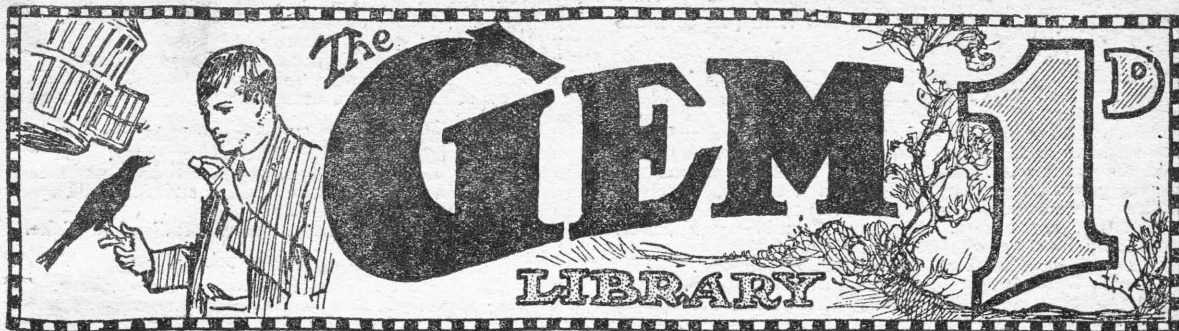


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THE SCHOOLBOY INFORMER!

A Splendid, New, Extra-Long Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry's News.

"THE great question is—"

"To be or not to be!"

"Rats! I was going to say—"

"Something silly—as usual!"

"Look here, Herries, if you're going to be funny, I'll dry up!"

"Good!"

Jack Blake, of St. Jim's, stood in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and glared round at his chums, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I was going to say," he went on deliberately, "that the great question is—"

"To be or not to be," said Digby blandly. "That's Shakespeare, isn't it? From 'Romeo and Juliet'?"

"Weally, Digbay," interrupted Arthur Augustus, the swell of the School House, "your ignomance is wegwettable! You are thinkin' of 'Hamlet'."

"I'm not," said Digby. "I'm thinking how jolly it would be if the weather suddenly behaved in a respectable manner."

"You uttah ass!"

Blake banged the table.

"When you fatheads have done interrupting," he said wrathfully, "I'll say what I have to say. The great question is, what shall we do with ourselves between the showers?"

"Is that the great question?" asked Herries in surprise.

"My hat! I thought you were going to say something important! How the dickens do we know what to do between the showers? Besides, I believe it's going to rain all the afternoon."

"Rats!" said Blake. "It's raining now, I'll admit, but I'll bet it stops in a few minutes. Anyhow, I can see the sky breaking through the clouds like a beautiful sea of blue—blue—"

"Blue blazes?" suggested Digby.

"You fathead!" exclaimed Blake. "I suppose you think that's funny? Anyhow, I want to know what to do between the showers. The sun'll be out in a minute, and then it'll be silly to stick here in the study."

Blake looked out of the window into the damp quadrangle. The afternoon was a typical April one, for it had been raining on and off since dinner-time, and the sky was clearing rapidly. Blake & Co. had been driven in from the playing-fields by the rain, but now it seemed as though the weather would clear up.

"Why shouldn't we pay a visit to Wylcombe, deah boys?" suggested D'Arcy. "Anythin' is bettah than stickin' heah in the studay doin' nothing. I pwopose to stwoll down and entah Mr. Bunn's establishment. I am wathah flush at pwesent, and I am quite willin' to stand a feed, if you chaps are agweeable."

Next Wednesday:

"D'ARCY, THE SUFFRAGIST!" AND "SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!"

Blake grinned.
 "Are we agreeable, kids?" chuckled Digby.
 "That's what I call a really sensible suggestion, Gussy," said Herries. "I didn't think you had it in you to make such a top-hole proposition!"

"Weally, Hewwies?"
 "Hurrah! Rain's stopped!" said Blake, turning from the window. "And here's the sun just coming out! Look! Come on, chaps!"

The Fourth-Formers hurried out into the passage, and were soon standing in the porch of the School House, looking out upon the sunlit quad. There had not been very much rain, and the ground, being dry, had soaked it up immediately.

Three juniors were crossing the quad, and they met Blake & Co. on the steps. They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell.

"You're wet, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.
 "Just a little damp, Gussy," replied Tom Merry. "We got caught in a giddy shower just after we left the village, and had to come through it."

"Why didn't you shelter?" asked Blake.

"Because we're not made of chocolate-cream," replied Monty Lowther. "Blessed if you kids ain't a lot of Mollies! Fancy sheltering because a few drops of rain happen to come down! I suppose you've been in the study all the afternoon?"

"We were playing until it started raining," said Digby.

"There you are!" ejaculated Lowther. "Just because it rained you buzzed indoors! Talk about cakes!"

"Look here," said Blake warmly, "if you hadn't been caught in the rain yourself you would have been dry!"

"Go hon!"

"I mean, if you'd been near a shelter you would jolly soon have hopped out of the rain!" said Blake. "You're all wet because you couldn't get out of the rain. We don't want any more of your giddy swank, Lowther!"

"Look here——"

"Rats!"

"You cheeky Fourth-Form sweep——"

Tom Merry stepped between Lowther and Blake and pushed them apart.

"Oh, dry up, you asses!" he grinned. "Blessed if you're not always having petty rows! After all, Monty, Blake was right."

"There you are!" said Blake triumphantly.

Monty Lowther glared round.

"Well," he said, "I'm glad I'm not a cake!"

"No, you're not sweet enough for that!" chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go and eat cokernuts!" growled Lowther.

He passed into the porch, and the others grinned.

Blake & Co. were about to descend to the quad, when Tom Merry stopped them.

"Heard the latest news?" he asked.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, have you been weadin' the news-papahs?" asked D'Arcy.

"No, ass! I don't mean that kind of news."

"What the dickens do you mean, then?" asked Jack Blake.

"There's a new kid just arrived in the Fourth——"

"New kid?" asked Digby interestedly. "My hat! That's funny! We haven't heard anything about him."

Blake & Co. were all attention.

"When did he come?" asked Blake.

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday!" ejaculated Herries. "What do you mean?"

If he came yesterday, we should have seen him before now, you chump!"

"Well, he came yesterday," grinned Tom Merry.

"And he's here now?" asked Digby doubtfully.

"No, he isn't!"

"Bai Jove, what evah are you talkin' about, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus, jamming his famous monocle into his eye and surveying the hero of the Shell.

"You say the new chap came yesterday——"

"So he did!"

"And he isn't heah now?"

"Quite right," chuckled Tom Merry. "He arrived yesterday, but he isn't here."

Blake & Co. looked mystified.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners.

"What's the joke?" demanded Blake suspiciously.

"I suppose this is some rotten catch of yours? There isn't a new fellow at all! You've been telling whoppers just for the sake of being funny!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as vevy bad form——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" grinned Tom Merry. "If you chaps had let me finish at first, you would have understood at once. I said there was a new fellow arrived, and I spoke the truth. He arrived yesterday."

"But he isn't here, and hasn't been here?" asked Blake.

"Quite right, my son."

"Then where the dickens is he?" roared Blake.

"At the Grammar School!" chuckled Tom Merry. "I was going to tell you that at first, only you were all in too much of a hurry. The new chap arrived at the Grammar School yesterday."

Blake & Co. gazed at one another in exasperation.

"And do you call that news?" demanded Blake warmly.

"Do you mean to say you've kept us here all this time to tell us that a fatheaded new fellow has arrived at the fat-headed Grammar School? You fatheaded ass!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's the new chap's name?" asked Herries.

"Well, I think it's Sinclair," said Tom Merry.

"Sinclair!" repeated Blake curiously.

"Yes; Tom Sinclair," said the hero of the Shell. "Any-

how, that's what Gordon Gay told us when we met him in Rylcombe, and I suppose he ought to know. The new chap's sure to be a decent sort, because he's got the same Christian name as I have!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Blake.

"What's up with you, ass?" asked Digby.

"Tom Sinclair 'at the Grammar School?" said Blake.

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Are you off your rocker, Blake?" demanded Herries.

"What the dickens are you looking so giddy surprised about?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"What's the mattah?"

"Do you know this Tom Sinclair?" asked Manners curiously.

"I should think I jolly well do!" said Blake. "Why, he's my uncle's ward, and I've known him since he was a little kiddie. Of course, we've only met now and again, but I know him as well as I know you chaps!"

CHAPTER 2.

Blake's Mysterious Behaviour.

TOM MERRY and the other juniors gathered round Blake interestedly.

"Then Sinclair's a chum of yours?" asked Manners.

"Well, not exactly a chum," replied Blake. "I haven't had much to do with him, because my uncle lives in Devonshire and my people in Yorkshire. The last time I saw him was about two years ago, so I can't say that he's exactly a chum. Still, I'll introduce him to you chaps when you see him."

"Rather rummy he wasn't sent to St. Jim's," said Herries.

"I don't know about that," replied Blake. "I don't expect Mr. Collins—that's my uncle—knew that I was at St. Jim's, or he might have sent Sinclair here. But are we going down to the village this afternoon, or not?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we'd better buck up!" said Blake. "If we stop here jawing, we shall waste all the time. Come on, kids!"

"Right-ho!"

And Blake & Co. parted with Tom Merry and Manners and sallied across the quad. The sun was still shining brilliantly, and there were no more rain-clouds within sight. Presumably the rest of the afternoon was destined to be fine.

"Hurry up!" said Blake, walking fairly fast. "I'm jolly peckish, and a good feed will suit me down to the ground. Don't lag behind, Gussy; we shall want you to do the paying bizney!"

"Rather!" chuckled Herries.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy set his shiny topper upon his head more securely, and hurried up to his chums, who were walking at a pace which was not exactly suited to the dignity which is supposed to stamp the caste of Vere de Vere.

"Bai Jove, deah boys! Pway modewate your gait!" panted D'Arcy. "There is uttaly no weason for this feahful wash! You are puttin' me into quite a fluttah, and my wotten collah is stickin' to my wotten neck!"

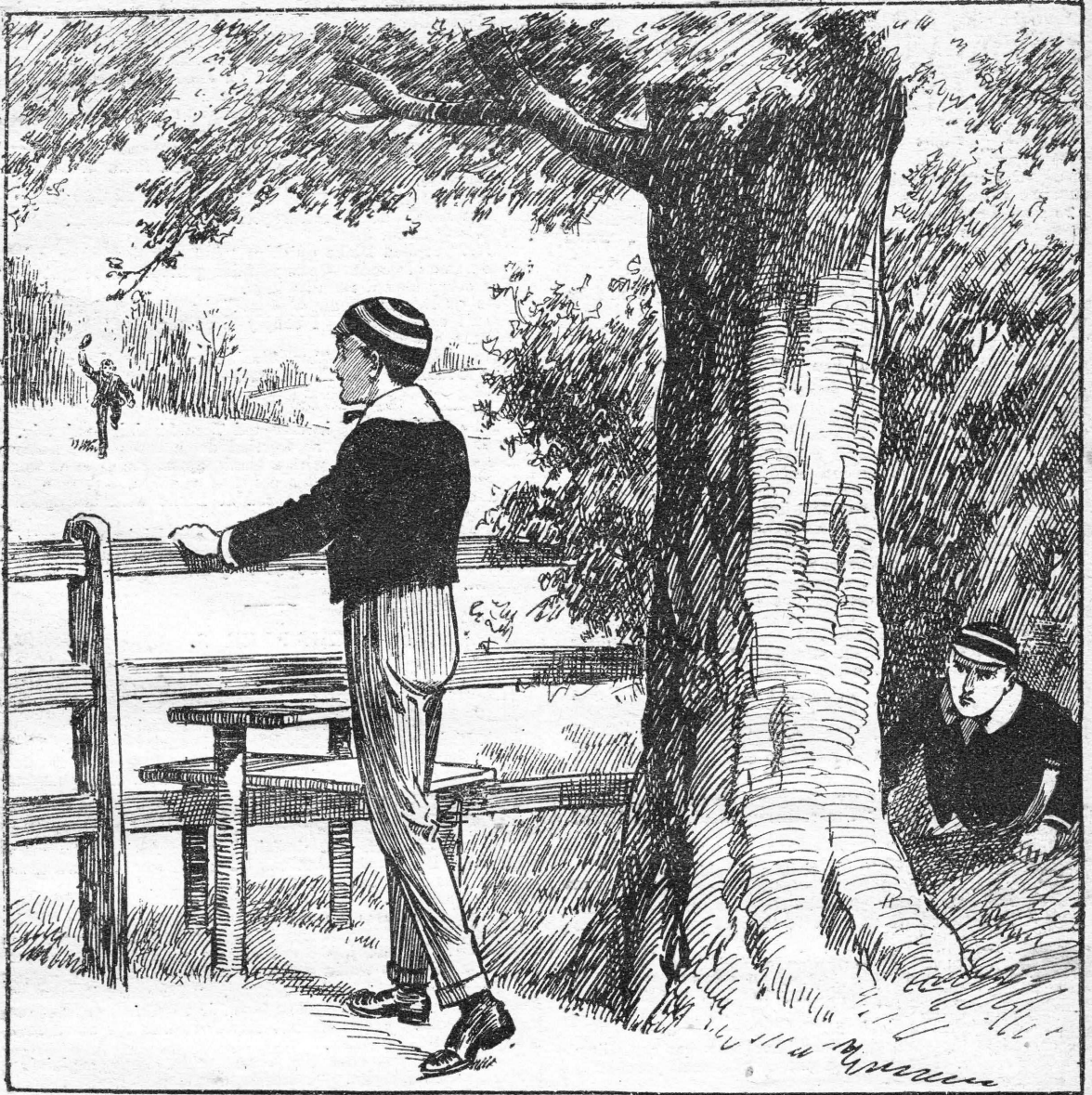
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273

(See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)



Creeping up, Levison was able to secrete himself almost exactly behind Blake, within two yards of him. He lay flat on the ground, and peered cautiously between a break in the branches. Tom Sinclair hurried up. "Blessed if I expected to see you here to-night, Jack!" he exclaimed breathlessly. (See Chapter 1.)

"That's all right, Gussy!" said Digby. "Let it stick. We don't mind."

"You uttah ass, Dig!"

"Buck up, Gussy! Make the dust fly!"

"I uttahly wefuse to make the dust fly, Herries!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "If I did I should get my twousahs into a feahful state. Besides, you silly duffah, there is no dust whatevah on the woad; the wain has laid it!"

"Well, make the mud fly, Gussy!" grinned Blake. "Don't you understand that we're hungry, and that we want to get to Mr. Bunn's establishment as quickly as possible?"

"There is no weason for this unnecessary huvwuy!" said D'Arcy protestingly. "You chaps can wush on if you like, and ordah the gwub!"

"Don't forget Miss Bunn, Gussy!" chuckled Blake. "She'll very likely be serving, and she'll think it awfully boorish of you if you don't turn up with us. You must act like a gentleman, you know, although it may be a wench."

Arthur Augustus came to a sudden halt.

"Do I undahstand that you imply that it is a w'ench for

me to act like a gentleman, Blake?" he demanded frigidly, jamming his monocle securely into his eye. "Bai Jove, if you do not immediately wetwact that wemark I shall be compelled to administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

"You uttah wottah!" shouted D'Arcy. "If you think it is a w'ench—"

"You shouldn't say 'it,' Gussy," interrupted Blake. "It's not gentlemanly to refer to a girl as 'it.'"

"I did nothin' of the sort, Blake!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "I was not wefewwin' to a girl at all!"

"But you said something about a wench," said Blake innocently. "Miss Bunn's a wench, isn't she? Anyhow, that's what they used to call girls in the olden days!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't say wench!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I said w'ench!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "What's the difference?"

Arthur Augustus gazed round excitedly.

"Wench and w'ench are altogether two different words!" he shouted. "You are deliberately waggin' me, Blake, and

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY, THE SUFFRAGIST!"

A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's,
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

if you do not immediately offer a complete apology, I shall be compelled to wet my steps to the coll."

"How about the feed, Gussy?"

"I shall not be present!"

"Then who's going to pay?" asked Digby.

"You can tell Mr. Bunn to book the feed to me," replied the swell of the School House frigidly. "As I have undertaken to provide the grub, I am compelled to keep my word. Blake has passed several disparaging remarks."

"Oh, dry up, you chump!" grinned Blake. "Blessed if you ain't more touchy than ever. I apologise humbly, and crave your august pardon! Tell me, O thou of noble attainments, if thou art satisfied with my apology—I mean apology."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy calmed down.

"You burbin' duffah!" he exclaimed. "Pway don't be an ass!"

"Am I reprieved?" asked Blake humbly. "Has your forgiveness been extended?"

"Bai Jove, Blake, are you off your wockah?" said D'Arcy. "As you have apologised, I will say no more about the mattah."

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Weally, Herries—"

"Oh, come on, for goodness sake!" exclaimed Digby.

And Blake & Co. proceeded once more to the village, harmony being fully restored. Arthur Augustus had realised that Blake had been ragging him, but, under the circumstances, D'Arcy decided to overlook the matter. There was no time for further argument.

Having arrived at Mr. Bunn's establishment in the village, the chums of Study No. 6 proceeded to enjoy a thorough "blow-out," as Blake elegantly put it. D'Arcy had just received a "fivah" from his pater, and he stood his chums a truly sumptuous spread. While they were in the midst of it, Levison, of the Fourth, strolled in. Levison was the cad of St. Jim's, and universally disliked.

"You chaps look comfy," he remarked sneeringly. "Room for another at that table?"

Blake looked up.

"Yes; you can join us if you like," he said in a moment of good-natured generosity. "I don't suppose Gussy will object."

"Wathah not!" said D'Arcy. "Pway join us, Levison."

"No thanks!" he said. "I'm rather particular who I feed with, you know."

"What!"

"I can pay for my own grub, thanks!" said Levison.

"You rotter!" shouted Blake wrathfully. "You beastly bouncer! My hat, I think you take the cake for caddishness, Levison! Even when we do offer to tolerate you, you insult us!"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Weally, Levison, I regard you as an utter outsider! If they were not for the wisk of soilin' my hands, I would throw you out of this building!"

"Oh, rats!" sneered Levison.

He turned to the counter, where Mr. Bunn was regarding him rather coldly. Levison made one or two small purchases, then left the shop.

"The wank wottah!" said D'Arcy warmly.

Blake & Co. continued their feast, and soon forgot about the cad of the Fourth. At last they had finished, and D'Arcy paid the bill.

"Well, thanks for the spread, Gussy," said Blake contentedly, as they passed out of the shop.

"Yes; it was topping!" said Herries.

"Oh, pway don't mention it, dear boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Suppose we stroll quietly back to the coll, now?"

"That's the ticket," agreed Blake.

And the chums of Study No. 6 leisurely walked up the High Street. The sun was still shining, and, for April, was quite warm. Blake dropped behind for a moment to tie his bootlace. He did not see Levison lounging in the doorway of a small shop—the grocer's—where he was waiting to be served. At the moment a fussy old lady fully occupied the shopkeeper's attention.

Blake straightened up, and was about to hurry after his chums, when he paused. A boy had just appeared from a side street, and he was coming straight towards Blake, although he had not seen him yet. He wore the Grammar School cap.

"Why," began Blake, that's—"

Then he paused, and a look of sheer amazement entered his eyes. He started forward with a low cry, Levison watching him interestedly.

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"Good heavens!" muttered Blake, in a startled voice, audible to Levison.

Blake came to a standstill in the centre of the road, and stood staring, wide-eyed, at the Grammar School boy. The latter suddenly looked up, and an expression came into his rather pale face, every bit as surprised as Blake's. He walked right up to Blake, and stood staring at him in consternation.

"Jack!" he exclaimed. "Jack Blake!"

For a moment the two boys stared at one another, and Levison, from the grocer's shop, watched them in considerable surprise.

"Great Scott," said Blake at last, "what on earth—"

"You here, Jack?" interrupted the other sharply. "Do you belong to St. Jim's?"

"Yes," replied Blake quickly; "but, my dear chap, what, in the name of goodness, are you doing here? I thought—"

The other looked round wildly.

"Be quiet, for goodness' sake!" he ejaculated anxiously. "I can't explain now. I simply can't explain!"

"Can't explain—"

"No. My name is Tom Sinclair, and I'm the new boy at the Grammar School. Please—please don't say another word."

"But—"

"I'll explain later," interrupted Tom Sinclair anxiously.

And, with pale face, he hurried down the street, leaving Blake staring after him with a blank, amazed expression upon his face. Levison, from his point of vantage, had seen and heard everything, and he gazed at Blake with undisguised curiosity.

The next moment D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby were crowding round Blake, for they had witnessed the little scene, and had heard a word or two as they hurried up at the last moment.

CHAPTER 3. Something Wrong.

"BAI Jove, Blake, whatever is the mattah?"

"You look flabbergasted!"

"Who was that Grammar School chap?"

Jack Blake started, and looked at his curious chums. They were gathered round him in a cluster, for they were anxious to know the reason for the hurried talk with the Grammar School boy.

"Who was it?" repeated Blake abstractedly.

"Yes, you silly chump!"

"It was Sinclair, you duffahs," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Didn't you hear the stwanga say it as we came up? It was Tom Sinclair, wasn't it, Blake?"

Blake hesitated.

"He said that was his name," he replied slowly.

"Said it was!" exclaimed Digby. "Look here, Blake, what's up? If that was Sinclair, why didn't you introduce us? You said you would when we met the chap."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "I regard it as vewy stwange that you should allow Sinclair to wethah before you introduced us. You were not talkin' to him for more than half a minute, deah boy."

"And what was that the chap said about explaining later?" asked Herries. "After he'd said that he buzzed off like lightning, and you stood staring after him as though he'd been a giddy ghost. What's the mystery, Blake—what's the matter?"

"You knew he was at the Gwammah School, so why were you so flustahed?" asked D'Arcy.

Blake looked at his chum, and started.

"Flustered?" he repeated. "Who was flustered?"

"You were, deah boy!"

"Rather!"

"Rot!" said Blake, moving forward. "Let's be getting on."

And the chums continued their walk through the village. Meanwhile, Levison had disappeared into the shop, and was now being attended to. But he was thinking of the strange conversation which had taken place between Blake and the new Grammar School boy. Levison knew that there was something wrong somewhere, and he told himself that he would ferret out the truth. Levison's nature was far from being honourable and straightforward, and he loved to pry into affairs which had nothing to do with him.

