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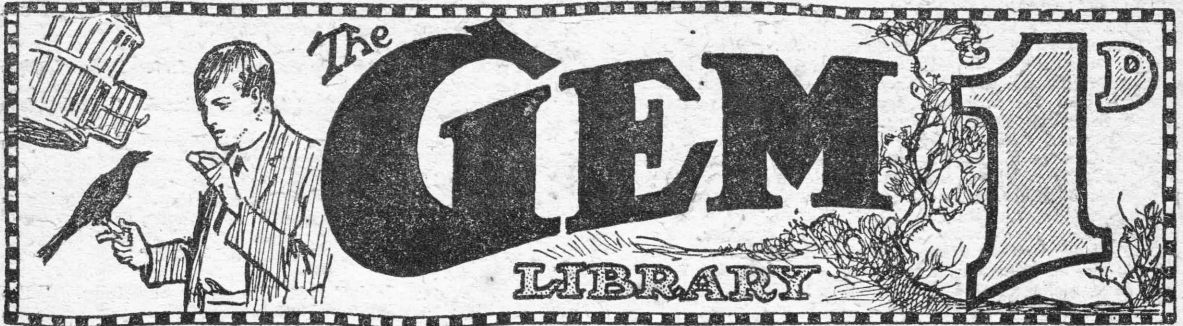
The **1^P POPULAR** No. **3** Vol. I



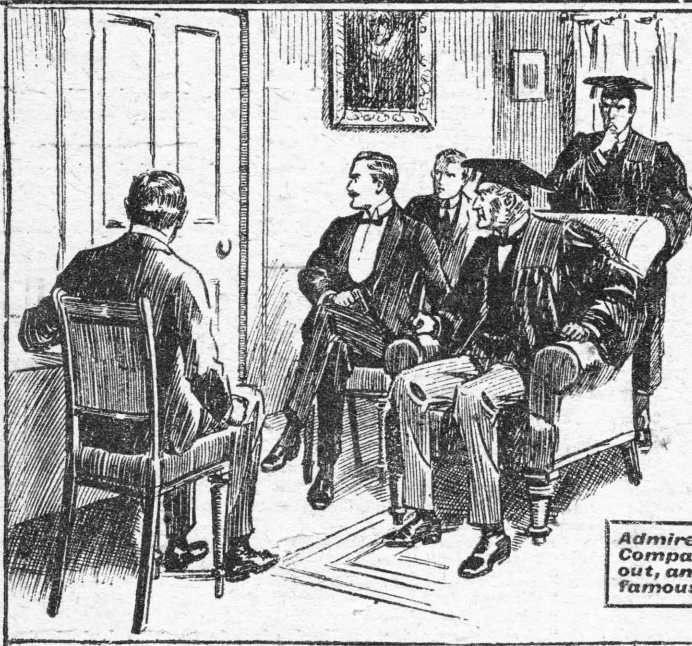
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the famous junior's early schooldays.—EDITOR.

CHAPTER 1. Quite Forgotten.

TOM MERRY tapped at the door of Bernard Glyn's study in the Shell passage in the School House. As there was no response, he turned the handle to enter.

The door did not open.

"Oh, blow!" murmured Tom Merry. "The silly ass has forgotten!"

He thumped on the door.

Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, came along the passage and joined Tom Merry. Anybody who had passed the Terrible Three at that moment would have glanced at them a second time. The Terrible Three were looking as spick and span as if they had just stepped out of a set of bandboxes. Their trousers were nicely creased, their boots were beautifully polished, their jackets were carefully brushed, their collars were almost aggressively white, and their neckties tied most elegantly. They carried three beautiful shiny toppers all ready to put on, and the polish on those toppers might have made even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, a little envious. It was evidently a very special occasion.

"Isn't he in?" asked Manners, as he saw that Tom Merry, was waiting outside Glyn's study.

"Somebody's in," said Tom Merry. "I can hear him moving."

"Why don't you go in then, fathead?"

"Because the door's locked, ass."

"Oh, biff on it!" said Monty Lowther.

"Thump! Kick! Bang!"

The combined assault of the Terrible Three elicited a reply at last from the locked study. The voice of Bernard Glyn, the junior from Liverpool, was heard, raised in tones of wrath.

"Go away!"

Thump! Bang!

"Go away! Go away! Buzz off! Scoot!"

"Open the door!"

"Can't! I'm busy!"

"But we've come!" roared Tom Merry indignantly.

"Well, go, then!"

"You ass!" shouted Monty Lowther through the keyhole.

"Open the door!"

"Rats!"

"It's time to go."

"Well, don't I keep on telling you to go?"

"You fathead!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Look here—"

"Open the door!"

"We're all ready!"

There was no reply from within the study this time. A faint whirring noise was heard, as of a machine that was starting in business on its own account, and that was all. The Terrible Three hammered on the door.

"The awful ass!" growled Manners. "He's on one of his rotten inventions again, and he's forgotten that he's asked us to go over to tea at Glyn House. He's forgotten all about the tea—and all about us!"

Next Wednesday:

"CAUGHT REDHANDED!" & "BIRDS OF PREY!"

"We'll remind him," grinned Monty Lowther. "Now, then, all together!"

Bang! Bang! Bang! BANG!

There was a crash inside the study, and a roar of wrath from the schoolboy inventor.

"Oh, you asses! You've made me drop the battery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! What's the wow, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form came along the passage with Jack Blake, also of the Fourth. Blake looked as neat and clean and fresh as the chums of the Shell. But all four of them faded into insignificance in the presence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a perfect picture, from the tips of his gleaming boots to his beautiful necktie and his glimmering monocle. The colours of D'Arcy's fancy waistcoat were as the colours of Joseph's coat; and Monty Lowther, as he turned and looked at him, put his hands over his eyes as if dazzled.

Arthur Augustus stared at him through his eyeglass.

"What's the mattah with you, Lowtah?"

"Oh, don't!" murmured Lowther. "You shouldn't spring yourself on a chap all of a sudden, Gussy! It's too much!"

"Weally, Lowtah, you ass——"

"Isn't Glyn ready?" asked Blake.

"No; the ass has locked himself in," growled Manners. "He's working on one of his rotten inventions, and he's forgotten the appointment."

"Bang on the door!"

"All together!" said Tom Merry.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

There was no answer from within the study. Bernard Glyn was busy picking up the fragments of his shattered battery. It was only too evident that the schoolboy inventor had forgotten the important business that was "on" that afternoon. Bernard Glyn was a most enthusiastic inventor, and his inventions were fearful and wonderful. Sometimes they worked, and sometimes they didn't, but they always made the study in a terrible state of untidiness and smelliness, and Glyn's study-mates were frequently driven to doing their work in the Form-room or in some other fellow's study. When he was working upon an invention, Bernard Glyn forgot time and space, and many a time Kangaroo, of the Shell, had dragged him by main force out of the study and rushed him down to lessons, to save him from punishment.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Harry Noble, otherwise Kangaroo, came along the passage, as resplendent in his attire as the other fellows.

"Trying to bust my study door in?" he asked.

"Glyn won't open it," howled Monty Lowther. "The silly ass is working on some rot, and he's forgotten that he's taking us to tea at Glyn House this afternoon."

The Cornstalk junior chuckled.

"All serene," he said. "I've got a key!"

"Good egg!"

Kangaroo inserted a key into the lock, and knocked out the key that was inside. Then he unlocked the door.

There was an exclamation from within, and the schoolboy inventor rushed to the door to jam his foot against it. In an instant, however, the whole crowd of juniors outside had thrown their weight upon the door, and it flew open. Bernard Glyn was hurled back, and he crashed bodily into the study table. The table was loaded with the paraphernalia of the schoolboy inventor. The table went flying, and Bernard Glyn rolled on the floor in the midst of a crashing and smashing assortment of wet batteries and dry batteries, coils of insulated wire, electric bells and receivers, and tools of all kinds. The havoc was terrific.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Glyn, old man, you'll smash up your property if you play those tricks."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo!" gasped Bernard Glyn.

"Do it again!" said Kangaroo cheerfully. "Is it a gymnastic exercise, or a conjuring performance, Bery, old man?"

Bernard Glyn sat up in the midst of the wreckage. He was

smothered with water and sal-ammoniac from the wet batteries, and a coil of wire was clinging round his neck.

"Oh, you asses! You silly jossers! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You look like a silly jossah at the pwesent moment, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, regarding the schoolboy inventor through his famous monocle. "You are hardly in a fit state to come to tea, Glyn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kangaroo helped his study mate to his feet. Bernard Glyn glared at the juniors.

"You—you frightful asses!" he exclaimed. "Look what you've done!"

"We didn't do it, deah boy. You did it yourself. I saw you distinctly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was making my telephone," roared Glyn. "I'm going to connect up the junior studies with a telephone, and now——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses, what is there to cackle at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All your own fault," said Kangaroo cheerfully. "It's past the time to start for Glyn House. Have you forgotten that you're going to take us to tea?"

Glyn started.

"My hat! I'd forgotten all about it!" he exclaimed.

"Excuse me, you chaps. I shall have to change——"

"Bai Jove! You will!"

"And wash," grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I won't keep you long," said Glyn, recovering his good humour. "Wait for me here. You can pick up these things while you're waiting."

"Right-ho!"

And Bernard Glyn rushed away to the Shell dormitory, to clean himself and change his clothes. The juniors sat round the end study, waiting for him, and the more industrious of them set the table upon its legs again, and picked up the fallen articles from the floor.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unwelcome Guest.

MELLISH, of the Fourth, came along the Shell passage, and looked into the end study. He was met by a general stare.

Mellish, of the Fourth, was not beloved by Tom Merry & Co. Mellish was the sneak of the School House, and he was especially in bad odour lately. He had narrowly escaped being expelled from St. Jim's, and his conduct had not been forgotten. As he looked into Glyn's study the juniors there frowned, and D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and scanned Mellish as if he had been some strange animal.

Mellish looked round the study.

"Glyn here?" he said.

"No!" snapped Kangaroo.

"Where is he?"

"Weally, Mellish——"

"You fellows going to Glyn's place to tea?" asked Mellish, with a curious glance at the gathering of juniors.

"I don't see that it's any of your bizney," said Jack Blake.

"But we are, certainly."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! I'm coming too!"

There was a general exclamation of surprise.

"What!"

"You?"

"Wats?"

Mellish nodded coolly.

"Yes, I," he said, "I'm coming."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "You don't mean to say that Glyn has asked you?"

"Oh, no! He hasn't asked me."

"You're coming without his asking you, do you mean?"

"Exactly."

"Weally, you wottah! We will see what Glyn says about that."

"Good!" said Mellish, seating himself upon a corner of the table. "Certainly, we'll see what Glyn says about it; but I'm coming, whatever he says."

"Wats!"

"There's a house-party at Glyn House," said Mellish. "Glyn's pater being a millionaire, he does you jolly well when you go there. I hear that there's champagne flowing, and all kinds of things."

"There won't be any champagne for us, you owl!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, no! Not champagne," said Mellish, laughing. "But lots of other things, and I'm going to have a good time."

"Bosh!"

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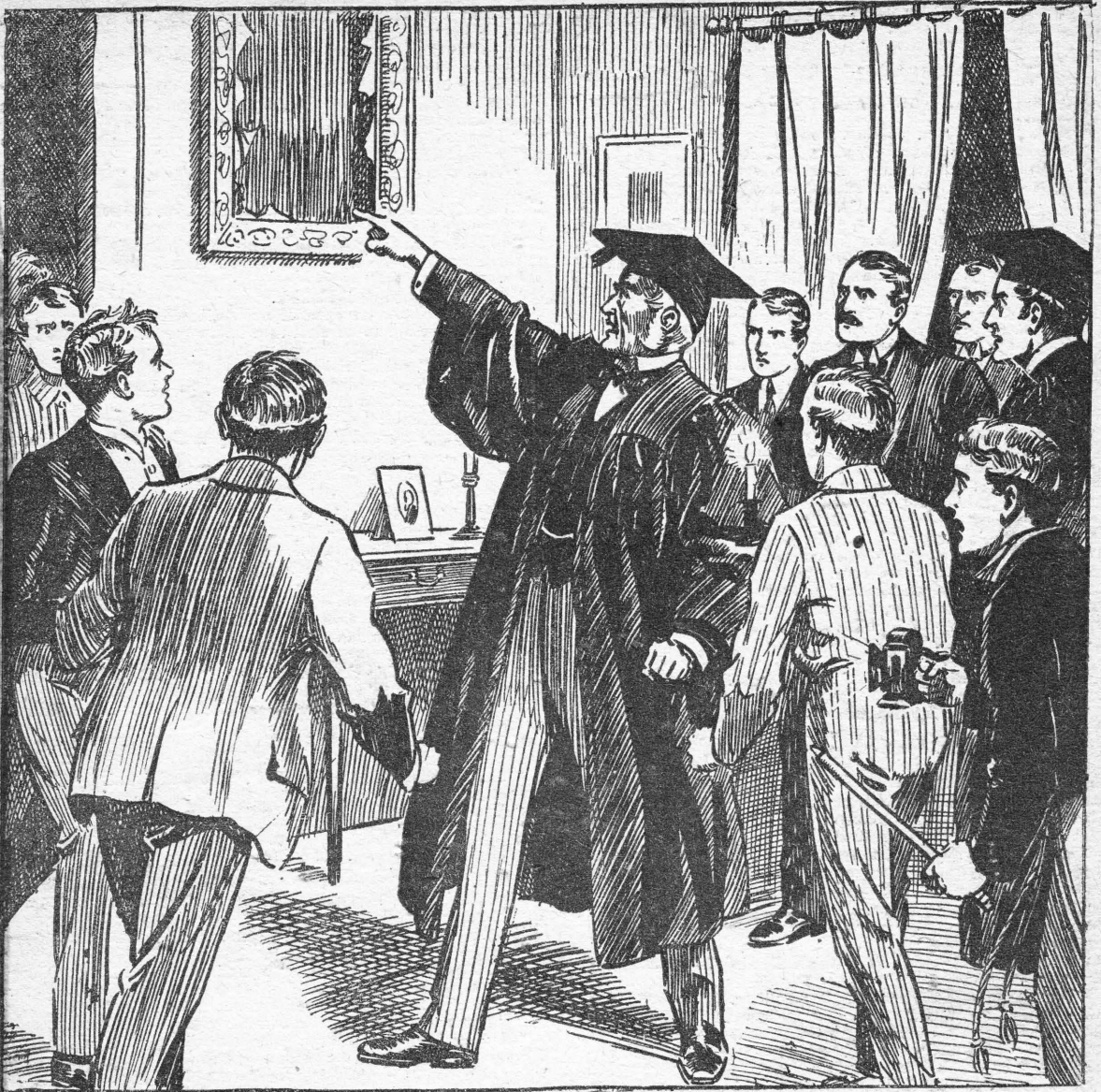
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The Head pointed. His voice failed him. "Look!" he gasped. "Look!" There was a cry of amazement. The picture-frame was empty. "Gone!" gasped the Head. "My picture—the villain has succeeded after all—my Rembrandt—gone!" (See Chapter 15.)

"You're not coming."

"Look here, Mellish," said Tom Merry, "I don't want to have to be rude, but your company isn't welcome. You and Crooke and Levison have got yourselves into bad odour, and we don't want to talk to you. You pretty nearly ruined Lumley-Lumley among you, and it will take you some time to live it down. You ought to have tact enough to keep yourself to yourself for a bit. Buzz off!"

Mellish did not move.

"You'd better go," said Kangaroo, with a gleam in his eyes.

"This is my study, Mellish, and I don't want a worm of your kind in it."

"Oh, draw it mild!" yawned Mellish. "As I'm going with Glyn I may as well wait here for him as well as anywhere else."

"You're not going with Glyn!" roared the Cornstalk.

"But I tell you I am."

"And I tell you you're not."

"Yaas, wathah! We wefuse to cwedit your statement, Mellish, you wascal!"

The cad of the Fourth shrugged his shoulders.

"Hallo! Here's Glyn!" said Tom Merry. "Glyn, come here. Mellish says he's coming to tea at Glyn House. Is it true?"

Bernard Glyn shook his head most emphatically.

"Oh dear no!" he exclaimed. "I'd as soon take Crooke or Levison, and as soon take Herries' bulldog as either."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wemarked that he was not speakin' the twuth," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard you as an unweliable wotah, Mellish. Now, if you're weady, deah boys—"

"All ready!" said Manners.

"I'm coming, Glyn, if you don't object," said Mellish.

"But I do object," said the schoolboy inventor promptly. "I bar you, Mellish. You can go and eat coke."

"But your pater—"

"My pater wouldn't like me to take a worm like you."

"Wathah not!"

"My cousin—"

"Oh, blow your cousin! Come on, you chaps."

"My cousin, Captain Mellish—"

"Captain rats! Come on!"

The invited party crowded out into the passage. Mellish followed them, with an unpleasant grin upon his face.

"Glyn," he exclaimed, "I'm really coming, you know!"

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Bernard Glyn faced round in the passage, and shook his fist at the cad of the Fourth.

"Buzz off!" he roared. "I'm not taking you. I'm fed up with you. I don't want you. I won't have you. Scoot!" Mellish laughed.

"My cousin's staying at your place on a visit to your father," he said.

"Bosh!" said Glyn.

"But he is, you know. Captain Mellish——"

"Captain of a Thames barge!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Captain in the Boobywallah Fusiliers," said Mellish, "and he's on a visit to Glyn House. I want to see him."

"Well, I daresay he doesn't want to see you," said Glyn. "Jolly queer taste if he did. You may have a decent relation, though one wouldn't think it to look at you. You're jolly well not coming with us. Buzz off!"

"But I've got a letter——"

"You'll get a thick ear if you bother me any more."

"I've got a——"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Mellish will keep us talking all day. He's as bad as Gussy when Gussy gets fairly going."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Look here," said Mellish, "I tell you I've got——"

But Tom Merry & Co. dashed down the passage at a run, and Mellish was left talking to the desert air.

The juniors were already late for starting, and they had no time to waste. They crossed the quadrangle at a run, heedless of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's pathetic appeals to them to slacken speed.

"Pway don't huvway like this, deah boys!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "We shall make our boots and twousahs dustay by the time we awwive."

"Hurry up!" roared Monty Lowther, clapping the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder, so suddenly that Arthur Augustus staggered forward and fell on his knees.

"Ow! Bai Jove!"

"Hurry up!"

"You frightful ass! You've wuined the knees of my twousahs!"

"Hurry up!" yelled Lowther excitedly.

Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet and rushed at Monty Lowther.

Lowther dashed towards the gates, and D'Arcy flew after him. Out into the road they went at top speed, and the rest of the party, laughing, hurried after them.

Arthur Augustus's boots were indeed dusty by the time he remembered himself and slackened speed.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped, as the other fellows came up. "Bai Jove! You will have to lend me a bwush as soon as we awwive, before I pwsent myself to your sistah and patah, Glyn!"

"I'll turn the garden-hose on you, if you like," said Glyn cheerfully.

"Weally, Glyn——"

"Blessed if that ass Mellish isn't following us!" exclaimed Blake, looking back.

The juniors all glanced over their shoulders.

Mellish of the Fourth was sauntering down the road after them. They hurried on, and turned into the little lane that led to the great gates of Glyn House.

Mellish turned into the lane after them.

"Bai Jove! He's weally comin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Glyn stopped in the gateway for Percy Mellish to come up. He waited for the cad of the Fourth, with a grim expression upon his face.

Mellish strolled up easily.

"Look here!" exclaimed Glyn. "I'm fed up with this rot! You——"

"I've come," said Mellish cheerfully. "By the way, I forgot to mention that I had an invitation from your father——"

"My father?" exclaimed Glyn, taken aback.

"Yes," said Mellish, chuckling. "Your pater sent me a note this afternoon. He said he'd just learned that Captain Mellish had a cousin at St. Jim's, so he wrote to ask me to come over with you and the others."

Bernard Glyn looked at him very dubiously.

"I'd like to see that note," he said curtly.

Mellish felt in his pocket and produced the letter.

Bernard Glyn looked at it. For once, at all events, the cad of the Fourth had spoken the truth. The letter was in Mr. Glyn's hand, and was addressed to Mellish of the Fourth, and it ran:

"Captain Mellish, my guest, tells me that you are his cousin, and he would like to see you while he is down here. I shall be glad if you will come over with my son this afternoon, and at any other time when you feel inclined."

Glyn handed the letter back to Mellish. His father, of course, did not know anything about him personally. To the millionaire Percy Mellish was simply a St. Jim's junior. Glyn had never mentioned him, especially at home.

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Mellish watched the schoolboy inventor's face with a covert grin.

Glyn attempted to be hospitable, though it was very difficult indeed to be polite to Percy Mellish.

"Come in, then," he said. "If you'd shown me this letter before it would have been all right. I didn't know my pater had asked you."

"I wanted to show you the letter, but you wouldn't look at it," said Mellish.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Glyn, with an effort. "Come on!"

Mellish nodded, and walked in with Glyn. They rejoined Tom Merry & Co., who regarded Mellish with disfavour.

Glyn explained awkwardly.

"It's true about Mellish having a relation in the house-party here," he said. "My pater's asked him over. He's welcome, of course."

"Thanks!" drawled Mellish.

"Oh, that alters the case, of course," said Arthur Augustus. "A chap is bound to be civil to a fellow guest. It's all wight, Mellish!"

"Go hon!" said Mellish.

"Try not to be a disagreeable cad, you know, and we shall get on better," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, watah!"

Mellish laughed, and they walked up to the house together.

CHAPTER 3.

"X"

"HALLO! Something's up!" Bernard Glyn uttered that exclamation as they entered the wide portico of Glyn House.

It was evident that "something" was "up."

The house was in confusion.

