor Polgrave's scientific inventions. The stiletto had been coated with a drug which, on entering the blood, instantaneously caused every muscle in a living body to become rigid and fixed.

The professor was very proud of this achievement, for it was one upon which he had devoted many weeks of his time, and which, now that it was successfully accomplished, possessed many startling possibilities.

A tiny gleam of light suddenly appeared as Kingston switched on his electric torch, and he directed its rays with some curiosity to the form lying among the weeds. The monster was a mass of dark brown matted fur with the exception of its face, and as Kingston looked at this a gleam entered his eyes for a second.

"By Jove," he murmured, "a gorilla! And one of the largest specimens I have ever seen."

He flashed his light over the huge creature and examined it intently. The face, however, engaged his attention most, for it had been disfigured in the most startling manner. All the expression of an ape had disappeared, and in its place

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was one unlike that of any living being. The hair was shaved off, and the bare skin painted and scarred in the most revolting manner.

"The brute!" thought Kingston angrily. "There seems to be no end to Zeetman's cruelty. This poor animal must have suffered endless torture before its appearance was so transformed. Yes, my friend, I feel sorry for you, but it was quite impossible to allow you to remain at large."

The gorilla was fully conscious—acutely conscious, in fact—yet it could not move the slightest muscle. The action of the drug was such that, while the victim was completely powerless, the senses were, if anything, intensified. The amount Kingston had administered would lose its effect in a couple of hours, when the ape would suddenly regain possession of its muscles and be enabled to walk about as before, none the worse for its existence.

"And in the morning," Kingston told himself, with a chuckle, "he will be found wandering about precisely as usual. There is no doubt about it the old professor is proving a useful friend and helper with a vengeance! And now to see Tim."

There was nothing further to be done there, so he rose to his feet and lightly made his way to the huge and lofty wall. Arriving there, he acted in the same manner as on the previous night, leaping to the top, grasping the railings, and hauling himself over.

This time it was not so difficult, for he had gained some experience. With scarcely a sound he dropped to the heath the other side, and glanced round over the dismal heather. There was no sign of the lad, and Kingston raised his hand to his lips and whistled in a peculiarly penetrating but nevertheless low tone. Even if heard by a keeper within the asylum, it would only be attributed to a night bird.

The call very soon brought forth its result, for after a few seconds' searching glance round, Kingston espied the small form of Tim Curtis appear from between the yew-trees leading to the main entrance. The lad was flushed with brisk walking, and he carried a large parcel under his arm.

"That you, sir?" he whispered excitedly.

"Yes, Tim," Kingston answered. "You're here prompt to time, I notice, for it has only just gone twelve."

"I've been 'ere just over a minute, sir, so I wasn't late," grinned Tim. "'Ow are you gettin' on, sir?"

"Splendidly, Tim, splendidly!" smiled Kingston, amused at the lad's eagerness. "Everything is working as though on oiled wheels. Is Fraser on the main road with the car?"

"Yes, sir. It's a kind o' covered car, sir, and although a good 'un, it don't come nowhere near your Daimler."

"As long as it runs all right, Tim, that's all we want. You have brought the rope-ladder, I see. Good boy!"

Tim handed over the parcel, which proved to contain a very neat rope-ladder of the wooden-rung variety, and with it was a short rod. This proved to be a telescopic arrangement with a hook at the end, which, when opened out, extended to a considerable length.

Kingston hooked the ladder on the end of this, and hoisted it to one of the pointed rails high above. Then he ascended and placed it in position, so that one half hung inside and the other half outside the wall.

"That's better, Tim," he said. "It is now quite easy to gain admittance."

"But 'ow did yer git over, sir?" asked Tim wonderingly, looking up at the wall. "You never could 'ave 'opped right up there!"

"I admit it was a bit of a task to spring up, but the necessity for another such effort is now passed. Now, Tim, there's no time to spare, so I will get back. Wait here until you see me return. I shall bring somebody with me who is to travel up to London."

"Travel up to London, sir?"

"Yes, Tim. It is one of the patients in this vile place who is kept here as a lunatic. No, you needn't be alarmed. He is quite safe, and I am merely giving him his liberty."

"Is liberty, sir? Lummy, 'e won't 'arf be pleased when 'e finds 'imself out in the world once ag'in! An' fancy you doin' it fer nothin'—"

"There, there, Tim!" laughed Kingston. "Don't you worry your little head about it. All I want you to do is to escort him to the car. He will tell Fraser the rest himself. You can expect me back in about a quarter of an hour."

And before Tim could reply his master had leapt lightly up the ladder. The lad watched in open admiration as Kingston disappeared over the top. To him the latter was a hero, a man amongst men, and Tim loved him with all the fervour his little heart was capable of.

Kingston ran towards the building, that same smile of pleasure hovering about his lips. He was enjoying himself now as he always enjoyed himself when engaged upon hazardous work of this nature. To his mind there was nothing half so exhilarating, and Carson-Gray was quite

correct when he stated that Kingston was cut out to make a first-class detective.

Indeed, there was no making necessary, for Kingston was already a detective of the first water. No other man could possibly have accomplished the work he had done since his departure from the Iron Island. Although he could have police assistance at any moment, he had never once asked for it, and did not intend to do so unless a very exceptional necessity arose. There was something immensely satisfactory in the feeling that he had won through with nothing but the assistance of his friends and allies.

He ascended the silken ladder to the roof of the long line of wards without fear of being discovered or heard, for the wind was rising still higher, and when he set foot upon the leads he was compelled to brace himself to keep his balance.

"Now," he told himself, "to assist No. 26 out of his pitiable plight. No. 26 is, I think, sandwiched between two empty wards. At all events, the two skylights on either side of that cell are in perfect darkness. It will not take long to see, anyhow."

Quietly as a mouse he crept along the roof in the space between the two lines of skylights. He had to be careful now and again, for the windows which gave light to the passage were direct in his path—he was walking exactly over the corridor. It was quite impossible for him to see anything that was going on, for all the skylights were fitted with thick opaque glass.

Arriving at Ward No. 26, the position of which he speedily located by a moment's calculation, he bent down quietly and flashed his light on the fastening.

"The same as my own," he murmured. "Well, there is going to be no difficulty here. The only thing I am frightened of is that the gentleman below will be startled into some loud exclamation. However, that will have to be chanced."

Absolutely noiselessly, he slipped the bolt back, and gradually lifted the heavy skylight. A warm gust of air floated upwards, to be instantly merged in the cold atmosphere by the high wind. Kingston took a small rod from his pocket and propped the skylight open, at the same time glancing below.

The sight was not a cheery one, and Kingston could not help clenching his teeth as he thought of Zeetman's devilry—as he thought of the weary months and years many of these people had been forced to endure caged up like wild animals, with practically never a sight of the blue sky, and, indeed, never a sight of the outer world.