Blake & Co. walked on.

ANSWERS

"It's all very well for you to say that you weren't flustered, Blake," said Digby, "because you were jolly flustered. Tell us—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Blake.

"Dry up!" repeated Digby indignantly. "My hat, I like that! Why, you ass, you've got to explain why you didn't keep Sinclair with you until we came up. Why on earth did he hurry off without seeing us?"

"Perhaps he was frightened?" said Blake crossly.

"Frightened?" repeated Digby.

"Frightened?" said D'Arcy. "Frightened of what, deah boy?"

"Of you chaps," exclaimed Blake. "Your funny faces are enough to frighten anybody. I wish you wouldn't ask so many fatheaded questions."

Arthur Augustus bristled.

"Bai Jove, Blake, I weally cannot allow that remark to go unchallenged!" he said warmly. "Do you mean to insinuate that our faces would frighten—"

"Ring off, Gussy," said Herries. "We want to ask Blake some questions."

"I uttably wufuse to wing off, Hewwies," said D'Arcy excitedly. "I—"

"Look here, Gussy, don't act the goat," interrupted Blake, looking strangely serious. "I've never known such chaps for being curious. What the dickens does it matter to you if Tom Sinclair didn't stop to speak to you? This isn't the only day in the year, is it?"

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Herries, who was a little dense.

"Can't you speak to Sinclair some other day? He—he was in a terrific hurry, and didn't want to stop. He—he— Oh, blow! I'm blessed if I'm going to make a lot of giddy excuses to you asses!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Look here, Blake, I'm bothered if I like the way you're treating us!" exclaimed Digby warmly. "There's something jolly queer about this business! Why did you look so awfully startled?"

"Did I look startled?" asked Blake.

"Yes, you did."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Howwibly startled, deah boy!"

"Besides," went on Dig, "you stared after Sinclair as though he'd been a ghost. Anybody might think that you'd had an awful shock. Why didn't Sinclair stop with you until we came up, that's what I want to know? Why did he look it so jolly quickly?"

"He was in a hurry," said Blake slowly.

"Well, that was pretty evident, you chump," said Herries exasperatedly. "It almost looked as though he didn't want to be seen with you. And there's another thing—"

"What's that?" asked Blake.

"Sinclair said he'd explain something later."

"Yaas, wathah! That's quite wight, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus. "The boundah said that he was weady to explain somethin' later on. It stvuck me as being wathah queeah, you know. What is he goin' to explain? An' why couldn't he explain it then? Why—"

"Dry up!" roared Blake.

"I uttably wufuse to dwy up—"

"Then keep on jawing!" growled Blake crossly. "I shan't listen to you."

"But ain't you going to tell us why you were so surprised?" asked Digby curiously. "Ain't you going to tell us why Sinclair rushed off so quickly? The thing's so jolly funny that we've a right to know."

"Rather!" agreed Herries.

"As your chums, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, "we have a perfect wight to know what is the mattah. You must admit that it is not exactly the thing to keep your chums in the dark over a mattah of this description. Undah ordinary ciroos, you would have w'ung Sinclair's hand, and intwouded him to us. Instead of that, howevah, you have a few huvvied woids with him, an' then he wushes off without even seein' us."

"Don't you call that rummy?" asked Digby.

"Oh, don't bother!" growled Blake, trudging on.

"Don't bother! Well, you rotter—"

"Gweat, Scott!"

The juniors stared at one another indignantly.

"Ain't you going to explain?" asked Herries wrathfully.

"No," said Blake uncomfortably.

"Not—not going to explain!" gasped Digby, staring.

"No!"

"Bai Jove, you wottah, why not?"

"Because I'm not!" said Blake aggressively. "I don't choose to."

"You—you—"

"You boundah, Blake!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly.

"You wotten boundah!"

"Rats!"

"Did you say wats to me—"

"No, I said 'rats'!" growled Jack Blake crossly.

And he walked on towards St. Jim's with set face and firm footsteps. His chum looked at him with wrathful expressions, and no matter how much they plied him with questions, he steadfastly refused to answer them. Therefore, when the quartette reached St. Jim's they were all feeling—and looking—decidedly ill-tempered.

Meanwhile, Levison had left the grocer's shop in Rylcombe, and was walking to the school with a thoughtful expression on his dark, keen face. The cad of St. Jim's was thinking of the strange meeting between Blake and Tom Sinclair. Levison realised that there was something mysterious about it, and the words he had overheard—although they revealed nothing to him—told him that all was not as it should be. There was some mystery about the new boy at the Grammar School which Blake himself did not fully understand. His amazement at the sight of Sinclair had been very obvious, and Levison told himself that he would find out what the secret was.

"The whole affair looks jolly queer to me," he murmured as he walked along. "Blake wouldn't have shown that surprise if everything was all right. This new chap told Blake that he'd explain. Explain what? I'm not going to rest until I know the reason for Blake's amazement and Sinclair's consternation."

Levison decided to tell nobody of what he had seen and overheard. Blake's chums knew practically nothing; they had not seen the meeting as Levison had, and, therefore, did not realise so fully that there was something radically wrong. Levison delighted in probing into other people's affairs, and meant to take full advantage of this occasion.

CHAPTER 4.

Many Visitors.

"GREAT SCOTT! What the dickens is up with you kids?"

Thus Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three were sunning themselves on the School House steps, and Blake & Co. had just crossed the quad. Blake was looking ill-tempered, and his chums were fairly bristling with indignation. Their efforts to make Blake explain had all ended in failure, and, in consequence, the Fourth-Formers were not in the best of spirits. Tom Merry gazed at them in surprise as they halted.

"What the dickens is up?" he repeated.

"You are!" growled Blake.

"I am? What—"

"Up the giddy pole!" said Blake. "Let's pass, you ass!"

"Look here, Blakey," said Tom Merry, "if you think I'm going to be cheeked by a kid like you, you're jolly well mistaken! You Fourth-Formers seem to think—"

"That's more than you do," said Blake aggressively. "You don't seem to think, even! You haven't got the brains to think with!"

"Look here—"

"Look here—"

"Bai Jove, deah boys, pway cease this squabblin'!" interrupted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "For once, Tom Mewwy, I agree with you that Blake is a silly duffah! I wegwet to say that Blake has acted in a mannah which is both ungentlemanly and unfriendly."

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "Trouble in the family?"

"Yaas, wathah! Blake is a wank wottah!" replied D'Arcy. "He has uttably failed to come up to the sewatch—"

"Oh, rats!" growled Blake.

And he walked into the School House rather hurriedly, leaving his chums and the Terrible Three staring after him in some surprise.

"Can't make him out," said Herries slowly. "Before we started for the village he was as jolly as could be. Now he's like a bear with a giddy sore head!"

"Eaten too much at the tuck-shop, perhaps?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Pway don't talk wubbish, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, he might have indigestion—"

"Rot!" exclaimed Digby. "He's worrying about the new kid at the Grammar School!"

"Have you seen him, then?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Yes—for about a second."

"You spoke to the chap, of course?"

"No, we didn't."

"Didn't speak to him?" asked Manners.

"No."

"Why, what—"

"Pway let me explain, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. And he told the Terrible Three how Blake and Tom Sinclair had

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 275.

met, and how they had parted almost immediately, and how Blake had looked startled and amazed.

"It's jolly peculiar," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Rather!" agreed Manners. "I vote we go and find him, and have it out!"

"After all," said Herries, "he oughtn't to have secrets with a blessed Grammar School cad! It's—it's treachery!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here, steady on!" laughed Tom Merry, looking at the indignant Fourth-Formers. "We don't know anything yet. All said and done, Blake hasn't performed anything terrible. Sinclair's almost a relative—being Blake's uncle's adopted son—and he may have told Blake some bad news."

"Bai Jove!"

"Blake may have been bowled over by the news, and doesn't want to tell any of us yet," went on Tom Merry, drawing upon his imagination. "That would account for Sinclair buzzing off immediately."

"How?" asked Herries.

"Why, having something serious on his mind, he wouldn't care to be introduced to a set of jabbering kids!" said Tom Merry blandly. "He would—"

"What did you say, Tom Mewwy?" asked D'Arcy warmly.

"Oh, don't get ratty, Gussy! I said he would hurry off and tell Blake that he'd explain fully another time. That's what you heard as you came up, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Digby.

"Then I expect I've hit it," went on the captain of the Shell. "I vote we find Blake and ask him what's up—tell him that we're sorry if there's anything wrong, and offer to help, if necessary."

"Bai Jove! You know," said D'Arcy, "I had nevah looked at the mattah in that light. If Blake is weally in twouble, that explains why he is touchy with us. Pewwaps we had bettah wout him out, and learn the twuth."

"That's the idea."

"Come on, then, deah boys!"

"Good egg!"

And the juniors entered the School House and went in search of Blake. The first place they went to was Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, and there they found him, sitting before the fire, staring into it rather abstractedly.

"Here he is, deah boys!"

The juniors crowded into the study, and Blake looked at them in surprise.

"What the—"

"It's all right, Blake!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"We've guessed what's the matter, and we've come to offer—"

Blake started, and rose to his feet.

"You've guessed?" he asked quickly.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"What do you mean?" demanded Blake anxiously.

"What have you guessed?"

"Why, that Tom Sinclair's told you of some trouble at your uncle's, and that you didn't want to tell us just yet," said Tom Merry. "Is it anything serious, old man?"

Blake sat down, again, obviously relieved.

"Well, not very," he said slowly. "It might be all right."

"Your uncle ill?" asked Manners.

"No."

"Aunt, perhaps?" suggested Lowther.

"No; she's all right," said Blake.

"Any cousins—"

"Oh, dry up, for goodness' sake!" snapped Blake, glaring round him. "Blessed if you haven't turned into a lot of curious Nosey Parkers! I—I'm not feeling exactly well, and I wish you'd all clear out!"

"Well, that's plain, anyway," said Monty Lowther.

"You want us to go?" asked Manners.

"Yes, I jolly well do! Can't you mind your own giddy bizney?"

"My hat! You cheeky rotter!" roared Manners. "If you think I want to know your bizney, you're jolly well mistaken! You can go and eat coke, for all I care!"

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"Bosh!"

"Bai Jove, Blake—"

"Buzz off, Gussy!"

"I uttahly refuse to buzz off!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Then don't jabber so much!" snapped Blake.

He looked round him with a warlike air, and the juniors gazed at him in surprise and indignation. It was not like Blake to act in this fashion, and Tom Merry realised that he was worrying over something, and that he wanted to be alone. The time to ask questions concerning Tom Sinclair would be after tea, when Blake had recovered his good

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 273.

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humour. So the hero of the Shell looked round at his companions.

"Come on," he said shortly, "we'll scoot!"

"Why?" demanded Herries.

"Because Blake wants to be alone," said Tom Merry.

"Hasn't he said so? The poor chap's ill—"

"I'm not ill, you fathead!" roared Blake.

"Well, you're worried," went on Tom Merry, "and that's pretty nearly as bad. What Sinclair told you hasn't improved your temper, old man, so we'll leave you to yourself to think matters out."

"Pewwaps that will be best, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Good!" said Blake, calming down. "Buzz off!"

And the juniors "buzzed off," although most of them objected in strong terms. They wanted to know the reason for Blake's strange behaviour in the village—for it truly was strange, considering that the new Grammar School boy was almost a relative—and they would not be satisfied until they were enlightened.

Half an hour later Arthur Augustus, Herries, and Digby arrived for tea. Blake was still sitting in front of the fire, and he looked up with a wrinkled brow.

"What's up now?" he demanded irritably.

"Tea, you ass!" said Herries.

"Tea?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Oh, blow tea!" growled Blake. "Why, you silly chumps, you don't mean to say you can eat any tea after that feed at the tuckshop? Blessed if you're not getting as bad as Fatty Wynn!"

The juniors glared, and Arthur Augustus surveyed Blake severely through his famous monocle.

"Weally, Blake, I uttahly fail to see the weason for that remark! Because we all had a feed in the village, that does not mean to say that we must miss tea! Pway don't be an ass!"

"I don't want any tea," said Blake. "I'm not hungry."

"All right," said Digby easily, "you can watch us. We sha'n't make any charge!"

"Ass!"

"You are certainly in a wathah peculiah mood, Blake," said D'Arcy. "Aftah tea we shall ask you seweval more questions about Tom Sinclair, and I twust you will answah them."

"Well, you can trust all you like!" said Blake grimly.

"What evah do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm not going to satisfy your beastly curiosity!" said Blake. "I've already told you that Sinclair was in a hurry, and that he didn't want to be introduced to you at the moment. If you're not satisfied with that, you can jolly well go unsatisfied!"

"But—"

"There are no 'buts' about it," said Blake firmly. "You can ask me questions until you're blue in the face, but I sha'n't answer 'em! How the dickens can I tell you what's up when I don't know myself?"

"Don't you know why you were so jolly startled?" asked Digby sarcastically.

"Yes, I know that," admitted Blake.

"Well, tell us!"

"I can't; and if I could I shouldn't," said Blake, suddenly firing up. "I always thought you chaps were decent sorts, but it seems that you like bothering a fellow when he's in trouble. I don't call that chummy, if you do!"

"In twouble, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus concernedly. "Bai Jove, I nevah thought—"

"Well, you should think!" growled Blake. And he picked up a book and commenced to read, declining to discuss the matter further.

Tea was on the go in a very short time, and Blake condescended to partake of a slice of cake and a cup of tea. His chums, however, had regained their appetites by this time, and proceeded to make the provisions look rather diminished.

There was a crash on the door, and it suddenly flew open. Bernard Glyn, Clifton Dane, Kangaroo, and Thompson of the Shell, trooped in.

"Good-evening!" said Bernard Glyn calmly.

"Good-morning!" said Digby sarcastically. "Come to borrow a pat of butter? Where would you like it—on a plate or on your nose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Kangaroo grayely. "We have come here on a mission of peace and solicitude!"

The Fourth-Formers stared.

"You've come on what?" asked Blake, looking up.

"On a mission of peace and solicitude," repeated the Cornstalk junior, without even a smile. "It has come to our ears that our worthy chum Blake has been taken suddenly and seriously ill! We have, therefore, made a

pilgrimage from the Shell passage in order to ascertain if the end is drawing near."

Blake sprang to his feet.

"You burbling idiots!" he roared.

"The patient is, I fear, becoming unmanageable!" exclaimed Thompson gravely.

"You—you—you frabjous chumps!" howled Blake. "I'm not ill! Who the dickens told you I was ill?"

"It came to our ears——"

"They're long enough, anyhow!" grinned Digby.

Thompson turned red.

"Look here, you Fourth-Form bounder——"

But Clifton Dane grasped Thompson's arm.

"This unseemly conduct is—is—is unseemly!" he exclaimed severely. "How dare you create a disturbance in a room of sickness? Blake, poor chap, is rapidly becoming worse and worse! His brain, I fear, is giving way."

"In my opinion," added Glyn, "the poor fellow is in the last stages of lunacy. In plain language, Blake is off his rocker. A single glance at his face is enough to tell anyone that obvious fact."

Blake, indeed, was crimson in the face with wrath, and he glared speechlessly at the visitors. Apparently the Terrible Three had given out that Blake was not quite himself, and the juniors had made up their minds to perpetrate a little rag. At any rate, although the visitors' faces were grave, their eyes were twinkling.

"If you think it's funny to come here and make asses of yourselves, you're jolly well mistaken!" roared Blake exasperatedly. "If you don't clear out we'll call to some of the chaps and have you slung out."

Thompson shook his head sadly.

"A sure sign of a weakened intellect," he said. "The poor fellow acutely imagines that these Fourth-Form kids could put us out."

"The idea, of course, is absurd," said Kangaroo gravely.

"Bai Jove, is it!" said D'Arcy warmly. "I wathah think you have cawwied this joke too far, you boundahs. As long as you wagged Blake only, it was all wight, but when you say that the Fourth is incapable of wipin' up the Shell, it is time for us to interfere."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Herries excitedly. "Chuck them out!"

"Rescue, Fourth!" yelled Digby. "Rescue! Rescue!"

"Here, I say," began Glyn quickly, "don't act the giddy ox, Digby——"

"Is the Fourth capable of whacking the Shell?" demanded Dig.

"No!" roared the Shell fellows. "Rather not!"

"Bai Jove, you boundahs! Wescue!"

Bernard Glyn & Co. glanced at one another hurriedly, then all coming to the same decision at the same moment, made for the door. But it was already blocked, and several Fourth-Formers squeezed into the study, others filling the passage.

"What's the row?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Who's being murdered intirely?" asked Reilly excitedly.

Brooke and Lorne pushed forward.

"It's all right!" shouted Blake. "These cheeky Shell bounders have been attempting to be funny! They say the Fourth couldn't wipe 'em up!"

"What!" roared the Fourth.

"Now, look here——" began Kangaroo hastily.

But Blake was exasperated, and he flung himself at the Cornstalk junior. Blake's action was the signal for a general attack, and the next moment the Shell fellows found themselves assailed on all sides. Study No. 6 was full of flying forms, and the dust rose in clouds.

The melee was short and sharp. A series of yells, and bumps, and gasps sounded, then Bernard Glyn & Co. were literally hurled out into the passage. The door of the study closed with a crash, and the Shell juniors picked themselves up and stared at one another through the dust.

"Well, it was your fatheaded, idiotic idea!" growled Bernard Glyn.

"My idea!" roared Noble. "Why, you burbling——"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Thompson savagely. "We're all in it! I vote we buzz off and get ourselves clean!"

And the Shell fellows "buzzed off," without wasting any more time on useless argument.

CHAPTER 5.

In Another's Shoes.

BLAKE looked, and felt, very much better after his tussle, and continued his interrupted tea, wearing a fairly amiable expression. Nevertheless, there was still a troubled look in his eyes, although he tried to joke and make his chums believe he was in his usual high spirits.

D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby had tact enough to say nothing further in regard to the incident in the village. By

this time they realised that it would be useless asking Blake any more questions. Therefore they continued their tea without referring to the subject.

They thought that Blake would possibly volunteer to tell them his little secret of his own accord, but Blake did nothing of the sort. After tea he descended to the common-room, and his chums accompanied him.

"I wathah think Blake is wowwied ovah something," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Blake stared thoughtfully out of the window into the evening sunlight. "Weally, deah boys, I fail to see the reason for all this mystewy."

"It's jolly rummy," agreed Herries and Digby.

Blake was over the other side of the room, so he could not hear his chums' remarks.

"Theah seems uttahly no reason for his wefusin' to tell us why he is so upset," went on D'Arcy. "I wondah—— Bai Jove, he is goin' out!"

Blake had suddenly walked across to the door, pushing his way hurriedly through the juniors who occupied the room.

"Where's he going?" said Digby wonderingly.

"Shall we follow the boundah?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Shall we——"

"You can if you like," said Herries gruffly. "Blessed if I'm going to run about after him! If he doesn't like to tell his chums what's up, he can jolly well look after his own troubles. I'm going to stop here."

"So am I," said Digby.

"Oh, vevy well, deah boys!" agreed the swell of the School House. "I will stop with you. Attah all, Blake is actin' in a mannah which I stwongly disappwove of. Pew-waps it would be bettah to ignore him for the west of the evenin'."

And the chums agreed upon that course. Meanwhile, Blake had hurried out on to the School House steps. From the common-room window he had seen a small village boy crossing the quad, and the thought had instantly crossed Blake's mind that the youngster might be bringing him a note.

And his supposition was correct. Blake arrived on the steps of the School House just as the small boy came up. As it happened, there was nobody about at the moment. Blake looked at the messenger eagerly.

"Have you got a note?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the village boy bluntly.

"Who's it for?"

"Young gent named Blake," replied the boy. "It was given to me by a young gent from the Grammar School, and said as I was to bring it up 'ere——"

"Good!" said Blake briskly. "Hand it over, kid! I'm Blake!"

The note was handed over, and the village boy took his departure enriched by a sixpence. Blake took the note to Study No. 6, and closed the door. Then he eagerly ripped open the envelope, and read its contents:

"Dear Jack,—I simply couldn't explain to you in the street this afternoon. Uncle had no idea that you were at a school near Rylcombe, or I should never have come. Please say nothing until I've seen you, when I will explain everything. I shall be at the stile, down Rylcombe Lane (opposite the wood), at half-past six. Please be there."

Blake stared at the note thoughtfully.

"He hasn't signed it—of course," he murmured. "My only aunt, I'm blessed if I can realise it now! Half-past six—eh? I'll be there to the tick of the clock!"

For five or ten minutes Blake paced up and down the study, deep in thought, then he went down to the common-room once again. His chums were busily engaged in an argument with the Terrible Three, and Blake felt rather relieved, for he did not want to be questioned just then.

Soon after six he quietly slipped out. The sky had become clouded now, and the evening looked like being a wet one. Indeed, as Blake crossed the quad, a sharp shower came on. But, as he was wearing his mackintosh, he did not mind. On the contrary, he was rather glad of the rain, for it would certainly prevent any other boys making a journey to the village, thus leaving him to have an uninterrupted talk with Tom Sinclair.

It was, of course, still light, and Blake saw, far down the road, the figure of the new boy at the Grammar School long before he reached him. A minute or two later the two met under a thick tree, being quite sheltered from the rain.

Tom Sinclair caught Blake's arm anxiously.

"Have you told anybody?" he asked quickly. "Have you said anything?"

"Of course I haven't, Bob," exclaimed Blake. "But what in the name of all that's wonderful, are you doing here?"

"I'm at the Grammar School."

"Yes, I know that. I mean, what are you doing here in Tom's name?" asked Blake quickly. "When I saw you this

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 273.

evening I was simply staggered—you could have knocked me down with a giddy feather. I tell you, Bob, I was placed in a rotten position. The chaps simply pelted me with questions."

"But you didn't tell them——"

"Not a word," said Blake—"not a syllable, old man!"

"Thank goodness!"

Blake's companion breathed a sigh of relief.

"But you haven't explained yet," went on Blake eagerly. "I'm simply dying to know how you got here. I thought you were in the—the——"

Blake paused, rather awkwardly, and the other smiled bitterly.

"The reformatory," he said quietly. "You thought I was in the reformatory?"

"Yes," said Blake in a low tone.

"Well, I'm not, as you can see. Look here, Jack," went on the other eagerly, "you don't think I'm guilty, do you? You don't think I really did steal——"

Blake coloured.