Mr. Glyn's voice could be heard from the library in disturbed tones. Startled servants were standing about whispering, and some of the guests were to be seen all looking very concerned and surprised.

"What on earth's the matter?" Glyn exclaimed. "Somebody ill, I wonder?"

He caught hold of the butler as that ponderous gentleman crossed the hall.

"Jenkins, what's up?"

Mr. Jenkins stopped.

"Oh, it's you, Master Bernard!" he exclaimed. "There's been a robbery!"

"A what!"

"A robbery!"

"My hat!"

"Inspector Skeat's in the library with your father, Master Bernard. Your father's very much upset," said Mr. Jenkins. "It's most amazin'. The Golden Mandarin has been took!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Jenkins passed on, and Glyn turned to his companions in dismay.

"That's rotten!" he said. "Beastly awkward for a robbery to happen now, just when we've come to tea, too. The pater will be cut up if they don't get that statuette back."

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry.

"A statuette, a Chinese mandarin made in solid gold," said Glyn. "It's worth heaps of money, and was a great curiosity. The pater has been offered three thousand quid for it. A nice little haul for the rotter, whoever he is. Rotten thing to happen when there are people staying in the house, too. Hullo! Here's the inspector!"

Inspector Skeat, of Rylcombe, came out of the library looking a little flushed and annoyed. It was evident that he had not been pleased with his interview with Mr. Glyn.

The inspector passed out, and Bernard Glyn looked into the library. Mr. Glyn was there, pacing up and down the room in a state of considerable agitation.

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"Hallo, dad!"

"Oh, is that you, Bernard?" said Mr. Glyn, stopping, and looking at his son. "Have you heard what has happened?"

Glyn nodded.

"The inspector is an ass!" said Mr. Glyn. "What do you think he has proposed to me? To have the rooms of my guests searched. The ass!"

"That would be rather thick, dad!"

"Yes. As if I could think of such a thing. The ass!" said Mr. Glyn, with great candour. "He will have to get the statuette back, though. I would not lose it for twice its value. I shall send for a detective from London. These country police—"

"How did it go, dad, last night?"

"No; to-day. I usually keep it on my desk, here, as you know, and it was gone when I came in an hour ago. Where, I don't know. But I found this here."

The millionaire jerked his hand towards the table. A small card was lying there, with an X inscribed upon it in red ink. There was nothing else upon the card, and Bernard Glyn glanced at it in amazement.

"What on earth does that mean, pater?"

"It was left by the thief," said Mr. Glyn irritably. "He must have come in from the grounds; the French windows have been open nearly all day."

"My hat!" said the junior. "It's rather a new dodge for a thief to leave his card, isn't it?"

The millionaire made an angry gesture.

"You have never heard of him then, Bernard?"

"I? What do you mean, dad?"

"No; of course, you do not read the newspapers," said his father. "There is a clever thief who has committed many robberies in wealthy houses, both in London and the country, and on each occasion a card of that kind has been left in the place of the article stolen. The man is a very clever rascal, and as cool as an iceberg. The police have records of a dozen robberies in which the same thing has occurred, and there has never been a clue to the thief. He chooses occasions when a house is full of guests; perhaps in order to introduce himself in some cunning disguise. Some of my guests have brought their own servants with them, and it would be quite easy for a man, dressed as a valet or groom, to come and go unnoticed. Mr. Skeat is an ass, he doesn't believe in the mysterious thief who signs himself 'X.' I've told him all I know on the subject, but he doesn't take any stock of it, as he says. This is an ordinary theft to him. But I am going to get the Golden Mandarin back somehow. I—"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in!" rapped out the millionaire.

The door opened, and a young man entered. He was a tall, well-built fellow, with a soldierly air, and a handsome, clear-cut face, with the tan of a tropical sun in his cheeks.

"Ah, Captain Mellish," said Mr. Glyn, with a more agreeable look. It was evident that the millionaire liked his guest.

"Excuse me," said the captain, "I was anxious to know if you have made any progress, and as I saw the inspector go—"

Mr. Glyn shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"No; the inspector is an ass!" he said.

The captain smiled.

"Then he holds out no hope of your recovering the statuette," he said.

"Oh, yes; he thinks he can find it. I know he cannot. I am going to send for a detective from London."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Most decidedly. I would rather have your opinion on the case, captain, than that of a dozen policemen."

"Thank you. I should suggest that a search is made in the house."

"Why, that is what Mr. Skeat suggested."

"I must say that I agree with him. I think your guests would prefer that their rooms, and those of their servants, should be searched," said the captain, "otherwise—"

"Impossible."

"But, my dear sir—"

"I should never dream of anything of the sort. Besides, I know whom the thief is."

"Really!"

"It is the rascal who signs himself 'X.' Look at that card." The captain glanced at the card on the table.

"Begad!" he exclaimed. "So you've had a visit from X. A cool beggar, by jove! I have heard that when he stole Lord Westwood's bonds, he sent a telegram to say that he was going to take them on a certain date, and by jove, he did! They had two detectives and several fellows watching for him, and he took them all the same. Not much use the police tackling a fellow of that kind!"

"Then you think I shall not get my statuette back, captain?" Captain Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope you will, sir," he said, in a tone that implied very plainly his belief that he did not think so.

There was a knock at the door again. Inspector Skeat came in. The stout inspector held a telegram in his plump hands, and his usually ruddy face was perfectly crimson with rage. He held up the telegram, and tried to speak, but he was almost stuttering with fury, and the words did not come.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Glyn testily.

"This—this telegram!" gasped the inspector, "I—I—"

"What about it?"

"It was addressed to me here, and handed to me just as I was leaving," howled the inspector. "It was despatched from London, an hour ago!"

"Well?"

"Read it!"

Mr. Glyn took the telegram and read it. He uttered an exclamation, or rather a shout, and passed it to the captain. The captain whistled. Bernard Glyn took the telegram, and gave quite a yell as he looked at it. For this is how the telegram read:

"Inspector Skeat, Glyn House, Rylcombe. Go it!—X."

"My hat!" murmured Bernard Glyn. "The cool beggar!"

"Do you see?" exclaimed the inspector. "That telegram was sent an hour ago; the villain knew that I should be sent for. He must have sent that wire immediately he got back to London with his plunder. It's sent from Charing-Cross Post-office. Imagine it—wiring to me—the thief! Telling me to go it. The impudence! The—the—"

Words failed the inspector in his indignation.

"I suppose you believe now that it was X who stole the statuette?" said Mr. Glyn tartly.

"Yes, yes; I suppose so. It is extraordinary. He must have entered the house in some sort of disguise," exclaimed the inspector. "I never heard of such coolness, such impudence. The scoundrel!"

"He does seem to be a cool hand," said Captain Mellish.

"But surely this telegram will give you a clue, inspector. You can find out all the passengers who left for London to-day; you can't have a crowd of passengers at a little station like Rylcombe."

The inspector shook his head.

"I shall inquire," he said. "But he may have gone by Wayland Junction, there are plenty of passengers at that station, or he might have walked to Abbotsford."

"An inquiry at Charing-Cross Post-office—"

"Depend upon it he was in some disguise when he sent the wire. But I shall certainly communicate with Scotland Yard at once about it."

And the inspector, picking up the telegram, stalked out.

Bernard Glyn rejoined his chums.

Tom Merry and Co. listened with the keenest interest and amazement to what he had to tell them.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "The chap's a cool beggar! The inspector was looking like a ruffled turkey. No wonder."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we may as well have tea, all the same," said Glyn philosophically. "Edith's got us a ripping feed ready, as she said she would; it's in the gun-room. Come on!"

"Hallo, Cecil!" exclaimed Mellish, as his cousin came out of the library.

Captain Mellish glanced at the Fourth-Former.

"Percy! So here you are!"

The handsome captain shook hands with the Fourth-Former of St. Jim's. Mellish, with an air of very great pride, introduced his companions to the captain. It was evident that Mellish was very pleased to have so creditable a relation to present to the St. Jim's fellows. Tom Merry and Co. were surprised; they would never have dreamed that the big, handsome captain, with his sunburnt face and pleasant manners, was a relative of the sneak of the Fourth. Captain Mellish made a very agreeable impression upon all of them.

"Will you come and feed with us, Cecil?" asked Mellish. "The fellows would all like it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, do," said Bernard Glyn. "You can tell us all about that chap X, too."

The captain nodded and smiled.

"Nothing I would like better," he exclaimed. "I should like to come over to the school and see your quarters, too, Percy."

"Yes, rather," said Mellish, seeming to grow an inch or two taller at the prospect of showing his handsome cousin round St. Jim's, before all the fellows. "I should be jolly glad to take you round the school, and we'll have a study feed, too."

"Good!" said the captain.

"This way," said Bernard Glyn.

And having paid their respects to Mr. Glyn, the juniors followed Bernard to the gun-room, where Glyn's sister had prepared a "feed" that was calculated to delight the heart of any schoolboy.

CHAPTER 4.
Mellish's Cousin.

EDITH GLYN greeted the juniors of St. Jim's with a sweet smile. Glyn's sister was a very charming girl of twenty-five. Arthur Augustus, once upon a time, had been in love with Miss Glyn, and had even gone to the length of proposing to her, a fact which his chums never allowed him to forget. Miss Glyn was engaged now, to a gentleman who had been a temporary Housemaster at St. Jim's, and so D'Arcy's dream was over in that direction, but he did not mind. D'Arcy was rather given to having affairs of the heart, which were dreadfully serious while they lasted, but which fortunately did not last long.

Edith, having seen that the boys had all they wanted, left them to themselves, very tactfully on her part. Captain Mellish sat down to the table with the juniors, in the highest good-humour. The juniors were very much taken with him. The more they saw of him, the more they were amazed that he should be a relation of Mellish. Indeed, it made them think more highly of Mellish, to discover that he had such a really ripping cousin, as Blake remarked sotto voce to Tom Merry.

The captain was full of good humour, and full of good stories. He told the juniors stories of India, where he had commanded a corps of irregulars, the Boodywallah Fusiliers. He had been in action, and the boys listened breathlessly to a story of a fight with the Afridis in a frontier pass.

The captain was very much interested, too, in St. Jim's. He talked football, and showed that he knew all about the game.

"Bai jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy exclaimed. "If you'd come o'ah to St. Jim's early, sir, we could give you a game, if you'd play with juniahs, sir."

"Good!" exclaimed Captain Mellish. "Nothing I'd like better. I suppose you are a great footballer, Percy."

Percy Mellish coloured uncomfortably.

Mellish was a slacker of the first water, and he hated cricket and football and every other healthy game with the deadliest of hatreds.

"Well, I play," he stammered.

"In the Form eleven, eh?" said his cousin.

"N-not exactly," stammered Mellish.

Blake chuckled at the idea of Mellish being in the Form eleven. Mellish would have been declined as a recruit by an eleven in the Second Form, let alone the Fourth. The captain glanced at Blake, and Blake changed his chuckle into a cough, and took a hasty bite at a jam-tart.

Arthur Augustus patted him on the back.

"Gone down the w'ong way, deah boy?" he asked sympathetically.

"Ow! No, you ass!" gurgled Blake. "Leave off punching me!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Groo-hoo!"

Mellish grinned. The captain changed the topic; perhaps he was keen enough to see that feeling was not so cordial between his cousin and the other fellows as it might have been.

"Well, I hope I shall see you play, Percy, when I come over," he said. "By gad, it will be like old times to be among you young fellows! I'm down here for a week, and I hope your father will have recovered his statuette before I go, Glyn."

That brought the talk round to the subject of "X," a topic which was full of the keenest interest to the juniors.

"I don't suppose it will be ever seen again," said Glyn. "It stands to reason the rascal will melt it down for the gold, though it will lose a lot of its value if he does. It was a jolly valuable thing—the eyes were diamonds, you know, and worth a lot of tin. I wonder——" He paused.

"Well, what do you wonder?" said Tom Merry.

"I was thinking that the thief might have had a go at St. Jim's, if he had stayed in the neighbourhood," said Bernard Glyn. "There's a lot of loot at the school, for a chap who knew how to get at it. You remember we've had burglars after the plate. And there's the Head's Rembrandt, too—what a haul for the bouncer if he could get at it."

"Genuine Rembrandt!" said the captain, with interest. "I'm a bit of a connoisseur in pictures; I should like to see that."

"Yes, genuine enough," said Glyn. "You fellows know the picture—it hangs opposite the Head's writing-table in his study."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Thing that looks like a smudge, you mean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it does look rather smudgy," said Glyn, "but I know it's frightfully valuable. They sold one of Rembrandt's pictures the other day for a hundred thousand quid."

"Bai Jove!"

"This is only a little one, but it's supposed to be an extra special good specimen," said Glyn. "I know the Head could sell it for a thousand pounds if he liked. An American collector once offered him a big sum—I don't know how much, but

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the fellows said it was thousands and thousands of dollars. Stolen pictures can be sold in America—and if X raided that daub—I mean picture——"

"What a chance for X, if he knew!" said Tom Merry.

"He probably does know," said the captain. "From what I've heard of the man, he seems to know everything that's worth stealing, and that's in a handy form to be taken away. As he has honoured this neighbourhood with a visit, your Headmaster would do very well to put his picture in a safe place."

Glyn laughed.

"Oh, he wouldn't do that!" he said. "He keeps it where he can see it. He looks up from his table and gloats over it, you know. Chaps have seen him standing in front of that picture for half an hour at a time looking at it—blessed if I know what for!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But really it would be only right to give him a warning," said the captain thoughtfully. "I've a good mind to walk over to the school with you lads and speak to him about it—after what's happened here."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We'll show you round the school, anyway."

The captain held to his idea. After tea, when the party left Glyn House, the handsome captain walked home with them to the school. Tom Merry & Co. felt very distinguished as they walked in at the gates of St. Jim's with the captain. Fellows looked at them, and wondered who their friend was; and Mellish swanked considerably. When the fellows learned that the captain was Mellish's cousin, they showed an astonishment that was not very complimentary to Mellish.

Captain Mellish strolled round the quadrangle with the juniors, and looked in at the gym, and walked round the playing fields. The Sixth eleven were just finishing a match with the Fifth, and the captain paused to look on, and he cheered as loudly as anybody when Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, kicked the winning goal.

"Goal! Bravo!" shouted the captain.

And Tom Merry murmured admiringly:

"He knew that was going to be a goal before it went in; he knows footer, my infants! Where did Mellish dig up a cousin like that?"

And when Captain Mellish left the juniors, to call upon the Head, he left them singing his praises right and left. And Mellish, of the Fourth, came in for a very unusual amount of attention. Tom Merry, after a mental struggle on the subject, came up to Mellish, and clapped him on the shoulder in a very unusually friendly way.

"Mellish, old man!" he said.

Mellish grinned; it was the first time Tom Merry had ever called him "old man."

"Hallo!" he said.

"We're thinking of making up a match on Saturday afternoon, and getting the captain to play," said Tom Merry. "He said he would."

"Well?"

"Well, it's only fair that you should be in the team," said Tom Merry, with an effort. "Look here, if you like to put in some practice between now and Saturday, we'll play you."

Mellish nodded.

"Right!" he said. "I'll be glad! Only don't practise me to death."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

And he started Mellish at once with some shooting practice in the common-room, as it was too dusky to play outside. And Mellish kicked in a way that showed that what he did not know about football would have filled whole libraries to overflowing.

CHAPTER 5.

The Captain's Warning.

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, greeted Captain Mellish very pleasantly. Mr. Raiton was in the study with the Head when Captain Mellish presented himself, and introduced himself in a frank and engaging manner which made a very favourable impression upon both masters. The Head of St. Jim's received, frequently enough, visits from relations of the boys, and the interviews were not always enjoyable. Anxious mothers who feared that there might be a draught in the Form-room, and wondered whether there ought to be fires in the dormitories of a night, bothered the Head considerably when they came, though he had cultivated a manner of urbane patience that was proof against all attacks. But Captain Mellish was very agreeable, and the Head was glad to see him—especially when the captain remarked that he had looked in to do him a service.

"Your Rembrandt, I suppose?" Captain Mellish remarked, with a nod towards the picture facing the Head's desk.

Dr. Holmes's face lighted up.

"He was an amateur in art, and he would talk pictures by the hour, and he was always pleased when a visitor observed his genuine Rembrandt."

"Yes," he said. "You recognise it?"

The captain smiled.

"I do not pretend to be a judge," he said, standing before the picture and gazing at it with half-closed eyes, "but I should certainly say that it is a splendid work. And it is the genuine thing?"

"Undoubtedly. It was bought by my grandfather for a ridiculous sum—seventy guineas, I think," said the Head. "It belongs to the period after the painting of the 'Night Watch.'"

"Yes. I have seen that in the Rijks Museum, at Amsterdam," said the captain. "There are some of the same wonderful colour effects in this picture. Is not this rather an exposed place for such a valuable work? That picture would sell on the Continent or in the United States for some thousands of pounds, doctor."

"If it were stolen, do you mean?" asked Mr. Railton.

The captain nodded.

"But it could be reclaimed, surely!" said the Head.

"Not from a collector, I imagine," said the captain. "If you heard of it in a collection, my dear sir, and claimed it, you would be fought tooth and nail before they would give it up. It would be averred that the picture you had possessed was a copy, you see. Doubtless, the purchaser would believe so, if he bought it in good faith. If it were so easy to recover stolen pictures, even when they are traced, they would not be worth the trouble of stealing. But they are—as witness the recent case of 'La Gioconda.'"

"True!" said Mr. Railton.

"But the picture is safe here," said the Head.

"Under ordinary circumstances, I suppose so," said the captain. "But, as a matter of fact, that picture is what I came to speak to you about."

"You do not wish to purchase it?" said the Head, with a smile.

"By Jove, I should like to," said the captain, "but that is not what I was thinking of! I am staying with Mr. Glyn, the father of one of your boys, and there has been a robbery at Glyn House. You have heard of the famous cracksmen who is known to the police as 'X'?"

"Who has not?" said the Head, with a smile. "The newspapers make a great deal of him when there is a scarcity of news."

"Well, the robbery at Glyn House was committed by 'X' said the captain. "The fellow actually had the impertinence to send a wire to Inspector Skeat, from London, immediately after the robbery. He must have gone straight back to town and sent the telegram immediately on stepping out of the train."

"Bless my soul! What impudence!"

"So I came over, really, to warn you to look after your Rembrandt," said the captain. "I heard of it from Bernard Glyn."

"Thank you very much," said the Head gratefully. "But if the rascal has left the neighbourhood, as appears from his telegram—"

The captain shook his head wisely.

"I have my own theory about that," he said. "It was no use stating it to Inspector Skeat; he is not the man to welcome an opinion from an outsider. But, as a matter of fact, there are many cribs, as the cracksmen would call them, in this neighbourhood quite as well worth cracking as Glyn House. It occurs to me that he has returned to London and sent that telegram, with the intention of coming back to the vicinity and perpetrating another robbery. The telegram would throw the police off their guard, as it gives the impression that the man is far away. What do you think of that for a theory?"

"Bless my soul," said the Head, "it is quite possible!"

"Or the wire might have been sent by an accomplice in London, the rascal himself remaining in this vicinity all the time," Mr. Railton remarked.

"Quite possible!" said the captain.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "We have twice had attempted burglaries at the school. I truly hope nothing of the kind will be repeated."

"A reason why you should be careful," said Captain Mellish.

"Quite so. But every precaution is taken."

"You have burglar alarms?" asked the captain.

"Well, no. But since the last attempt at burglary, I have had a burglar-proof shutter put up at my window here, and it is always closed of a night," said the Head. "The study door is also closed with a Yale lock. It would not be easy for the cracksmen to get into the study, even if he came here."

"He is a cool hand," said the captain, with a shake of the head. "However, you certainly seem to have made the room pretty safe. I see that you keep your safe in this room."

"Yes; and it is a strong one. I fancy X would have only

his trouble for his pains, if he paid us a visit," said Dr. Holmes, with a smile.

"The picture would not be easy to take away," said Mr. Railton. "It is only a small one—eighteen inches by twelve—but the frame is very heavy."

Captain Mellish smiled.

"I imagine that a burglar would rip it out of the frame," he said. "A slash or two of a knife would do that."

"Upon my word, you are right; I did not think of that."

"Well, I thought I would give you the warning, Dr. Holmes," said the captain; "though really you seem to be pretty seure."

"Thank you very much for the kind intention, however," said the Head.

"The curious thing is, that if the rascal intended to raid the place, he would be quite capable of giving you a warning first," said the captain. "Have you heard the story of Lord Westwood's bonds? The cracksmen actually sent his lordship a telegram, announcing that he should steal the bonds upon a certain date—and he did it!"

"Extraordinary!" said the Head.

"There were five of us—I was staying there at the time—and we sat up all night with pokers and things, sitting round the safe where the bonds were kept," said the captain. "We watched for him, and we did not intend him to get away again if he came. But he came—and the bonds went."

"How did he manage it?" asked Mr. Railton, with keen interest.

Captain Mellish shook his head.

"That is more than anybody can say. A stone was flung at the window, and the electric light went out—he had got at the wires somehow. There was a light on the scene in less than three minutes, and the safe was looking quite intact; but we opened it to make sure, and sure enough the bonds were gone. In those three minutes the rascal had got in and tapped the safe, and he left nothing behind but footprints in the flower-bed under the window."

"A clue for the police," said Mr. Railton.

"The police discovered the boots that had made the footprints—a very large pair. It was clear that the man had put them on over his own, and taken them off when he reached the road again, and thrown them away."

"What a cunning trick!"

The captain glanced at his watch, and took his leave of the Head and Mr. Railton. A crowd of juniors walked down to the school-gates with him, and the captain laughingly agreed to come over on the following Saturday and play footer.

"Your cousin's going to play," said Tom Merry. "We shall put Mellish in goal. And if you promise to play for us, sir, we shall be able to challenge a senior team."