The room was a small one, and was heated by means of hot-water pipes—roughly painted pipes, more suitable to a school-room than a private apartment. Of paper there was none, the walls being merely distempered. The furniture consisted of a small table, a washhand-stand, a chest of drawers, and a folding bed. The latter in the daytime evidently packed away into a small compass.

The whole general appearance was one of dinginess, and a look of pity entered Kingston's disguised eyes as he gazed down upon the form lying in the bed.

It was that of a young man who had at one time possessed a smiling and cheery face. Now it bore an appearance of hopeless misery which could not be hidden even in sleep. All the manliness seemed to have disappeared from it, although Kingston saw distinct signs of a strong will and a stubborn determination.

"The years of imprisonment have turned a strong man into a meek and obedient slave," thought Kingston. "One sight of a strange face, however, one inkling that liberty is within sight, will awaken all his dormant feelings and cause him to become as active as any other man."

He was still looking down at No. 26, and as he looked the patient—he could not have been more than twenty-five—turned uneasily in his sleep, and then settled down again.

"The cold air is disturbing him," the rescuer told himself. "My best policy will be to fully awaken him before he falls into a sound slumber."

Kingston produced from his coat-pocket a long string, to which an oblong piece of cardboard was attached. This he lowered swiftly into the room, and hung it exactly over the chest of the unconscious man. Then, with a sure aim, he dropped a small piece of screwed-up paper precisely on the other's mouth.

The sleeper started slightly and opened his eyes. Full in front of him, seeming to him, in his half-dazed state, to hang on nothing, were the words:

"PLEASE KEEP SILENT!"

The young man struggled into a sitting posture, his face expressing absolute amazement. He grasped the eard, and then, seeing where it came from, glanced upwards. The smiling countenance of an elderly gentleman was looking down upon him.

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NEXT

WEEK:

"THE RIVAL SCHOOLS."

"Good heavens!" he murmured, remembering at the same time the injunction to make no noise. He looked upwards as though in a dream, as though he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes. Then, with practically no sound, he leapt out of bed.

"I am a friend," whispered Kingston, before the other could utter a word, "and have come to effect your escape. Don't be alarmed, and, above all, don't raise your voice higher than a whisper. If the keeper in the passage hears the slightest suspicious sound, he will immediately investigate."

The patient passed a hand over his eyes.

"Who are you," he murmured dazedly, "and what does this mean? I—I am bewildered—"

Before he could get any further Kingston raised his hand in warning, then threw a rope into the apartment below.

"Please do not trouble your head about any single thing," he urged. "Knowing you are perfectly sane, I have decided to effect your escape. Make all haste possible and dress yourself. When that is done, I will haul you up this rope and get you clear of the grounds."

"But—"

"Please do not waste time, for every minute is fraught with danger. I will explain everything when we are on the beach. For the present dress yourself."

The young man, now fully awake and thoroughly alive to the fact that speed was absolutely imperative, hastened into his clothes. He was trembling with excitement, and every now and again glanced upwards as if to ascertain whether his rescuer was still there, or whether all this was but a vivid dream. At the end of three minutes he was ready.

"You have got everything you want?" whispered Kingston.

"There is nothing else," replied the other. "My hat is not here, so I shall have to go without it. But we shall be seen. We shall be tracked—"

"Leave everything to me," replied Kingston sharply. "Do exactly as I tell you, and everything will go well. You see that screwed-up piece of paper on the bed? Put that in your pocket."

"What for?"

"I threw it at you to awaken you, and such a thing might leave a trace. Good! Place your hand in that loop of the rope, and I will haul you up. Take care, however, to kick nothing while you are in the air."

"But you cannot lift me!" protested the young man. "My weight—"

"Your weight is nothing. Please do as I tell you."

Too amazed, too excited to utter another word, the patient grasped hold of the rope, then, as though he had been a child, Kingston hauled him to the skylight. The ease with which he did this was truly amazing, for it seemed to cause him no effort whatever. His eight years of life on the Iron Island had caused his every muscle to become abnormally developed.

The young man looked at him almost in awe, for to him it was utterly incomprehensible that an old man such as Kingston was represented to be could have pulled him up to that skylight with such consummate ease.

For a moment Kingston did not speak, but looked intently into the ward, his keen eyes noting every tiny detail. He was looking to see if any trace was left. But no, there was none. In the morning the mystery of No. 26's disappearance would be utter and complete, for there was no clue whatever.

"Good!" Kingston murmured. "We have pulled off your case, my young friend, in the most satisfactory manner."

He lowered the skylight into position again, and gently shot the bolt; then, stowing the piece of cardboard which had proved so effective into his pocket, together with the length of rope, he grasped the young man's arm.

"Come!" he whispered. "We have done here. Nothing remains but to get you clear out of the grounds and away to London."

"London!" echoed the other. "Good heavens, what does it all mean? Who are you, and why are you taking all this risk to get me away from this terrible place?"

"I cannot answer any of those questions now, except to say that it is my intention to get every sane person out of the Grange. I am fully aware that most of the patients are sane, and are kept prisoners here, and it is quite time they were rescued."

"But tell me who you are?"

"You shall know in good time, perhaps. It matters little to you who or what I am. I am your friend, and that is all I can say. There is no reason, however, why I should not know your name."

"My name?" the other repeated. "You do not know it? It is Ralph Harland, and I am the son of the—"

"Ah, yes, I remember!" Kingston interrupted. "You disappeared some two years ago, and were given up for dead. Indeed, to all intents and purposes you were dead. But come, I will lead the way. Mind the skylights, whatever you do."

Kingston walked quietly back to the extreme end of the building, young Harland following, his brain simply in a whirl. In less than one minute they had both climbed down the silk ladder, and were standing in the grounds. Evidently the accused man knew nothing of the gorilla, for he made no comment as they walked swiftly and silently towards the outer wall.

"Why," exclaimed Ralph Harland, as he saw the preparations, "you must have been planning my escape for days beforehand. Won't you tell me why you are acting in this wonderful manner?"

"I am sorry," replied Kingston, "but I cannot. Now, please, listen. Here are ten pounds in gold; when you get to London I want you to go to an hotel and put up for a week under an assumed name."

"But why?" cried the other, in a low voice. "My family—"

"Your family have given you up for dead, and it will be quite easy for you to remain so for another week. You have got your liberty, and, I presume, you would be glad to hear that the other sane people in this establishment have secured theirs?"

"Yes, yes; of course!"

"Well, if you mention a word about your escape all my plans will be ruined," said Kingston tensely. "The newspapers will get hold of it, investigations will be made, and even if Zeetman is left alone, he will be strictly on his guard. So you see the reason why I am asking you to remain in the 'background' for at least a week. By that time your fellow-patients will be at liberty, and you will be free to do as you please."

"Then you mean to rescue them all?" cried the other.

"Every one," said Kingston grimly. "Zeetman has had them in his foul clutches long enough. I shall ask them all to act in the same manner as you will be doing. At the end of the week you can, of course, say anything you like, for then everything will be exposed. That is all, I think," he added, looking up at the wall.

