

**SPLENDID COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.**

The

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**THE SHADOW ON LEVISON!**

*(A Thrilling Incident from the Grand Long Complete School Story Inside.)*

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# "MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

Half-a-crown is paid for all contributions printed on this page.

## MATCHBOX MUSEUMS.

The newest craze among schoolboys is collecting pictorial tops of match-boxes. An interesting feature of one match-box museum is the number of foreign specimens. Sweden has no fewer than twenty-six different varieties, each one the product of a different factory. Britain comes next with twenty-two, while Holland and Norway tie with nine each. Belgium has seven, Denmark six, Russia two, while France, Italy, Japan, and Finland contribute one each. Most of the boxes bear pictorial designs. A Norwegian specimen displays the Tower of London, another shows Jumbo, the celebrated elephant, and a Russian box gives a map of the British Isles. There is an illustration of a forest fire on a Canadian box, with a warning underneath: "Do not throw away burning matches, especially in the woods."—Albert Holmes, 9, II Block, Orchard Street, W.

## PLAIN ENGLISH.

He was a page-boy at a hotel, and was given to studying the English language. One day recently he received his wages, and was surprised to find that a small sum had been deducted from them for some misdemeanour. Indignantly he sought out the manager. "Pardon me, sir," said the page courteously, "but if you should ever find it within the scope of your jurisdiction to levy a small assessment on my wages for some trivial act alleged to have been committed by myself at some inopportune moment in the course of my vocation, I would suggest that you refrain from exercising that prerogative. The failure to do so

on your part would force me reluctantly to tender my resignation." The fainting manager grasped hold of a chair to support himself as he gasped out: "What ever do you mean, boy?" "To speak plainly," replied the lad, "if you fine me again I'll chuck up the job."—H. Redgrove, 117, Liverpool Road, Canning Town, E. 16.

## BAD FOR THE COMPANY.

Brown: "I twisted the railway company nicely last night." Smith: "How did you manage that?" Brown: "Why, I bought a return ticket, and never came back."—M. Taylor, 253, Marton Road, Middlesbrough-on-Tees.

## FOR STAMP COLLECTORS.

When the German armies overran France in the war of 1870, one of the most important results—to the stamp collector—was the issue of postage stamps by the Army of Occupation for use at the various post-offices in the French towns held by the German invaders. These stamps, rightly or wrongly have always been known among philatelists as the stamps of Alsace Lorraine.—Wm. Hill, Daisy Bank, Whitaker Lane, Heaton Park, Manchester.

## SEEING AND BELIEVING.

"But surely," urged Jobson, "seeing is believing?" "Not necessarily," replied Dobson. "For instance, I see you every day, but as to believing you— He never finished the sentence.—Fred W. Cooper, Coventry House, High Street, Eastchurch, Sheppey, Kent.

## SO HE THOUGHT.

A gentleman waiting for a train which was late looked at his watch, and said to a porter: "Porter, how long is this train overdue?" The porter shook his head gravely. "Lookin' at your watch's no good, sir," he said. "You want a calendar!"—Thomas Anwyke, 7, Gwindy Terrace, Rhuddlan, North Wales.

## THE DEEPEST WELL.

The deepest well in the world was recently drilled near Fairmont, West Virginia. When the boring stopped on June 18th, 1919, a depth of 7,579ft. had been reached, exceeding by 193ft. the depth of the previous deepest well. The latter is also in Virginia. The well was sunk in search of oil or natural gas, but yielded neither.—E. A. J. Crook, West Street, Bramwell, Somerset.

## SOAKED THROUGH.

A milkman was brought before the court of a country town charged with selling adulterated milk. "Have you anything to say in answer to the charge?" asked the magistrate. "Well, your Honour," answered the milkman, "I think it was this way. The night before it was raining very hard, and the cow must have got wet all through."—Joe Hunter, 2, Kennet Village, by Alloa, Clackmannan, N.B.

## THE PEACE POEM.

"I have here," said the caller, "a poem advocating peace." "I suppose," asked the editor, "that you honestly and sincerely desire peace?" "Yes, sir." "Then burn the poem!"—J. Taplin, 39, Penkville Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

## THE MISSING SOVEREIGN.

In a crowded London tramcar, one wet night, a coin was heard to drop, and an old man stooped and picked it up. "Anybody lost a sovereign?" he asked anxiously. Several passengers hurriedly searched their purses, and replied: "I have!" "Well, I've found a halfpenny towards it," said the old man.—Frank Grist, 10, Irving Street, Litherland, nr. Liverpool.

## A CURIOUS TREE.

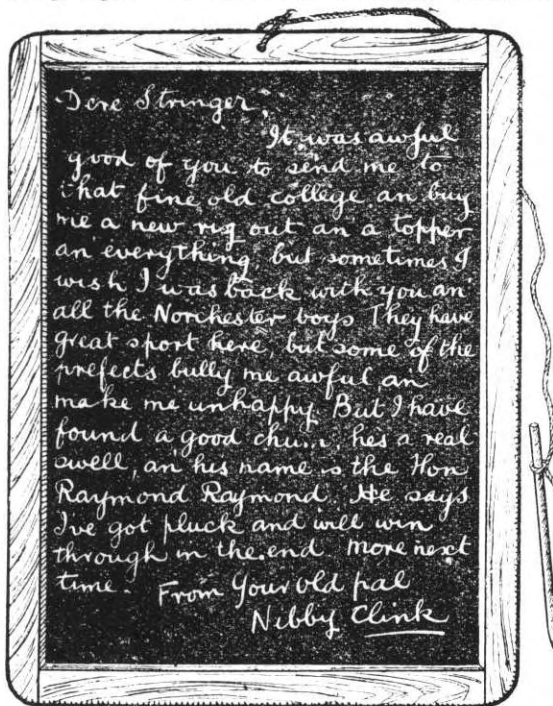
There is a very small tree native to Japan, called the maple-tree, and it takes four hundred years to reach its full size. Its height when full grown is eighteen inches. It sheds its leaves in autumn, and they come on in spring, as with any other tree.—Miss Ivy Chapples, Pack Horse Hotel, Calder Street, Burnley, Lancs.

## THE KING OF ENGLAND.

The King of England is elected. That may seem strange, but when the King enters Westminster Abbey on Coronation Day to be crowned, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as he pours the anointing oil on the King's head, says: "Will you have this man as your King?"—or, at least, words to that effect. Several boys selected from Westminster School, who represent the people, answer "Yes." This is in accordance with an old custom. The King's cars are the only cars privileged to go about without a registered number. The King is the fountain of honour. All titles are conferred by him. He is also the source of justice.—George Ballantine, 89, Hazlebury Road, Silver Street, Upper Edmonton, N. 18.

## GALLEONS.

Galleons were originally warships with three or four gun-decks. The name was subsequently applied to the Spanish treasure-ships which conveyed gold from the Spanish possessions in America to Spain. For this reason they were much sought after as prizes by pirates and alien countries in time of war. Being unwieldy vessels, they were often destroyed by storms and human agencies. Probably many were wrecked off the coasts of England and America, and for all one knows to the contrary, there is much treasure buried beneath the sea to this day.—B. Nixon, Kiltumilty, Blacklion, co. Cavan, Ireland.



Get this week's "Boys' Herald" and read the great School Serial entitled, "The College of Sportsmen."



# THE SHADOW on LEVISON

A Grand Long Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's.  
By Martin Clifford.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Waiting for Levison!

"LEVISON!"

"He's not here."

"Bless him!" said Tom Merry.

"Bothah him, you mean," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is weally wathah asinine of Levison to keep the whole field waitin' like this."

Tom Merry looked almost cross.

It was time for the kick-off, and two elevens—School House and New House juniors—were ready, on Little Side at St. Jim's—with the solitary exception of the School House outside-right.

Levison of the Fourth had not turned up.

Generally, Levison of the Fourth was prompt and reliable enough. There had been a time when Ernest Levison had been a slacker; but that time was long past.

Tom Merry would not have been surprised if Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been a little late. The swell of St. Jim's might have delayed to give a final touch to his hair, or a last rub to his beautiful boots. But Tom expected Levison to be there prompt to time, and Levison wasn't there.

Figgins, the great chief of the New House juniors, smiled indulgently.

"We don't mind waiting a minute or two," he remarked. "We never really expect the School House to be on time."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah, Figgay—wats, and many of them," said D'Arcy warmly. "Pwobably Levison will be here in a minute."

"No sign of him," said Figgins, looking round. "But bless your little hearts, it doesn't matter! There's time to beat you before dark."

"It gets dark early now," said Monty Lowther, right-half in the School House junior team. "N.G., Figgay. You'd require a Polar summer to beat us before dark."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Levison!" roared Tom Merry, thinking that perhaps the missing winger might be somewhere within the range of his voice. "You thumping ass, we're waiting for you!"

"Somebody wun and look for him," said D'Arcy.

"Bother him!" growled Jack Blake.

Figgins gave a long yawn.

"Let's put the ball about a bit, you fellows," he said to his merry men. "The School House mayn't be ready for hours yet."

"I wish I'd brought some grub," said Fatty Wynn, the New House goalkeeper. "I say, Tom Merry, I suppose there'll be time to walk over to the tuckshop before you're ready?"

"Lots, I should think," said Figgins.

"You can walk over to Jericho, if you like!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Look here, you chaps, we're not going to hang on waiting for Levison. I'll put another man in."

"Yaas, pewwaps that is a good ideah!"

Tom Merry looked round.

"Hold on," said Sidney Clive, Levison's chum, who was centre-half in the House team. "Give the chap a chance, Tommy."

"I've given him a chance, haven't I?" said the School House junior captain gruffly.

"He can't be long now."

"What's keeping him?" grunted Tom.

"I don't know! He had a letter after dinner——"

"I suppose he's not sitting in his study reading a letter, while we're waiting for him on the football-ground!" exclaimed Tom.

"Numo. But——"

"Cardew!" called out Tom Merry.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth, was lounging among the fellows who had gathered to see the junior House match. He came over as Tom called to him.

"Anythin' wanted?" he asked.

"Levison's not here——"

"No; I see he isn't."

"I want another man. If you'd care to play——"

Cardew considered.

"I'd care no end," he said. "Just feelin' in the merry mood for a game of footer; an' I feel convinced that I could present you with five or six goals——"

"Make it five or six dozen!" interjected Figgins sarcastically.

"Well, get into your things—quick!" said Tom.

"But——" said Cardew.

"But what? Sharp!"

"But I'd rather not bag Levison's place, if he's prepared to play," said Cardew urbane. "Shall I cut off and fetch him, instead?"

Tom Merry breathed rather hard. It was seldom that his sunny temper was disturbed; but football—and especially House matches—were serious matters to Tom.

He was about to make a rather hot reply to Cardew's suggestion, when Talbot of the Shell touched him lightly on the arm.

"Give Levison a chance, Tom," said Talbot, in his quiet way. "He can't be keeping us waiting on purpose."

"Oh, all right!" said Tom, who generally was amenable to Talbot's quiet influence. "Cut off and find him, then, Cardew. But we sha'n't wait long."

"My dear man, I'll out-race the giddy lightnin'," said Cardew.

And the dandy of the Fourth quitted the football-ground, and cut off towards the School House, at a pace he was very unaccustomed to.

"Bai Jove! Cardew's actually wunnin'!" said Arthur Augustus, putting up his celebrated eyeglass and staring after the Fourth-Former.

"Wonders will never cease!" remarked Monty Lowther.

Ralph Reckness Cardew disappeared from sight very quickly. He ran into the School House, and almost ran into three fags who were coming out—Levison minor, Reggie Manners, and Wally D'Arcy, of the Third.

"Match started?" called out Wally, as Cardew dodged round the fags and ran to the staircase.

"Not yet."

"It's time," said Wally. "Are they waiting while my major does his hair?"

Cardew did not even hear that frivolous question; he was mounting the stairs two at a time, at a great rate.

"Come on," said Frank Levison. "My major's playing to-day, you know—the game will be worth seeing."

"It might be worth seeing, because my major's playing!" suggested Reggie Manners, with sarcasm.

"Or mine!" said Wally cheerily. "My major is always worth watching. I'm always expecting to see him faint when he gets some mud on his bags. Come on, you fags!"

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And the three minors marched out of the School House and headed for the football-ground.

They arrived there, and cheerily elbowed a way to the front, in spite of loud expostulations and dire threats.

"Hallo! Not started yet?" called out Wally. "Get a move on, you old fogeys! What's the matter with you? Rheumatism come on in your old age?"

"Where's your brother, young Levison?" called out Tom Merry.

Frank stared.

"Isn't he here?"

"No."

"Your majah is keepin' us waitin', Fwank," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard it as vevy wewpwehensible on the part of your majah."

"Oh, they're not waiting for you to do your back hair, Gus?" called out Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky young wascal!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Where on earth can Ernest be?" exclaimed Frank Levison, in great surprise. "Tain't like him to keep the field waiting. Shall I cut off and look for him, Tom Merry?"

"Cardew's gone," said Tom. "You needn't trouble. If he isn't here in one minute more he doesn't play."

And Tom Merry's jaw set squarely. He was quite determined on that.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Levison Causes Surprise!