"Challenge them, by all means," said the captain. "I played for my regiment in India, and I have not forgotten how to shoot. I shall enjoy it."

And the captain went swinging down the road with his cavalryman's stride.

"What a ripping chap!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the captain disappeared in the dusk.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Splendid!" said Blake. "How on earth did you get a cousin like that, Mellish?"

Mellish grinned. Under the influence of his cousin the captain, the cad of the Fourth had been much more agreeable that afternoon; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy confided to Blake that he weally thought he would be able to stand Mellish.

"We'll challenge the Fifth," said Tom Merry, as the juniors walked back to the School House through the dusky quadrangle. "With a chap like the captain playing for us, I shouldn't mind challenging the Sixth, for that matter, only—"

"Only they wouldn't play us!" grinned Blake.

"Exactly," said Tom Merry, laughing.

CHAPTER 6.

Tom Merry Comes Down Heavy.

LEFEVRE, the captain of the Fifth, was in his study, talking to Cutts. Cutts was seated on the table, swinging his legs, and Lefevre was leaning against the mantelpiece. They were talking football, when there was a tap at the door, and Tom Merry came in, with Blake and Figgins of the Fourth. The two Fifth-Formers looked at them.

"Well, what do you kids want?" asked Lefevre.

"Thick ears?" suggested Cutts.

"I hear that you're not playing on Saturday afternoon?" said Tom Merry.

Lefevre nodded.

"No; the Grammar School seniors have scratched," he said.

"What about it?"

"Will you play us?"

"Eh?"

"Will you play us?" repeated Tom Merry, very distinctly.

"What at?" asked Cutts, pleasantly. "Hop-scotch, or noughts and crosses?"

Lefevre laughed.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "CAUGHT REDHANDED!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and Ferrers Locke at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Or leap-frog?" he asked.

"Football!" said Tom Merry, calmly.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said the captain of the Fifth. "We're not in the habit of playing little boys. Go and eat toffee."

Tom Merry smiled.

"You saw that chap we brought to the school to-day?" he asked.

"Mellish's relation?"

"Yes."

"A fine-looking chap," said Cutts. "Not the kind of relation you'd expect Mellish to have. But what about him?"

"He's going to play for us on Saturday," said Tom Merry. "He's played for his regiment in India, and he's a ripping player; knows footer to the life. We want to get up a match worthy of the occasion, you know—we don't like to make him play against juniors. So as you've scratched your match on Saturday, we thought we'd play you."

"Oh, that alters the case!" said Lefevre thoughtfully. "I like the chap's looks, and I should like to be civil to him. That's what I say."

"Of course, we could beat you on our own, as far as that goes," Jack Blake remarked.

"Hands down!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Sure he's coming?" asked Lefevre dubiously.

"Oh, quite!"

"Good; then I'll put it to the fellows. We should have had a practice match, and we may as well play you; and with Captain Mellish in your team, you ought to be able to give us the ghost of a tussle, at least," said Lefevre. "That's what I say."

"Good. It's agreed, then."

"Well, yes."

"Right-oh!"

And the three juniors left Lefevre's study, looking very satisfied. The Fifth Form, as a rule, disdained to meet juniors on the playing-fields, and they politely but firmly declined challenges from the lower Forms.

"We'll beat them hollow," said Tom Merry, as the junior went back to their own quarters. "Even without the captain we could do it!"

"What-oh!" said Blake.

"Yes, rather; especially if you played a good number of New House chaps in the team," said Figgins thoughtfully. Figgins, it need not be mentioned, belonged to the New House at St. Jim's.

"Rats!" said Blake courteously. "I was just feeling doubtful about that very point. On an occasion like playing the Fifth, I think the eleven ought to be all School House chaps."

"Of all the silly asses!" began Figgins.

They had reached Tom Merry's study by this time. A crowd of juniors were gathered there to hear the result of the visit to Lefevre's study. Kerr and Wynn, Figgins's chums of the New House, were there with the rest. There was a general chorus of inquiry as Tom Merry and his companions came in.

"Well, what says the oracle?" asked Monty Lowther.

"They're going to play us!" said Tom Merry.

"Good egg!"

"Hurray!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great satisfaction. "It's wippin'. We don't often get a chance of beatin' the Fifth!"

"We shall have to be jolly careful in selecting the eleven," said Kangaroo, with a shake of the head.

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps you would like to have some suggestions on the subject, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the captain of the junior eleven.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Pile in!" he said.

"Well, undah the circs., we shall want an extwa special eleven, and an extwa special captain," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Of course, you fellows know that I'm not the kind of chap to put myself forward in any way. But undah the peculiar circs. of the case, I weally think that it's up to Tom Mewwy to wesign the captaincy in my favah, for the one occasion only."

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther.

"What do you say, Tom Mewwy, deah boy?"

"Oh, I say rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Any more suggestions from anybody?" asked Tom Merry, looking round. "Any more budding skippers who don't want to put themselves forward in any way?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you ass——"

"Well, I've been thinking——" began Figgins.

"Silence for Figgins!" said Monty Lowther, raising his hand.

"Figgins has been thinking. At such a time——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "I've been thinking, as this

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is a very special match, perhaps it would be a good idea to make some changes in the team."

"Yes; we're going to put Mellish in," said Tom Merry. "We can't do less."

"Yes; but besides that, as we want an extra special team, don't you think it would be the best thing for some of the School House members to stand down?"

"Eh?" said the School House fellows, all together. "What?"

"And play New House chaps instead!"

"Bai Jove! Of all the cheek!"

"What do you say, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, I say the same as I did to Gussy!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, don't be an ass!" said Figgins persuasively.

"I don't intend to be," said Tom Merry laughing. "I shall play you and Kerr and Wynn. Wynn can play back instead of goal as usual. We'll put Mellish in goal, I think—he'll do least damage there. Two chaps will have to be left out to make room for Captain Mellish and Mellish of the Fourth."

"Ahem!" said all the juniors.

"Any offers?" asked Tom Merry.

Silence.

There was evidently no offers.

"I call upon D'Arcy to resign," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Somebody will have to make a start," explained Blake. "It's a D'Arcy's place to lead—I've heard you say so often enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you ass——"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Mellish takes D'Arcy's place."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"That's settled!"

"I wefuse to wegard it as settled," shouted the swell of St. Jim's. "I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy. I am bound to play. Not because I specially want to, but I am vewy keen on the Fifth bein' beaten."

"But you can help us to beat them splendidly by keeping out of the team, Gussy," Monty Lowther suggested.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Lowther with a glare.

"You uttah ass, Lowtah——"

"Now——" began Tom Merry. "Hallo, what's that?"

A bell suddenly rang in the passage. Tom Merry looked out of the study. The passage was empty. He turned back into the study, looking mystified.

"Didn't you chaps hear a bell ring?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In the passage?"

"Yes," said Blake.

"Well, there's nobody there."

"That's jolly queer," said Monty Lowther. "I—— Hark!"

Buzzzz!

The juniors made a rush to the door and looked out into the passage. The bell had rung outside the door. But when they looked into the passage, it was empty.

"What on earth——"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's the giddy ghost of St. Jim's," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You know he always appears in Nobody's Study at Christmas time——"

"Well, it isn't Christmas time yet, fathead!"

"No, he's a little bit previous, that's all," said Lowther.

"And he's getting up to date, too, ringing electric bells instead of clanking a giddy chain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Buzzzzzz!

The bell rang again. Tom Merry dashed out of the study. In a dusky corner of the passage he saw a little electric bell, and a wire ran from it along the passage towards the end study. Tom Merry jumped towards the bell, and came down upon it with both feet. There was a faint, agonised buzz from the bell, and then it was silent for ever.

"It's that ass Glyn, japing us," growled Tom Merry. "He won't jape anybody again with that giddy bell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door of the end study opened, and Bernard Glyn came running out. He looked at the squashed bell, and gave a roar.

"Oh! What silly ass did that?"

"I did," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You shouldn't jape us with your giddy electric bells, you ass!"

"You fathead!" roared Glyn. "I wasn't japing you. I was just testing the bell for the telephone I'm making, you frightful chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses!"

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

"Well, I thought it was a jape," gasped Tom Merry. "The next time you test your blessed bells, you'd better put a notice up. Ha, ha, ha!"



The Bounder took off his hat to the Cliff House girls. "So kind of you to let me come to tea," he said politely. "By the way, you pierrots can buzz off, I am done with you!" The four pierrots looked at the Cliff House girls, and the Cliff House girls looked at the pierrots. They tried not to laugh, but it was very hard to look sympathetic at such a time. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Marjorie. "Do excuse me! I can't help laughing, you look so funny!" (An amusing incident from the splendid complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "TOP DOG!" by Frank Richards, which is contained in this week's issue of our popular companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

Bernard Glyn picked up the shattered bell, and retired to his study with the wreck, speechless with wrath. And Tom Merry & Co. gathered in the study again, and resumed the discussion upon that important point, which members were to be left out of the junior eleven on Saturday. They discussed the question most earnestly, not to say excitedly; but it could not be said that they got much "forrarder."

CHAPTER 7.

Rung Up!

DR. HOLMES was wearing a very thoughtful expression. He was seated in his study, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, had dropped in for a chat after dinner. Outside in the quadrangle the October evening had settled down deep and dark.

Dr. Holmes gazed across at the picture opposite his table. It was evident that Captain Mellish's warning was still in his mind, and he was uneasy about his picture.

"After all, it is safe enough," he said, breaking the silence.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"You are thinking about the picture?" he asked.

"Yes," said the Head, smiling too. "After all, even if the rascal is still in the neighbourhood, which is doubtful, he could not get at the picture. When the shutters are closed in this room, I would defy any cracksmen to enter. But I think it would be a good idea for Taggles's mastiff to be turned loose in the quadrangle at night, for the present. He would give the alarm immediately if a stranger succeeded in penetrating into the grounds."

Mr. Railton nodded.

Buzzzzzz!

It was a sudden ring at the telephone.

Dr. Holmes rose to his feet, and took up the receiver.

"Yes?" he said.

"Hallo!"

"Well?"

"Is that St. Jim's School?"

"Yes."

"Dr. Holmes?"

"I am Dr. Holmes."
 "Good! I am X."
 Dr. Holmes almost dropped the receiver.
 "What? You are—what?"
 "X!" came the reply from the telephone.
 "Good heavens!" muttered Dr. Holmes.
 Mr. Railton rose to his feet.
 "Nothing the matter, I hope, sir?" he exclaimed.
 "A hoax, I think," said the Head, very much agitated.
 "Take the other receiver, Mr. Railton, please, and listen. It is a hoax, undoubtedly, or at all events it is very extraordinary."
 "But—but what—"
 "Take the receiver."
 Mr. Railton took the second receiver, and listened.
 "You hear me?" came the voice, clear and distinct to both the masters. The wires disguised the natural tones of the voice, perhaps, but there was a clear, metallic tone in it that both the masters thought they would know again, if they ever met the man who was speaking over the line.
 "I hear you," said Mr. Holmes. "Is this a hoax?"
 "Certainly not."
 "You have said that you are X."
 "Yes."
 "The cracksman?"
 "Yes."
 "The man who robbed Mr. Glyn to-day?"
 "Yes."
 "Upon my word!" muttered Mr. Railton, aghast. "The astounding impudence!"
 "Do you believe him?" asked the Head.
 "Either it is he, or it is a hoax, of course," said the Housemaster. "I hardly know what to think. Listen! He is talking."
 "You may expect me," went on the hard, metallic voice over the telephone.
 "What?"
 "You may expect a visit from me."
 "A visit?" said the Head, dazed.
 "Yes."
 "What do you mean?"
 "Don't you understand plain English?" asked the voice, with a mocking tone in it. "I will say it in French if you like—*Je vais vous faire une visite.*"
 "Bless my soul!" said the Head.
 "Do you understand?"
 "Yes, of course I understand. But what do you mean by saying that you are going to pay me a visit? Who are you?"
 "X!" was the reply.
 "That is not a name."
 A chuckle was distinctly audible on the telephone.
 "No, it is a sign of the unknown quantity," came the reply.
 "And I am an unknown quantity—a very unknown quantity."
 "Is this a hoax, or are you really the rascal you pretend to be?" the Head exclaimed indignantly.
 "You will find that it is not a hoax."
 "In what way?"
 "When I have taken your picture."
 The Head started violently.
 "My—my picture?" he stammered.
 "Yes. I am coming to take it."
 "My picture! You—you are coming to take my picture!" said the doctor, scarcely able to believe his ears. "Am I talking with a madman?"
 "No. With X."
 "And you say you are coming to take my picture?"
 "Yes."
 "When?"
 "On Saturday night."
 "You impudent rascal!" exclaimed the Head. "I only hope that you will dare to come here. You shall not get away again easily."
 "I shall get away again quite easily, and I shall take your picture with me," said the voice.
 "The cool scoundrel!" murmured Mr. Railton. "No wonder the police are unable to deal with him. Who ever heard of a thief notifying his intended victim in this manner?"
 "It must be a hoax!" muttered the Head. But he spoke without conviction. In spite of himself, it was borne in upon his mind that the man at the other end of the telephone wire was in reality the mysterious cracksman—the unknown criminal whom the police knew as "X."
 "You may expect me on Saturday night, at exactly midnight," said the voice. "You hear me? Saturday midnight."
 "You rascal!"
 Another chuckle.
 "I always keep my word. But I am going to make you an offer—a really generous offer. I can sell your picture in Amsterdam or New York for three thousand pounds. But I will sell it back to you for two thousand. What do you say?"
 "Bless my soul!"
 "I shall lose on the transaction, but something is due to

courtesy," said the voice. "And I have a great esteem for you, Dr. Holmes. I have heard a great deal about you, and I feel very friendly towards you."

"You—you—"
 "I understand. You do not feel very friendly towards me. It is only natural. Now, if you accept my offer, I will sell you the picture at once, without bothering you by removing it from the school. What do you say? Two thousand pounds sent in cash to an address which I will name to you, and your word of honour to say nothing about the transaction till I have collected the cash? This is a good business offer."

"It must be some rascal who has heard of the thief's reputation, and is trying to blackmail me," muttered the Head.

He did not intend to speak those words into the telephone, but they were heard at the other end. There was a chuckle again.
 "No; I am the real and genuine X," came the voice. "I am making you a good offer, because I respect your character, Dr. Holmes, and shall be sorry to trouble you. Of course, I should only trouble you in the way of business."

"I could not accept your ridiculous offer, if I wished," said the Head. "I should find it very difficult to raise two thousand pounds, even to recover my picture if I had lost it. And certainly I should not hand such a sum to you or any other rascal."

"I am sorry. Then there is nothing for it but to take the picture."

"You are welcome to do that, if you can," said the Head grimly. "I shall take the best care of my property, I assure you."

"It will be useless."

"We shall see."

"I shall come on Saturday at midnight and take the picture," said the voice. "If you care to ransom it afterwards, the price will be three thousand. I do not work for nothing."

"Bless my soul!"

"I shall ring you up on the telephone the following day, and ask you whether you want it at that figure," said the voice.

"Now remember, Saturday night at twelve."

"If you come here, you will find us ready."

"Good! Expect me."

"I shall. Are you there?"

There was no reply.

The unknown interlocutor had rung off.

Dr. Holmes laid down the receiver, and looked at Mr. Railton blankly. The School House master looked at him, breathing hard.

"Well, what do you think of that, Mr. Railton?" exclaimed the Head, as soon as he found his voice.

"It is amazing!"

"It must be a hoax."

Mr. Railton was silent.

"You do not think so?" asked the Head.

"Frankly, I do not," said the Housemaster. "This is in keeping with the character of that astounding rascal. It is in keeping with his action in sending a telegram to Lord Westwood that he was coming to steal his bonds."

"And he came—and stole them?" said the Head musingly.

"Exactly."

"And you think—"

"I think he will come here," said the Housemaster, finishing the sentence. "Yes, I think so."

"On the day—at the time—he declares?"

"I think so."

"But he will be mad to do so!" exclaimed the Head, in an agitated voice. "After receiving this warning, I shall certainly not go to bed on Saturday night. I shall stay up—in this room. And you will stay up with me, Mr. Railton."

"Undoubtedly. And it would be only wise to have the inspector from Rylcombe here as well, and a couple of the prefects," said Mr. Railton. "The man is a desperate character, and if he appears there will be real trouble."

"But if we are thus prepared, what can he do if he does come?"

"We shall capture him, I hope, sir."

"Very good," said the Head. "At all events, he will not succeed in getting the picture, and that is the important point."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"No; I do not think he will succeed in getting that," he said. "I only hope that we shall succeed in getting him. The man is a cool and determined rascal, but I think he has over-reached himself this time, and it may be at St. Jim's that the mysterious 'X' will meet his Waterloo."

CHAPTER 8.

Bernard Glyn's Little Wheeze.

THAT strange talk on the telephone was not kept a secret. The masters heard it from Mr. Railton and the Head, and the boys soon heard it too, and all St. Jim's discussed it, to the exclusion of every other topic. Dr. Holmes wisely considered that it was best to let the whole school know about it, for the boys would then naturally be on the alert for

any suspicious characters that might appear near the school. The whole of St. Jim's, indeed, would be like an armed camp against the intended invader. It was not likely that even "X," accomplished cracksmen that he was, would attempt to break into the school without spying out the li of the land first. He would want to know how to get at the place, and, more important still, how to get away again when he had secured his plunder. If, during the next day, any person in the least degree suspicious in appearance had hung about St. Jim's, there were fifty fellows ready to pounce upon him and make him give an account of himself. But nobody appeared—nobody who could, by any stretch of the imagination, be supposed to be the cracksmen in disguise.

"I suppose the Head will be keepin' watch in his study on Saturday night," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully, as the juniors discussed the matter round the fire in the common-room after lessons.

"Most likely," said Tom Merry. "I know I should if anybody were coming after my props."

"Yaas. I think I shall ask the Head to let me keep watch with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry.

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at in that remark, Tom Mewwy," he said, with asperity. "This beastly cracksmen appears to be a weally dangewous chawactah, and what is wanted to deal with him is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Ask the Head, and see what he says," said Blake, with a chuckle.

"I intend to do so, deah boy," said D'Arcy loftily. And he walked away towards the door of the common-room.

Blake stared, and shouted after him.

"Where are you going, Gussy?"

"I'm going to the Head."

"What for?"

"I've just told you."

"My hat!" exclaimed Herries. "He means it—he's going to ask the Head! What will you bet on his getting—lines or a caning?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come back!" roared Digby.

"I refuse to come back."

And Arthur Augustus walked out of the common-room, with his aristocratic nose high in the air.

"My only Aunt Maria!" said Tom Merry. "He's going to ask the Head! Well, I should like to be one of the party sitting up, if the Head'd let me. But——"

"But I don't suppose he'd see the value of juniors in such a case," Manners remarked.

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's just it!" he agreed.

Bernard Glyn came into the common-room, grinning. There were stains of chemicals on his hands, and stains of all sorts of things on his clothes, but he looked very pleased with himself. He nodded to the juniors, with a grin.

"Finished your giddy telephone?" asked Tom Merry Glyn chuckled.

"I've put that off for a bit," he said. "I've been working out a new wheeze."

"What's the wheeze—something up against the New House?" asked Blake.

"No." Glyn glanced round. "Where's Gussy?"

"Gone to see the Head. He wants to stage-manage the scene on Saturday night," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good old Gussy! Has it occurred to you fellows that X—I believe the chap's called X—that X might make another haul here as well as the Head's giddy Dutch daub?"

"What else—the school plate?"

"No, Gussy's ticker."

The juniors looked curiously at the schoolboy inventor. They could see that Bernard Glyn had some idea in his mind.

"What are you driving at?" asked Blake bluntly.

The Liverpool lad chuckled again.

"I'm talking about Gussy's ticker. You know he's lost it times without number. It always turns up again like a bad penny. Now, suppose X, the cracksmen, were to telephone to Gussy that he's coming after his ticker at twelve to-night——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he won't!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, he will!"

"What do you mean?" asked Tom Merry, puzzled. "The Fourth Förm kids haven't got telephones in their studies yet, at any rate."

"Not necessary. There's a telephone in the prefects' room, and juniors are allowed to use it when their loving parents call them up to ask if they've changed their socks, and things of that sort. And I——" Glyn paused.

"Well?" demanded the juniors, all together.

"You'll keep it dark?" said Glyn mysteriously.

"Yes—what is it?"

"You'll keep it frightfully dark?"

"Yes!" roared Tom Merry. "What on earth have you been doing?"

"I've——" Glyn paused to chuckle—"I've—ha, ha, ha!"

"Well?"

"I've—ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared Glyn.

Jack Blake caught up the poker.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "Next time you cackle, you silly ass, you get the end of this in your silly ribs! Now, what's the joke?"

"I've run a wire—ha, ha, ha!"

Biff! Blake kept his word, and Bernard Glyn roared in good earnest as he caught the hard end of the poker with his sixth rib.

"Ow! Yow! Yaroo! Oh! You've punctured me! Ugh! Oh!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" growled Kangaroo. "Why can't you explain yourself? What have you been up to, you silly owl?"

"I've—ow—I've—yow—groo—I've run a wire—ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, there he goes again!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.

"Blessed if I don't really puncture him this time! I'll——"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Glyn. "I must tell you before Gussy comes back. I've run a wire from the end study to the prefects' room—shoved it under the edge of the linoleum in the passage, you know."

"What on earth have you done that for?"

"To connect up the telephone there with a receiver in my study," grinned Glyn.

The juniors stared at him.

"But what—what——"

"Don't you see?" exclaimed Glyn, chuckling. "We can talk along the telephone from the end study now, and anybody we're talking to there will think we're miles away. We can ring up Gussy from the Shell passage, and unless he discovers the wire—which he won't do—he will think somebody is talking to him from the call-office in Wayland."

