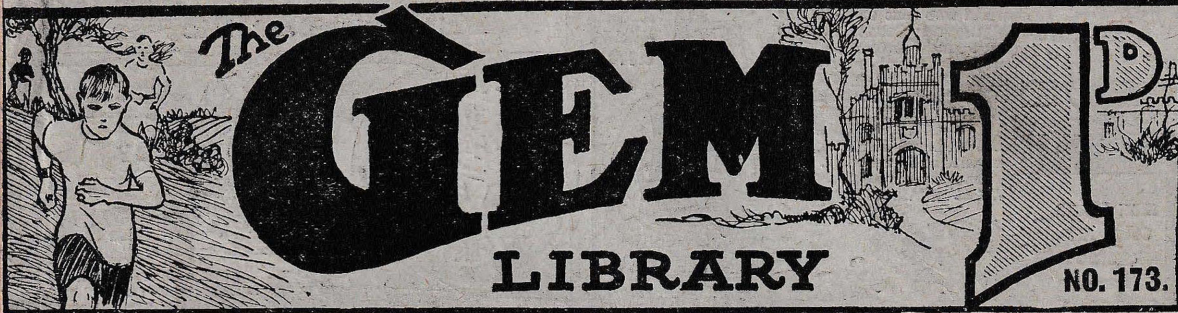


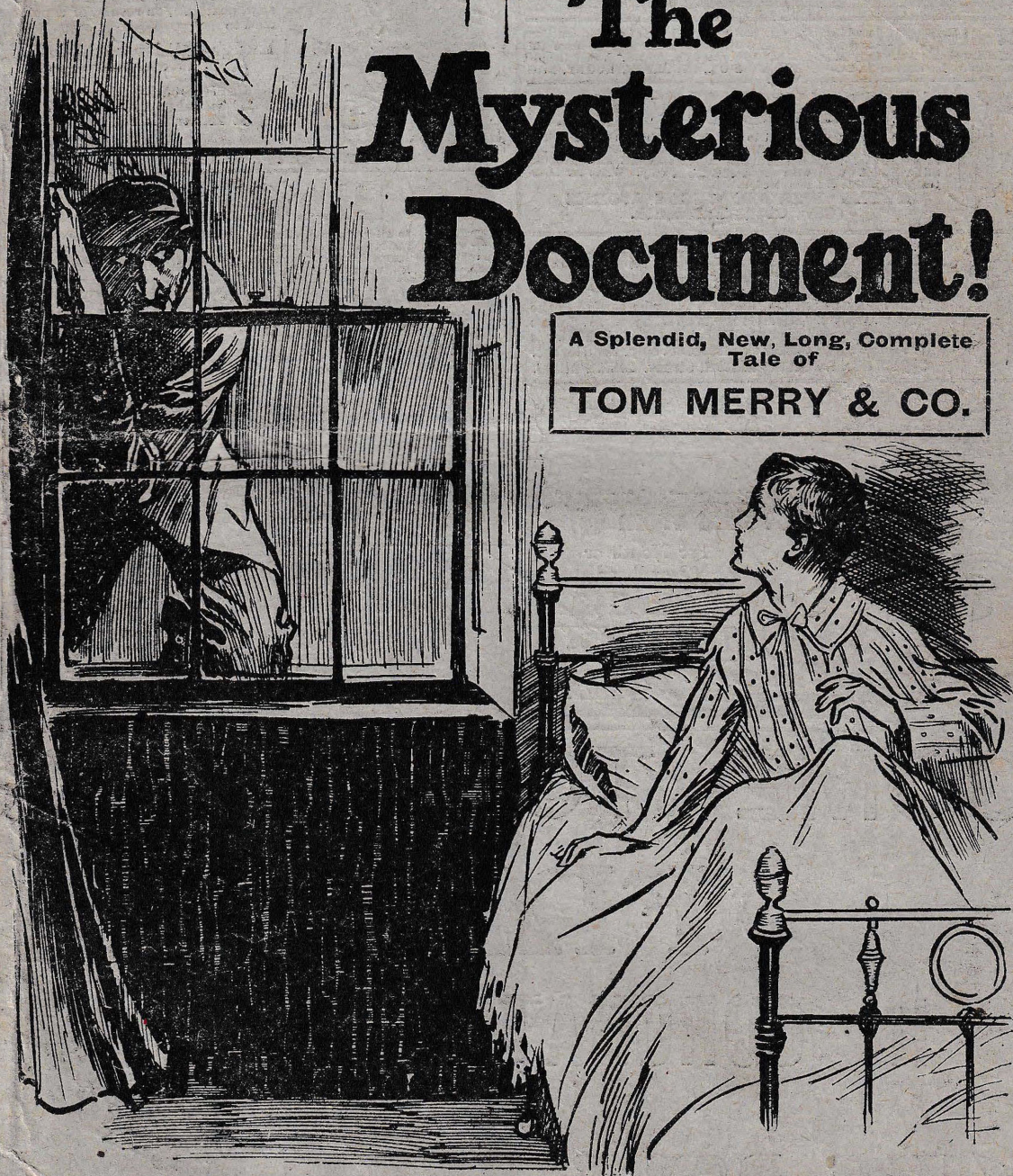
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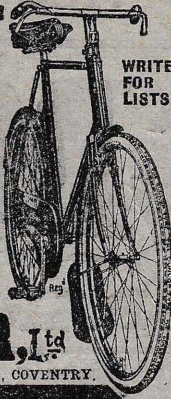
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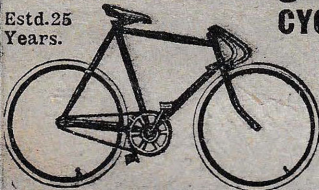
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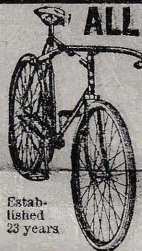
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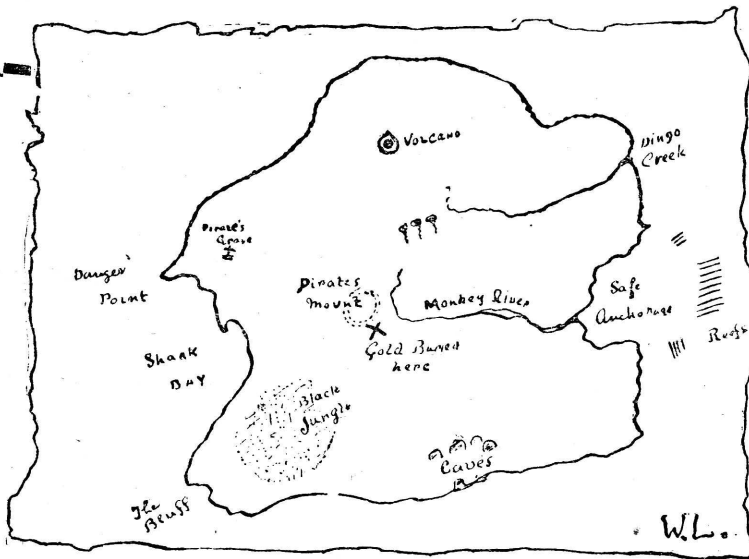
[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

THE MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT.

A Splendid, New, Long Complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD



of a man, yet from its height above the ground it appeared that it must be that of a boy.

"Senorito!"

The swarthy face came nearer to the edge of the wood, and the man it belonged to emerged from the cover of the thicket. Then Tom Merry understood. The man was a dwarf—with a large, dark face and massive shoulders, and powerful arms; but his body seemed to shrivel away lower down, and his total height was not more than four feet six.

He nodded to Tom Merry, with a peculiar grin—a grin in which there was expressed much more of malice than of humour.

"Senorito! Stop a minute!"

The man was a Spaniard evidently, but he spoke English very well. Tom Merry stood in the sunny lane, and looked at him.

"Yes," he said. "What do you want?"

"I am looking for someone, senorito," said the little man; "a friend of mine—a dear comrade whom I have missed upon the road—a sailorman. Have you seen him?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No," he replied.

"Ah, you are sure you have not seen him?"

"Quite sure," said Tom Merry. "There are not many sailormen about here. I am sure I should have noticed him if I had seen him on the road."

The little man contracted his heavy brows, and his black eyes looked piercingly at the St. Jim's junior.

"You are quite sure, senorito?"

"Yes, I tell you."

"But—you are not lying to me?"

Tom Merry flushed.

The Spaniard had stepped out of the wood now, and he stood in the sunny lane, in Tom Merry's path. Tom, as he looked at him, could not help wondering what had brought

CHAPTER 1.

A Strange Meeting.

"SENORITO! Senorito!"

Tom Merry stopped in sheer amazement.

He was sauntering along Rylcombe Lane, towards St. Jim's, when the voice called from the wood. With his hands in his trousers' pockets, and his straw hat on the back of his curly head, Tom Merry looked a picture of happy and careless boyhood. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and there were plenty of the fellows up the river bank, and in the glades of Rylcombe Wood, and Tom Merry had expected to be hailed from the wood as he strolled towards the school. But to be hailed in a foreign tongue was a surprise to him.

"Senorito!"

Tom Merry looked round into the big, overhanging trees that bordered the lane. The voice came from the wood, but he could not see who called.

"Senorito!"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Who is it?"

He looked with puzzled eyes into the deep shadows of the wood. In contrast with the burning sunshine in the lane, the wood seemed very dark and sombre. The trees grew thickly, with great ferns intermingled. From the shadow a little swarthy face, with twinkling black eyes, looked out, and Tom Merry started as he discerned it. For the face was the face

Next Thursday:

"TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND," & "THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON."

No. 173 (New Series.)

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the swarthy foreigner to that quiet Sussex countryside. There was a seafaring look about the stranger, in his manner and his clothes; but St. Jim's was a good distance from the coast, and seafaring men seldom came so far.

"No," said Tom Merry quietly, "I am not lying; and in this country, my man, we don't say things like that to strangers. If you don't learn better manners, you may have them taught to you free of charge."

The little man grinned.
"Ah, and perhaps you will teach me, seniorito!" he remarked.

"Yes, if you like."
Tom Merry, boy as he was, towered over the little Spaniard.

He had very little doubt of being able to toss the little man back into the wood if he wanted to; but even as he thought of it, he dismissed the thought from his mind. One in the full flush of health and strength had no right to lose his temper with a man who was deformed; after all, what did it matter if the little foreigner was rude to him?

"Never mind—never mind!" he said. "I have not seen the man you asked me about. That's all. Good-day!"

But the Spaniard was still standing in his path.
"Not so fast, little senior," he said.

"My dear chap," said Tom Merry, good-humouredly, "I want to get on! Will you stand out of the way?"

"Not yet!"
"Look here—"

"I am not yet finished with you, little senior. If you wish to teach me manners, as you hinted, I am ready to learn, and then I will speak."

And the little Spaniard laughed maliciously.
"Will you let me pass?"

"No."
Tom Merry clenched his hands.

The best of good tempers would hardly have borne the strain that was put upon Tom Merry's. He did not want to hurt the dwarf, and he was not looking for trouble in any way; but his eyes were gleaming with anger now.

The hero of the Shell made a step towards the Spaniard.
"Stand out of my way!" he said.

"You have to answer me first, seniorito!"
"I have answered you."

"Listen to me," said the Spaniard, still barring Tom Merry's path. "I know that the man took this path, and I have been watching for him from the wood. He has not passed me. You must have seen him on the road, from the way you came."

"I have told you I did not."
"But you must have seen him, seniorito. He may have gone into the wood before coming so far as this, and you have seen him."

Tom Merry made an impatient gesture.
"Once for all, I tell you I have seen no sailorman upon the road," he said. "Now let me pass, or there will be trouble."

The Spaniard grinned mockingly.
"There will be trouble, as you call it, if you do not tell me the truth, little senior," he said. "What path did the sailorman take?"

Tom Merry did not reply to the question. He had had enough of bandying words with the swarthy stranger, and his anger was at boiling point now. He made a stride towards the Spaniard, and grasped him by the shoulders to swing him aside.

Then he had a surprise.
The Spaniard, dwarf as he was, stood like a rock, and Tom Merry's powerful swing did not move him an inch from where he stood.

He laughed in the boy's amazed face. Tom Merry was the finest athlete in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's; but he realised that his strength was as nothing, to that of the little Spaniard.

"It is not so easy, seniorito!" grinned the dwarf.
"Get aside!" panted Tom Merry.

"Not yet!"
Tom Merry made a movement to pass the man. Then the long arms grasped at him, and he was whirled round. He struck out now in deadly earnest, and the Spaniard gasped as the boy's fist crashed into his dark face.

He relaxed his grasp for a moment, and Tom Merry made an effort to get away.

But it was in vain.
The strong, hairy, sinewy hands closed upon him again, and he was swung off his feet, and the Spaniard carried him as easily as if he had been a baby into the wood, and hurled him there upon the grass under the heavy branches.

The next moment he was kneeling beside Tom Merry, and his hand was upon the junior's throat. His fierce black eyes blazed down at the boy.

"Now, seniorito!" he hissed. "Now will you answer?"
Tom Merry panted.

"You scoundrel! Let me go!"
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"Bah! I will throttle you unless—"
His grasp tightened. He looked savagely angry enough to carry out his threat. Tom Merry made an effort, and sent a shout for help ringing through the wood.

"Help! Rescue, St. Jim's!"
The Spaniard gritted his teeth.

"Ah, will you?" he said.
And his grasp fastened tighter; the evil face above, and the branches of the trees, swam before the dizzy eyes of the St. Jim's junior.

But Tom Merry's cry had been heard.
There was a ringing shout from the wood.

"This way, deah boys! Wescue, St. Jim's!"
And a junior ran out of the trees, and the crashing in the thickets showed that others were following behind.

CHAPTER 2.

The Wrong Man.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, paused one second to jam his eyeglass into his eye. He took in the scene at a glance; and then, allowing his famous monocle to drop to the end of its cord, he rushed at the Spaniard.

The dwarf looked up, his evil eyes glittering, and his grasp relaxing upon Tom Merry. Before he could rise to his feet D'Arcy was upon him.

"You uttah wascal!"
The Spaniard went over in the deep grass, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rolling over him.

"Carambo!"
"Bai Jove! Help, deah boys—the beast is awf'ly stwong!"

Jack Blake and Digby and Herries, of the Fourth, ran out of the thickets. They had been strolling through the wood with D'Arcy, and all four of them had heard Tom Merry's desperate cry for help as the ruffian's grip closed on his throat.

Herries paused for a moment and looked back into the wood.
"Towser! Towsy!"

Gr-r-r!
"Come on, Towsy! Seize him!"

The Spaniard had leaped to his feet, throwing off D'Arcy as if he had been a child, much to the astonishment of the swell of St. Jim's.

He stood back, a strange wild figure against the green of the thickets, his dusky face aglow, his breath coming thick and fast through the thick, bearded lips.

"Carambo!"
"Collar him!" shouted Blake.

"Bai Jove—"
"Hold on!" said Herries. "Towser's got him!"

The bulldog leaped forward.
The Spaniard had not quailed from the crowd of boys, but at the sight of the bulldog's open jaws he turned and ran.

Crash!
Headlong through a thicket he went; and Towser, with a short, sharp growl, went after him, loudly encouraged by his master.

"Go it, Towser! Seize him, Towsy! Go it!"
"Bai Jove! Towsah is useful for once!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! The beast has no respect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs, but—"
"Go it, Towser! Seize him!"

Meanwhile, Digby helped Tom Merry to his feet. The captain of the Shell was white and dazed, and his hands were shaking.

"Thanks!" he gasped.
"Who was it?" said Digby. "What's the row?"

"The—the hound! I—after him!"
"Good!" said Blake. "I suppose he was going to rob you, the cad. Let's run him down."

"Yaas, wathah!"
Tom Merry was not vindictive; but his blood was boiling now. He wanted to get to close quarters with the Spaniard again. He dashed off through the wood on the track of Towser, who clung to the track of the Spaniard. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy followed him.

"It's all right," Herries gasped. "No need to worry, you know. Towser won't lose that track; Towser's simply ripping at following a trail—"

"Wats, deah boy—"
"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Buck up!" shouted Blake. "Don't jaw!"
"Look here—"

"Bai Jove! Towsah's got something!" D'Arcy exclaimed.
There was a sound of loud, fierce growling, and a voice raised in angry alarm. The juniors of St. Jim's burst out of the trees into a glade, where a man was backing against a tree, trying to keep the bulldog off with thrusts of a heavy cudgel.

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"Got him!" roared Herries, rushing on to the attack.

"Stop!" gasped Tom Merry.

"What!"

"That's not the man!"

"My hat!"

Herries stopped just as he was about to hurl himself upon the stranger. So certain was he about Towser's unerring instinct, that he had not thought of looking at the man to see that there was no mistake.

"Bai Jove! Towser's twacked down the w'ong man——"

"As usual!" grinned Blake.

The man was a short, thick-set fellow in seafaring garb. His face was tanned by tropical suns, and his eyes were deep-set and gleaming. There was a bundle tied in a red handkerchief on the grass, and remnants on the ground seemed to show that the seaman had been making his lunch there of sandwiches.

The man bore no resemblance whatever to the Spanish dwarf, but Towser was evidently not the kind of dog to be troubled by making distinctions of that kind. So long as he ran somebody down he seemed to be satisfied.

And it would probably have gone very hard with the brown-faced sailorman or with Towser if Tom Merry & Co. had not arrived upon the scene.

Either Towser would have been brained by the cudgel, or the sailorman would have felt the bulldog's teeth in his leg, but for their arrival.

"Call him off!" shrieked the sailorman. "If that there dog belongs to you, call 'im off! I'll brain him!"

Gr-r-r! Yow!"

"Call him off!"

"You let that dog alone!" said Herries. "That's my bulldog——"

"Call him off, you ass!" said Blake.

"Towser! Towser! Come off, old boy! Towser!"

Gr-r-r!

Towser did not seem inclined to come off. He made another spring at the sailorman, and popped back just in time to escape a fierce slash of the oaken cudgel. Herries gave a shout of wrath.

"Stop that, you ruffian!"

"Bai Jove! That's wathah cool, you know, Hewwies."

"Oh, rats! Towser! Towser!"

"Collar the beast!"

"If you're calling Towser a beast, Blake——"

"Collar him, you ass!"

Herries snorted, and ran at Towser. He grasped the bulldog's collar, and said soothing words, but Towser wanted a great deal of quieting. Towser had had some knocks with the cudgel, and Towser's blood was up.

He tried again and again to rush at the sailorman, and Herries was dragged to and fro by the dog, shouting to him to "lie down!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "This is jolly near as good as a circus! Go it, Herries! Go it, Towser!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Towser, old boy! You beast, be quiet! Lie down! Good dog! Good doggy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Towser's efforts relaxed at last. Perhaps he recognised his master's voice, or perhaps he was getting tired. The sailorman lowered the cudgel, which he had been holding in readiness in case the dog should get loose.

"Better take that brute away!" he panted.

"Rot!" said Herries. "He's very quiet—you could trust him with a baby! I expect you're not much class, or Towser wouldn't go for you."

"Oh, cheeso it!" said Blake. "Take the beast away. My hat! If I had a dog like that I'd borrow a gun for him."

"Bosh!"

"Yaas, wathah! And I would lend you one with pleasuah, deah boy."

"Oh, rot!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Come on, Towser—come on, old doggy!"

And Herries marched off with Towser with a great deal of dignity.

"We're awfully sorry," said Tom Merry, to the panting sailorman—"very sorry indeed. We were looking for somebody else."

"Yaas, wathah! We beg to apologise most pwofoundly, sir," said D'Arcy, taking off his hat with a bow.

The sailorman grinned.

"No offence," he said. "I ain't used to dogs. I guess there's no 'arm done, young gentleman. It's all right."

"We were looking for a friend of yours, I think," said Tom Merry. "At all events, he had been inquiring for a sailorman on the road."

The seaman started, and a shade of pallor came into his mahogany face.

"A friend of mine," he said. "I ain't got no friends in these parts, I reckon. Wot was he like, young gentleman?"

"Oh, a foreign chap, who was inquiring for a sailorman," said Tom Merry.

"A foreign chap?"

"Yes."

"Not a Spaniard, by any chance?" asked the sailorman, and there was an inflection of strange eagerness in his voice.

"Yes; I took him for a Spaniard," said Tom Merry, wondering at the agitation in the tanned face of the seaman.

"Not a little ugly figure of a man," said the seaman, in a shaking voice—"a little black-jowled demon as strong as a horse and the height of a boy—'bout so high?"

And he stretched out a tanned hand.

"A dwarf?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Yes, that was what he was."

"With rings on his fingers, maybe?"

"Yes, I noticed that," said Tom Merry, his hand going to his throat. "I felt it."

"Ah! It was Pablo, then."

"Pablo?"

"Pablo Lopez," said the sailorman. "So he is here, is he? And all the way from Southampton I ain't seen him, and I reckoned he was right off my course by this time. And he's here, looking for a sailorman!"

He muttered the last words in low, fearful tones, looking round him into the sombre depths of the wood, as if in terror of seeing the evil face of the Spaniard looking at him from the shadows there.

There was something in his terrified manner that had a strange effect upon the juniors. They felt that there was something in this that they could not understand—something that hinted of tragedy and mystery. What were these two men doing in the quiet Sussex country-side?

Tom Merry understood now that the Spaniard had been speaking falsely when he had said that he was looking for a friend.

It was evidently not as a friend that the sailorman regarded the man he called Pablo Lopez.

"Where is Lopez now, young gentlemen?" the sailorman asked, his glance returning to the astonished juniors.

"He's in the wood."

"In this wood—near here?"

"We were after him," Tom Merry explained. "We've had a row—he's a ruffianly cad. We've lost him now, though."

"But he hasn't lost me," said the sailor.

"Is he an enemy of yours?" asked Blake.

"Ay, ay!"

"And he is after you?"

"Ay, ay!"

"I should think you could handle a little bouncer like that."

The sailor looked at him queerly.

"It's more than my life's worth to meet Pablo Lopez, young gentleman," he said. "I've got something that he wants—you see that? He means to have it, too, but not while I'm alive—not much!"

He cast a quick look round into the wood.

"I reckon I'll be getting on," he said. "If Lopez is here, this ain't a place for me to drop my anchor."

And he tramped away into the wood, with his head sunk, and his eyes gleaming on either side of him at the slightest sound in the trees. The juniors stood silent, lost in amazement.