"You ass!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Do you think I'd believe that my own cousin was a thief? The very instant I heard the news, Bob—that you'd been sent to a reformatory for stealing—I told myself that there was some rotten mistake."

"You're a brick, Jack."

"Rot!" said Blake. "But can't you tell me how it is that you're here? You, Bob Collins, masquerading in Tom Sinclair's place—using Tom's very name?"

The new boy at the Grammar School looked thoughtful.

"Yes," he said, "I'll tell you all about it. As you know, my school was Holbridge, and I was in the Fourth Form there. Well, there was a series of thefts perpetrated—money taken out of fellows' lockers, and all that sort of thing. This went on for weeks, and nobody could find out who the thief was. At last, one day, some postal orders were found in my locker—postal orders that belonged to other fellows."

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake.

"I was flabbergasted when I saw them," went on his cousin. "I denied that I'd stolen them, but the proof was too much against me. Everything—I simply can't go into details now—but everything was against me, and I was expelled from Holbridge, and sent to a reformatory—actually sent to a reformatory like a low-down pickpocket!"

"Yes, I know," said Blake seriously. "When uncle told me about it in a letter, I was simply amazed. Of course, I didn't say a word to the chaps because, not knowing you, they might have thought you were guilty. And you know what it is in a big school like St. Jim's. I mean——"

"I know what you mean, Jack," said the other quietly. "I'm jolly glad you said nothing—glad for your own sake, I mean. A lot of the snobs would have cut you, and made it jolly uncomfortable for you. Well, I was sent to the beastly reformatory, and stuck it until last week."

"Did you escape?" asked Blake eagerly.

"Yes, I managed to get out of the place in the middle of the night. It was fearfully risky, and it was only by luck that I managed to do the thing at all. As it happened, nobody had attempted to escape for years, and so they were fairly slack. After all, you know, a reformatory's not exactly like a prison. Still, I had the very dickens of a job to escape!"

"Yet you did escape?"

"Yes, I got clean away," replied Tom Sinclair calmly.

"The reformatory is about twenty miles from home, and I trudged every inch of the way. I didn't dare ask for anything to eat anywhere—I hadn't any money—for fear of being looked upon with suspicion. Of course, they were searching for me everywhere when it was known that I'd escaped, but I arrived home in safety."

"Good," said Blake. "I'm jolly glad you managed to get out of the reformatory. It may not be exactly the right view to take, but as you were innocent, it was sheer injustice to send you there at all. Well, what happened when you got home? Did your pater get wild with you?"

The other smiled.

"Get wild with me, Jack?" he repeated. "No fear! Dad always believed I was innocent, and when he saw me he went on no end. Said I was plucky, and had got grit in me, and all that sort of rot. Mother, too, was jolly glad I'd escaped, so I can tell you I felt pretty happy. Then dad suddenly got a ripping idea."

"To send you to Rylcombe?" said Blake.

"Yes. You see, Tom, dad's ward—we've lived so long together that he's practically my brother—was just on the point of being sent to Rylcombe Grammar School. Dad had written to Dr. Monk weeks before, and arranged it. Well, dad's idea was to send me to the Grammar School in Tom's name. He'd never been, near this part of the country, so not a soul here knows that I'm the wrong chap. Besides, it simply flummoxed the reformatory authorities; they never

dreamed that I'd been sent to another school in somebody else's place. How should they think of such a thing? They're still searching all over the country, thinking that I'm wandering about. I wouldn't mind betting a fiver they'll never think of coming here for me!"

"But how about Tom?" asked Blake. "How did he take it?"

"He's a brick!" replied Tom Sinclair's substitute enthusiastically. "He's a first-class brick, Jack. As soon as he heard the idea he agreed to it at once. Some chaps would have kicked up a row about being kept at home while another fellow uses his name. But Tom's just like a brother, and was simply mad about the idea—said it was the neatest thing he'd ever heard."

"So it is," relied Blake, with shining eyes. "My hat, it's simply ripping to have done them in like that. Of course, I suppose uncle will be liable to fine, or something, if the trick's found out?"

"Rather. But he doesn't care a dash about that. He's trying to prove my innocence all the time, and when he's done it, he's going to tell the reformatory officials where I am and what he thinks of 'em. If the headmaster at Holbridge wasn't a first-class rotter, I should never have been sent to the place!"

Blake looked at his cousin with admiring eyes. The rain was still coming down, and darkness was rapidly gathering.

"And so you're here in place of Tom?" he said breathlessly. "Well, my hat, if it doesn't take the biscuit! I'm jolly glad I didn't breathe a word about anything, or it might have been all up with you. I shall have to keep as mum as an oyster, because if the facts of the case got out you'd be sent away from the Grammar School in two ticks."

"By Jove, rather! But, look here, Jack, for goodness' sake don't forget that I'm Tom Sinclair, and that I'm simply a friend of yours—no relation whatever. Understand? You mustn't forget yourself, and call me Bob, you know!"

"Don't you worry, Bob—I mean Tom!" exclaimed Blake. "Well, I can tell you I'm feeling a jolly lot better now! All this afternoon I didn't know what the dickens to think; but now you've explained everything, it's O.K.!"

Tom Sinclair—for it will be best to call Blake's cousin by his temporarily assumed name—smiled, and grasped Blake's hand.

"You're absolutely a top-hole cousin!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Jack, I've been worrying myself to a blessed rail since I saw you this afternoon! I thought perhaps you'd let out the truth—by accident, of course—and that it would be all up with me. Dad didn't have a suspicion that you were at St. Jim's, or, if he had, he'd no idea that St. Jim's was so near to Rylcombe."

"Well, it's all plain sailing now," said Blake easily. "It'll be as easy as rolling off a form to call you Tom and keep the deception up. But we'd better agree to meet here every now and again and compare notes. I may hear something about the reformatory johnnies, and could give you the tip. It's not likely, of course, but there's no telling. Now, I've got a suggestion to make."

"What's that?" asked Tom Sinclair.

"Why, that you should come up to St. Jim's with me now," replied Blake. "It's not seven yet, and there'll be heaps of time for you to have a jaw with the chaps. It won't matter so much if you are late for call-over at that hole of a Grammar School!"

Sinclair grinned.

"I've heard all about that rivalry between St. Jim's and the Grammar School," he said lightheartedly. "I suppose, if you take me up to St. Jim's, you won't all jump on me as one of the enemy?"

"Rather not," said Blake. "It'll be pax, old man. Come on!"

"Well, I'm not sure——"

"Rats!"

"Right-ho, then!"

And Tom Sinclair fell in by Blake's side, and the pair marched off through the falling rain in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

Levison Catches it Hot!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY screwed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed his chums in Study No. 6. They were just going to commence their preparation. Tom Sinclair had just left, having been introduced all round. He had created a very favourable impression, and Blake's chums had already almost forgotten the little mystery which had first surrounded him.

"I considah that Tom Sinclair is a weally wippin' chap!" said Arthur Augustus. "I must admit that there has been a



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle in his eye, and gazed down at the wicket in a very surprised way. "I suppose that's out, deah boy?" he remarked to the grinning umpire. "I suppose it is!" agreed the umpire. "Bai Jove!" And Arthur Augustus carried home his bat! (An amusing incident in "FRIARS versus SAINTS!" the splendid long, complete school tale of Greyfriars and St. Jim's contained in this week's issue of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, which all "Gem" readers will specially enjoy. Now on sale. (Price One Penny.)

little argument about the new fellow at the Gwammah School, but that is all ovah. I vegrard Sinclair as a weally decent sort!"

"Glad to hear you say that, Gussy," said Blake cheerfully. "He's a great pal of mine, but it doesn't alter the fact that he's a Grammar School boulder! If we think of anything up against Gordon Gay & Co. we'll jape Sinclair with the rest of 'em!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "Simply because he's a wippin' chap it doesn't mean to say he isn't to be japed! As a mattah of fact, nearly all the Gwammah School fellows are wippin' chaps!"

"Well, we know that!" grunted Herries. "Dry up, there's a good chap, and let's get to work."

"Vewy good, deah boy!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 were soon hard at their prep. Blake was now in his usual state of high spirits—in fact, he seemed to be more genial than usual. Therefore, the juniors decided to question him no more with regard to the unaccountable incident of the afternoon. After all, it was none of their business, and it might be something private

which Blake did not wish to talk about. For this reason, much to Blake's relief, the matter was dropped.

But there was one boy in whose mind the incident was still very much to the fore. This boy was Ernest Levison, of the Fourth. He had seen the new boy, with the other fellows, in the common-room, and had studied him closely, without Sinclair being aware of the fact. And, although Levison knew absolutely nothing of the facts, he was shrewd enough to suspect that everything was not as it should be.

The other boys were not possessed of Levison's keen and cunning character. Since Blake did not wish to tell them the cause of his unbounded amazement when he had first met Tom Sinclair, they let the matter slide without further trouble. But Levison was different. He had no intention of letting the matter slide. He had made up his mind to sift the matter to the bottom, and he fully intended to do it. Possibly, he told himself, he would find that the affair had a very simple explanation. But, on the other hand, there was an inkling of something far deeper and more complicated. Levison could not forget Blake's attitude of stupefaction, and Sinclair's open-eyed consternation and alarm.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 273.

"Things seem all right now," Levison told himself shrewdly, as he sat in his study. "But the two bounders have had time to talk matters over since tea—Sinclair has explained—and they have arranged everything to look all serene. It seems to me that there's some shady secret between the two, and I'm jolly well going to keep my peepers skinned!"

At supper-time, and in the dormitory, Levison kept his eyes upon Blake. But the leader of Study No. 6 had fully recovered his spirits; he was tremendously interested in his cousin's daring and hazardous scheme, and upheld it wholeheartedly. He was quite convinced of "Tom Sinclair's" innocence, and therefore considered it quite right and proper that the reformatory authorities should be "diddled."

The following morning broke clear and fine, and, except for a short shower or two, remained fine throughout the morning. After lessons, the juniors trooped out into the sunlit quad, and a mild House row started between Tom Merry & Co., of the School House, and Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co., of the New House.

Levison stood looking on for a few moments with a sneer on his dark features. He looked upon House rows as "kids' games." Percy Mellish, of the Fourth, approached.

"Silly asses!" he said disdainfully.

"Bad as a lot of fags!" sneered Levison. "Blessed if I know what St. Jim's is coming to! This House rivalry is a lot of tommy-rot!"

"Rather!" agreed Mellish.

"I'm going down to Rylcombe," said Levison, glancing at his watch. "Coming?"

"Is there time?"

"Heaps."

"Right-ho!" said Mellish.

And the two cads walked out of the gates, and made their way to the village. They had no particular object in going, except to call in at the tuck-shop, and to buy some cigarettes. Levison considered it manly to smoke, and was often to be found in the woodshed enjoying a puff—at least, he declared he was enjoying it. Whether he spoke the truth or not, however, was a question.

Mellish felt rather glad he had accompanied Levison, for the latter treated him to some tarts and a ginger-beer. After leaving the tuckshop the pair directed their steps in the direction of St. Jim's.

They had nearly reached the end of the village when there was a sudden scuffle and a yell of childish laughter. The next second a small form scudded round the corner of an old barn which adjoined the road. It was a small village youngster, and he was being chased by another little boy—the two, apparently, being engaged in a game of "touch."

"Look out!" said Levison in alarm.

But the village boy was too occupied in his game to take heed to the warning. Indeed, there was no time, for he flew round the corner and crashed into Levison with considerable force. The whole incident happened in two seconds, and Levison rolled over in the dirt, the village boy sprawling on top of him. His companion, witnessing the disaster, took to his heels with a squeal of fright.

"You—you young sweep!" gasped Levison. "Hold him, Mellish!"

Mellish complied with alacrity, and jerked the little boy to his feet, squeezing his arm viciously. Mellish was exceedingly brave and blustering when he was dealing with a boy much smaller than himself.

"Hold still, you little rotter!" he snapped.

"P-please, I—I c-couldn't 'elp it!" stammered the youngster, with a frightened gulp. "I n-never saw you!"

"You did it on purpose!" snarled Levison, picking himself up, and brushing his clothes.

His arm was bruised, and he had no intention of letting the boy go without inflicting a severe punishment. Any other junior would have realised that the thing was a pure accident, and would have sent the village boy off with a word of warning to be more careful next time.

But that was not Levison's way.

He glared furiously at the youngster, who could not have been more than nine years of age.

"What the dickens do you mean by blundering into me like that?" he exclaimed angrily.

"I—I never saw you comin'!" gasped the village boy.

"Don't tell lies!"

"I ain't tellin' lies, so there!" protested the youngster defiantly. "Oh, you're a-hurtin' me, young master!"

"Serve you right!" growled Mellish, who was twisting his victim's arm.

"Let me go, you great big cowards! Let me—"

"Shut up!" snapped Levison viciously. "Look here, Mellish, hold him tight while I— By Jove! He's got new boots on!"

Levison stared at the youngster's brand new boots, which had evidently only been worn a few hours. A grin spread Levison's face, and the owner of the boots glanced down at them with an involuntary look of pride.

"Suppose he has got new boots on?" asked Mellish. "What of it?"

"You'll see!" chuckled Levison.

"See what? What are you driving at?"

"Hold the little beggar tight!"

Mellish did so, and Levison, much to the little boy's consternation and alarm, rapidly unfastened the laces of the new boots. Then the cad of the Fourth drew the boots off the lashing feet.

"What yer goin' to do?" asked the owner shrilly. "'Ere, they're my boots, an' I only put 'em on this mornin'! What yer goin' to do?"

Levison grinned unpleasantly.

"I'm going to teach you a lesson, you little brat!" he exclaimed harshly. "You see that pond over in the meadow?"

He pointed across the hedge to a muddy little pond.

"Y-y-yes!" gasped the village boy.

"Well, I'm going to throw your precious boots into the middle of it!" said Levison with a chuckle. "You can fetch 'em if you like; the pond's only about a foot deep. It'll be a lesson to you not to rush about the streets without looking where you're going!"

"My hat," chuckled Mellish, "that's a good wheeze!"

The village youngster stared at Levison with startled eyes. "You're goin' t-to chuck my noo boots into the pond?" he panted in horror.

"That's it, sonny!" grinned Levison.

"Oh, don't—please don't, young master!" shouted the little boy pleadingly. "I ain't got any other boots, an' dad can't afford no more just yet! They was noo this mornin', and—and—" He finished up with a yell of fright as Levison swung the boots to and fro. The next second the youngster was crying piteously.

"Oh, shut up!" said Mellish roughly, twisting the little chap's arm. "Don't blub, for goodness' sake! My hat, what a row!"

The two cads grinned as their victim roared with grief and fright. To them the loss of a pair of boots was a huge joke, but to the little boy it was a terrible catastrophe. The pride he had taken in them had been great, and it broke his little heart to see them destroyed so ruthlessly. Levison and Mellish enjoyed their victim's sufferings immensely.

"Chuck the things into the water!" grinned Mellish.

"Two-and-eleven pair, I expect! It'll teach the little rotter to be more careful!"

"Rather!"

Levison swung the boots round twice, and their owner gazed at him in sudden silence. He was too frightened to cry again. In addition to losing the boots, he knew that he would receive a tremendous hiding from his father.

"Put those things down, you cad!"

Levison was just about to throw the boots when his hand was stayed. A boy had suddenly appeared upon the scene, and he sprang at Levison and wrenched the boots from his grasp. The new-comer was Tom Sinclair, and he had taken the situation in at a glance. He had heard Mellish's words, and instantly realised Levison's intention.

"You rotter!" he shouted indignantly.

Tom Sinclair's eyes blazed with anger, and Levison and Mellish backed away from him. The latter was genuinely frightened, but Levison was made of sterner stuff. A dark frown came over his face as he recognised the new-comer.

"Here you are, kiddie," said Sinclair kindly. "Buzz off!"

With a mumbled expression of gratitude the little boy grabbed his boots and rushed off, his eyes red and his cheeks running with tears. But he had got his boots again, and felt happy.

"What the dickens do you mean by this?" snarled Levison furiously. "My hat, it's like your rotten cheek to interfere! What do you mean?"

Sinclair's lip curled.

"I mean that I am not going to stand by and see two hulking brutes bully a little kid," he said quietly. "You were going to throw those boots into the pond!"

"Yes, I was!" roared Levison. "The young scoundrel had knocked me down!"

"I don't want to know what he'd done!" exclaimed Sinclair. "I know that you were treating him in a bullying manner, and that sort of thing isn't going on while I'm anywhere about. If I see you do such a thing again I'll treat you to a prize thick ear!"

Levison choked.

"You—you—"

"Go for him!" urged Mellish from a safe distance. "Wipe up the road with the rotter!"

"You'd give me a thick ear?" roared Levison furiously.
 "Exactly!" said Tom Sinclair hotly. "Two, if you deserved them!"

"Do it now!" shouted Levison. "Give 'em to me now, you beastly blunder!"

"No; I sha'n't do it now."

"Yah, you're afraid! You rotten funk!"

Sinclair turned abruptly.

"I'm afraid!" he said sharply. "You say I'm afraid?"

"Yes, you jolly well are!"

And, without waiting for Sinclair to act, Levison flung himself at the new boy. He was wild with anger, and fought like a tiger. For a moment Sinclair staggered back before the onslaught, being totally unprepared. Levison was beside himself, and simply pounced with wildly waving arms, and hacked at his opponent with his feet.

Then Tom Sinclair stepped back. The next second his fists were up, and his left shot out. It hit Levison on the nose with stunning force, and the cad of the Fourth reeled back with a gasping cry.

But Sinclair meant to teach him a lesson, and, following up his first blow, he delivered two sharp body punches, which caused Levison to take a seat with surprising abruptness on the slightly muddy road.

"Ow!" he gasped painfully. "Ow-yow!"

"Had enough?" asked Tom Sinclair grimly.

Levison scrambled to his feet and glowered at the Grammar School boy.

"You wait!" he muttered thickly. "I'll pay you out for this!"

Sinclair's lips parted in a smile.

"That's just what I expected you to say," he said quietly.

"Cads always threaten to pay people out. I believe in finishing the thing straight away, so if you haven't had enough—"

"Go to the dickens!" growled Levison.

And he walked away and joined Mellish, who had watched the incident with a rather startled face. Then the two cads made their way to St. Jim's, Levison furious, and Mellish rather amused. Mellish always felt amused when he saw some other fellow in pain.

Tom Sinclair watched them go, then went on his way, feeling that he had performed a very necessary act. He little dreamed of the consequences that were to follow, mainly because of that act.

CHAPTER 7.

The Eavesdropper.

PERCY MELLISH was a junior who simply couldn't keep anything to himself. Consequently, by the time the dinner-bell rang, practically the whole of the Lower School had heard of the incident in the village. Mellish had conveniently left himself out of the story, but most of the juniors knew that he had taken a part in the bullying, even if he hadn't received any punishment. Levison's red and puffy nose was a silent corroboration of Mellish's tale, so it was accepted as fact. Without that corroboration the juniors might not have believed the sneak of the Fourth. Even the Fifth and Sixth got to hear of it, and all declared that Levison deserved all he had received.

"Serve him right, that's what I say!" declared Lefevre of the Fifth.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was within hearing. "I weally considah that Tom Sinclair acted in a mannah which was wight and pwoper. Although he is a Gwammah cad, stwictly speakin'—"

"How do you know he's strictly speaking?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I fail to undahstand you, Lowthah!"

"From what you said it might be supposed that Sinclair is a chap who speaks strictly," said Monty Lowther heavily.

"As you haven't any proof of that statement—"

D'Arcy surveyed the humorist of the Shell with a withering glance.

"You are off your wockah, Lowthah!" he said severely.

"Oh, am I?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wepeat, stwictly speakin', that although Sinclair is a Gwammah cad, he is—"

"A Grammar cad!" said Lowther blandly.

"Weally, Lowthah, if you considah that funnay, I shall begin to have sewious doubts as to your sanity!"

"I've had doubts for months!" said Blake.

Monty Lowther turned red.

"Look here," he began wrathfully, "if you think I'm going to stand—"

"I don't think anything of the sort," interrupted Blake.

"You can sit down if you like!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You humorous idiot!" sneered Lowther.

Blake grinned, and looked round with a wink.

"Funny thing how people talk to themselves!" he remarked. "Lowther knows his character like a giddy book. He thinks he's a humorist, and everybody knows that he's an idiot—therefore he's a humorous idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Blake walked into the School House. Dinner was over, and a little crowd of juniors had collected on the School House steps. Monty Lowther gazed after Blake wrathfully, while his companions chuckled.

"Never mind, Lowther!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Mind!" growled Lowther. "If Blake thought he was funny, I didn't! Hallo, here's Levison. I say, Levison, that's an angry-looking protuberance on your face. Have you been in the wars, or does it run in the family?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison glowered at Lowther, and passed down the steps.

"Rats!" he growled.

He walked across the quad, rapidly, and disappeared round the old elms. There was still some fifteen minutes before afternoon lessons, and the cad of the Fourth meant to fill them in by having a quiet smoke in the woodshed.

Presently he was seated on an old log of wood, puffing furiously at a cheap cigarette. He made himself believe that he was enjoying it.

But his thoughts were not with the cigarette or with his surroundings. He was picturing, in his mind, the scene which had taken place in the village. And he stamped his foot viciously as, once again, he raised a hand to his swollen and tender nose.

"The rotter!" he muttered. "The bullying hound! By Jove, I'll make that Sinclair smart for having treated me like this! There's some secret between him and Blake—something they won't let out—and I mean to discover that secret! It may mean that I shall be able to get my own back on Sinclair!"

For, somehow, Levison had an inkling that Sinclair's secret was not an honourable one. For this reason, Levison was more determined than ever to find out what was wrong. He knew that the only way he could do so would be to keep a sharp eye on Blake, and, if necessary, follow him about until an opportunity arose of overhearing a conversation between the pair.

Levison had just arrived at this decision when the bell for lessons rang, and he stamped out his cigarette, with a muttered exclamation of determination. All along he had intended to look into the matter, but now that Sinclair had given him such a hiding, he was more resolved than ever to carry out his object.

During afternoon lessons he was sullen and morose, and little Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form-master, had to reprimand him, on several occasions, for insolence.

When the Fourth was released Levison gazed rather curiously at Blake. For the latter was singularly lighthearted—very different from what he had been when he had first met Tom Sinclair. This lightheartedness rather upset Levison's calculations, for if there was a guilty secret between Blake and Sinclair, then Blake would scarcely be in such good spirits. Nevertheless, Levison told himself that Blake might be acting, and that it would be best to look into the matter as he had already resolved to do.