Without waiting for the other to reply, Kingston clambered up the ladder and disappeared down the other side, to be followed after a moment by Harland. Tim was there waiting.

"Now, Mr. Harland," exclaimed Kingston, extending his hand, "I will say good-bye. This lad here will escort you to a motor-car which is waiting in the road. You will be landed in London in the early morning, and will then, I hope, act in the manner I have outlined."

"I shall certainly do so!" exclaimed the other, wringing his rescuer's hand with vigorous fervour. "How can I thank you enough for what you have done? How can I express my gratitude in fitting words?"

"I should advise you not to try," smiled Kingston, "for they would only be wasted upon me. I am doing this because I have a sense of what is right and wrong, and because I know that Zeetman is one of the greatest scoundrels unhung?"

"Heaven bless you for your kindness!" cried Harland, still retaining hold of the other's hand. "I had given up all hope of seeing the world again; and now, as by a miracle, I am to commence life over again. Thank Heaven there are some good and honourable men in the world!"

Dr. Julius Zeetman Receives a Shock.

Frank Kingston smiled quietly.

"I must be getting back," he exclaimed, "for there's nothing whatever to keep me any longer."

"Do you mean to say," cried the young fellow, "that you are an inmate of the asylum? By Jove, how do you do it? How is it possible for you to get in and out without being seen?"

"It is possible, and there my explanation must end. Good-bye, Mr. Harland. It has given me great pleasure to perform this rescue, for you have acted throughout in the most sensible manner. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" cried Ralph Harland. "I shall never cease to be grateful. My only hope is that you will be as successful in your other rescues as you have been with mine."

"I can only do my best," exclaimed Kingston quietly, as he leaped lightly up to the top of the wall. "Tim!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Take this rope-ladder with you back to the car, and be here at twelve o'clock again to-morrow night. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the lad. "I'll be 'ere sure enuff!"

"I shall rely on you."

With that Frank Kingston turned about and dropped to the ground, leaving Harland gazing up at the massive iron railings in wonderment and awe. He could scarcely realise that he had gained his liberty, that he was a free man once again; and all through the ingenuity of this unknown and

mysterious old gentleman, who seemed as agile and active as a boy.

The rescued patient never had the slightest suspicion that Kingston was disguised, for the transformation was so perfect that it was impossible to detect it. It was utterly incomprehensible to Ralph Harland how the old fellow had managed to liberate him.

Kingston himself was feeling elated, for his plans had, as usual, passed off without the slightest hitch. He paused for a moment as he drew near to the form of the gorilla. It was still lying motionless and rigid. Its eyes were wide open, and a fixed glare of wild fury could be seen, but Kingston knew the brute to be quite helpless.

"I dare say you are angry, my friend," he murmured, "but by the time you recover the use of your limbs I shall be in a safe place, and, I hope, fast asleep."

He laughed, and nimbly ascended the ladder to the roof, drawing it up after him. The wind still howled about the chimneys, and Kingston felt glad, rather than otherwise, that it was such a boisterous night. He did not immediately return to the skylight, but walked a few paces onwards to that of the ward in which Harland had spent so much time.

There he produced his torch, and made a thorough examination of the skylight, and any marks which had been made, or any disturbances in the grime surrounding the bolt, were rapidly obliterated and adjusted. There was no fear of dust marks, for the gale had swept the roof as clean as a slate.

"Now," thought Kingston, "everything is done satisfactorily, and I think, in the morning, there will be something for Zeetman to puzzle over. The disappearance of my friend Harland will never be cleared up, I imagine. Now for a good night's rest!"

He took a last look round over the wind-swept heath, and then gently raised the skylight of his own room. The sounds he made were practically infinitesimal, yet Dolores was waiting underneath when he looked down. He smiled, and, without waiting for her to arrange the tables and chair, lowered himself in the easiest manner possible, and hung with one hand.

"I shall not need the furniture, Dolores," he whispered, as he lowered the heavy framework with his other hand. Then, with truly remarkable lightness, considering his weight, he dropped to the table, which was permanently in that position. The way in which he landed was peculiar, for his feet seemed to touch with scarcely a jar. He stepped to the floor with a smile.

"I am pleased to say, Dolores," he drawled languidly, "that my plans have carried exceedingly well."

"That is always your report, Mr. Kingston," said Dolores, wondering how he could be so calm and self-possessed at such a moment as this. "But do tell me exactly what you have done, for I am simply longing to know."

"Without the slightest hitch I have succeeded in giving Mr. Ralph Harland his liberty," replied Kingston, seating himself in one of the chairs. "I will tell you all about it."

He did so, Dolores listening eagerly to his narrative. When he had done they sat for some moments in silence, then Dolores looked into his steel-blue eyes, with an eager expression in her own.

"What will happen now, Mr. Kingston?" she asked.

"When Zeetman discovers that Mr. Harland is gone he will be in a terrible way, for, knowing the escaped man to be sane, the doctor will expect him to inform the police. Isn't it possible that he will flee?"

"Hardly, Dolores. I think Zeetman will bluff it out, making up his mind to declare Harland insane, and demand his return to the asylum. But, of course, he will hear no more, for Harland will lie low for a week. But to-morrow night our worthy doctor will lose another of his patients, and that will make him look up, with a vengeance."

"That is the point that is puzzling me!" exclaimed Dolores.

"After the second escape Zeetman will naturally realise that a systematic attack is being made upon him, and will, in consequence, guard the place treble-fold."

Kingston smiled in his old, sleepy manner.

"I quite realise the wisdom of what you say, Dolores. But at present I do not mean to trouble myself with something which will not occur until the day after to-morrow. The second rescue will prove as simple as the first, and that is the immediate thing to think about. For the present I intend turning in and obtaining a good night's rest. You, too, must be feeling tired after your long day. I will say good-night!"

Kingston rose, shook her hand, and moved towards the door.

"Good-night!" she answered. "You will be called at eight o'clock, remember."

"I shall be awake, I expect, Dolores, although I think it would be best to feign sleep, for, should the nurse knock at my door, I should like to give the impression that I sleep heavily."

Ten minutes later everything was perfectly quiet, the



The young man struggled into a sitting posture, his face expressing absolute amazement. He grasped the cord, and read the words, "Please keep silent"! (See page 21.)

sitting-room was deserted, and both Kingston and Dolores were in their respective bed-rooms. But while the former, who had performed all the exciting work, slept as soundly as a top, Dolores found some difficulty in banishing her thoughts sufficiently to drop off to sleep at once.

The rescue work had been performed as though it were a mere matter of course, and now the large and gloomy building was quiet and still. Everybody, except those two in the end rooms were utterly unaware that anything out of the common had occurred—Kingston had worked too cautiously.