CHAPTER 3.

The Treasure Chart.

"B AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to break the silence with that ejaculation.

"My hat!" said Digby.

"It's a giddy mystery of some sort," said Blake slowly. "That sailor chap looked as if he thought his life was in danger. Judging from the looks of the foreign bouncer, I think it may be."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I've got an idea," said Tom Merry quietly. "The Spanish fellow is still in the wood, and he's looking for the sailor. If he finds him——"

"There'll be mischief."

"Exactly. Let us follow the sailor."

"Follow him?"

"Yes; we've nothing to do, and we might as well see the man clear of the wood. We may drop on the Spanish chap again that way, too, and give him something to remember us by."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! We'll have Towser, then."

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A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND."

"Herries—Towser!"

But Herries and Towser were gone. Tom Merry and Blake and D'Arcy and Digby cut sticks in the thicket in case they should have need of weapons, and followed on the track of the seaman. They could hear him tramping doggedly on some distance ahead through the thick wood.

"He'll come out on the Wayland road if he follows this path," Digby remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Listen!"

The juniors paused.

They had reached the edge of a broad, sunny glade, which the sailorman had crossed. He was about to plunge into the trees on the opposite side when a figure bounded into view from the fern.

It was the dwarf.

The sailorman saw him as the juniors did, and he sprang back against a tree, his right hand swinging up with the cudgel grasped in it, but the cudgel was shaking like a leaf from the trembling of his hand. It was evident that he was in deadly fear of the dwarf.

"Stand back, Pablo Lopez," he exclaimed—"stand back!"

The dwarf laughed—a low, ugly laugh.

"I have found you, Peter Raff," he said.

"Stand back!"

"Where is the chart?"

"I ain't got it."

The dwarf laughed again.

"You are lying, friend Peter," he said—"you are lying! You have the chart in your pocket, and you know you have. Give it me."

Peter Raff set his white lips desperately.

"I won't!" he said. "You shall kill me first."

"It will not take me long to do that, Peter."

"Look you 'ere, Pablo," said the sailorman, his eyes watching wildly every sinuous motion of the dwarf, who seemed about to spring upon him every moment. "Look you 'ere, you belay! You ain't in the South Seas now—you're in England, my man, and there's a law 'ere to hang up men who use their knives—you see?"

"I am not afraid of your law, Peter."

"Stand off!"

"Besides, I shall not use my knife," grinned the dwarf.

"My hands will choke the life out of you, Peter, if you do not give up the chart."

"I won't!"

"Hand it over!"

"No!"

"Carambo!"

The Spaniard leaped forward like a tiger.

Peter Raff brought the cudgel down with a swing, but his hand was shaking so that the Spaniard had no difficulty in avoiding the blow.

The cudgel missed its mark, and the next instant the dwarf's terrible grip was upon the sailorman.

Peter Raff, powerful fellow as he was, was borne back against the tree, and the next moment was rolling in the grass, with the dwarf upon him.

"Now," panted the dwarf. "Now, hombre! The chart!"

"Never."

"The chart—or your life first!"

"Help!"

The juniors were dashing across the grassy glade, and the sailor's rolling, despairing eyes had caught a glimpse of them. The dwarf's back was to them, and he saw nothing.

He laughed mockingly.

"There is no help here, Peter," he said. "We are alone—the wood is lonely! Bah! The chart or your life—will you trouble me to take it from your dead body? You are a fool! The chart, I say!"

"You hound!"

Tom Merry sprang upon the Spaniard.

Pablo Lopez started up with a fierce cry.

"You! You, nino—you again!"

He whirled round upon the juniors. But they were ready for him. Four sticks were lashing out; they did not feel disposed to stand upon ceremony with the murderous ruffian. Crash!

The dwarf reeled back from the crashing sticks, with a yell of pain.

He made a savage spring forward, with murder in his snapping black eyes; but the juniors of St. Jim's stood their ground, hitting out fiercely.

"Bai Jove! Down with the wottah!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Give him socks!"

The Spaniard retreated, hissing like a spiteful cat.

"Carambo, I will—I will—"

"Get out!" said Tom Merry. "Buzz off, or you'll get worse than that, you scoundrel!"

"Senorito—"

"Buzz off, I tell you."

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Tom Merry made a motion with his stick, and the Spaniard retreated again. Strong as he was, he was no match for the four juniors.

He turned a savage look upon the sailorman, who had risen to his feet, and was leaning against a tree, gasping.

"I shall see you again, Peter Raff! You will not escape me."

Then he disappeared into the wood, muttering Spanish oaths.

"Gweat Scott!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wogard that fellow as a wank wottah! I twust you are not hurt, Mr. Waff."

The sailorman was breathing hard, and the colour was ebbing in his tanned face.

"No," he said, "I've been near it, though. P'r'aps you young gentlemen would—"

He paused.

"We'll do anything we can for you," said Tom Merry. "If you're afraid of that fellow, why not apply to the police for protection?"

The sailorman gave a hollow laugh.

"The police wouldn't be much use agin Pablo Lopez," he said. "You don't know him! I was with him in the South Seas. I've seen him—" He broke off abruptly. "Young sir, you saved my life just now—if Pablo Lopez had fastened his grip on my throat, I should have been a gone coon."

"I did no more than the others," said Tom Merry.

"You was the first," said the sailorman; "but I'm obleeged to you all. I want you to do something more for me, and p'r'aps for yourself. What is your name, sir?"

"Tom Merry."

The sailorman was fumbling in his breast.

His hand came out with something in it—something that looked like a crumpled paper. But as the juniors looked at it, they saw that it was a kind of leather—a pale-coloured, delicate kind of leather they had never seen before. There were marks upon it in Indian ink, tattooed into the leather.

"Look at that!" said the sailorman.

He handed the fragment of leather, which was about four inches by six, to Tom Merry. Then, a sudden thought seeming to strike him, he closed his rough hand over it.

"No, don't look at it! Young gentleman"—he came closer to Tom Merry, and looked sharply and searchingly into his face—"young gentleman, I can trust you."

"I hope so," said Tom Merry.

"You wouldn't go back on a poor sailorman."

"Certainly not."

"Wathah not," said D'Arcy. "I assuah you that you can wely entirely upon Tom Mewwy, my deah fellow. He's all wight."

"You take that chart," said the sailorman, placing it in Tom Merry's hand. "Wrap it up, and don't look at it."

"Do you want me to mind it for you?"

"Ay, ay!"

"Very well."

Tom Merry took out his handkerchief, and wrapped it round the oblong leather. The sailor watched him with anxious eyes.

"Now make a knot," he said.

Tom Merry smiled, and knotted the corners of the handkerchief.

"You won't look at that," said the sailor. "You won't open that, and look at it, while it's in your 'ands."

"Certainly not."

"Right you are," said the sailorman, "I can trust you—I know it in your face. Look you 'ere, then! I'm goin', but if I live I'll come back agin, and ask you for that paper, or else let you know where to send it by post. You see?"

"Yes."

"If the Spaniard finds me agin—and I reckon he will—he can't get that chart now," said the sailor. "He won't suspect me of giving it away—not he. But he won't find it on me now. You savvy?"

"I understand."

"If I write to you within three days, you send me that chart in the post," said the sailorman. "You savvy that?"

"Yes."

"If you don't 'ear from me on the third morning," said the sailor, in low tones, "it will be because I can't write to you; because—well, because the chart won't be no use to me in Davy Jones's locker."

"My dear chap—"

"Ay, ay, I know what to expect," said the sailorman; "but Pablo Lopez will never have it—that's my comfort. Where can I write to you?"

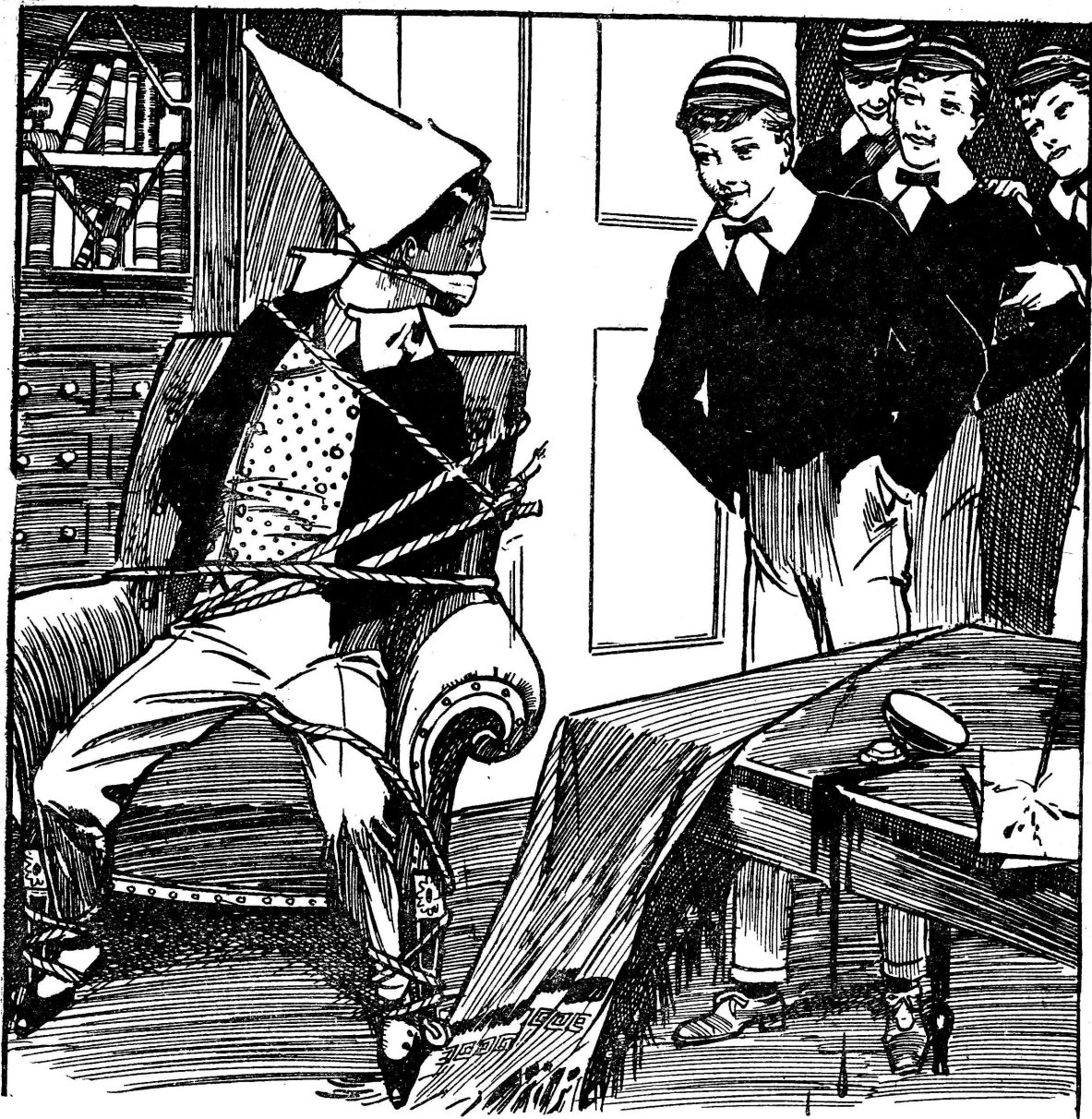
"Tom Merry, School House, St. Jim's."

"I reckon I shall remember that."

"Why not write it down?"

The sailorman shook his head.

"No, Pablo Lopez would find it, and guess! No, I'll bear



The chums of the School House stared at Arthur Augustus. They had not been in a merry humour when they entered the study; but the sight of D'Arcy's predicament was too much for them. "Ha, ha, ha!" they roared. (See page 9.)

it in mind. Mind, if I don't write you by the third morning, I sha'n't never claim that chart—and it is yours."

"Mine?"

"I reckon so," said the sailorman. "Mind, I came by it honest—I swear that on the Good Book. It's mine, and if I don't claim it in three days, I give it to you, and these young gents are witnesses."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Maybe, you'll have friends who can stand by you, and 'elp you to find what's written on that chart," said the sailorman. "P'r'aps you won't see Pablo Lopez again. He won't know you've got the chart. He may never even know that the treasure's been lifted at all."

"The treasure?" said Tom Merry, with a gasp.

Peter Raff nodded.

"Yes, the treasure," he said. "There's treasure enough on Skeleton Island to make a dozen men rich—rollin' in money, I reckon. But it's got to be found, and Pablo Lopez means to find it. You steer clear of Pablo Lopez, and you're all right. Keep that chart out of sight."

"I will take care of it."

The sailorman looked round into the wood.

"I reckon I'll go now—"

"Shall we see you clear of the wood?" asked Blake.

"If you'll be so kind, young gents."

The juniors walked with the sailorman as far as the Wayland road. They walked in silence. The circumstances were so peculiar that they did not know what to think. Was the man a dreamer, and did he imagine that the leather chart he had given to Tom Merry had the value he assigned to it? That he was speaking in good faith, and believed every word he said, was evident.

But it was clear, too, that the Spaniard believed in the chart—else why his desperate efforts to obtain possession of it. And the dwarf did not look like a dreamer!

The whole thing was amazing.

The sailorman walked with dogged steps, like a man who felt himself in the grip of a fate from which there was no escape, but would not yield to fear. He marched on grimly, his eyes well about him, and he seemed to breathe more freely when they came out of the wood, on the sunny Wayland road.

He held out a big, rough hand to Tom Merry.

"Good-bye, young gent!" he said. "And thank you

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kindly—thank you all kindly. I don't suppose I shall write for that there chart; but if I do, you'll send it to me."

"Immediately."

"And, remember, if you don't hear from me in three days, the chart's yours, to do what you like with—all yours," said the sailorman.

And he pressed Tom Merry's hand, and ducked his head to the other fellows, and went tramping away down the road towards Wayland.

CHAPTER 4.

Mellish Knows.

TOM MERRY entered his study in the Shell passage at St. Jim's, threw his straw hat on the table, and sat down.

He wanted to think out what had happened.

The leather chart was still in his pocket, wrapped in the handkerchief; but it did not seem to Tom Merry that that was a safe place for it.

Suppose the Spaniard should get some clue to where it was. Suppose he had been watching in the wood—it was unlikely, but possible.

The evil dark face of Pablo Lopez was before Tom Merry's eyes as he thought of it—the hard, cruel, unscrupulous face.

Tom Merry drew the knotted handkerchief from his pocket. His curiosity to see the chart was intense; but he would not look at it; the thought of breaking his word to the sailor never even crossed his mind.

If a letter came from Peter Raff within three days, Tom Merry would send the chart to him unlooked-at.

But if not—

If not, it might mean that Peter Raff was dead, or that he had fled far, and abandoned the thought of finding the supposed treasure.

Then, by his words, the chart would belong to Tom Merry. The junior trembled at the thought. A chart to a treasure buried upon an island—it seemed like a dream of romance.

Tom Merry had laid the wrapped handkerchief on the table, and his eyes rested upon it dreamily.

Where should he place it for safety.

There was a step in the passage, and the door was kicked open, and two fellows came into the study—Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, Tom Merry's chums and study-mates. Tom Merry made a quick grasp at the chart.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "What have you got there?"

"What's the giddy secret?" demanded Manners. "Is it something new in grub?"

Tom Merry flushed and laughed.

"No," he said. "It's a treasure chart."

"What!"

"A treasure chart," said Tom Merry calmly.

Manners stared, and Monty Lowther grinned.

"Try us with something a little less steep, my son," said Monty Lowther. "I'm afraid my swallowing capacity is not up to that."

"It's a fact."

"Gammon!"

"Honest Injun!"

Monty Lowther became grave.

"What on earth are you getting at, Tommy?" he demanded. "Explain yourself, before I lam you with a cricket-stump!"

Tom laughed.

"I'll explain soon enough," he said. "Shut the door—I don't want all the School House to hear!"

Monty Lowther kicked the door shut.

Tom Merry explained about the meeting with the sailorman and the Spaniard. Monty Lowther and Manners listened with breathless interest.

"Well, my only summer hat!" exclaimed Lowther, in amazement. "If that doesn't take the giddy cake!"

"Blessed if I catch on to it, either," said Manners.

"Treasure charts are a very well, but—but they don't happen, you know."

"This one has," said Tom Merry.

"The man must have been dreaming."

"The Spanish chap wasn't dreaming—he meant business all the time."

"It's amazing!"

"And the chart's yours, if you don't get a letter in three days?" Monty Lowther asked, with a deep breath.

"That's it."

"By George! And if it becomes yours?"

"Then we shall see it."

"A giddy chart, of a giddy treasure island!" exclaimed Lowther. "My hat! Why wasn't I born a sailor? Fancy being bunged into a private school, with a giddy treasure waiting on a giddy island all ready to be lifted!"

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"Rotten!" said Manners. "We might run away to sea, you know."

"H'm!"

"We might get off in the summer vac.," said Tom Merry. "The South Seas aren't as far off as they used to be—I mean, you can get there in a couple of weeks in a fast steamer. The vac.'s quite long enough."

"My word! What a giddy summer holiday—South Seas, buried treasure, cannibals, and pirates!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I think the pirates will have to be marked off," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Also the cannibals. But I really think the treasure's there—that sailor chap had such an earnest way about it, and he looked honest all through. But if I should have the chart, and find any treasure, I should keep half of it for him if he ever turned up to claim it, although he gives me the chart."

"Quite right!"

"I think—Hallo! What on earth's that?"

There was a sudden terrific uproar in the passage. Something heavy bumped against the door, and there was a stifled yell. In the midst of the bumping and scuffling came the well-known tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House.

"You uttah wottah! You feahfully mean beast!"

"Ow! Leggo!"

"That's Mellish's voice!" grinned Manners. "What has the cad been doing now?"

Tom Merry's brows contracted.

"Listening at the door, I expect, and Gussy has caught him."

Monty Lowther threw the door wide open.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, very flushed and wrathful, seemed to be waltzing in the passage with Mellish. The cad of the Fourth was struggling to get away. But D'Arcy, in spite of his elegant ways, was an athlete. He whirled Mellish round and round, and finally whirled him into the study, sending him crashing into Monty Lowther.

Lowther staggered back, and sat down in the fender.

"Ow!" he roared. "You silly chump!"

"Sowwy, deah boy—"

"Yow! You utter idiot!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yaroooh! Yah!"

"Awfly sowwy, deah boy! Of course, I couldn't possibly know that you intended to get in the way, when I thwew Mellish in. Sowwy!"

"Br-r-r-r—"

"I was comin' along to speak to you, Tom Mewwy, about takin' care of that chart, you know," said Arthur Augustus, "and I found that howwid wottah kneelin' at the door outside, with his beastly eah to the beastly keyhole, you know!"

"I wasn't!" roared Mellish. "I—I—I was just stooping down to tie my shoelace, when that rotter came and jumped on—"

"Wats! The beast had his eah glued to the beastly keyhole—"

"Are you sure, Gussy?" asked Manners.

"Quite sure, deah boy!"

"Sure it was glued there?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite certain that it wasn't gummed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and took a scornful survey of the humorous Manners. Manners bore it without being shrivelled up.

"I wegard you as an ass, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus, in measured tones. "I was speakin' metaphowically, of course!"

"I wish you'd chucked that rotter at me metaphorically, too!" growled Lowther, picking himself out of the fender and rubbing his dusty trousers.

"I have stated that I am sowwy, and between gentlemen an apology ought to be sufficient to close the mattah," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! Undah the circs.—" D'Arcy broke off as Mellish dodged to the door. He caught the cad of the Fourth by the shoulder and swung him back. "You feahful wottah! Stop there!"

"Look here—"

"I'm lookin'!" said D'Arcy. "I've got an eye on you, you uttah scamp! I wegard you with feahful contempt! Have you fellows been talkin' ovah anythin' pwivate?"

Tom Merry looked a little worried.

"I suppose Mellish has heard me talking about what happened in the wood," he replied.

"Bai Jove! I weally wegard that as wathah weckless of you, Tom Mewwy! I should have thought you would be careful to say nothin' about the tweasure chart!"

"Eh?"

"You should not have mentioned the tweasure—"

"You ass!" roared Manners. "You're mentioning it yourself, ain't you?"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"I never heard anything," said Mellish. "It was quite an accident that I happened to stoop down close to your door, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry gave the cad of the Fourth a glance of contempt.

"Don't tell lies, Mellish!" he said scornfully. "I know very well that you were listening!"

"I tell you—"

"Get out of my study! No good keeping him here, Gussy; we can't make him forget what he's heard!"

"We can make him pwomise not to wepeat it."

"I don't suppose a promise would make much difference to Mellish."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

Monty Lowther stepped to the door, and held it open for Mellish to pass. He also held his right foot in readiness to help Mellish out when he started.

"This is your way, Mellish!" he remarked.

"I—I—"

"Get out!"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"I'm waiting for you!"

Mellish looked at the doorway and Lowther's ready boot. He made a movement to pass, and Lowther's boot swung up, and he started back again.

"Are you going, Mellish?"

"Look here—"

"Kick him out, Manners!"

"Certainly!" said Manners.

Mellish gave a snarl, and made a desperate rush through the doorway. Quick as he was, he was not quick enough to escape Lowther's boot. Monty Lowther's long leg whipped out, and his boot came with a crash behind Mellish, and the eavesdropper landed in the passage on his hands and knees, with a fearful yell.

"Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther slammed the door after Mellish, and the cad of the Fourth was heard to tramp away down the passage, grunting. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wagged an admonitory finger at Tom Merry.

"You have been awfully weckless, Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Mellish will tell Goah and Cwooke and Levison, and all the set. They will talk of the mystewious document all up and down the school."

"Can't be helped."

"Yaas; but—"

"Oh, don't croak, Gussy! It can't be helped now, anyway!"

"Oh, vevy well! I was only goin' to say—"

"Well, don't!"

"I came here to speak about that document, Tom Mewwy. It will be necessary for it to be kept vevy safe."

"I know that, Gussy."

"If you like, I will take charge of it."

"Eh?"

"You see, in a mattah of this kind, what you need is a fellow of tact and judgment!" D'Arcy explained. "I shall be vevy pleased to take the wesponsibility of the mattah."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thanks vevy much; but I really think I am able to look after the chart," he said. "You see, it was entrusted to me, and I can't vevy well give it to anybody else to take care of."