Blake had every reason for feeling lighthearted, for his cousin was practically secure from discovery at the Grammar School, and, somehow, it pleased Blake to think that Sinclair was defying the law in such an open manner. He was walking about, associating and living with hundreds of boys in a big school, and yet the reformatory authorities were looking for him all over the country.

Blake hurried up to Study No. 6 while his chums went across to the tuckshop to purchase provisions for tea. It was Blake's intention to make up the fire and have a cheerful blaze when his chums arrived. The fire was nearly out, but after a bit he succeeded in getting it going cheerfully, having used three-parts of a newspaper in the process. Then he stood and watched the fire get up, a sheet of newspaper still in his hand.

Almost unconsciously he commenced to read one or two of the short paragraphs, and suddenly he started. He had caught sight of a paragraph headed: "Escaped Reformatory Boy Still Missing!"

"My hat!" muttered Blake. "I wonder—"

He was on the point of reading the paragraph, but at that moment voices sounded in the passage, and he hastily crammed the news sheet in his pocket. Of course, the paragraph would simply state that the missing boy had not been seen or heard of, thought Blake. Therefore, there was no need for him to worry.

The door burst open, and the chums entered.

"Bai Jove, there's a wippin' fiah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Good!" exclaimed Herries. "These sossingers will cook in no time. They're ripping fine sossingers—"

"Sausages, deah boy!" corrected D'Arcy severely.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 273.

A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.
 By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Sossingers is good enough for me!"

"Sausages is cowwect—"

"You can call 'em sosses if you like!" said Herries, planking a pound of the said articles on the table.

"I didn't say sosses!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "The term is uttably absurd, and I've told you more than once, Hewwies, that I stwongly object to it! Sausages are sausages—"

"Perhaps!" grinned Digby. "They might be minced dog, for all you know! There's no telling what they shove in these skins! If Herries's bulldog disappears suddenly, we shall know—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gazed at Digby in horror.

"Pway do not make such wotten suggestions!" he exclaimed. "Weally, Dig, I shall not feel like partakin' of the wotten things at all!"

"All the more for us, Gussy!" chuckled Digby.

"You gweedy boundah!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Herries. "Let's fry the giddy things! I'm willing to eat 'em on the chance that they're all right."

And, notwithstanding D'Arcy's protestation, the swell of the School House ate a very hearty tea, declaring the "sosses" to be "weally wippin'!"

Blake had been rather thoughtful during tea, although not sufficiently reticent to cause comment among his chums. As soon as tea was over, however, he made an excuse, and left the study, leaving his chums to wash up and clear the food away.

Blake went out into the quad. It was just after six, and the evening sun was still shining. Under one of the old elms Blake pulled the newspaper sheet out of his pocket, and eagerly glanced at the paragraph he had previously seen. It was only short, but there was enough in it to cause Blake an inward tremor:

"The missing reformatory boy, although search has been made for him far and wide, has still eluded capture. His name is Robert Collins, and he is the scapegrace son of a well-known gentleman. On Tuesday last it was reported in Bramcourt that his capture had been effected. A boy of Collins' age was arrested, but, upon investigation, it proved that he was not Collins at all. The latter is still at large. The authorities, however, have every confidence of recapturing him at an early date. The police round Bramcourt are very alert, and have an idea that the boy is somewhere in the district."

"My hat!" muttered Blake, staring at the newspaper. "So they're looking for him round about here? Bramcourt's only nine miles away, and it's quite on the cards that some ass will come nosing about in Rylcombe. If he happens to see Tom Sinclair it will be all up with him. I must warn him rightaway!"

Blake was rather more alarmed than was necessary, under the circumstances; for, though the police were on the lookout at Bramcourt, which was a large town, there was no indication that they would search in a small village such as Rylcombe. But Blake was very anxious about his cousin, and thought it absolutely necessary that he should tell him of the police activity in the district.

So, with serious face and quick footsteps, he hurried across the quad, to the gates. He passed out quickly, and hastened down the lane towards Rylcombe. If Tom Sinclair wasn't about—as he had indicated he might be—Blake made up his mind to go straight to the Grammar School. In his opinion the situation was quite serious enough to warrant such a step.

But had Blake been less occupied with his thoughts, he would have noticed a boy lounging just outside the gates. As it was, Blake passed him without a look, as it was a usual custom for juniors to gather round the gate and chat.

But this junior was quite alone, and it was Levison.

He looked up curiously as Blake passed him, and started. Blake's face was unusually serious, and his hurried gait told Levison that something unusual was in the wind.

"By Jove!" thought Levison quickly. "I wonder if he's going to meet Sinclair? Anyhow, I'll follow him on the off-chance. By the look of his face there's something up!"

And Levison detached himself from the stonework pillar, and hastened after Blake. After a few hundred yards had been traversed, he pushed his way through a gap in the hedge. He was now in Rylcombe Wood, and it was just as easy for him to walk along inside the wood—parallel with the road—as it was to walk along the road itself. And if Blake chanced to glance behind, he would imagine himself to be alone.

Levison put on a burst of speed now, thus drawing much closer to his quarry. He dodged in and out of the trees subtly, and glanced now and again over the hedge to

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ascertain Blake's position. At last the latter reached the old stile, and here he halted.

"What a bit of luck!" thought Blake. "I've just got here at the right moment. Bob's turned up as he said he might."

For Blake had seen the figure of Tom Sinclair leisurely strolling up the road from Rylcombe. He was still a quarter of a mile away, but broke into a trot as Blake waved his hand.

Blake sat on the stile and waited.

Meanwhile, Levison, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes, had seen the form of Tom Sinclair. Somehow, although Levison knew absolutely nothing, he had a presentiment that he was going to learn something which would give him the whiphand—which would place him in such a position that he would be able to exact a cowardly revenge upon the boy who had knocked him down.

With extreme caution—for to betray himself would mean disaster—he crept towards the unconscious Blake. Nature had set itself to assist Levison in his object, for a strong wind was blowing, causing the high trees to sway violently. The wind whistled through the fresh leaves and branches with a considerable amount of noise, and the hedge close to Blake was swaying to and fro.

Consequently, Levison's task was simplicity itself. Creeping up, he was able to secrete himself almost exactly behind Blake, within two yards of him. Had the evening been a still one, he would have been unable to attain his object. Levison lay flat on his stomach, and peered cautiously between a break in the branches.

Tom Sinclair hurried up.

"Blessed if I expected to see you here to-night, Jack!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Well, I'm here, old man."

"I only came along because I had nothing particular to do, and it was a jolly fine evening," said Sinclair cheerfully. "But, I say, you're looking mighty serious about something. What's up—anything happened?"

"No, nothing's happened," said Blake seriously; "but it's on the cards that something will. While I was lighting the fire for tea, about an hour ago, I happened to catch sight of a paragraph in the local paper—yesterday's."

"Well, what of it?"

"Simply this," said Blake grimly, lowering his voice a trifle. "The police are keeping a jolly sharp look out for you in Bramcourt, a large town nine miles away. Some chap was arrested there in mistake for you, and, in consequence, the police seem to have got the idea that you are in the district."

Tom Sinclair turned pale for a moment.

"Rot!" he exclaimed at last. "Why should the police think that? Even if another fellow was arrested, that doesn't say that I'm in the same district. Still, the police there have evidently been studying my photograph, so that if one of them came to Rylcombe and saw me, he might very likely recognise me."

"That's exactly what I thought," said Blake quickly. "For goodness' sake, Bob, keep as much in the Grammar School grounds as you possibly can. It would be simply awful if you were discovered, and sent back to that rotten reformatory!"

Tom Sinclair set his teeth.

"I won't go back!" he declared firmly. "I've escaped from the injustice of it all—for I'm innocent of the charge against me—and I mean to stick here. I'm safe here, and not a soul suspects me of being Bob Collins, your cousin. Let's have a look at that newspaper."

Blake pulled it out of his pocket, and handed it over to Sinclair. For a moment there was silence. Levison lay in the bracken, scarcely daring to move an inch. He had heard practically every word. Now and again an extra gust of wind had carried a word or two away, but he had heard sufficient to tell him exactly how things stood between Blake and "Tom Sinclair." The latter looked up from the torn news-sheet.

"After all," he said, "I don't think it's anything to worry about. We both knew, of course, that the police are on the look out for me, so that's nothing fresh. And as for them searching for me at the Grammar School, or in Rylcombe, it's about the unlikeliest thing that could possibly happen. Still, it's jolly good of you to show me this paragraph."

"You don't think there's any danger, then?" asked Blake.

"No; not any more than there was, old man," answered Sinclair.

The two continued to talk, and neither of them heard any unusual sounds in the thick bushes behind them. The wind caused so much rustling that it was practically impossible to hear the sound of Levison's cautiously moving body. Altogether, Levison took five minutes to get out of his position, for he did not wish to be discovered. Then, when he had slipped through the wood for a couple of hundred yards,

he paused and looked back. In his eyes there was a look of malicious triumph, and his lips were curled in a grin.

"By Jove," he murmured breathlessly—"by Jove! I've learned the truth now, with a vengeance. So Tom Sinclair is really Collins, the escaped reformatory thief, and Blake's cousin! What a discovery—what a bombshell to spring on St. Jim's!"

Levison stood there, in the evening light, chuckling with sheer joy. Then, suddenly, his eyes grew fierce, and he shook his fist in the direction of the two cousins.

"And I'll have my revenge, too!" he muttered vindictively. "The rotter knocked me down this morning, and I'll pay him back in a way that he's never dreamed of. He's a thief—a common, low-down thief—and I shall only be doing the right thing if I show him up!"

CHAPTER 8. The Informer.

LEVISON walked into the School House, apparently as cool and self-possessed as ever. Nobody who saw him guessed what was going on in his mind. But the incident of the morning was still fresh in the juniors' minds, and as Levison entered the hall a chuckle went up from a small crowd of juniors.

Levison looked at them with a scowl.

"Wonder what he'll say when he sees it?" said Bernard Glyn in a stage-whisper.

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

Levison strode across to them, irritated by their manner.

"What's the joke?" he demanded. "What are you asses sacking about?"

"Oh, nothing much!" said Lorne carelessly.

"It's about a very unimportant person!" chuckled Ker-ruish. "He's mentioned on the notice-board."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly chumps!"

Levison looked at the notice-board, the juniors making way for him. The cad of the Fourth glared at the notice-board, and saw that a large sheet of exercise paper was pinned to it.

"Hallo," said Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three entered the hall. "Levison's spotted it! Wonder if he'll endorse it with his initials?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison scanned the notice with a dark scowl on his features:

"NOTICE!

"Everybody at St. Jim's is aware that Levison, of the Fourth, is an utter rotter, and I, therefore, beg to make a suggestion. As he acted in a really disgraceful manner this morning in the village, I vote that we teach him a lesson which will have a lasting effect.

"It is that we should collar all the bounder's boots, shoes, and slippers, and tie them into a bundle. The bundle will then be thrown into the middle of the Ryll, weighted down with stones. This, I imagine, would teach Levison a lesson, and he would hesitate before attempting such disgraceful bullying again.

"This notice is on no account to be seen by Levison himself. I am pinning it on the board, but I shall expect the fellows to prevent Levison reading it.

"(Signed) ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

"Well, Levison's read it, in spite of Gussy's strict injunction!" chuckled Manners. "Gussy couldn't have been serious when he wrote that last bit. Just as if the chaps would guard the blessed notice."

"It's only a little joke," said Tom Merry, grinning.

Levison turned suddenly, and his face was black with anger.

"I suppose you think this is funny?" he exclaimed furiously.

"Well, it's not bad, for Gussy!" grinned Lowther.

Levison didn't say a word, but turned back to the board and tore the notice down. Then, screwing it up in his hand, his lips set, he pushed his way through the juniors. He passed upstairs, and the crowd looked after him in surprise.

"Here, where's that notice?" bawled Glyn.

"I'm going to burn it!" said Levison angrily, turning. "If D'Arcy wants to know where it is, you can tell the young ass it's burnt!"

And Levison disappeared, leaving the juniors chuckling immensely over the incident. Nobody thought that D'Arcy was serious, and, unfortunately, he had not been present during Levison's visit.

The cad of the Fourth went up to his study in a furious

temper, for D'Arcy's notice had made him realise that his nose was still sore and tender, and that he was the laughing-stock of the Lower School. The study was empty, and he crashed the door to and turned up the gas. Then he flung D'Arcy's precious notice into the fire, where it blazed up merrily.

"The cheeky rotter!" muttered Levison.

He paced up and down the study, and gradually his thoughts centred themselves upon one subject, and one subject alone—Tom Sinclair, and his secret. Levison chuckled again and again as he pondered over the matter. Half an hour passed, and he still paced up and down. He was thinking over the whole affair—thinking out a way to expose Sinclair without appearing in the exposure himself. He knew what the juniors would do to him if they learned that he had played the part of a spy and an informer.

"I've got it!" he told himself at last. "I've got the very idea! By Jove, it'll expose the bound completely, and nobody will know that it was I who revealed the facts!"

Levison sat down at the table, and for ten minutes practised writing in a disguised hand. He was an adept at copying other people's handwriting, and it was an easy matter for him to disguise his own handwriting until it was totally different.

Having satisfied himself on that point, he drew a piece of ordinary notepaper towards him, and commenced writing slowly and carefully. After an interval of five minutes, during which he had written several lines—for it was slow work—he looked up sharply. Somebody had halted outside the door.

The next moment the door opened, and Levison whisked the paper on to his knees, under the table. He had to act with the quickness of lightning, or the paper would have been seen.

Crooke, of the Shell, looked in.

"Hallo, Levison!" he said cheerfully. "Coming down to the common-room?"

"No!" said Levison shortly.

"You're not?" asked Crooke. "Why not?"

"Because I've got something else to do," replied the cad of the Fourth. "I'm writing a letter," he added carelessly.

"Oh, all right!"

Crooke went out, and closed the door.

"The curious rotter!" muttered Levison angrily.

He pulled the sheet of paper from under the table, and then uttered an exclamation of annoyance. The writing was smudged to such an extent that it would be impossible to send the letter.

"Hang!" murmured Levison savagely.

"Confound Crooke!"

He gazed at the letter in a wrathful glare, and then commenced copying it all out. Practically word for word he wrote it again, only this time he was more careful and the writing was perfectly disguised. At last he laid his pen down, and looked at the result of his pains.

"That's all serene!" he chuckled. "My hat, when old Monk gets this he'll have a fit! But he won't know who's sent it, or how his informant got his information. He'll simply call in the police, and give Sinclair in charge."

Levison grinned with vicious anticipation.

"It's a ripping way to pay the rotter out!" he told himself. "He'll be exposed before everybody, for the Head of the Grammar School can't give him in charge without the chaps hearing of it. But even if he did so it will be in all the papers the next day! And Blake will be the acknowledged cousin of a thief! I'll take good care to rub it in!"

With these pleasant thoughts Levison read through the note he had just written. It was short, and bore neither address nor date:

"To Dr. Monk, Headmaster of Rylcombe Grammar School,—The boy who has just entered your school under the name of Tom Sinclair is, in reality, the missing reformatory boy, Robert Collins. You are harbouring a branded thief. This is a friendly warning, for if you do not heed it the police will very shortly pay you a visit. Make inquiries, and you will find this to be true."

The note was written in such a disguised hand that Dr. Monk would be unable to tell who had written it. But after receiving it he could not possibly ignore it. He would naturally make instant inquiries, which would result in Tom Sinclair's arrest.

Levison chuckled again over his contemptible scheme, and laid the letter on one side. Then he screwed up the smudged, uncompleted first copy, and threw it into the fire. He turned

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round in his chair and made certain that the letter had fallen into the fire, and then turned back to the table. Had he waited to watch results, he would have noticed that the letter did not blaze up; the fire had died down in one side of the grate, although in the other it was still glowing. But in the strong light of the gas Levison did not observe this. The screwed-up sheet of paper had fallen into the fire, so there was no need to wait for it to blaze.

The cad of the Fourth was full of his plan, and he carefully addressed an envelope in the same disguised hand as the letter. Two minutes later he turned down the gas, and left the study, the letter in his pocket, ready to post.

"I'll shove it in the school letter-box," he decided, as he strolled down the Fourth Form passage. "It'll bear the Rylcombe postmark, so old Monk won't be able to tell where it was posted."

And Levison descended to the hall.

CHAPTER 9. D'Arcy's Discovery.

"BAI JOVE!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood before the notice-board, gazing at it through his famous monocle. He had just descended from Study No. 6, where he had been doing prep., and, incidentally, trying on several new neckties.

"Bai Jove!" repeated D'Arcy.

"What's the matter, Gussy?" inquired Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, appearing with Reilly and Kerruish.

"The mattah!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Are you aware that theah is somethin' missin' from the notice-board?"

The juniors looked at the board and grinned.

"Well, what of it?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"I pinned a papah to the board a short while ago," said D'Arcy indignantly. "It wferred to that wottah Levison. Somebody has taken it down. I am quite certain of that, because it is no longah theah!"

"It doesn't seem to be there, does it?" grinned Kerruish.

"Sure, an' it's vanished intirely, Gussy darlin'!" chuckled Reilly.

D'Arcy gazed at the juniors wrathfully.

"I wegard this as a wotten twick!" he exclaimed warmly.

"It is wotten bad form to take anothah fellow's notices down from the board durin' his absence! Did you move the notice, Lumlay?"

"Not guilty, Gussy!" grinned Lumley-Lumley.

"Was it you, Kewwuish?"

"Rather not!"

"Then it was you, Weilly!" said D'Arcy indignantly.

"Weally, you wottah—"

Reilly chuckled.

"Faith, ye're mighty hasty, Gussy!" he said. "It wasn't me who took the elegant notice down!"

"Bai Jove! Then it was somebody else!"

"Well, that's fairly evident!"

grinned Kerruish.

"Who was it?" demanded Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Who was the wotten boundah, deah boys? Pway tell me, so that I can immediately wout him out an' give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "It was Levison himself!"

"Levison! Bai Jove! I did not want Levison to see the notice."

"Well, the chaps, after due consideration, refused to form a guard round the notice-board," said Lumley-Lumley solemnly. "Levison came along, saw the notice, and tore it down."

"Gweat Scott!"

"So you'd better write out another notice," advised Kerruish.

"I uttably wefuse to write out anothah notice!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "Pway tell me what Levison did with the papah!"

"He screwed it up, and said he was going to burn it," replied Lumley-Lumley. "You'd better buzz up to his study and have it out with him."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"That is what I shall pwoceed to do," he replied firmly. "I'll first tell Levison what I think of him, and then administrah a feahful thwashin'!"

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Even though the notice was mainly about him, he had no wight whatever to intahfeah!"

And the swell of the School House, very indignant, hurried off to Levison's study. He arrived, and polite even at such a moment, tapped on the door before entering. There was no reply, so D'Arcy turned the handle and walked into the study.

"You wotten boundah— Bai Jove, he is not heah!"

D'Arcy paused just inside the study, for the gas was turned low, and the room was empty. For a moment Arthur Augustus stood there looking round.

"Pewwaps the wottah is in the common-woom," he murmured. "Bai Jove, to think that the uttah wascal thwey my notice into the fiah!"

Instinctively, as he murmured the words, his eyes rested for a moment upon the fireplace. In the darkness of the room, the fire in one side of the grate was glowing, but in the other side it was quite dead. Nevertheless, the glow from the live embers clearly illuminated a screwed-up piece of paper in the fireplace. D'Arcy spotted it immediately.

"Theah it is!" he exclaimed, striding forward. "Bai Jove, the wascal thwey it into the fiah, and it has not burned."

D'Arcy bent down over the fireplace, and picked the piece of paper from the warm cinders. Under any other circumstances he would not have intruded into another fellow's study; but just now he considered that he had a perfect right to do so, especially as Levison had almost destroyed his precious notice.

The piece of paper was very much scorched in one corner, and crumbled away as Arthur Augustus straightened it out. The rest of it, however, was merely slightly discoloured. D'Arcy was sure that it was his notice, and passed out of the study with the paper in his hand, still extremely indignant with Levison.

In the passage he paused for a moment under the gas, and glanced at the paper. Then he started.

"Bai Jove, it is not the notice!" he exclaimed blankly. "It is a lettah! Weally, this is wotten! I have taken one of Levison's pwivate—"

As D'Arcy murmured the words, his eyes had unconsciously glanced over the smudged writing on the paper. He could see it was not Levison's writing, but the words "Tom Sinclair" and "Dr. Monk" caught his eyes before anything else. He did not read the letter, for D'Arcy had a strong sense of honour, and had no wish to pry into Levison's affairs, even though the paper had been thrown away. But those two names set him thinking. What had Levison to do with Tom Sinclair, of the Grammar School?

"I had bettah thwow the thing away," decided Arthur Augustus, after a moment. "It is weally nothin' to do with me!"

At that moment a door opened further down the passage, and Jack Blake emerged from Study No. 6. He glanced up at D'Arcy, and then came towards him.

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"What are you looking so giddy serious about, Gussy?" he inquired cheerfully. "What's that mouldy old piece of paper you've got in your flipper?"

"I uttably wefuse to have my hand wferred to as a flippah!" said D'Arcy. "Oh, rats!" said Blake. "Let's have a squint!"

"I am sowwy, deah boy, but it is uttably impos. for you to have a squint!"