Dr. Zeetman himself, although by no means a man to retire early, was one of the first to rise in the morning. Indeed, nobody entered the grounds before he was up. The reason for this was obvious. The gorilla was a savage brute, and Zeetman was the only man who could handle him—the only man who dared approach to its near vicinity. The doctor congratulated himself on his novel "watch-dog," for, in Zeetman's mind, it was absolutely out of the question for any stranger to enter the grounds without instantly being detected by the giant ape.

Dr. Zeetman himself could handle the brute as though it were a child, although it would perhaps mean death for one of the ordinary keepers to approach it. For this reason the doctor made a rule to rise at seven o'clock and lock the animal in its quarters, which were situated in the private quarter of the house—next door, in fact, to Zeetman's own library.

The wind was still high the following morning when the chief of the asylum opened his private side door—a side door leading only to his library—and emerged into the grounds. He held a large whip in his hand, and a lighted cigarette in his mouth. Truth to tell, the Inner Councillor was feeling in a good humour, for he saw prospects of obtaining a great amount of money from his latest arrivals.

"Ah, there you are, my beauty!" he cried suddenly, as he saw the gorilla approaching. "Come in, will you, and have your breakfast. I am a bit late this morning, and the keeper is waiting to open the main gates."

The ferocious brute was quite meek under his master's cold eye, and it was plain to see that he feared the heavy lash Zeetman carried. He rushed past the doctor quickly, and entered the private door, to be then locked up for the day. There was nothing whatever to tell that it had been helpless for two hours during the night. Had it been able to talk, Kingston's plans would have come to nought.

Another of the doctor's daily customs was to visit his prisoners—for they could be called nothing else—immediately after locking up the ape, and before breakfast was served. He performed this work in the company of his head-keeper—a ruffian who went by the name of Stevenson.

Things went on smoothly, as they usually did, until Ward No. 26 was reached. Zeetman enjoyed this usual morning round, for nothing gave him greater pleasure than to gloat over his victims' discomfiture—to jeer at them and to mock them—and, strange to say, when he was in a good humour his tongue was more cynical and more sneering than ever.

"Now for Mr. Ralph Harland!" he chuckled, as they came opposite to his ward. "I have something exceptionally appropriate to say to Mr. Harland this morning, for to-day is the anniversary of his second year with me. Good! I only hope I may be able to keep him here for another ten!"

The key was inserted in the lock, it snapped back, and the massive door swung open. Stevenson stepped back, and his master walked in, with a sneering smile already disfiguring his features.

"Ah, my brave Mr. Harland, you are still in bed, I observe—Why, what—Great heavens!"

"What is it, sir?" exclaimed the head-keeper quickly.

Zeetman turned a pale, startled face towards him. "Harland!" he said, in a dazed kind of tone. "I—I am at a loss! What can it mean? The patient is not here—the patient is not here!"

Dr. Zeetman was nearly frantic, and his voice rose to a shout as he repeated his words. Stevenson ran into the ward with a cry of alarm and incredulity.

"Not here, sir?" he echoed. "Why—Great Scott, he can't have escaped! It's impossible!"

The keeper bent down and glanced under the bed, then looked round the little room as though there were a possibility that Harland was hiding in the chest of drawers or in the water-jug.

Suddenly Zeetman burst forth again, and his voice vibrated with amazement and passion.

"Harland has escaped!" he shouted. "Hang it, there can be no doubt on the matter, for I know I locked him in here last night! But where can he be? It is impossible for him to have escaped! This will be my ruin!"

For a moment the two stood there in absolute silence, unable to form their thoughts into words. The shock had been

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so stunning, so amazingly abrupt, that neither man could realise the true purport of what had occurred.

"Everything is the same as usual, sir," cried Stevenson. "See, the bed's been slept in, the furniture's screwed to the floor just the same as usual, and the door was securely locked! Could he have got out by the skylight?"

"The skylight be hanged!" cried Zeetman. "Use your sense, Stevenson! How on earth could he have got out by the skylight? It's utterly impossible for a man to reach half the distance with the furniture screwed down, and nothing to assist him. Besides, even if he got there, the skylight is securely bolted! No; there must be some other explanation—some logical explanation—there must be!"

"But how, sir? How could he—"
"I don't know how, Stevenson!" snapped the Inner Councillor. "A thousand things are possible. One of the keepers may have let him out for some unknown reason. Go and make inquiries this very minute among the nurses while I see the other keepers. This matter must be thrashed out without the delay of a second, for Harland must be found at all costs!"

The head-keeper hurried off in one direction, while Zeetman went in another; but their inquiries met with blank results, for nobody had heard or seen anything of No. 26. The ward had not been approached, and the man who had kept watch all night swore that nothing unusual had occurred.

Dr. Zeetman was very nearly off his head with worry, for he could not help realising what terrible results the occurrence might end in. He paced up and down his study with feverish strides, his tall form resembling that of a hawk as he walked. His hands were behind his back, clasping and unclasping themselves, his shoulders bent, and his head thrust forward.

"Ah, Stevenson!" he exclaimed, as the man entered the room. "Have you anything further to report?"

"Nothing whatever, sir!" replied Stevenson. "Harland has disappeared without leavin' a single trace! It's utterly out of the question to suppose he was helped, but there is no doubt about it—he has got absolutely clear away from the asylum!"

A Deadlock—Kingston's Second Rescue.

Dr. Julius Zeetman brought his fist down upon the table with a bang.

"Something must be done!" he cried fiercely. "The manner in which Harland has disappeared is little short of miraculous. I cannot see any way in which he could have broken out of the ward. Those rooms are as strong as prison cells, and there was a guard in the passage outside to see that nothing occurred. The guard says nothing unusual happened, so we may eliminate the possibility of Harland's having escaped by means of the door."

Zeetman glared at his companion. "What then remains?" he cried. "The skylight is equally as inaccessible, equally as difficult to break through, as the door. For one thing, it is altogether too high to reach, and, for another, even if he gained the roof, he would be in a no better position than previously!"

"The gorilla!" suggested Stevenson. "Of course! The ape would have captured him in a moment had he been able to descend to the ground, which in itself would have been impossible without at least many injuries. I tell you, Stevenson, the thing is uncanny."

"It is, sir, and no mistake! But he's gone, and nobody can deny that. I've sent men to examine the roof, and they say all the bolts are shot, and everything's in order. What will it mean, sir?"

"What will it mean?" shouted Zeetman frantically. "It will mean, in all probability, that Harland will blab everything out to the police! What else would he do?"

"Then we're in danger, sir?"
"No, it is not so bad as that, Stevenson. I think I can bluff the matter out all right if the police come, for Harland is presumably a lunatic, and if I produce a certificate to prove so his word will be utterly useless. But if I do not send wires all over the place to ask for his return, then it will look suspicious."

"You mean to do this, then, sir?" asked the head-keeper.

"I mean to send you down to the telegraph-office at once. If I take the first steps things will look genuine," said Zeetman savagely. "But it is a confounded nuisance! My name will appear in the papers, and the whole thing brought into publicity. Hang it, the thing is a perfect puzzle!"