**R**ALPH RECKNESS CARDEW ran into Study No. 9, in the Fourth, almost breathless.

It was quite unusual for the careless, fastidious Cardew to hurry himself in any way; generally, he was laziness personified. But he had hurried himself now.

Though little was to be seen of it in outward appearance, there was a deep bond of friendship among the rather queerly assorted chums of Study No. 9.

Three fellows could not have been much more unlike than Ernest Levison, quiet, thoughtful, perhaps a little hard; Cardew, easy and careless and dandified; and Sidney Clive, the good-natured, sturdy junior from South Africa. But the three pulled together remarkably well; and perhaps their friendship was all the stronger for their great differences in looks, disposition, and character. Certainly, in time of difficulty or trouble, the three stood together with unshaken loyalty.

"Levison!" exclaimed Cardew, as he ran in.

Cardew was quite puzzled by Levison's failure to turn up for the House match. He did not know where to look for him, even; but he looked in the study first. Fortunately, Levison was there.

But it was a very different Levison from the cheerful fellow Cardew had seen last.

A change had come over him, that was obvious to the most careless glance.

Ernest Levison was sitting at the table, with a letter in his hand, which he was not reading.

His gaze was fixed before him, and his face was very pale. Cardew's glance was startled as it fell upon him.

He ran forward, and caught his chum by the shoulder.

"Levison! What's the matter?"

Levison of the Fourth hastily crumpled the letter in his hand. He made an evident and painful effort to pull himself together.

"Eh? Nothing!" he stammered.

"Anythin' wrong in that letter?" asked Cardew. "I see it's in your sister's hand. Doris ill?"

"No, no!"

Levison put the letter into his pocket.

"Did you come here for me?" he asked.

"You've forgotten the House match."

Levison started.

"My hat! So I had! Is it time?"

"A good bit past time, and Tom Merry is getting his hair off," said Cardew. "Get a move on—if you're going to play. Lucky you've changed already!"

"I—I—"

"If you want to cut the match—"

"No—no—I'll come!"

"Then, come on!" said Cardew, catching him by the arm. "There isn't a tick to lose, if you want to play!"

"All right, then!"

Cardew almost dragged his chum from the study. Levison seemed dazed as he went with him. Cardew hurried him down the stairs, and out into the quadrangle.

"Now, put it on!" he said.

Levison pulled himself together. He made an evident effort to throw aside whatever it was that was weighing on his mind.

"Hook it!" said Cardew impatiently.

"Right!"

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Levison ran for the football-ground. There was a shout from the crowd of juniors there as he came in sight.

"Here he is—"

"Here's the slacker—"

"Buck up, Ernest!" shouted Frank Levison.

Levison of the Fourth came up panting. He threw his coat and muffler to Frank, who caught them. Tom Merry turned a grim eye on him.

"Are you ready now?" he asked curtly.

"Yes, yes! Have I kept you waiting?" stammered Levison.

"Bai Jove! Don't you know you have, you feahful slackah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly.

"I—I'm sorry!"

"Line up!" snapped Tom Merry. "No need to go into it now. Time enough wasted already!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Dear old Tommy's got his rag out!" murmured Monty Lowther to Manners. "Mind your p's and q's, old top!"

And Manners grinned.

"My only hat!" exclaimed George Figgins, with an air of great astonishment. "You School House fellows aren't really ready at last, are you?"

"Oh, cut the cackle!" said Tom Merry. "Let's get going!"

"Waiting for you, Figgins!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, Figgay—pewwaps you wouldn't mind gettin' on with the game instead of talkin' so much?" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bow-wow!" retorted Figgay.

"Ready?" asked Lefevre of the Fifth, who was referee, and who had been yawning in quite a portentous manner.

"Yes," said Tom.

Levison of the Fourth took his place in the School House line. Arthur Augustus was next to him, and he noted that Ernest Levison looked absent-minded—very different from his usual keen and alert self.

"Anythin' w'ong, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus asked.

"Oh, nothing!"

"You don't look vevy fit!"

"I'm all right!" said Levison, rather curtly.

"Oh, all wright, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Don't be watty, you know!"

The kick-off fell to George Figgins, who set the ball rolling. The junior footballers were glad to get going at last. It was a cold, nipping afternoon, and loafing about in the keen wind was not the most agreeable of occupations. But the game soon warmed them up.

Figgins & Co. were going in great style.

Of late, Figgins & Co. had suffered some reverses, in the undying warfare between the rival Houses of St. Jim's; and they were anxious to wipe out defeat by sweeping success on the football-field. And it looked as if their ambition was likely to be realised.

Tom Merry & Co. were penned up in the School House half for some time. Once the leather came very near goal, but Herries fisted it out. Kangaroo cleared to mid-field, and Lowther's toe picked up the ball and sent it over the line. There was a rush of the School House, glad to be on the go. Figgins & Co. closed in to defend, and there was a struggle in mid-field.

Then the School House forward-line got away. Talbot had the ball on the left wing, and he sent it in to Blake, who centred to Tom Merry. The New House defence rushed Tom down, but not before he had passed the leather on to D'Arcy. Kerr of the New House was marking Arthur Augustus—and Gussy sent the ball out on the right wing to Levison. Pratt, a New House back, rushed up—with no chance at all against Levison if the latter had been in his usual form. Levison had every chance to run the ball on and send it back to centre, where Tom Merry was ready to take the kick. Instead of which, Levison fumbled the ball, miskicked, and was robbed of it by Pratt, who skied it and dropped it in the School House half.

"Well done, Pratt!" shouted Figgins.

Pratt grinned with satisfaction.

It had looked very like a goal for the School House; and now they had their work to do over again.

Tom Merry gave Levison a glance.

Tom was not the kind of skipper to rag a man in the middle of a game, or to be hard on a player for a mistake. But Levison's failure was really exasperating, in the circumstances. Tom said nothing, however—perhaps leaving it to the outside-right's conscience!

But plenty of fellows round the field said things. Good play was expected of Levison—and he had given bad play—very bad. It was not ill-luck—it was sheer clumsy fumbling; and the St. Jim's crowd let Levison learn that they had noticed it.

"Call that football?" roared Grundy of the Shell.

"Yah! Why don't you play marbles instead of footer?" hooted Hobbs of the Third.

Levison's face crimsoned.

"Shut up, Hobbs!" said Frank Levison ferociously. "Do you want me to punch your silly nose, you owl?"

"Yah!" retorted Hobbs.

"Yes, shut up, Hobby," said Wally D'Arcy authoritatively. "No ragging Frank's major. If he can't play, he can't!"

"He can, you silly ass!" said Frank hotly. "Best player on the field, if you come to that, barring Talbot and Tom Merry!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Reggie. "What about my major?"

"Rats to your major!" said Frank crossly.

"Well, rats to yours, then!" said Reggie Manners warmly. "Your major jolly well ought to be playing hop-scotch, judging by his form to-day!"

"Look here, Reggie, you dummy——"

"Look here, Frank, you cheeky ass——"

"Order!" yelled Wally.

"Well, if Reggie——"

"If Frank——"

"Order! I'll jolly well bang your nappers together if you rag!" said D'Arcy minor severely. "Shut up, the pair of you!"

Trouble seemed to be imminent in the happy family of minors. But fortunately attention was drawn just then to the game, by a brilliant goal from Figgins. Right in the School House net it landed, and there was a yell from the New House crowd:

"Goal! Goal! Hurray!"

**CHAPTER 3.**  
**The Startling Scene!**

**F**IGGINS & CO. walked back to the centre of the field with smiling faces. The New House were doing well, and they enjoyed it. Tom Merry found an opportunity for speaking to Levison as the players lined up.

"Don't you feel fit to-day?" he asked.

"I'm not at my best," muttered Levison.

"You could have stood out!"

"I—I never thought——"

"Well, you might have thought," said Tom tartly. "You've played, so far, like a fag. For goodness' sake pull yourself together. We don't want to make the New House a present of the match."

"I—I'll try!"

The ball rolled away, and the School House attacked. In the next few minutes Levison of the Fourth had a chance again, and miskicked, and the ball went into touch.

Tom Merry compressed his lips. He was angry; and, like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry. Levison was hopelessly off his form; and he ought not to have been in the eleven. Players have their bad days—but, at least, a fellow could say that he was not fit, and give his captain a chance of replacing him before the game started.

Now the School House team were landed with a passenger. Tom Merry was really playing ten men against the New House eleven, and it was rather too heavy a handicap. Figgins & Co. were at the top of their form, encouraged by success, and playing up hard.

Levison's failure caused another School House attack to crumple up; and after that, the struggle was mostly in Tom Merry's half. The School House had to fight hard to defend their goal; and when the whistle went for the interval, New House were still one up.

Levison of the Fourth, unheeding the glances cast at him by his fellow-players, walked away to the dressing-room; and several of the School House team, feeling the spirit move them to say things to Levison, followed him there.

Outside the dressing-room, Cardew touched Levison on the arm.

"Is anythin' up, old bean?" he asked.

Levison shook himself impatiently.

"What does it matter?" he muttered.

"It matters a goal to the New House, and it may matter a lickin' to us!" said Cardew.

"Hang it all!"

"Football's football, you know!"

"Hang football!"

Levison tramped on, leaving the dandy of the Fourth staring in blank astonishment.

"Hang football" was about the last remark Cardew had ever expected to hear fall from Levison of the Fourth. He almost doubted his ears. Something evidently was very wrong with his chum.

In the dressing-room, Herries paused in sucking a lemon to glare at Ernest Levison.

"Call yourself a footballer?" he inquired, not pleasantly.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Don't worry, dear boys," said Monty Lowther, "Levison is in one of his generous moods—he's going to make the New House a present of the match. But perhaps we might hint, meekly, that Levison might be just before he is generous."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Levison.

Lowther stared at him.

"Dear man," he said, "your manners need improving, as well as your footer—not so much as your footer, though."

"Oh, give it a rest, Lowther!" said Sidney Clive, with rather an anxious look at his study-mate. He did not understand, and did not like, the expression on Levison's face.

Ralph Reekness Cardew strolled in. Tom Merry came in at the same time. The captain of the Shell was not looking pleased.

"I want a word with you, Levison," he said quietly. "You're not fit to play this afternoon!"

"I've heard that already!" said Levison bitterly.

"Are you ill?"

"No!"

"Then what's the matter?"

"That's my business!"

"My business, too, I think, as I was ass enough to play you in a House match!" exclaimed Tom angrily.

"You shouldn't be an ass, then!"

"What?"

"You heard what I said, I suppose?"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath. The other fellows were silent now, looking on rather breathlessly.

"I—I say——" began Cardew.

"You needn't say anything, Cardew," interrupted Tom Merry curtly. "You're not in the team, and that fumbling slacker is."

"Levison's not a slacker!" said Clive.

"If there's nothing the matter with him, he's a fumbling slacker to play as he's been doing. A fag in the Third would be more use in the team. He says he's not ill!"



Ernest Levison was sitting at the table, with a letter in his hand, which he was not reading. Cardew ran forward and caught his chum by the shoulder. "Levison!" he cried. "What's the matter?" "Eh? Nothing!" stammered Levison, making an effort to pull himself together.

"I'm not ill!" said Levison doggedly.  
 "You're off your form, old fellow," said Clive.  
 "I know that!"  
 "Couldn't you tell me so before the match started?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in great exasperation. "A dozen fellows would have jumped at taking your place—Roylance, Durrance, Wildrake—a dozen fellows—if you'd given me the hint. Why couldn't you?"  
 "I never thought of it!"  
 "Never thought of it!" exclaimed Blake. "That's pretty cool. Don't you know you're playing in a House match?"  
 "Hang the House match!"  
 "Wha-a-at?"  
 "Bai Jove!"  
 "Levison——"

Tom Merry set his lips. Tom was a patient fellow, but this would have been rather too much for the patience of Job, if that patriarch had ever figured as a football skipper.

"That's enough, Levison!" he said. "You're out of the team for the second half. You're no good, anyhow, and may as well keep out of the way of fellows who can play!"

"Yaas, wathah! I've had enough of the uttah ass bumpin' into me!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I don't care!" snapped Levison. "I've got other things to think of. I was a fool to play at all!"

"You were!" agreed Blake.

"If I'd thought a minute, I wouldn't have played——"

"And you couldn't think a minute, rather than chuck away a House match?" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly.

Levison opened his lips to reply. But he did not speak. A change was coming over his face—a change that startled the angry footballers, and caused the anger to die out of their faces.

Levison's features were working—and it was painful to see the effort he made to control himself—a strong, desperate effort, but in vain. His lips quivered, his mouth worked—and to the astonishment and dismay of the juniors, Levison of the Fourth broke into a sudden wild sob, and collapsed to the floor.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### The Man Who Watched!

FRANK LEVISON, quite in ignorance of what was passing in the dressing-room, was wearing a worried look all the same. Although nothing would have induced him to admit that the School House team would have been better off without his major, he could not help seeing that Ernest was rather a hindrance than a help to his side. And the other Third Form fags were not slow to let him hear their opinion. In the Third Form at St. Jim's there was not very much thin-skinned sensitiveness; the fags were plain speakers and they had "no use" for over-refinement of speech. They thought that Levison major's play was rotten, and they said so with great frankness, regardless of the sensitive feelings of his minor. Even Wally felt called upon to deliver his opinion to the same effect. Frank's resentment, indeed, only seemed to egg the fags on to emphasise their remarks.