"My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So it will be quite easy for X—any X, you know—to ring him up, just the same as he did the Head, and tell him he's coming for his watch to-night at twelve!"

The juniors simply shrieked.

"Bai Jove! what's the joke, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming into the common-room, and regarding the juniors inquiringly through his famous monocle.

"You are!" said Monty Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass——"

"How did you get on with the Head?" asked Blake.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"The Head said he was vevy much obliged, but that he wouldn't twouble me. I tried to point out to him that it would be no twouble, but he told me to leave the studey—I don't know why. I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bernard Glyn rose.

"Well, I'm going to my study!" he said.

"I'm coming with you!" said Kangaroo, rising too.

And the Terrible Three rose, and said they were coming, too. So did Blake and Herries and Digby and Reilly—all the juniors, in fact, who had been taken into the confidence of the schoolboy inventor.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down to write. He was doing an article on the latest fashion in trousers for "Tom Merry's Weekly." Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in favour of trouser-straps, and his article dealt with that subject. He was deeply interested in it, and his pen glided over the paper rapidly. He was interrupted by Mellish clapping him on the shoulder. He looked up with annoyance.

"Weally, Mellish, I wish you wouldn't intewwupt me!" he said.

"You're wanted," said Mellish.

"What am I wanted for?"

"The telephone."

"The telephone!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in surprise. "Wats! The office is closed in Wylcombe now, and nobody can be wingin' me up fwom Wayland!"

"Somebody is," said Mellish. "Kildare told me. It's buzzing in the prefects' room now. You'd better go!"

Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth looked into the common-room.

"D'Arcy there?" he called out.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"I guess you'd better buzz off to the seniors' room!" said Lumley-Lumley. "Some giddy ass is ringing you up on the telephone!"

"Bai Jove! It's vevy remarkable!"

"I guess you'd better hop it!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Yaas, wathah! Thanks for tellin' me!"

And Arthur Augustus hurried out of the common room to answer that unexpected call upon the telephone.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus is Alarmed!

BUZZ-Z-Z-Z-Z!

The telephone bell was buzzing as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into the prefects' room. There was nobody in the room, as it happened, but the telephone bell could be heard the length of the passage. Arthur Augustus hurried to the telephone-stand, and picked up the receiver from the hook.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Hallo!" came back a far-away voice. "Is that D Arcy of St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! I am X!"

"Eh?"

"No, not A! X!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You have heard of me, I suppose?"

"Gweat Scott! Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Have you still got your gold ticker?"

"M-m-my what?"

"Gold ticker."

"Yaas."

"Good! I want it!"

"You—you—you want it?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! that's a fwightful cheek on your part, deah boy—I mean, you awful wascal! I shall certainly not let you have it! I wegard you as a wank wottah!"

"I am coming for it!"

"You are coming for my gold tickah?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! I wish you would! I should give you a feahful thwashin', you wottah!"

"Look out for me at twelve to-night!"

"What?"

"I am coming for your gold ticker at twelve o'clock exactly! X-actly! Do you see?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You had better go to bed and put your head under the clothes! If you watch for me, it will not be any good; I shall keep your watch for you! Ahem! That is a pun!"

"You—you—"

"When midnight strikes, I shall be there! If you resist, I shall imbrue my hands in your gore! Got that?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"If you struggle, I shall strew the hungry churchyard with your bones! I am bound to have that gold ticker! Watches were made to go; yours is going to-night!"

"Bai Jove! You fwightfully cheekay wascal! I shall stay awake to-night, and watch for you with a cricket stump!" said Arthur Augustus furiously. "If you come aftah my watch, I shall bwain you without wemorse!"

"Expect me at twelve!"

"Weally, you awful wascal—"

"To-night! Keep your ticker handy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Leave it on the washstand beside your bed, instead of putting it under your pillow, as usual! It will save me the trouble of waking you up, and I don't want to come too near you! Your face might give me a shock in the dark!"

"Why, you—you—you—" stuttered D'Arcy.

"Remember, twelve o'clock!"

"I wufuse to speak to you! I shall stay awake and watch for you! Bai Jove!"

"I will ring you up again in ten minutes! If you like to send me twenty quid, I will let you off the watch! You can pawn your eyeglass to raise the money!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Or you might raise it among the fellows in a subscription! Promise not to sing any more tenor solos this term if they all subscribe!"

"You—you—you—"

There was no reply; X had rung off. Arthur Augustus breathed fury over the telephone receiver. Kildare of the Sixth came into the room.

"Hullo, what's the matter with you?" he asked.

"The awfully cheekay wascal!"

"What—who—"

"The feahful boundah!"

"Why, what—"

"The impertinent wottah!"

The captain of St. Jim's grasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy by the shoulder and shook him. The swell of the Fourth was almost stuttering with indignation.

"What is it?" roared Kildare. "What are you talking about?"

"That fwightful wascal—X!" gasped D'Arcy.

"What—what do you mean?" exclaimed Kildare, in

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astonishment. "You don't mean to say that X has been ringing you up, too, do you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't be a young ass!" said Kildare.

"But it's quite twue, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly. "He says he's comin' at twelve o'clock to-night for my gold tickah!"

"Rubbish!"

"But I tell you he said so!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Bosh!" said Kildare. "It's one of the fellows japing you! I remember one of the young bounders rung up Mr. Ratcliff on the telephone and japed him!"

"But the office is closed in Wyleombe now, Kildare, deah boy! This call comes ffrom Wayland, and all the fellows are indoors!"

Kildare started.

"By Jove! that's so!" he exclaimed.

"He's goin' to wing me up again in ten minutes, to see if I will send him twenty pounds, instead of havin' my tickah stolen!"

"Is he?" said Kildare. "Then I'll be at the 'phone, and hear what he has to say! I can't quite swallow that it's the real and genuine X after your ticker, D'Arcy!"

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z!

"Bai Jove! There he is!"

This time it was Kildare who took up the receiver.

CHAPTER 10.

Not Quite so Funny!

"HALLO!"

"Hallo!"

"Is that the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy?"

"I'm answering for him! Who are you?"

"I'm X!"

Kildare started.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"At the telephone, of course!"

"I mean, are you in Wayland?"

"Never mind where I am, old fellow; I'm keeping that dark! Is D'Arcy going to hand out that twenty quid, or is he going to have the ticker taken?"

"What is he sayin', Kildare, deah boy?"

Kildare handed the receiver to Arthur Augustus. He was utterly mystified. He could hardly believe that it was the famous cracksmen who was speaking, and yet who else could it be, so far off as Wayland? If it had been daytime, it might have been some japer of St. Jim's speaking from Rylcombe; but that was impossible now. If it was not X himself, who was it? If it was a joker, that joker must know about the telephone call the Head had received; and how could anybody in Wayland know?

"Are you there, Gussy—I mean, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about the twenty quidlets?"

"I wufuse!"

"The fellows would subscribe willingly if you promised not to sing any more this term. They would think it cheap at the price."

"You impertinent wascal!"

"Well, look out for me at twelve o'clock, that's all."

"I shall sit up for you."

"Yes, I'm going to make you sit up!" D'Arcy thought he heard a chuckle on the telephone. "When from the tower strikes forth the hour, I'll meet you in the haunted bower—I mean in the Fourth Form dormitory."

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, the young rascals!" murmured Kildare.

The Sixth-Former chuckled softly. Arthur Augustus looked round, and saw that the captain of St. Jim's was examining a wire that ran behind the telephone, and disappeared along the wainscot of the wall.

"Bai Jove, that's a new wire!" said D'Arcy in surprise, lowering the receiver.

Kildare laughed.

"Yes; and there's only one fellow at St. Jim's who understands these things well enough to connect up the telephone on his own," he said. "The cheeky young rascal, to meddle with the telephone. Go to my study and fetch me a cane, D'Arcy."

"But—but—I—weally—"

"Quick, I tell you!"

"Yaas, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus hurried out. The telephone-bell rang, the mysterious interlocutor apparently had not finished his conversation. Kildare picked up the receiver, to keep the fellow at the other end occupied until D'Arcy returned with the cane.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Who's that?" asked the voice.

"I'm Kildare."

"Oh, you're Kildare, are you? I'm coming for your bike to-night."

"What?"

"I'm X."

"Oh, you're X, are you?" said Kildare grimly, with his eye on that new wire, which he was pretty certain ran as far as the end study in the Shell passage, and no farther.

"Yes. At midnight to-night I'm coming for your bicycle."

Kildare grinned. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came back into the prefects' room with a cane and handed it to the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare handed him the receiver.

"Keep on talking to the chap, D'Arcy," he said. "Keep him busy for a few minutes while I follow this wire to the other end."

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"Then it's a jape, deah boy?" he asked.

"Yes; and I'm going to surprise the japer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talk to him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus grinned into the receiver, and talked. Kildare left the prefects' room, and followed the course of the wire.

"Are you still there, you wottah?" asked D'Arcy on the telephone.

"Yes, I am here."

D'Arcy chuckled softly. Now that he was enlightened by the discovery of the wire, he thought that he could recognise the voice of Bernard Glyn, although the schoolboy inventor was speaking in disguised tones.

"Vewy well. You are comin' for my tickah?"

"At midnight's hour—"

The voice broke off suddenly. Arthur Augustus spoke again. "Are you there?" he asked into the receiver in his blaudest tone.

No reply.

"Are you there, you ass?"

Silence!

Arthur Augustus chuckled, and hung up the receiver, and hurried out of the seniors' room. Kildare had followed the wire!

The captain of St. Jim's did not really need the wire to guide him. He had a pretty clear idea of where he would find the other receiver. The wire was indeed well concealed, close by the dark wainscot of the passage, and wherever possible pushed under the edge of the linoleum. If Kildare had not been looking for it he would certainly not have discovered it.

He hurried along the Shell passage, with the cane in his hand, and a grim expression upon his face. There was a buzz of voices in the end study.

Kildare opened the door softly.

Six or seven juniors were gathered round a telephone on the wall on the opposite side of the study.

All of them had their backs to the study door, and as Kildare had opened it very softly, they did not see or hear him.

Kildare looked at them with a grim smile.

"Poor old Gussy!" Blake was murmuring. "Fancy him sitting up in bed with a cricket-stump waiting for twelve to strike."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Kildare, too! Fancy his sitting up in the bike-shed to look after his bicycle in case X comes after it!"

The juniors roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pile in, Glyn, old man!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We'll never let the Sixth hear the end of it if Kildare sits up—"

"Indeed!"

The juniors swung round as if electrified as they heard Kildare's voice in the study. Kildare stepped in. Bernard Glyn dropped the receiver.

"Oh!" he exclaimed

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

"Ah!" murmured Blake.

"M-m-my hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo.

"Well?" said Kildare grimly.

"We—we—we—just experimenting with a—a—an amateur telephone," said Monty Lowther blandly. "Glyn's invention, you know."

"How funny if I should have sat up watching over my bike!" remarked Kildare.

"Ahem!"

"Ahem!"

"You would never have let the Sixth hear the end of it, would you?"

"Ahem!"

"Ahem!"

"You young rascals!"

"A-a-ahem!"

Kildare strode towards the juniors, and the cane sang in the air. There was a wild rush round the table. The juniors were quick, but the senior was just as quick. The cane rose and fell, and there was a terrific roar.

"Ow! Ow! Oh! Yah! Yowp!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yah! Oh! Yaroo!"

The juniors dodged wildly round the table. Kildare halted, panting. An elegant figure appeared in the doorway, and an eyeglass glimmered into the study. Arthur Augustus smiled sweetly at the gasping juniors.

"Hallo, deah boys! Will you have the gold tickah or the twenty quid? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh!"

Kildare strode out of the study, laughing. Arthur Augustus chuckled softly, and followed him. The juniors rubbed the places where the prefect's cane had fallen, and glared at the schoolboy inventor.

"Ow!" groaned Tom Merry. "You ass! If you ever say telephone to me again I'll take you into a quiet corner and suffocate you! Ow!"

CHAPTER 11.

Arthur Augustus is Very Much Surprised.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS did not stay up that night to watch. In fact, it was Blake who felt more sleepless than the swell of St. Jim's, as Blake had caught several cuts of Kildare's cane in Glyn's study. Arthur Augustus smiled sweetly at his chum when the Fourth went to bed.

"I twust you are not feelin' sore, Blake, deah boy," he remarked.

Blake grunted.

"It was weally vewy clevah of Glyn to connect up the telephone, wasn't it?" persisted the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And don't go off like a cheap American alarm-clock," growled Digby.

"Weally, Digby, I wefuse to be compared to a cheap American alarm-clock," said Arthur Augustus with dignity.

"Now, then, you kids not in bed!" said Kildare, looking into the dormitory.

"We're talkin' about telephones, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

And Kildare laughed.

After the lights were out, and the prefect had retired, several fellows talked telephones to Blake and Herries and Digby. Arthur Augustus chuckled softly. The intended jape had turned out very much against the japers, owing to Kildare's discovery of the extra wire, and Arthur Augustus was entitled to his triumph.

"I'm not goin' to sit up to-night and watch, deah boys," he remarked presently. "But, as a mattah of fact, although the Head does not seem to think it a good ideah, I weally think I ought to be on the watch on Satadah. It would be vewy wotten if that boundah X. did come here and lift the Head's Wembwandt."

"Don't you think that perhaps Mr. Railton and the Head and Kildare and Darrel may be able to handle him without your assistance?" suggested Mellish.

"It is not only stwength that is required, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What is required in a case like this is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah," said D'Arcy. "I shall certainly make it a point to wemain awake on Satadah night."

"It would be a jolly good idea to have my bulldog Towser in the house," Herries remarked in a thoughtful way. "I suggested it to Kildare, but he did not seem much taken with the idea somehow."

"Weally, Hewwies, I twust you will not be allowed to have that feahful beast in the house undah any pwetext whatever. He has no wespsect whatever for a fellow's twousahs."

"He would jolly well nob the burglar if he came," said Herries. "I know that! You remember how he can follow a track—"

"Yaas, I dare say he could follow a railway twack, or a cycle twack," agreed D'Arcy.

"Why, you ass—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"It's not a bad idea, really, for some of us to stay up on Saturday night," said Jack Blake thoughtfully. "If the cracksman comes, and gets away from the Head, we may be able to nab him. That would be one in the eye for the New House if we nabbed X!"

"X-actly," said Levison.

"Oh, don't!"

"I shall be vewy pleased to have some of you fellows stay up and watch undah my diwection—"

"I dare say you would," said Blake, with a chuckle. "But you'll have to stay in bed, Gussy. I think I'll stay up with Dig and Tom Merry—three will be enough—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, go to sleep!" yawned Lumley-Lumley.

The Fourth-Formers dropped off to sleep one by one—many of them to dream about "X" and the threatened raid upon the Head's picture.

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The next morning, when St. Jim's turned out at the clang of the rising-bell, there was only one topic in the school—and that topic was "X."

The juniors were as keenly as ever on the watch for suspicious characters, and a tramp who tried to beg at Taggles's lodge was surrounded by a crowd of them, and Redfern of the Fourth tugged at his beard to make sure that it was not a disguise. It was a real beard, as the unfortunate man's yell of anguish testified; and that tramp fled at top speed down the road, without waiting to extract the price of a drink from anybody, fully convinced that he had called at a private lunatic asylum by mistake.

Tom Merry & Co., however, had another matter to think about, as well as the threatened raid of the cracksman.

The next day was Saturday, when they were going to play the Fifth, with the assistance of Captain Mellish.

Lefevre and Cutts and the other footballers of the Fifth Form were taking the thing very much in a humorous spirit, but the juniors were in deadly earnest about it.

Tom Merry selected his eleven with great care. He had promised Percy Mellish that he should play in the eleven, out of compliment to the captain, and Mellish held him to his word. The slacker of the Fourth did not, however, care to practise very hard, and Tom Merry realised that putting Mellish into the team practically meant playing one man short. Upon further consideration, he decided to play Fatty Wynn of the New House in goal, as usual, and make Mellish a back. Mellish was no better as back than as goalie, but he might do less harm there. But Tom Merry hoped that the brilliant new recruit, Captain Mellish, would more than make up for any shortcomings of his cousin.

The match with the Fifth was a matter that the juniors of both Houses of St. Jim's could join heartily in. As a rule, School House and New House were deadly rivals, but now it was juniors against seniors, and Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. co-operated heartily.

On Friday evening Tom Merry posted up the finished list of the Junior Eleven, and it was read with eagerness by the juniors, especially by those who had hoped against hope, up to the last moment, that their names would be included.

The eleven consisted of Fatty Wynn, goal; Mellish and Herries; Kerr, Redfern, Kangaroo; Tom Merry, Figgins, Captain Mellish, Blake, and Monty Lowther. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at the notice on the board, and read down the list of names carefully. Then he read them down again. Then he carefully polished his eyeglass, and jammed it in his eye, and read the list down for a third time. Then he ejaculated:

"Bai Jove!"

"Not quite right, is it, Gussy?" Figgins remarked, with a shake of the head.

"Wathah not, Figgay, deah boy."

"Only four New House chaps," said Figgins.

"Oh, I was not thinkin' of that," said D'Arcy, with a sniff.

"I wegard four New House chaps as quite suffish, as fah as that goes. That's not what's wong with the list."

"Why, what else is wrong with it?" said Figgins, with an air of surprise. "Excepting that it doesn't give the New House a very good show, I think the list is all right."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Of course, there's a weak spot—Mellish in the back line,"

said Figgins. "But the captain

would expect to see his cousin

in the team, you know. And

Captain Mellish will more than

make up for the harm Percy

does."

"Yaas, wathah! I was not

thinkin' of that."

"Blessed if I can see any-

thing else wrong with the list,"

said Figgins. "Can you, Kan-

garoo?"

Kangaroo shook his head.

He had just read his own name,

Harry Noble, in the list, and

he was quite satisfied with Tom

Merry's selection. Indeed, every

fellow whose name was down

there considered that Tom Merry

had shown unusual ability in

the art of selecting a footer team.

"Seems to me all right,"

said Kangaroo.

"Couldn't be improved, that

I can see," Blake remarked.

Arthur Augustus turned his

eyeglass upon the juniors. They

were all quite grave and solemn,

and apparently quite uncon-

scious of the thoughts that were working in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's mind.

"I must say I wegard you as a set of asses, deah boys," said D'Arcy wrathfully. "This team would do vevy well for any othah occasion—it would be all wight for playin' the Gwammah School, or the Wayland Wamblahs. But on an occasion like this, of playin' a seniah Form, it behoves—"

"Beh-whiches?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Behoves," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "It behoves a footah captain to select the vevy best playahs available."

"Well, that's what's been done," said Blake. "My name's down."

"Exactly!" said Kangaroo. "Mine's there!"

"And mine!" said Lowther. "I don't see anything wrong with that list."

"Only the best playah in the juniah Forms is left out," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Lowther looked thoughtful.

"You mean Lumley-Lumley?" he asked. "Well, Lumley is a good footboller, I know, but I don't know that he's all that class."

"I was not wefewwin' to Lumley."

"You mean a New House chap!" said Figgins. "Lawrence, I suppose?"

"I was not thinkin' of Lawrence."

"Owen, then?"

"Certainly not."

"Thompson of the Shell?" hazarded Figgins.

"I was not thinkin' of a New House chap, Figgins. I wathah think there are too many New House boundahs in the eleven already."

"Ah, you mean Manners," said Lowther. "But Manners is standing out this time, you know. He's going to photograph the match, and keep a record of our licking the Fifth."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You weren't thinking of Manners?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

"Certainly not."

"Oh, he's going to suggest Glyn," said Kangaroo. "Glyn's been neglecting practice lately for his rotten inventions, you see."

"You know perfectly well that I was not alludin' to Glyn, Kangaroo."

Kangaroo shook his head.

"Not Skimpole?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Certainly not Skimpole!"

"He means Digby," said Blake. "It's hard on Dig being left out, but somebody had to make room, you know; and Study No. 6 is represented by Herries and me, so that's all right. The study won't be let down."

"Yes, it seems to me a very satisfactory list, fair all round," said Lowther. "Blessed if I know who that wonderful footboller can be that Gussy's thinking of. He may have discovered some new talent that we haven't noticed. The looker-on sees most of the game, you know; that's an old saying, and Gussy may have seen wonderful qualities in some chap who's hiding his light under a bushel. A fellow can judge of another fellow's

form, you know, without being able to play much himself,"

said Lowther, with owl-like gravity.

"You uttah ass!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Eh?"

"You know perfectly well whom I am alludin' to."

"Do you mean the new chap, Lorne? I haven't noticed him much myself."

"I do not mean a new chap. I mean a chap who was at this school before you came here, Lowthah!"

"One of the old brigade," said Blake. "Now, who can it be? You're jolly mysterious about it, Gussy. N t Gore?"

"You silly ass!"

"Oh, draw it mild. I'm trying to guess."

"You uttah wottahs! You know perfectly well that I am alludin' to myself!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in great warmth.

"You?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Yaas."

"You are serious?"