"Is it? I've got eyes, and there's the gas—"

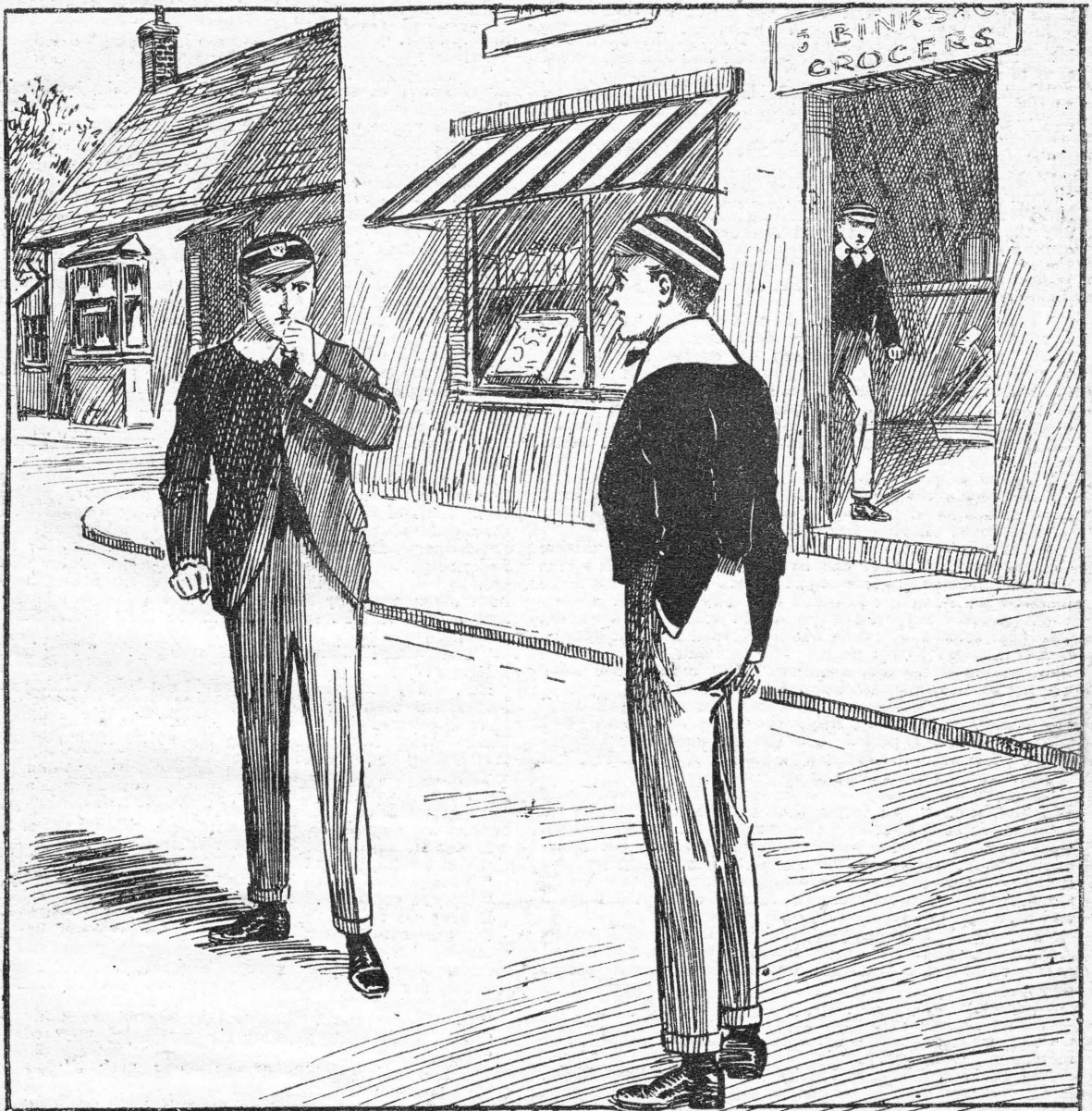
"But this is a pwivate lettah of Levison's," interrupted D'Arcy. "Pway let me explain mattahs."

And D'Arcy told his chum how Levison had torn the notice down. Much to D'Arcy's indignation, Blake chuckled over the news.

"So you haven't got your giddy notice, after all?" he grinned.

"No, deah boy. I took this out of the fiahplace undah the impwesh. that it was my notice, but I have now discovered that it is a portion of a lettah. I have not wead it, of course, but two names I involuntarily saw struck me as bein' watah swange. Your fwiend, Tom Sinclair, is mentioned, also Dr. Monk."

Blake's grin vanished.



"Be quiet for goodness sake!" ejaculated the Grammarian anxiously. "I can't explain. My name is Tom Sinclair now, and I'm the new boy at the Grammar School. Please—please don't say another word, Jack. I promise to explain later!" Levison, from his point of vantage, had seen and heard everything, and he gazed at Jack Blake with undisguised curiosity. (See chapter 2.)

"By Jove! Are they?" he exclaimed interestedly. "What the dickens has Levison got to do with Tom Sinclair?"

Blake had not the slightest suspicion of the truth, and had no desire to read the letter. But, unconsciously, his eyes rested upon it as he spoke, and, like D'Arcy, he naturally read at least one word during the glance. And that word was "reformatory."

"Good heavens!" he shouted.

His face blanched, and he literally tore the sheet of paper from D'Arcy's grasp. Then, with shaking hands, he held it up to the light and read the smudged words:

"To Dr. Monk, Rylcombe Grammar School.—The boy who has entered your school under the name of Tom Sinclair is, in reality, the missing reformatory boy, Robert Collins. You are harbouring a branded thief. This is a friendly warning, for if you do not—"

The note finished abruptly at that point in a jagged line—the point where Croke had put his head into Levison's study and made him spoil the letter. Blake stared at it in dumb amazement and alarm. Levison knew everything! And he had written to Dr. Monk, exposing him!

"Bai Jove, Blake! Whatevah is the mattah?" inquired D'Arcy, looking curiously at his chum. "I weally must say that I stwongly disappowe of your weadin' that lettah!"

Blake stared at D'Arcy in a dazed manner.

"And this—this was in Levison's grate?" he asked

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

Blake thought swiftly for a moment.

"Gussy," he exclaimed, "come into the study!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus saw immediately that Blake was very much perturbed, and did not waste time in unnecessary questions. Two minutes later the pair were in Study No. 6, and the door was closed. They knew that they would be safe from interruption, for Herries and Digby were in the common-room playing chess.

"Gussy," said Blake quietly, his voice full of emotion, "you can set your mind easy about reading this note. You know Levison as well as I do. You know that he's a contemptible cad and a spying beast!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I've found out, through this note, that he's up to

his rotten tricks again. When you've read this you'll understand what I mean."

And Blake passed the note into D'Arcy's hands. The latter read it wonderingly, and, when he had finished, stared at it in amazement.

"Gweat Scott!" he ejaculated blankly. "Is this twuo, Blake? Bai Jove, I cannot wealise it! Tom Sinclair is not weally a reformatowoy boy, is he?"

"Yes," replied Blake grimly; "and he's my cousin."

"Good gwacious!"

D'Arcy stared at Blake in startled wonder. Then Blake, without loss of time, explained everything—explained why he had been amazed on his first meeting with Sinclair. Gradually the amazement died from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyes, and he understood. There was not a larger-hearted junior at St. Jim's than the elegant swell of the School House, and when Blake had done he was looking extremely thoughtful.

"This is wotten, you know!" he said quietly. "Of course, I undahstand ewerything now, deah boy. So Sinclair is weally your cousin, Bob Collins? Of course, it is uttably absurd to suppose that he is guilty of theft! If you are satisfied that he is innocent, I am willin' to stake a fivah you are wight, Blake, I wegard you as a bwick, and I'll do ewerythin' in my powah to help you. At the same time, I fully undahstand that stwict secwey is essential. It would nevah do to let a word of this leak out!"

"You're a good old stick, Gussy!" said Blake gladly.

"Still, what's the good of talking about letting it out? Look at this note! Can't you see what it means?"

"Bai Jove! Levison has sneaked!"

"Yes; he's sneaked against Bob!" exclaimed Blake, choking down his anger and banging the table. "It's that row in the village this morning, I expect. Levison must have followed me to-night, and heard what I said to Bob. Otherwise, he could never have got at the truth. He's written this letter so that my cousin will be exposed and sent back to the reformatory by the police. It's Levison's way of paying Bob out for giving him a hiding. What a fatheaded ass I was not to make sure we were alone to-night!"

"It is uttably useless to talk about that now, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "But is theah any need to wowwy? This lettah is not posted, and Levison may have thought bettah of sendin' it. Besides," added D'Arcy quickly, "it is not w'ritten by the wottah at all."

"That's just where you make a mistake, Gussy," said Blake grimly. "You forget that Levison can disguise his handwriting so that nobody can recognise it. Can't you see what's happened? He was writing this letter to Dr. Monk anonymously, otherwise he wouldn't have disguised his writing. Then, somehow, he smudged it, and threw it into the fire. It's practically certain that he wrote it out again and posted it."

"Bai Jove! I believe you're wight, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, in alarm. "This is tewwibly sewious, you know! If we could get hold of the lettah before Levison posted it—"

Blake started.

"Great pip, that's a good idea!" he exclaimed. "If we did that we could have it out with Levison and prevent him informing. Come on!"

And Blake and D'Arcy hurried out of the study. Blake, in his eagerness to help his cousin, did not realise that even if he did rescue the letter, Levison would still be in possession of the secret, and would almost certainly spread it about the school. And that would be just as harmful as a letter. And Levison would do it in such a way that nobody would know the source of the information.

But Blake's hopes were dashed to the ground. For, ten minutes later, he learned from Lawrence, of the New House, that Levison had posted a letter in the school box not half an hour since. Lawrence had seen him doing it, so there was no doubt about the matter.

The letter had gone! In the morning Dr. Monk would know the truth.

Blake could have cried aloud with rage and mortification as he realised what the consequences would be.

Something would have to be done—something desperate. And a daring plan was slowly forming itself in Blake's mind. By supper-time it had taken shape, and just before going up to bed Blake revealed his idea to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 10.

A Desperate Venture.

JACK BLAKE looked at D'Arcy seriously. He had just outlined his scheme, and the swell of the School House had listened to it with no comment except for an occasional "Bai Jove!" Blake had finished now, and waited for his chum's comment.

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"Well," asked Blake eagerly, "how does it strike you?"

"It's fwithtfully wisky, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Risky?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, well, of course it's risky!" said Blake impatiently.

"You don't expect we can do the thing without risk, do you? If you're feeling rather nervous, or funky——"

D'Arcy bristled.

"You uttah ass!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Do you mean to suggest, Blake, you weally suspect me of being funky? Bai Jove, I'm bothahed if I feel like helping you! Unless you immediately apologise I shall find it impos. to assist you!"

Blake grinned faintly.

"That's all right, Gussy!" he said. "You didn't think I was serious, did you? When it comes to it, you're one of the pluckiest chaps in the coll. But what do you think of the wheeze? Do you think it'll work? Do you think we shall be able to do it?"

"I wathah think we shall, deah boy. Nevahtheless, I still stick to my formah opinion—it will be fwithtfully wisky. But I am pweaped to wun any wisk to wally wound your cousin. You can wely on me to the bittah end!"

"Good old Gus!"

"Oh, wats!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "There is nothin' whatevah in wallyin' wound a fwient!"

It was bed-time a few moments later, and Blake and D'Arcy went up to the Fourth Form dormitory with the rest. Both of them were looking extremely thoughtful, but they endeavoured to keep up a show of joking and light-heartedness. It was a great effort to Blake, for, far from feeling lighthearted, he was terribly dejected. After all the trouble Sinclair had had in side-tracking the police, he had been given away by Levison! And Levison was laughing and joking with Percy Mellish in the most genial manner possible.

"The rotter!" thought Blake savagely. "The beastly informer!"

But, at the same time, Blake could not help realising that, had it not been for Levison himself, D'Arcy would never have discovered the copy of the letter. For it was owing to the fact that Levison had torn the notice from the board that D'Arcy had gone to Levison's study.

The lights were put out, and soon the dormitory settled down for the night. By ten o'clock nearly all the juniors were sound asleep. But it was not until the school clock boomed out eleven that a form cautiously slipped out of bed.

It was Blake, and he bent over D'Arcy's bed.

"You awake, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" murmured D'Arcy sleepily.

"Up you get, then!" whispered Blake.

D'Arcy sat up.

Then he cautiously slipped from between the sheets and commenced dressing. Blake was already doing so, and five minutes later they were ready. The rest of the dormitory was fast asleep, and the room was in comparative darkness. The light of the moon flooded in at the windows.

"Weady, deah boy?" breathed Arthur Augustus.

"Yes. Don't make a sound, for goodness' sake!"

"Twust me."

The two juniors quietly slipped out of the dormitory with their boots in their hands, and made for the little passage window which had served as an exit for more than one nocturnal expedition.

In less than five minutes they were out in the quad., and it did not take them long to clamber over the wall at the usual place. Not until they stood in Rylcombe Lane did Blake speak. Then he turned to Arthur Augustus with a grave, serious face.

"Look herc, Gussy," he said quietly. "I don't feel exactly comfortable about hauling you into this affair."

"Wot, deah boy!"

"It's not rot, Gussy," said Blake. "I'm speaking seriously. Do you realise what will happen if we're found out—if the Head gets to hear of it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, what?"

"We shall be expelled," replied D'Arcy simply. "I wealise that quite well, deah boy; but it does not attah mattahs in the least. For one thing, theah is uttably no weason why we should be found out. If the luck turns against us we must gwain an' beah it. We are doin' nothin' dishonouwable, so theah is no need to wowwy."

"Well, if you're really decided——"

"I am!"

"Right-ho, then!" said Blake gladly. "I won't waste any more time gassing. You're a brick, Gussy, in spite of your funny little ways."

"Weally, you wottah——"

"Come on!"

In the moonlight they hurried down Rylcombe Lane, their thoughts busy. They were on a desperate mission. Under any other circumstances, Blake would never have thought of such a scheme.

But the circumstances were urgent. Tom Sinclair, thanks to Levison's spite, was in danger of being exposed in his true colours. To the general public he was a young criminal—a boy escaped from a reformatory. But Blake was quite certain that there had been a miscarriage of justice, and that his cousin was innocent.

By a wonderful piece of luck the youngster had been able to go to Rylcombe Grammar School in the name of Tom Sinclair. Now, through Levison's caddishness, he was exposed as Bob Collins—or would be when the letter reached Dr. Monk. To prevent the exposure was impossible.

But Blake could warn his cousin and help him to escape. There was no necessity for him to be taken back to the reformatory, even though his short career at the Grammar School was at an end.

So Blake and D'Arcy had decided upon a scheme whereby Tom Sinclair could be warned and helped to escape. It was now or never. The escape would have to be effected to-night, or it would be too late. In the morning Dr. Monk would have received Levison's letter, and after that Sinclair would be kept a secure prisoner. Therefore he would have to be got away from the Grammar School, so that in the morning he would be missing.

And Blake's scheme was desperate, though feasible. Unless a serious hitch occurred, there was every likelihood of its succeeding.

It would mean expulsion if either of the juniors were discovered helping Sinclair to escape. But what did that matter?

Sinclair was Blake's cousin, and he simply had to be rescued.

It would be rank treachery to let him sleep, unconscious of the disaster.

Both Blake and Arthur Augustus were excited, and eager to get to work; so the risk of their mission was almost overlooked. They did not think of danger at all. They walked on through the moonlight with swift footsteps.

It was well after eleven, so the countryside was quiet and still. Rylcombe was asleep, and not a soul passed the juniors. Nevertheless they kept a strict look-out, for to have been seen by a constable—or anybody else, for that matter—might end in disaster.

"The Gwammah School at last!" murmured D'Arcy.

"And now the fun begins!" said Blake grimly. "This is going to be serious work, Gussy, I can tell you. For one night we're acting the part of burglars. We're going to break into a house."

"Pway don't be so absurd, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "We shall be doin' nothing of the kind! Bweakin' into the Gwammah School to wescue Sinclair can't be called bweakin' into a house."

"Can't it?" asked Blake. "What's the Grammar School, then—a haystack?"

"You uttah duffah! I mean that bweakin' into a house genevally means that you are doin' it so that you can collah the silvah and plate. We shall be doin' nothing of the sort."

"I hope not, Gussy! But give me a leg-up this giddy wall."

Under the influence of excitement Blake had recovered his spirits. He had got over his rage and disappointment, and only thought of rescuing his cousin—in fact, Blake was quite eager to commence operations.

D'Arcy forgot all about his elegant clothes, and allowed Blake to scramble on to his shoulders, although the latter's boots were far from clean. But Blake reached the top of the wall, and assisted his chum. A large tree overhung the wall at this spot, so there was no chance of their being seen by anybody in the school buildings.

They dropped cautiously to the ground.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy suddenly. "How shall we know which is the Fourth Form dorm., deah boy? There would be a frightful wumpus if we got into the Sixth Form-room by mistake."

"Don't you worry, Gussy," replied Blake. "I know which is the window right enough. Weeks ago, when I was here one day, Frank Monk pointed it out to me. I shall know it in a minute, because there's some ivy growing just under it. It's the only window with ivy on that side of the building."

"That's all wight, then!"

They crept along beside the wall, and presently came within sight of the window of the Fourth Form dormitory. There was not a single light showing in the whole building. Nevertheless, there was a certain amount of risk in crossing the open space to the house. Blake waited until a thick cloud

was passing across the face of the moon, temporarily causing darkness.

"Come on!" he whispered.

They raced across to the house, and, arriving under the window, paused breathlessly.

"How are you goin' to get into the dormitow, deah boy?"

"Up this ivy."

"Will it bear your weight?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

"If it doesn't I shall come a cropper!" replied Blake. "Anyhow, I'm going to chance it, old son. Gordon Gay told me once that it had been strictly forbidden to use this ivy as a ladder, because it wasn't safe. But that was swank, I expect."

"Pway be careful, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "And, whatever you do, don't waken any of the othah fellahs up. It might mean a geneval wumpus."

"Trust me, Gussy!"

And Blake calmly turned to the wall and commenced his perilous ascent.

CHAPTER 11.

Hidden Away.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stood looking anxiously at Blake as the latter ascended the ivy. It was fairly strong, but now and again it sagged ominously, as some of the roots parted from the wall.

But Blake clung on tenaciously. The distance to the window was not very great, but if he fell it would mean, probably, a broken limb. So there was cause for D'Arcy's anxiety.

"Bai Jove, it looks frightfully dangewous!" he murmured to himself. "Thank goodness he has weached the window at last!"

Blake was indeed pulling himself up on the sill. Fortunately, the window was open a trifle, and he very cautiously pushed it up. Inch by inch he raised it, fearing to do it quickly lest a creak should break the stillness of the dormitory. At last he was able to clamber into the room. He looked down at Arthur Augustus.

"All serene, deah boy?" whispered the latter.

Blake nodded, then disappeared.

"I wondah what will happen?" thought D'Arcy.

To tell the truth, the swell of the School House was expecting to hear a general commotion every minute. He thought it practically certain that Blake would unwittingly awaken some of the Grammarians.

But no such commotion came to his ears.

Blake, in the dormitory, was moving about like a shadow. Scarcely a sound did he make, and he saw at once that all the boys were sound asleep. They were all healthy youngsters, and not likely to awake at a slight sound. Indeed, had Blake accidentally tripped over something, and fallen with a clatter, it is doubtful whether the juniors would have awakened.

But Blake did not trip. He moved up and down the rows of beds, scanning the faces of their occupants. At last he located Tom Sinclair. His cousin was fast asleep, little dreaming of the disaster which was about to befall him.

In the beds on either side of him were Gordon Gay and Carbo, both of them snoring rather loudly. There was not much risk of their suddenly awaking.

Blake shook Sinclair a trifle. The sleeper stirred slightly. Blake shook him again, and this time Sinclair opened his eyes, and struggled to a sitting posture. In the dim moonlight which streamed through the window he stared dazedly at the visitor.

"Why, wassermarrer?" he mumbled sleepily. "Taint risin'-bell yet, you chump! Why, blessed if it isn't moonlight!" he added, blinking.

"Quiet!" whispered Blake urgently. "For goodness' sake be quiet!"

Tom Sinclair started.

"What the—?" he began; then gazed at Blake with staring eyes. "Jack!"

"Shut up, you fathead!" urged Blake.

Sinclair stared at him in sheer amazement, fully awake now.

"What's it mean, Jack?" he murmured in a startled voice. "What are you doing here? Great Scott, it's the middle of the night, isn't it?"

"Yes," whispered Blake. "For goodness' sake don't wake up the fellows! Slip into your clothes like lightning, and follow me out into the grounds!"

"But what for?" asked Sinclair amazedly. "Has—has anything happened, Jack?"

"Of course there has!" replied Blake. "There's something jolly serious happened, or I shouldn't be here. If we're found out it'll mean the very dickens!"

"But—"

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"Can't you realise that if we're heard we shall be copped?" whispered Blake. "I've broken bounds to come here, and it'll mean the sack if it's known! Jump into your clobber as quickly as possible!"

Tom Sinclair, with serious face, did as Blake said. He realised that nothing short of a calamity would have caused Blake to take a desperate step such as this. He knew that it was useless to ask questions there, so he swiftly dressed. Blake helped him, and he could feel that his cousin's hands were trembling. A suspicion of the truth had entered Sinclair's mind, and it had caused his heart to sink and his face to blanch.

"At last he was ready. "Come over to the window," whispered Blake. "It's a pretty stiff climb, but I expect you can manage it. I'll shin down first, and Gussy and I will catch you if you fall."

"Gussy!" exclaimed Sinclair quickly. "Who—" "He's a pal of mine," breathed Blake. "Now be quiet, or we shall be spotted."

With that Blake cautiously clambered out on to the window-sill, and descended to the ground. It was a risky descent, but the ivy was strong, and Blake's nerves were of the best. He dropped to the ground when he was within a yard, and Arthur Augustus steadied him.

"Well," asked D'Arcy quickly, "how did you get on, deah boy! You've been a feahful time, you know. I weally began to think that you had got collahed."

"It's all right, Gussy!" whispered Blake. "Bob's just coming down."

"Bai Jove, so he is!" The two juniors looked up. Sinclair had lost no time, for he was already clambering down the now weakened ivy, but it held out, although Sinclair lost his grip when eight feet from the ground. He fell that distance, and rolled over at Blake's feet.

"Gweat Scott, are you hurt, deah boy?" "No; it's all right!" panted Sinclair painfully. "Only grazed my blessed wrist! Oh, you are the chap I saw at St. Jim's! It's jolly good of you to take this risk for me!"

"Wats!" "Come on!" exclaimed Blake. "We'll slip across to the

wall straight away. It's no use waiting until the moon goes behind a cloud."

Now that Sinclair was with him, Blake was not quite so cautious, and the trio slipped across to the high wall. Five minutes later they were in the roadway several hundred yards away from the Grammar School. Sinclair had stopped there, insisting upon an explanation.

"What does it all mean?" he asked anxiously. "Why, in the name of all that's mysterious, have you lugged me out of bed and brought me here? Is the game up? I—I—mean—"

Sinclair paused, and gazed at Arthur Augustus. "It's all wight, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I am quite aware that you are Bob Collins, Blake's cousin, and that you have escaped ffrom a wotten weformatow. But it's uttally widic, to suppose that you are a thief! Pway let me shake you by the flippah, deah boy!"