So Frank looked worried and angry—worried about his brother, wondering what was the matter with him; and angry with his comrades for their outspoken criticisms of his beloved and admired Ernest.

They played football in the Third Form—rather a wild and weird kind of footer, perhaps. Still, they played it; and Frank's friends averred, with great unanimity, that Levison major would have been "chucked" out of the Third Form team if he had had the honour and distinction to be a member of it.

"I must say the chap is a silly goat," said Wally, with an air of great fairness and moderation. "I don't want to say anything against your brother, of course, Frank; but he is a silly owl, and you're bound to admit it."

"I've seen him play fairly good footer," said Reggie generously. "But to-day—oh, my aunt!"

"The New House are chortling over it," said Frayne.

"Fairly killing themselves!" said Hobbs.

"What's the matter with him?" said Wally. "It's rotten putting up a show like that! Tom Merry's always refused to play the Third in a House team! I shall ask him presently if we haven't got better men in the Third than his precious outside-right."

"He'd be right outside if I was skipping the team!" remarked Hobbs, venturing upon what he probably regarded as a pun.

"Don't you try to be funny, young Hobbs!" said Wally.

"Look here, Wally——"

"But of all the cough-drops——" said D'Arcy minor.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Frank, at last.

"Look here, young Levison——"

"Rats!"

Levison minor walked away. He was feeling miserable, and if he remained, he would probably have quarrelled with all his chums on the spot. Wally shook his head as Frank departed.

"That young ass thinks a lot too much of his major," said Wally. "It doesn't do to pet majors. Makes 'em conceited. I always jolly well keep my major in his place."

"Same here," said Manners minor.

"It's rotten, specially as there are outsiders watching the game," remarked curly Gibson. "Tain't often the public come in to see a junior game, either!"

"Where's the giddy public?" asked Wally, looking round.

"Well, there's one, anyhow!" amended Gibson.

"You're an exaggerating young ass, curly!" said Wally reprovingly. "One man with sandy whiskers ain't the public!"

There was a gentleman with sandy whiskers, as Wally described them, who had strolled on to the footer ground. The public were admitted to the St. Jim's matches, if they cared to come, free, gratis, and for nothing. Junior matches seldom attracted the public, though the big Sixth Form matches often drew quite a considerable crowd. On the present occasion, the sandy-whiskered gentleman was the only member of the public who had taken the trouble to come along.

The fags looked at him, now that curly Gibson had drawn their attention to him. He was a rather well-dressed man, a darkly-bronzed face that seemed somehow oddly unsuited to his sandy whiskers. He was of very powerful build, though rather below the middle height. He could not be called handsome. His face was rugged and strong, and the nose—once prominent—had been damaged, either in an accident or a fight—and had a peculiar flattened look. After a good look at him, Reggie Manners winked at his comrades.

"That must be the chap who took the prize in the beauty show," he murmured. "He would do it, with that nose!"

And the cheeky fags chuckled.

"Shurrup—he'll hear you!" said Wally.

"Well, let him!"

"Haven't you any manners, you young ruffian?" said Wally severely. "He's a visitor—let his nose alone!"

"Wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs!" answered Reggie, and the fags chortled again.

The flat-nosed gentleman was coming towards the group of fags, and they suppressed their merriment as he stopped quite near them. Even the Third Form had some inkling of good manners.

He nodded pleasantly to them.

"Fine game—what?" he remarked.

"Oh, topping, sir!" said Wally, with elaborate politeness, and a stern glare at Reggie, who seemed on the point of bursting into a giggle again. "Been watching it long, sir?"

"No; I've only just arrived," said the stranger. "I'm very keen on the game, though. I like to watch a school game much more than a League match—more genuine football, to my mind!"

Wally was pleased to approve.

"This show isn't so good as usual," he informed the stranger. "Our side is playing a fellow off colour. He's let 'em down!"

"That's bad! I've heard several people referring to somebody named Levison——"

"That's the chap!"

"Levison is a member of the team?"

"That's so!"

"He's let the side down," said Reggie Manners. "Played rottenly. All the rest are worth watching."

"That's too bad! What position does Levison play in?" asked the gentleman with the flattened nose.

"Outside-right, sir!"

"It's the interval now, I suppose?"

"Yes—and a jolly long interval!" said Wally. "They've had more than five minutes. Blessed if I know what's up!"

"Rotten game, anyhow!" said Manners minor disparagingly. "Not like ours in the Third!"

"Oh, they're doing their best!" said Wally tolerantly.

The gentleman with the sandy whiskers strolled on and took up a position near the ropes at a short distance. Considering that it was only a junior match, and not the best possible show at that, the man was curiously interested. He waited patiently for the players to come into the field again. Wally & Co. looked at him once or twice, but they forgot him as they caught sight of Frank Levison "mooching" at a distance by himself.

"There's old Frank—sulking!" said Wally, with a grin.

"Let's go after him. After all, he's fond of his silly major, and we rubbed him the wrong way. Frank's a good sort!"

"Touchy!" said Reggie Manners.

"Well, he's touchy about his major," admitted Wally.

"Blessed if I am! I don't mind anybody calling old Gussy an ass. But Frank's a good sort—let's go and speak to him."

"Oh, all right!"  
 And the fags bore down on Levison minor and surrounded him, and all was peace once more in the kingdom of the Third.

**CHAPTER 5.**  
**A Sudden Blow!**

**L**EVISON!"  
 "What—"  
 Tom Merry & Co. simply blinked at Levison as he stood before them, his face working, his breast shaking with heavy sobs.

They were almost thunderstruck.  
 For the cool, cold self-contained Levison to break down in this public way, was amazing.

Ralph Reckness Cardew made a quick step forward; Clive moved to the side of his chum. The thought of both of them was the same; to shield Ernest Levison from view. "Blubbing" was an almost indecent disgrace—and Levison was blubbing; there was no mistake about that. It was amazing, incredible—and very painful.

"The chap must be ill!" muttered Monty Lowther, in wonder.

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Levison, old chap," said Tom Merry remorsefully, "I—I had no idea—I—I never thought—pull yourself together, old fellow!"

"Pway buck up, Levison!"  
 "For goodness' sake don't blub!" said Herries. Herries was rather a slow-thinking youth, and he supposed that a few hard words had caused Levison to "turn the tap on." All the other fellows, however, could see that there was something much deeper than that the matter.

"Shut up, Herries!"  
 "Well—," began Herries.  
 "There's something wrong—something serious."  
 "Oh!" said Herries. And he shut up.

Levison made an heroic effort to pull himself together. His weakness lasted little more than a minute, though his face was still quivering.

The crimson flooded his cheeks now.  
 "Better get out of this, old chap!" muttered Cardew.  
 "You're not fit to play, anyhow."  
 Levison caught his breath once or twice, and then his voice came:

"I—I'm sorry, Tom Merry! I—I've been knocked over by some news I—I had just before the match. I oughtn't to have played, but I never thought; I wasn't myself—"

His voice broke again.  
 "I'm awfully sorry," said Tom sincerely. "If I'd had the faintest idea of that, of course—"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus sympathetically.  
 "Is it very bad news?" asked Blake.  
 "My father—" Levison choked.

"He's ill?" asked Tom.  
 "Yes."  
 "Vevy ill?" asked Arthur Augustus softly.

"Yes," choked Levison.  
 "Poor old chap!"

"That letter from your sister?" said Cardew.  
 Levison nodded.

There was nothing like anger among the footballers now. Certainly, Levison ought to have stood out of the match; but it was clear that he had been so upset by the bad news that he had hardly known what he was doing. He seemed to have acted like a fellow in a dream.

The unhappy junior pulled himself together. There was sympathy in every face now; but he was deeply ashamed of his show of weakness—all the more bitter to Ernest Levison, because he prided himself upon being "hard." He was not a fellow to ask for sympathy; he was more likely to reject it when offered.

"It was so sudden," he muttered, as if in excuse. "I—I hadn't heard anything. When I saw the pater at Christmas he was well and hearty, and now—now it's come on suddenly, and—and it's awfully serious—" He choked again. "I was a fool to play. I don't think I quite knew what I was doing. I'm sorry, Tom Merry!"

"My dear chap, never mind that," said Tom kindly. "You stand out of the game now, of course. Better get indoors."

Figgins looked in, with a sarcastic grin on his face. He was quite unaware, so far, of the painful scene within.

"You fellows gone to sleep?" he asked. "The referee's just told me that if you're gone to bed, he may as well go back to his study where there's a fire."

"Chuck it, Figgy!" said Tom. "We're ready—we're going to play a man short for the rest of the game."

"Man crooked?"  
 "No; Levison's had bad news about his father, and it's upset him. We're coming out now."

Figgins became serious at once.  
 "Sorry, Levison, old man," he said. "I thought there must be something the matter, the way you were playing. Excuse me!" Figgins reddened. "I say, we want you to have fair play, Tommy. Put another man in."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.  
 Levison had turned his back to the rest, making a pretence of sponging his face. He was ashamed to let his comrades see the trace of tears.

"I mean it," said Figgins.  
 "What about the wules, Figgy?"  
 "Fair play's a jewel," said Figgins. "We sha'n't call it a win if you're handicapped like this. Put another man into Levison's place. That's only fair."

"Yes; but—"  
 Tom Merry hesitated. In the peculiar circumstances, he felt that he was justified in accepting Figgins' offer. Levison ought not to have been in the team at all.

"Well, Figgy, if you like—"  
 "I've said so."  
 "Done, then," said Tom. "You get into your things, Cardew. Levison, lend Cardew your things to save time."

"Right-ho!" muttered Levison.  
 Tom Merry & Co. quitted the dressing-room, and went out into the field. The two teams lined up again, waiting for outside-right once more—though now it was a different outside-right.

The man with the flattened nose looked over them, and seemed a little perplexed at seeing only twenty-one players.

But in a few minutes Cardew ran lightly out of the dressing-room.

The stranger's sharp black eyes watched Cardew with a



"What's the matter, Levison?" asked Tom Merry. "You're off form. Don't you know you're playing in the House match?" "Hang the House match!" "Wha-a-at!" Tom Merry set his teeth. "That's enough, then," he said. "You're out of the team for the second half!"

keen, hawk-like look, as the dandy of the Fourth ran to Levison's former place.

Lefevre blew the whistle, and Tom Merry kicked off. In spite of the flat-nosed gentleman's interest in school football, which he had mentioned to Wally & Co., he did not remain many minutes after the second half had started. He remained long enough to get a good look at Ralph Reckness Cardew at outside-right. Then he strolled away, and disappeared from the ground.

Nobody on the football-field noted his departure—he had no interest for anybody there. All eyes were on the game. Frank Levison stared at the sight of Cardew in his brother's place, and ran off to the dressing-room—the thought in his mind that Ernest must have been injured in the first half. A few minutes later the brothers quitted the football-field together, and walked away to the School House; and Frank's young face was now as pale and clouded as his brother's.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Strange News from Doris!

"GOAL!" It was from a pass by Cardew that Tom Merry drove the ball into the New House goal.

Cardew was proving himself worth his salt. From the moment he stepped on the field the dandy of the Fourth had dropped his leisurely manners; he was as keen as any fellow there. His desire was to fill his chum's place worthily; and he was doing it.

"Goal!" roared the School House crowd. "Even now," remarked Wally of the Third. "Where's that young ass Levison got to? Why are they leaving his major out, I wonder?"

"Best thing they could do," said Hobbs, with a sniff. "I'd have booted him out if I'd been skipper."

"Putting another man in at this stage of the game!" said Reggie Manners, with lofty scorn. "They call that football in the Fourth and the Shell, I suppose?"

"Wouldn't do for the Third!" said Joe Frayne.

"No fear!" "Well, we've equalised now," said Wally. "It will be a draw, at least. Thank goodness they sheered Levison off!" "Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry's goal had been taken within ten minutes of the finish. After that, it was a gruelling game, both sides struggling hard to score the odd goal. But they struggled in vain.

It was a case of "nothing doing." When Greek meets Greek the result is often inconclusive. So it was in this case.

When the final whistle went, the score remained even, and the House match was drawn.

Most of the footballers were beathing hard as they came off. Arthur Augustus fanned himself gently.

"Wathah a gwuellin' game," he remarked. "You New House boundahs have been vewy lucky. If Levison had been in form—"

"The luck was on your side, old top," said Figgins genially. "Fancy the School House getting off without a licking!"

"Miraculous, I call it!" remarked Kerr gravely.

"Weally, Kerr—"

Tom Merry was thinking of Levison again, now that the game was over. He was not chummy with Levison, but he liked him well enough; and he was sincerely concerned about the bad news the junior had received. After he had changed, Tom considered the matter, and then went along to Study No. 9 in the Fourth.

He found Clive and Cardew already there; they had lost no time in rejoining their chum. Frank was also in the study.

Ernest Levison was quite himself again now. His face was pale, but quiet and calm. Frank, less self-contained than his elder brother, sat in the armchair, looking the picture of woe.