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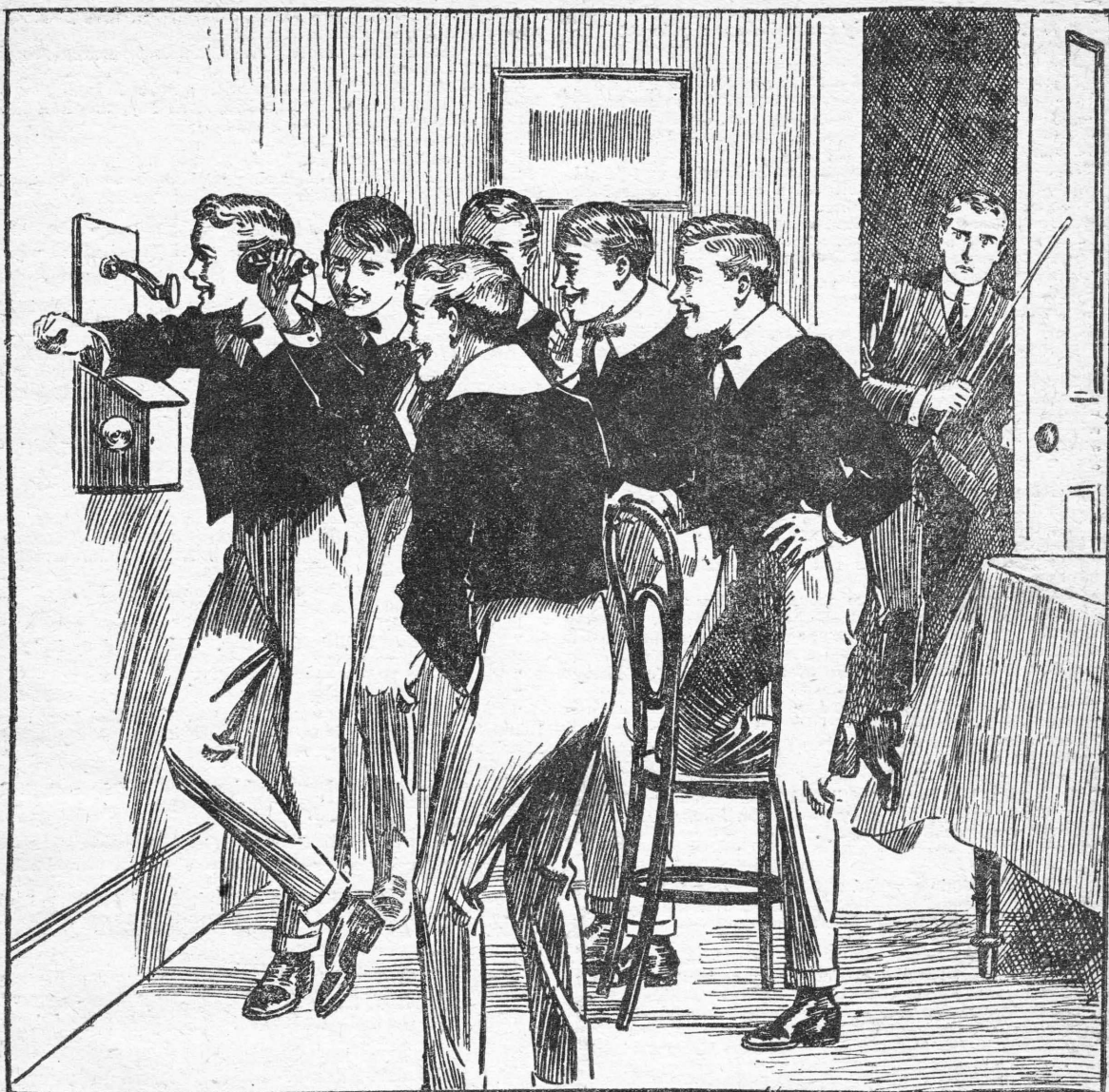
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Six or seven juniors were gathered round a telephone on the wall, and all of them had their backs to the door, as Kildare stepped in. "Pile in, Glyn, old man!" chuckled Tom Merry, "We'll never let the Sixth hear the end of it if Kildare sits up—!" "Indeed!" The juniors swung round as if electrified at the sound of the captain's voice. (See Chapter 10.)

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But you said a footballer!" said Lowther, with a puzzled air. Then he fled; for Arthur Augustus was at boiling point, and he made a wild rush at the humorist of the Shell. The juniors scattered, laughing loudly; and Arthur Augustus, with a snort of wrath, made his way to Tom Merry's study to give the junior captain a piece of his mind.

CHAPTER 12. Very Kind of Mellish!

TOM MERRY was in his study, grinding through a German imposition which Herr Schneider had kindly given him. Tom Merry's pen was driving away over the paper at a great rate, and the German characters, naturally a little weird in appearance, grew weirder and weirder as he proceeded. Arthur Augustus looked in at the open door, and coughed. Tom Merry did not look up. He knew D'Arcy's step, and he knew that the swell of the Fourth must have read the list in the hall. He drove away at his imposition at top speed, apparently oblivious of the presence of the caller.

D'Arcy coughed again.

"Nun mit Entsetzen wachst ich Morgens auf!" murmured Tom Merry aloud, as his pen drove away at racing speed. Cough!

"Ich mochte bittere Thränen weinen!" muttered Tom Merry Cough!

"Den Tag zu seh'n——"

"Tom Mewwy!"

"Der mir in seinem Lauf——"

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus, dropping all politeness. "You know perfectly well that I am here."

Tom Merry could not pretend not to hear. He gave a start, and looked up.

"Hallo, Gussy!" he said affectionately. "This is really kind of you."

"Eh?"

"Come right in," said the Shell fellow. "There's another pen there."

"Pen!" said D'Arcy.

"Yes; you can't write without a pen, you know," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"Write!"

"Yes. Sit down on that side of the table."

"Sit down!"

"Certainly. You're not going to write standing up, are you?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Do you know why I have come here, Tom Mewwy?" demanded Arthur Augustus, breathing heavily.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; you've come to help me write out my impot," he replied.

"You uttah wottah! I have come for nothin' of the sort, and you are perfectly aware of it!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Well, it would be a good deed, you know," said Tom Merry gently, "and I should like to get out of half the lines. Take that sheet, and begin at 'Und doch hat jemand—'"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Just come to keep me company while I write, eh?" said Tom Merry. "All serene; sit down and toast your feet, and don't jaw, there's a good chap. I'm trying to get through this. You'll find some ginger-beer on the shelf."

"I do not want any gingah-beer."

"Sorry I haven't any coffee—"

"I do not want any coffee, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, sit down, anyway."

"I decline to sit down."

"Stand up then, old man; anything for a quiet life," said Tom Merry.

"Now, where was I? Had I got as far as Den er nach rast—blest if I can read it myself now I've written it. I wonder how Schneider will manage it?"

"I have come to talk to you—"

"After I've done the impot, Gussy."

"About the football."

"You want to sell your football?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, you ass. About the eleven, I mean."

"Oh, that's all right."

"I do not wegard it as all right."

"Yes, that's settled," said Tom Merry affably.

"My name is not up."

"No; that's because it is not down," said Tom Merry playfully.

Arthur Augustus was in no mood for humorous remarks. He sniffed. Tom Merry sighed, and went on writing. D'Arcy advanced to the table and smote upon it with a mighty smite. The ink danced in the inkpot, and a number of blots scattered themselves from Tom Merry's pen over the sheet. Tom Merry gave a roar.

"Oh, you ass! You've mucked up my impot."

"Pway listen to me—"

"Look what you've done!"

"Wats!"

"Why, you ass—"

"My name is not in the list," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly. "I wequire to know your weason for leaving me out?"

"Better men," said Tom Merry.

"What!"

"Better men."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort. Undah the cires, I considah that it would be judicious to hand over the captaincy to me. I shall not, howevah, insist upon that—"

"Go hon!"

"But I wefuse to be left out."

"Now, my dear chap," said Tom Merry seriously, "I can't play the whole school, can I? What would the Fifth say if we marched on the ground fifty or sixty strong?"

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"Somebody had to stand down," said Tom Merry patiently, "and as it is a D'Arcy's place to lead, why, there you are."

"Do you seriously mean that I am to be left out?"

"I'm afraid there's no help for it, Gussy, unless one of the other fellows resigns and gives you his place."

"I wegard it as wotten!"

"You're the nineteenth chap who's said the same thing to me since I started on this giddy impot!" said Tom Merry wearily. "It isn't all lavender to be a footer captain. I can't play everybody. Dig's left out, so is Lawrence, and Owen—"

"That is diffewent," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "It was specially necessary to play me this time, as we particularly want to beat the Fifth."

Tom Merry smiled.

"Well, I'm afraid there's no room in the team, unless one of the chaps resigns," he said. "Eleven chaps is the limit, you know. The New House have been howling at only four New House chaps being in. The Shell have grumbled at only three Shell fellows being played in the whole team. Now you're grumbling because I've only put in two fellows out of your study. I shall have the Third Form ragging me next for not playing Wally."

"Pewwaps it was wathah a difficult posish for you," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Howevah, that does not excuse your wiskin' the match in this way. You see, I am bound to play. One of the othahs had bettah we sign."

"Ask 'em," suggested Tom Merry. "Put it to 'em one after the other, and explain that it's a time for self-sacrifice."

"Bai Jove! that's a good ideah."

"Run along and strike while the iron's hot," said Tom Merry eagerly. "Don't lose time."

Arthur Augustus looked at him rather suspiciously; but he walked out of the study. Tom Merry chuckled softly, and went on with his imposition.

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carried out that excellent idea. He approached the members of the team in turn upon the subject. Lowther was the first. D'Arcy found him in the common-room, and took him aside.

"Lowthah, old man," he said, with a noble forgetfulness of Lowther's late offences. "Lowthah, deah boy, this is a time for self-sacrifice."

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Quite so," he agreed.

"On an occasion like this, a chap ought to be weady to sacrifice himself for the geneawal good," D'Arcy remarked.

"Exactly."

"Even by stayin' out of the team, if necessary."

"Yes, quite so," agreed Lowther. "I'm jolly glad to see you taking it like this, Gussy."

"Eh?"

"It's the proper spirit," said Lowther, wagging his head wisely.

"No good cutting up rusty because you're left out."

"I don't mean that—I was not speakin' about myself—I mean—"

"Quite right, old man," said Lowther. "Jolly sensible way for you to look at it. Hallo, there's Manners calling me. Excuse me—" And Lowther rushed off.

"Bai Jove!"

The other footballers were not so humorous as Monty Lowther, but they were equally unsatisfactory. Mellish was not tackled by the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus felt that it would not be quite the thing to ask Mellish to stand out, when his cousin was playing, and would expect to see him in the team. But curiously enough, Mellish ran D'Arcy down in the common-room, after he had given up his quest as hopeless, and broached the subject himself.

"I hear you're very keen to play to-morrow, D'Arcy," the slacker of the Fourth remarked.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, wathah, Mellish, deah boy. I do not deny it."

"They've left you out."

"Yaas," said D'Arcy, with a grimace.

"Rotten!" said Mellish.

"Yaas, I wegard it as wathah wotten. Indeed, I have been thinkin' that weally it is up to me to wefuse to wecognise the match at all," said D'Arcy with dignity.

Mellish grinned.

"Do you weally mean it, I've been thinking about it," he remarked.

"Of course, I'm awfully keen to play—ahem—"

"Natuwally, deah boy."

"But I don't know that I ought to keep the place, and have a better man left out to make room for me," said Mellish, shaking his head solemnly.

D'Arcy looked at Mellish very approvingly. He began to have a better opinion of the cad of the Fourth than he had ever had before. After all, there was good in everybody; but really, who would have expected Mellish to turn out a sportsman like this? Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had never expected it, certainly, and he felt his heart warm towards Mellish.

"Weally, Mellish, I wegard that as a vevy pwopah way for you to look at the mattah," he said. "But your cousin will be disappointed if you don't play."

"Not if I explain to him that I stood out from a sense of duty, to let a better man in," said Mellish. "That ought to satisfy anybody."

"Yaas, wathah; that's quite wight."

"Then it's a go," said Mellish. "Take my place."

D'Arcy's heart jumped.

"Do you weally mean it, Mellish, deah boy?"

"Honest Injun! I suppose Tom Merry will let you have the place if I resign?"

"Oh, yaas; he said I could have the place if I could get any chap to we sign," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy eagerly. "But, weally, Mellish, I hardly like—"

"For the good of the team, you know," said Mellish.

"Yaas, that's so."

"Then it's a go!"

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, grasping Mellish by the hand and shaking hands with him warmly. "I wegard you as havin' played the game, deah boy. I wegard this conduct as simply wippin' of you."

"Not at all," said Mellish airily. "By the way—" he hesitated.

"What is it, deah boy?"

"If you could do me a small favour—"

"Anythin' you like, deah boy," said the grateful swell of St. Jim's.

"If you could lend me a quid—"

"Two, if you like."

"Well, I'll have two, since you put it that way," said Mellish agreeably. "Thanks. Play up and beat the Fifth, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mellish strolled away to his study. Levison was waiting for him there. Mellish closed the door as he came in, and Levison gave him a look of inquiry.

"Well, got out of it?" he asked.

Mellish nodded and chuckled.

"Yes, blest if I knew how I should be able to get out of the rotten match without giving myself away to Cecil," he said.

"I've resigned in favour of a better man—that's a reason a chap can give anybody, I should think."

"Good egg!" said Levison admiringly.

"Come down to the tuck-shop," said Mellish.

Levison stared.

"You were stony to-day," he said. "Have you had a remittance?"

"No; D'Arcy's lent me two quid!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Levison.

"Come on," said Mellish.

"Who's the chap you've resigned in favour of, though?" asked Levison.

"D'Arcy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three were all there, eating roast chestnuts before going to bed. They looked at Arthur Augustus with sweet smiles, prepared to talk about anything but the footer eleven. But D'Arcy's first remark showed that he was not on the same track as before.

"It's all wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, beaming.

"Yes, I know it is," assented Tom Merry. "Have some chestnuts?"

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy. It's all wight about the eleven, I mean. Mellish has wesigned in my favah."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Terrible Three in chorus.

"The blessed slacker," said Monty Lowther. "Any chap but Mellish would have jumped at the chance of playing. But I had my doubts whether he would, all the time."

"He didn't want to displease his cousin, the captain, or he wouldn't have accepted my offer at all," said Tom Merry. "Captain Mellish is keen on footer, and our dear Percy wants to keep in his good books. I wonder what excuse he's going to make."

"Mellish has acted in a vewy noble way, deah boys. He is wesignin' in my favah for the sake of the team, to make sure of beatin' the Fifth."

"Ahem!"

"He said so himself," said Arthur Augustus, as if that finished the matter.

Monty Lowther looked admiringly at the swell of St. Jim's, and patted him affectionately on the shoulder.

"You're worth your weight in gold, Gussie," he said. "Sit down and have some chestnuts. I'm jolly glad you're going to play, anyway."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry and Manners heartily.

And Arthur Augustus ate roast chestnuts with the Terrible Three in the most amicable way in the world. The clouds had rolled by.

CHAPTER 13. The Form Match.

THE next morning interest at St. Jim's was divided between two great topics. One was the threatened raid of "X," which was to take place that night, and the other was the Form match between the juniors and the Fifth. The latter matter interested the juniors most, but the former was of the greater interest to the seniors and the masters, especially the Head, who perhaps had not heard of the projected Form match at all.

Captain Mellish was expected at the school after dinner for the match, and the juniors looked forward keenly to his coming. They had seen the captain once or twice since Wednesday. He was still staying at Glyn House, and was not to leave till the following week.

Bernard Glyn, who had been home one day, had told the captain all about "X's" threat concerning the Head's picture, and the captain had been very interested. He had told Glyn that he was looking forward to the footer match very keenly, and that message pleased the St. Jim's juniors very much.

That the captain was a ripping fellow was an opinion that was held without a single dissentient voice, and the wonder grew that Percy Mellish should possess such a relation.

During morning lessons on Saturday it is probable that a good many fellows gave as much thought to "X" and the coming footer match as to Julius Cæsar and Todhunter. But lessons were over at last, and the juniors streamed out of the Form-room, free for the rest of the day.

After dinner they changed into their footer rig, and waited for the captain to arrive.

Tom Merry & Co., with coats on over their football clothes, stood in a group at the school gates to wait for him.

They soon recognised the captain coming down the road with his swinging cavalryman's stride.

The captain looked in the pink of condition, and his eyes were very bright, and his expression very happy and pleasant. It

was evident that he looked forward to a day's enjoyment. He carried a bag in his hand, doubtless containing his football things.

He greeted the juniors in his frank, hearty way.

"A ripping day for footer!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands with Tom Merry. "We are going to beat the Fifth Form, my lads."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great emphasis.

"I hope so, Captain Mellish," said Tom Merry. "I want to ask you if you'll captain the team, sir."

"Who's the skipper?" asked the captain.

"I am, as a rule—"

"Then you shall skipper us to-day," said Captain Mellish. "I'm not going to take the command away from you. I'm just a recruit, that's all."

"You are jolly good, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The captain laughed.

"It will be a real enjoyment to me," he said.

"You'll stay to a feed in the study afterwards, won't you, sir?" said Tom Merry.

"We're going to have steak-and-kidney pies," said Fatty Wynn temptingly, "and—"

"Ha, ha, ha! With pleasure, my lads!"

"Jollay good!"

And the juniors, in an enthusiastic crowd, marched their distinguished recruit off to the football ground.

Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, greeted Captain Mellish most courteously. He could see by the look of the captain that he was "hot stuff," as Lefevre confided to Cutts, and Cutts nodded assent.

Captain Mellish changed in the dressing-room, and when he came out in his footer garb he looked a splendid athlete. The juniors felt very proud of their recruit, as he appeared among them, and the Fifth, when they looked at him, realised that they would have to play up. Whether the juniors could hold their ground against the seniors or not, there was no doubt that Captain Mellish was a host in himself.

Mr. Railton came down to the ground, and shook hands warmly with the captain.

The Housemaster of the School House had consented to referee the match, a very great honour, considering that one of the teams belonged to the Lower School.

"Our referee, captain!" said Monty Lowther, proudly.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"I hope you will have a good match, captain," he said. "You look fit enough."

"I feel fit," said the captain cheerfully. "Not time for kick-off yet? I hear you have a rather curious affair coming off to-night, Mr. Railton."

The Housemaster nodded.

"Ah! You have heard about the telephone message from the cracksman."

"Yes. Bernard Glyn told me about it."

"It is extraordinary, is it not?" said the Housemaster.

"Quite in keeping with the man's character," said Captain Mellish, smiling. "A very extraordinary man, that mysterious 'X,' Mr. Railton."

"I agree with you."

"You take the message seriously, then?"

"Undoubtedly. The Head is doubtful whether it may not be a hoax."

"I confess that the same thought entered my mind," said the captain.

"But I think the threat is quite seriously intended," said Mr. Railton. "At all events, hoax or genuine, we shall be on our guard."

"You will be keeping watch for the man to-night, then?"

"Certainly. The Head, myself, and Inspector Skeat from Rylecombe, and Kildare of the Sixth. I think 'X' will find us a difficult handful to tackle."

"By gad!" said the captain. "I should like to be present and see the fun. Have you any use for another recruit?"

Mr. Railton laughed.

"I am sure the Head would be glad to have you," he said. "A gentleman of your profession, captain, would probably be of more use than us civilians if it came to a real struggle. And I have an idea that the cracksman will not allow himself to be taken easily."

"I think you are right there," said Captain Mellish, with a nod. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Railton, I have brought over my revolver with me, in case the Head should allow me to join the party waiting up for the thief."

"You will be very welcome, captain."

"Good! Though when he discovers that we are on the watch, I think that even 'X' will decide to leave the picture alone."

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I think not, captain. He must have known that we should keep guard. His telephone message seems to have been

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intended to make us do so. It is sheer impudence on the part of the criminal, a desire to give the robbery a dramatic turn. But I must say that I think he has over-reached himself. If he comes we shall have him."

"Alive or dead!" said the captain grimly.
 "If he should attempt to use a weapon, of course, we shall be justified in doing the same," said Mr. Railton. "I have a loaded cane. But perhaps your revolver will be wanted. Ah! The boys are ready!"

Tom Merry and Lefevre of the Fifth tossed for choice of goals. Tom Merry won the toss and chose his goal, and the Fifth-Formers kicked off.

The match began.
 A large crowd had gathered round the footer ground to watch the match. Junior matches did not attract large crowds as a rule, but most of the St. Jim's fellows were keen to see the captain play.

And Captain Mellish fully justified their interest in him. He was a splendid player, and he was in the best of form. The Fifth-Formers found that they were playing a man who might have been an International.

Lefevre, Cutts and Co. led off with rushing tactics, intending to sweep the juniors off the field, if not off the face of the earth.

But they found that Captain Mellish came through their lines like a knife through cheese, and almost before they knew where they were he had sent the leather spinning into the net before the game was five minutes old.

There was a roar of surprise and delight from the crowd.
 "Goal! Hurray!"
 "Goal!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Huwway! Huwway for us!"

Lefevre & Co. were a little more careful after that. But their care did not save them. Even when they got through, and kicked for goal, Fatty Wynn saved every time with deadly precision. Fatty Wynn could have kept goal against League players with their best shooting-boots on. He gave the Fifth no chance. True, the juniors would not have had much chance of scoring against the Fifth, either, but for their recruit. But Captain Mellish worked wonders. He had had no opportunity of practising with the rest of Tom Merry's team, but he seemed to know the value and ability of each player by instinct, and to know exactly how much to rely upon them, and in what way.

His passing was splendid, and he brought out the powers of the juniors in a way that surprised themselves.

Although he had declined to deprive Tom Merry of the captaincy, he was really skipping the team, and Tom Merry was only too glad to have it so.

Two more goals went in, taken by Tom Merry and Figgins, both from passes from the captain, and to him more than half the honour was due.

Just before Mr. Railton blew the whistle for half-time, the captain brought the junior front line up the field in splendid style, passing like clockwork, and the leather was put in for a fourth time in spite of the desperate defence of the Fifth.

Four goals to nil in favour of the juniors was the result of the first forty-five.

"Hurray! Hurray!" thundered the crowd, as the two sides rested for a brief interval, a much-needed rest, after a gruelling half.

"Bai jove! It's simply wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he fanned himself.

He nodded in a very friendly way to Mellish, who was standing by the ropes with Levison and Crooke.

"Mellish, old man, you've missed a wippin' game."