"Not to any ordinary person, certainly," D'Arcy agreed; "but, in my case—"

"Of course, I'm quite willing to admit that you are an extraordinary person—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"But I think I had better look after the chart myself."

D'Arcy opened the door.

"Vevy well, Tom Mewwy; the wesponsibility is yours, you know. I felt bound to make the offah, and I weally wash my hands of what may happen!"

And the swell of St. Jim's marched out of the study, leaving the Terrible Three laughing.

CHAPTER 5.

Towser's Find.

TOM MERRY thought a good deal about the mysterious document during the following day or two.

He had locked it up for safety in a secret drawer in his desk. There it reposed until he should hear from the sailorman, or until the lapse of three days should make it his own property.

Needless to say, the chums of the Shell were very keen to get sight of it, and to examine closely the tattooed lines on the leather, of which they had caught a passing glimpse when the sailorman handed the chart to Tom Merry.

But they did not think for a moment of breaking the compact with the sailor.

It is probable that with the lapse of a day or so Tom Merry, in the other interests he had, would have almost forgotten the chart that reposed in the secret drawer of his desk, still knotted up in the handkerchief.

But he was not allowed to forget it.

The chums of the School House had agreed, and intended, to say nothing of the chart to the school. It was nobody's business but their own, and they did not want to make it the talk of St. Jim's.

But the matter was out of their hands now. As Blake and Digby and D'Arcy and Herries and the Terrible Three themselves all maintained that they had not said a word, it was pretty clear that Mellish of the Fourth had heard the story, with his ear to Tom Merry's keyhole.

Undoubtedly he had told his friends, and they had chattered about it, for on the second day the story of the sailorman, the Spaniard, and the treasure chart was all over the school.

Fellows came up to Tom Merry and demanded to know the story; and at first his answers were short and sharp.

"Mind your own bizney," or "Go and eat coke," did not satisfy the inquirers, and they came again and again, and all sorts of stories came floating about.

Under the circumstances, Tom Merry related the facts, as it was better for the facts to be known than for all sorts of wild rumours to be afloat.

The story caused a great deal of excitement in the Lower School. The seniors came to hear of it, and the captain of St. Jim's, Kildare of the Sixth, had Tom Merry in his study to tell the story to a group of Sixth-Formers.

The seniors all agreed to grin at it.

They averred that the sailorman had been a tramp with a turn for practical joking, and that when Tom Merry looked at his chart he would discover that he had been taken in.

Tom Merry was content to let them believe so if they chose.

He was quite convinced himself of the genuineness of the sailorman's story, and of the chart; but the less attention others gave to the thing the better.

Tom Merry was already planning in his mind a voyage to the South Seas during the summer vacation if the chart should be left in his hands.

But he sincerely hoped, too, that nothing had happened to the sailorman. He took a strangely deep interest in the fate of Peter Raff. Whenever he thought of the swarthy, cruel face of the Spaniard he felt a pang of anxiety for the brown-complexioned sailorman. Where was he now? Had he fled—or had he perished, as he so evidently feared, at the hands of the Spanish dwarf?

"I fancy he's all right," Monty Lowther remarked, when Tom Merry mentioned the matter at tea-time in the study on the second day. "If anything had happened to him in this neighbourhood we should have heard of it."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I suppose so," he assented. "But—well, whenever I think of that Spaniard chap I feel scared about Raff. He was no match for Lopez."

"That Spanish chap was a demon," said Blake, who was in the study having tea with the Terrible Three. "He wasn't so tall as most of us, but he had the strength of three or four full-grown men. I'm sorry for the chap who got into his hands, with no help near. But if anything had happened to the sailor it would be the talk of the countryside. Things don't happen about Rylcombe every day; and anything like that would make a sensation."

"Yes, unless—"

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"Unless what?"

"The woods are very thick," said Tom Merry, in a low voice, "and a man might lie there for weeks without being found. Or the river, where it flows through the wood—"

Blake shuddered a little.

"Hang it all, that's beastly!" he exclaimed. "But we saw the sailor well on his way on the Wayland Road before we left him."

"True!"

"I shouldn't wonder if you get a letter from him in the morning," said Manners.

"I hope so."

"But you don't think so?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No," he said, "I don't! I can't help thinking that Lopez has been too much for him. I think—"

"Well?"

"Let's have a stroll out now," said Tom Merry. "We can get a pass out of gates, and we might have a stroll up the Ryll."

"What about the cricket?"

"Oh, we've done enough at the nets to-day!"

"Right you are!" said Manners. "After all, I can take my camera, and the light's good enough. We can get some snaps up the river."

And when tea was over the four juniors walked out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met them at the doorway.

"Goin' out, deah boys?"

"Yes. Come?"

The swell of St. Jim's shook his head.

"I've got a beastly impot to do," he said. "I wathah think that Mr. Lathom is wathah a beast, you know. Fancy givin' a chap fifty lines of 'Howace' to do on a summer's evenin'! I wegard it as wotten!"

"Poor old chap!" said Tom Merry. "Can't you cut it?"

"I've got to show it up by seven."

"Beastly! Never mind!" said Tom Merry. "You can keep your study door open, and keep an eye on the passage. I can't help thinking that some of the chaps who are curious about that chart may try to get at it."

"I will keep an eye open, deah boy."

And the juniors went out. Figgins & Co. of the new House met them near the gates. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were in flannels, fresh from cricket, and Figgins had a bat under his arm. Figgins & Co. drew up in a line directly in front of Tom Merry & Co.

"Halt!" said Figgins.

The chums of the School House halted.

"Where's the chart?" asked Figgins.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, that's got as far as the New House, has it?" he asked.

"What-ho!" said Figgins. "Is it a fact—honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun!"

"And now you're going treasure-hunting, I suppose, in the giddy South Seas?" Kerr asked.

"Perhaps—in the vac."

"I'll come," said Figgins.

"Same here," said Kerr.

"So will I, if the grub's all right," Fatty Wynn remarked.

"You'll have to be jolly careful about the provisions in a hot climate."

"Trust Fatty to think of that!" grinned Blake.

"Yes, and it's a jolly important thing to think of, too!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Chap might find himself booked for a long holiday, without a proper arrangement about the grub. And then where would he be?"

"I suppose you'll call in the whole family to hear the will read—I mean, to see the chart, when you examine it?" asked Figgins.

"Yes, if you like. Are you coming out now?"

"Certainly! We'll come and see that you don't get into any trouble. Might be some giddy Spaniards knocking about in the wood."

And the juniors left St. Jim's together. It was a sunny evening, and very warm, and the banks of the Ryll were very pleasant for a stroll. The juniors chatted cheerfully as they walked on by the shining river. Only Tom Merry was silent.

The hero of the Shell was thinking.

There was a sudden rustling in the wood, and Tom Merry swung round quickly. He had been thinking of Pablo Lopez, and he would not have been surprised to see the swarthy, grinning face of the dwarf.

But it was Herries of the Fourth who burst out of the thickets, on the track of Towser, who had something in his mouth.

"Towser! Towser! Stop, you beast!"

Towser stopped by the river. He did not seem inclined for a swim. Herries came panting across the towing-path, and grasped the bulldog's collar.

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"Towsy! Towsy!"

"What on earth has he got there?" asked Blake.

"Blessed if I know! Looks like a cap," said Herries.

"I was walking along the Feeder with him, and he picked it up. I suppose it belongs to a chap who was bathing, though I didn't see anybody in the stream."

Towser dropped the cap.

Tom Merry glanced at it, and gave a sudden start. He knew that cap! It was an old, torn, and dusty cap—not at all uncommon in its appearance—but Tom Merry had seen it before, and he remembered with perfect clearness where he had seen it—on the head of the sailorman in the wood!

CHAPTER 6.

A Tragic Mystery.

TOM MERRY made a quick movement towards the cap. Towser growled, and Herries dragged him back by the collar. The Shell fellow picked the cap up and turned it over in his hands, looking at it.

He had not the slightest doubt that it was the same cap. Now that he looked at it closely he could see that it was of foreign manufacture. It was the cap the sailorman, Peter Raff, had worn in the wood that day when he was fleeing from the Spaniard. And he had had it on his head when the chums parted with him in the Wayland Road, at a spot more than a mile distant from the Feeder.

The juniors could see by the expression of Tom Merry's face that startling thoughts were in his mind. They gathered round in silence.

"What is it?" Monty Lowther asked at last.

"It's Peter Raff's cap."

"By George!"

"Sure?"

"Quite sure!"

The juniors looked at the cap with grim faces. How had Peter Raff's cap come to be lying beside the stream in the heart of Rylcombe Wood?

"He must have come back into the wood after we left him," Blake said slowly.

"Yes."

"Perhaps he found the Spaniard watching the road?"

"Very likely. Lopez might easily have guessed that Raff would make for the nearest town where there was a railway-station."

"But—but how came he to leave his cap in the wood?"

"If there was a fight, and he ran—"

"Or if—"

Tom Merry turned to Herries.

"Do you remember just where Towser picked this up, Herries?" he asked.

"Yes, rather! It was close by the spot where we had the camp, the time we were playing redskins," said Herries.

"Good! Let's go there!"

In silence the juniors followed Herries in the devious paths under the trees. The silence and shadow of the deep wood seemed fraught with tragedy to them. What had happened there in those green, shadowy depths?

The Feeder, a little stream that ran through the wood and emptied into the Ryll, guided them as they went. The waters murmured and rippled under great overhanging branches.

Herries stopped at last where the stream ran through a broad glade. It was a familiar spot to the juniors.

"That's where it was lying," said Herries.

It was a lonely spot. The thickets in this place grew down very near the water, and the soil was damp and soft.

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation, as he stooped and picked up a red-spotted handkerchief that was caught on the thorns.

There was no doubt now.

That was the handkerchief the sailorman had carried his sandwiches in. There were stains of grease clearly visible upon it.

Tom Merry searched the spot with a quiet, set face.

He had little doubt now of what had happened. The sailorman had found the Spaniard watching for him on the road, and had turned back into the wood to avoid his relentless pursuer. Into the depths of the wood the Spaniard had tracked him, and there—

What had happened under those green boughs? What terrible tale could those gleaming waters have told?

In the soft soil by the water's brim there were deep foot-marks—deep, thick, one blotting out another. There had been a struggle there—the most casual glance could ascertain as much.

And the result?

Tom Merry searched the shining waters with his eyes. In this spot the Feeder ran wide and deep. The waters might have hidden anything.

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake.

There was an ejaculation from Lowther.

He came out of the thicket, holding up the cudgel the juniors had seen in the hands of the sailorman.

"It was in the bush," he said.

"Poor chap!" said Blake huskily.

Tom Merry felt his eyes dimmed.

Peter Raff had been a stranger to him—he had never seen him before or after that day in the glades of Rylcombe Wood. But the man had been honest and kind, and Tom Merry felt with a keen shock that there was little chance that he was now living. The fate of the sunburnt sailorman had been sealed under those green branches.

"It's horrible!" muttered Figgins.

"We're not sure yet," said Kerr, in his keen way. "It looks as if the man has been done for here, but—"

"But what, Kerr?" asked Tom Merry. He knew how keen the judgment of the Scottish junior was.

"But this might be a dodge; it looks as much like suicide as anything else," said Kerr. "Raff may have got this up to make the Spaniard think he had drowned himself, to throw him off the scent."

Tom Merry's face lightened a little.

"It's possible, Kerr."

"Not very likely, though," said Blake. "I suppose we shall have to tell the police about this, Tom Merry."

"Yes; they'll drag the Feeder for the—the body." Tom Merry shuddered. "Poor old chap! But if they don't find him, I shall hope that he is still alive. The wood will be searched from end to end."

In silence the juniors threaded their way through the wood, and came out into Rylcombe Lane. Then they turned into the village, and visited the police-station. Inspector Skcat was rather inclined to scout the story at first, suspecting a schoolboy's jape; but he was soon convinced that the matter had to be looked into, at all events.

The chums of St. Jim's left the police-station.

"No good giving up hope yet," Kerr said. "There is still to-morrow morning's post, Tom Merry. You may get a letter."

"I hope I shall get one."

"Saturday morning was to be the limit—that's the third morning," said Blake thoughtfully. "If you don't get a letter, Peter Raff will not claim the chart again."

"That was the arrangement."

"And that would mean—"

"That the poor fellow is dead."

Blake shivered.

"It seems awful," he said. "Still, it's always possible that he may think the chart too risky a thing for him to carry about, and he may prefer to be rid of it. He naturally would prefer anybody to have it; rather than give it to that beast of a Spaniard."

"It's possible."

But Tom Merry did not think it likely.

He did not believe that he would ever look again upon the honest, sunburnt face of the sailorman from the South Seas.

The juniors returned to the school.

After consulting with his chums, Tom Merry decided that the Head had better be told about what had happened. He was certain to hear from the police, in any case. Tom Merry knocked at the door of Dr. Holmes's study, and was told to enter.

Dr. Holmes had only recently returned to the school, after being away for his health. The good old doctor was still a little pale, but his smile was as kind as ever.

"Yes, Merry; what is it?" he asked.

"There's something I want to tell you, sir."

"Then sit down, my boy."

Tom Merry sat down, and told the story of the sailorman and the mysterious document. Dr. Holmes listened with deep attention.

"That is a very strange story, Merry," he said, when the Shell fellow had finished. "You still have the document quite safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pray take care of it; or, if you prefer, I will lock it up in my safe, along with the school plate," said Dr. Holmes.

"Would you prefer it?"

"Certainly, sir; thank you very much. I have felt very uncomfortable about it," said Tom Merry. "I did not like to carry it about with me, in case I should lose it or be robbed; and my desk is a very flimsy one."

"Very good. Bring it to me whenever you like, then, Merry, and I will lock it up. I am very sorry to hear that harm has probably befallen the man who gave it to you. But from your description, the police should easily be able to find so remarkable a character as the Spaniard."

"Yes, I hope so. I have given them a description of him. Will the document have to be handed to the police, do you think?"

"It is possible they may wish to see it, Merry; but it

will undoubtedly remain your property," said the Head. "I must caution you, however, against attaching too much importance to it. Whatever Raff may have believed the document was worth, it is hardly likely that it really contains a clue to a buried treasure. But certainly the document should be taken the greatest care of. Bring it to me at any time, and I will lock it up."

"Thank you, sir!"

Tom Merry quitted the Head's study. Lowther and Manners and Blake were waiting in the passage. Figgins & Co. had gone to their own House.

"The Head is going to lock the chart up in his safe," Tom Merry explained. "I think I'll go and get it now."

"Right-ho!"

They ascended the stairs. As they entered the Fourth Form passage, there was a strange sound from Study No. 6—Blake's study, which he shared with D'Arcy and Digby and Herries.

Herries and Digby were out of doors, but the chums remembered that D'Arcy had stayed in to write out an imposition given him by his Form-master.

"What on earth's the matter there?" Blake exclaimed.

Bump, bump!

"Groo!"

"My hat! It's something wrong with Gussy!"

"Let's look!"

Bump!

"Groooh!"

Somewhat alarmed, the juniors threw open the door of Study No. 6. An astonishing scene met their gaze.

CHAPTER 7.

Gone!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was there. But he was not sitting at the table, grinding away at his imposition.

He was sitting in the armchair, and a rope, passed round his chest and round the chair, fastened him there.

Another rope fastened his legs to the front legs of the chair, and his wrists were tied behind him.

A silk muffler had been crammed into his mouth, and twine was wound round and round his head to keep it there.

The muffler was intended, evidently, to act as a gag. It stopped all D'Arcy's utterance except for a gurgling grunt.

The noise the juniors had heard from the passage was now explained.

D'Arcy could not move except to jerk the heavy armchair slightly forward, and let it bump down again; and he had been doing so, in the hope of attracting attention from someone passing in the passage.

D'Arcy's face had been richly ornamented. Red ink was daubed upon it down as far as the mouth, and black ink from the mouth down over the chin. His parti-coloured countenance presented an astonishing appearance.

To enhance the effect, white had been chalked on the end of his nose, and his eyebrows had been darkened with soot.

A fool's cap of paper was set on his head.

The chums of the School House stared at him. They had not been in a merry humour when they entered. But the sight of D'Arcy's predicament was too much for them.

They burst into an irresistible roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooh!"

That was all the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's could say. The silk muffler choked any further utterance.

"Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gr-r-rooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake staggered forward, rocking with laughter, and opened his pocket-knife. He sawed across the twine, and severed it, and jerked the muffler out of the mouth of the swell of the School House. D'Arcy gasped for breath.

"Ow-w-w-w!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses! There is nothin' whatevah to laugh at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The thing is not comic at all, you feahful asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have been tweated with the grossest diswespct."

"You have!" gasped Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "There's no doubt at all about that. You have! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But who did it?" exclaimed Blake, gasping for breath. "Ha, ha, ha! Who has mucked up the one and only Gus like this?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's have his name," said Blake. "We'll scalp him! We'll pulverise him! We'll strew the churchyard with his hungry bones, as Shakespeare so touchingly remarks."

"Ass!" said Lowther. "Strew the hungry churchyard with his bones!"

"Look here, Lowther——"

"Look here, Blake——"

"You uttah asses!" roared D'Arcy. "Do you think I should let one chap tie me up like this? I should have given him a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose there were at least a hundred," said Manners gravely.

Lowther shook his head.

"More like a thousand," he said. "I can't imagine Gussy letting a mere hundred handle him like this."

"Pway don't be a silly ass, Lowthah. There were four."

"Four thousand? Dear me!"

"No, you uttah ass!"

"Four hundred?" asked Manners.

"No!" yelled D'Arcy. "Four, you feahful ass!"

"But you didn't let four fellows tie you up like this, surely?"

"I couldn't help it, ass."

"Why didn't you slay them with a stare? If you had looked at them as you are looking now, they must have had a fit, and——"

"Welease me, Blake! Buck up! I feel that I must give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'. There is a time not to be funny, and Lowthah does not understand it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake cut through the ropes. It took some time; the swell of St. Jim's had been well secured. D'Arcy made a movement to rise, with the intention of committing assault and battery upon Monty Lowther; but he sank back into the chair again with a gasp.

"Ow! Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

"Yow! The cwamp! Pins and needles, deah boy."

"Horrid!" said Lowther sympathetically. "Shall I rub you?"

"No, you champ!"

"My grandfather used to be rubbed for his rheumatism," said Lowther.

"Fathead!"

"But who did it?" asked Tom Merry, laughing. "Who were the four?"

"I was sittin' heah w'tin' out my beastly impot," said D'Arcy. "I wasn't thinkin' of dangah, of course. I had one eye on the passage, because you asked me to keep an eye open for anybody going to your studay. I wasn't thinkin' of dangah, howevah. Then Mellish came cweepin' along, and as soon as he saw the studay door was open, he cwept back. I called aftah him, and told him he was a spyin' beast. Then he washed in, with Levison and Cwooke and Weilly."

"Reilly!" exclaimed Blake. "It's not like Reilly to mix up with those chaps. He's a decent sort."

"I wefuse to wegard him as a decent sort. He pwoposed puttin' the ink on my beastly face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was taken by surprwise," D'Arcy explained. "Othah-wise, I should have thwashid the lot of them and cjected them ffrom the studay."

"Naturally," said Tom Merry, with great gravity.

"But I was bowled over before I had time to say Jack Wobinson," said D'Arcy. "They had me on the floor, and they tied me up and tweated me in that diswespectful mannah. I wegard it as an unpawalleled outwage—unpawalleled in the histowy of St. Jim's. I uttably fail to see what you fellows are laughin' at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look in the glass, old son," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"You'd better go and get a wash!" grinned Blake. "Blessed if I see how you can have the cheek to sit like that in a respectable studay, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake——"

"I mean it, you know. I'm not a particular chap, as a rule, but I really don't like a fellow in that state in my studay, and——"

"Ass!"

And the "pins and needles" having now subsided a little, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose, and made a rush for the nearest bathroom. The chums of the School House roared with laughter.

"All the same, we shall have to make an example of those chaps," said Blake. "A jape is a jape, when it's played off in somebody else's studay; but in one's own studay, it's an altogether different matter."

Tom Merry laughed.

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"Exactly so," he agreed. "And it was very rough on Gussy! I wonder——"

"You wonder what?"

"Whether Mellish was thinking of the chart in my studay, and—and they tied up Gussy to get his eye off them," said Tom Merry musingly.

Blake whistled.

"I shouldn't be surprised," he said.

"But Reilly wouldn't enter into any scheme of spying on the chart," said Lowther, with a shake of the head. "He's too decent for that."

"Yes, I know; but he may have been taken in by the others. As a matter of fact, he's the only one of the four who'd have had pluck enough to tackle Gussy, if Gussy had had a chance of cutting up rough. I think I'll go and look at the chart and make sure."

"Good!"

The juniors hurried down the passage to Tom Merry's study round the corner. The door was closed, and when the Terrible Three and Blake looked in, the study wore its usual aspect.

Tom Merry's desk was standing in the corner, and did not seem to have been interfered with. Tom crossed to it at once.

The desk was a handsome one of oak, and had been presented to him on some birthday by his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. It had had some hard knocking about in Tom Merry's study, and it was not so strong as it once had been. Tom Merry opened the top. The secret drawer was situated under the inkstand, and was supposed to be very secret indeed; but, like most secret drawers, it was not of a kind long to baffle a searcher.

Tom Merry, as a matter of fact, kept money in the secret drawer when he had any, and more than once, going to the desk in a hurry, he had left it quite open. Secret as the drawer was supposed to be, probably a good many of the fellows in the School House knew all about it, or, at all events, knew that it was there.

Tom Merry removed the inkstand from the desk, and pushed the little spring that controlled the lid of the secret drawer.

The lid sprang up.

Then he pulled out the drawer.

"My hat!"

It was a sharp exclamation from the Terrible Three simultaneously.

For the drawer was empty!

Empty!

The knotted handkerchief containing the chart was gone!

CHAPTER 8

Reilly is Surprised.

"GONE!"

"Stolen!"

"Great Scott!"

Tom Merry stared into the empty drawer.

The chart of the treasure island was gone—the handkerchief it had been knotted up in was gone, too; a thief had been there.

"Who the dickens——" began Blake.

Tom Merry's brows contracted.

"That's why Gussy was tied up in No. 6," he said. "Those rotters were after the chart, and they wanted to get him out of the way."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"It's jolly certain," said Monty Lowther. "I'm surprised at Reilly being in it. But it looks pretty certain."