And, much as Zeetman considered the matter from every point, he could find no explanation to the mysterious disappearance. The whole asylum was in a state of disorder, and the usual routine was considerably disturbed.

Dolores could not help noticing this, so she naturally asked the nurse who attended her own and her patient's wants what

was the cause of the commotion. The nurse, who said her name was Mrs. Manning, saw no reason for keeping back the truth—for, after all, none of the females were aware of the Brotherhood's existence.

Dolores' simple, old-fashioned manners readily invited confidence, and the nurse informed her as to the mysteriousness of the escape, and what steps Zeetman was taking to recover the patient.

"The doctor is absolutely at a deadlock!" exclaimed Dolores to Kingston, when they were by themselves in the sitting-room. "He cannot possibly account for Harland's escape, and is sending telegrams all over the place, with a description, and a request to bring him back here."

Kingston smiled quietly.

"I thought Zeetman would act in that manner," he said. "After all, it is the most natural thing he would do when we consider the position he is in. Of course, he anticipates no further escape?"

"Surely not," said Dolores. "The nurse made no remark to that effect. Besides, there is nothing whatever to point to it. One escape does not necessarily say another is to follow. No, Mr. Kingston, you will find your path as clear to-night as it was last night. But, I was going to say, do you think there is any possibility of Harland being tracked, when it is remembered that Zeetman is sending off all these telegrams?"

"I do not think so, Dolores. I have told the young fellow to lie low and make himself as unobtrusive as possible. I think we may set our minds at rest, Dolores, that Harland will never return to this accursed place."

"And you will effect to-night's rescue in precisely the same manner?" asked Dolores interestedly.

"Without any change whatever, Dolores," replied Kingston languidly, as he stretched his slippers feet towards the cheerful fire. "I shall drug the ape the same, and treat No. 24 the same as I did Harland. I don't know who he is, or what he is, but that matters nothing. He is one of the victims, and must be rescued."

Dolores glanced at her companion's calm face in admiration and wonderment. Clever as she was herself, she could not understand how Frank Kingston thought of all his plans. Ever since his campaign against the Brotherhood of Iron started, he had always made his plans without the least sign of difficulty, and they had always resulted in nothing but success. She herself could not see what Kingston would do on the third night.

"By that time," she said thoughtfully, "Dr. Zeetman will have become suspicious, and the most stringent precautions will be taken to prevent a further escape."

"Precisely," agreed Kingston calmly. "And that, my dear Dolores, is altogether to my liking. There will be a spice of danger in the adventure which is altogether lacking in these first two rescues."

Dolores laughed.

"Lacking?" she repeated. "Personally, I think the episode is dangerous from beginning to end. Have you formed your plans yet for to-morrow night?"

"No. For something may occur which would ruin them all. In a case such as this I think you will admit, Dolores, that much must be left to chance—or, I should say, be left to decide at the last moment. I am anxious for to-night's work to be over so that I may get to work on the real task. The other is merely preliminary."

The day passed quite uneventfully. Kingston looked upon the whole undertaking as a kind of holiday, for he did nothing but lounge about in front of the fire all day reading novels and magazines. It was nothing short of remarkable how he switched his mind from one object to another.

There is not the least necessity to describe the work Kingston performed that night, for it was merely a counterpart of what he had done when rescuing Ralph Harland. Nothing had come of Zeetman's telegrams, and no extra watch was kept.

Certainly, the night was not so favourable, the stars shining brightly and the air practically calm. To compensate for it Kingston knew the ropes exactly, and set about his task with every confidence of success. No. 24 proved to be an elderly gentleman, and Kingston's ruse in connection with the piece of cardboard and the screwed-up paper ball acted as effectively this time as the last.

This gentleman was, if anything, more overflowing in his gratitude than Harland had been, and at the last moment, as Kingston was talking to Tim, he nearly broke down with emotion. A few cheerful words from Kingston soon braced him up, and the rescuer mounted the ladder to the top of the wall. Then, a thought suddenly occurring to him, he descended again.

"Tim," he said, "I've got a word to say to you."

The lad stepped forward quickly.

"Well, sir?"

"Tell Fraser to procure in some way or other the skin of a large gorilla."

"A what, sir?" asked Tim wonderingly.

Kingston laughed.

"Tell Fraser to call it a giant ape. It will be just the same, and he will know exactly what I mean. I want him to get this skin, prepared ready for a man to wear, and be here with it as soon as it is dark to-morrow night. You understand, as soon as it is dark?"

"But that's about half-past seven, sir."

"I know that, Tim. But be here all the same. You can bring it to me while Fraser remains with the car. Any further instructions can be discussed to-morrow night. For the present, escort this gentleman to London."

"Right, sir," cried Tim, as Kingston reascended the ladder. "I won't forget nothin'. Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, Tim! Stand clear, and I will throw the ladder down."

A moment later Kingston had done so. He then turned, jumped to the ground, and hurried back to the building. He gained admittance without the slightest hitch, and the second rescue had been successfully performed. In the morning Zeetman would receive a bigger shock if anything than before.

He told Dolores of his success in the most matter-of-fact manner, but she, who was vastly interested, did not look upon it in that light.

"But tell me," she said, "why have you told Fraser to bring a gorilla skin? To what use can you put it?"

"I do not know myself yet. I only ordered it to be brought on the chance that it might come in useful. A certain contingency which may arise is simmering at the back of my head—hardly taking form, in fact—and if it materialises the skin will come in singularly useful."

"You are puzzling me, Mr. Kingston," smiled Dolores; "but I will wait patiently until you have formed your plans. I only wish I could render you more valuable assistance—active assistance—than I am doing."

"Surely, Dolores, you do not imagine you are not doing a large share of the work. Without you I should be utterly helpless. Indeed, I could never have gained admittance to the asylum had it not been for your aid."

"But still, now I am here I can only look on and see you performing the wonderful work. I do not think you realise Mr. Kingston, how greatly I enjoy doing any work that has for its aim the downfall of the Brotherhood."

"I realise it fully," replied Kingston quietly—"as fully as I realise that you are doing everything in your power to assist my campaign. Now, to-morrow night things will be much more exciting, for Zeetman will be on his guard. But I have my plans formed, practically speaking, and the scoundrelly doctor will find at least six more of his patients missing."

"Six!" exclaimed Dolores in surprise.

"Six at least; and so sure am I of my plans that I almost dare to positively state they are already as good as clear of these infernal walls."

And the words left Kingston's lips in a tone of profound conviction.

Kingston Effects Another Disguise.

"Thank you, Mrs. Manning; that will be all to-night!"

Dolores smiled pleasantly on the nurse as the latter stood in the sitting-room. She had come to inquire if there were any further orders.

"Then you won't want me to come again, Miss Thurston?" she inquired, walking towards the door.

"No, thank you! I intend retiring fairly early to-night."

Within a minute Dolores heard the heavy dividing door closed and securely bolted, and knew that she would be left alone for the rest of the night. She was quite alone, as the time was about twenty-minutes past seven. "Mr. Meredith Hall" had retired to bed at seven o'clock, and was now in his own room.