"That's all right," said Mellish, who was feeding himself with an apparently inexhaustible supply of toffee in his overcoat pocket. "Sense of duty, you know."

"Why aren't you playing, Percy?" asked Captain Mellish.

"Stood out to make room for a better player, Cecil," said Mellish airily. "Felt that I had to, you know, for the sake of the side."

"Yaas, it was wippin' of your cousin, wasn't it, captain?" said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as bein' the act of a weal sports-man."

Captain Mellish laughed. Perhaps he knew exactly how much of a real sportsman his cousin Percy was.

The whistle blew for the second half.

The Fifth-Formers looked very determined as they lined up again.

But their determination did not help them very much. Fatty Wynn put "paid" to all their efforts to score almost up to the finish. It was only within ten minutes of the end that Cutts of the Fifth succeeded in getting the ball through, and

(Continued on Page 19.)

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that solitary goal was all the Fifth could boast in the Form match, to which they had looked forward with such great confidence.

When the final whistle went the score stood at five for the Juniors and one for the Fifth, and it was not surprising that the Juniors yelled themselves hoarse as the teams trooped off the field.

CHAPTER 14.

Watch and Ward.

TOM MERRY'S study was crowded with a merry party after the football match. The Juniors were gleeful over their victory. True, they owed it in great part to Captain Mellish; but it was a victory, and a great victory. They had beaten the Fifth, and they rejoiced. All the team were invited to tea in Tom Merry's study, and a good many other fellows as well.

There was not room for half of them in the study, and they crammed in and overflowed in the passage, but everybody was happy and cheerful.

Most cheerful of all was Captain Mellish. The Juniors managed to give the handsome captain room enough to sit down and take his tea, but he was the only fellow there who had room to breathe. He seemed to enjoy the crowding and excitement with as much zest as if he had been a junior himself.

The Juniors had heard that he was to remain with the Head that night, to watch for the mysterious X; and some of them begged him to use his influence to get them included in the watching party, which he promised laughingly to do.

Things were still going strong in Tom Merry's study when the captain took his leave. The Juniors roared out the chorus of "He's a jolly good fellow" as a send-off to the captain. Captain Mellish took his way to the Head's study, where he found Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton.

The Head greeted him warmly.

As the time came nearer for the threatened raid of the mysterious cracksmen, the Head felt himself growing uneasy.

It had been easy enough to plan to keep watch for the rascal, and to seize him if he should venture within the walls of St. Jim's. But now that the crucial hour was close at hand, the matter seemed to change its aspect a little. The man who could make that threat, and follow it up in person, was no ordinary man. He was a desperado of the first water, and he would be captured, if at all, with the greatest difficulty. He was only too likely to carry a deadly weapon, and to use it; and the Head, upon second thoughts, had changed his mind about having any of the prefects in the room. The boys were in his charge, and he was responsible for them; and he felt that he could not in conscience run the risk of Kildare or Darrel being injured in a conflict with an armed burglar. And, much to Kildare's disappointment, the Head told him he would rather he went to bed as usual.

For himself, the Head was not afraid; the old gentleman was brave enough. Upon Mr. Railton, too, he knew he could rely, and Inspector Skeat would do his duty. But it was a distinct relief to find the captain ready to join the circle. A man who had led a soldier's life, and had known what hard fighting was among savage tribes, was the man of all men to deal successfully with the desperate cracksmen. The Head declared frankly that Captain Mellish would probably be of more use than the rest of them put together, a remark that Mr. Railton fully endorsed.

"Do you know, I cannot help thinking that the rascal will not come, after all!" Captain Mellish remarked.

The Head drew a deep breath.

"I truly hope so!" he said.

"How can he possibly hope to get away?" the captain argued. "I cannot help coming to the conclusion that the telephone message was bluff, after all, sir!"

"I hope it will prove so!"

There was a knock at the door, and Kildare came in. The captain of St. Jim's was looking a little downcast.

"What is it, Kildare?" said the Head.

Kildare coloured.

"N-n-nothing, sir; only——"

"Nothing has been seen of the—the man, surely?" exclaimed the Head.

"Oh, no, sir; but—but——"

"Speak out, Kildare!"

"If—if you thought I could be useful, sir——"

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"It would not be consistent with my duty to allow you to remain up, Kildare," he said. "I should never be able to forgive myself if harm came to you!"

"But you will need help, sir, if the man should come!" said Kildare eagerly. "Besides, if there is an alarm, of course, I shall get up at once!" He glanced at Captain Mellish. "Won't you speak a word for me, sir?"

The captain smiled.

"Kildare would be very useful if it came to a struggle!" he said, with an admiring glance at Kildare's sturdy figure.

"But in case of a weapon being used——" faltered the Head.

"In that case, sir, I shall use mine!" said the captain grimly, tapping his breast-pocket, where the revolver reposed. "And I flatter myself that I shall be able to use it with effect! X will not be more dangerous than an Afridi tribesman!"

The Head shivered a little.

"Well, if you think Kildare might remain up——" he said.

"Give him a chance," said the captain good-humouredly.

"The more the merrier! That will only make five of the party—none too many to tackle X!"

"Very well, Kildare; you hear?"

"Thank you, sir!" said Kildare gratefully. "Then I'll be here!"

And Kildare retired with a very cheerful face. Dr. Holmes was not looking very cheerful. He stood before his Rembrandt, and gazed at it in a thoughtful way. The captain followed his gaze and smiled.

"I think we shall be able to keep it safe enough, sir!" he said.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Yes, I hope so, captain!" he said. "You will dine with me, will you not?"

"With pleasure, though those young scamps have spoiled my appetite, I am afraid! I do not know how many jam-tarts and meringues I have eaten!" said the captain, laughing.

The captain was all gaiety and high spirits at dinner. Dr. Holmes was cheered, in spite of himself, though the thought of midnight was hanging heavily upon his mind. Mrs. Holmes was not present; the Head had arranged for his wife to pay a visit the past two days, and she was not to return to the school until the Monday. The Head did not wish to have an anxious woman upon the scene when there was anxiety enough already. Mr. Railton also dined with the Head.

After dinner, during which the talk had run upon nothing but the Rembrandt picture and the mysterious cracksmen, Inspector Skeat arrived from Rylcombe. The inspector had a half-solemn, half-shamefaced air. He more than half-believed that the whole thing was a hoax, and he had a lurking fear that, by being present, he was risking compromising his position as one of His Majesty's inspectors of police. But he could not very well decline to attend; and, besides, he was very keen for the slightest chance of getting to close quarters with the famous cracksmen. If the night's adventures should end in the capture of X, Inspector Skeat was a made man.

The Juniors were greatly excited when they saw Inspector Skeat come in. They marched round him in the dusky quad, up to the Head's door, and gave him a cheer.

"It's simply wotten that we can't stay up and join the party!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared, with great disgust. "Howevah, I shall keep watch on my own!"

Many of the fellows had decided to do that; but the Head had foreseen something of the kind, and he had taken his measures. Before bed-time, Mr. Railton made an announcement to the Juniors. All boys were to remain in their dormitories that night, on pain of the severest punishment, and at a late hour the prefects would visit all the dormitories to make sure that the boys were there.

The Juniors looked at one another in dismay when that announcement was made. Arthur Augustus summed up the feelings of all with the expressive remark:

"Wotten!"

The Juniors went to bed at the usual time, but not to sleep. As Blaké remarked, you could take a chap to a dormitory, but you couldn't make him sleep. Excitement ran high in both houses at St. Jim's. Even in the New House, which was too far from the scene of operations for the fellows to have any chance of seeing anything that happened, the fellows were excited and sleepless. In the School House nobody thought of closing his eyes. The prefects saw lights out in the various dormitories, and visited them afterwards to make sure that all the Juniors were in bed. The Juniors were all in bed, but they were not sleeping, and there was a ceaseless hum of talk among the beds.

Later in the evening most of the seniors retired, but not to sleep. Sleep was impossible for all. Many fellows only half-dressed, to be ready to jump up and rush out at the first sign of alarm. Some of them had taken pokers and cricket-stumps to bed with them, in case of necessity. It certainly looked as if the mysterious cracksmen would have a very warm reception, if he kept his word and came to St. Jim's.

At eleven o'clock Mr. Railton went down to Taggles's lodge. He found the school-porter wide awake and uneasy. Taggles intended to lock and bolt himself in his lodge. There was a policeman in the lodge with him, and three others were on duty outside, patrolling the road along the walls of St. Jim's. Mr. Railton ascertained that Taggles's mastiff had been turned loose in the quadrangle, and that the constables were on the alert. The gates of St. Jim's were securely locked.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "CAUGHT REDHANDED!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and Ferrers Locke at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Mr. Railton walked back to the School House, and, in spite of his iron nerve, he could not help casting glances to and fro in the shadow of the trees as he went. The unknown, imagined form of the cracksman was present to his mind's eye. He would not have been surprised to hear a stealthy footstep, to see a lurking shadow under the old elms in the quad; but there was no movement—no sound. The quadrangle was silent and still in the dim light of the stars.

Mr. Railton re-entered the School House, and the great door was closed and locked and barred and chained. Then a round was made of all the doors and windows in the building, and in the Head's house, which was a part of the same building, Captain Mellish and Kildare and the inspector accompanied the Housemaster on his round. Every door was secured; every window was safe.

They returned to the Head's study.

The study looked very warm and cosy and comfortable, with a fire burning in the grate, and the electric light showing up every corner of the room. The Head was seated there, and he turned a somewhat worn look upon them as they entered.

"You have seen to everything, Mr. Railton?" he asked.

"Everything, sir!" said the Housemaster.

"The doors—the windows—"

"All are safe! The mastiff is loose in the quadrangle, and he is scarcely likely to allow a stranger to enter the grounds without giving the alarm. There is a policeman with Taggles, and Inspector Skeat's men are on duty in the road. If the man comes, he cannot escape; of that I am certain!"

"Very well; the shutters here had better be closed now!"

"I was about to suggest it."

"Let me help you," said Captain Mellish, as the Housemaster went to the window.

The shutters were closed. They were iron shutters, secured on the inside with bars and padlocks. Burglars' tools, perhaps, might have penetrated them; but certainly not without long labour, and, most certainly not without giving the alarm to the men on the watch within.

Captain Mellish looked round the room with a keen, business-like eye. He was as cool as an iceberg, and showed no trace of the excitement which was gradually mounting in the breasts of the others. Kildare was pale with excitement, and the doctor's hands were trembling a little. Captain Mellish paused and looked at the safe.

"You have the key of this, sir?" he said.

"Yes," said the Head.

"It would be only wise to look into it. It would be curious if the rascal should be hidden inside it all the time. Safe locks do not mean much to X!"

The Head started.

"Good heavens! I never thought of such a thing!" he exclaimed, in a faltering voice.

"Nothing like making sure!" said the captain. "What do you think, inspector?"

Inspector Skeat could not help shrugging his shoulders.

"I really think you are over-doing it, sir!" he said. "That's my opinion, but take every possible precaution, by all means!"

"I will stand by with my revolver while you open the door, Dr. Holmes!" said Captain Mellish. "I have learned on the Indian frontier to leave nothing to chance! I found a Thug once hidden in a mealie-sack!"

Dr. Holmes unlocked the door of the safe and swung it open. Captain Mellish looked in, and then returned his revolver to his pocket with a smile.

"Nobody there!" he said.

The Head locked the safe again.

The captain made a round of the room. He examined the shutters once more, and peered even up the chimney. The fire was burning low. The chimney was a wide, old-fashioned one, and the captain shook his head a little.

"There are bars across the chimney inside!" said the Head.

"Oh, good! That settles that point!"

A sound came dully through the air. It was the chime from the clock in the old tower of St. Jim's.

"Half-past eleven!" said Mr. Railton, in a somewhat strained voice.

"Half an hour more," murmured the Head.

Kildare clenched his hands to control his growing excitement. Captain Mellish glanced out into the passage, and closed the door of the study. He sat down in an easy-chair where he could keep his eyes upon the door.

"Thirty minutes before our friend the enemy is due to appear," he remarked. "Gentlemen, we have done all that is possible. It only remains to wait."

CHAPTER 15.

Stolen!

SILENCE!

Deep, heavy silence as the minutes crawled by.

Almost every moment the eyes of the watchers turned upon the Head's clock on the mantelpiece.

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Never had the minutes seemed to crawl with such irritating slowness.

It seemed an age, a century, that the large hand occupied in crawling from one figure to another upon the dial.

"The quarter!" said Mr. Railton, at last.

Faintly from the quadrangle came the chime.

The next time it came it would chime in midnight—the hour at which the cracksman was to come, if he came at all.

Dr. Holmes shifted uneasily in his seat. Mr. Railton stood leaning upon a corner of the mantelpiece, his loaded cane in his hand. Inspector Skeat sat upright, portly, in his chair, grim and silent. But even the stolid inspector could not suppress the twitching of his lips, the restlessness of his eyes. Kildare changed his position several times; it seemed as if he could not keep still.

Of all the party gathered in the study, Captain Mellish seemed the only one who was perfectly cool, perfectly self-possessed. Doubtless, the strange midnight watch was less strange to the man who had fought and watched in the lonely mountain passes, carrying his life in his hand amid treacherous foes.

At ten minutes to twelve the captain took out his revolver and examined it carefully. After that he sat with the weapon resting upon his knee.

Dr. Holmes's uneasy glance rested upon the picture opposite him.

In the electric light the picture glimmered and glowed with colour; that picture, a masterpiece of a dead master's hand, for which the strange watch was being kept—and which was to be the prize of the cracksman's daring.

The minutes seemed to crawl more slowly than ever.

Captain Mellish had his eyes fixed upon the door; his head was bent a little to one side—he was listening—listening.

Suddenly he made a slight movement.

In the still tension of the watchers in the study the slightest movement was sufficient to send the blood thrilling to their hearts.

"What is it?" breathed the Head.

The captain held up his hand.

"Did you hear nothing?"

"Nothing."

"I heard nothing," said Mr. Railton.

The captain was listening.

There was a faint sound in the midnight stillness—it came from the quadrangle. The doctor half rose from his chair. But Mr. Railton made a reassuring gesture.

"It is the dog," he said. "He is loose in the quadrangle."

"Ah, the dog!" said the captain.

"Yes."

Captain Mellish glanced at the clock.

Five minutes to twelve.

Five minutes more.

The tension was growing almost unbearable.

Inspector Skeat held a truncheon ready across his knees; his jaws were set squarely, to keep his teeth from chattering. He was not afraid. But the deadly stillness, the thrill of that strange waiting, had set his nerves in a twitter. Kildare moved again—his hand closing convulsively on the cricket stump he had in his grasp.

Four minutes!

"Good Heavens!" muttered the Head, wiping the perspiration from his damp brow. "Good Heavens! Will it never be over!"

"Four minutes more," said Mr. Railton, in a hushed voice.

A cinder fell in the dying fire. It was a slight sound, but in the deadly stillness of the study it seemed to the straining ears of the watchers to have a crashing sound of thunder. The doctor sprang to his feet, the inspector half rose, Kildare swung round, his teeth setting hard. Then they all looked at one another shamefacedly. Captain Mellish had not moved.

Three minutes!

Captain Mellish sprang to his feet, his eyes gleaming. There was a general movement of excitement.

"Did you hear?" breathed the captain.

"No. What—"

"What—"

"He is in the house!"

"My heavens! What!"

"He is in the house," breathed the captain. "I heard it, I tell you—a stealthy footstep—he is in the house—he is in the passage."

"Heavens!"

The captain stepped to the door—he stepped on tiptoe, without a sound. The others, grasping their weapons, watched him—with thumping hearts, with straining eyes. He reached the door—he laid his fingers upon the handle—he turned it softly.

Boom!

It was the first stroke of twelve from the clock-tower.

Boom!

Boom!

The captain tore the door open and sprang into the passage,

His hand, with the revolver in it, was raised—crack! A shout—a crash—a rush of darkness in the passage—the light was out. Then the voice of the captain—shouting—shouting for help. With a cry, a cry wrung from the depths of their hearts, the watchers in the study rushed after him—all was dark—there was a trampling of footsteps—then a ringing pistol-shot.

Bang!

"Where are you?"

"Where is he?"

"Help!"

Bang!

The sound of a confused struggle—a crash of glass—bang! Mr. Railton's hand struck on somebody in the darkness—it was Kildare—Kildare called out as the Housemaster grasped him. The Head's voice was calling—the inspector was shouting and blowing his whistle alternately—the voice of the captain could be heard—in the quadrangle, the startled mastiff had set up a furious barking.

"Lights!" yelled the captain. "Lights! Help! Lights!" Lights were flashing from a dozen different directions now. Masters and boys were crowding into the passage—some with lamps, some with candles, all of them grasping weapons of some sort. Tom Merry of the Shell was the first to reach the Head's study—in his pyjamas, with a bicycle lantern in his hand. Blake was after him with a candle, and then came a rush of others.

Light was on the scene at last—light in the passage, light in the study. The Head was leaning against the wall, almost fainting with the reaction. Captain Mellish was in the passage, his revolver in his hand, a streak of red upon his cheek, his face blazing with excitement. Kildare was in the doorway of the study, Mr. Railton in the passage, further off, then the captain. Inspector Skeat was standing in the middle of the study, which he had not quitted, blowing his whistle shrilly. Outside, in the quadrangle, the mastiff was clamouring furiously.

"What's happened?"

"Has he been here?"

"Where is he?"

Captain Mellish came striding into the study, panting. "He has been," he exclaimed. "He has been and gone. The villain fired at the lights—I never foresaw that. I caught a glimpse of him before the light went—then he vanished. I heard a window crash."

"The passage window is smashed," came Lowther's voice from the passage. "It's been smashed through with a chair—the chair's lying outside. That's the way he went."

"Then he's in the quad.!" shouted Kildare.

Inspector Skeat rushed to the passage window and clambered out through the smashed sashes. He blew his whistle, and whistles from his men answered in the darkness. The dog barked furiously.

"Good Heavens!" stammered the Head. "Good Heavens! So—so he came, after all. The villain! But—but will he get away?"

"They'll have him," said the captain. "We may as well have the window open now, sir." He flung back the shutter, and looked out into the quadrangle, dimly lighted by the stars, and shouted: "Have you got him?"

"Not yet."

Captain Mellish turned back into the room with a gesture of disappointment.

"He will get away—hang the luck—but—but I am sure I hit him—I fired twice—three times."

"Then the other shots were his?" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes—he was armed."

"You are wounded, captain!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, in alarm, as he caught sight of the red smear on the captain's cheek. The captain dashed his hand across his face.

"It is nothing—the merest scratch. It might have gone closer, though it was not his fault that it did not. The scoundrel!"

"The villain!" gasped the Head. "There might have been murder done!"

"All's well that ends well," said the captain. "He has escaped, I fear—but he has gone empty-handed."

"Yes, yes, he has not succeeded—"

The Head broke off.

His eyes had turned instinctively towards the picture on the wall as he spoke. In the blaze of excitement the picture, the cause of it all, had been forgotten. But now—

The Head stared, and his voice failed him.

"What is the matter?" cried the captain, as he caught the stunned look upon the face of Dr. Holmes.

The Head pointed. His voice failed him.

"Look!" he gasped huskily. "Look!"

Every eye turned upon the picture. There was a cry of amazement.

The frame was empty.

A knife had slashed round the picture, and the canvas had been separated from the frame.

The frame was empty, save for a few tags of canvas clinging to it—the picture was gone. The captain's jaw dropped. He was dumbfounded.

"Gone!" he gasped.

"Gone!" muttered the Head. "My picture—the villain has succeeded, after all—my Rembrandt—gone!"

"Oh, the scoundrel!" said Kildare. "That was why he put the lights out. The picture's gone—he's got it, after all."

The captain gritted his teeth.

"He cannot have got away with it yet!" he exclaimed.

"Follow me—we'll have him yet—come!"

He laid his hands upon the window-sill, and vaulted out into the quadrangle. Mr. Railton and Kildare followed him quickly. Tom Merry and Blake held their lights up at the window. The Head panted, and regarded the empty frame with tears in his eyes.

"Gone!" he muttered. "Robbed! My picture!"

There were confused voices from the quadrangle, trampling feet, and the furious barking of a dog.

It was a quarter of an hour before the searchers came in—worn, disappointed, and furious.

They came back unsuccessful.

The Head gave them a hopeless look. He had not expected that they would recover the picture, or capture the desperate man who had taken it.

"He has escaped?" he asked.

Captain Mellish nodded gloomily.

"We found the ivy torn loose in one place," he said. "But the constables in the road did not see him. He is gone. The police are searching for him, but—"

"They will not find him," said the Head.

"I fear not—now—but later—"

"I have little hope."

"He has kept his word," said the captain grimly. "He has come, as he said that he would—but who would have dreamt it?"

There was nothing like sleep for St. Jim's that night.

And when morning came the inexhaustible topic was still being discussed untiringly.

"X," the mysterious cracksman, had kept his word. He had declared that at midnight he would take the picture—and he had taken it. The watchers had nothing to blame themselves for; they had done their best. But they had had to deal with a man of amazing cunning, and he had beaten them. That was all. "X" had won, after all—and the picture was gone.

Captain Mellish took his leave of the Head in the morning in a gloomy humour.

"I feel that I ought to have been equal to the man," he said. "I came to help you, but I have been of no use. I am sorry."

The Head smiled, a little wanly.

"You did more than any of us," he said, "and you ran more risks. I thank you very much, captain; if anybody could have saved my picture you could have done it. But the scoundrel is a man there is no dealing with."

"The police may recover it yet," said the captain hopefully.

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"I have little hope," he said. "But we shall see. I shall not rely upon the police; I shall send for Ferrers Locke, the detective. But we shall see. Good-bye, captain, and thank you for helping me, though, unfortunately, it turned out of little use."