And the swell of the School House frankly held out his hand. "Thanks!" said Sinclair, flushing. "You're a good chap, D'Arcy. But you haven't told me what I asked? Does this affair mean that I've been discovered?"

"Yes," replied Blake quietly. "By George, how rotten!" exclaimed Sinclair simply. "Well, I suppose I couldn't really expect it to last! I was rather an ass to hope for it."

Blake and D'Arcy regarded their companion admiringly. They had almost expected him to burst into a startled cry of disappointment and alarm. Instead of that, however, he had remained perfectly calm, and had taken the news philosophically.

"It's perfectly wretched, of course," he went on. "But how the dickens does anyone know, Jack? Are the Bram-court police in Rylcombe, or what?"

"It's nothing to do with the police at all," replied Blake grimly. And he proceeded to tell his cousin what had happened, and that Dr. Monk would receive the informing letter by the first post in the morning. Blake's rage rose as he related the news, and his condemnation of Levison's conduct was scathing.

"Yes, Levison's a cad of the first water," said Sinclair.

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"So it amounts to this—I've either got to clear out or be collared by the police?"

"That's it," said Blake. "That's why we've come here to-night. If we'd let you be, you'd have been recaptured without a standing chance."

Sinclair nodded thoughtfully, and although he endeavoured not to show it, the others could see that he was biting his lips with keen disappointment. Just when he thought himself secure, the vindictiveness of one boy had altered everything. It was terribly hard on Sinclair.

"It's awfully good of you fellows to have warned me," he said slowly; "but, honestly, I don't see what I'm going to do. Suppose I try to escape? Suppose I rush away from here as fast as possible? Why, I should be spotted in the morning, wherever I was! And the police, being on the look-out for a boy, would recognise me at once!"

"Exactly!" agreed Blake.

"Then what am I to do?"

"You're to do as your uncle tells you," replied Jack Blake calmly. "I've thought it all out, Bob, so you needn't worry. Necessity is the mother of invention, you know; and as Levison's acted the hound, I've thought of a plan to cheat him, after all!"

"And a weally wippin' plan too, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "Of course, you will have to wuff it."

"Wuff it!" repeated Sinclair in a puzzled voice. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Wuff it, deah boy—wuff it!"

"Blessed if I can make you out!" said Sinclair.

"You don't understand Gussy's beautiful language yet," chuckled Blake. "The silly chump means that you'll have to rough it! You'll have to get used to his little ways, although I admit that it wants a bit of doing."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gussy says you'll have to rough it," said Jack Blake calmly. "Well, he's right; but I don't suppose you'll mind that, considering that you're being hidden away from the police. You've got to remember that if you're caught—which you certainly will be if you don't follow out our suggestions—it'll mean a return to the reformatory."

Tom Sinclair shivered.

"Anything but that!" he exclaimed tensely. "My hat, I'd rather live in a wood, without any shelter, than go back to that reformatory! Every minute I was in it I was wild with indignation. Innocent, and I was locked up like a convict! If I'd really been guilty of theft I could have stood it without worrying."

The tone of his voice told Blake and D'Arcy that he was really innocent of the charge made against him. The juniors' hearts warmed to him, and they pitied him greatly.

"You're not nervous, are you?" asked Blake.

"Not a bit. Why?"

"Because we're going to hide you in the old castle ruins, about a mile and a half from St. Jim's," replied Blake. "Under the ruins there are some really ripping rooms, with great stone doors, and as dry as tinder. With some blankets and candles and grub you'll be as comfy as possible!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "And in the daytime you can come up and wander round the ruins. Only, of course, you'll have to be jolly careful!"

Sinclair's eyes sparkled.

"By Jove, it's a great idea!" he exclaimed. "But it's too much to expect of you, Jack. If I was there you would have to bring me food, and run the risk of being discovered. Why, it might go on for days and days!"

"Well, I expect it will," replied Blake calmly. "But that doesn't make any difference. You'll be saved from the reformatory, and Levison will be diddled hollow! Don't you worry about us, my son; we can look after you all right!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tears almost welled into Tom Sinclair's eyes as he realised what it would mean to him. His short career at the Grammar School would be ended, but he would not be in the reformatory, or wandering hungry about the countryside. He would be in the old ruins, carefully concealed, and looked after by his cousin and D'Arcy.

Under some circumstances the prospect would have been appalling, but to Tom Sinclair it was absolutely joyous. The old ruins had no terrors for him. He was not possessed of "nerves," and would be quite comfortable in his hiding-place—a hiding-place which the police would never discover.

"Well, now you know what we're going to do," went on Blake. "It's the best our little think-boxes can manage. I'm going to write to uncle—your pater—to-morrow, and tell him where you are, and that he's got to get your innocence proven within a week! When he knows the circumstances he'll buck up like one o'clock, and make things hum!"

Tom Sinclair's spirits were raised immensely.

"I'm blessed if I know what to—to say," he muttered gratefully.

"Don't try to say anything," exclaimed Blake cheerfully. "I'll do all the gassing! We're going to Rylcombe Lane now, and we're going to leave you by the old stile while we buzz back to St. Jim's and get blankets and candles!"

"But the risk—"

"Rats to the risk! Come on, we'll be getting along. It's jolly late, and we want to get back to our little cots before brekker!"

And the trio hastened to the old stile. Sinclair did not have to wait there for more than twenty minutes by himself. At the end of that time Blake and D'Arcy returned with rugs, food, and candles. The risk in getting them had been considerable—for the juniors had had to pay a visit to the study—but nothing of an alarming nature had occurred.

Then, feeling quite cheerful, the trio tramped across the moonlit meadows to the castle ruins.

CHAPTER 12.

A Surprise for Levison.

"THERE, my son, I reckon you'll do!"

Blake uttered the words, and he gazed at his cousin with a smile of cheerfulness. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy placed his monocle into his eye, and took a survey of the surroundings.

"Weally, you know," he exclaimed, "I nevah thought this old place could be so jolly comfy! It's weally wippin'!"

There was certainly some cause for D'Arcy's praise. The juniors were standing in one of the old vaults under the ruined castle. It was one with a secret door, which Blake & Co. had discovered months before. When closed, it was practically impossible to detect it, and in the event of the police searching the ruins, they would certainly never discover the missing boy.

Three candles illuminated the place. On the floor, at the driest corner, were several rugs, a cushion, and a cricket-bag filled to overflowing with tuck—nearly the entire contents of the cupboard in Study No. 6. Several books lay on the floor, so that Sinclair would be able to occupy his time during the sunlit hours; for it would be quite safe for him to venture out now and again.

On the whole, the vault looked fairly comfortable.

"It's simply splendid!" exclaimed Tom Sinclair enthusiastically. "By Jove, you chaps are bricks, and no mistake! Nobody will ever think of looking for me here, so close to the Grammar School, and I shall be as safe as eggs!"

"Good!" said Blake. "Then I vote Gussy and I buzz back to bed!"

"You'll be quite all wight, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

"Right as ninpence!" replied Sinclair cheerfully. "But before you go, I'd like to thank you for taking all this trouble and risk for me! I'm a rotten hand at this sort of bizney, but I'd like to express my gratitude—"

Blake frowned.

"You'll express nothing of the giddy sort!" he growled. "Look here, Bob, if you try to thank us again, I'll give you a thick ear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Sinclair smiled.

"But you've done so much—"

"Bosh!"

"Uttah wubbish!"

"Nice sort of cousin I should be if I left you in the lurch!" went on Blake. "I'm helping you—and Gussy's helping you—because we like the excitement of it; because it's a bit of an adventure. The fact that we're helping you to escape from the reformatory officials is of secondary importance—isn't it, Gussy?"

"Eh? Pway wepeat—"

Blake glowered.

"Ain't we helping Bob because we like the excitement of it?" he demanded.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" agreed D'Arcy readily.

"There you are!" exclaimed Blake triumphantly. "So, you see, Bob, we're hugely enjoying ourselves. We'll come and see you some time to-morrow, and attend to your wants!"

"Thanks awfully—"

"Rats! Good-night!"

"Good-night, Jack—you're a real pal!"

Tom Sinclair shook hands with his two helpers, and then they departed, knowing that Sinclair would be quite all right in the ruins. For several hundred yards they hurried along in the moonlight without speaking. At last Blake glanced at his watch.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

"What is the mattah, Blake?"

"The time! It's past one o'clock!"

"Bai Jove, that's wathah late, isn't it?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 273.

"Late!" ejaculated Blake. "It's jolly early! Fancy going to bed in the early hours of the morning! Why, it's unheard of. If the Head knew that two of his most worthy pupils were walking about in the moonlight at this time of the night he would have about twenty fits!"

"Pway don't be so wedic, deah boy," protested D'Arcy.

"How could Doctah Holmes have twenty fits all at once?"

"I won't argue the point!" grinned Blake. "Hurry up!"

They hurried up, and arrived at St. Jim's just as the clock was chiming the half-hour. There was really less risk of discovery now than there had been when they had stole out. For the whole building was dark and silent; and all its occupants were wrapped in slumber.

The two juniors succeeded in getting into the School House without adventure. Once, while creeping along the corridor upstairs a door banged. Blake and D'Arcy held their breath, their hearts in their mouths. But nothing occurred, and they concluded that the bang had been caused by the wind—as, indeed, it had.

Fifteen minutes later they were asleep. And their slumber was sound and healthy, for they were both tired out with their exertions.

The rising-bell rang next morning as usual, and awakened every junior in the Fourth Form dormitory except Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Herries and Digby tumbled out of bed, and looked at their chums in surprise.

"Lazy bounders!" said Herries.

He bent over Blake and shook him. Blake opened his eyes dazedly.

"Gerraway!" he mumbled drowsily. "Lemme alone!"

"You ass!" shouted Herries. "Rising bell's rung!"

"Eh? Wassat?"

"Rising bell's rung!" roared Digby.

At last Blake and Arthur Augustus were aroused. The other Fourth-Formers regarded them with some surprise, for it was not usual for the chums of Study No. 6 to be so heavy of a morning. Blake whistled as he dressed, for he had seen Levison eyeing him curiously—and he did not want Levison to suspect anything.

"Bai Jove, you know," whispered D'Arcy, as he and Blake descended the stairs together, "I feel awfully gwoggy!"

And, as a matter of fact, Blake was feeling groggy, too. But they were both healthy youngsters, and after a hearty breakfast the feeling passed off.

Levison went about with a smug expression of satisfaction upon his dark face. By this time, he thought, Dr. Monk had received the letter, and Sinclair would be in the hands of the police.

Levison waited impatiently for news all the morning, but nothing was heard until just before dinner, when a little group of juniors round the gates were startled to see Bernard Glyn and Kangaroo rushing up from the village at top speed.

"They're in a blessed hurry!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess they've seen something that's given 'em a surprise!"

"Grammarians on the warpath, perhaps," suggested Figgins, the famous, long-legged leader of the New House juniors.

"Might be that," agreed Kerr.

"Rats!" said Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House.

"I'll bet I know why they're in such a giddy hurry!"

"Why?" demanded Kerruish, of the School House.

"Because it's near dinner-time," said Fatty Wynn triumphantly. "Their watches are fast, I expect, and they think we've already started!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at—"

"Here they are!"

Bernard Glyn and Kangaroo came up, and paused as they ran into the crowd of juniors. They were both looking excited, and they singled out Blake particularly. Blake, who had just come up with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, guessed instantly what the cause of the excitement was. The other juniors, however, were eagerly asking questions.

"Oh, shut up, all of you!" panted Bernard Glyn. "We've just come from the village, and you'll never guess what's happened!"

"What has happened?" demanded Blake.

"Why—why Rylcombe is simply swarming with police!" gasped Bernard Glyn.

"Swarming with 'em!" agreed Kangaroo.

"Well, there's old Crump, anyhow!" said Monty Lowther, chiming in.

"You ass!" roared Glyn. "There are two others as well—one from Wayland and one from Bramcourt! It's—it's about the Grammar School! You all know Tom Sinclair—that new kid, who taught Levison a lesson?"

"Yes!"

"What of him?"

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"What's happened to him?"

"Sinclair's not his giddy name at all!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn excitedly. "Blake knew who he was all the time, but I don't blame him for keeping mum—it's just the thing I should have done under the circumstances!"

The juniors clamoured round.

"What do you mean, Glyn?" demanded Tom Merry.

"What is Sinclair's name, then?"

"It's Collins—Bob Collins!" replied the Liverpool lad breathlessly. "He's the chap who escaped from a reformatory a little time ago! He's been at the Grammar School so that the police wouldn't know where he was! Dr. Monk's got on the scent, though, and found out the truth!"

There was a buzz of excitement, and Bernard Glyn and Noble found themselves surrounded. Levison, on the outskirts of the crowd, grinned gleefully to himself. So everything had gone all right, he thought.

"Sinclair a reformatory boy!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"At the Grammar School, under a false name!"

"Great Scott!"

"Collins—Collins!" shouted Digby, in amazement. "Why, Bob Collins is Blake's cousin!"

"Of course!" yelled Herries.

Blake looked serious.

"That's right!" he said, glaring round. "Suppose he is my cousin—what of it?"

"He's a reformatory rotten!" roared Croke, of the Shell. "My hat! Fancy Blake having relatives in a rotten reformatory! I always thought the family was a pretty low-down one!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"You cad!" he shouted angrily. "I'll knock you down, Croke, if you don't apologise to Blake for that remark!"

"Yaas, watah!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "The caddish wottah!"

"Apologise!" roared Manners.

And Croke mumbled a few words, and slipped out of the crowd, feeling rather alarmed.

Blake had turned red at Croke's words, but he looked round now with a warlike expression on his face.

"My cousin, Bob Collins, is a jolly decent chap!" he shouted. "He was shoved in the reformatory unjustly! He is not a thief at all, and I'll smash the first chap who says he is! He's innocent, or I wouldn't have let him be at the Grammar School in another chap's name! If he'd been guilty, I should have exposed him, as he deserved!"

"He's innocent, you sillay duffahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Levison pushed his way into the crowd.

"Well, I think it's a good thing he's copped!" he said coolly.

Bernard Glyn turned swiftly.

"You rotter!" he exclaimed hotly. "If it'll please you to know it, I believe what Blake says! I saw Tom Sinclair, as he called himself, and he seemed a jolly decent chap! And I'm jolly glad he's escaped!"

"Escaped!" shouted Levison, starting back.

"Yes, escaped," said Kangaroo. "He must have had an inkling of what was coming, for when the rest of the chaps got up this morning they found Sinclair's bed empty! He'd hooked it during the night!"

"My hat!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good for Sinclair!"

"The chap's got pluck, anyhow!"

There was no mistaking the attitude of the juniors. They were nearly all glad to hear that Sinclair had escaped, for during his short visit to St. Jim's Blake's cousin had created a very favourable impression. And his tussle with Levison had won him immediate popularity.

Blake and Arthur Augustus watched Levison closely. The cad of the Fourth almost went pale as he heard the news. So Sinclair had escaped! After all the trouble Levison had taken to expose him, he had managed to get clear away before Dr. Monk had read the informing letter. It was a tremendous shock to Levison.

He looked up quickly.

"How do you know he's escaped?" he demanded.

"Because Gordon Gay told us," replied Glyn. "He was sleeping in the same dormitory, so he ought to know. Sinclair's hooked it, and he can't be found anywhere!"

Levison pushed through the crowd, and walked off by himself under the old elms.

"How did he get to know?" he asked himself fiercely. "How did Sinclair know that there was danger in stopping until the morning? Hang it!"

He paced up and down savagely until the dinner-bell rang. There was an unusual buzz of conversation in Hall during dinner, and the masters found it impossible to put a stop to

it. But they knew of the affair at the Grammar School, and understood the cause of the juniors' excitement.

After the meal was over the boys collected in groups all over the quad. The sole topic of conversation was the amazing case of Tom Sinclair. Some of the groups were discussing whether Sinclair was innocent or guilty, while others did not think for a moment that Blake's cousin could be guilty of theft.

Blake's own chums, the Terrible Three, Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co. all rallied round Blake.

A few cads backed up Crooke in an attempt to get Blake sent to Coventry for shielding a convicted thief, but the effort fell to the ground for want of support.

Blake and D'Arcy were feeling quite contented. They had been prepared for the storm to break, so were not taken by surprise.

Immediately lessons were over, several enthusiastic juniors hurried down to Rylcombe. When they returned they brought the news that nothing had been seen of Sinclair.

The two strange policemen had left, and P. c. Crump was swaggering about Rylcombe very importantly, declaring that he would lay hands on the "young raskil" before many days had elapsed. The police round about, meanwhile, were instructed to keep a sharp look-out for the fugitive boy.

"There's no need to wowwy whatevah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy complacently, as he and Blake strolled in the quad. "It's not as though your cousin were a cwiminal, you know. There won't be a hue-and-ewy aftah him, an' the old wuins will nevah be visited by the police."

"Crump won't go there, anyhow!" said Blake cheerfully. "It's not on his beat, for one thing, and there's utterly no reason for him going. No proof, I mean, that Sinclair is there—"

"Bai Jove, dwy up, deah boy! Here comes Digbay!"

Digby hurried across the quad. It was just tea-time, and he and Herries had been about to prepare the meal.

"I say," burst out Digby excitedly, "our giddy cupboard's been raided! Every blessed thing's cleared out, and we haven't even a sardine left for tea!"

Arthur Augustus looked shocked.

"Bai Jove, that's wotten!" he exclaimed. "I wondah who has done it?"

"Ah, yes; I wonder!" exclaimed Blake innocently.

"What's the good of wondering?" said Digby, in exasperation. "We had sardines and salmon and cakes and tarts—Why, even the blessed tin-opener's been nicked, as well as some knives and forks and plates! I've never known such a raid!"

"Well, it's no good making a fuss about it!" said Blake complacently. "Let's go and get some more tuck from Dame Taggles."

And it was a source of much wonderment to Herries and Digby that Blake and D'Arcy did not seem at all indignant at the raid—or, at least, if they did, they were very half-hearted in their indignation.

CHAPTER 13.

Levison Becomes Suspicious.

AFTER tea Levison took a stroll by himself in the quad. He was enraged at the turn events had taken. After all his trouble to have Sinclair exposed and recaptured, the whole plot had failed by Sinclair having escaped.

But, after considerable thought, a change came over Ernest Levison's face. He pictured Sinclair skulking behind hedges to escape observation. He pictured him hungry and footsore, afraid to show himself, and anxious to put as many miles between himself and Rylcombe as possible.

"After all," thought Levison, with a grin, "I don't expect the rotter's having a very nice time! Perhaps it's best, after all, that he has escaped. He's sure to get collared in a day or two, and meanwhile he's going through a pleasant experience!"

The thought gave Levison much pleasure, and he chuckled over it immensely.

Just before locking-up Levison observed Blake and D'Arcy enter the gates. They were both panting, and he heard Tom Merry ask if they had been down to the village. Blake had answered in the negative. Levison thought no more of the matter at the time, and he strolled into the School House.

Fifteen minutes later he was standing on a bench in the gymnasium, addressing a crowd of juniors.

"Look here!" shouted Levison. "I've got you chaps together to discuss an important question!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Levison!"

"Pile in, you rotter!"

"Shut up!" yelled Crooke. "Let Levison speak!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The cad's only going to talk about Blake's cousin, and we know what he thinks!"

"I think that Sinclair is a thief!" roared Levison. "I want to know what we're going to do about it! We've got Blake here at St. Jim's—the cousin of a convicted thief! What's the school coming to? What—"

"That's what I want to know!" shouted Figgins angrily. "I'm blessed if I can understand how we've stood Levison all this time! If he's not a thief and a rotter, I don't know who is! I vote we collar hold of Levison, and frog's-march him up and down the quad!"

"Hear, hear!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"That's the idea!"

"Collar the rotter!"

"Bump him!"

The crowd of juniors was getting bigger every minute, and Levison's supporters were crushed round their leader by the wrathful juniors.

"Let me speak!" shouted Levison. "I'm going to have my say, and then you can go to the dickens!"

"Shut up!"

"Dry up, you rotter!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway close your insultin' mouth, you uttah worm!"

Levison raised his voice.

"I vote," he bawled, "that we send Blake to Coventry! He can't deny that he's the cousin of a thief, and he can't deny that he's let the cad remain at the Grammar School knowing the facts all the time!"

"It's outrageous!" yelled Crooke.

"Awful!" shrieked Mellish excitedly.

"Blessed if I don't believe Levison's right!" said Gore, of the Shell. "Blake's behaving in a rotten manner over this affair—actually shielding a criminal from the law!"

"Therefore I say he ought to be sent to Coventry!" shouted Levison, glaring round. "I, for one, don't want to live in the same school with a thief, and I'm blessed if I'm going to without showing my displeasure! All those who vote for sending Blake to Coventry hold up their hands!"

About six hands rose ceilingwards.

There was an angry, derisive yell.

"Come off your perch, Levison!" shouted Figgins. "You're done in!"

"He will be if he stops there much longer!" said Manners wrathfully. "Why, I've never heard such a rotten speech! Blake, old man, I should give him a thick ear!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm going to," began Blake.

"No, don't!" interrupted Tom Merry grimly. "Since Levison and his beastly set have held this meeting, I suggest that we give the lot of 'em a jolly good bumping, and then frog's-march them round the quad. That'll prove that we don't take any notice of Levison's rotten insults!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Redfern, of the New House. "That's a jolly good wheeze! Even if Blake's cousin is guilty—and I don't believe he is—that's no reason why we should be down on Blake himself. Talk about the sins of the fathers—why, this is ten times as rotten! Collar the rotter!"

"Heah, heah!" yelled Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Pway do not delay any longer, deah boys!"

"We won't!" declared Herries bluntly.

"Come on!"

A huge crowd swayed forwards towards Levison and his little knot of supporters.

"Stand back!" shouted Levison in alarm.

"You cowards!" shrieked Mellish.

"You'd better not touch me!" growled George Gore, of the Shell. "I—"

"You're going to be touched, all the same," said Monty Lowther grimly. "Collar him, you chaps!"

Gore was duly collared, and so were Levison, Mellish, and the others. Then, to the accompaniment of fiendish yells, the unfortunate speech-makers were bumped on the hard floor of the gym. As Monty Lowther said afterwards, they "jolly near came to bumping the floor of the gym. into match-wood!"