"Come in," said Levison, in a perfectly calm voice, as the captain of the Shell appeared in the doorway.

Tom shook his head.

"I'm not going to bother you," he said. "I just looked in to tell you I'm sorry. And—and if there's anything a chap can do—"

"Thanks, there isn't."

"You're going home?"

"I've asked the Head." Levison set his lips. "I—I can't show him my sister's letter, and—and I suppose it's natural that he won't let me go. Or Frank."

Tom looked surprised.

"But if your father's seriously ill—"

"I can't show him Doris's letter. He wouldn't understand. But he's promised to get a trunk-call through to my home and ask how matters are, and to let me go at once if necessary. I suppose that's all I can expect." Levison hesitated a moment, and then added: "Come in, Tom."

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Merry! I'd like to ask your opinion, as well as these chaps, if—if you don't mind."

"Of course, old scout!"

Tom Merry stepped into the study and closed the door. He was rather puzzled. The matter had seemed to him plain and straightforward enough; but there was evidently something in it that he did not catch on to. Levison took a letter from his pocket.

"I've got Doris's letter here," he said; "I was just going to show it to these chaps. I'd like you to see it, too. You know Doris, Tom—you know she's not a fool—"

"Anything but that," said Tom.

"I mean, not the flighty kind—not likely to get silly ideas into her head—"

"I'm pretty certain of that," said Tom.

"Well, look at this."

Levison laid the letter open on the table. Tom Merry, Cardew, and Clive read it together. Frank, apparently, had already seen it.

The letter was startling enough; it was no wonder that it had "knocked over" the usually quiet and self-controlled junior who had received it. It ran, in Doris Levison's clear writing:

"Dear Ernest,—I must write to you—there is no one else to help. Mother is still away at Bournemouth, and she is no better, and I should not dare to worry her in her state of health. I am very anxious about father.

"Last week a man came to stay here—some old acquaintance of father's at the time he was in America. His name is Carson—but in speaking to him, father has often addressed him as 'Dandy,' which must be some nickname he knew him by in the old days out West. It was clear to me from the beginning that father did not like him, and he even seemed to me afraid of him. The man is very civil to me; I avoid him as much as I can. Since he came, father has not been like himself—and yesterday he was taken ill. I found him quite unconscious, in the dining-room, quite insensible and white as a sheet. I ran to telephone for the doctor at once, and when Dr. Smith arrived, he was a long time bringing him round. He said it was a heart attack; but he seemed puzzled. Father has never suffered from his heart.

"I am afraid—I hardly know of what. Father has hardly spoken since his attack, and I dare not question him. I asked him to let you come home from school, and he shook his head without answering. Ernest, you must come home. I am afraid of that man Carson. I know he is wicked, and means father harm. It seems too terrible to think of, but I have even suspected that he has done something to cause father's strange illness. You will be shocked when you see poor father. Do come, somehow, at once.

"DORIS."

"What do you think of that?" asked Levison, when the three juniors had finished reading that strange and startling letter.

Tom Merry's face was very grave.

"Doris isn't the girl to be frightened about nothing," he said quietly. "I think it's pretty serious."

Clive nodded.

"Ever heard of this man Carson before?" asked Cardew. Levison shook his head.

"There's lots of things in my father's early life in America I know nothing of," he said. "He went through hard times out there, before he made his pile, and—and strange experiences. I know once a man he knew came back from Alaska—you remember Dirk Power, Tom—"

Tom Merry nodded.

"That man is dead," said Levison. "But—but my father may have had other enemies—"

"But if the man's an enemy, why should your father admit him to his house at all?" asked Clive.

"I can't understand."

"But—but—" Clive hesitated. "I know Doris is a jolly sensible girl. But your father's free to turn the man out of the house, if he likes, I suppose?"

Levison did not answer. A dark cloud was on his face. Tom Merry, looking at him, wondered.

"The man's got some hold over him," said Cardew.

"What hold could he have?" said Clive blankly.

"No good askin' me that."

"You ought to go home, Levison," said Tom Merry. "But—but I suppose the Head can't see this letter. He—he wouldn't be likely to think there was anything in it. It—it sounds—"

There was a tap at the door, and Toby, the page, looked in. "Message from the Head for Master Levison," said Toby.

"Out with it!" said Levison.

"Dr. Holmes has telephoned to your 'ouse, sir," said Toby, "and your father answered him on the 'phone. He said he didn't want you to come home, sir, and there was no need. That's all, sir."



And Toby departed.  
"That settles it, Levison," said Clive, breaking the silence in the study. "If your father answered the telephone himself, he can't be very seriously ill—and if he doesn't want you to go home—"

"I can't make it out!" muttered Levison.

He crumpled the letter in his hand.

"I shall have to think it out," he said. "You fellows won't mention anything of this, of course?"

"Of course not!"

It was pretty clear that Levison of the Fourth wanted to be alone with Frank; and the three juniors left the study. Tom Merry went along to No. 10 in the Shell, in a puzzled mood. Clive and Cardew remained in the Fourth Form passage for a few minutes.

"What do you think of it, Cardew?" asked the South African junior.

Cardew shook his head.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "If Doris was a silly flapper, I should think it was all moonshine. But she's got her head screwed on the right way."

"She has. But—but it's too—too—" Clive hesitated. "There can't be anything in it. She doesn't like the man, and her father's taken suddenly ill, and—and that's about all. Don't you think so? If he didn't want Carson in the house, he's his own master."

"Might not be."

"How do you mean? How could the man have any hold over him?"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Levison's father seems to have had some queer adventures in his time out West," he answered. "Some of them may have come home to roost."

Sidney Clive started.

"Dash it all, Cardew! You can't mean—"

"Dear man, I never mean anything!" said Cardew, and he nodded to his chum and walked away. Clive, with a thoughtful wrinkle on his brow, went along to Study No. 9. Cardew, still more thoughtful, sauntered out into the dusky quadrangle, thinking deeply.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Mistaken Identity!

LEVISON of the Fourth looked pale and harassed the next morning, in the Fourth Form class-room.

Keenly. Most of the Fourth were sorry for him; they Mr. Lathom noted it, and looked at him rather had quite forgotten his hapless show on the football-ground the previous day. Levison's father was ill, and if Levison was cut up by it, it was rough on Levison, and the Fourth-Formers sympathised.

Levison was thinking as much of his sister as of his father. Her position in the strange state of affairs at home was a strange and almost terrible one—if the description in her letter was to be relied upon. And Levison relied upon it.

Unless Doris was deceived, Mr. Levison was somehow in the power of the man who had suddenly come out of the unknown West—a man who had known him in his old adventurous, perhaps lawless, days. If he was in the man's power, that accounted for his reply to the Head's telephone-message.

Doubtless Carson did not want his victim's son at home—especially if Doris' more terrible suspicion was well-founded, and he was undermining his victim's strength by drugs of some kind.

Was it possible?

Levison asked himself that question again and again; it drummed in his mind and gave him no rest.

If it was possible—if it was barely possible—his place was at home, by his sister's side, to save his father.

But was it possible—was it likely? Was not Doris deceived by her evident dislike to the stranger?

Levison's position was a difficult one.

If he had shown Doris's letter to Dr. Holmes, he could not have expected the Head to be influenced by what he would have regarded as a girl's vague and undefined imagination. If Mr. Levison had desired his son's presence at home, and asked for him to come, the Head would have given him leave at once. In the circumstances he was not likely to let him go.

To go without permission was running away from school—a very serious step for a junior to take. And it would be futile; for after Mr. Levison's answer on the telephone, it was only to be expected that he would immediately send his truant son back to St. Jim's.

It was a miserable morning to Ernest Levison. He had written to Doris by return of post, explaining. He could not promise to come.

After the Fourth was dismissed for the morning, Cardew and Clive joined Levison in the quadrangle. But he soon left them, looking for Frank. His chums could not help him; and he was too disturbed and troubled to want com-

pany. Sidney Clive went to join Tom Merry & Co. in punting a ball about, and Ralph Reckness Cardew went for a stroll. Footer did not appeal to Cardew. The previous day he had played up manfully in the House match, but his brief energy seemed to have completely evaporated.

"Not coming to the footer?" asked Clive.

Cardew yawned.

"Thanks, no."

"It will keep you warm, at least."

"Too much of a fag, dear boy. I did enough yesterday to last me for the rest of the term," yawned Cardew.

And they separated, each going his own way.

Cardew rambled lazily out of gates in the frosty sunshine. He was more troubled on Levison's account than he cared to admit, even to himself. But for his knowledge of Doris Levison's quiet, sensible character, he would have disregarded the whole affair as a foolish fancy. But he could not dismiss it like that, knowing Doris as he did. He told himself irritably that it was no business of his, anyhow; but all the same, he knew that it was his business. It affected his chum, and therefore it affected himself. And Cardew was capable of deeper friendship than St. Jim's generally gave him credit for.

A man with sandy whiskers and a flattened nose was loafing in the lane near the school gates, with his collar turned up against the wind. He was lighting a pipe—he had lighted that pipe every time anyone passed him, as if for a pretext for stopping near the gates. He looked sharply at every fellow who came out—he had eyed Baggy Trimble, and Aubrey Racke, and Figgins & Co. of the New House, in turn. A glitter shot into his black eyes as he saw Cardew.

The dandy of the Fourth did not heed him. He had not noticed the man on Little Side the previous day, and now he gave him only the most careless glance as he passed.

The flat-nosed man ceased lighting his pipe, at last. He followed in the wake of the St. Jim's junior, as the latter strolled down the lane towards Rylcombe.

At some distance from the school gates the man quickened his pace and overtook Cardew.

"Excuse me, sir," he said civilly.

Cardew looked round.

He was thinking—still about Levison's affairs—and he was rather glad of an interruption of his troubled thoughts.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I've rather lost myself in these lanes," said the man with a smile. "I dare say you know this country well?"

"Quite well. Where do you want to get?"

"Wayland. Is there a road—"

"That's the market town," said Cardew. "It's a good distance if you follow the road, but the footpath through the wood is shorter."

"Near here?" asked the man.

"Only a few steps. I'll show you, if you like."

"You're very kind."

"Not at all," said Cardew politely.

He walked on, and the flat-nosed gentleman walked by his side. In a few minutes they reached the stile that gave access to the footpath through Rylcombe Wood.

"Here you are!" said Cardew. "Follow the footpath and don't turn off where it branches, and it brings you right out into the Wayland road. Then turn to the left."

"Thank you very much," said the stranger.

Cardew nodded and walked on.

The next instant the dandy of the Fourth received the surprise of his life.

He had turned his back on the stranger as he walked on, and a sudden grasp was laid on him from behind.

Before Cardew knew what was happening he was torn off his feet and tossed over the stile into the leafless bracken of the wood.

He came down with a bump, shocked and breathless and dazed.

With a quick vault, the flat-nosed man was over the stile and bending over the astounded junior.

His grasp was laid on him again—the grasp of a man of great and terrible strength. Cardew was dragged into the cover of the wood, struggling feebly in that strong, savage grip.

A dozen yards from the footpath, the flat-nosed, bronze-skinned man stopped. He pitched Cardew against a tree, where the St. Jim's junior reeled, breathless, dizzy, and panting with rage.

"You cheeky hound!" panted Cardew. "What the thunder do you mean? How dare you lay your filthy hands on me?"

"Stand where you are! If you call for help you will get a grip on your throat that will stop you fast enough—perhaps for ever!" said the flat-nosed man grimly.

"I'm not likely to yell for help!" said Cardew disdainfully. "I want to know what you mean by this, you ruffian. If you think you're goin' to pick my pockets—"

The man laughed harshly.

"I don't want your money!"  
 "What do you want, then, confound you?"  
 "I want you, Ernest Levison!"

## CHAPTER 8.

## For His Chum's Sake!

**R**ALPH RECKNESS CARDEW stared blankly at the man. He was so astounded by that reply that he forgot even to be angry at the rough handling he had received.

This man, whom he had never seen, that he knew of, before, took him for Levison of the Fourth! What did he want with Levison of the Fourth? Back into Cardew's mind came the strange letter of Doris Levison. He did not need telling that this man had some connection with the strange mystery of Levison's home. What did it all mean?

Cardew's struggle had been feeble and futile in the herculean grasp of the ruffian. But it had had one effect—it had torn loose the sandy beard, which hung now partly displaced. That was evidence enough that the flat-nosed man was disguised.

"That surprises you—what?" grinned the man.

Cardew drew a deep breath.

"Yes, a little," he said. "You take me for Ernest Levison?"

The flat-nosed man laughed again.

"Are you going to deny your name?" he sneered. "It won't serve you, my fine fellow. I dare say you guess who I am?"

Cardew drew a shot at a venture.

"Carson, I suppose," he said.

"Exactly!"

Cardew breathed hard. The suspicion had occurred to him, but he had hardly expected the man to confirm it. So this was the man of whom Doris Levison was in fear! What evil intent had brought him to St. Jim's?

"And what makes you think that I am Levison of the Fourth?" he asked.

"I guess I made sure enough before I handled you," grinned Carson. "You see, I was hanging round the school yesterday, looking for you!"

Cardew eyed him curiously. He could not understand how the man came to make such a mistake. He was nothing like Levison to look at.