"And they've got it."

"Let's get after them," said Tom Merry abruptly.

He closed the secret drawer, and they ran down the passage. If the raiders had taken the chart, there was little chance of recovering it before it had been looked at; but Tom Merry meant to do his best. Reilly's study was nearest to them, and they kicked open the door and ran in without the slightest ceremony.

The boy from Belfast was sitting at his table, alone in the study, working, when they rushed in; and he jumped up in amazement, spilling a shower of blots over his paper.

"Begorra!" he roared. "And what——"

He had no time for more.

The four juniors grasped him, and whirled him away from the table, and bumped him up against the wall, and held him there.

"Now, then," shouted Tom Merry, "where is it?"

"Phwat!"

"Have you got it?"

"Eh?"

"Hand it over!"

"Faith, and it's raving dotty ye are!" roared Reilly. "Help! Help! Sure, Tom Merry's gone cranky! Help!"

"Where's the chart?"
 "What?"
 "The chart!" roared Tom Merry, shaking him. "You've raided my desk, and taken the chart—you know what I mean. Where is it?"
 Reilly struggled violently.
 "Sure, and I'll smash ye entirely!" he roared. "Do ye think I'd go to a fellow's desk and take a thing that belonged to him, ye spalpeen!"
 "Look here——"
 "Where's the chart?"
 "Lemme get at him!" yelled Reilly. "I'll pulverise him! I'll tache him to call me a thafe! Lemme get at him!"
 "Hold on," said Jack Blake. "Looks to me as if there's some mistake. You know I said all along Reilly wouldn't have had a hand in such a thing."
 "Faith, and I——"

The Terrible Three released the Irish junior. Reilly's excitement showed pretty plainly that he, at all events, was innocent. Reilly clenched his fists, and pranced up to Tom Merry.

"Put them up!" he roared.

"Look here——"
 "Faith, and I'll dot ye on the boko!"

"Hold on," said Tom Merry. "We haven't come here to look for trouble——"

"Sure, and it's a quare way ye have of not looking for trouble, then."

"Somebody's raided my desk and taken the treasure-chart. You've heard about that?"

"Sure, and I have, but I——"

"They tied up Gussy in his study, because he was keeping an eye open while I was out," said Tom Merry. "Gussy told us you had a hand in that."

Reilly's angry face cleared, and he burst into a chuckle.

"Faith, ye're right," he said. "Mellish looked in, and said they were getting up a great joke on Gussy, and asked me if I would lend a hand. Sure, and ye couldn't expect me to stand out of a jape!"

"You ass!" said Blake. "They were just making use of you. After Gussy had been tied up, what did you do?"

"Sure, I came back to my work."

"And the others?"
 "I don't know."

"It's pretty clear," said Manners. "Reilly acted the giddy goat, and then came back, and the other rotters—I mean, the other fellows—raided our study, having made use of this chump to get the coast clear. I don't believe the three of them would have tackled Gussy without this blessed ass to back them up."

"Faith, and I niver suspected! And is it true that the chart is gone, Tom Merry?"

"Yes; it's been taken from the secret drawer in my desk."
 "If it was a sayoret drawer——"

"Well, it could be found by looking for it—that's pretty clear. Anyway, the chart is gone; and Mellish and Levison and Crooke have taken it."

Reilly's face grew crimson.

"Sure, and they've used me to help them steal it, without telling me what the game was!" he exclaimed. "If I had known, I should have walloped them intirely!"

"You've played the giddy ox, of course."
 "Faith, but I'll make them sit up for it!"

Reilly rushed out of the study.
 "Hold on!" shouted Blake. "What are you going to do?"

But Reilly did not reply. He dashed on, breathing vengeance. His ire was fully aroused at having been made a party to what amounted to a theft. The raiders would pretend, of course, that taking the chart was only a "lark," but there

was little doubt that they would keep it if they were not discovered. The character of the cads of the School House was only too well known to the Terrible Three.

Crash!
 The juniors were dashing after Reilly. The Belfast boy was already at Mellish's door, and he had found it locked. But Reilly was in no humour to stand upon ceremony.
 Crash!

**CHAPTER 9.
 Levison's Dodge.**

HERE were three fellows in Mellish's study. Mellish and Levison, who shared the study with Lumley-Lumley, were there, and Crooke, of the Shell. Lumley-Lumley was not present. For some time past Lumley-Lumley, the one-time Outsider of St. Jim's, had had little to do with the black sheep of the School House, and he spent as little time as possible in his own study, where he was certain to meet Mellish or Levison. The three cads of the School House were gathered round the table, and on the table before them lay the leather chart.

Tom Merry's handkerchief, in which it had been knotted, was lying beside it. The raiders had locked themselves in their study to examine their plunder, little dreaming of the storm that was to burst upon them.

Mellish did not see any reason why his share of the raid should be suspected. His knowledge of the secret drawer in Tom Merry's desk had been gained by spying, and the hero of the Shell did not know that he knew of it. Knowing it, of course, Mellish had naturally thought of looking there for the chart.

The raiders had tied D'Arcy up in his study to get him out of the way; but they expected that to be regarded as a mere jape, especially as they had cunningly dragged Reilly into it. They were studying the chart now in the locked room, and Mellish had taken up a pen to make a copy of it.

"Blessed if I think there can be anything in it," said Crooke, of the Shell. "Tom Merry seems to believe that there is."

"Why not?" said Levison. "I'm not usually very credulous, as you know, but I don't see why there shouldn't be something in this. Pirates have buried treasure; it was a common custom when there were pirates. A pirate who carried his plunder about with him would jolly well soon have been murdered for it, I should think. Well, a chap buries his loot, and gets killed or hanged afterwards, and there lies the loot. Nobody knows about it, and it stays there. It must have happened in lots of cases."

Crooke nodded.
 "Of course, it's possible," he said.

"Besides, why was that Spanish chap we've heard about so jolly keen to get hold of it?" said Levison. "He was willing to commit murder for it, so they say. That shows he thought it jolly valuable."

"Quite so."
 "I believe it's all right," said Mellish, who was working away busily with his pen. "The chart's clear enough. I don't see why Tom Merry should have it. I dare say the sailor chap stole it in the first place. It might even belong to that Spanish chap. Finding's keepings, and we found this."

The three rascals chuckled together.
 "Good!" said Crooke. "Look here, you chaps! You know my pater is a millionaire?"

"You've told us often enough," agreed Levison.



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The three rascals chuckled together.
 "Good!" said Crooke. "Look here, you chaps! You know my pater is a millionaire?"
 "You've told us often enough," agreed Levison.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND."

"Oh, rats! What I mean is, he's quite rich enough to fit out a yacht for a holiday in the South Seas in the summer vac., and he'd do it if I asked him. What price searching for this giddy treasure?"

"Oh, ripping! We should have to come, as the thing belongs equally to us."

"Of course!" said Mellish.

"Shares of three," said Crooke—"or, rather, shares of four, one for my pater. If there's anything in the chart, it could be worked. But what's the good of copying it, Mellish? No good having copies about for people to see."

"Suppose Tom Merry guesses—"

"He won't!"

"I don't know. Those chaps are very keen. They may raise a fearful storm to get the chart back; and if they do we want a copy," said Mellish, with a grin. "Of course, we shall keep the copy dark; not a word about it."

"Of course!" agreed Levison. "But we're going to keep the original if we can. The cream of the joke is, that Tom Merry himself hasn't seen it yet, as he promised the sailor not to look at it for three days."

Crooke sniffed.

"I expect he's seen it, all the same," he remarked. "I know I should."

"I dare say you would," said Levison; "but Tom Merry wouldn't. I know him too well for that, though I don't like him."

Crash!

The three young rascals leaped up in a fright.

Crash!

The door of the study shook and trembled under the terrific shock.

Crash!

"What on earth's that?" muttered Crooke, turning quite pale.

There was a roar from the passage.

"Open this door, ye thaves!"

"It's Reilly!"

"Don't let him in," said Mellish hastily.

"Right-ho! The door's locked."

Crash!

"He's bungling a chair against the lock," said Levison uneasily. "He'll alarm the whole blessed House!"

Levison crossed to the door. A chair or a form was evidently being wielded by the boy from Belfast. The din was terrible.

"What do you want?" Levison called through the keyhole.

"Don't make that row, Reilly. What is it you want?"

"I want the chart."

"The what?"

"The chart, ye thafe! The chart ye stole from Tom Merry's study!"

Mellish turned white.

"How does he know?" he muttered.

"We can deny it," whispered Crooke.

Mellish shook his head.

"They'll search us—and search the study."

Crash—crash!

"Hold on!" shouted Levison. "We'll let you in."

"Faith, and be quick, then, ye thafe of the worruld!"

"Just a minute. I've lost the key."

Crash—crash!

"That's right, Reilly," came Tom Merry's voice from the passage. "He's lying! He hasn't lost the key. Lend me the stool. I'll biff the lock through!"

Crash—crash!

Levison stepped quickly back to the table. The juniors outside were in deadly earnest, and they evidently did not care if they brought the whole House upon the scene. They meant to have the stolen chart back at any cost.

Mellish was white and trembling, and Crooke seemed stricken with dismay. But Levison, savagely angry as he was, was cool and collected.

"You haven't finished the copy yet?" he whispered.

"N-n-no."

"There's a chance, though."

Levison thrust the unfinished copy into a drawer out of sight. Then he put the leather chart under a cushion on the armchair.

Mellish caught his arm.

"Don't be an idiot, Levison! We shall have to give it up, I tell you. That lock will be through in a minute."

Crash, crash, crash!

"I know what I'm doing," said Levison coolly.

"But—b-b-but—"

"Shut up, and let me alone!"

Levison picked up a boot—not one of his own—quickly opened a penknife, and sliced a piece of leather out, about the size of the leather chart. That he proceeded to tie up in Tom Merry's handkerchief, precisely as the treasure chart had been tied up.

He put it in his jacket pocket, as if by accident allowing the corner of the handkerchief to show.

Crooke grinned slightly. He understood. Mellish was too terrified to think at all.

Levison went to the door again.

Crash—crash!

The lock cracked ominously.

"Oh, cheese that!" said Levison. "It's like your cheek to come rowing at our door, but, of course, you can come in if you like. I've found the key."

"Open the door!"

The key turned in the lock, and the door opened. The juniors rushed in from the passage. Reilly was the first, and Reilly appeared to be quite at boiling-point.

The Irish junior did not stop to argue.

He rushed at Levison, hitting out—and Levison caught his left on the nose, and his right in the eye, and collapsed upon the carpet.

Reilly ran over him at Crooke.

Crooke dodged round the table, but he was not quick enough to escape. Reilly was after him like a shot.

He grasped Crooke by the shoulder and swung him round, and got his head into chancery, and pommelled away vigorously. Crooke's yells could be heard all along the passage. He was nearly twice as big as Reilly, but it did not seem to occur to him to put up a fight. He yelled and roared, and struggled to get away.

Blake and the Terrible Three stood in the doorway, looking on with great interest at Reilly's performances. Their assistance did not seem to be wanted.

Crooke broke away at last, yelling.

"Where's Mellish?" roared Reilly.

Mellish had made a rush for the door, but Jack Blake had pushed him back. He was pushed back into Reilly's arms. He would almost as soon have been pushed into the claws of a raging lion.

"Put up yer fists!" roared Reilly.

"Ow! I— Oh!"

"Take that, ye thafe! Take that, ye spalpeen!"

"Yow!"

"And that, you worm!"

Mellish took them all, and fell on the carpet. He did not get up again. He lay and gasped and whimpered.

Reilly glared round the study.

"Do any of ye want any more?" he bellowed.

"Ow!"

"Groc!"

"Yow!"

The replies of the three young rascals were not very lucid, but their meaning was clear. They did not want any more.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"I think you've settled them, you blessed fire-eater!" he said. "Now, you cads, where is the chart?"

"Ow!"

"We know you've taken it from my desk, and if it's given up at once we're willing to say no more about the matter."

"Yow!"

"What's that sticking out of Levison's pocket?" asked Blake.

"My handkerchief! By Jove!"

Tom Merry jerked at the handkerchief. It came out, and his face lighted up as he saw that it was still knotted, apparently just as he had left it when he placed it in the secret drawer of his desk.

"By Jove! It's all right!" he exclaimed. "The rotters haven't looked at it! I'm willing to pass this over, Levison, as you've had a licking all round, but mind it doesn't happen again, that's all."

And the juniors left the study. Reilly paused for a moment in the doorway, and gave the three rascals, groaning on the floor, a final glare.

"If you chaps want any more," he said, "you've only got to come to my study; or if you're ready now, I'll stay and see it through."

There was no reply. More, evidently, was not required. Reilly went out, and slammed the door. Crooke sat up with a groan. Mellish lay and mumbled. But Levison, who was cool as ice, rose quietly, and turned the key softly in the lock.

"Get up, you grumbling idiots!" said Levison. "There's no time to waste moaning and groaning. We may have only a few minutes. Quick, Mellish!"

ANSWERS

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"What do you want?" snarled Mellish, as he rose slowly and painfully. "Ow, my jaw! I shall have a jaw-ache for days!"

"Finish the copy—quick!"

Levison laid the leather chart and the unfinished copy before Mellish. Mellish was very quick with his pen, and drew very well. He sat down to his task again, with a gleam in his eyes. The raiders had been very hardly used; but there was a chance, after all, that the Terrible Three might be "done" in this transaction.

Mellish's pen was soon working away at express speed; while Levison and Crooke listened anxiously for the returning footsteps of the Terrible Three. How long would it be before they discovered the cheat?

CHAPTER 10.

The Keeness of Kerr.

TOM MERRY was feeling greatly relieved when he returned to his study. His pledge to the sailorman lay upon his conscience. He had promised Peter Raff that the chart should not be seen till the third day. He felt a keen relief to know that the raiders had not had time to look at what they had stolen. Levison's trick did not even occur to Tom Merry's candid, unsuspecting mind.

"Jolly glad I've got this back," he said, as he went into the study with Manners and Lowther and Blake. "And jolly glad, too, that the cads didn't have time to look at it."

"Hallo! What have you got there?"

It was Kerr's voice. Figgins & Co. were in the study. They had come in, and were waiting there for the Terrible Three. Figgins had laid a roll of manuscript on the table. Across a page could be seen scrawled: "Tom Merry's Weekly." Instalment of serial—The Mystery of a Taxi-cab. By G. Figgins. Figgins & Co. were over in the School House for their editorial duties. It was time to prepare the copy for the forthcoming number of the school magazine.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I hadn't forgotten the 'Weekly'! We've had rather an exciting time, so you'll excuse us. Some cads raided the chart in my desk."

"Is that it?" asked Figgins.

"Yes." Tom Merry held up the knotted handkerchief. "Sorry I can't show it to you, but I've promised not to open it till to-morrow."

Kerr looked at it.

"You say that's been raided?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"Levison and Crooke and Mellish."

"And it's been in their hands?"

"Of course!"

"How long?"

"I don't know—quite half an hour, I should think."

"And they haven't looked at it?"

"What are you getting at, Kerr?"

"I'm getting at this—how the dickens do you know that the chart is in there at all unless you look?" demanded the Scottish junior.

Tom Merry started.

"My hat! I didn't think— But it looks just exactly as I left it, and I can feel the leather inside the handkerchief," he said.

"How do you know it's the same?"

"Well, I took it for granted," said Tom Merry slowly.

Kerr grinned.

"When you're as old as I am, my son, you won't take things for granted," he said loftily.

"Why, you ass, you're younger than I am," said Tom Merry indignantly.

"I mean in experience and sense," said Kerr cheerfully. "As far as mere years go, I suppose you're the older of the two."

"Oh, rats!"

"Were you going to lock that up just as it is?"

"Of course!"

"Without looking at it?"

"I've promised not to open it."

"Then you'll be locking up something that's been palmed off on you, in my humble opinion, and leaving the real thing in Mellish's study," said Kerr.

"My word!" said Jack Blake. "I never thought of their playing a trick like that, Tom Merry, but it's quite possible."

Tom Merry looked distressed. He had not thought of it, but now that it was pointed out to him he saw how possible it was. That would account, too, for the delay in the opening of Mellish's door. If the raiders had meant to open it, why had they not done it at once?

Yet— Tom Merry had given his word not to open the chart and look at it, and Tom Merry's word was sacred.

"What shall I do, then?" he exclaimed. "I've promised not to look at the chart, but I can't tell whether Levison has tricked me unless I look at it."

"Levison?" said Kerr. "Was it in Levison's hands?"

"Yes. Blake saw the corner of the handkerchief sticking out of his pocket, and—"

"And it was nicely arranged to be seen, I've no doubt," sniffed Kerr.

"My hat!" said Blake.

"Look here, you're jolly uncanny," said Manners, looking at Kerr. "Blessed if I should like to have a chap like you seeing right through me. I don't know how you think of these things."

Kerr laughed.

"I keep my eyes open," he said. "I really think a chap would have to get up very early in the morning to take me in. Look here, Tom Merry, if you lock that thing up in your desk you may be leaving the real article in Levison's hands. Why should he have kept it half an hour without opening it, when he must have taken it in the first place for the purpose of looking at it?"

That argument was a clincher.

"I'll tell you what you can do," said Kerr. "Let one of us open it and tell you whether it's the real thing or not. You needn't see it. You have had a glimpse of it, I understand, and can tell enough to know whether it's the real thing or not."

Tom Merry hesitated; but undoubtedly, as he realised, his promise to the sailorman should be construed according to the spirit of it. He would not be keeping his promise by running the risk of leaving the real chart in Levison's hands if a cheat had been imposed upon him in the knotted handkerchief.

"I think you're right, Kerr," he said. "You open it, will you, and tell me whether it's a piece of pale-coloured leather, very soft, with a chart tattooed upon it."

"Right you are!" said Kerr.

He untied the handkerchief. The juniors stood round, anxiously waiting. Kerr uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What is it?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Look!"

Kerr held up a fragment of boot leather. The juniors gazed at it blankly. They needed no further proof that Levison had deceived them.

CHAPTER 11

Tom Merry Recovers the Chart.

KERR grinned a little as he held up the worthless fragment of leather. Kerr meant to be of service to Tom Merry in the matter, and he was sorry to see that he had been taken in, but he could not help feeling just a little elated at his success in exposing the imposture. But for his presence in the study, Tom Merry would certainly have locked the worthless fragment up in his desk, in the full belief that it was the chart entrusted to him by the sailorman.

"My hat!" said Blake.

"It's a bit cut from a boot," said Fatty Wynn. "Blessed if Kerr oughtn't to be a detective! I shouldn't have thought of it myself."

Tom Merry's brow darkened with anger.

"The wretched cad!" he exclaimed. "He's got the real chart all the time, then, and they're laughing at us for not knowing that they were such rascals."

"The rotten outsiders!"

Tom Merry ran out of the study, with the juniors after him. The hero of the Shell reached Levison's door. He caught up the stool from the passage wall and crashed it upon the lock.

There was a sharp exclamation within the study.

"Hallo! What's the row?"

Tom Merry did not reply.

Crash—crash!

He had no words to waste upon the rascals. He meant to smash the lock in, and then very nearly to smash the raiders when he got at close quarters with them. Tom Merry's blood was fairly up now.

Inside the study the three rascals were on their feet. Mellish had been working quickly, but he had not finished yet. He had the outline of the island worked out, and most of the names put in, but the interior he had not touched, and some of the most important markings of the map were in the interior of the island.

"It's no good!" muttered Levison. "You can't finish! Give it to me."

Crash!

Levison took the copy quickly and blotted it, and slipped it under a torn edge of the study carpet. It was safe there from any but a very close search. He put Mellish's pen in

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his pocket, and pushed away the inkstand, to conceal what had been done. Mellish was sitting terrified. Levison dragged him from his seat and pushed him towards the window.

"Mind, not a word!" he muttered.

Crash!

The lock burst.

On the table, in full view, lay the leather chart of Skeleton Island. Levison knew that it was useless to attempt to keep it now. If it were hidden the juniors would search for it, and they would find it, and probably the copy, too.

The door swung violently open, and Tom Merry dropped the stool and rushed in. His hands were up, but he dropped them as he caught sight of the chart lying in full view in the light upon the table.

He caught it up.

Without looking at it closely he knew that this was the original chart, and he wrapped the handkerchief round it at once.

"Sure you've got the right one now?" asked Kerr.

"Yes; quite sure."

"Good!"

"Thanks to you, Kerr," said Tom Merry. "I can't say how much I'm obliged to you for putting me up to this cad's trick."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Kerr.

Levison gave the Scottish junior a very unpleasant look.

"Oh! So it was you, Kerr?" he said.

Kerr nodded cheerfully.

"Yes, I saw through your rotten trick," he said. "It's quite possible for an honest chap to be as keen as a mean, dirty thief, you know!"

Levison flushed with rage. But he had no time to talk to Kerr. Tom Merry had knotted up the handkerchief round the chart and placed it in his pocket. Then he pushed back his cuffs and turned on Levison.

"You've seen this chart, you cad?" he said, in a voice trembling with rage.

Levison nodded coolly.

"Yes, I've seen it," he said. "You needn't cut up so rusty about it. It was only a lark, of course. I never meant to keep the thing."

"I don't believe you!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"You can please yourself about that," he said. "I never meant to keep it, all the same. Will you oblige me by getting out of my study?"

"Not till you've put up your hands."

"I don't want to fight you."

Tom Merry laughed scornfully.

"I dare say you don't," he replied; "but you should have thought of that before you broke open my desk."

"Look here—" began Crooke blusteringly.

Tom Merry turned on him in a flash.

"Your turn's coming," he said, "but you can have it first, if you like." And he advanced upon the cad of the Shell.

Crooke backed away.

"I—I don't want a row," he said. "It was only a lark, and I'm willing to apologise."

"S-s-s-so am I," stammered Mellish. "It was only a lark, and, in fact, it was Levison's idea from first to last. He won't deny that."

Levison burst into a scoffing laugh.

"Well, I don't deny it, and I'm willing to take all the credit," he said. "I don't apologise, either, and you can begin as soon as you like, Tom Merry. I know you can lick me, but I shall do my best. Come on!"

Tom Merry dropped his hands.

"If you don't want to fight I won't touch you," he said. "You're the least rotten of the three, I believe. Let's get out of this place, you chaps—they make me sick."