It was not many minutes after the nurse's departure, however, that the sitting-room door quietly opened and Frank Kingston appeared. He smiled at Dolores, and closed the door softly behind him.

"There is no chance of our being disturbed?" he asked.

"None whatever, Mr. Kingston. There is no reason why anybody should come again. Zeetman has paid you his daily visit, and is more certain than ever that you are a hopeless imbecile, and that I am an extremely simple old maid."

They both laughed.

"There is no doubt about it, Dolores, you are a splendid actress," exclaimed Kingston. "I verily believe you could deceive even such an astute individual as Mr. Carson Gray. It would be a very clever detective indeed who discovered your real personality at the present moment. But, by Jove, it is nearly half-past seven."

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NEXT WEEK:

"THE RIVAL SCHOOLS."

"The hour at which Tim will be outside?"

"Yes. I must see him the very moment he arrives," declared Kingston. "The gorilla skin he is bringing will play a very important part, as you know, in to-night's adventure."

"But do you not think it too risky to venture out at such an early hour?" asked Dolores. "In spite of what you said earlier in the day, I cannot help thinking that a very strict watch will be kept."

"Not now, Dolores. In all probability there will not be a single soul in the grounds—for since Zectman is still away the ape has not been let loose—and the possibility of a keeper prowling about is slight."

"But suppose, for an instant, there was one?"

"In that case, I should merely have to be very careful. But, without boasting, I really believe I could pass within ten yards of him without his being aware of my presence."

He pulled a cap over his head and glanced up at the sky-light.

"Have no fear, Dolores," he said, "I shall turn up quite safe and sound in well under half an hour."

In a few seconds he had the furniture piled up as before, but this time the skylight lifted with practically no effort, and in a very short time he was crouching on the roof, deeming it unwise to show himself against the skyline. For several minutes he lay there watching the trees in the untidy grounds waving about in the breeze. No sign of life was visible, and that part of the garden seemed absolutely deserted.

Overhead the sky was dull and lowering, and Kingston knew very well that before many hours had passed the rain would be descending in torrents. The prospect of this, however, was rather to his liking than otherwise.

"Everything's clear," he told himself finally, "and I think I can descend with perfect confidence."

In a trice the rope was secured round the chimney, and Kingston was descending the silken ladder to the ground. Arriving there he had another look round, then darted to a large clump of bushes about twenty yards distant. He ran in a crouching position, and with scarcely a sound. Indeed, considering the numerous twigs which lay in his path it was remarkable how he progressed so silently.

There seemed no necessity whatever for his stealthy movements, but Kingston was a man who took no chances what-

ever. His maxim was to take risks when risks were necessary, but also to take every precaution possible. It cost nothing and meant everything—the difference between success and failure.

An incident to prove the truth of this happened at that very moment. He was just about to make another swift run for the wall when he drew back into the bushes and crouched on the ground. Faintly—ever so faintly—he had heard voices. The next second two men turned the far corner of the building, one of them carrying a lamp. They paused for a moment as a door was opened.

"Everything secure now, Jim?" asked one.

"As far as I know, mate," answered the other keeper. "It's a fair knock-out to me how these here chaps have escaped. It don't seem possible to me."

"It is a bit of a puzzler. Still, it ain't nothin' to do with us. Old Zed has gone to London to-day to see about it. I reckon there won't be no more of it. All I hope is we ain't put on to watch outside to-night. It's goin' to rain like anything presently."

"Shouldn't be surprised," said the other. "What time is the boss goin' to be back?"

"Nine, mate. Time to have a hand at poker with the others if we're quick. There's no sense in stoppin' out here as early as this. Everything's locked up."

The two keepers disappeared into the building, and Kingston smiled to himself. Had he started on his run across the grounds he would, in all probability, have been detected.

"The coast is clear now, however," he told himself. "A game of poker—eh? I think I can rely on having the garden to myself for the next half-hour or so."

He glanced at his watch, saw the time was seven-thirty exactly, and proceeded to gain the other side of the high wall. Scarcely had he landed when a small figure appeared from the yews. It was Tim.

"I'm 'ere, sir," he whispered.

"Good boy, Tim! Have you got what I wanted?"

"Yes, sir," replied the lad producing a large parcel. "Fraser 'ad the very dickens of a job to git it, but knowin' as it would be urgent he wasn't goin' to be done. We only jest got away from the smoke in time, sir, an' 'ad to mop along like lightnin' as it was."

"Still, you have both done well, my boy," replied Frank Kingston, patting his little assistant on the back. "Now, look here, I haven't a moment to waste—"

"You never 'ave, sir," grinned Tim.

"The work must be done, Tim. Where is Fraser now?"

"With the car, sir."

"On the main road?"

"No, sir," replied the boy. "'E's found a clump o' trees near the road which 'e can drive the motor into nicely. Then 'e shoves the lights out an' waits for me. So it ain't possible for nobody to see anythink! Fraser thought it best, knowin' 'ow cautious you always was!"

Kingston laughed.

"Tell Fraser I am proud of him!" he exclaimed. "I never credited him with such forethought. Now, Tim, I expect a great deal will happen to-night. After the other two escapes, the most stringent precautions will be taken, and I shall have an extremely busy time of it."

"Then there won't be nobody to take back to-night, sir?"

"On the contrary, Tim, there will be no less than six gentlemen to pack into the car somehow!"

"Six!" gasped Tim. "Love a duck! I—I mean— Beg pardon, sir, but you fair took me breath away! 'Ow can you git six out at once, 'specially when they're on their guard?"

"Don't you worry your little head about that, Tim," replied Kingston. "I shall see to it all right. Before the time comes to take them away, however, I may want you again. So remain hidden in the yews until I return."

"S'pose you don't come, sir?"

"There's no supposing about it, young 'un—I shall come," returned Frank Kingston calmly. "So au revoir until then."

"Good-bye, sir. I won't shift a yard."

With the gorilla-skin under his arm, Kingston pulled himself up the rope he had tied to the railings. Once in the asylum grounds again, he rapidly crossed to the long, windowless building which composed the wards.

"Catch this parcel, Dolores," he whispered, as he held the skylight up. "It is not at all heavy."

A moment later he was beside her, cutting through the string which was bound round the parcel. The contents proved to be the skin of a huge gorilla, and its face had been prepared so as to exactly resemble the real article which at that moment reposed in its quarters on the other side of the house.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Kingston. "Fraser couldn't have done better! It is quite evident he interviewed Crawford before procuring this. For while Fraser has never seen the

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gorilla, Crawford has been practically face to face with it on several occasions."

Dolores looked at the hideous features with a shiver. "What a terrible creature the thing must be!" she exclaimed. "It is scarcely surprising, Mr. Kingston, that Zeetman trusts the animal to guard the grounds at night! What a shock you must have had on first seeing it!" "I admit the ape is not a pleasant fellow to meet in the dark, Dolores," replied Kingston. "Now let me see, the time is just ten minutes to eight. Old Zed, as the keepers call him, is not expected until soon after nine, so I have heaps of time at my disposal."