"There was a football match on," smiled Carson. "I looked on—I came along in the interval. I heard the name of Levison spoken in the crowd, and found that he was in the eleven. You see?"

"I—I see," said Cardew slowly.

"I asked some kids what was Levison's place in the team, and they told me he played outside-right," grinned the flat-nosed man. "I watched the players when they came out for the second half—and watched you at outside-right. Now you understand."

Cardew did understand now.

He smiled.

Evidently this rascal had not seen the first half; and he knew nothing, of course, of the scene in the dressing-room, and the change that had taken place in the team.

He had learned that Ernest Levison played at outside-right; he had watched outside-right in the second half, and had seen—Cardew! In the peculiar circumstances, his mistake had been natural—indeed, inevitable.

"So you needn't take the trouble to tell me any lies!" resumed the flat-nosed man. "You are Ernest Levison, and you are my game—"

"You've never seen me before—"

"But I know who you are, my buck, and you need not try to fool me!" said the bronze-faced man contemptuously.

"Lies come easily enough to you, I dare say, the same as to your father. But it would want a sharper galoot than either old Levison or young Levison to pull the wool over the eyes of the Denver Dandy!"

"No doubt!" smiled Cardew.

"Are you denying still that you are old Levison's son?"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"It doesn't seem much use, does it?" he said.

"None at all, I guess!"

"Then I'll save my breath. And now—what do you want?"

Cardew had had time to think now. The man from the West had some evil design upon Levison of the Fourth—that was clear. It was just like Ralph Reckness Cardew to take upon his own shoulders the unknown danger that threatened his chum, without giving a thought to the consequences.

He could have convinced the man of his mistake, doubtless; he had things about him that would have proved his

identity. But he did not choose to do so. He intended to learn what this scoundrel intended—to learn the danger that threatened Levison of the Fourth—to learn all he could, in fact, of the tragic mystery that overshadowed his chum. For the danger to himself he cared little—indeed, he gave it no thought.

"I guess you know what I want," said the Dandy coolly. "You had a letter from your sister yesterday."

"So you've been spying on Doris!" said Cardew.

"Sure! I guess I keep my eyes open in Levison's house!" sneered Carson. "The foolish girl has been spinning you a yarn of what has been going on at home—what?"

"Perhaps."

"No perhaps about it, I guess! Now, I'd never seen you before yesterday, Master Ernest Levison, but I've heard a bit about you. You're sharp, you're dangerous—I guess I've got your character down fine, from what I've heard of you from your father and your sister. You are not going to interfere with me. Savvy?"

"So that's why you've come to see me?"

"Correct!"

"And what now, now you've seen me?" said Cardew.

"I guess you're coming with me," said the Dandy. "I haven't wasted two days for the pleasure of a talk with you, Ernest Levison. You're going to stay in a safe place for a time!"

Cardew's eyes glimmered. He understood the man's plan now. It was an attempt at kidnapping. He understood, too, that if he revealed his identity, it would not save him, for the ruffian would never allow him to go free to warn Levison of his peril.

He gave one look round—and the flat-nosed man stepped nearer.

"I guess you'd better not try to get away," he said quietly. "At present, it's not my game to harm you—only to keep you quiet where you can't interfere. But I guess I'd wring your neck as soon as look at you! There's plenty of quiet spots in this hyer wood where you could lie hid and never be found for months, once your neck was wrung!"

"And there's a public official with a rope to deal with you afterwards, Mr. Carson!" said the St. Jim's junior coolly.

"You're a cool card—like the old man in his young days!" said Carson. "But it won't help you! Has the old man ever told you about early days out in Colorado?"

"Never."

"You've never heard who gave me this nose, and why?" said Carson, passing his hand over his disfigured face, and scowling.

"No," said Cardew.

"No; Poker Jack always knew how to keep his mouth shut, I guess!"

Poker Jack! Cardew called to mind a picture of Levison's father—the grave, quiet, rather hard man of business. Was it possible that in wild old days in the Western country that grave, dignified man had ever been known by such a name as "Poker Jack"?

"But I guess I'm not here to talk," said Carson. "I'm hyer to take you to a quiet spot where there's a room ready for you, Master Ernest Levison. Give me any trouble, and you won't leave this hyer wood alive, I guess! I reckon I'm going to be careful in this country—it ain't Colorado—but I'm not wasting time on you or takin' risks. Are you coming quietly?"

"I don't seem to have much choice," said Cardew.

The man from Colorado laughed.

"Sure!" he said. "Come on, then!"

He dropped a heavy hand on Cardew's shoulder, and led him away through the dim, leafless wood. It was pretty clear now that the man knew his way about in the locality; obviously he had spied out the surroundings before taking action.

Cardew's thoughts were busy, as he went quietly. To resist was futile—he was like an infant in the muscular grasp of the ruffian. His life was at the man's mercy; his fate lay in those strong, cruel hands! But as he went with the kidnapper, Cardew felt no fear—only satisfaction. He was following the rascal—he was saving Levison from the kidnapper—he was leaving his chum free to act. If only he could have warned Levison of his danger! But, at least, he was warding off the danger.

Deeper and deeper into the wintry wood they tramped, leaving the open paths. There was no chance of rescue now—they were in untroubled recesses of the old wood.

In a deep, shadowy glade, thick with fallen leaves, the flat-nosed man stopped at last. He gave a long, low whistle.

A man emerged from the trees.

Cardew glanced at him curiously. He was a man of thin, lithe build, with high cheek-bones and a dark complexion. There was Indian blood in his veins.

He grinned at the sight of Cardew.

"You got him, boss?"

"I guess so, Chiquito. Keep him safe—and you know where to take him after dark."

“I guess so, boss.”

Carson spoke a few words in a low voice that Cardew did not catch, and then disappeared among the trees. Cardew noted that he took a direction which would land him on the Wayland road; he could guess that the man was going back to Wayland, to leave by train. The junior felt a sense of exultation. The rascal was not going near St. Jim's again; he would not have a chance of discovering his mistake. Believing that Ernest Levison was a prisoner in the hands of his half-breed confederate, the Denver Dandy was returning to the Levison's home—to his evil work there.

Levison was still free, at least!

As for his own fate, Cardew speculated upon it with a cynical coolness. He knew that he was in danger; he did not care. At least this strange adventure was a change from the usual groove. The dandy of the Fourth, who was always bored, or dreading to be bored, was not bored now, at all events. In his present grim and dangerous surrounding there was no room for boredom.

### CHAPTER 9.

#### Missing from School!

**M**R. LATHOM, the master of the Fourth, frowned ominously. The Fourth Form had gathered for afternoon lessons, and there was a vacant place in the Form. Cardew had not come in.

Cardew had been missing at dinner—a sufficiently serious infraction of rules. And now he had failed to turn up for afternoon classes.

Cardew was anything but punctual by nature, and it was not uncommon for him to try his Form-master's patience in many little ways. But certainly he had never ventured before upon so glaring a disregard of the school as this. “Cutting classes” was a sin of the first magnitude.

“Levison,” said Mr. Lathom.

“Yes, sir?”

“Do you know where Cardew is?”

“No, sir.”

“Do you know, Clive?”

“I know he went out of gates shortly before dinner, sir,” said Sidney Clive. “I haven't seen him since.”

“Does anyone here know where Cardew is at the present moment?” mumbled Mr. Lathom.

There was no reply from the Fourth. Evidently nobody knew.

“This is very serious,” said Mr. Lathom. “Apparently, Cardew has taken a holiday without leave. No one has seen him?”

“I saw him in the lane, sir,” said Trimble.

“When was that, Trimble?”

“Just before dinner, sir. He was speaking to a man,” said Baggy. Baggy was famous for knowing things. “The Johnny who was on the football-ground yesterday, sir.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Lathom. “We shall proceed without Cardew. I shall deal with Cardew when he returns.”

Mr. Lathom's tone indicated that his dealing with Cardew would be very painful to that erring youth.

Lessons proceeded in the Fourth Form-room, most of the juniors wondering where Cardew was, and marvelling at his “cheek” in absenting himself from classes. So far, no one was thinking of an accident—even his chums did not think of that. Cardew's erratic ways were too well known to them.

But when lessons ended, and the dandy of the Fourth had not appeared, Mr. Lathom's wrath was changed into something like anxiety. It was dark now; and the school gates were locked at dark. If Cardew was giving himself a holiday, it was amazing that he should venture to “stick it out” after lock-up. Mr. Lathom called Levison to his desk as the juniors were filing out.

“Have you any idea where Cardew may be, Levison?” the Form-master asked. “You are very friendly with him, I understand, and probably in his confidence?”

Levison shook his head.

“I haven't the faintest idea, sir,” he answered. “I—I hope that nothing's happened to him.”

“It is very improbable,” said Mr. Lathom gravely. “But as he has not returned, the matter must be inquired into. I will speak to the Head. If Cardew is causing us groundless anxiety, the consequences to him will be very serious.”

“I feel sure he's not staying out on purpose, sir.”

“Then what can be detaining him?”

“I—I don't know, sir.”

“Very well, Levison. You may go.”

Levison went out of the Form-room with a clouded brow. In addition to his home troubles, he was now worried by concern for his chum. Clive was waiting for him in the corridor, looking very grave. The Shell had just been dismissed, and the Terrible Three, coming along the corridor, paused as they saw Levison and Clive.

“What's up?” asked Tom Merry.

“Cardew hasn't come in.”

Tom Merry whistled.

“Naughty!” said Monty Lowther. “Is he looking on the wine when it is red, or the billiard-table when it is green.”

“The silly goat will catch it!” remarked Manners. And Manners and Lowther walked on. But Tom Merry remained with the Fourth-Formers; he did not dismiss the matter so lightly as his chums.

“There can't have been an accident,” he said. “If Cardew had been run over, or anything like that, we should have heard before this.”

“I can't imagine what's happened,” said Levison, with a troubled brow. “But he wouldn't ask for trouble in this way for nothing. Trimble says he saw him speaking to a man. That mayn't mean anything, of course. But I think I'll speak to Trimble.”

Tom Merry and Clive accompanied Levison to look for Baggy. They found that fat youth snuggling over the fire in the Common-room. Trimble was ready to give information, but he had little to tell.

“I think the man was asking Cardew the way,” he said. “I was coming across the fields, and saw them. Cardew walked down the lane with him.”

“You didn't hear what they said?”

“No,” said Trimble regretfully. “Too far off. I mean, I wouldn't have listened to what they said, of course. They didn't even see me.”

“You'd seen the man before?” said Levison.



The flat-nosed man pitched Cardew against a tree, where the St. Jim's junior reeled, breathless, and panting with rage. “If you think you are going to pick my pockets—” began Cardew. The man laughed harshly. “I don't want your money,” he said, “I want you, Ernest Levison.” Cardew stared blankly at the man. He had been taken for Levison.

"On the football-ground yesterday," said Trimble. "I happened to see him speaking to some fags—D'Arcy minor and young Manners."

The juniors left the Common-room rather puzzled. A stranger asking Cardew the way was little to go upon; but, in view of his strange absence, the faintest clue was worth following up. They looked for D'Arcy minor, with the idea of discovering something further about the unknown man, if there was anything further to discover.

Wally of the Third was presiding in the Third Form-room over the cooking of a sumptuous meal, with the rather noisy assistance of Joe Frayne, Manners minor, Hobbs, and Curly Gibson. Frank Levison was not there. Just at present Frank was taking little part in the cheery and noisy doings of the Third Form of St. Jim's.

"Don't worry, when I'm looking after these herrings!" was Wally's reply to the first question addressed to him.

"You're burning that warrior, Curly!"

"You jogged my elbow," said Curly.

"Bother your elbow! Don't burn the herrings!"

"Well, give a fellow room."

"Look here——"

"You're burning yours, Wally," said Reggie Manners.

"Careful, you know!"

"Don't be cheeky, Reggie!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry took Wally of the Third by the shoulder, and jerked him away. There was a roar of protest from Wally as his herring dropped off the pen-nib upon which it was impaled, and fell into the fender.

"You silly Shell-fish! Look!"

"This is serious, Wally," said Tom Merry. "Cardew hasn't come in——"

"Let him stay out, then! My herrings——"

"Something's happened, kid," said Clive.

"Oh, all right!" said Wally, resigning himself to his fate.

"What's up? You don't want me to go hunting for Cardew, do you? He ain't worth finding, anyhow."

"He was seen speaking to a man in the lane," said Levison of the Fourth. "A man who was on the football-ground yesterday, and spoke to you, Trimble says."

"The man with the nose?" asked Wally.

"The what?"

"Man with sandy whiskers and a nose like a flat-iron," said D'Arcy minor. "I remember! He was asking about you."

"About me?" exclaimed Levison, with a start.

Wally grinned.

"Yes. Interested in the amazing way you were playing footer, I suppose. He'd heard the fellows talking about you."

"Cut that out!" said Tom Merry. "What did he want to know about Levison, Wally?"

"Nothing much. Only when he was playing on the field. I told him Levison was outside-right."

"Couldn't he see for himself?" said Clive.

"He came along in the interval," explained Wally. "You were all in the dressing-room—taking an interval that we shouldn't allow in Third Form footer. We stick to the rules in the Third."