Tom Merry & Co. cheered the captain as he left. They gazed with admiring awe at the patch of sticking-plaster upon his bronzed cheek. The captain had failed to deal with the cracksman, but he was a hero in the eyes of the juniors.

"It might have gone vevy differently if the Head had allowed me to stay up and watch," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with a wise shake of the head. "What was wanted, deah boys, was a fellow of tact and judgment."

"To which Tom Merry & Co. replied, with one voice:

"Rats!"

And so the strange affair ended—but was it ended yet? Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, was coming to St. Jim's; and the Head still cherished a lingering hope that his picture might be recovered. But the hope was very faint.

THE END.

(Another grand tale of St. Jim's and the mysterious cracksman "X," by Martin Clifford, next Wednesday. Order your copy of the "GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)

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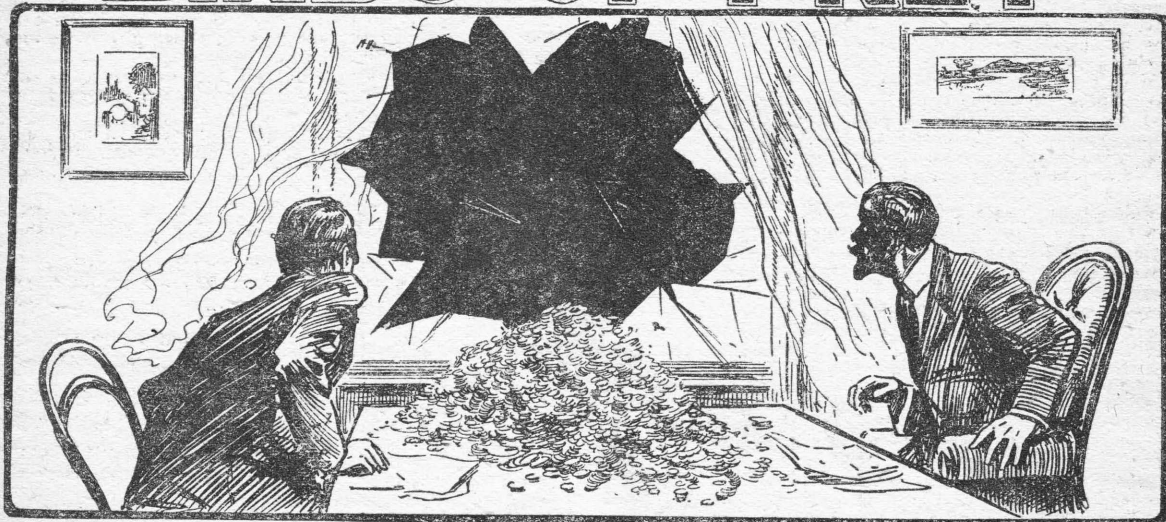
Ferrers Locke and Tom Merry & Co. and Ferrers Locke at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

ANSWERS

NEXT WEDNESDAY: "CAUGHT REDHANDED!" A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

OUR SPLENDID NEW SERIAL.

BIRDS OF PREY



A Thrilling Story Dealing with the Adventures of Nelson Lee, Detective.

By **MAXWELL SCOTT.**

THE FIRST INSTALMENT BRIEFLY RE-WRITTEN.

On the bleak November afternoon when we first make the acquaintance of Jack Langley, the famous consulting electrical engineer, he is sitting in his office, writing out a report, when his clerk ushers in a man dressed entirely in black, who tells Jack that he is a member of the Sheffield Town Council. Something has gone wrong with the electric machinery, and he asks Jack to accompany him to the town to attend to the matter.

Jack Langley agrees, and the two enter the Sheffield train. A little while before the train is due to steam into Sheffield Station, the Man in Black offers Jack a drink from his flask. Suspecting nothing, Jack drains it off at a single draught; but the moment he has swallowed the stuff he knows that he has been drugged.

He becomes insensible, and the Man in Black then quickly opens the carriage door, and flings him out on to a tarpaulin held by four masked men stationed on the side of the line.

When the young engineer recovers consciousness, he finds himself in an enormous coiners' den—a miniature Royal

Mint. He is told by the man who successfully duped him, and who appears to be known as the Squire, that if he repairs one of the coiners' dynamos he will be allowed to go free.

Jack executes the repair, but the promise is not kept, and instead of being allowed his freedom, he is forced to go aboard the yacht *Dolphin*, which belongs to the great secret society known as the Order of the Ring, of which the Squire is one of the heads. Jack, however, succeeds in freeing himself from his bonds in the darkness, and plunges over the rail into the dark waters of the Channel, followed by several revolver shots.

The scene shifts to the ocean-going pleasure-steamer, *Fire-fly*, which is owned by the Order of the Ring, and is under the charge of a man known as the Doctor, another of the heads of the infamous society. An elderly passenger, who has just come aboard, is presenting himself to the Doctor.

"My name is Mr. Theophilus Grundy," says the old man.

"Ah! Then you are the gentleman who insisted upon occupying a cabin next to mine?" inquires the Doctor.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Rescue of Jack Langley.

"I am," said Mr. Grundy. "You see, I am rather nervous about myself, for I am subject to sudden and violent attacks of heart disease, and I thought I had better be as near as possible to the doctor, in case I happened to be taken bad in the middle of the night."

"Quite right!" said the Doctor approvingly. "I hope however, that you won't—"

Before he had time to finish his sentence Mr. Grundy suddenly clutched his arm with a grip that was remarkably strong for one so old and stricken with disease.

"Did you see that?" he cried excitedly, pointing out to sea. "It's gone now; but, no, there it is again—a man's head, about two ship's lengths away!"

"By Jove, yes! I see it!" said the Doctor. "It's some poor fellow, no doubt, who has been washed overboard and drowned, and whose body has risen."

"No; he's alive!" cried both men simultaneously, for at that moment a hand was raised above the head, and a sea-soaked pocket-handkerchief was feebly fluttered to and fro.

"Man overboard!" yelled Mr. Grundy in a wonderfully lusty voice.

And the words had scarcely crossed his lips ere the man on the look-out spied the fluttering handkerchief, and sang out the news to the officer on the bridge.

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In a moment all was bustle and excitement. The *Fire-fly's* engines were promptly reversed, and as soon as the vessel had been brought to a standstill a boat was lowered. A moment or two later, alarmed by the sudden stoppage of the engines, a crowd of passengers rushed on deck, some of them only partly dressed. The latter went back to their cabins again when they found there was no danger, but the rest remained to witness the work of rescue.

Amongst those who remained on deck was Ethel Aymler. With straining eyes she watched the boat draw near to the all but exhausted swimmer. She saw him stretch out his hands and grasp the gunwale of the boat. She saw two of the sailors lay down their oars and raise him in their arms. She saw them haul him into the boat; then, all of a sudden, her beautiful face turned deathly white, and a startled cry burst from her lips.

Mr. Grundy, who seemed to have eyes and ears for everything, hurried towards her, and offered her his arm.

"You are ill," he said in sympathetic tones. "The excitement has been too much for you. Permit me to escort you to your cabin."

"No, thank you; I would rather remain on deck," said Ethel, whose eyes were fixed in an agonised stare on the rapidly approaching boat. "Unless I am greatly deceived, that man whom they have rescued is a friend of mine."

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The Doctor, who was standing close at hand, heard the words and sprang to her side.

"What's that?" he demanded in a hoarse, excited voice. "Did I hear you say that that man in the boat was a friend of yours?"

"Yes," said Ethel. "I just caught a glimpse of his face as they were lifting him into the boat, and I'm almost certain that it's Mr. John Langley, the well-known electrical engineer."

The Doctor staggered back as though he had been struck. Then he rushed up on the bridge, where the captain was examining the boat through his glass.

"What's to be done?" he gasped. "That man they've picked up is Jack Langley! He has evidently given the Chief the slip, and made his escape from the Dolphin by leaping overboard. He knows all about the Order of the Ring, and all about the Firefly; and as soon as they bring him aboard he'll blurt out all he knows, and we shall all be ruined!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said the captain calmly. "He'll never know that this is the Firefly unless you tell him."

"Oh, yes he will!" said the Doctor despairingly. "He'll know it's the Firefly as soon as he sees Miss Aylmer."

"Then you mustn't let him see her."

"But I can't prevent him. She has already recognised him, and the moment they haul him on board she'll throw herself into his arms."

The captain stroked his beard, and pondered for a moment or two.

"Then I'll tell you what you must do," he said. "You must be ready to receive him the instant he steps on board, and you must give him something which will stupefy him before he has time to open his mouth."

A gleam of hope sprang into the Doctor's eyes.

"That's not half a bad idea," he said. "It will be somewhat risky, with all these people looking on; but, so far as I can see, it's the only thing I can do."

He hastened down from the bridge and retired to his cabin where he quickly prepared a powerful sleeping draught. By the time he returned on deck the boat had reached the Firefly's side, and a few minutes later, more dead than alive, Jack Langley was skilfully hoisted aboard and laid on a rug at the doctor's feet.

"Quick! Swallow this!" said the doctor, stooping down and thrusting a tumbler into his hand.

Jack raised the tumbler to his lips, but at the same moment his eyes fell on Ethel Aylmer, who was hurrying towards him, and in the twinkling of an eye he dropped the tumbler and staggered wildly to his feet.

"Ethel, you here!" he gasped in tones of mingled horror and despair. "Then am I—am I on board the Firefly, the murder-ship that belongs—that belongs—"

The sentence ended in an inarticulate moan. Exhausted by his long immersion in the sea, weakened by loss of blood, crushed by the discovery that he had fallen once more into the clutches of his foes, he sank back into the Doctor's arms and fainted.

Nelson Lee, Detective.

"He is dead!" cried Ethel in an anguished voice.

"Not at all," said the Doctor brusquely. "He's only fainted. The shock of seeing you was evidently too much for him in his present feeble condition. We must get him to bed at once, and give him something to revive him."

He beckoned to two of the Firefly's crew.

"Carry Mr. Langley into my cabin," he said. "I'll follow you down in a moment or two."

As soon as he had uttered these words Mr. Grundy, who had been an interested spectator of the whole scene, quietly slipped away and hurried to his cabin. From one of his many portmanteaus he took out a gimlet, and quietly bored a hole in the wooden partition which divided his own cabin from that of the doctor. Then he glued his eyes to the hole, and waited to see what would happen.

In the meantime the Doctor was explaining to the passengers that Jack's incoherent speech—his reference to the Firefly as a "murder-ship"—was due to the fact that his sufferings had affected his brain and rendered him delirious. Most of his listeners were perfectly satisfied with this ingenious explanation, but one or two began to smell a rat, and although they were far from suspecting the whole of the truth, they were none the less convinced that there was more truth in Jack Langley's words than the Doctor was willing to admit.

As soon as the Doctor entered the cabin he saw that Jack was on the point of recovering from his swoon.

"He seems to be coming round again, sir," said one of the men who had carried him down.

"So I see," said the Doctor curtly. "I'll attend to him. You can leave us now."

The two men retired, and closed the cabin door. The

Doctor then walked over to a locker and took out a small glass syringe, such as doctors use for injecting drugs beneath the skin. Having charged this syringe with a liberal dose of morphia, he glided up to the bunk in which Jack lay; but just as he was about to plunge the needle of the syringe into his victim's arm the door was suddenly flung open, and Mr. Theophilus Grundy burst in.

"Doctor, doctor, I'm dying!" he gasped, pressing his hands to the region of his heart, and writhing in apparent agony. "I've just been seized with one of my old attacks, the worst I've ever had. For Heaven's sake give me something to relieve this awful pain, or else—"

His voice died away in a choking sob, he swayed to and fro like a drunken man, then he stumbled forward, as though he were going to fall.

The Doctor darted forward and caught him in his arms, but no sooner had he done so than the old man suddenly seized him by the throat, tripped him up, and seated himself on his chest.

"Not a sound, as you value your life!" he hissed, clapping a revolver to the Doctor's head. "Open your mouth—quick, or I fire!"

Shivering with fright the Doctor meekly obeyed, and in the twinkling of an eye the old man whipped out his handkerchief, rolled it into a ball, and crammed it into his mouth.

"And now, if you please, I'll trouble you to roll over on your face," he said, springing lightly to his feet and producing a pair of handcuffs.

When the Doctor had complied with this request, he handcuffed his hands behind his back, and bound his legs together with his necktie. Then he closed and locked the cabin door and turned to Jack, who was sitting up in the bunk, staring at the scene before him in mingled surprise and bewilderment.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Langley," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm merely going to ask you a question or two; and then, if your answers confirm my suspicions, I'm going on deck to denounce this scoundrel to our fellow-passengers."

"Who—who are you?" stammered Jack. By way of reply the old man suddenly straightened himself, pulled off his wig and beard, and rubbed his wrinkled face with the sleeve of his coat.

"Why, it's Nelson Lee!" cried Jack.

"At your service," said the great detective, with a bow.

The Detective's Plan, and How it Failed.

For a moment or two amazement held Jack spellbound; then he rubbed his eyes and pinched himself to make sure that he was awake.

"Well, I'm blest!" he managed to ejaculate at last. "Fancy meeting you on board the Firefly! I don't understand it! How did you get here, and why did you come?"

"Before I can answer your question," said Nelson Lee, "I must first explain that for some time past the suspicion has been deepening in my mind that most of the undetected crimes of recent years have been the work of a skilfully organised secret society. It would take too long to tell you all the facts which have led me to this conclusion. Suffice it to say that I am absolutely certain that a secret society is at work in our midst, and that the doctor here—this scoundrel on the floor—is one of its members."

"Six months ago I decided to devote myself to the task of unmasking this infamous society and bringing its members to justice. I will not weary you by relating the various devices I adopted, or the risks which I encountered, in my search for some clue which would enable me to tear aside the veil of mystery in which this villainous organisation is enshrouded. It is enough to say that at the end of six months I was just as much in the dark as when I began."

"As a last resort I determined to take a trip in the Firefly, in order that I might be able to keep the doctor under constant observation for a week or two. Needless to say, I had no desire to put the scoundrel on his guard by revealing myself in my true character, so I disguised myself as an old man, and booked my passage in the name of Theophilus Grundy."

"It was I who first caught sight of you this morning, but it was Miss Aylmer who recognised you and told us who you were. As soon as the doctor heard your name he was seized with uncontrollable agitation, and immediately rushed away to consult the captain. Since then he has made two attempts to dose you with morphia—in fact, his whole behaviour since you came on board points to the fact that he is desperately anxious to prevent you telling your story to the passengers."

"Why is this? What is the doctor afraid of? Why does he wish to muzzle you? Is it possible that you are in possession of some information which he does not wish you to

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reveal—some information which would prove that he is a member of the society to which I have alluded?"

"That's it!" said Jack. "I know—and the doctor knows that I know—all about the secret society to which you have referred."

"You do?" cried the detective joyously. "Then at last I have found the clue for which I have sought so long. Tell me quickly all you know, and then I can decide what is best to be done."

In response to this request, Jack briefly recounted his adventures from the moment when he was kidnapped by the Squire to the moment when he escaped from the Dolphin.

"The Chief fired at me just as I was in the act of leaping overboard," he said. "His bullet merely drilled a hole through the fleshy part of my arm; but, in order to make him think that I was mortally wounded, I uttered an ear-splitting shriek, and made no attempt to swim until I was out of sight. My ruse succeeded perfectly, for he evidently thought that he had done for me, and didn't even lower a boat to make sure that I was dead."

"The rest you can guess for yourself. Partly by swimming and partly by floating on my back, I contrived to keep myself afloat until daybreak, when the Firefly picked me up. And this is my reward! Instead of having escaped from the clutches of my foes, I have merely blundered back into their power again, and all my labour has been in vain."

He turned away his face, and something suspiciously like a sob burst from his lips.

"Cheer up!" said Nelson Lee encouragingly. "You're in a tighter fix than I had bargained for, but with decent luck we ought to be able to cheat these villains, even yet."

Jack shook his head.

"What can we do?" he asked despairingly. "You spoke just now of going on deck and denouncing the doctor to the passengers. Suppose you do—suppose you tell them everything that I have told you, what can they do?"

"Nothing," admitted Nelson Lee. "When I spoke of denouncing the doctor to the passengers I was not aware that all the crew were members of the Order of the Ring. I suspected that the doctor was, and possibly the captain, but I never dreamed that all the crew were members, too. Seeing that there are only about a hundred and fifty passengers aboard, of whom half are women, and a large proportion of the rest are invalids, and seeing that the crew number over a hundred, it would clearly be madness to think of overpowering them and compelling them to take the vessel back to port."

"Then what can we do?" asked Jack again.

"We must resort to strategy," said Nelson Lee. "I'll give the doctor a rousing dose of morphia, which will render him unconscious, and keep him so for eight or ten hours. I'll then unbind him, and lay him out in such a way as to make it appear that he has fallen down in a fit. I will then resume my disguise and go on deck, where I'll rush up to the captain and tell him that the door of the doctor's cabin is wide open, and that the doctor is lying unconscious on the floor."

"There are several medical men amongst the passengers. The captain is sure to send them to see what's the matter with the doctor; but before he does so I'll draw them aside, tell them exactly how the matter stands, and get them to inform the captain that the doctor has had an apoplectic stroke, and that the only way to save his life is to put him ashore at once, and send him into hospital."

"The captain, no doubt will readily agree to this, and will probably put into Portsmouth. As soon as the vessel arrives in port I'll slip ashore, summon the police, raid the vessel, and arrest the whole gang at one fell swoop."

"That's all very well," said Jack; "but what about me? Don't you think it's more likely that the captain will take the precaution of knocking me on the head before he ventures into port?"

"No doubt he would if he found you here," said Nelson Lee; "but as soon as I've stupefied the doctor I'll carry you into my cabin, where I've ten or a dozen different disguises, and I'll rig you out as an elderly maiden lady. The captain, of course, has not had time to become familiar with the faces of all the passengers yet, so that even if he sees you he'll never suspect that you weren't on board when the vessel sailed."

"But won't he smell a rat when he finds that this bunk is empty?"

"No; he'll simply think that you've given the doctor the slip, and made your escape by dropping overboard. Probably he'll think that that's the reason why the doctor took a fit."

"You've an answer for everything!" said Jack admiringly. "At the same time, I should feel far more comfortable if I'd something wherewith to defend myself in case I am discovered."

"Then take my revolver," said Nelson Lee, thrusting the

weapon into Jack's hand. "I can get another when we go to my cabin, though I don't suppose—"

A loud and peremptory knock at the cabin door drove all the colour from his cheeks, and brought his sentence to an abrupt termination. For an instant he was too demoralised to act; then he pulled himself together, and signed to Jack to lie perfectly still.

"Who's there?" he asked, mimicking the doctor's voice.

"Me!" said the voice of the captain. "Open the door, I've some news for you."

The detective turned to Jack, who was trembling in every limb.

"There's hope yet!" he whispered hastily. "He doesn't know there's anybody here except yourself and the doctor, so that if I suddenly open the door and pounce upon him unawares, it's quite on the cards that I may be able to drag him into the cabin and strangle him into submission before he has time to raise the alarm."

"Hadn't you better take your revolver?" suggested Jack.

"No," said Nelson Lee; "I'm going to use my hands for this job. Revolvers make too much noise."

With these words he took off his coat, and stole on tip-toe to the cabin door.

In the meantime, however, the Doctor had contrived, by the skilful use of his tongue and teeth, to remove the pocket-handkerchief which Nelson Lee had crammed into his mouth, and just as the detective was about to turn the key the Doctor yelled at the top of his voice:

"Look out! It's Nelson Lee!"

After this, of course, there was not much chance of taking the captain unawares.

Nevertheless, the detective determined to make the attempt, and with lightning rapidity he turned the key and flung the door wide open. Even as he did so however, the captain made a backward spring and whipped out his revolver.

"Back! Back into the cabin, or I fire!" he cried, levelling his weapon at Nelson Lee's head.

Undaunted by the threat, the detective darted forward. True to his word, the captain promptly fired; but at the same instant the detective dropped on his hands, caught hold of the captain's ankles, and jerked him off his feet.

As the captain went down, his revolver flew from his grasp, and his head struck the floor with so much force that he lay for a moment dazed.

The detective accordingly seized him by the collar of his coat, with the object of dragging him into the cabin, but in the meantime the sound of the firing had alarmed the crew, and almost before the echo of the shot had died away the second mate came tearing down the alleyway at breakneck speed.

Quick as thought, the detective loosed his hold on the captain's coat, and darted towards the spot where the fallen revolver lay.

By that time, however, the captain had partly recovered from the shock of his fall, and the moment Nelson Lee relaxed his grip the wily scoundrel thrust out his leg and tripped the detective up.

Ere Nelson Lee could regain his feet, the mate dashed up and flung himself on top of him, and in less time than it takes to tell the detective was lying on his stomach on the ground, and the mate was sitting astride his back, with both hands firmly clenched around his throat.

"Who is he, and what has he done?" panted the mate excitedly.

"It's Nelson Lee, the detective!" said the captain, scrambling to his feet in feverish haste. "He's overpowered the Doctor, and bound him hand and foot!"

"Then what are you going to do with him?" asked the mate.

"I'm going to put a bullet through his head, of course!" replied the captain savagely.

He picked up his revolver, and placed the muzzle behind the detective's ear. In the meantime, Jack Langley had contrived to scramble out of his bunk and to crawl across the cabin on his hands and knees.

He had Nelson Lee's revolver in his hand, and the moment he reached the door he levelled the weapon and fired.

The bullet lodged in the calf of the captain's leg, and caused him to pitch forward on his face with an agonised shriek.

The mate turned round to see who had fired, and in the twinkling of an eye the detective skilfully unseated him and sprang to his feet.

No sooner had he done so, however, than the mate flung out his arms and clasped him round the legs, and before Nelson Lee could shake him off, a crowd of excited sailors burst into view at the end of the alleyway.