"You do not mean to venture out again immediately, then?"

"Oh, yes! I shall take the opportunity at once, or it might possibly slip by. There is a chance Zeetman may return before nine, and should he do so, I want to be in readiness."

Kingston slipped his coat off, and then proceeded to don the novel disguise. The skin had been prepared perfectly, and now as Kingston stood there in the sitting-room, he looked for all the world like the genuine article. So exact was the resemblance to a real animal, in fact, that Dolores instinctively shrank back.

"You look terrible," she whispered. "I am sure, Mr. Kingston, not even Dr. Zeetman himself would know you from a real gorilla. At least, not in a moderate light."

"I do not want him to see me at all," replied Kingston. "But if he does—well, I do not think I shall be discovered. Have no fear for my safety, for I am taking the blow-pipe with me, and with that insignificant weapon I shall be perfectly secure."

With that Kingston proceeded to take his departure. As he crept through the grounds along the weed-grown path, his movements were an exact imitation of the original. With no sign of hurry, yet with considerable speed, he crossed over to the private door which led only to Zeetman's library. He did not think it would be locked, for there was no necessity for such a thing.

His surmise proved to be correct. The door opened noiselessly enough, and, having taken a cautious look round, Kingston slipped into the passage, and closed the door. He stood there for a moment, listening, and faintly to his ears came the sound of conversation. It is probable that nobody else could have detected anything had they been in his place, but Kingston's hearing was remarkably acute.

A window at the other end of the passage shed a faint light, and the door of Zeetman's library could just be seen. No light of any description emanated from beneath it.

"Quite deserted," Kingston told himself with satisfaction. "The conversation I can hear is proceeding from the other side of this wall. I think I can rely on being to myself over this little business."

He walked up the passage, and grasped the door handle.

"Locked. Good! The very thing I wanted. Zeetman can never have the slightest suspicion now that anybody had entered. I do not think, however, that I shall find much trouble in gaining admittance!"

From a secret pocket he produced a bunch of small skeleton keys, and after a few moments' manipulation of these, the library door swung open. The lock was a very good one, otherwise Kingston would have been inside the room in less than a minute.

"Now to lock it again."

He closed the door, and left it precisely as it had been before he commenced his task. The large windows in the library allowed sufficient dim light to enter to enable the intruder to distinguish his surroundings. He had not been in there before, so he had to rely wholly on the description which had been given him.

"The screen is the first thing to find. That must be it against the wall yonder. Behind that, I understand, is the door leading to my double's quarters."

He walked over and stepped behind the large screen. Here, being concealed, he produced his tiny electric torch, and flashed the light before him. There was no danger whatever of that little point of light being seen from without—even if anybody had been there to see.

"Good!" he thought. "I half expected it to be this way, for, after all, there is no reason why the door should be bolted."

He was looking at the massive lock which held the door secure. There were no bolts whatever, but the size of the lock told its own tale, for it needed something exceptionally strong when the captive was an animal possessed of terrific strength. The key, a large iron one, was in the lock.

Without further ado, Kingston stowed the light away, having first got ready the stiletto with which he intended to quieten the gorilla. Then, with calm deliberation, he turned the key in the lock and swung the door open. Contrary to

his expectations, there was no window whatever in this apartment, and everything was black as a dungeon.

Kingston closed the door behind him, and stood just inside, perfectly still; then there came to his ears the sound of heavy movements. Without wasting a second, he produced his torch again, and pressed the button. The light revealed a rather small room, absolutely bare of furniture. A third of the floor space, however, was occupied by a partitioned-off cubicle, which was evidently the sleeping-place of the giant ape.

Suddenly, with a low utterance, the huge animal appeared and stared fascinatedly at the tiny point of light. Then, with a snarl, it advanced on all fours. Its eyes were gleaming furiously, yet Kingston was perfectly calm—every bit at home. Then, with startling abruptness, the gorilla rose on its hind feet, and literally rushed at the intruder. It could not see the latter, owing to the bright light from the torch, but its sense of smell told that a human being was in the room.

Kingston raised the stiletto in the air, to meet his assailant squarely. Somehow, however, just as he was on the point of striking, the creature's hairy arm caught his own unawares. The movement was so rapid, and so unexpected, that Kingston had no time to prevent the lunge striking home.

In one second the stiletto was sent flying across the room, and in another the gorilla's other arm dashed itself at the light. Kingston was too quick for him, however, and rapidly slipped the torch into his pocket, at the same time backing swiftly until he felt himself pressing on the wall.

But his object was far from being achieved. The gorilla was full of life, wild with anger, and absolutely alone with him in a room as dark and secure as the grave itself.

The Gorilla Overhears Some Useful Information.

Frank Kingston stood there, with his back to the wall, feeling perfectly cool and collected. As a matter of fact, a certain sense of pleasure had taken possession of him. He knew there was to be a tussle—a struggle between him and the gorilla. Yet he was perfectly confident as to the result, and the thought of having a good fight was rather to his liking.

He could not possibly see where his assailant stood, but heard it slowly advancing. Relying on the sounds only, he suddenly bent forward and lunged out with his left fist, putting terrible force into the blow.

Where it struck he could not tell, but it did strike, and with a stunning thud. The gorilla uttered a low roar, and staggered back. Kingston grasped his opportunity without a second's delay. Out came the torch, and the gorilla stood revealed. Kingston did not wait for the attack this time, but stepped forward himself.

Before the animal could realise what was happening, it received a blow between the eyes such as no other man could have administered. So terrible was the thrust that the recipient was lifted off his feet and thrown to the floor as though its weight had been trivial.

The fall had the effect of enraging the gorilla still more, and in a second it was on its feet again, whirling its arms about in a perfect frenzy. Had Kingston been within reach, he would have been knocked senseless with one blow; but he was more cautious, and knew the fight could only be won by careful tactics. He had thought, at first, that he would need both hands, but now he realised that the light was of more use, since it served to flurry his assailant.

After a moment the creature got tired of waving its arms about to no purpose, and suddenly, evidently making up its mind, dashed headlong at the light. With truly remarkable swiftness, Kingston darted aside, and the gorilla hit the wall with a crash which caused the whole place to shake. This was exactly what Kingston wanted, and before the other could regain its scattered senses, he delivered a second uppercut which finally settled the matter.

Strong as the gorilla was, it had proved a very easy prey to Frank Kingston, and now lay bruised and dazed upon the hard floor. Kingston realised that in one minute it would be upon its feet again as lively as ever, and frantic with anger. So he glanced round rapidly for the stiletto. The floor being absolutely bare, it was quite a simple matter to find it, and as the great ape was in the act of struggling to its feet, he buried the point of the sharp instrument into its arm.