"And after that?" asked Levison.

"Nothing after that. Didn't see him again—didn't notice, anyhow. I suppose he cleared off."

"He didn't stop to see the match out?"

"No. I should have noticed him if he had."

"He saw the second-half begin?"

"Must have!"

"Did he say anything else?"

Wally made an effort to remember.

"Something about being more interested in school football than in the League game," he said. "I thought that was rather sensible of him."

"Why did he want to pick me out specially?" asked Levison, whose face was very grave.

"Blessed if I know, if it wasn't because of what he'd heard the fellows saying about your weird football! That enough?" asked Wally. And, without waiting for a reply, D'Arcy minor returned to the crowd of fags before the big fire, and the important task of toasting herrings for a sumptuous spread.

The three juniors quitted the Third Form-room. Tom Merry and Clive looked puzzled, Levison grave and disturbed.

"There's something in this," said Levison, stopping in the corridor. "The man told the fags he was interested in football; but he only arrived when the game was half over, and went just after the second-half had started. He wasn't there to see the match."

"That seems pretty clear," assented Tom Merry.

"He was asking about me, and found that I was outside-right. You remember that Cardew took my place——"

Tom Merry started.

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"Then, unless he inquired further, he would take Cardew for you," he said.

"Why should he inquire further? He couldn't dream of the change that had been made. He took Cardew for me."

"But——" stammered Clive.

"He was here inquiring after me. He took Cardew for me, and now something's happened to Cardew," said Levison, with a lowering brow. "It looks—it looks—as if what's happened at home——" He clenched his hands. "It wasn't because of what he'd heard the fellows saying in the interval that he was interested in me. He didn't care anything about football, or he'd have watched the game. He came here to get to know me by sight, and he got Cardew by mistake. Now something's happened to Cardew, after he was seen speaking to the same man. Doesn't it look——"

"Good heavens!" muttered Tom Merry. "You think——"

"I don't know what to think," said Levison desperately. "Doris wrote to me yesterday asking me to go home. That blackguard in the house probably knew it. He may have wanted to keep me away. I don't know, but I suspect everything. Now, Cardew——"

"But if the man tackled Cardew, taking him for you, Cardew would tell him his name."

"Would he?" muttered Levison. "You know Cardew! Just like him to keep it up, and take it on his own shoulders! He's capable of doing it out of sheer recklessness, even if he wasn't my pal."

Tom Merry nodded.

"There may be something in this," he said. "It's pretty flimsy, but if Cardew doesn't come back——"

"I'm going to the Head!" said Levison.

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Prisoner!

WHERE was Ralph Reckness Cardew?

That was the question that all St. Jim's was asking when bedtime drew near.

Cardew had not returned, and many of the fellows believed, by this time, that something had happened to him. But most of them still "figured it out" that this was one more of Cardew's reckless freaks. Cardew was not built quite like other fellows. He was capable of reckless escapades that other fellows would not have dreamed of.

"Gone on a burst!" was the comment of Racke of the Shell. "He reckons that his giddy grandfather, the noble lord, will see him clear with the Head when he does turn up."

And many agreed with Racke.

Levison had been to the Head. He had told Dr. Holmes what he knew, or, rather, what he vaguely suspected. It was all flimsy enough, as Tom Merry had said. But in view of Cardew's unaccountable absence, the Head was bound to take note of it.

Lord Reckness had been telephoned. Dr. Holmes knew enough of Cardew's erratic character to think it probable that his disappearance was simply a wilful escapade. But the old lord had answered that he had seen nothing of his grandson, who certainly had not returned home. But he had stated his opinion to the Head that Ralph could take care of himself, and that his absence was probably only some prank. Indeed, the scandalised Head even thought he detected a chuckle on the telephone, as if the rather disreputable old nobleman was rather amused than otherwise.

Dr. Holmes was disposed to concur in Lord Reckness' opinion, but he had his duty to do. The local police were notified of Cardew's absence, and a description was given of a man with a disfigured nose and a sandy beard and whiskers.

Inspector Skeat telephoned later that a man answering such a description had been seen taking the train at Wayland Junction early in the afternoon. But he had been alone. Cardew, certainly, had not accompanied him. Several porters had noticed the curious flattened nose especially, but they were quite certain that the man had travelled alone.

Levison's vague theory that Cardew had been kidnapped in mistake for himself by the flat-nosed man seemed to melt away when this was known.

But where was Cardew?

In the black, wintry night, little searching was possible, but the Wayland police did all they could. They learned that the missing junior certainly had not gone away by train. When daylight came there was to be a search. That was all they could promise.

Cardew had not returned at bedtime. Clive looked troubled, and Levison almost haggard, when the Fourth Form went up to their dormitory.

"Buck up, Levison, old man!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said kindly. "He will turn up all right, you know. Cardew always falls upon his feet."

Levison nodded, without speaking.

"He is wathah a weckless ass, you know," continued the swell of St. Jim's sagely. "I wegard this as only a weckless pwank. You can wely on the opinion of a fellow of tact and judgment, you know."

Levison turned in without answering. He slept little that night.

He was thinking of his home—of his sister there, who had called to him for help, and whom he had not been allowed to join. He was thinking of the man Carson—the Dandy—and he believed that Carson and the flat-nosed man who had been seen with Cardew were one and the same. What had happened to Cardew? What was it that he had faced in the place of his chum? Where was he in these dark, wintry hours?

It was no wonder that Ernest Levison tossed and turned through the long night, and found little sleep.

Morning came at last.

Levison was first down of the Fourth, eager for news. But there was no news. He met Kildare of the Sixth in the lower corridor, and Kildare answered his eager question with a shake of the head. Cardew had not returned during the night.

Even Arthur Augustus was shaken in his sage opinion now.

"Somethin's happened to the chap!" he told Blake and Herries and Digby. "Cardew is a weckless ass, but he is too respectable to stay out all night. There's been twouble of some kind. When I come to think of it, I wathah thought so all along, you know."

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I wonder—" said Herries thoughtfully.

"What do you wondah, Hewwies?"

"I wonder if Cardew's crocked up somewhere, and can't get home, and is waiting to be found, I wonder if Towser—"

"Towsah?"

"My dog Towser," said Herries. "You know what a nose he's got for a scent—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Towser could trail him out if he's anywhere near St. Jim's," said Herries confidently. "Would you fellows advise me to suggest it to the Head?"

"Not quite!" said Jack Blake.

"Weally, Hewwies, you are a feahful ass—"

Tom Merry came along and joined the chums of Study No. 6.

"No news," he said. "Something's happened to Cardew. We'd better get up a search-party, I think."

"Yaas, wathah!"

After breakfast there was an announcement from the Head that the whole school was given leave to join in the

search for the missing junior. All the school Scouts were to turn out in force. And in a short time a crowd of St. Jim's fellows were on the search.

Ralph Reckness Cardew rolled off a plank bed, and stretched himself and smiled.

The winter dawn was creeping through a little window guarded with bars of iron.

Cardew glanced round the room.

It was bare, gloomy, dirty, cold. The Denver Dandy's prisoner had not been given comfortable quarters. But they were secure. Cardew had discovered that before he had lain down to sleep on the plank bed, covered by two or three ragged rugs.

He moved about the narrow confines of the room, exercising himself to restore the circulation to his chilled limbs. The smile lingered whimsically on his handsome, reckless face.

He was a prisoner in his chum's place. But his chum was free, and Ralph Reckless Cardew had no regrets. Fastidious dandy as he was, he had a reserve of steady endurance, and the grim discomfort of his surroundings did not seem to affect him. He still drew entertainment from the thought of Carson's mistake in his identity.

There was a grating of a key in the door, and it opened. The copper-faced confederate of Carson entered. He grinned at the junior, and placed a loaf and a portion of cheese on the bare table.

"Top of the mornin', old top!" said Cardew affably. Chiquito showed his white teeth in another grin.

"Jolly glad to see you, old bean!" continued Cardew. "Your features have no end of a cheerin' effect on a chap. Do you always look so pleasant and nice early in the mornin'?"

"Your food," said the half-breed.

"What about my morning bath?" asked Cardew genially.

No answer.

"Thanks for the grub, old nut-brown bean!" said Cardew. "But haven't you forgotten the eggs and the rashers? If you feed me like this, I'm dashed if I shall care to remain as a guest in this establishment! I'm rather particular about my brekker, you know."

Chiquito chuckled.

"How long are you keepin' me here?"

"No savvy."

"Is my friend Carson at home?"

Chiquito shook his head.

"I suppose you're takin' me out for a walk for exercise?" Another shake of the head.

"You're not so kind-hearted as you look, old coffee-bean," said Cardew reproachfully. "But don't go now! Your features cheer me up—they do, really. Don't take them away! They remind me of my childhood days, and visits to Madame Tussaud's."

The half-breed quitted the room, and locked the door on the outside.

"Now I wonder," murmured Cardew—"I wonder what the coffee-coloured scoundrel and his pug-nosed boss would think if they knew they had the grandson of a peer of the realm in this garret instead of the hopeful heir of Mr. Levison—alias Poker Jack? I wonder?"

And Ralph Reckness Cardew turned to his frugal breakfast with a good appetite.

THE END.

(What will be the result of this mistaken identity. Next week's grand long story of Tom Merry and Co., entitled: "THE GREAT CARDEW MYSTERY," will tell you. Be sure you order your copy of the GEM early.)

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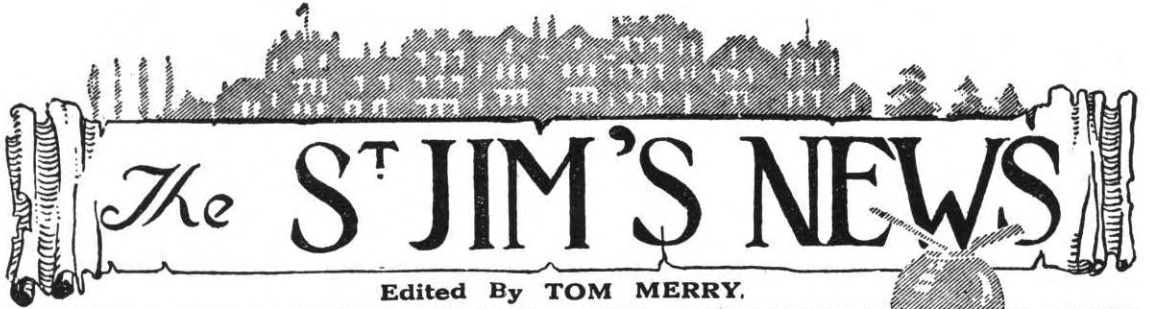
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# The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

## Gordon Gay Has His Say.

### HIS OPINION OF ST. JIM'S.

**I** DARE say some of you people who make a habit of reading the "St. Jim's News" have already had rather a shock upon seeing my name at the top of this article. Of course, you all know that I'm not a St. Jim's fellow—I wouldn't be found dead in the tumbledown old shack. (You'll be found dead somewhere pretty soon, old bean, if you're not jolly careful.—T. M.) And it may at first sight appear to be rather a queer thing that a Grammar School chap should write an article for the publication of a rival—well, I'll call it a school, out of courtesy.

But the explanation is obvious. There's a lack of brains at St. Jim's. There isn't by any means enough to go round. So, of course, faced with the necessity of having to fill up a certain amount of space week by week, they're absolutely lost, poor little rabbit-brained blitherers. So they naturally have to send over to the Grammar School to be helped out.

Not that I mind doing it. So long as they're properly grateful, that is, and ready to acknowledge that the Grammar School is top-dog on all occasions.

We've got St. Jim's well taped. Look at the number of times that we've given them the giddy kybosh. And we're prepared to do it again—any old when, any old where, any old how.

Think of what happened to Gussy in Rylcombe Wood, when the silly old ass was trying to talk to a tree. I wish that some of you could have seen him, trailing along the Rylcombe Lane with all his blessed clothes turned inside out.

Of course, Blake was furious at the way we'd treated his Gustavus. I suppose it was a bit of a come-down for Study No. 6. But that's their own affair. If they can't keep their end up it's about time they retired from business.

Still, it would have been better for Blake if he'd left the matter where it was. His attempt at revenge landed Study No. 6 in a worse hole than ever. It was only what he might have expected, trying to buck up against the Grammar School.

They spotted Carboy alone in the village one fine afternoon, and decided that their chance had arrived, I suppose.

Of course, Carboy was a bit of an ass to be wandering about on his own like that, but he wasn't ass enough to stop there and be collared, so he hiked off as soon as ever he became aware of the danger. Fortunately, Monkey and the Woottons and Mont Blone and I were not far away, and when Carboy came tearing round the corner we began to tumble to the drift of things.

Carboy pulled up as soon as he saw us, and the next moment Blake, Herries, and Digby came pelting into the middle of us. By the time they'd got over the shock they were on the floor with a fellow sitting on each of their chests, and we were looking round for Gussy.

It appears, however, that Gussy wasn't with them that journey. Blake had told him to stop at St. Jim's and keep out of mischief, and poor old Gustavus was so upset at the thought of having let the study down, that he'd actually agreed to stay.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 726.