"Better lick them," said Figgins. "It will be a lesson to

them, you know. I can't have you neglecting your duties in this way, Tom Merry."

But Tom Merry left the study. He knew that Levison was no match for him, and a fight under those circumstances did not appeal to his taste.

The chums of St. Jim's returned to Tom Merry's study. Tom Merry looked at his watch, and then locked up the chart in the desk.

"Going to leave it there?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No; I'm going to take it to the Head to lock up in the plate safe, but he's at dinner now, and I can't disturb him till after. The chart will be safe while we're in the study, at least. Let's get on with the 'Weekly.'"

"Right-ho!"

And the editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" settled down to work. A few minutes later they were joined by D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's had bathed in hot water and changed his clothing to the skin. But there was still a suspicion of red ink about his ears and the roots of his hair. The juniors grinned as he came in. But D'Arcy himself was very far from grinning.

"Well, you look a little more respectable now," said Monty Lowther. "You can come in."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We haven't got your article on the latest fashion in trousers yet," said the editor, looking up. "We can't have this delay in the copy, D'Arcy. If you can't get your stuff in to time, we shall really have to look for somebody else to do it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Sit down, and get it done!" said Tom Merry severely. "You can't expect the printers to wait for the copy."

"I was goin' to suggest—"

The editor waved his hand.

"Never mind making suggestions now—get on with your copy. The whole thing has got to go to press to-night."

"I was goin'—"

"Silence, please!"

"Look here, you uttath ass, I was goin' to suggest waidin' those wottahs, and givin' them a fearful waggin' for their beastly impertinence!"

"They've been raided, and they've had a fearful ragging," said Tom Merry. "Reilly has attended to that. Get on with the washing."

"Oh, vevy well! Undah the circs.—"

"Exactly; under the circs., dry up and get on."

And D'Arcy sat down to write out his copy. In the engrossing task he soon forgot about the jape in Study No. 6. D'Arcy was an authority on the subject of trousers, and he could tell a good cut at a glance, and the exact way they should set over the boots, and the proper extent of the crease. Like the generous fellow he was, he wanted to impart that valuable knowledge to the other fellows, and he had been at work on the article for the "Weekly" for some time.

"Vevy well!" he murmured, writing aloud, so to speak.

"Trousahs should be worn—"

"Silence, please!"

"Trousahs should be worn well bwaced, as that gives the set over the boot, but not too much so, or too gweat an extent of the uppahs of the boot is left uncovahed. The cwease should be carefully pweserved, as ewevy respectable pair of trousahs has a good cwease. Trousahs should be kept in a trousah-pwess. Chaps who cannot afford to buy a trousah-pwess—"

"Shut up mumbling!"

"Chaps who cannot afford to buy a trousah-pwess can make one quite simply. Take long stwips of stout cardboard, nearly as long as the trousahs, and a little widah. Lay a sheet of cardboard on a box, or on the floor, and lay the trousahs carefully upon it, takin' care to flatten them out so as to pweserve the original cwease—"

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MASTER JESSE CAST, 34, Cambay Road, Balham.

MASTER HORACE GRIDLEY, 312, Cavendish Road, Balham.

PELHAM SCHOOL, WIMBLEDON.

MASTER EDWARD GATES, 16, Hartfield Road, Wimbledon.

MASTER ALBERT TRINDER, 34, Latimer Road, Wimbledon.

MASTER REGGIE BROWN, 55, Ridley Road, South Wimbledon.



As Tom Merry pushed the spring, the lid sprang up. Then he pulled out the secret drawer. "My hat!" he exclaimed. The drawer was empty. The knotted handkerchief containing the chart was gone. (See p. 10.)

"Dry up!"

"Lay another sheet of cardboard oveh the twousahs, and then pile on weights—a desk, or a table turned upside down, or a box would do. If there are several pairs of twousahs, place them above one another, with a sheet of cardboard between each pair."

"Order!"

"Fellows who cannot afford to get the cardboard can twy a cheapah plan; for poverty is no excuse for cwumpled twousahs. The twousahs can be flattened out in the mannah aforesaid, and placed undah the mattwess of the bed at night. The weight of the sleepah keeps them nicely cweased, and they are all wright by mornin'—"

"Shut up!" roared the whole staff, with one voice.

D'Arcy looked up.

"Did you speak, you fellows?"

"Yes; shut up!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "How can I write when you are mumbling like that about trousers?"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Look what I've written!" snorted the exasperated Figgins. "'Horace stepped into the taxicab, and what was his horror on beholding, amid stains of blood, and the signs of a feahful struggle, a pair of trousers—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It ought to have been dead body!" growled Figgins. "I shall have to erase it. If you say trousers again, I'll scalp you."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Order in the editorial office," said Tom Merry severely. "The staff are not allowed to rag one another. Dry up!"

And the staff dried up, and no sound was heard in the editorial office but the scratching of pens.

CHAPTER 12.

The Face at the Window.

AFTER Dr. Holmes had returned to his study that evening, Tom Merry took the knotted handkerchief with the chart in it to the Head. The doctor took charge of it, and promised to lock it up in the safe. Perhaps he saw a momentary gleam of anxiety in Tom Merry's eyes, for he rose from his seat, and told Tom Merry to follow him to the library. There the chart was locked up in the safe, much to the Shell fellow's relief.

Tom Merry went to bed that night feeling much more easy in his mind about the chart of the treasure island.

No one but an experienced burglar was likely to be able to

get at the Head's safe, and the chart was therefore quite secure.

Tom Merry dreamed about the chart that night. It had taken a great hold upon his imagination. The story of buried treasure, and the terrible shadow of doubt that hung over the fate of Peter Raff worked upon his mind, and he dreamed that he was hunting for the treasure upon an island where cocoanut palms grew in abundance, and black cannibals peered out from the jungle; and Pablo Lopez, the dwarfed Spaniard, was upon his track with a knife in his hand. The dream was fearfully realistic, and Tom Merry murmured and moved in his sleep as the strange images chased one another through his mind.

All was dark and silent in the Shell dormitory.

To the excited mind of the sleeper the dark, cruel face of the Spaniard was clear and threatening, and Tom Merry moved in his sleep spasmodically, as if trying to escape from the relentless pursuer.

Suddenly he awoke.

It was probably the stress of the feverish dream that awakened him. He started into wakefulness, a cold sweat breaking out upon him.

He started up in bed.

The dream had been so intense, so realistic, that he could hardly believe that he was in bed in the Shell dormitory, in the School House at St. Jim's—safe, with friends round him sleeping in the quiet night.

The dark face of the Spaniard danced yet before his eyes.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "I—I thought—"

The muttered words were unfinished upon his lips.

There was a sound in the dead silence of the dormitory; a sound that came like the crack of a pistol upon the stillness.

It was a sound from the window at the end.

Tom Merry peered towards it.

The dormitory was dark; but there was a glimmer of starlight upon the window, making it stand out a glimmering square in the gloom.

Against the glass, blacking out the starlight, was a round object—and Tom Merry did not need telling that it was a human head.

The boy sat up in bed, shivering.

A face was looking into the Shell dormitory—the face of a man who must have climbed up the rain-pipe by the window. That was a feat some of the more active of the juniors had sometimes performed; but it was dangerous, and doubly dangerous at night. A sailor, used to dangerous climbing, might do it—and Tom Merry knew, as by an inspiration, that it was a seafaring man who was there—he knew, without being able to distinguish a single feature, that it was the face of the Spaniard that was looking into the room.

Tom Merry sat silent.

He was too startled to know what to do for the moment. Like one fascinated, he watched the dark shadow on the window. It came higher, more plainly into view. The man was leaning upon the window-sill now, holding on to the ivy.

That heavy, massive head, those powerful shoulders, Tom Merry knew them well. It was the Spanish dwarf.

Why was he there? Had he guessed, then, that the chart was at St. Jim's—had he seen, or learned, that Peter Raff had given it to Tom Merry? In the last terrible scene that Tom Merry suspected had taken place in the shadows of Rylcombe Wood, had Peter Raff, with the Spaniard's cruel grip upon him, gasped out what he had done with the chart?

The dwarf must know—else why was he there?

He could not know that this was Tom Merry's dormitory. The rainpipe and the ivy had afforded him an opportunity of climbing into a window, which he could see by the starlight was partly open at the top.

Tom Merry sat and stared at the growing shadow on the window.

There was a sound again—a faint crack, which sounded strangely loud and echoing in the silence of the night.

The window was moving.

Tom Merry sprang from the bed.

If the Spaniard gained entrance, what would happen? The man was desperate—he was doubtless armed.

Tom Merry did not hesitate.

He picked up a boot, and hurled it with an unerring aim at the pane. With a loud crash, the boot smashed through the glass, and struck the dark figure outside.

There was a yell from the Spaniard.

"Ah, carambo—ah!"

The form disappeared from the window.

In the Shell dormitory there were shouts of alarm, too. Fellows started up in bed, shouting to know what was the matter. The crash of the breaking glass had rung with a deafening noise through the dormitory.

Tom Merry ran to the window.

He had done well; it was necessary to keep the desperate ruffian out of the house at any cost. But a terrible fear was

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tugging at Tom Merry's heart that the Spaniard might have fallen to the ground and broken his neck.

A fall from such a height would be a terrible one.

Tom Merry threw the window open.

Outside, in the starlight, he scanned the ivy. Below the window a dark form was clinging—it was that of Pablo Lopez.

The Spaniard was clinging to the ivy—but it was yielding under his weight. His fierce, dark face was turned upward, his eyes glittered at the boy.

"Ah," he hissed—"you!"

"You scoundrel!" said Tom Merry. "But I am glad that you are not killed."

"I shall remember this, *senorito!*"

"I hope you will remember it in prison, then," said Tom Merry, and he shouted: "Help, help! Burglars!"

The Spaniard showed his teeth like a snarling dog, and scrambled down the crackling ivy.

The dark, hunched figure disappeared in the darkness.

The School House was alarmed by this time; lights flashed from several windows. Mr. Railton, the House-master, opened the dormitory door.

"What is it?" he exclaimed.

"The Spaniard, sir—a burglar—I shied a boot at him as he was at the window!" Tom Merry gasped. "He's escaping."

The House-master ran downstairs.

Mr. Railton, with half a dozen prefects and seniors, ran out into the quadrangle. Taggles, the porter, joined them with his lantern. Search was made on all sides for the dwarf. But he was not found.

He had had only a few minutes, but he had made the most of them; he was gone. The searchers returned disappointed to the House.

There was great excitement the rest of that night, especially in the junior dormitories. Few of the fellows closed their eyes again. Tom Merry, naturally, did not feel inclined for sleep.

"The rotter is on the track of the chart, after all," Monty Lowther said, when they returned to bed. "He knows it's at St. Jim's."

"It looks like it."

"He hasn't got it, anyway," said Manners, "and by to-morrow morning it will be sent away, Tom, or it will be yours."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I should feel a great deal safer with it, though, if that Spaniard scoundrel were in prison. But he's in the neighbourhood; we know that now, and Mr. Railton will let the police know at once. They will be looking for him, and if he's caught—"

"He will have to explain what has happened to Peter Raff."

"Yes."

Tom Merry was glad when morning light streamed in at the dormitory windows. He was dressed and down long before rising-bell, and he waited at the school gates for the postman.

Blagg, the postman, came along at the usual time, and Tom Merry ran towards him eagerly.

"Letters for me, Blagg?"

Blagg shook his head.

"Nothing for you this morning, Master Merry."

"You're quite sure, Blagg—not one?"

"Not one, sir."

And Blagg tramped on to the house.

Tom Merry stood in the morning sunlight, the colour coming and going in his face, his heart beating with a strange conflict of emotions.

There was no letter from Peter Raff.

The chart was his. But had it cost the life of the sailor-man? With that dark and terrible thought in his mind, Tom Merry could not rejoice that the treasure-chart had become his own.

CHAPTER 13.

The Chart.

TOM MERRY waited for the Head that morning to speak to him after prayers. Dr. Holmes stopped and greeted him with a kindly nod.

"Have you had the letter you expected, Merry?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! I am afraid that looks bad!" said Dr. Holmes gravely. "The police have been informed of the attempt made by Lopez to enter the school last night, and Inspector Skeat seems very hopeful of catching him. Nothing has been discovered of the sailor. The stream in the wood has been dragged, and the thickets searched, but no body has been found. Of course, it may have been safely hidden, but I hope most sincerely that the man has not met with

a mishap in the wood. I do not think you should conclude that Peter Raff has fallen unless some definite discovery is made."

"Yes, sir, I think so myself. But what about the chart? I suppose I may look at it?"

"Certainly. It is yours."

"I would rather wait till this evening, to give Raff every chance of writing," Tom Merry said. "He may have been delayed."

"Quite so!" said the Head approvingly. "Come to me for the chart this evening, and I will hand it to you."

"Thank you, sir!"

"No letter, Tommy?" whispered several voices, as Tom Merry entered the Shell Form-room.

"No."

"Where's the chart?"

"In the Head's safe."

"Going to look at it after school?"

"This evening—yes."

"Ahem! Silence!" said Mr. Linton.

Tom Merry was thinking more about the chart than about the lessons that morning, as was only to be expected. He was called over the coals several times by Mr. Linton, and after morning lessons he was the richer by a hundred lines. Mr. Linton did not know or care anything about treasure islands or mysterious charts, and he would have had no sympathy on the subject.

Crooke looked at Tom Merry several times with his quiet, malicious grin. He wondered inwardly what Tom Merry would say if he knew that a copy of the chart had been made, and was safely reposing in Levison's pocket-book.

Tom Merry evidently had no such suspicion.

Twice again that day the postman came, and each time Tom Merry looked eagerly for a letter. The second time there was a letter for him, and he took it eagerly; but it was only from his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, containing urgent injunctions to him to keep his feet dry and not to catch cold.

From the sailorman there came no word.

After the last post Tom Merry asked the Head for the chart, and Dr. Holmes handed it to him. Tom Merry carried it off to his study, his hand trembling with excitement.

Quite a crowd of fellows were waiting for him there.

Monty Lowther, and Manners, and Blake, and D'Arcy, and Herries, and Dig were there, of course, with Figgins & Co., from the New House. Kangaroo, of the Shell, had come in, and a dozen more would have come if there had been room. But Monty Lowther had gently but firmly declined to have the study packed like the inside of a sardine-tin, and so a limit was placed upon the number.

There was a general exclamation as Tom Merry came in.

"Got it?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

Lowther closed the door. The fellows all gathered eagerly round the table as Tom Merry laid down the knotted handkerchief.

"I've given the man every chance to write," said Tom Merry slowly. "He said I was to open it if I didn't get a letter this morning. There have been two posts since then, and I haven't had a line. It means that he isn't going to write. Either he wants me to have the chart, or he isn't able to write." The junior's voice faltered a little. "That Spanish villain has killed him. I don't want to think so—I hope it isn't so—but if he is living, it's clear that he wants me to have the chart, or he would have written. I suppose all you fellows think the same?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite right, Tommy!"

"You all agree that I ought to open it now?"

"Yes!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!"

Tom Merry untied the handkerchief. Every eye was bent eagerly upon the leather chart as it rolled out. Tom Merry spread it flat upon the table.

There was a deep-drawn breath from the crowded juniors. They gazed eagerly at the chart.

It was marked on the leather in tattoo, and the black marks showed up clearly against the pale colour of the leather.

There was the outline of an island, and, outlined round it, were coral-reefs. The points and indentations of the coast were named, and in the interior were further indications. The juniors, gazing at it with breathless curiosity, read out the names marked on the chart:

"Danger Point!"

"Shark Bay!"

"Dingo Creek!"

"Pirate's Mount!"

"Look! 'Gold buried here.' By Jove!"

A black spot was marked "Pirate's Mount," and at the foot of it was a cross, with the words "Gold Buried Here." The words seemed to fascinate the juniors.

"Gold buried here," repeated Blake, with a deep breath.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat! And it only wants picking up!" said Herries. "If we were there, I'll bet that Towser would find that place in next to no time, and—"

"Wats!"

"Oh, it's ripping!" said Blake. "What a find! Is the latitude given?"

"Yes. Look at this in the corner."

"Good egg!"

In the corner was scratched "Latitude of Sydney."

"My hat!" said Kangaroo. "That's the latitude of Sydney, in Australia, of course. But the longitude isn't given."

"Easy enough to find it from the latitude, though," said Kerr shrewdly. "You only have to take the latitude of Sydney for a guide, and sail on that parallel till you come to the island."

"Might have to go right round the world," grinned Figgins.

"What's this?" said Tom Merry.

He pointed to two dotted letters in the right-hand bottom corner of the chart. The letters were "W. L."

The juniors wrinkled their brows over them.

"W. L.," repeated Blake. "They can't be the initials of the owner. They would be 'P. R.,' for Peter Raff."

"May have been some previous owner; this is a jolly old document," said Digby. "I should think it's been in existence more than a century."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Perhaps there was some famous pirate whose initials were W. L.," Herries suggested. "Have you ever heard of a well-known chap whose initials were W. L.?"

"Bai Jove—yaas!"

"Who, then?"

"Waitah Long," said D'Arcy. "He was a Cabinet Ministah in the last Conservative Government, you know; had somethin' to do with muzzlin' dogs, or somethin'."

"You uttah ass!" roared the juniors.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Do you think a Cabinet Minister drew up this chart, you chump?"

"Certainly not. But—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"L' might stand for Lopez," Figgins remarked, "but 'W' couldn't possibly stand for Pablo, could it?"

"Wathah not."

"What the dickens—"

"Bai Jove, I've got it!"

"What is, then?" asked Tom Merry, not very hopefully.

"Watch Lopez."

"Eh?"

"It's a sort of wemembwancah, like tyin' a stwing on your fingah, you know," D'Arcy explained. "It means 'Watch Lopez.'"

"You ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You hopeless chump!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Perhaps it's a warning of some sort," Herries said thoughtfully. "It might mean 'Wild Lions,' or 'Wild Leopards.'"

"Or 'Woolly Lambs,'" suggested Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Or 'Wallop Lowthah,'" said D'Arcy warmly. "And, undah the circs, I considah—"

"Order!"

"I weally considah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr, bursting into a sudden laugh. "What asses you fellows are! It means 'West Longitude,' of course."

"By Jove, yes, of course! The longitude isn't given."

"W. L. West longitude," said Blake. "Of course. They don't give the degrees."

"No, that's unfortunate; but probably the chap who drew up the chart doesn't—or didn't—know the exact longitude himself," said Kerr. "It's pretty certain that this island isn't marked on any map."

"Wathah not!"

"He's given us the West Longitude—that's longitude west of Greenwich—and the Latitude of Sydney," said Kerr. "That ought to be quite enough to find the island by."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Then—"

"Then we lift the giddy treasure."

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!" said Kangaroo. "The long vacation's

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A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

just on us, you know. Could we fix it to search for the treasure?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Hurrah!"

"We'll all go! All you fellows are with me, of course?"

"Hurrah!"

And the cheer that the juniors gave rang through the School House. There was no doubt that they were all with Tom Merry, heart and soul, in the scheme for searching the South Seas for the treasure island.

CHAPTER 14.

Levison's Loss.

THE next day was Sunday, and with the exception of the two services the boys had the day mostly to themselves. Tom Merry & Co. spent most of their leisure time in discussing the treasure chart, and in going over their plans for seeking the pirate's treasure. That it was a pirate's treasure they had made up their minds—it seemed the most natural thing to think, under the circumstances. Upon reflection, the summer vacation seemed too far off for them to wait, and they discussed the possibility of getting leave from the Head and from their people, to seek the treasure without waiting for that time to arrive. Naturally enough, they were keen upon starting.

Levison, and Mellish, and Crooke had some discussion to go through on the same subject. They had the copy of the chart in their possession, and although the interior of it was not marked, Mellish had some recollection of how the indications had been put in. But if they could find the island, the cads of the School House had little doubt of being able to find the treasure, too. And as Crooke's father was a millionaire, and denied him nothing, and was, moreover, the possessor of a steam-yacht, with which he sometimes cruised in southern waters, it really seemed as if Crooke would have a chance. As for the baseness of having stolen the clue to the island, that did not seem to enter at all into the calculations of the precious trio. They were very little more scrupulous than Pablo Lopez in that matter.

But there was one thing they understood perfectly well, and that was, that it would not do to let Tom Merry get wind of the fact that they possessed a copy of the chart, imperfect as it was. Levison carried it in an envelope in his pocket-book, and the rascals did not venture even to look at it within the walls of St. Jim's.

"We'll stroll out of school this afternoon, after church, and look at it in the wood," Levison said; and as he was the leading spirit of the precious Co., the others agreed.

And that sunny afternoon they went out together. Tom Merry saw them go, but he little dreamed what their intentions were, or what Levison carried in his pocket.

"Safe here," grinned Levison, throwing himself down in a grassy glade in the heart of Rylcombe Wood. "Got a fag, Crooke?"

"Yes, rather!" said Crooke, producing a packet of cigarettes from his pocket. "Here you are! Got a match?"

The three young rascals lighted their cigarettes, and puffed away with a great pretence of enjoyment. They would much rather have eaten toffee, but they would not admit that even to themselves.

"Now, then, we'll discuss the matter," said Levison, taking out his pocket-book. "In the first place, Crooke, you think you can get your pater to take us on his steam-yacht in the summer vac.?"

"Certain!" said Crooke.

"That's ripping!" said Mellish. "It will be a jolly good holiday, anyway, whether we find the treasure or not. And I don't see why we shouldn't find it."

"Hush!" exclaimed Levison, suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

"I heard a sound in the wood," said Levison, looking round anxiously at the thick, green bushes and trees.

"Oh, rats! A rabbit, I expect."

"If Tom Merry should come along—"

"Stuff! Tom Merry's at the school."

"Well," said Levison, his alarm subsiding as no further sound was heard, "it's agreed, then, if your pater takes us all three, Crooke, we divide the treasure into four equal shares if it's discovered, and take one each—your pater having one for his trouble?"

"Agreed!" said Crooke.

"Is he likely to ask many questions as to how we got the chart?" said Mellish, a little anxiously.

Crooke chuckled and winked.

"My pater's a business man," he said. "He doesn't ask awkward questions. If he thinks there's anything in the biznez, he'll take it up and not ask a word."

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"The difficulty will be to convince him that there's something in it," Levison said thoughtfully.