"That's settled you, my friend," murmured Kingston to himself. "By jingo, but you've got some strength! If it hadn't been for this light, I very much doubt whether I could have gained such an easy victory. I am afraid you will be forced to remain in your present state of unconsciousness for at least a couple of hours. I would prefer you to be helpless while I am forced to share the same room."

Kingston took hold of the now motionless gorilla, and

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dragged it into its sleeping quarters, leaving the door open as before. This was placed in such a position that it was quite impossible to see into the cubicle when entering the room. Kingston pulled out his watch and glanced at the face. He had, of course, his ordinary clothes on under the gorilla-skin.

"Eight-fifteen," he muttered. "Well, now everything is done, I trust Zeetman will not be so late. After I have heard the plans, there may be work for me, and I don't think there will be much time. Ah, but there is the door!"

He remembered that the latter was unfastened, and produced from the same secret pocket a tiny pair of tweezerlike pliers, made with extreme strength, but also with extreme delicacy.

In a trice they were inserted in the keyhole, and after a moment's manipulation the key snapped back into its original place, and Kingston was locked in the gorilla's quarters. When Zeetman came there could be no suspicion whatever, for the intruder had left absolutely no sign of his presence.

There was nothing further to be done until the Inner Councillor put in an appearance, so Kingston quietly seated himself opposite the door, and settled himself for half an hour's sleep. He knew there was no danger of being caught unawares, for the slightest sound was sufficient to awaken him.

He had not closed his eyes for more than twenty minutes when he started up, wide awake and alert. From the other side of the thick door he could faintly hear the oily tones of Dr. Julius Zeetman.

"He has returned by an earlier train," thought Kingston. "Excellent! This is more than I dared hope for!"

He rose to his feet, and moved over to the partitioned-off portion of the room. The gorilla was lying there breathing evenly, and Kingston crouched down beside it, and listened. From there he could only catch a word now and again, and he was just thinking of approaching the door when the grate of the key sounded in the lock.

Kingston advanced until he was within full sight, and dropped on to all fours. Through the eye-holes he watched the door, and was quite prepared to receive the doctor.

Fortunately the latter had no light with him, only the beams from the other room entering. Dr. Zeetman stood framed in the doorway, the heavy lash in his hand. Kingston could see that he had only just returned, for he still wore his overcoat and hat. The utter darkness of the room was converted into a dim twilight.

"Now, my good Jack, you will be wanting your supper!" exclaimed the Inner Councillor, in what seemed to Kingston genial tones; evidently the doctor's visit to London had resulted in something good.

In the comparative darkness of the room there was absolutely nothing to fear. Indeed, Kingston was convinced that he could have deceived the doctor had the latter carried a lamp. Kingston backed into the sleeping-quarters, and stood in the doorway, gazing at his companion. His object in doing this was to prevent Zeetman coming too close.

One glance inside the cubicle would have caused Zeetman to lose a great deal of his self-possession. But the scoundrel did not trouble to do anything of this sort. He gave merely a cursory glance round, and then placed the gorilla's supper on the floor near the wall.

"There you are, Jack; you can eat that, and then sleep as much as you like. There's no night-work for you this time."

Zeetman was evidently in a hurry, and without losing time he turned round and left the room, closing the door and locking it behind him.

"The gorilla won't be needed to-night," thought Kingston quickly. "I shall have to hear who is going to

take his place. Jove, but the doctor has not the slightest suspicion!"

He laughed softly to himself, and crept over to the door. As before stated, the lock was of exceptional size, and Kingston's eyes expressed satisfaction, as he observed that the keyhole, although the key was still in it, was quite large enough to convey any ordinary conversation which took place in the library.

"Yes, Stevenson, the brute does seem quiet to-night," Zeetman was exclaiming, obviously in answer to a question from the head-keeper. "But we must get to business. Now Jack is fed there is no necessity for him to be again touched before morning, so that is off my mind."

"Have you seen the Chief, sir?"

"Yes, Stevenson. I have seen him, and my plans are all cut and dried," replied the doctor. "I think we can safely assume that our other prisoners are perfectly secure. Now, listen."

Kingston heard the sounds of a match being struck, and guessed that Dr. Zeetman was lighting a cigar. There was a creak of a chair, and then the Inner Councillor began speaking again.

"Now, Stevenson, up till to-night there has only been one man on duty in the corridor, and the gorilla in the grounds?"

"That's all, sir. But they are quite enough, I should think, to keep watch. How anybody could get past that brute of an ape gets right over me!"

Zeetman uttered an exclamation.

"Whether it gets over you or not, Stevenson," he said, "the fact remains that two of my patients have completely vanished. To-night, however, if any more games are tried they will be nicely nipped in the bud!"

Kingston smiled quietly to himself.

"The four keepers, Stevenson, will be stationed at intervals along the passage, thus making egress that way an impossibility."

"And what shall I do, sir?" asked Stevenson.

"You, my man, will be placed in a responsible position, and, though an uncomfortable one, is absolutely necessary. You will be paid extra, of course, for having to sit up all night, especially as your work will be the hardest of the lot. I shall require you to keep watch from the roof."

"From the roof, sir?" said the head-keeper, in tones of dismay. "But it's pouring with rain!"

"Nevertheless, Stevenson, a watch must be kept there. I am setting you this task, as, from past experience, you can be trusted to keep your eyes open."

"And shall I be out here all alone, sir?"

"No. You will have no less than ten men to keep you company. For, in place of the gorilla, there will be ten common-members placed in the grounds to keep an absolutely strict watch that no one enters or leaves. These, with the addition of yourself, and the four men in the corridor, will certainly ensure no repetition of what has already occurred."

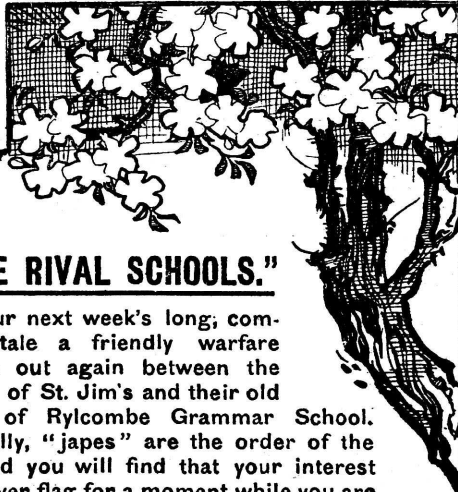
"I think we shall be safe enough, sir, if that's what you mean," said Stevenson, "with all them men on the watch. Another escape is out o' the question. But where are the other ten comin' from, sir, an' what time will they be here?"

"I will tell you, Stevenson. At ten o'clock a large motor-car will start from the address of the South-Eastern District Superintendent, and will arrive here, with the ten men aboard, at about twelve o'clock—a little before, if possible. Everybody inside the house, with the exception of myself and you keepers, will be in ignorance of their arrival, or of their being here at all, in fact."

"Who's to let them in, sir?"

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