Levison & Co., thoroughly sore, exhausted, and bedraggled, were then grasped by strong hands, and frog's-marched three times round the quad. That task being completed, the juniors considered that they had done their duty. So the cads were allowed to crawl off, their clothes torn, their collars missing, and smothered with dust from head to foot.

"Well," panted Tom Merry, "that's a jolly good job done!"

"Rather!" agreed Figgins. "I'm jolly glad that Levison isn't a New House chap!"

"If he was," said Kerr ominously, "he'd have been murdered by this time! We should have boiled him in oil!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lumley-Lumley. "You know jolly well that we've got to stick the bounder, whether we like him or

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not. I vote we give Blake three cheers, just to show him that we don't believe in any of this piffle!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Give him three good-'uns!"

And the crowd surged round Blake and lifted their voices in a hearty cheer. Jack Blake flushed with pleasure, for this ovation told him how little the juniors upheld Levison in his caddishness. Practically all the juniors, both School House and New House, were of the opinion that Tom Sinclair was innocent. The very fact of Levison's getting up the meeting made the juniors all the more convinced of the innocence of Blake's cousin. And, after all, the juniors asked themselves, suppose he were really guilty? Was that anything to do with Blake? Was that any reason why they should be down on their own school-fellow?

Blake could not help what his cousin did, and all the juniors knew him to be a first-class fellow. Therefore, Blake's supporters numbered hundreds by the time the frog's-marching had finished.

Levison, having tidied himself up, sat in his study sore and furious.

"My hat!" he muttered between his teeth. "The rotters won't be swayed over! I thought that I should get a regular gang of them against Blake, but they weren't having any!"

He sat in his chair thinking. Then, suddenly, he had it forced upon his mind that Blake was very complacent—that he had shown no great amazement at the news of Sinclair's escape.

"Can it be possible that Blake knew anything about that letter?" thought Levison, startled. "I should have thought he would have been filled with wild alarm when Bernard Glyn brought the news from the village. But he seemed as contented as possible—although he pretended to be startled!"

Then Levison remembered that Blake and D'Arcy had been out for an hour just after tea. They came back hot and flushed, having evidently been running. And they had not been to Rylcombe. Where, then, had they been to?

"My hat!" ejaculated Levison, staring before him fixedly. "I don't like the look of this! Can it be possible that Blake and D'Arcy know where Sinclair is? Sinclair might easily have let Blake know he'd escaped, and asked his cousin's assistance! Sinclair might even be hiding somewhere near St. Jim's, and Blake and D'Arcy are providing him with grub!"

Levison paced up and down his study, his suspicions keenly aroused. There was certainly strong evidence in support of his conjecture.

And when Levison went in to supper he did so with the mental decision to watch Blake and D'Arcy carefully, and, if necessary, to follow them wherever they went.

CHAPTER 14.

The Secret Out.

JACK BLAKE and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy managed to slip away from their two chums after tea the following day, and discuss the situation in the quad. They were unaware of the fact that Levison was carefully watching them from the direction of the woodshed.

"Well," said Blake, "I've written to uncle, so he knows all about the bizny by now. Let's hope he comes up to the scratch, and relieves us of our charge jolly soon. I don't mind helping Bob a bit, but the chaps'll begin to get suspicious soon. When we get back to-night, Herries and Digby will want to know where we've been."

"It doesn't mattah, deah boy!" replied Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I've been wondahing whethah it wouldn't be as well to take them into our confidence. Aftah we come back from the wuins to-night, I considah that it would be chummay to take Hewwies and Dig. into the secret."

Blake scratched his head.

"Well, perhaps you're right," he agreed. "I think we can trust 'em not to let the secret slip out. We've got to remember that if Crump gets on the scent he'll be up to the ruins in no time."

"Even then, deah boy, he wouldn't be able to discovah anything," replied Arthur Augustus D'Arcy easily. "Your respected cousin is quite safe until his patah eithah pwoves his innocence or seawetly fetches him away."

"Right-ho! We'll tell Herries and Digby all about it when we come back," exclaimed Blake. "If we stop to do it now we shouldn't have time to get back before locking up. So come across to the tuckshop and get the giddy provisions for the prisoner."

And Blake and D'Arcy crossed the quad, to Dame Taggles' little shop. A few minutes later they emerged, each of them carrying a parcel. Levison watched them curiously, and his

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eyes gleamed as he saw them make for the gates, with hurried footsteps, obviously trying to slip out without being noticed.

"That proves it," Levison told himself. "That proves that Sinclair is hiding somewhere round about! They're taking him provisions on the quiet, or my name's not Levison!"

And the cad of the Fourth carelessly strolled across the quad, and made his way to the gates. Watching his opportunity, he slipped into Rylcombe Wood and followed the two juniors without their knowing of the fact—for Levison was walking on one side of the hedge, and they on the other, as he had done when he had learned Sinclair's secret.

He saw them cross the stile and take to the footpath, and, after allowing them to get a good long way ahead, followed.

But suddenly he paused irresolutely.

He allowed Blake and D'Arcy to continue alone.

"After all," he thought, "what's the good of my going after them? They can only be going to the ruins along this path, and I'm positively certain that they're taking that grub to Sinclair. The rotter's at the ruins—that's certain. Why should I go after them now, and risk being seen, and allowing them to give Sinclair warning?"

Levison considered the matter. Before he reached the ruins he would have to pass across the open meadows, and would almost certainly be seen in the twilight, for Blake and D'Arcy would keep a strict look-out. Also, while they were in the ruins, they would be on the alert for every sound.

Levison decided that it would be the best plan to go immediately to Rylcombe, inform P.-c. Crump of his suspicions, and then go to Dr. Monk at the Grammar School.

"Sinclair will be collared then," Levison told himself vindictively. "The rotter won't have a chance to escape this time."

Levison was absolutely positive that Sinclair was in the ruins, so he saw no necessity to go further. To do so would be a waste of time, and in any case a risky proceeding, for at the slightest suspicious sign Sinclair would make his escape.

"Besides," thought Levison, as he hurried back to the stile, "if I tell Crump now, he'll arrive at the ruins while Blake and D'Arcy are still there, and when that gets known the two bounders will be let in for a terrific row. Yes, I certainly think it's best to waste no time."

The cad of the Fourth was feeling extremely pleased with himself. He saw the means now to expose Sinclair's hiding-place, and to deal a blow at Study No. 6 at the same time.

He hurried down Rylcombe Lane at a fast trot, and, as luck would have it, almost ran into the bulky form of P.-c. Crump as the latter was coming round a corner from a side lane.

"My heye! Steady hon, young gent!" said Mr. Crump.

"By Jove!" gasped Levison. "You're the very chap I want, Crumpy!"

"Wot's that, Master Levison?" said the constable suspiciously, recognising the junior. "Wot do you want me for?"

"It's about Collins, the reformatory boy."

Mr. Crump started.

"Well, wot of 'im?" he asked quickly.

"I know where he is."

"You know where 'e his!" repeated Mr. Crump, with a gasp. "My heye! You ain't speakin' serious, Master Levison? If this 'ere's a joke—"

"It isn't!" exclaimed Levison quickly. "I tell you that Collins is hiding in the old ruined castle. Blake and D'Arcy have just gone there, taking him food. If you go up there straight away, you'll catch them without any trouble."

P.-c. Crump gazed at Levison excitedly, and his bulky form seemed to swell with importance. Then he eyed the junior again with sudden suspicion.

"Look 'ere, Master Levison," he said warningly, "hif you're a-sendin' me to the ruins hon a fool's herrand, you'll 'ave to pay for it mighty 'eavily!"

"Don't waste time!" shouted Levison. "I tell you it's a fact! I'm going straight to the Grammar School now to tell Dr. Monk. If you waste any more time jawing here, you'll lose him!"

"Oh, hall right, Master Levison, I'll go!"

"Good! Run all the way!"

"Which I certainly sha'n't!" replied Mr. Crump. "I don't mind 'urrynin', but I hain't a-going to do no violent runnin'!"

And Mr. Crump hastened off, excited and eager. It was very seldom he had a case, and to capture an escaped reformatory boy would be a big feather in his cap.

Meanwhile, Levison was approaching the Grammar School at top speed. To make his triumph complete, he would need

to tell Dr. Monk of his discovery. Levison had not the slightest doubt that the headmaster of the Grammar School would commend him highly for his action in betraying Sinclair's hiding-place.

He walked in at the gates of the Grammar School, half expecting a hostile reception from the Grammarians. But there were only one or two fags visible, the Fourth-Formers all attending a meeting within the building.

Levison was glad of this, and was soon admitted into the headmaster's private quarters. Dr. Monk was in his study, and as Levison entered he was reading through a telegram with obvious pleasure. A frown crossed his brow as he saw who his visitor was. Dr. Monk knew Levison's character, and did not like the boy.

"Well, Levison?" he inquired. "Why are you here?" "I've found a discovery, sir!" exclaimed Levison eagerly, but with perfect coolness. "I've found out the hiding-place of Collins, the reformatory cad! I thought I'd better come straight to you and tell you, sir."

Dr. Monk started. "Indeed, Levison?" he exclaimed quickly, looking keenly at his visitor. "Perhaps you will tell me how you gained the information, and where the boy is?"

"I followed Blake and D'Arcy down Rylcombe Lane, sir," replied Levison. "They'd just bought some provisions from Mrs. Taggles, so I know jolly well that what I say is right! Collins is in the old, castle ruins, and I've already sent Crump, the constable, there to arrest him!"

Dr. Monk looked up quickly. "Are you sure of this, Levison—positive?" he replied. "Positive, sir!" "And you have sent Mr. Crump to the ruins?" "Rather, sir!"

Dr. Monk looked at Levison coldly. "And why have you hurried so much in order to tell me this news?" he inquired. "Being a schoolboy, I should naturally have thought you would have endeavoured to shield the poor boy who is hiding among the ruins. You evidently take delight in giving him away."

"But I thought—" "You thought that I should be glad of the news, so that I can hand Collins over to the reformatory?" said Dr. Monk. "Well, perhaps you are right. I am glad of the news. But, Levison, I do not admire your action in coming to me. Perhaps—I may be wrong—you are the author of the anonymous letter which informed me of the facts?"

Levison started. "I, sir?" he exclaimed. "I don't know anything—But what anonymous letter do you mean?" he added hastily. "Surely, sir, you wouldn't think I should send you such a letter?"

"We will not discuss the matter, Levison," replied Dr. Monk, rising. "As you have brought me this information, I will accompany you to the ruins at once, and personally take charge of Collins."

"Oh, good, sir!" And Levison, flushed with triumph, followed the headmaster of the Grammar School out into the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER 15.

At the Ruins.

TOM SINCLAIR—still to call him by the name he had been known by at the Grammar School—looked at Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy by the light of two candles in the old vault.

"It gets over me why you fellows are doing all this for me!" he exclaimed. "Look at all this grub you've just brought me! It must have run away with all your tin, and left you without a brass farthing between you!"

"Wubbish!" replied Arthur Augustus. "I have anothah fivah in my pocket-book, deah boy, so it is uttaly widic. to talk about being stonay!"

"Besides," said Blake, "you speak as if we'd been sacrificing a terrible lot, Bob. After all, we've only acted in the same way as you would act in similar circumstances. If you don't want to get a thick ear, you'd better not say anything more about our kindness and our thoughtfulness. It's all piffle!"

"Uttah bosh!" agreed D'Arcy heartily. Tom Sinclair laughed. "All right," he said; "have your way. I suppose you'll hear from the pater in the morning, and he'll—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake suddenly. "What's that?" The three juniors looked at one another, startled. Footsteps could plainly be heard descending the stone stairway.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "There is somebody comin'!"

"The door!" whispered Blake excitedly. "Shut the door!"

But before D'Arcy could do so there was an exclamation outside, and the next moment P.-c. Crump stood in the doorway, looking triumphantly at the three dismayed juniors.

"Ho!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming. "So 'ere you hare!"

"Hallo, Crumpy!" exclaimed Blake, recovering himself. "What the dickens are you doing here?"

"Yaas, watah! What's the mattah, Cwumpy?" "The matter is, young gents, that I've come 'ere in the hexecution of me dooty!" replied Mr. Crump heavily. "That young rip yonder is Robert Collins, an' it's my dooty to arrest 'im—"

"Arrest him?" echoed Blake. "He's not a criminal, you chump!"

"I don't say as 'e is, Master Blake, but Hi've got horders to take charge of 'im. 'E's a escaped reformatory boy, an' 'e'd best come along o' me quiet!"

Tom Sinclair stepped forward.

"It's all up, you chaps!" he exclaimed resignedly. "We can't do anything against this, you know. It's the constable's duty to take me, so, of course, I shall go with him quietly. But how on earth he knew I was here is more than I can make out!"

"Yaas, watah!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "Bai Jove, deah boys, I feel in quite a fluttah! Cwump, you wottah, how did you get on the twack?"

Mr. Crump stepped forward and laid a hand upon Sinclair's shoulder. Blake and D'Arcy looked on with dismayed faces and miserably feelings.

"Ow did I git on the track, Master D'Arcy?" repeated Mr. Crump, gripping Sinclair firmly. "Well, I don't mind hadmittin' that Hi was given the tip, has it were. I was jest enterin' the willage when Master Levison came hup—"

Blake uttered an exclamation. "So Levison told you?" he asked, silently gnashing his teeth.

"That's hit, Master Blake!" "The wottah—the howwid wascal!" shouted D'Arcy, literally dancing up and down in his excitement. "Good gwacious, this is uttaly wotten of Levison! I have nevah heard of such wank tweachery!"

"No; it's about the limit!" agreed Blake grimly. "My word, I shall have something to say to Levison when I see him again! I expect you'd like to have five minutes with him, Bob?"

"Ten!" corrected the reformatory boy quietly. "In ten minutes I could just about show Levison what I thought of him. But I don't suppose I shall have a chance, worst luck!"

"Now, come hon, young shaver!" said P.-c. Crump impatiently. "I can't stand 'ere hall night—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Blake suddenly. "Somebody else coming!"

"Gwreat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Whatevah is the mattah? Ewevybody seems to be comin' to the wuins tonight! I wondah— Bai Jove, Dr. Monk!"

Blake wheeled round, and saw the figures of Dr. Monk and Levison, the latter wearing a self-satisfied smile.

Dr. Monk stepped into the vault and looked round. "I am glad I arrived before you took your prisoner away, Crump!" he exclaimed. "I have a word to say to him. Good-evening, boys," he added, looking at Blake and D'Arcy with a smile.

"Good-evening, sir," replied the St. Jim's juniors, rather surprised at Dr. Monk's cheery smile and genial tone of voice. "So this is where you have been hiding, Collins?" continued the doctor, glancing round. "Well, well, I do not blame you in the least. And as for you, Blake and D'Arcy, I consider that you have acted in a very self-sacrificing and heroic manner. Notwithstanding the fact that you risked expulsion, you stood by this much-wronged boy to the very last."

"But—but I don't understand, sir?" gasped Blake. "Perhaps I had better enlighten you, then," replied the Head of the Grammar School. "Crump, kindly take your hand off that boy's shoulder. Collins, I have some very good news for you—news which will instantly put an end to all this secrecy and unpleasantness."

Bob Collins stepped forward, his eyes gleaming, his heart beating quickly. "Do you mean that—"

"I mean that your innocence has been proved, my boy," replied Dr. Monk. "I have received a wire this evening from the headmaster of Holbridge School, and it positively clears you of all guilt."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Blake's cousin thankfully. Levison, in the background, was staring before him with pale face, and a set look in his eyes. Innocent! Collins' innocence had been proved! So that was the reason why Dr. Monk had looked at him so coldly. Levison understood now.

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and a wild rage filled his breast. After all the trouble he had taken it was proved, at the last moment, that Collins was innocent.

Without a word, Levison turned and made his way out of the ruins.

Meanwhile, those within had not noticed his departure.

"So I hain't got a prisoner hat all!" exclaimed Mr. Crump indignantly. "Hunless you can prove this lad's innocence, sir, I'm afraid Hi can't let 'im go!"

"That will be all right, Crump," replied Dr. Monk. "I will take full responsibility for his safety. My boys, this affair has had its unpleasant aspects, but they are compensated for by the splendid exhibition of pluck and good-comradeship which you have shown. I will ask no questions as to how you escaped from the school, Collins, and Dr. Holmes will, I am sure, let the matter rest as it is. I have my suspicions, of course," he added genially, with a twinkle in Blake and D'Arcy's direction, "but of those I will say nothing."

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed Blake.

"Bai Jove, sir, you're a bwick!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy enthusiastically.

"But how is my innocence proved, sir?" asked Collins eagerly.

"By a very simple explanation, my boy," replied Dr. Monk. "I can only express my surprise that the affair was not investigated thoroughly before you were condemned. Several valuable articles, I believe, were found in your locker, at Holbridge?"

"Yes, sir," replied Collins quickly. "Lots of the fellows' things had been disappearing for weeks, and at last a couple of watches, some money, and other things were found in my locker. The proof was dead against me, so I was expelled and sent to the reformatory."

"Who really took the things, sir?" asked Blake.

"They were not taken by a thief at all," replied Dr. Monk. "It appears that they have just discovered a boy at Holbridge who is a sleep-walker. This boy, totally unconscious of the fact, left his bed at nights, and walked about the building. In his unconscious condition, he stole things from his companions' lockers, and hid them away in odd places. The reason the matter came to light was startling but very simple. While one of the masters was having a last pipe in the privacy of his own room, the sleep-walker entered and quietly deposited some stolen money in the master's desk, under his very eyes. Then the boy left the room and went back to bed."

"My only topper!" ejaculated Collins. "So—so there wasn't a thief at all, sir?"

"Only an unconscious thief, my boy. This news reached me this evening by letter, but I could do nothing because you were not to be found. An hour ago I received a telegram from Holbridge saying that the headmaster will be delighted to have you back as a pupil."

"Bai Jove, that's wippin'!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "The only twouble is that we shall lose you, deah boy!"

Half an hour later, Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were back at St. Jim's, telling the news to an excited crowd of juniors in the common-room. Tom Merry & Co. and the others wanted to find Levison and punish him for his caddishness, but the cad of the Fourth was nowhere to be found. He realised the welcome he would receive, and had accordingly made himself scarce.

Meanwhile, Tom Sinclair—otherwise, Bob Collins—had accompanied Dr. Monk to the Grammar School, where he was welcomed heartily. After a hearty meal, he was packed off straight to bed, with the knowledge that everything was all serene, and that his time of trouble was at an end.

CHAPTER 16.

The Guest of Honour.

"YOUR giddy cousin arrived yet?"

Tom Merry put the question to Blake as the two met in the Fourth Form passage the following evening.

"No," replied Blake cheerfully; "but I expect the beggar every minute."

In Study No. 6 a huge feast was being prepared. The guest of honour was to be Bob Collins, Blake's cousin. On the following day he was to leave Rylcombe, so Blake had insisted upon his honouring St. Jim's by a visit.

The whole matter of the escape from the Grammar School had been discussed by Dr. Monk and Dr. Holmes, and they had decided to take no action in the matter. They were well aware—or, practically certain—that Blake and D'Arcy had had a big hand in the affair, but they asked no questions. As Dr. Holmes pointed out, everything had turned out satisfactorily, and there was no need whatever to go into details.

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Even if Blake and D'Arcy had seriously broken the rules of the college, they had done nothing dishonourable. On the contrary, they had shown themselves to be boys quite worthy to uphold the traditions of the old school.

The banquet in Study No. 6 was to be a gorgeous affair, and the guests were to be numerous. Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co., of the New House, had been invited, as well as the Terrible Three, Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, Lumley-Lumley, and several others. In fact, as Blake remarked, several of the guests would be forced to have their tea out in the passage. The study would be too small altogether to accommodate everybody. Still, there were many juniors who were only too willing to partake of the feast in the passage rather than go without it.

Towards six o'clock the guests began to arrive in twos and threes, and as the clock boomed out the hour everybody was present except the guest of honour.

Bob Collins had not turned up.

"What the dickens can be keeping him?" exclaimed Jack Blake, looking worried.

"I have a weally gweat wegard for your cousin, Blake," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely, "but I must be allowed to remark that it is scarcely good form to keep his hosts waitin' on such an occasion as this!"

"He was told the time, anyhow," said Herries. "I heard you say distinctly, Blake, that the feast was to start at six."

There was a shout out in the passage:

"Here he is!"

"Good!" ejaculated Blake.

Bob Collins hurried in, panting, the juniors making way for him to pass.

"Am I late?" he gasped.

"No, not a bit!" said Monty Lowther sarcastically. "It's only about ten past six, and we've been sitting here glaring at the good things till we've got twice as hungry as we were at first. You've come in the nick of time, my son!"

"I'm sorry!" said Blake's cousin. "I was—er—delayed."

The juniors looked at the guest of honour curiously. Then they noticed that his nose bore slight traces of blood—which he hastily proceeded to wipe away—and also that his knuckles were red and slightly grazed.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake curiously. "Who've you been murdering?"

"Nobody," smiled Bob Collins. "But I met Levison in the lane, and I had a little argument with him. He was the chap who made me leave the Grammar School, you know. If it hadn't been for him I should have been left peacefully alone until the good news came. I think I've paid my debt to the full!" he added quietly.

The juniors understood perfectly, and asked no questions.

Three minutes later the banquet started. As a matter of fact, it had been going for some minutes, for during Bob Collins' entrance Fatty Wynn had made himself busy. The good things had proved too much for him, and he had succumbed.

The meal was one of the jolliest that had ever taken place within the ancient walls of the School House.

And when at last Bob Collins took his departure, he did so with a heavy heart. He liked the juniors immensely, and had expressed a wish that he could join the old school. But his father intended sending him back to Holbridge, which, upon the whole, was the better course.

The old quad was simply swarming with juniors bidding the one-time reformatory boy good-bye, and Bob Collins was feeling very happy.

And after he had gone Blake and D'Arcy were given three rousing cheers for the part they had played in the affair. The evening, upon the whole, was an extremely exciting and noisy one. But Mr. Raiton and the other masters took care to keep out of the way, as they had no wish to spoil the juniors' fun.

At bed-time Levison went up to the Fourth Form dormitory with the rest. He was strangely subdued, and all his efforts to hide his injuries had been of no avail. It was clear to everybody that he was suffering from a very much swollen nose, a black eye, and two thick ears. But nobody said a word to him, or took the slightest notice of his presence.