One glance sufficed to show the sailors what was happening, and, with a chorus of infuriated yells, they rushed to the mate's assistance.

Jack waited until they were well within range, then he emptied a couple of barrels into their midst.

His first shot brought the boatswain down, and his second disposed of the steward.

Dismayed by these catastrophes, the rest hung back. It was only for a moment, but in that moment the detective hurled the mate to the ground and darted into the cabin.

Having dragged Jack after him, he slammed the door in the face of the baffled mate, and rapidly turned the key.

An instant later the crowd outside came thundering up, and hurled themselves in a human avalanche against the door.

For a second or two the cabin echoed with the din of their kicks and blows; then Nelson Lee stooped down, and placed his mouth to the keyhole.

"Listen to me!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "The Doctor is here, and is absolutely at our mercy. Mr. Langley is standing over him with a revolver in his hand, and the moment this door bursts open the Doctor gets a bullet through his brains!"

If a bombshell had suddenly exploded in the midst of the scoundrels outside it could scarcely have caused more consternation than this sanguinary threat.

selves with the idea that you're going to catch us napping; so take my advice, and don't attempt to play any tricks with the door. For the moment I hear the slightest sound that is at all suspicious, I shall blow out the Doctor's brains without any further parley!"

"All right, old cocky! Keep your hair on!" said the voice outside. "When we want your advice, we'll ask for it."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and turned to Jack, who was lying at full-length on the floor, with the muzzle of the revolver closely pressed to the Doctor's head.

"Now that we have gained a moment's breathing time," he said, "permit me to thank you for the gallant way in which you came to my assistance just now."

"It was nothing," said Jack modestly.

"It was magnificent!" said Nelson Lee. "How on earth you managed to get out of that bunk and crawl to the door in your present exhausted condition I can't for the life of me imagine!"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I hardly know how I did it myself," said Jack. "I was carried away by the excitement of the moment, I suppose. But what was the use of it all?"

"Well, it saved my life, at any rate," said Nelson Lee.



"Who—who are you?" stammered Jack. By way of reply the old man suddenly straightened himself, pulled off his wig and beard, and rubbed his wrinkled face with the sleeve of his coat. "Why, it's Nelson Lee!" cried Jack. "At your service," said the great detective, with a bow.

The uproar ceased, as if by magic. By straining his ears, the detective caught the murmuring hum of a whispered consultation, which was presently succeeded by the muffled tramp of departing footsteps.

Fainter and fainter grew the footsteps in the distance, till at last they died away, and death-like silence reigned.

Nelson Lee a Prisoner.

"Have they gone?" asked Jack, in an eager, anxious whisper.

"Most of them," said Nelson Lee, after listening intently at the keyhole.

"They would like me to think that they have all gone, no doubt; but I can distinctly hear the breathing of at least three men on the other side of the door."

He placed his mouth to the keyhole again.

"Say, you fellows!" he called out.

"What is it?" came a surly voice.

"I merely want to tell you that I'm quite aware that you are there," said Nelson Lee. "You needn't delude your-

"If you hadn't fired when you did, the captain would have shot me."

"Perhaps it would have been better for you if he had," said Jack moodily. "You would have been out of your misery by now, instead of being face to face with the prospect of a lingering death."

"A lingering death!" said Nelson Lee, with just a touch of scorn in his voice. "I don't think there is very much prospect of that."

"But I do," said Jack. "They won't attempt to thrust open the door, for fear that you should carry out your threat and shoot the Doctor; so they'll simply wait outside till starvation forces you to open the door yourself. When that happens, you'll be too feeble to offer any serious resistance; so that they'll easily overpower you, and in return for all the trouble you have given them they'll probably torture you."

"I think not," said the detective grimly. "If the worst comes to the worst, there'll always be a bullet apiece for us in that revolver. But enough of these gloomy forebodings. Black as the outlook undoubtedly is, it isn't hopeless."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "CAUGHT REDHANDED!" A splendid, new, long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co. and Ferrers Locke at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Jack stared at him in undisguised astonishment.

"Surely you don't mean to say that you still entertain any hope of escape?" he said.

"Of course I do," said Nelson Lee. "It isn't a very bright hope, I admit; but still—"

In the midst of his sentence he suddenly paused, for at that moment the silence was rent by a deafening volley of revolver shots, which appeared to proceed from the main deck of the steamer. The next instant a perfect pandemonium of shrieks and groans was heard, mingled with which they heard the captain's voice roaring out some indistinguishable order to the crew. Then, high above the shrieks and groans, a woman's piercing scream rang out, followed by a rush of feet and another volley of revolver shots.

"This is what I feared—this is what I feared!" cried Nelson Lee, pacing to and fro, and wringing his hands. "The villains! The fiends! And to think that I must stand idly here whilst innocent women and aged men are being ruthlessly butchered in cold blood!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Jack. "What do you think is taking place?"

"Can't you guess?" said Nelson Lee, in a hoarse, excited voice. "Several of the passengers heard you describe the Firefly as a murder-ship. They also saw how anxious the Doctor was to prevent you opening your mouth, and these two facts aroused their suspicions that something was wrong. What has happened since has doubtless served to convert their suspicions into certainty. They have probably gone to the captain, and asked him for an explanation. Possibly they have mutinied, and have demanded to be taken back to port. And this is the result—these fiends in human shape are firing on the passengers, and mowing them down like sheep! In another ten minutes, you and I will be the only passengers left alive!"

As a matter of fact, the detective was only partly right. What had really happened was this:

Shortly after Jack was taken below—in fact, at the very moment that Nelson Lee and the Doctor were straggling on the cabin floor—the man on the look-out reported to the captain that the Dolphin was in sight, and that the Chief was signalling to the Firefly that he wished to come aboard. The captain thereupon gave orders for the Firefly's course to be altered, and then he hurried below, in order to inform the Doctor that the Dolphin had been sighted.

What happened next the reader already knows. The detective tried to take the captain unawares, but was overpowered by the mate, and all but taken prisoner himself. At the critical moment Jack crawled to the cabin door, and shot the captain in the leg. The detective subsequently dived back into the cabin, dragged Jack after him, and locked the door. The crew made a futile attempt to break in, but desisted from their efforts when they heard the detective's threat, and hurriedly consulted as to what should be done.

As a result of this consultation, it was decided to leave three men on guard outside the door, whilst the mate prepared a charge of dynamite, by means of which the door should be suddenly blown open, and the detective overpowered before he had time to carry out his threat. The captain's wound, which was not a serious one, was then bound up, and he limped on deck, whilst the bo'sun and the steward, who were also wounded, were carried into their respective cabins.

By that time the passengers had become thoroughly alarmed, and as soon as the captain arrived on deck he was surrounded by an excited crowd of men and women, who insisted upon knowing what had happened. He tried to put them off with evasive answers, but the more he shuffled the more they grew convinced that there had been foul play.

Some of them—Ethel Aylmer amongst the number—demanded that they should be allowed to see Jack Langley, in order to satisfy themselves that he was safe. When the captain refused, the passengers broke into open revolt, accused him to his face of being a murderer, and demanded to be taken ashore without any further delay.

This, of course, brought matters to a crisis. The captain summoned the crew, and ordered them to draw their revolvers. One of the hatches leading into the steamer's hold was then removed, and the passengers were ordered to descend. By way of hastening their movements, the captain ordered the crew to fire a volley over their heads, and when this had been done he commanded Ethel Aylmer to be seized and carried to his cabin, there to await the arrival of the Chief.

The scene which ensued completely baffles description. Struggling and screaming, Ethel Aylmer was secured, and carried into the captain's cabin.

The passengers were then surrounded by the crew, and driven back at the point of the revolver towards the open hatchway. One by one they were tumbled into the hold;

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: **"CAUGHT REDHANDED!"** A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and Ferrers Locke at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

then the hatch was replaced and battened down. And the captain turned to the mate.

"This is a bad business—a very bad business," he said, shaking his head. "There'll be a deuce of a row when the Chief arrives, but I don't see how I could have acted differently."

"Of course you couldn't," said the mate. "It isn't your fault. It's the fault of that cursed Nelson Lee!"

The captain scowled, and bared his teeth in a venomous snarl.

"I'll flay him alive when I get him into my clutches!" he hissed. "Is the dynamite ready?"

"Yes," said the mate.

"Then the sooner we set to work the better," said the captain, glancing towards the Dolphin, which was now but a mile and a half away. "The Chief will be here in twenty minutes at the outside, and before he arrives we must manage, by hook or crook, to liberate the Doctor and secure Nelson Lee."

"Come along, then," said the mate. "Everything's ready."

In the meantime, Nelson Lee was pacing to and fro in the Doctor's cabin in a state of uncontrollable agitation. The thought of his helplessness stifled him, and by-and-by he staggered across to the porthole, for the purpose of opening it and admitting a breath of fresh air. As he did so, his eyes fell on the Dolphin, which was the only vessel in sight. He did not know, of course, that it was the Dolphin, and he turned to Jack with a gesture of impotent despair.

"Just fancy!" he said. "There's a vessel close at hand—not more than a mile and a half away. If I could only discover some way of escape from this cabin, it would be the easiest matter in the world to leap overboard and swim to this vessel in search of help. Isn't it maddening?"

"You couldn't enlarge the porthole, I suppose?" suggested Jack.

The detective shook his head.

"Impossible!" he said. "The only possible chance would be if there happened to exist a secret door or a sliding panel."

As he uttered these words, the Doctor gave a slight and imperceptible start. Slight as it was, the detective noted it, and instantly checked himself.

"Give me that revolver!" he said hoarsely.

He snatched the revolver from Jack's hand, and thrust it into the Doctor's face.

"There is a secret door!" he said, in tones of profound conviction. "Your face betrays you! Where is it? Quick! Answer me, or I fire!"

"There's a trapdoor under the rug on which you are kneeling!" whimpered the Doctor, shivering with terror. "Where does it lead to?"

"To the lower hold."

"If I let myself down into the hold, can I find any way of getting on deck and leaping overboard?"

"I don't know," replied the doctor. "I swear I don't know; but there may be, all the same."

Quick as thought the detective handed the revolver back to Jack, and whisked away the rug on which he had been kneeling. A small trapdoor was then revealed, which Nelson Lee, with trembling fingers, promptly raised.

"This is splendid!" he exclaimed, turning to Jack, and speaking in a low, excited whisper. "There's a rope ladder fastened to the under surface of the door, which apparently leads right down into the hold. I'm going to descend and explore. Keep that revolver to the Doctor's head, and if anybody attempts to tamper with the cabin door you know what to do."

Without waiting for Jack's reply, he placed his feet on the uppermost rungs of the ladder, and commenced to descend. Just as he reached the bottom, he was startled by a deafening report, accompanied by a blinding blaze of light, and in the twinkling of an eye he grasped the fact that the cabin door had been burst open by the aid of dynamite.

Quivering with excitement, he started to swarm up the ladder again, but long before he reached the top the crew rushed into the cabin and secured Jack, who had been hurled to the ground by the force of the explosion. An instant later the captain thrust his revolver through the open trapdoor, and fired at random into the darkness. The detective saw the gleam of the revolver, and sprang off the ladder in the nick of time. By doing so, he undoubtedly saved his life; but the consequence of his action was an ugly fall to the bottom of the hold, which momentarily stunned him. And before he had time to collect his scattered wits, the ladder was hauled up into the cabin, and the trapdoor closed with an ominous bang.

A Check for the Chief.

A quarter of an hour later the Dolphin steamed alongside, and the Chief came aboard. He knew nothing, of course, of the rescue of Jack Langley, or of Nelson Lee's attempt to overpower the captain and the Doctor. From the Dolphin's deck, however, he had witnessed through his glass the short, sharp fight which had taken place between the passengers and the crew, and his face, as he stepped on board the Firefly, was a curious study of mingled excitement and anxiety.

"What has happened?" he demanded, ignoring the captain's salute, and addressing himself to the Doctor.

"You may well ask that!" said the Doctor bitterly. "This is the blackest day in all our history. For the first time since the Order of the Ring was founded we have met with a serious check. The secret of the Firefly is a secret no longer. Every passenger on board is aware of the purpose for which she is used; and if you'd been here a little while ago, you would have heard them clamouring to be put ashore, in order that they might denounce us to the police."

The Chief turned pale, then a spasm of rage convulsed his face, and he whipped out his revolver.

"And who is responsible for this?" he cried, glaring round at the assembled crew with an air of tigerish ferocity. "Show me the traitor who has betrayed us, and—"

"Nobody has betrayed us," said the Doctor, interrupting him. "It isn't a case of treachery, but of downright carelessness."

"On whose part?" demanded the Chief.

"On yours, I suppose," said the Doctor quietly. "All this trouble has arisen through your carelessness in allowing Jack Langley to escape."

The Chief staggered back as though he had been struck.

"In allowing Jack Langley to escape!" he gasped. "What do you mean? Jack Langley didn't escape. He tried to, but I shot him—shot him dead—just as he was in the act of leaping overboard."

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Come with me!" he said.

He led the Chief to his cabin.

"If you shot Jack Langley dead, who is that?" he asked, pointing to the young engineer, who was lying in the bunk, bound and helpless, with two of the crew mounting guard beside him.

The Chief gave vent to a startled oath, and favoured Jack with a scowl of malignant vindictiveness.

"Curse him! He's more lives than a cat!" he hissed. "How and when did he come on board the Firefly?"

In answer to this question, the Doctor narrated all that had happened from the moment Nelson Lee first sighted Jack, to the moment when the crew burst into the cabin, secured Jack, and imprisoned the detective in the lower hold.

The Chief made no remark, though his face betrayed his inward agitation, till the Doctor came to the end of his tale. Then his pent-up feelings found relief in a string of venomous imprecations, most of which were levelled at the head of Nelson Lee. When his fury had somewhat abated, he flung himself into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. For nearly ten minutes he remained absorbed in silent meditation. Then he raised his head, and signed to the men who were guarding Jack.

"You may leave us now?" he said. "The Doctor and I will take care of Mr. Langley."

The men saluted, and silently withdrew. The Chief then turned to the Doctor.

"This is a bad business, Doctor, a very bad business," he said.

"It is," admitted the Doctor. "Still, it's not so bad, but it might have been worse. We may not have been able to prevent the passengers learning our secret, but we haven't let any of them escape to tell the news to the outside world."

"True," said the Chief. "That is certainly something to be thankful for. But what are you going to do with these selfsame passengers? You daren't set them free, and allow them to return to their homes, for the first thing they would do would be to denounce us to the police. On the other hand, you can hardly keep them in captivity for the rest of their lives!"

"Of course not," said the Doctor. "But what's to prevent us shooting them, and heaving their bodies overboard?"

"Nothing," said the Chief. "But what are you going to do after that? Are you going to take the Firefly back to England. If so, how are you going to account for the mysterious disappearance of all your passengers?"

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial story next week. Order a copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price one penny.)

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"CAUGHT REDHANDED!"

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and Ferrers Locke at St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons. One taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C., England."

T. A. Summerville, Greta, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl-reader in England.

G. S. Merrett, P. O. Box 696, Christchurch, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl-reader, age about 16.

A. Downes, P. O. Box 2269, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with readers living in Friendly Isles, Malay States, or Toronto, Canada.

T. Baker Brown, Redcourt, Coldstream, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl-reader; living in the country.

K. S. McCallum, G. P. O. Box 50, Christchurch, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl-reader, age 16, living in England.

J. Gallard, Coranna Road, Eastwood, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl-reader, age about 15 or 16.

W. Sullivan, 42, Wigran Road, Glebe, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl-reader interested in stamp-collecting.

L. Radovnick, 23, Ripon Street, Lyttleton, Canterbury, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader interested in photography, who is willing to exchange photographs.

E. V. Prentis, c. o. Mrs. Neill, Rose Bank, Royal Terrace, Kingsland, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a Russian reader.

R. Browne, 48, Place D'Armes, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a reader living in the British Isles.

A. A. E. Heavens, South Post Office, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with English readers.

W. Armstrong, 4, Goodwin Terrace, Port Elizabeth, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to exchange postcards with readers in England.

J. Kilpatrick, Talgai West, Hendon, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 16.

G. Holton, P.O. Box 378, Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader between the ages of 14 and 15, living in England.

Will Miss H. Hodgson, of Sheffield, kindly send to R. H. W. Colley, of 151, Joel Terrace, Mount Larley, West Australia, her address so that he can reply to her postcards?

J. Chew, 233, Caroline Street, N., Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a reader living in England.

J. McKee, 10, Rideau Street, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in England.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"CAUGHT REDHANDED,"

is the title of our next grand, long, complete tale of the juniors of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford. The mysterious intruder who signs himself "X" is abroad again in the old school, and a determined effort is made to solve the puzzle. Thanks to the exertions of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, who is also a friend of the chums of St. Jim's—and in lesser degree to those of the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—a cunning trap is devised, and the mysterious "X" is finally

"CAUGHT REDHANDED!"

As a school tale, brimming over with interest and excitement, "Caught Redhanded" will be hard to beat.

"No More 'Penny Bloods' for Me!"

An Assistant Postman's Appreciation of "The Gem" and "The Magnet."

The following letter from a North of England Gemite speaks for itself, and adds eloquent testimony of the way in which the two good old companion papers are quietly and unostentatiously, but none the less effectively, undermining the baneful influence of the "Penny Dreadful" type of paper by the sheer merit of the clean and wholesome, but withal, intensely interesting and amusing school stories which they contain. The better influence of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries has always been recognised by all who read them, and has grown steadily week by week since these papers were first started. This influence will henceforward be still further strengthened by the addition of our latest success, the "Penny Popular," to the two original companion papers, thus forming, to quote the words of an enthusiastic reader,

"An Invincible Trio of Companion Story Papers!"

But to come to my Radcliffe correspondent's letter. Here it is:

Radcliffe, nr. Manchester.

"Dear Sir,—I should like to tell you how I came to read 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet.'

"About three years ago I left school and started in the Post Office, Manchester, as a telegraph-messenger. I was put at a sub-post-office, where there were seven more telegraph lads besides myself. Well, I had been at the office for about three weeks, when I saw three of them reading 'The Gem.' I asked them what kind of tales they were and they told me they were school stories, and that they were 'champion,' and they would not miss reading them each week for any money. When one of them had read his 'Gem' he offered it to me, but I refused it, saying I would not read such 'rubbish!' A few weeks after I had refused the book I was on late duty, and I had not had a message for an hour or so, so I soon got sick of doing nothing, and looked round the place to see if I could see a 'Penny Blood!' as we used to call them, but I could not find one. All that I could find was a 'Gem,' so I read it, and I was more than surprised when I got half through to find what jolly good tales they were. From that day I have not yet missed getting 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet,' and since starting to read these papers I have never read a 'Penny Blood,' and I hope never to do so. I always give 'The Gem' and 'The Magnet' away, when I have finished with them, to different girls and boys each week.—I remain, your faithful reader,

W. H. G.

"P.S.—I am now an assistant postman."

An excellent and most interesting letter, W. H. G., for which many thanks. You aptly describe a process which many thousands of readers have been through before you, and many others are still going through—namely, the process

of finding out by comparison the superiority in every way of the grand companion libraries over papers of the "Penny Dreadful" type. Once any healthy-minded person—boy, girl, or grown-up—has read and enjoyed the splendid and perfectly wholesome stories contained in "The Gem" and "The Magnet," and I may now add "The Penny Popular," the taste vanishes for the sensational and harmful literature which is so recklessly offered on all sides, and which is often got up, as far as outward appearances go, to resemble the popular companion libraries, which are so different inside.

However, the famous saying is still true, that "it is possible to mislead all the public some of the time, and some of the public all the time, but not all the public all of the time!" And that's just why it is that an ever-increasing number of people are turning, like my correspondent W. H. G., with disgust from the sensational blood-and-thunder story-papers to those which offer—and at the same price, too!—really good, entertaining, and exciting reading matter, not a line of which contains anything to which the most particular reader could take exception. Every week more and more readers are taking in our splendid little companion papers, with the mental resolve, "No more 'Penny Bloods' for me!"

Replies in Brief.

J. G. Kerley (Ireland).—I cannot tell you from the description you send, if the stamp you possess has any particular value or not, as there are various shilling three-corner Cape of Good Hope stamps. I cannot insert your advertisement as the Chat Page is reserved exclusively for matters relating to "The Gem," and its companion Libraries.

A Manx Girl-Reader.—For the purpose of the Correspondence Exchange, you would rank as an English girl. You can, however, get into correspondence by watching the Exchange, and answering any of the advertisements which appears there.

No. 3 OF "THE PENNY POPULAR."

Well, and what do you all think of it? Am I right in thinking that it was even better than Nos. 1 and 2, which had such a wonderful reception? I hope all my reader-friends will drop me postcards, telling me just what they think of our latest companion paper—No. 3 of the "Invincible Trio," and letting me have their opinions and ideas as to whether it can be improved upon, and if so, in what directions. For the reader's postcard containing the best criticism and most helpful suggestions, I will award

A CASH PRIZE OF FIVE SHILLINGS.

To Strengthen the Hand.

There are any number of exercises which will strengthen and develop the muscles of the forearm and hand. Here are one or two for which no apparatus is necessary. Stand about two feet away from a wall, and then fall forward and allow the flat of the hands to rest on the wall. Then, by means of the muscles of the hands and arms, spring back to an upright position. Repeat this movement until tired.

The simple exercise of opening and clenching the fist, many times repeated, will in a short time have an extremely beneficial effect.

A splendid method of developing the muscles of the hand and forearm, without going to the expense of buying grip machines, is to use an ordinary indiarubber ball.

Do not get a hard one—at any rate, at first; a soft one will give as much resistance as you require.

Take the ball in one hand, and practise squeezing it as hard as you can, applying the pressure quite slowly, over and over again, until you feel the muscles just below the elbow contracted into hard knots.

THE EDITOR.