"Oh, I don't know. He'll take me for a cruise in the South Seas in the vac., if I ask him, without believing in the chart. Then we can look for the gold."

"Good! Jolly well wish I had a pater like that!" said Mellish enviously.

"Well, here's the chart," said Levison. "It's unlucky Mellish wasn't able to copy down the rest of the signs. But we've got the position of the island. We can search over it till we find the giddy treasure. The island can't be very large."

"Exactly!"

"Look at this," said Levison. "I—"

"Senoritos!"

A man stepped from the thicket—a man with massive shoulders and a short figure that dwindled away to the feet; a man with swarthy face, and ringed fingers, and black, scintillating eyes. The juniors had not seen him before, but they did not need telling who he was.

"The—the Spaniard!"

"Lopez!"

The dwarf grinned.

"Quite right, ninos," he said. "I will ask you to give me the chart."

Levison sprang up, crumpling the paper in his hand. His eyes were gleaming fiercely.

"You jolly well won't have it!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you've been listening—"

The Spaniard grinned.

"Exactly, little senor!"

"You're not going to have this paper! It isn't the original—it's a copy—and it belongs to us!" said Levison.

Crooke stood hesitating. Mellish was already scuttling away into the bushes. He had heard too much of the Spanish dwarf to want to remain at close quarters with him.

The dwarf held out his hand.

"Give me the chart!"

"I won't!"

"Be-etter give it to him, Levison," muttered Crooke. "We—we can't do anything else. It's no good."

Levison gritted his teeth.

"Hang him, he sha'n't have it!"

He made a movement to dash into the wood. With the spring of a tiger, the Spaniard reached him. His powerful hands closed upon the junior, and he hurled him to the earth, with a concussion that almost deprived Levison of his senses.

The dwarf stooped over him and grasped his wrist.

"Give me the chart!"

"Hang you!"

Lopez twisted the junior's wrist. Levison uttered a cry of agony, and the grasp of his fingers upon the paper unclosed. Pablo Lopez picked up the paper with a yell of triumph.

"Mine!" he shouted.

"You hound!"

Levison staggered to his feet. He was about to spring upon Lopez, but the Spaniard turned upon him with a look that made him shrink back. The dwarf waved his hand towards the road.

"Go!" he said. "Carambo! Go, while you are safe!"

Crooke was gone already, after Mellish. Levison clenched his hands, but he followed them. The Spaniard grinned, and plunged into the wood. Levison joined Mellish and Crooke, who were waiting for him in the road.

"He's got it?" asked Mellish.

"Yes."

"And we haven't even a copy!" muttered Crooke.

Levison burst into a harsh laugh.

"That's an end to our treasure-hunting!" he said savagely. "If you fellows had stood by me I could have kept the paper!"

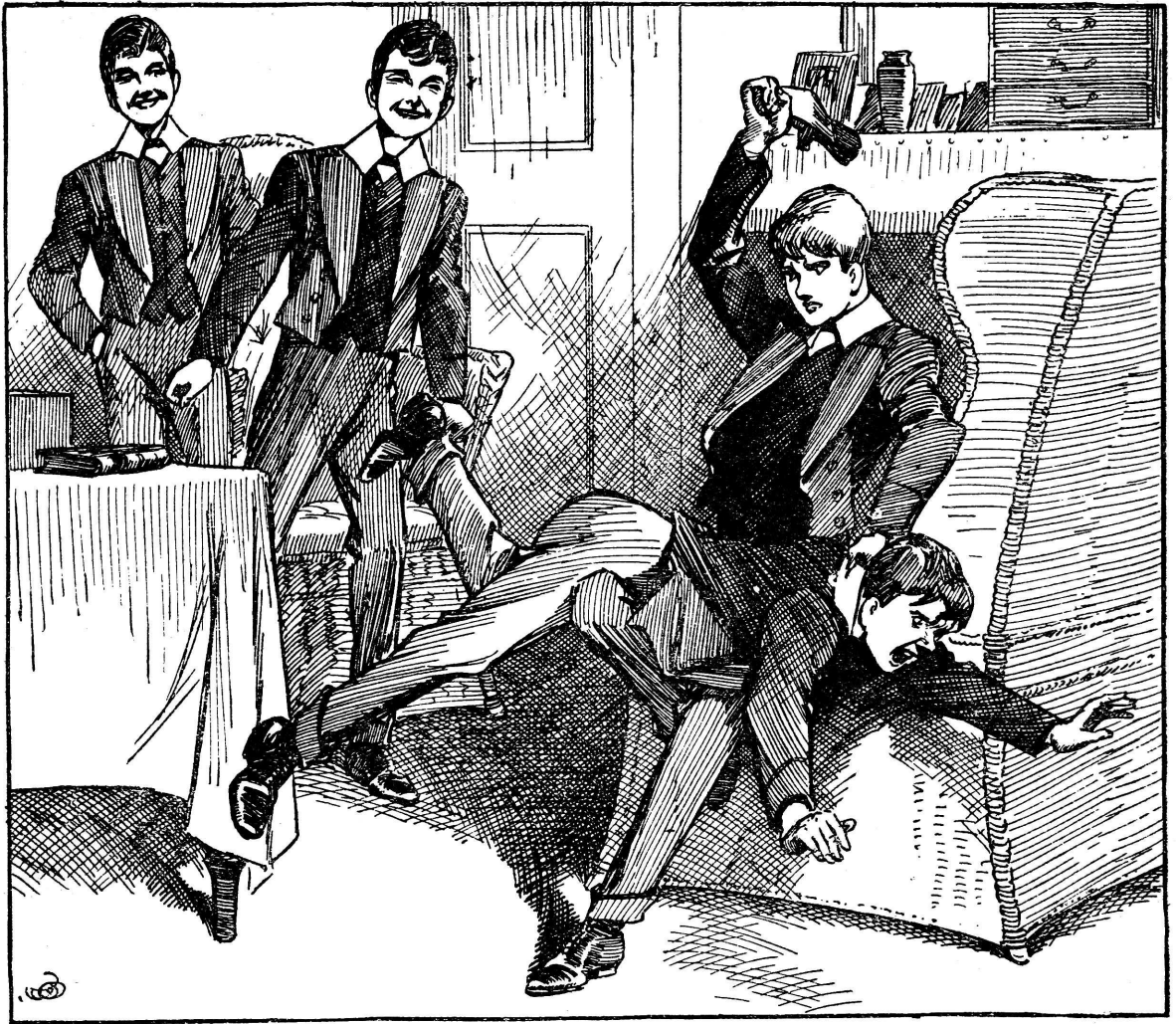
"I believe he had a knife!" muttered Mellish.

"Bah!"

"Well, what are we going to do now?" snarled Crooke.

"I'm going to the police-station," said Levison. "Not a word at the school about the paper! We should have the whole crew of them down on us if they knew we'd a copy at all. If Tom Merry looks for the treasure, let him find that rotten Spaniard looking for it, too. Serve him right—hang him! But I'm going to the police, now, to tell them that the man's in the wood, now, who tried to break into the school last night. They may be able to lay the brute by the heels."

And Levison ran all the way into the village, and gave his information, breathlessly, at the police-station. He did not mention the chart. He simply said that he and his companions had seen the Spaniard in the wood. Search was made at once, but it was in vain. Pablo Lopez had disappeared.



Bob Cherry drew Heath across his knee and grasped a slipper. "If you won't fight," he said, "you can take your licking like a kid in the First Form. So here goes!" (An exciting incident in the *Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.*, entitled, "Driven from School," contained in the "Magnet" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

CHAPTER 15. Glorious Prospects.

TOM MERRY heard nothing of that adventure in the wood. By the next day it was pretty clear that the Spaniard had left the neighbourhood. The police were searching for him far and wide, and it was found that a man answering to his description had been seen at a considerable distance, towards the coast. There was no doubt that the Spaniard was gone, and Tom Merry & Co. believed that he had either given up the idea of stealing the chart, or that he did not really know that it was in Tom Merry's possession. Of the fact that he possessed a copy, complete enough to give him a full indication of the exact whereabouts of the island, though not of the treasure, Tom Merry had no knowledge, and Levison & Co. did not mean to tell him. They were shut out of the matter now, but they found a spiteful satisfaction in knowing that Tom Merry would have a dangerous rival in the quest for the buried gold.

Nothing more was heard of the Spaniard, and nothing more of Peter Raff. Tom Merry hoped more and more that the sunburnt sailor had not really fallen a victim to the dwarf. If he lived, it was clear that he intended Tom Merry to possess the chart, and Tom was fully resolved that if he discovered the treasure, half of it should go to the man who had given him the clue, if ever he should claim it.

Tom Merry was little given to thinking about money; but he knew the value of it, and he knew what this treasure might mean to him. Tom Merry had been born to wealth, but his money had been in the charge of Miss Priscilla

Fawcett, his guardian, and that kind lady, in her old age, had been tricked into reckless generosity, and the money had been swept away.

Tom Merry's expenses at St. Jim's—everything he had, in fact—came from his uncle in America. He was to be the old gentleman's heir. At the same time, his desire to have some more stable possession will be readily understood.

The gold of Skeleton Island might put him back in his old position, and that would mean a very great deal to Tom Merry.

"Half of it will be put away for Peter Raff," Tom Merry said, in discussing the matter with his chums, "and the other half will be divided among us—"

"No, it won't!" said Lowther. "Raff gave you the chart, and he clearly enough made it understood that the treasure belongs to you, and you alone, if he didn't claim the chart again."

"Yes, but—"

"Yaas, wathah! Howevah, the wemainin' half of the trespure might be divided into two parts, and Tom Mewwy could take one, and we would divide the other quartah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We might agreee to that."

"But—"

"That's final!" said the swell of St. Jim's firmly.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, we won't quarrel about it," he said. "We haven't found the treasure yet, and we don't want to act like the hunters who shared out the bearskin before the bear was caught."

"Ha, ha! No!"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND."

A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"But what about going for the loot?" asked Blake. "We can't wait till the summer vac., you know. It's really too long."

"We might get leave——"

"Bai Jove! I weally think we ought to get leave," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "I wathah think I can awwange the mattah."

"Rats!"

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Might get up a round robin, or something to that effect," said Herries. "And he could be assured that we should be all right, you know. I should explain to him that we were taking Towser with us."

"Bai Jove! What?"

"Towser, of course, would have to come. He——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Manners. "We haven't got leave to go at all yet; and we can settle about Towser when we do get leave."

"Something in that!" grinned Blake. "But how are we to get leave? That's the question."

"I think I could awwange——"

"Bosh!"

"I could awwange——"

"Order!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "It's just barely possible that Gussy may have a sensible suggestion to make."

"Nonsense!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I could awwange it, I tell you," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You chaps know my bwothah Conway—you wembamah he was elected an M.P."

"What the dickens——"

"He's goin' on a cruise in the South Seas. I've heard from him about it to-day. And he's comin' down here to-day to say good-bye to Wally and me."

"My hat!"

"You see, he's been wathah seeday since he went into the House of Commons, owin' to bein' wowwied with Budgets and things. He's paired off with another chap, and he's goin' on a cruise. My ideah is to capture him when he comes down heah, and make him pwomise to get the Head to let him take us."

"Good egg!"

"Let's wait till Lord Conway comes," said Tom Merry. "We'll make him agree. If he won't we'll shut him up in the study, and start Gussy singing tenor solos to him."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Conway, who had the honour of being D'Arcy's elder brother, arrived later in the afternoon. The juniors met him at the gates in a crowd, and marched him in triumph into D'Arcy's study—No. 6 in the Fourth.

A cheerful-looking youth with a smear of ink on his collar and a blot on his nose was already there. It was D'Arcy's minor of the Third, more familiarly called Wally.

"Hallo, cocky!" said Wally cheerily.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" implored Wally. "Sit down, Con, old chap, and make yourself at home. You chaps buck up and get tea."

Lord Conway laughed.

"You're all very kind," he said. "I'm going to dine with the Head, so——"

"Bai Jove! You're going to have tea with us first, Conway?" said Arthur Augustus. "We shall weally take no wefusal."

"A very light one, then."

"Buck up, you fellows! Fill the kettle, Wally. Cut the cake, Dig, deah boy. Buck up with stirrin' the fish, Lowthah."

Over tea the subject of the proposed excursion to the South Seas was delicately approached. The chart was shown to Lord Conway, and the story of how Tom Merry had obtained possession of it was related to him—most of the juniors speaking at once.

The young man was genuinely interested. He scanned the chart, and looked it over, and felt it in his hands.

"By Jove," he said, "this is——"

"It's a clue, ain't it?" said Blake.

"Yes. But I did not mean that. Do you know what this leather is made of?"

"Never seen anything like it before," said Tom Merry.

"They made leather like it, from the skins of aristocrats, in the French Revolution," said Lord Conway quietly. "I've seen leather like it in Africa."

The juniors caught their breath.

"Human skin?" said Tom Merry.

Lord Conway nodded.

"Good heavens!"

"Gruh!"

"How howwid!"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND."

"Some grim old pirate drew up that chart," said Lord Conway. "It's genuine enough. I can see that it's a great deal more than a hundred years old. I shouldn't be surprised if there's something in it."

"Oh, we're convinced of that!" said all the juniors at once in a breath.

Lord Conway laughed.

"Naturally you would be," he agreed. "At your age I should have been convinced of it without any proof at all. But there may be something in it. I wish I could take you all to the South Seas with me to look for the island."

The juniors exchanged glances.

Lord Conway's careless remark had brought them to their subject. Several of them started at once.

"That's just what we want."

"You see, Conway, deah boy——"

"That's it!" said Wally. "We're coming!"

"Weally, Wally——"

Lord Conway stared.

"Well, I would take you," he said. "You would make the yacht lively enough, I've no doubt, and prevent the cruise from being monotonous. But you could never get leave from your headmaster to leave school for so long a time."

"That's just it," Tom Merry explained. "We want you to get leave for us."

"Me?"

"Yaas, wathah! Our govannah is a govannah of the school, you know, Con, deah boy, and you are an old Saint. You've got heaps of influence with the Head."

"Yes, rather!"

"Do it—there's a good chap!"

"But I couldn't ask——" began Lord Conway, in dismay.

"Yes, you could, you know!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The real question is whether you'd care to be bothered with a crowd of youngsters in your yacht," Tom Merry said. Conway laughed.

"I should like it," he said. "Nothing would suit me better. I'm not such an awfully old stager myself, you know."

"Then ask the Head."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's bound to say 'yes,' to you if you put it to him nicely," said Monty Lowther. "He couldn't refuse a real Member of Parliament. He wouldn't have the nerve."

"But—but——"

"No 'buts,'" said Wally. "You've got to do it, and you may as well make up your mind to it. If you refuse, Gussy is going to sing to you till you give in!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lord Conway set down his teacup and rose to his feet, smiling.

"I'll speak to the Head," he said. "Mind, I don't promise anything. But I'll do my best for you."

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, deah boy! Do you think I had bettah come with you and see the Head, in case you weaquiah the assistance of a little tact and judgment?"

"No, I don't," said Lord Conway.

"I'm quite willin'——"

"Yes; but I'm not!"

"Weally, you know——"

Lord Conway made his way to the Head's study, with a very dubious expression upon his face. The juniors waited for him in the passage, with the keenest anxiety.

The viscount was quite a long time in the study, and the juniors could hear a faint murmur of voices. Their anxiety grew in keenness every moment, and several times Arthur Augustus had to be restrained forcibly from going in to his brother's aid.

The study door opened at last, and Lord Conway came out, smiling.

The juniors gathered round him breathlessly.

"Bai Jove! What is the verdict, deah boy?"

"What does he say?"

"It's all right!" said Lord Conway, laughing. "You can come with me, you young rascals, on condition that you promise to behave yourselves."

"Hurrah!"

"Thanks—thanks awf'ly, old chap!"

"Bravo!"

And Tom Merry & Co. rejoiced. And from that hour little was spoken of among them but preparations for joining Lord Conway's yacht and voyaging to the South Seas in quest of the treasure island.

THE END.

(Another splendid Tale of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "Tom Merry's Treasure Island," by Martin Clifford.)

A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

[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 on Land and Sea.



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 break up 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, a manservant, and a lad named Tim.

Kingston has brought nine Inner Councillors to book, one by one, when he hears of a plot to kidnap the Crown Prince of Balataria. Kingston learns that the prince is to be taken to the Iron Island, where he himself was once confined.

He therefore works out an ingenious scheme to checkmate the Brotherhood, and proceeds to put it into practice. He disguises himself as the prince, and allows himself to be kidnapped and taken aboard the Unicorn, the Brotherhood's yacht. On arrival within ten miles of the Iron Island, however, the sham prince turns the tables, and is shortly joined by his own yacht, the Coronet, and his submarine, the Dart. Taking the three Inner Councillors who were on board the Unicorn—Lyle, Formby, and Count von Breczen—Kingston enters the Dart, and lands on the Iron Island, where he intends to leave the Councillors. While on the island, however, Kingston falls into a trap laid for him by two men whom he had landed there years previously. Fraser, learning whom he had landed there months previously. Fraser, learning of his master's danger, boards the submarine to return to the Coronet for help.

(Now go on with the story).

In the Hands of the Enemy.

In a moment the machinery was in motion, and the Dart swung round in the shallow water and headed for the reef. It was a race for life now, and somehow Fraser felt despairing. The exiles knew their prisoner's singular power, and would hasten his end. Could the submarine get to the Coronet and back in time?

"I thought the fellow was a coward!" exclaimed Don Sebastian, as he saw the Dart making for the open sea. "The sight of this weapon frightened the wits out of him. But now he has gone we can greet one another. Needless to say, I am amazed to find three such masterful men as yourselves kidnapped and placed on this rock with Marsden and myself."

Count Von Breczen swore violently.

"It was Kingston's ingenuity which got the better of us!"

he snarled. "It is useless denying the fact—he is amazingly clever, and no man in the world could compete against him!"

"There is no time now to go into details," put in Captain Formby. "I am curious to hear how Kingston allowed himself to fall into a trap. By Jove, I never hoped for such news as this! Well, we can revenge ourselves for the harm he has done us, and, incidentally, prevent him continuing this campaign against the Brotherhood."

Don Sebastian rapidly told his new—though old—companions what had occurred in the shady lane beyond the banyan-tree, and they were immensely pleased when they heard how easily Kingston had been tricked.

"You see," explained the Spaniard, whose spirits were feeling high, "both Marsden and myself felt that Kingston would return at some future date, and thought of a plan whereby to capture him, astute as he is. It is gratifying to both of us that he walked right into the trap as though it did not exist."

Don Sebastian smiled sneeringly.

"The bay is the only place for a boat to land its crew, and we knew that he would come straight into the lagoon. For this reason we took care never to show ourselves in this part of the island, for we never knew when he might turn up. Meanwhile, we spent our time in digging a great hole in the pathway which leads from here to the centre of the island. With proper implements we could have accomplished the work in less than a week, but situated as we are, it took a whole month, hard working. And the rest—well, you can guess the rest."

"You covered the hole over the top, and Kingston walked blindly into it?"

"Exactly. He could not distinguish it from the rest of the path, and so can hardly be blamed for tumbling into the trap. We kept away from the beach for the especial purpose of drawing him ashore to ascertain what had become of us."

"It was a first-rate scheme," declared Lyle, looking up the beach curiously. "But where is this path you refer to? Marsden will be getting impatient."

"Yes, we had better be moving. Now that the submarine has gone, there will be nothing to hinder us carrying out a scheme I have in mind. Marsden will be pleased to see you."

Don Sebastian turned, and proceeded to walk up the shingly beach. The other three were looking at him rather curiously, for he seemed an altogether different being to the spruce and neat Don Sebastian they had known, months before, in London.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND."

Strange to say, not one of them showed signs of anger—anger for being placed in this terrible position. Their weeks of confinement in the interior of the submarine had been trying and uninteresting, and during that time they had grown to look forward to being free once more—free in the sense that they could move about at will.

So that when they stepped upon the shore of the Iron Island they were quite resigned to their fate, and pleased rather than anything at having been freed from the stuffiness of the Dart.

As they walked up the beach Formby suddenly stopped. "Look here!" he exclaimed excitedly. "We've got this man—Kingston—absolutely secure, haven't we?"

"Yes."
"Well, then, what is to prevent us demanding our release as the price of his liberty? The submarine's bound to return, and—"

"The idea is utterly impracticable," interrupted the Spaniard. "Suppose we did such a thing—gave Kingston his liberty, and were ourselves taken aboard his yacht? Why, you need not be told what it would end in. As soon as we were there—as soon as he was free—we should simply be put in irons, the yacht would be turned about, and we should once more be landed on this isolated rock."

"I suppose you are right," admitted Formby. "Even if he gave his word, I do not suppose that would count for much."

The councillors judged Kingston's word of honour as being identical with their own—worthless. So the idea was not again referred to, and they proceeded past the banyan-tree practically in silence.

A Dastardly Scheme.

Colonel Marsden was particularly pleased to receive the new-comers to the Iron Island. He knew Lyle and Von Brezen intimately, and Captain Formby and he were well acquainted.

"Kingston has not made the least sign," he told them, after a few moments. "In spite of all his powers—in spite of his amazing cleverness—he has overstepped the mark this time. Before long he will doubtless be pleading for mercy. With five against him he will realise how hopeless it is for him to escape."

"He will certainly do that," said the Don; "but with regard to his pleading for mercy, you are wrong there, Marsden. Although his nerve may break down, I do not think he will ever utter a word of fear. He is not the man to do that. But I have one thing to warn you against."

"What is that?"
"Do not allow him to look you straight in the eye. He is possessed of terrible will-power, and is able to hypnotise one practically at a moment's notice. Of course, with five of us present, he would be helpless. But I am saying this just as a word of warning."

"And Kingston is down there, beneath those logs?" questioned Von Brezen, looking at the break in the path before him.

"Yes. I think you will admit even he cannot make his escape very easily. He is possessed of considerable strength, but no man in the world could lift those logs from the under side, as there is no foothold whatever. I will show you how deep the hole is."

Don Sebastian and Marsden rolled the logs to one side, and the others crowded round and peered over the edge into the roughly-made pit. Then several exclamations of surprise escaped their lips. Frank Kingston was there right enough, but he was seated on the sandy bottom of the shaft fast asleep.

"Well," exclaimed Lyle, "he's certainly a cool customer. He is well aware that he is a prisoner, yet he has settled himself to sleep as though he were in his own home. Hand me that pebble there, and I will soon bring him back to his senses."