For the time being Levison did not exist in the juniors' minds. He had received his punishment, and, like true sportsmen, the juniors did not rub it in.

And so, in spite of his anticipated triumph, Levison had come off decidedly the loser, and for many days he regretted the hour when he had decided to become that most contemptible of characters—the informer.

THE END.

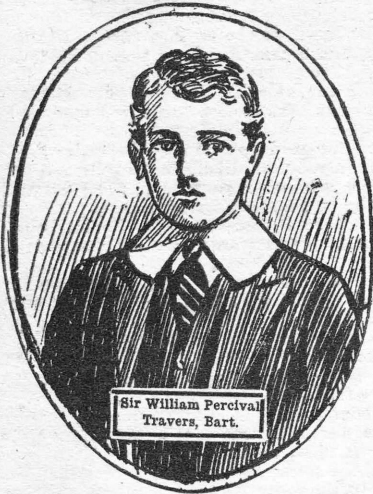
(Another splendid, long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled "D'ARCY, THE SUFFRAGIST," by Martin Clifford, Please Order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

Great New Public-School Serial!

Sir Billy, of - - - - Greyhouse!

*A Magnificent New Serial Story
dealing with Public-School Life.*

By R. S. WARREN BELL.



WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

Sir William Percival Travers, Bart.—to give him his full title—is a slight, fair lad of twelve when he is first sent to "Fighting Greyhouse" by his guardian. His Form-fellows in the Lower Fourth are considerably older than "Sir Billy," as the youngster is soon nicknamed, and he has to put up with a good deal of bullying. His great hero is Wardour, the captain of the school.

One day a wealthy Greyhouse fellow named FitzClarence Dewberry finds that his valuable gold watch has been stolen, and some time later notices the identical watch in the window of a Belser jeweller's shop. Dewberry elicits from the jeweller's assistant the astounding information that the watch was sold to the shop by a "gentleman from Greyhouse, name of Wardour." Wardour, of course, contemptuously denies the charge, but the jeweller's assistant sticks to his story. Thus the matter rests when one day, Sir Billy runs into the changing-room to fetch a sweater for Hallam, a monitor, and a friend of Wardour's and finds Mike, the odd-job boy, calmly rifling the pockets of Hallam's coat!

Sir Billy is joined by Parsnip, whose proper name is Carew, and together they chase the thief. He lures them to the ruins of a neighbouring castle called Meadowdene, where by a trick he shuts them up in a cell and leaves them there.

"He'll just clear out of the district and leave us here!" is Parsnip's happy way of looking upon their position.

(Read on from here.)

Prisoners!

The idea sobered them. They stood still without speaking for a full minute. Then they began to feel their way round the cell.

As they knew, the place was not more than eight feet square by six feet high. It was supplied with air from the underground passage by means of a very narrow slit in the wall, and, as the atmosphere of the passage was not of a very pure order, the quality of the air in the cell may be imagined.

"If any one comes along, we can yell to him through that slit," said Parsnip.

"If," returned Billy slowly.

"I say, old chap, don't lose heart," said the other. "We shall get out all right. It's merely a matter of waiting."

"How long?"

"Hang it! Won't they search for us?" demanded Parsnip.

"How are they to know we are here?"

"Mike won't dare to leave us—at any rate, not for long."

Parsnip seemed determined to take a cheerful view of the situation. After a time they went to the door and yelled to Mike to let them out. There was no reply.

"Oh, he'll come after a bit!" said Parsnip. "He's only riled with us for chasing him."

They sat down on the damp floor, and tried to chat cheerfully about the approaching sports and other school matters. But the weirdness of their plight oppressed them. If all the Lower Fourth had been with them, this would have been rather a lark, but they were just two—alone—and nobody knew they were here.

Again they hammered on the door and yelled frantically to Mike. They kicked the door and threw themselves against it again and again. Nobody spoke to them from without.

Evidently Mike had left them to their fate.

In dull despair they sat down by the door and huddled together for warmth's sake. Conversation was impossible. They now perceived it to be quite probable that they would have to spend the night in this loathsome chamber. Their imprisoned state would have had its terrors for grown-up folk, and these two were only youngsters. What wonder that Billy slipped his hand into Parsnip's, and didn't dare pass a remark, because of the big lump in his throat!

The hours crept on, and they grew cold and stiff. They rose to their feet and paced up and down the cell. By this time, as Parsnip presently said, the other chaps must be in prep, wondering where on earth they were. When supper time had arrived, and they had still not turned up, the Head would be informed. Telegrams would be sent to Petershall. Mr. Soames would reply that he hadn't seen anything of them; then the Head would grow anxious.

Perhaps a search party would be organised, perhaps they would wait till morning.

Meanwhile—

The idea of spending the night in that cell filled them with frightened energy. They belaboured the door with bruised and aching knuckles, and cried out desperately for "Help!"

Nobody answered, nobody came.

Parsnip had long ere this lost his cheerfulness. Now he was as despondent as his chum. But he found a bit of hardbake in his pocket, and this he shared with Billy. Each made his portion last as long as possible, lingering long and reluctantly over its delicious flavour.

For they were desperately hungry and shivering with cold. To add to their discomfort, denizens of that dark cell—queer, crawling, creepy creatures—paid them visits. Some were dry and some slimy; some peered at them with bright black eyes; such peculiar horrors had this dreadful gloom.

In course of time they slept, only to awake and start to their feet with exclamations of dismay. Then they would sleep again. And so the long night passed, and the day came; but within the cell it was eternal night, and the prisoners did not know that the sun was shining outside.

Just in Time.

Nearly two days had elapsed since Billy and Parsnip tore out of the school precincts in pursuit of Mike Smith.

Detective Halward, of Scotland Yard, was smoking the pipe of peace, and enjoying himself very much. His copy of that week's "Answers" had just arrived, and Mr. Halward was surveying the first page, his intelligent countenance decorated by what seemed to be a fixed and permanent grin.

"Here's a good one," he was just saying to his companion, when "Yo-hoop!" went the speaking-tube whistle.

The other man put his ear to the tube, and then turned to Halward with:

"The gov'nor wants you."

Reluctantly then did Mr. Halward lay aside his favourite

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A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's,
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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"D'ARCY, THE SUFFRAGIST!"

paper, and betake himself to the sanctum of Detective-Superintendent Ramsey, otherwise known as "The Guv'nor."

"Halward," said Mr. Ramsey, gravely pulling his long moustache, "a young fellow was run over by a cab yesterday, and taken to St. Matthew's Hospital. To-day I hear he is dying, and wishes to make a confession. The usual police will be there, but I want you to be present, too. The confession may be an important one."

Halward climbed into a hansom and was quickly whirled away to St. Matt's, as the students were pleased to term that immense institution.

Arrived at the hospital, the detective was conducted to the casualty ward. Evidently something of more than usual importance was in the wind, for those of the inmates who were strong enough to do so were reclining on elbow, and gazing towards a bed which was almost hidden from their view by a screen.

"We can let the lad say what he wants to, now you have come, sir," whispered the doctor in attendance, approaching Halward.

When the detective—who was quite accustomed to scenes of this kind—took his place at the foot of the bed, he found that a nurse was supporting the sufferer's head on her shoulder. The doctor stepped to the bedside and applied his fingers to the lad's pulse. Then the sergeant who had been summoned from the nearest police-station to hear the confession gave a short cough, by way of announcing that all was ready. The young constable he had brought with him to do the writing examined his pen, and the nurse bent gently over her charge.

"Now, 26," she said, "you may begin."

The patient opened his eyes and gazed feebly round. Then he sighed, his eyelids drooped, and he would have sunk back on to the pillow had it not been for the nurse's arm round his shattered frame.

"A spoonful of brandy," said the doctor to another nurse who was in attendance.

She procured the stimulant, and administered a small portion of it to the dying boy. A faint tinge of colour rose in his pallid cheeks, and his eyes opened more briskly this time. Instinctively he fixed them on the doctor as he demanded in a hoarse whisper:

"Is it all up with me?"

"I am afraid so," replied the doctor, who knew that the pulse he was feeling would not beat for many more minutes.

"Then I'll round on that chap!" gasped the lad, adding in an affrighted tone: "He won't know I split on him before I die, will he?"

"No," said the doctor; "you need fear nothing from him."

The look of dread passed from the boy's face, and a strange light of revenge for the moment came into his dull eyes.

"I'll tell you all I know, then. My name's George Cable, and I'm assistant to Moses, a jeweller at Belsert."

Then he closed his eyes.

"Another spoonful," said the doctor in a matter-of-fact tone.

The liquor put fresh life into 26. He opened his eyes again, and proceeded with his confession, idly watching, as he spoke, the rapidly moving pen wielded by the policeman in attendance.

"Soon after I was taken on by Moses I met a chap called Mike Smith in a public-house. He and I became friends. Until I met him I was all right, afterwards—"

He stopped speaking. The doctor motioned to the nurse, and again the dying lad's dry lips were moistened.

"I went to the bad. He was at Greyhouse School, and used to nick things, and I used to buy them in the guv'nor's name. They were only little things at first—pencil-cases—then they got bigger, and I was scared."

He sighed, and closed his eyes.

"I'm tired," he said. "Why can't you let me go to sleep?"

"Make an effort, my lad," said the doctor in a firm voice. "Your evidence is important. Tell us what Smith made you buy from him."

"The best was a watch," said No. 26, "a real beauty. I gave Smith six pound-ten for it. I had to, else he said he'd round on me for buying the things before that. And when inquiries were made he said I was to say it was sold to me by Wardour, of Greyhouse School, who he'd got a grudge against, and so I said so."

Again he collapsed, and again the life-sustaining fluid was poured down his throat. Detective Halward felt disappointed. It was, then, just a common larceny. This was hardly worth wasting time on.

"Is that all?" asked the doctor.

No 26 sat up without the nurse's assistance.

"No," he screamed, "it's not all! Two fellows saw him stealing, and chased him to Meadowcène Castle, and there

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"THE PENNY POPULAR"
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he bolted 'em into a dungeon; and that was on Saturday afternoon, and so they must be dead—it's more'n two days—"

The detective was listening now with eagerness. They had been informed at the Yard of the strange disappearance of two Greyhouse boys, and a man had been sent down to hunt for them.

No. 26 was gasping for breath. The detective leant over him, and said, sharply and distinctly:

"Where's Smith?"

"We came up to London—he made me—Saturday night," murmured Cable huskily. "Said he'd kill me if I didn't."

"Where is he?" demanded Halward, pushing aside the nurse and holding the boy up in his strong arms.

"Seven—Great Spencer Street—down in Shoreditch."

Once again he rallied, and gazed at the man who was supporting him.

"Shall you take him? You're a 'tec, ar'n't you?" he said.

"Yes; I'm a detective—I shall take him," was the quiet answer.

A look of great terror came into the boy's eyes.

"You won't tell him—I told you?" he gasped.

"You needn't be afraid," said Halward reassuringly. "I won't say a word about you."

"Then—I'll go to sleep. I was afraid—he might get to know—"

He sank back, and the nurse arranged the bedclothes about him. But the doctor suddenly stepped forward and gazed steadily at No. 26.

"Dead!" he said, looking at Halward. "You were just in time."

On leaving the hospital Halward promptly dispatched a wire to his colleague at Greyhouse. Then, hailing a cab, he drove to Great Spencer Street, Shoreditch, and nabbed his man just as Smith was preparing to decamp. For some years afterwards the erstwhile boot-boy at Greyhouse knew no home save that provided by a benevolent Government for the benefit of persons who break laws.

Billy and Parsnip, when the door of their prison was flung open, were in a pitiable state indeed. Covered with grime, hardly able to move, famished, and parched with thirst, they fainted clean off at the mere sight of their rescuers.

Wardour was of the party. So was Hallam. With the detective's aid they carried their two schoolfellows out into God's pure air and sunshine, and applied restoratives.

When Billy came to, his first question related to Smith.

"They caught him," said Wardour.

"And he took Dewberry's watch?" asked Billy.

"Yes," said Wardour. "That's proved."

"I'm so glad!" said Billy weakly. "Because, you know—"

"Yes; I know why," interrupted Wardour, with a bit of a catch in his voice. "Here, old boy, have some more of this."

An Epidemic.

The Lent term had almost run its course, when there came to Greyhouse an epidemic. If you look in the dictionary you will find that worthy Mr. Nuttall describes ophthalmia as: "An inflammation of the eye." But probably Mr Nuttall had never had it, or he wouldn't have dismissed it with so brief a definition.

I will tell you what ophthalmia is. First your eyes begin to tingle, and then to smart, and then they become pink, and then red. Then, one morning, when you wake up, you only do so mentally, as it were, because you cannot raise your eyelids. You struggle and struggle to open your eyes; but the ophthalmic fiend says that you shall not, for during your slumbers he has set his seal upon your lashes, and look upon the fair sunlight you cannot until some kindly soul brings a warm sponge and releases your organs of vision from their imprisonment.

But this is not the worst. The cure is as bad as the disease. A doctor comes, bearing a little bottle and a camel's-hair brush. Being the school doctor, he talks to you just as if he were a master, and as a master you recognise him. Obediently you pull down your lower lid, and he plunges into each eye the brush, soaked in what the bottle contains. Then, for a few minutes, you rather wish that you had never been born. If somebody were to kick you you wouldn't feel it. A flogging would not even distract your attention in any material degree. You roll about, and groan, and bite, and sob, and gradually the awful tingling abates, and at length, in a bloodshot way, you leer at the world again.

However, ophthalmia is not too serious a malady. It is

about equal, in point of inconvenience, to an attack of measles. It comes and goes, as a rule leaving the patient no worse for its visit.

So the ophthalmic fiend descended upon Greyhouse School, and in a single night set a score of eyes itching. Twenty-four hours later fifty fellows had got it, and the malignant humour had extended itself to a third of the school ere another morning wore to eve.

Things were now looking very black—or, in the case of the stricken ones, unpleasantly crimson. The Head took counsel with his staff, and decided that, as the end of term was but three weeks distant, it would be as well to hold out during that period in hopes that the scourge would abate. His only other course was to break up the school at once.

Meanwhile, the doctor's gig bowled merrily up the drive two or three times a day instead of at 4 p.m., the doctor's usual hour of call.

Did a fellow wish to avoid detention, he had but to rub his eyes, and a watchful Form-master whisked him off to his matron, by whom he was passed on to the sick bay, there to await the doctor. But such malingers paid penalty for shamming, for even though the doctor found their eyeballs clean and white, on their own confession of knuckle-rubbing they had felt the fatal itch, and so they were detained in the infirmary to await developments, with the result that the infection from a hundred eyes soon caught them and claimed them as victims.

Each morning added fresh patients to the already heavy roll, and at last things came to such a pitch that one day, while Greyhouse was breakfasting, the Head stalked into the hall, and, after grace, commanded the whole school to line up in the playground. This plan had evidently been laid overnight, for in the playground was found the doctor, irreverently dubbed "Beaky," on account of his nose—or, rather, the shape of it. Monitors and all had to line up. Only Wardour, by virtue of his captaincy, walked up and down the serried ranks, and eyed the fellows in a mournful manner, for half the football team had been struck down by the malady, and the sports had had to be postponed.

The Head and the doctor conferred together, and then, as Wardour gloomily returned to his place at the head of the ranks, the doctor turned to him and started his examination. Each fellow was directed to pull down his lower eyelids and glance heavenwards. Wardour was all right, but several of the Sixth were condemned, and, by the time the doctor had reached the end of the line another five-and-twenty fellows had been dispatched to the infirmary.

The school infirmary was a big building, but it proved too small for this occasion of sickness.

The doctor, looking tired, later on in the day went to the Head.

"We are full up, sir; the boys are herded together now like cattle. You must give me all the dormitories in one of the houses."

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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."

A. H. Smith, 1921, South Railway Street, Regina, Sask., Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers in Australia, New Zealand and England, age 14 to 16.

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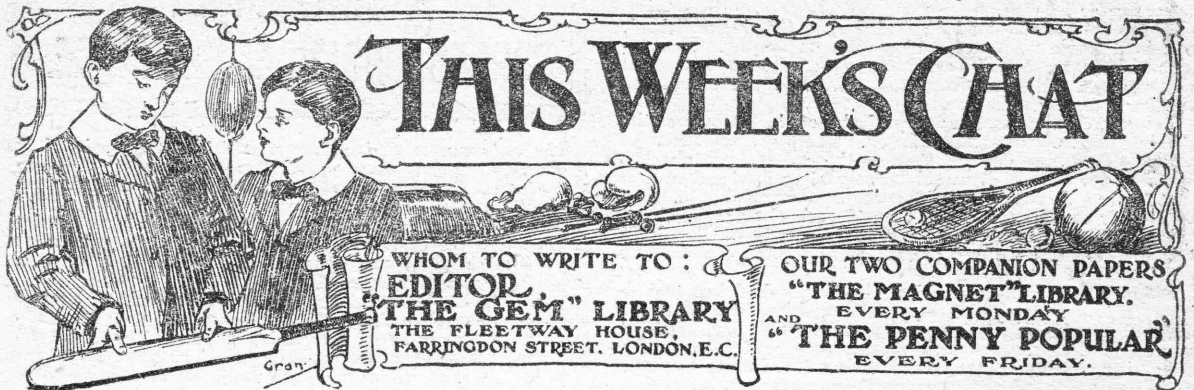
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The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"D'ARCY, THE SUFFRAGIST!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Next week's splendid, long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's centres mainly round the figure of the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in his newest role as an ardent supporter of the cause of Woman's Suffrage. The swell of St. Jim's holds very pronounced views on this vexed question, and does not hesitate to back them up in a most energetic manner. The result, however, is not quite what he expects, and his views gradually undergo a change!

"D'ARCY, THE SUFFRAGIST!"

is an extra funny story, and, after reading about the visit of Miss Jibbe, the militant Suffragette, to St. Jim's, my readers will be ready to admit that, as a writer of humorous school stories, Mr. Martin Clifford is very hard indeed to beat.

"GEM" PORTRAIT GALLERY NEXT WEEK.

So great was the success of the Portrait Gallery in our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, that I have been besieged with requests from keen readers of both papers to put a special Portrait Gallery in "The Gem," too. I have therefore arranged with our special "Gem" artist to make separate portraits of the principal characters in the famous St. Jim's stories, and several of these will be published each week, beginning with our next issue; and I am sure many thousands of my readers will give this new feature a cordial welcome, and will take the opportunity of introducing their non-reading friends to the good old "Gem" now that it is

BETTER AND BRIGHTER THAN EVER.

"FRIARS VERSUS SAINTS!"

This week's issue of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, contains a long, complete school story of particular interest, entitled "Friars versus Saints," by Frank Richards. Tom Merry & Co. play no inconsiderable part in this splendid yarn, in which a most exciting cricket match takes place between the juniors of Greyfriars and those of St. Jim's, on the latter's ground. All GEM readers will be particularly interested in the visit of Harry Wharton & Co. to St. Jim's, and should therefore make a special point of getting a copy of this week's "Magnet" Library, containing

"FRIARS VERSUS SAINTS."**WHEN YOU FORGET "THE GEM."**

Should you be so unfortunate as to forget to buy a copy of the "Gem" when you go on a long railway journey, a very interesting occupation is to find out how fast the train is travelling. Placed at intervals along the track, may be seen little white posts of about 2 feet in height. These are marked 1 1/2, 2 1/2, 3, and so on. The figures represent the number of miles the post is from the London terminus; thus, if the post is marked 50, it would mean that it was fifty miles from London, and a quarter of a mile from the last post. By taking note of the time it takes to get from one post to another, you would be able to find out how many miles an hour you were travelling. This is quite a good way of passing away the time when you forget your "Gem."

LETTERS ACKNOWLEDGED.

My best thanks are due to the following readers for their interesting letters and suggestions: "A MagGemPopite," C. F. T. S. J. G., Australia, "Les Marshman," Victoria, Australia, and G. Johnson, Australia.

HOW TO FORM A NIGGER MINSTREL TROUPE.

By a Professional Entertainer.

A few years ago minstrels were the craze, but they died out for a time; but the last few months a revival has come about, so anyone able to organise a troupe should find a wide scope and plenty of engagements.

In the first place you must get from eight to twelve boys who are willing to work and rehearse. Of course, fair voices are wanted.

Supposing that you have got together eight boys. Out of these you must choose two to take "corner men" (the comedians of the troupe). They are known as Tambo and Bones. Also an interlocutor is wanted. This gentleman asks the questions, gives out the items, and, in fact, is a kind of stage-manager. On the stage Tambo and Bones must be quarrelling the whole time, and the interlocutor must try to settle their disputes.

The rest of the troupe will sing nigger songs such as "Nellie Gray," "The Old Folks at Home," "Swanee River," etc. The latest rag-time songs can be introduced, also stump-speeches by Tambo and Bones, and cross-talk after the style of the following (Int. will stand for interlocutor):

Int.: "Tambo, what is this I hear of you fighting with Bones?"

Tam.: "Me, sah?"

Int.: "Yes, you, sir!"

Tam.: "Well, we had a little quarrel."

Int.: "Indeed!"

Tam.: "No; in word."

Int.: "Yes?"

Tam.: "It was like this—we were both of the same mind."

Int.: "You mean to tell me that you quarrelled because you were of the same mind?"

Tam.: "Yes, sah. It was like this. I saw a sixpence, and Bones he saw the sixpence, and he thought that he was not going to get half of it, and I thought that he was not going to get half of it; so we quarrelled."

Int.: "Indeed?"

Tam.: "Yes, he ran at me, knocked me down, jumped on me, and—"

Int.: "And do you mean to say that you did not move to help yourself?"

Tam.: "Well, you see, I was standing on the sixpence!"

Int.: "Ah, I see. And then what happened?"

Tam.: "And then he offered me a drink."

Int.: "Do you mean to tell me that after all this he offered you a drink? How could he insult you so! And what did you do?"

Tam.: "I swallowed the insult."

Int.: "How dare you make an idiot of me in this manner!"

Tam.: "Don't blame me—blame Nature."

Int.: "How dare you? Now, come, if you don't sing something good I shall turn you out!"

Tam.: "Very well, here goes!" (Sings.)

This sort of cross-talk goes down very well—at least, I have found so; and I have done nearly every branch of entertaining. Of course, the troupe must be able to play the bones, so I will explain the method next week.

THE EDITOR.