Still, we'd got three of them, and considering that we'd had our money's worth out of old Gussy on the previous occasion, we weren't worrying any. And we can always pull Gussy's leg any old time. Just send him a letter in a disguised hand, signed with a girl's name, and making an appointment, and the old dear turns up there as per programme, arrayed like Solomon in all his giddy glory.

Carboy's yell had brought out another half-dozen of our fellows who had been bunsstruggling in the cafe near by, and so there was a nice little crowd of us to deal with the St. Jim's jossers.

As the old cookery-book says, "first catch your hare." Well, we'd caught ours—in fact, we'd caught three of them—and now we'd got to decide on the best method of dressing 'em for table.

We all thought for some time, and I had a sudden idea that necessitated Monkey buzzing off to the other end of the village.

When he returned he'd got a sackful of carrots and turnips and mangold wurzels, and some rope. We made three long necklaces by stringing the carrots and turnips on to the cord, and then we cut out the insides of three of the biggest mangolds, and put them on the heads of Blake & Co., with the vegetable necklaces round their necks.

Their hands were fastened behind them, and then we tied them together by their legs, Blake's left leg to Herries' right, and his right to Digby's left.

When we let them start off on their own, the silly jossers all stepped out together, and, of course, came down with a bump. We helped them to their feet again, for which kindness they weren't at all grateful, judging by what they said to us, and they had another try.

It was really funny to see them hobbling along, working out which foot or pair of feet to put out next, and rolling over every time they made a mistake.

They worked out a way of doing it at last. First Herries put down his left foot, and then Digby his right; then Blake's left and Herries' right, followed by Blake's right and Digby's left—and then they started the sequence again. It was a jolly slow method, but pretty sure, unless one of them took too long a stride and upset the balance of the lot, which happened fairly often at first.

They were a quarter of an hour getting clear of the village, after which we left them plodding along to St. Jim's. How long it took them to reach there I don't know, but I should like to have heard what Gussy, whom they had left at home to be "out of mischief," said to them upon their arrival.

On another occasion, if Tom Merry gives me the opportunity, I'll brighten up this old rag of a paper with some accounts of our life at the Grammar School, and give more interesting details of the attempts made by those poor pieces of cheese at St. Jim's to challenge the supremacy of the Grammar School. Readers of the "Gem" stories hear too much of the other side of the matter, and not enough of ours.

GORDON GAY.

## Skimpole 'the Sage.

### THE PHILOSOPHER TALKS.

**O**F course, I have to keep to simple language when I am writing for a juvenile paper like the "St. Jim's News." (Not so much of that, Skimpy, or I won't put any more of your drivels into the weekly.—T. M.) But all the same I hope I shall be able to explain what I mean.

(I am not sure you will, old bean! You always get so frightfully mixed.—T. M.)

It has often amazed me that so little attention is paid to the majestic subject of relativity at St. Jim's. The famous school is losing the magnificent opportunity offered to it by my presence in its precincts. Now, as we all know, or ought to know, things are not what they seem, as Longfellow said some few years since. I should have been the first to say it, had I been on the spot at the time. Things are not what they seem. We are not really here at all, though we think we are. The plain fact of the matter is we are all somewhere else.

(I always thought you did not know where you were, Skimpy, dear boy.—T. M.)

As I was saying, these homely truths have not as yet soaked in. At one time I had hoped that Cardew would follow me through the mazy windings of philosophy, but he failed me, and went off with his feather-brained companions. Then Gussy did betray an inkling of understanding, but he soon gave it up.

True philosophers like myself always suffer these disappointments. They find themselves deserted by their friends. But I fall back on Professor Balmcyrumpet. As he points out in Treaties 111, Part 1, Section V., Vol. XXXI., Paragraph XC.: "If we knew we should rejoice. We should feel a deeper sympathy with the apparently humble earth-work, and shrink from ending a few coils of its life as bait."

The learned professor says much more. (Yes, but we don't want to hear it.—T. M.)

The world is not yet ready for these deep truths. Only the other night, while strolling near Taggles' lodge, sounds of a nocturnal scuffling smote my listening ear. Something was amiss, I knew, and, after marking my place in the book I was reading, with the aid of my pocket-lantern, I advanced cautiously towards the lodge of the worthy, if often misguided, Taggles.

As I approached I distinguished the hoarse cries of chickens in distress. I saw a shadowy form, and realised that some vagabond was helping himself to the porter's poultry.

Before I could reach the miscreant he had filled his sack with fluttering captives and fled into the darksome night. Taggles was dancing wildly on the step of his domicile. He was in his dressing-gown.

When I reached him, armed with words of comfort regarding the loss of property, Taggles tripped in his garment and went headlong into a flower-bed. I assisted the poor fellow, to his feet.

"Taggles," I said, "mourn not for the absent roosters. They were only a myth, like all other things which are outwardly physical. Be a true philosopher, and feel glad that your mind is unburdened from the embarrassment of the hideous sense of ownership. In other words, be free and unfettered from the sordid."

"You young rip!" shouted Taggles, in a seriously inconsequent manner. "I believe you were in it!"

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YOU WILL LIKE IT.

"In what, Friend Taggles?" I asked patiently, for we philosophers are ever patient. "In the sack? You know that statement must be contrary to all verity. I am here, prepared to comfort you. Remember, those chickens were not really there at all. For all practical purposes they do not exist. Appeal to your imaginative insight, and you will understand that I am speaking the truth."

Taggles said—"But on second thoughts I see no good and valid reason for repeating what Taggles said. (All the same, we would like to have known.—T. M.).

At present, I, Herbert Skimpole, enthusiastic follower of the world-famous Professor Balmcrumpet, am a prophet roaming through a wilderness of scepticism and ribaldry. But it will not be ever thus. The day will come. I shall have a library crammed with mighty volumes of wisdom, all written by myself, and wise men from all parts of the globe will come and sit at my feet.

H. SKIMPOLE.

## The Fight in Kildare's Study.

GRUNDY v. TRIMBLE.

I MIGHT as well point out at the commencement that it is not at all usual for the captain of a public school to contribute to the pages of a periodical under the control of members of the junior school; and in the ordinary way I should have met Merry's request for an article with a very decided negative—and probably an ash-plant as well.

On the other hand, as Darrel pointed out at the time, the young beggars deserve to succeed if only because of their colossal cheek, and consideration of that fact led me to agree to the penning of this.

To be candid, I am not too well disposed towards the "St. Jim's News," in consequence of the publication of an article that recently appeared over the signature of Levison, and which was headed "Amazing Revelations," purporting to be an account of some proceedings that took place in the Sixth Form Club. I am not going to make

any further reference to this matter, beyond saying that the officers of the club consulted me with regard to it, and, as a result, I had a short interview with Master Levison. Short as it was, however, I have no doubt that it was lengthy enough for him. I have lately had a Whiteley Exerciser rigged up in my study, and have been putting in some practice with it. I would suggest that if the makers of this aid to muscle-building are in any need of a testimonial as to the benefits which can be gained by using it, they should apply to Levison. He has been afforded an excellent opportunity for judging the difference it has made to my power of wielding an ash-plant.

As a matter of fact, the exerciser was the cause of some excitement the first day I installed it. I was busy screwing it into place on the door, when a message came that Mr. Railton wanted to see me. I left the job half completed, the apparatus being held to the door by a couple of screws not properly driven into the wood.

I was away for about ten minutes, and when I reached my study again I was staggered to hear a most horrible noise from the other side of the door. I strode in, to find that the room was in a ghastly state of disorder.

The table, which had held a number of books, an inkpot, and some papers, had been overturned, and had scattered its load in every direction. The carpet was rucked up, and the bookcase tipped over. The exerciser had gone from the door. On the floor were two struggling figures, rolling over and over among my books, paper, and ink.

I took hold of an ash-plant and sorted them out. I discovered them to be Grundy of the Shell, and Trimble of the Fourth Form. By this time half the School House part of the Sixth Form had been attracted by the noise, and were at my door asking what it was all about.

As I was no wiser than they, I invited the two intruders to explain matters. The both started to talk at once, but Darrel held a cushion across Grundy's mouth while Trimble recited his little piece, and then we let Grundy sing the chorus to it.

By piecing it all together, we discovered what had actually taken place. It appears that Trimble had been guilty of the unparalleled impudence of sneaking into my study in search of grub. Of course, he told some long-winded story about chasing a burglar down the corridor, and following him

into my study, where he had taken refuge; but if any burglar had really been seen going into my room, I'm certain that it would have been the last place on earth to which Trimble would have ventured. And as my cupboard door was wide open, and a large jam-tart was missing, while there was a big smear of the same kind of jam across one of Trimble's cheeks, it didn't need the deductive powers of a Ferrers Locke to put two and two together.

Hearing somebody coming along the corridor, he had no time to get out of the study, so he dodged under the table, where he apparently finished the jam-tart, judging by the crumbs on that part of the carpet.

It was Grundy who came in—as far as I could make out—for the purpose of offering to play for the First Eleven on the following Saturday.

He was waiting for me to return, when his eyes fell on the exerciser. Being unaware of the fact that it was not properly secured, he grasped the handles and commenced to do stunts with it. Although Grundy is not well supplied with brains, he's a pretty hefty sort of chap, and from all accounts he tugged at the exerciser in a fashion that would have put a fairly good strain on it even if it had been properly fastened to the door.

As things were, however, the third pull fetched the screws clean out of the wood, and the springs hit Grundy at the back of the head and pitched him across the study, half-way under the table. Trimble, who didn't know who it was, or what had happened, got the wind up, and lashed out with his foot. It caught Grundy a crack on the side of the head, and between that and the smack he'd had from the springs, his brains would have been knocked out if he had happened to possess any.

He pitched into Trimble, and the pair of them rolled about all over the floor, knocking down everything movable within reach. It's a jolly good job I came in when I did, or the study would have been wrecked.

As Trimble was the worse offender I dealt with him myself, while Darrel was kind enough to attend to Grundy for me.

Although it took place some time ago, and the exerciser is still in my study, it has not received any further attentions from Grundy. My jam-tarts, too, have remained undisturbed in my cupboard.

I think it was a lesson to both of them.

ERIC KILDARE.



"Football Ferdy's" Adventures at the Chelsea Football Ground.



On The Track.

**T**HE gang had heard rifle-shots and seen the smoke of camp-fires, and this made them cautious. Before continuing their journey they decided to make quite sure about things, and the leader sent out a number of men to spy out the land.

It was one of these prowling advance guards who caught sight of Madeleine riding in the distance. The man at once signalled to his comrades, and two other men came riding up at express speed.

Then they carefully hid themselves. It was apparent to them that the lonely rider was coming in their direction, and they would wait until she drew a little nearer so that they could pounce upon her and carry her off.

Poor Madeleine was quite unaware of the danger which awaited her. The three sinister figures in their hiding place smiled as the girl approached them. A few minutes more and it would be time for them to act.

The pounding of the hoofs of the horse was like the sound of music to their ears. Then the faithful animal whinnied, and halted as he scented danger.

Madeleine knew that there was something wrong, and like a flash she whipped her horse round and set off in the opposite direction. But it was too late!

The three villainous members of the Black Circle gang did not intend to be robbed of their prey in this manner. With a bound they set off in pursuit of the retreating figure.

Madeleine was riding her horse like fury, and the noble animal was putting forth every effort he was capable of, but still the three men gained upon her.

Would she be able to reach the camp in time? That was the thought which filled her mind. She shouted out for help, but there was no response, and then she realised for the first time that morning that she had ridden a good deal farther than she had intended.

It seemed such a long way back, and already she could hear the panting of the horses of her enemies. The poor girl knew now that she could not hope to escape them.

A few more yards, and they were upon her. One of the men clutched at the bridle of her horse, and the animal stopped. But Madeleine would not give in easily. She jumped from the back of the horse, and made for a path through the mountain.

### Captured!

**T**HE outlaws did not intend to let Madeleine escape so easily, though. The men sprang from their horses, tethered them to a near-by tree, and then raced after the fleeing girl.

Madeleine's only hope was to hide in one of the mountain passes, and thus elude her enemies. It was a desperate chance, and her heart fell when she gave one glance behind, and saw that the bandits were already well on her track.

She now regretted most heartily that she had ridden in advance of the party. With them she would have been perfectly safe. She could not help thinking how foolish she had been, and how worried her friend Dr. Brutell and his party would be when they became aware of her absence.

Madeleine headed towards a high rift in the canyon. This was not very wide, and it

# The Queer Case of Dr. Brutell

Written by Professor Hector Gordon, Science Master of St. Jim's.

was spanned by a tree which acted as a bridge. It was the girl's intention to cross this, and gain the other side. But when she looked round again she was dismayed to see that the outlaws were dangerously close to her.

It seemed that she could not hope to escape them now, and the plucky girl was faced with two alternatives.

At the other side of the canyon she paused, and in an instant her mind was made up. She decided that death would be preferable to capture by the outlaws, and she intended to jump over the edge of the precipice rather than let these men have the satisfaction of making her a prisoner again.

By now the bandits had reached the end of the bridge, and, with one last look in their direction, the plucky girl jumped over the side.

It looked as though certain death stared the unfortunate girl in the face; but the outlaws were determined to secure Madeleine at all costs, and the cunning men had already guessed that she would make a daring attempt to foil them at the last moment.