The pebble dropped on to Kingston's head, and he looked up immediately.

"Why, it's Lyle!" he exclaimed coolly. "You have met your old companions, then? When I have left the island the five of you ought to get on well together. Well, what do you think of the place?"

"You speak very confidently," cried Von Brezen. "But however calm you may be now, Frank Kingston, you will quickly realise that we have got the upper hand, and that you are entirely in our power."

"I certainly realise that at the present moment I am in your power, but I will not go so far as to say that I am destined to immediately enter another world, as you have so pleasantly suggested."

"You will die to-day!"

Kingston smiled.

"Of course," he drawled, "opinions differ, so I will say nothing. But you know perfectly well that I have sworn

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to exterminate every member of the Inner Council. Before I die that work shall be done."

"It is useless talking to him," snapped Don Sebastian, enraged at the prisoner's attitude. "Cover the hole over again, and come with me. It is quite impossible for him to escape, and I have a plan to discuss with you."

The logs were once more drawn over the top of the pit, and the five Inner Councillors, led by Don Sebastian, proceeded to walk along the path until they came to the clearing beyond the wild vegetation. The three new arrivals were somewhat surprised at the sight before them.

The clearing, which had at one time been merely a small stretch of grassland, had now been considerably cultivated, and vegetables of all descriptions were growing. On the side nearest where they stood the tent, which had been used by Dolores when she arrived on the Iron Island, served as a sleeping place for the two exiles. Beside it a large natural arbour had been made, for it was altogether too hot during the day to inhabit a tent.

"But where did you get all these vegetables?" inquired Formby, looking round him.

"When Kingston came to the island a few months ago to land Marsden, he brought with him a large bundle of seeds and a couple of clasp knives. He did not mean the work to be too easy for us, so we were forced to make our own implements out of the hard wood of one of the trees. That accomplished, it was a comparatively easy matter to clear the ground and set the seed. The result you can now see before you."

"We passed a dilapidated hut in a small clearing just before leaving the pathway," put in the count. "Why did you not occupy that place as a shelter instead of the tent?"

"The hut you refer to," explained Colonel Marsden, "was originally the treasure-house where the bullion of the Brotherhood was stored, and for a week or two we occupied it. We found, however, that it was much too stuffy in this warm climate, so erected this tent—which we found in another part of the island—and have used it ever since. But come, there is that plan to discuss!"

They moved forward and seated themselves before the tent. Then, having lighted cigarettes—Don Sebastian and Marsden had not smoked since their arrival—they waited for the Spaniard to tell them the scheme he had in mind.

"You are all agreed, I suppose," he commenced, "that Kingston is to die?"

"Of course!"

"Well, seeing the terrible havoc he has wrought among the ranks of the Inner Council, none of you will be satisfied at his simply dying a quiet death. For this reason I suggest we make him feel it. You understand—"

"Torture him?" put in Marsden coolly.

"Exactly! None of you are squeamish enough to object to that. The debt we owe him is a very big one indeed, and it shall be paid in full before he finally gives up life."

"How do you mean to do it?"

"In this way. The hut you referred to a few moments ago is absolutely useless to us, so there is no reason why we should not thoroughly bind Kingston, strap him to a stake in the middle of the building, then set fire to the latter. It will be some time—perhaps an hour—before the fire reaches him, and he will suffer untold agonies before the end comes. When he is finally dead, I think you will admit that he has received the punishment he deserves."

The councillors looked at one another for a moment in silence. They were all hard, flint-hearted men, but were nevertheless somewhat taken aback at the Spaniard's scheme. To say the least, it was devilish, and Formby and Lyle, who were not quite so bad as the others, looked a little uncomfortable.

"I am with you whole-heartedly as far as killing Kingston goes," said the latter slowly, "but don't you think it a little too—too fiendish to carry out that plan? Kill him by all means, but get it over quick."

"No, no!" cried Von Brezen. "I consider the Don's plan an excellent one. You do not seem to realise, Lyle, what harm this scoundrel has done to our organisation."

"And you do not seem to realise, count," put in Formby, "that Kingston himself was exiled by us for eight years on this island. Those eight years he spent absolutely alone; and, after all, it was only natural that he should seek to revenge himself. Sebastian has been here only a few months, and has had the companionship of Colonel Marsden for the greater part of the time. After all, the treatment you have received is not nearly so bad as that which he was subjected to."

"That counts for little," replied the Spaniard. "If you have no other objections to make than those, you may as well close your mouths. What do you say, Marsden? Do you propose killing Kingston right out, or letting him suffer agony before finally dying?"

Marsden thought for a moment.

"I agree with the proposal you have put before us," he

replied, with a hard glitter in his eyes, clearly showing his true character. "There is no hope of our ever reaching civilisation again, and Formby's words are so much nonsense. He says that Kingston was here for eight years. Well, in all probability we shall remain on this island for the rest of our lives. Yes, place him in the hut, and let him suffer untold pain before he finally goes."

"It is too terrible—" began Rupert Lyle.

"We are three to two, Lyle, so it is useless your talking. I am surprised that you and Formby should take up this attitude. After the harm he has done you, I imagined you would agree unanimously."

"So we do—to the first part of your plan. But when it comes to such ghastly torture— Well, since it is useless objecting, we will say no more. Fetch Kingston out, and get it over as quickly as possible—before the submarine returns."

"The sooner the better!" cried Von Breczen. "We do not want him on our hands too long. I shall feel safer when he is at last settled with. Come, we will hoist him out of

He looked into the uneven aperture, and saw that Kingston was still reclining on the sand. Now, however, he was wide-awake, and returned Marsden's gaze with the most perfect unconcern.

"Catch hold of this line," directed the colonel, "and bind it round your waist. We mean to haul you to the surface." Kingston smiled.

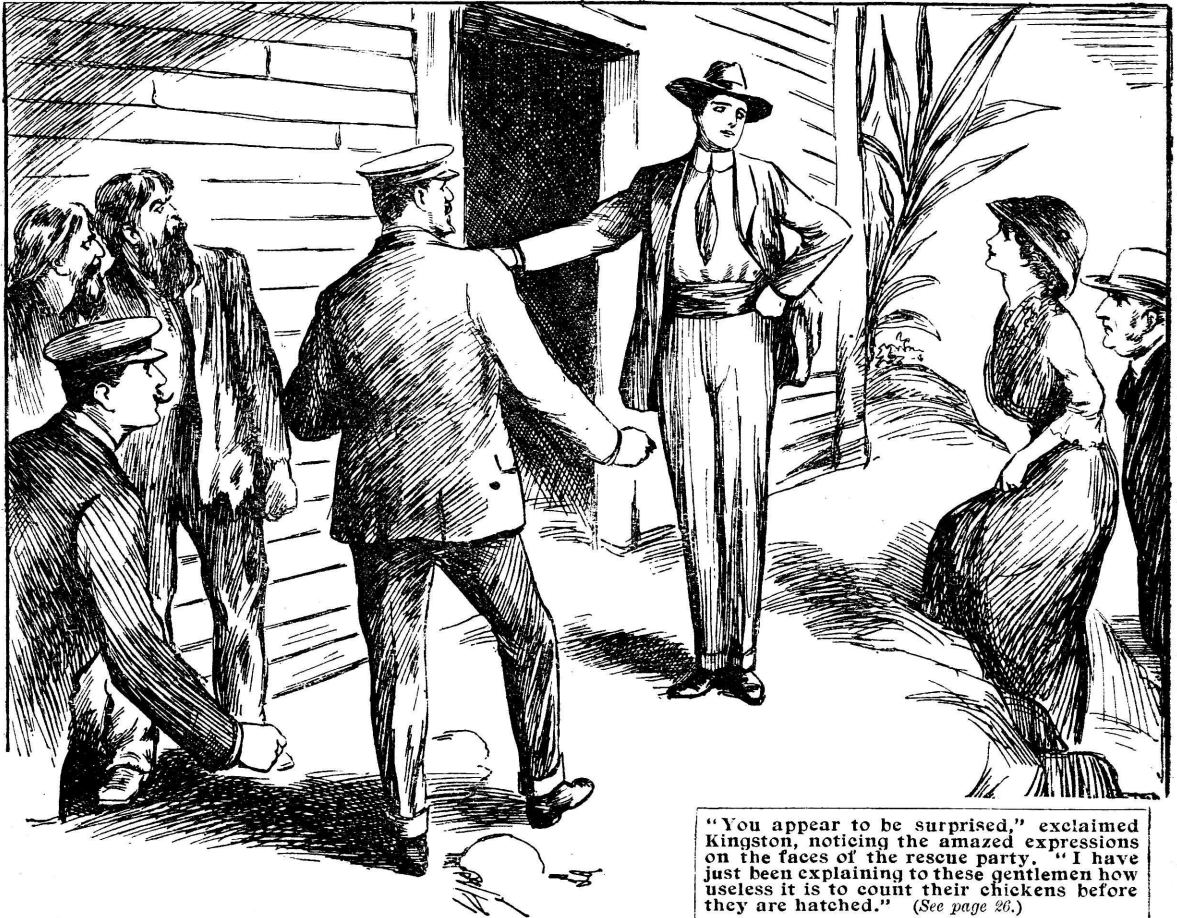
"Suppose I refuse," he said pleasantly, "what then?"

His captors glanced at one another, and realised that should Kingston really refuse to tie the twine round himself they would be utterly unable to carry out their plans. But Kingston had other things in mind.

"It's all right," he called up. "Throw the rope down, and I will do as you say. I was only joking. Thanks!"

By the tone of his voice one would imagine that those at the top were personal friends, and were doing him a favour. The creeper held tightly enough—there were three strands of it placed together—and a few moments later the prisoner stepped on to the edge of the pit.

He was surrounded instantly, but he gave no sign of offer-



"You appear to be surprised," exclaimed Kingston, noticing the amazed expressions on the faces of the rescue party. "I have just been explaining to these gentlemen how useless it is to count their chickens before they are hatched." (See page 26.)

his prison, and tell him what we intend to do. It will be amusing to see him go pale when he hears his fate!"

The five scoundrels were full of the scheme, three of them being particularly enthusiastic. Without further discussion they made their way back to the hole in the pathway, their thoughts, for the time being, centred entirely on the work in hand. Their own position did not worry them in the least.

The logs were pulled aside once more.

"Before we haul him up," said Marsden at this point, "we had better have some twine in readiness to bind him. His strength is terrible, and it is best to be prepared."

"Twine?" repeated Formby. "There is nothing on the island to serve, is there?"

"Plenty. One of the creepers which grow a little lower down is as strong as any rope. If you will wait a few moments, I will go and get some."

The colonel hurried off and presently returned with a large handful of extremely tough creeper. In a few moments he had tied several lengths of this together, thus forming a long line.

"Now," he announced, "we can get along with the work."

ing resistance. He noted, with a smile, that the five men stood round him on the alert to hold him should he make a move.

"Don't worry yourselves," he drawled, carefully adjusting his tie. "I quite realise that the odds are in your favour, and that it would be useless for me to make a fight. Now, tell me, what choice fate have you been arranging for me? I am rather curious to know."

"Your tone will alter in a moment!" cried the count, enraged at the prisoner's calmness. "Since you seem very eager to know, I will tell you! You are going to be bound hand and foot, and tied to a stake in the centre of that hut—the one you can see through the trees."

"Ah, the treasure-house, which I had the pleasure of looting?"

"Yes, hang you! It is a very appropriate place for you to meet your end. As I said, you will be bound and secured in that hut. Then, with no delay, we shall pile sticks round the walls and set the place afire. In half an hour you will be roasted to death!"

Von Breczen glared at Kingston triumphantly, expecting to

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see him turn pale at the words. On the contrary, Kingston's smile became more pronounced, and he carelessly picked a piece of fluff from one of his sleeves.

"By Jove, count," he murmured languidly, "your conversation is singularly uninteresting! Suppose we put joking aside and talk seriously? You speak as though I were destined to end my days on this island, when, as a matter of fact, I am setting sail for Europe this evening. I can assure you I am speaking the truth."

The Situation Reversed.

Don Sebastian stepped forward angrily. "Enough of this!" he cried. "We know you well enough, Kingston, to take no notice of what you say. Although you appear outwardly so calm, you know positively well that there is no avenue of escape. When you were foolish enough to come ashore by yourself you signed your own death-warrant!" "You evidently are not acquainted with my signature," replied Kingston calmly, "for I have no intention of ending my life just yet. But, come, if you mean to bind me, pray do so at once. I am in the full glare of the sun just at this spot, and it can hardly be called cool."

He looked round from one to another of his five captors, and although they glared at him in triumph, he himself returned their glares with that same bland, foppish-looking smile.

Without further ado the thick twine was placed round his arms and legs. He offered no resistance whatever, and when the task was completed seemed to be utterly helpless. He was grasped with rough hands, and half carried, half dragged along the shady path to the bullion-house.

"We will leave him leaning against the wall for a few moments," declared the Spaniard. "One of us will be quite sufficient to guard him. The other three of you follow me, and we will bring the dry sticks which are to give the fire a good start. You, Lyle, as you seem to be somewhat against the idea, had better remain."

"Very well, I'll see he doesn't get loose." "You had better hold this revolver just as an extra safeguard," continued the Don. "It is some peculiar weapon of Kingston's which I cannot quite make out. However, it is evidently of some use, or he would not have possessed it himself."

"I observe that your powers of deduction, Don Sebastian, have not deteriorated through your stay on the Iron Island!" exclaimed Kingston ironically. "Pray proceed with your plan and get the business over. I am sure they will be wondering what has become of me on my yacht."

Don Sebastian did not answer, but departed with three of his companions in the direction of the tent, leaving Kingston alone with Rupert Lyle. For a short while nothing was said. Then Kingston broke the silence.

"So you don't entirely agree with this plan—eh—Lyle? How is that?"

"Be quiet!" snapped the other. "I do not wish to speak about it, especially with you. The best thing you can do is to take your gruel without grumbling."

"But I am rather anxious to know which part of the plan you do not like."

"Well, since you're so curious, if I had my way I should simply put a bullet in you and bury you straight away. It seems too horrible to burn you alive as they suggest. Don't imagine I'm squeamish," Lyle continued, "because I'm not! I only think that you don't deserve such treatment as that. You've done a deken's of a lot of harm, one way and another, to us and the Brotherhood in general, but a speedy death is quite sufficient punishment. You couldn't do any more harm, anyway!"

"By Jove, Lyle, you certainly surprise me!" said Kingston, pressing his arms out gently against the twine which bound them. "I had no idea you were so soft-hearted. I knew, of course, that you were not nearly so bad as Von Brezen or Sebastian, but I did not know before that you would object to such a revenge as they outlined. Such a punishment as sudden death is slight in comparison."

"What's the use of talking?" growled the other. "They've decided what to do with you, I can't alter it."

"No, I can understand that well enough. But, see, they are coming back, if I am not mistaken!"

Kingston bent forward a trifle, and looked behind Lyle's back down the pathway. Lyle involuntarily turned, and for a moment his back was towards the captive. As he thought Kingston to be thoroughly secure, he had not been at all on the alert. It would have been better had he been so.

For the very second his back was turned he was startled to hear a sudden series of sharp snaps, and before he could even turn, a terrible grip was laid on his shoulder, and the revolver, which lay in his right hand, was instantly seized.

"I think," drawled Kingston suavely, "this little toy would be safer in my hands!"

Lyle stared before him in stupefied amazement. The whole thing had been so sudden that he could hardly realize what had occurred. A second before Kingston had been securely bound hand and foot. Now, although his feet were still encircled with the thick twine, his arms were perfectly free.

"What—?" "You seem to be surprised," said his companion. "I told your friends that I should depart to-night, didn't I? No, stop just where you are. Have you got a knife of any sort on you?"

Lyle recovered from his amazement rapidly, and was now furiously angry at having been so easily tricked. He had some excuse, however, for he had never guessed that Kingston's strength was so terrible. The thongs which bound him had been snapped in two like so much cotton.

"You fiend!" cried the Inner Councillor, starting back a pace. "How did you do it—how did you manage to get free? It seems utterly incredible that—"

"We are losing time. Kindly give me that knife—"

Lyle fumbled hastily in his pocket, and then brought to light a small, pearl-handled pocket-knife.

"That will do admirably. Kindly bend down and cut through those pieces of creeper. It will be far more comfortable to be untrammelled by such an encumbrance!"

Lyle ground out an oath.

"No," he cried, "I'm hanged if I will!"

"I'm not the sort of man to take 'no' for an answer," said Kingston, a little more sternly. "This pistol may not be an ordinary one, but I can assure you it is not utterly useless. Now, then, what's your answer?"

He pointed the revolver ominously at the Inner Councillor's head, and Lyle was brought to understand how very completely the tables had been turned. With another curse, he bent down and proceeded to carry out the order.

"Good!" exclaimed Kingston, as he walked up and down a few steps. "Now, I can face the others a little more advantageously. I think, without boasting, that, with the help of this little companion, I shall be able to more than hold my own. Fraser will probably be back before long, so until he arrives I shall keep myself entertained by talking to you and your companions."

Lyle couldn't utter a word, and glanced behind him hurriedly as he heard a crackling of twigs. The others were returning, and he shouted out loudly. This had the effect of bringing Von Brezen and Formby up at a run. They had dropped their bundles further down the path, for Lyle's tone had told them that something was seriously wrong.

"What's the matter?" cried the former. "What— Good heavens!"

He stopped short suddenly, and stood in the middle of the path, gazing with wide-open eyes at the form of Frank Kingston as the latter leant idly against the wall of the bullion-house.

"The situation has changed somewhat since you departed," he exclaimed. "You see, that creeper Don Sebastian was so confident about was not so very effective, after all. Ah, here come the others!"

Marsden and Don Sebastian themselves now rushed up, and were equally amazed to see what had occurred. They could not understand it; they were staggered, and turned furiously on Lyle for an explanation. Don Sebastian himself was half-mad with rage, for at the very moment of victory his prey had been torn from his grasp.

"You fool!" he snarled, to Lyle. "What did you let him go for? You had that revolver, and could have shot him down at the least sign—"

"Wait a moment, Sebastian," interrupted Kingston. "Lyle was not to blame in the least. I had burst your precious bonds, and had obtained possession of the revolver, before he realised what had happened. The fact remains, however, that I now hold the upper hand. You will all seat yourselves in a circle before me, and do exactly as I tell you."

Don Sebastian was too excited to think clearly.

"Rush him!" he cried. "If we all make a determined attack we can overpower him."

Suiting the action to the word, he dashed at Kingston, Von Brezen and Marsden following his example. Kingston did not move until Don Sebastian had thrown himself completely at him. Then, like a pistol-shot, his open palm came into contact with the Spaniard's cheek. A cry of agony escaped Don Sebastian's lips, and the force of the blow sent him headlong to the ground, where he lay for a second moaning.

"You see," observed Kingston, "to rush me is quite out of the question. Had I used my fist then instead of my open palm your wretched friend would by now have been uttering his death gasp. I should advise you to do as I ordered

without further resistance. I assure you it will be the most comfortable method."

Marsden and the count backed away fearfully. The exhibition of Kingston's strength they had just received was quite sufficient to satisfy their curiosity. It was brought home to them with stunning force how puny they were when compared to this most marvellous man. In that moment they realised how he had succeeded all along the line with his campaign.

Don Sebastian rose to his feet and joined his companions, who were standing in a frightened group on the far side of the pathway. They were startled—demoralised. When they had thought themselves to be absolute masters of the situation, they found that this one man was more than a match for them all put together.

When Kingston spoke again his voice, his manner, and his whole bearing had altered. Instead of the calm, languid fop who had been so bantering before, there now stood before them a quite different Frank Kingston—Frank Kingston without his affected mannerisms—Frank Kingston himself.

"Now," he exclaimed, in a terribly commanding voice, "I am going to tell you just what I think of you. There is going to be no more pretence—no more beating about the bush. You deserve death, every one of you, but I am simply going to keep you here until my friends turn up. If one of you moves so much as an inch I shall not be answerable for what happens!"

And the tone in which these words were spoken told his trembling listeners that their lives were in their own hands.

The Rescue Party Find Their Work Already Accomplished.

Meanwhile, how was Fraser faring?

Both he and Tim were agitated to an extensive degree by what they had just learnt from Don Sebastian. Nothing could be done beyond what they were doing—return at all speed to the yacht and tell them what had occurred. For a moment Fraser had some wild thoughts of going and rescuing his master himself. But then he realised how hopeless such a thing would be, for if Kingston really were helpless, what could he and Tim do against five?

The Dart fairly flew through the water once she had passed the reef. Fraser set her bows straight for the Coronet, and drove the engines to the fullest extent of their power. Both he and Tim were more agitated than they liked to admit.

"Do you think we'll be in time?" asked the latter breathlessly. "Luv a duck, Fraser, wot's goin' to 'appen if—"

"Shut up!" muttered the man, as he bent over the steering-wheel. "It won't make it no better by your talkin' about it." Then he suddenly looked up. "I tell you the guv'nor's got to be saved," he cried. "D'you hear? Saved! I should never rest another night as long as I lived if we get back and find it too late!"

"An' it's the last time as 'e's ever bin copped," sighed Tim regretfully. "Lummy, ain't it a pity! It don't seem possible that 'e can do anythink to 'clp 'imself—not wiv five ag'in 'im, leastways."

"He oughtn't to have gone. It was a blessed trap those two skunks bein' out of sight. Yet how was he to know—how was he to tell that they weren't dead? My word, Miss Dolores won't half be cut up when she hears it!"

"Rather!"

Very soon afterwards the funnel of the Coronet rose above the horizon, and the Dart seemed to give a spurt as it was drawing towards the latter part of its journey. Tim had his head out of the conning-tower, which had now been opened, looking ahead through a pair of binoculars. Suddenly he entered the engine-room again.

"Look 'ere," he said. "The crew don't know nothing about the Iron Island, do they? I mean, they don't know where the guv'nor went to?"

"No," replied Fraser. "Why?"

"Well, won't they think it rather funny when they don't see 'im go aboard? They think we've bin simply on a pleasure trip, don't they, and it will look rather queer when the guv'nor don't show 'imself?"

Fraser rubbed his chin.

"Look here," he said. "We don't want the crew to know everything, so you'd better pop on deck as soon as we arrive as though we'd forgotten something, and have simply come back for it. When the others get aboard the men'll just think that Mr. Kingston's takin' 'em for a run. See?"

"Right-ho!"

So when the Dart slid alongside the only person who emerged from her conning-tower was Tim Curtis. The accommodation-ladder was already lowered in readiness, and

Dolores, the professor, and Prince Xavier were somewhat surprised to see only his diminutive figure rapidly ascend.

"Where's Mr. Kingston?" said Dolores curiously. She was, of course, under the impression that Kingston had returned from his mission, and was naturally surprised when he did not now appear. The next moment Tim, doing his best to look unconcerned, approached them.

"Why, Tim, what's the matter—" began the girl.

"Can you come in the saloon, miss?" he exclaimed urgently. "You, too, Mr. Polgrave—all of yer, please! There's somethin' 'appened—somethin' I can't tell yer 'ere!"

"Dear me!" said Professor Polgrave, looking at Tim curiously. "The lad appears to be somewhat agitated. We had better humour him, and go into the saloon."

"Yes, do, sir!" urged Tim. "You wouldn't believe, wot's 'appened!"

Curious and somewhat alarmed, they followed the boy across the deck into the magnificent saloon. The door was closed, and they waited to hear what was amiss.

"I hope it's nothing serious," said Dolores somewhat anxiously.

"It is, miss—it's blessed serious!" exclaimed Tim. "The guv'nor—Mr. Kingston, I mean—as bin an' got 'imself copped—"

"Copped!" cried the professor. "What do you mean, my lad? Do you mean to state that your master is captured by those scoundrels on the Iron Island—that he is in their hands? Good gracious me, what a calamity!"

"You're right sir, it is! You see, sir, when we got there, there wasn't no one to be seen, an' Mr. Kingston went ashore to find out wot 'ad become of Marsden an' Don What's-'is-name. But it was all a trap, an' that brute of a Spaniard come down after a bit an' told us as 'ow the guv'nor was copped fair an' square. They mean to murder 'im, sir—that's wot they do! So Fraser come back as fast as the Dart would travel to fetch you."

"I?" exclaimed the professor.

"You an' Miss Dolores, an' this 'ere gent.," Tim added, indicating the prince. "There ain't a second to be lost, an' you'd all better take revolvers, so's to be ready to meet 'em. They said they was going to kill Mr. Kingston right orf, but there's a chance we may be in time."

"This is terrible!" exclaimed the prince agitatedly. "According to what I can make out, our friend is in imminent peril of his life. Quick! You two get aboard the submarine while I run and fetch some weapons, and tell the captain not to move from this spot. Every minute is of importance. I presume you wish to come, professor?"

"Good gracious, yes!" cried the old scientist. "I shall certainly accompany you, and do all that is within my power to effect a rescue. I am an old man, but not too old for such an adventure as this, I hope. I wanted to see the Iron Island, but certainly not under such conditions as these. It is appalling—appalling!"

The professor bustled out, Dolores following him immediately. She had paled somewhat at the news, but now a resolute expression had entered her eyes. If it were possible to save Kingston she meant to do all in her power to help in the rescue.

As quietly as possible she, Prince Xavier, and Professor Polgrave descended the accommodation-ladder and entered the submarine. It was necessary that they should affect a look of unconcern, and they succeeded really well when the object of their mission was remembered.

They left the Coronet floating lightly on the calm water, and her brass and paintwork literally quivered with the heat of the sun. The captain on the bridge had not heard all the facts, but he knew enough to cause his usual equanimity to vanish, and a certain agitated uneasiness to take its place. He had grown to thoroughly respect Kingston, and this sudden news of his master's plight had caused him to become restless and unsettled.

The Dart, now containing its three passengers, acted magnificently, upholding its name right well. The little submersible literally flew through the water, Fraser, in his eagerness, driving the engines at forced pressure.

Hardly a word was spoken, for each one of them was too overcrowded with thoughts for conversation. The professor stood looking out of the conning-tower muttering to himself incessantly. The drawn look on his face clearly showed how fond he was of his young friend.

Ordinarily Fraser took the passage past the reef at crawling speed, but now, with daring recklessness, he sent the Dart flying between the jagged rocks without slackening the engines. Luckily, no bad result followed, and the lagoon was covered in record time. Dolores was first on deck, and in her right hand she held a large revolver—not a silver-plated toy, but a real Service weapon. The professor realised now more than ever how it was that she had helped Kingston so effectively to escape from the Iron Island many months previously.

Polgrave himself and the prince were both armed similarly. Before Fraser could offer to open the folding-boat Dolores had leapt into the water, and was wading ashore. She was not in the least afraid of a wetting. The scientist, however, was an old man, and a soaked suit of clothes might have given him a severe chill. So the prince, as eager as anybody, offered to carry him ashore on his shoulders.

"Now, Tim, we're goin' to see what's up," said Fraser quickly. "You stop on deck here, an' see that nothing goes wrong."

Tim was greatly disappointed.

"Ain't I to go with yer?" he asked.

"Can't be done, Timmy," replied Fraser kindly. "You know somebody has to look after the boat, and I might be wanted. I'm half-afraid to go, for fear of findin'— Well, good-bye!"

He leapt off the deck as he spoke, and a moment later had caught the others up. Dolores, Fraser, and the prince were soaked, but they never thought of that then. All they could keep in their minds was the fact that Kingston was probably dead, or, at least, dying.

"I hardly imagined the place to be like this," said the professor, as they walked up the shingle. "This bay is quite a delightful little place, whatever the rest may be like. The only sign of the iron which gives the island its name are those jagged cliffs on either hand. And, dear me, what a truly magnificent tree!"

The professor was speaking to himself, rather than to his companions, and he looked in surprise as they passed under the many-trunked banyan-tree. Dolores, although she had been thinking of something altogether different, heard the remark, and turned to the old gentleman.

"Yes," she exclaimed; "that is the tree in which Mr. Kingston spent nearly the whole eight years of his life while staying on this isle. You see, the inside is hollow, and he had it fashioned into a room."

"Quite so—quite so!" murmured the professor. "How very interesting. But I am forgetting myself—I am forgetting the terrible nature of our visit. Should Kingston prove to be alive—and, when I remember what he has done in the past it is almost impossible to think he is other than alive—I shall get him to explain all these things to me."

The professor was stepping it out as briskly as the others, and not a moment of time was wasted as he made these remarks. The prince, although he said nothing, was very interested. But until he knew for certain whether Frank Kingston was alive or dead, he would utter no comment. Dolores, too, was silent, and they continued their walk, wondering all the time what it would end in.

Overhead the birds were singing unconcernedly, and insects of every description buzzed through the air. The foliage of the trees which formed the hedges of the path were brilliantly green, and seemed exceedingly refreshing to the eye.

Suddenly Dolores stopped, and held up her hand.

"I hear voices!" she exclaimed, in a low tone. "Get your revolvers ready!"

Fraser cocked his weapon with alacrity, and the others followed suit. Then, with one accord, they moved forward and turned the corner.

In their excitement they passed the logs of wood and the jagged hole in the path with scarcely a glance. It did not strike them then what the pit had been used for.

The corner turned, a strange sight met their gaze—a sight they had never expected to see—a sight which gave every one of them instant relief, as well as amazement. Standing upright, with his back to the wall of a low, wooden building, stood Frank Kingston, and before him, looking frightened and cowed, were the five Inner Councillors. In a second the rescuers saw that Kingston had got decidedly the better of the situation, for he stood there, every bit at his ease, twirling his glittering weapon easily between his fingers. He glanced round as he saw them appear.

"By Jove!" he drawled coolly. "You have been remarkably smart! I didn't expect you to appear for at least another half an hour. You see, I have been kept pretty busy here, otherwise I should have met you on the beach."

The rescue party stood still and literally gasped.

The Coronet Sails for Europe.

"You appear to be surprised," exclaimed Frank Kingston, looking at the amazed expressions on the newcomers' faces. "I have just been explaining to these five gentlemen how useless it is to count their chickens before they are hatched!"

The professor wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Upon my soul," he exclaimed—"upon my soul! We expected to find you in the enemy's hands, perhaps dead, and here you are, as cool as ever, giving them your mind! Dear me, Kingston, what does it mean?"

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"It means, professor, that these scoundrels were just a little too confident. I succeeded in turning the tables in the simplest manner possible."

Dolores was looking greatly relieved.

"I was expecting you to say that, Mr. Kingston," she smiled. "Everything is simple to you, no matter how difficult it would be to anybody else. As the professor says, we fully expected you to be either dead or on the point of execution. It is glorious to find you like this!"

"The gov'nor'd never let himself be under for long," murmured Fraser, as if to himself. "I felt sure as we'd find him safe an' sound."

The new-comers were looking at the Inner Councillors curiously. It was plain to see they were entirely defeated and impotent. Their chance of venting their venom on Kingston was gone, and they saw that the odds were now very much against them.

"Hang you!" snarled Don Sebastian, clenching his fists convulsively, "your usual luck has been the means of saving your life!"

"Luck!" interposed the prince, with a smile. "I am inclined to think there is no question of luck over this matter. Mr. Kingston is too careful and conscientious a worker to ever trust to luck."

"We had him as firm as a rock," cried Von Breezen furiously. "It was this fool Lyle who—"

The count completed his sentence, accompanied by several oaths, and Kingston turned sharply.

"Come," he said; "there is no reason why we should stay here and listen to this unseemly language. Well, I am very glad you have come, for I can now show you round the island. Fraser, I observe you have got a serviceable-looking revolver in your hand. Remain on guard here, and see that these men do not alter their position! You can leave them when you hear a whistle from me."

"Right, sir!" replied Fraser joyously.

The task which had been allotted to him was quite to his liking, for he had long wished for the opportunity to arise when he could tell his one-time superiors exactly what he thought of them. Besides that, he was particularly merry just now at having found his master safe and sound.

"You treat the matter as though it were an everyday occurrence," remarked Dolores, as she, Kingston, Polgrave, and the prince made their way back along the shady path. "Fraser arrived at the yacht in a great state of agitation, and informed us that you were in the enemy's hands."

"Fraser spoke the truth," replied Kingston, "for at the time I certainly was not in a position to dictate terms. The amiable intention of the prisoners, I may add, was to slowly burn me to death. Happily for myself, I was able to frustrate their little game."

"To burn you to death!" echoed Dolores, aghast. "How terrible! They are even worse than I supposed them to be, and their punishment in being exiled on this island is certainly none too severe."

"To be just, however," said Kingston, "I had better let you know that both Lyle and Formby were against the idea, and only agreed as they were in a minority."

"But you have not told us how you got the upper hand," cried the professor impatiently. "I am very anxious to know that, Kingston—very anxious, indeed!"

"It was simplicity itself, my dear professor. They made a grave mistake in thinking that a certain tenacious creeper would be of sufficient strength to hold me secure. I dare say it would have held most people tightly enough, but I happen to be possessed of rather abnormal strength."

And Kingston, in a languid voice, explained how he had succeeded in gaining his freedom, and how he had surprised the councillors on their return with the sticks which were to have set the wooden shed afire.

"The creeper," he concluded, "will stand a great strain to a certain point, and then snaps without the least trouble. It is a curious fact, but when I myself occupied this island I made a habit of testing my strength every now and again with this very twine. At one time I could not snap it, then, as the time went on, and I grew more muscular, I found it quite a simple task. So, even while I was being bound, I knew perfectly well that I could gain my freedom at any moment."

"And you simply waited your opportunity?" asked Dolores interestedly.

"Yes. It came when Lyle was left alone on guard. But really there is no reason why we should talk further on this subject. I have to show you round the island, so if you will follow me I will explain everything as I go along."

"Good," murmured the professor—"good!"

Kingston spent every minute of two hours taking his companions round the island. He showed them everything—the banyan-tree, the spot where Dolores had been landed by the French Government, and the peculiar cave in one of the cliff-faces which was totally submerged at high tide.

Finally he came to a halt under the banyan-tree, and

looked at his companions. All of them were feeling the heat, with the exception of Kingston, who seemed as cool as ever.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I have shown you all there is to be seen, and that, after all, amounts to very little. This island is for the most part merely rough ironstone, and it is a very lucky thing for the prisoners that they have at least a certain amount of vegetation. Without that it would be impossible to live here."

"Quite so," agreed the professor. "The place is exactly as you described it, and it is beyond my comprehension how you spent a whole eight years utterly alone. Upon my soul, it must have been a living death! But you are having your revenge, Kingston—you are certainly having your revenge."

"And dealing out justice at the same time," put in Dolores quietly. "When I remember what these men have been responsible for, their punishment in being exiled on this rock seem utterly inadequate. They have not even the horror of loneliness."

The Crown Prince lit a cigarette.

"Nevertheless," he remarked, "they will not be happy. Men of their stamp are essentially men of the world, and to be cooped up in an out-of-the-way place such as this must be particularly galling."

"You are quite right, your Highness," agreed Kingston. "Although to some men this exilement would be no hardship at all, to the Inner Councillors it is about as severe a punishment as I could possibly mete out. Now, as you have seen everything, there is nothing to prevent our returning to the Coronet."

"And then?" said the professor interrogatively.

"Then," replied Kingston quietly, "we set immediate sail for Balataria."

"For Balataria?" echoed Prince Xavier, in surprise. "Do you—you do you intend to take me home, then?"

own accord. But, oh dear, I forgot that we have to get aboard again!"

"I will order Tim to get the boat ready," replied Kingston, with a smile. "If I am not mistaken I can see him capering about on the deck yonder."

A few moments later they were standing at the water's edge.

"Luv a duck, sir!" cried Tim. "I ain't 'arf glad to see as you're all right. I thought as 'ow they'd go ashore an' find you'd bin killed. 'Ow did you do 'em, sir?"

"You will learn all about that, Tim, from Fraser. For the present you must be contented to know that everything is all right. You know where the folding boat is kept?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then get it out on to the water as quickly as possible. It won't take you more than a couple of minutes if you are quick."

Tim was quick, and five minutes later the Dart swung her bows round and headed for the reef. Fraser had turned up safe and sound, and was now at the wheel, feeling as light-hearted as he had ever done in his life. He had been fully convinced that his master's last hour had come, and it seemed as though Kingston had come back from the dead.

On the shore could be seen the figures of the five exiles. They stood in a group and watched the last sight of civilisation as it sped rapidly away. They realised now more than ever the tremendous power of their arch-enemy. And now, when they knew the identity of that enemy, they were utterly helpless to make use of their knowledge.

The submarine cleared the reef and sped onwards.

The King of Balataria—Off to London.

"Good heavens, it can't be true!"

"I am grieved to say, your Highness, that there is no shadow of doubt," replied Kingston gravely. "Your father

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"Yes, your Highness. As I have been instrumental in preventing your being kidnapped by the Brotherhood, I think it only right that I should see this business through. You say you have friends in the capital. Well, you can remain with them disguised until you yourself are king. Then, having supreme power, you can simply do as you wish. General Stolzenburg will be frustrated, for, knowing nothing of your presence, he can suspect nothing. It will then be an easy matter for you to have him placed under arrest."

The prince grasped Kingston's hand.

"It is useless for me to try and express my gratitude," he exclaimed. "At present I am in a very unfortunate position, and can do nothing, but as soon as I ascend to the throne—as soon as I have the power to do so—I will repay you for what you have done for me."

"Please do not talk of that," said Kingston. "You do not seem to realise that I have done this as much to defeat the ends of the Brotherhood as to help you. Of course, strictly speaking, the case is now at an end, but I could not possibly leave you in the lurch at this juncture. The least I can do is to escort you to your own kingdom."

Without waiting for the other to reply he turned and looked in the direction of the grove of trees. A peculiarly piercing whistle issued from between his lips, and a second later an answering whistle could be distinctly heard.

"Fraser will be here in a moment," he said quietly. "Perhaps we had better walk down to the submarine and get aboard. You will be glad to get to the yacht, Dolores, I should imagine. Walking about in wet clothes is scarcely very comfortable."

Dolores laughed.

"They are very nearly dry now, I think. We have been walking about so long in the sun that they have dried of their

died yesterday morning at ten o'clock, and you are now King of Balataria."

Zavier sat in his chair, looking straight before him without uttering a word. Although the death of his father had been expected for many months, now that it had actually happened the blow seemed a heavy one—more especially as the Crown Prince had been unable to be at his father's bedside during the last hours of life.

"Well," he exclaimed at last, a little sorrowfully, "there is no sense in giving way, is there? My father was an old man, and his death has been anticipated for a long while. We must travel at all speed for the capital and arrive there, so that I can take a last look on his face. Thank goodness, Kingston, we arrived as soon as this!"

Frank Kingston and the prince—or, rather, the king—were seated in a private room of a large hotel in one of the Balatarian ports, having arrived there the same morning. As they had driven from the docks Kingston had noticed that the town seemed to be in general mourning, but he said nothing to his companions.

They had not been in the hotel long, and now, whilst the professor and Dolores were taking a walk round, Kingston had learnt of the old monarch's death. His son was not a very emotional man, and although he felt the blow greatly he did not show many outward signs of grief. He was, of course, travelling with Kingston incognito.

"How far is the capital from here?" asked Kingston, crossing the room and unhooking a time-table from the wall.

"Monte Questo is no more than seventy miles distant," replied the other. "We can quite easily be there before evening—that is, of course, if you have any desire to accompany me farther."

"I will see this business through to the end," replied Kingston quietly. "When you are established as the King of

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Balataria, then I will return to the Coronet and set sail for England. It will be safest for you to remain in your present personality of an English tourist."

"But—"
"Only until you reach Monte Questo. Then you can go immediately to the chief of police, state your identity, and order the instant arrest of Stolzenburg and his fellow-conspirators. The whole thing will not occupy an hour's time, and, from what I can see and hear, more than half the populace will acclaim you enthusiastically as the rightful king. After all, the followers of General Stolzenburg are only half-hearted, and will rapidly drop their foolish ideas when Stolzenburg is placed under arrest."

"I only wish I could believe that," said the new monarch. "Ah, there is a train in little over an hour from now!" he added, laying the time-table down. "Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly!" replied Kingston. "Miss O'Brien and the professor will be in before long, but there will be nothing to prevent their immediate departure. There is nothing to pack, as we shall leave everything aboard the Coronet."

Very shortly afterwards Dolores and Professor Polgrave put in an appearance. They had heard the news, and were somewhat surprised to find all arrangements made. There was no time for Kingston to visit the Coronet, so he hastily scrawled a note and sent it by a boy. He merely told Morrison to wait there until he received further orders.

When the train left the station for the capital a certain amount of interest was taken in the party of English tourists. Although the prince's likeness was well known in Balataria, nobody would have thought this careless young man in the lounge suit to be their new king. Indeed, Kingston could not openly proclaim his friendship with Zavier, as that would bring the suspicions of the Brotherhood down upon him.

"This being so," explained Kingston, while they were in the train, "the very instant you become your own self you will be unable to recognise us again—either personally or by communication. So while we put up at your best hotel you will go to the chief of police and simply say that you are the king."

"I understand exactly," replied the prince. "There is no necessity for me to say where I have come from, and I have any amount of proofs that will satisfy the chief of police in a very few minutes."

The train they were travelling in was not nearly so luxurious as those in England, nor did it travel at anything like the speed of the British trains. The scenery, however, cannot be described as anything but magnificent. Balataria was only a small country, but it boasted some of the finest scenery in Europe, and Kingston, Dolores, and the professor enjoyed the journey immensely.

Monte Questo proved to be a fairly large town in a very prosperous condition. There seemed to be nothing lacking, and everything was of the most up-to-date order. The hotel they were driven to by taxicab from the station was a very palatial building, and Zavier could hardly prevent a slight air of pride taking possession of him as he drove through the capital.

Everywhere could be seen signs of mourning, and Kingston was more convinced than ever that once the treacherous ministry were thrown out of power the people would turn completely round, and be loyal to the new king.

"Now," he said briskly, when he and Zavier stood in one of the rooms of the suite which had been engaged, "we will get to business. If you will sit in this chair for a moment or two, the professor will rapidly cause your present expression to disappear and your natural one to take its place. He is at this moment preparing the hypodermic syringe in the adjoining room."

There was no time lost, and ten minutes afterwards King Zavier of Balataria stepped into a taxicab outside the hotel and ordered the driver to make straight for the police headquarters.

Meanwhile Kingston and his guests made a tour of the town and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. They had scarcely dressed for dinner on returning when the word was passed round that the Crown Prince had returned, and that General Stolzenburg and his villainous associates had been arrested for treason.

Kingston smiled quietly as he read the verification of this in an evening paper. He was not very well acquainted with the Balatarian language, but he knew sufficient to get the gist of the news.

"Well," he drawled quietly, smiling across the table at his companions, "there is nothing further to keep us in Monte Questo. It has been a flying visit, but now that the whole episode is over, I see no reason why we should remain."

"Do you think there is any necessity to leave immediately?" said the professor. "There are several scientific institutions I am anxious to visit now that I am here, and I can assure you you would be vastly interested as well as myself—vastly interested."

"Very well, professor; we will stay in Monte Questo for several days if you wish. There is nothing to prevent us that I can see. I have wired to Carson Gray, telling him we are here, but I do not think there is any necessity for our immediate return to London."

"Of course not," agreed Dolores. "I myself am very interested in the prince's welfare, and should like to see how the people take the sudden change before I leave. I can only—"

She was interrupted by a tap at the door, and a second later a waiter appeared, bearing an envelope on a salver. It was a telegram addressed to Kingston. He ripped the flap open and rapidly read the contents. Then he looked up at the others and smiled.

"I am afraid," he said, "I must return to London with the greatest possible expedition. It is very unfortunate under the circumstances."

"Upon my soul!" cried the professor. "Who is the telegram from, Kingston? This is most surprising! Is the news very important?"

Kingston passed the sheet of paper across the table. "If you read that," he said, "you will understand."

Dolores picked it up and read, in the Balatarian language: "Please come at once. Matter of gravest importance requires your attention. Will explain fully when we meet.—CARSON GRAY."

Dolores looked up. "Is there any necessity for you to go immediately?" she asked.

"Yes. I arranged with Gray before leaving that should anything in connection with the Brotherhood arise he was to communicate with me, using the words 'gravest importance.' By that I know he has heard of something unexpectedly important. I am afraid I must leave to-night by the overland mail. I can travel the whole distance from here to Calais by train, and that will be much quicker than the Coronet."

"And what about us?" inquired the professor blankly.

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