Just at the instant when she took her fatal leap a long coil of rope came whizzing through the air. Then a second coil followed with lightning-like speed.

Both these men were experts with the lasso, and the loops at the ends of the ropes landed over the head of the leaping girl. The first one dropped to her ankles, and the second encircled her waist.

Immediately Madeleine's descent was stopped with a jerk, and the bandits held on firmly to the tightened ropes. To her it seemed a miracle had happened. But to the outlaws the fact that their lassos had accomplished the object they intended caused them no surprise.

Lariat-throwing was second nature to these rugged outdoor men of the Wild West, and not a day passed when they were not called upon to use their ropes for some purpose or other.

By this time the main party of outlaws had arrived upon the scene, and the leaders, Hammer and Pinchers, laughed mockingly as they saw the tied and trussed figure of the girl swaying about in mid-air over the canyon.

Madeleine was then hauled up to safety, and at the top she was surprised to see that the bandits had also captured her friend, the lady housekeeper of the Stanton ranch.

They intended to hold her as a hostage, but now that they had again secured Madeleine they altered their minds, and released her. They evidently considered that one prisoner was quite sufficient to look after now that the sheriff was close upon their heels.

The housekeeper was told that she was free, but the outlaws would not allow her to retain her horse. She was ordered to proceed on her way on foot.

This was a wise move on their part, for by the time the housekeeper returned home Hammer and Pinchers & Co. would be miles away. While, if they allowed her to ride, it was just possible that she would be able to carry information of their movements in time enough for the sheriff and his men to get on their tracks again.

The housekeeper very much regretted having to leave Madeleine to her fate, but she realised that the best thing she could do would be to take advantage of the freedom which was offered to her before the Black Circle gang changed their minds. Then she would, at least, be able to inform Dr. Brutell of the unhappy plight of Mr. Stanton's plucky daughter.

The outlaws did not show any consideration towards Madeleine. After having tied her hands behind her back they secured her to a horse, and thus effectually prevented any chance of her escaping from them for a third time.

Then there commenced for Madeleine a very tiring journey through the mountains. It seemed to the tired and exhausted girl that they chose the most uneven and difficult paths possible.

This was in reality what they intended to do, for they desired to dodge and evade the sheriff's men, who were on the look-out for them.

They were aware that there was now a considerable number of men hot upon their tracks, and the greatest caution was necessary. They did not know when or where some of their enemies, the representatives of law and order, might spring up.

Madeleine, of course, was quite helpless, and the only thing the poor girl could do was to resign herself to her unhappy fate. She had by no means given up hope, though, and she knew that Dr. Brutell would do everything in his power to find and rescue her.

She had not forgotten that on the last occasion when she needed help so badly he arrived as if by magic, in time to assist her. After a time—it seemed like hours to Madeleine—the party arrived at a small village, and here they halted for food and refreshments.

It was a place they evidently knew very well, for two of the men left the main party, and some time later they returned, seated in a large motor-car. Meanwhile, some of the others had gone away with the horse.

From this Madeleine gathered that the villains of the Black Circle intended to complete the remainder of the journey by motor-car. Anyhow, this would give her a rest, and she badly needed it.

Hammer and Pinchers took quite a long time over their meal, and evidently they considered that they were safe enough for the time being. They were no doubt relying upon the motor-car to increase the distance between them and their foes.

But neither Hammer nor Pinchers, nor any of the rank and file noticed a tall, well-set-up man, who was regarding their activities with the greatest suspicion.

This isolated village had few residents, and the gang no doubt considered that they were perfectly safe here for the time being. Nobody, they thought, would trouble themselves about their presence there.

Parties of cowboys often rode into the district from time to time, and there seemed to be nothing unusual about these men—at least, nothing that a casual observer would notice.

But the stranger continued to size up the newcomers, and he seemed to be taking in every detail.

"If those two men are not our old friends Hammer and Pinchers, I'll eat my sombrero!"

This is what the man's expression seemed to say, even if he did not actually express the words. Anyhow, he was so convinced that he was correct that he walked along to the nearest telephone, and rang up the sheriff's office.

The news came back that the sheriff was out just then, but the speaker said that he would communicate any message to him as soon as possible.

"This is Johnson, Secret Service agent," was the reply. "Kindly inform the sheriff that the Black Circle gang stopped at Pine Creek to-day. They intend to start off for the city almost at once by motor-car!"

And with that the mysterious stranger put down the receiver of the telephone, and departed.

(To be Continued.)

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# THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE

Read this magnificent story dealing with the adventures of three chums in a strange country.

By REID WHITLEY.

## THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Hobby Tarrant and Tony Matthers, with Billy Kettle, a trusted negro servant, are on an expedition in the Andes. A volcanic eruption, causing a tremendous tidal wave, carries their canoe into the Valley of Surprise. The party explore the valley, and experience many adventurous times. Reaching a village, they are confronted by a race of strange, primitive men, who show great hospitality, and make friends. But Maxla, the medicine-man, hates the newcomers, and through a dastardly scheme which he hatches, they very nearly lose their lives. For this action the Ariki lose faith in him. He succeeds in making friends with the Mangas, but with the assistance of these semi-human brutes his cunning schemes prove futile.

Hobby invents a kite with a basket attached, to carry the trio out of the valley. A trial trip sees Hobby soaring slowly above the tree-tops, and out over the lake.

### Hobby's Rise—and Fall!

**H**OBBY TARRANT had been in the air twice before—once in the car of a short balloon, once for a very short flight in a plane. But this slow ascent behind a kite was like neither of these experiences. It was steady enough, for the wind blew strongly, but, owing to the elasticity of the line, the basket bobbed up and down like an anchored boat in a tideway.

If Hobby had not been a good sailor he would speedily have been airsick. As it was, some time had passed, and he had ascended to a considerable height before he had overcome the nausea that made his head swim.

But when this had passed he was compensated. A wonderful panorama lay beneath him. At the farther side of the lake, far beyond the spot to which they had been carried by the Stegosaur, he could see the cliffs rise up, sheer and unscalable, without any of the ledges along their lower parts, which made the nearer cliffs seem less formidable.

"No road that way," murmured Hobby, and slowly scanned the whole round of the valley.

Everywhere, so far as he could see, appeared to be the same. Everywhere towering cliffs seemed to overhang each other; bastions, whose tops leaned out above the abyss, laughed at any attempt which man could make to climb them.

Very quickly Hobby realised that his great idea was pure moonshine. Even now, when he floated at the utmost height to which the kite would carry his weight, he was still far below those inaccessible summits.

To make a bigger kite was possible; but it would require stronger rope to hold it, which would mean more weight, so that it was improbable that the bigger machine would go higher.

This being decided, he turned his attention to the long, steep slope of lava down which they had been carried by the giant wave. The mouth of the gorge at its head was certainly within reach of the kite, so far as its height was concerned. But Hobby had overlooked something.

He had forgotten that the kite could only be directed into the gorge by chance. Most probably the swirl of wind through the gap would drive it away. Even if it could be steered so as to fly through the narrow mouth, carrying its passenger, the chances were that some flaw or sudden gust would wreck it against the iron sides of the gorge,

and then the passenger would get his neck broken.

With a sigh of disappointment, Hobby gave up all thought of escaping from the valley on kite-back—or, rather, kite-tail. A lot of hard work had gone for nothing, simply because he had not thought sufficiently about the problem beforehand.

"But, anyhow, I'm getting a gorgeous ride and a superb view!" muttered he, and cast his eyes downwards.

By this time he was far out over the lake, and could see something of the farther end. For the first time he perceived an island which lay near shore. It was very small, but supported two huge trees of the same sort as those of the forest.

Close beside it something moved in the shallows. A long neck darted upwards, and Hobby recognised the thing. It was either the creature which had so narrowly missed plucking him from his perch when he first tried fishing, or a relation.

While he watched it he saw a swirl in the water close alongside, and a big alligator appeared for a moment on the surface, only to make off in haste as the long neck darted towards it.

"No place for mixed bathing!" muttered Hobby, and looked hastily up as a shadow fell across him.

Immediately he felt very lonely and far from home, for overhead, hovering on wide-spread pinions, was a great bird, beaked and taloned like an eagle, only very much bigger than any eagle he had ever seen. It was of the same species as the bird that had tried to carry off the Ariki baby and been shot by Tony.

Its feathers of reddish gold glittered in the sunlight like scales of burnished metal, its claws looked like hooks of steel, while its fierce, unwinking eyes glared at Hobby, as though speculating whether or no he was good to eat.

Hobby sat still in his basket. There was nothing to do but await the bird's decision. He was unarmed, except for a sheath-knife not so long as the cruel curved beak.

He heard a distant shouting, and a bullet hummed somewhere near him. Tony had seen the danger, and fired in hope of scaring off the bird, though, owing to its position, he could scarcely anticipate hitting it.

Unfortunately, the shot had quite the opposite effect. With a harsh scream the bird wheeled, and dashed at Hobby. His knife flashed out, and as it whirled above him he struck. At the same moment the bird smote with one of its big wings. Steel and wing met—and steel won.

The keen edge cut away a handful of flight-feathers, and even bit into the flesh. The eagle toppled over, recovered itself with a mighty beating of wings, cannoned against the basket, and drove in a vicious blow with its beak, which would inevitably have laid open Hobby's cheek if he had not ducked his head.

As he did so he struck again, and this time the knife sank home deep in the bird's breast. A hiss, a shrill, piercing screech, then it lashed out, with both clawed feet as it strove to grip its prey. Hobby felt the talons rip through the flesh of his shoulder, felt the blood trickle, and hit out wildly.

Again his knife found sheathing in flesh, whilst his left fist hammered the side of the bird's hard head, sending it backwards. There was a mighty convulsion in mid-air, a thrumming jar ran along the rope holding the kite to earth, and then he saw the eagle clutching at it with beak and claws, its wings flailing the air in an effort to preserve its balance.

Hobby yelled in consternation. He saw the fibres of the rope untwisting as the kite tugged to a squall. Another bullet whizzed aloft, touched the eagle. It fluttered, turned over, its beak working madly on the rope as it tried to haul itself back to the precarious perch.

Whang! With a loud thrumming note the rope parted a few feet below the point from which the basket was suspended!

Hobby saw the earth, the lake, the sky, all whirling together in a confused blur. For a moment he was hanging upside down, clinging to the basket-rim for dear life, the wind howling in his ears.

Then he righted as the released kite leapt up, but only for an instant. In the next breath he felt himself falling, but, strangely enough, not very swiftly. The kite acted as a parachute, the wind still upheld it, driving it forward as it slanted down and down towards the surface of the monster haunted lake.

Hobby caught one glimpse of the eagle falling over and over, its outspread wings fluttering helplessly, and felt a thrill of savage exultation at the sight. At least he had settled the bird who had sent him to a horrid death.

He knew he was lost. If he did not drop in the lake he would fall upon the shore, far from help. He would have no choice. He would either be gobbled up by the beasts of the water or the brutes of the land. Which was it to be?

His head was reeling, and he could scarcely see. The horizon tossed to and fro as the basket heaved. Was he over the lake or—

Swish! Something touched the bottom of the basket, a green curtain seemed to envelop him, he threw out a hand, and clutched something firm, hung on, and, as the kite jerked itself aloft, sprawled out into the upper branches of a tree.

It was one of the two tall trees growing upon the island in the lake.

Hobby lay still for a minute, hardly daring to breathe lest he should fall. Only by a very narrow margin had he escaped death, for the water of the lake lay beneath him. He had caught at the bough in the nick of time. Had he missed it he would by then have been trying conclusions with the teeth of some water horror, for the kite, caught by some side current, had dived at the moment he quitted the basket, and now lay waterlogged.

Very cautiously he crawled along the branch which bent to his weight, till he reached one large enough to support him. There he sat, recovering himself, till the pain in his shoulder reminded him that he had not come off scathless.

He examined it as best he could, and was relieved to find that it was not deep, since he could do nothing for it but tie a strip of his shirt about it. Then he remembered his friends. Perhaps they had seen him fall into the branches, but very likely they had already given him up for dead. He would reassure them.

The tree on which he had landed was much the same as those of the forest. It was so overgrown with creepers and parasites of all sorts, that he found space enough to camp. First of all, he collected dried twigs enough to make a blaze, lighted them with one of a carefully hoarded half-dozen matches, and heaped damp leaves upon it.

A column of smoke shot aloft, and drifted away to leeward. Hobby grunted his satisfaction. The smoke would be seen. Tony and Billy would know that he was alive. Somehow or other they would contrive to rescue him, and all would be well.

Meanwhile, he must fend for himself, since, at the best, days must pass before he could be released. He did not worry over the problem, having enough to think about. His first need was for stones on which to lay his fire. They lay beneath him in great profusion. He began by descending to within thirty feet of the ground, and there hung for a little, examining the earth. By the water's edge there were a few blurred tracks in the mud that suggested alligators, but nothing else.

Noise of the animals so numerous on the mainland came to the island. He had nothing but the water beasts to fear. He dropped to the ground, collected flat stones enough for his purpose, made them fast to lianas, and got them aloft without interruption. Soon he had his fire established, and a space cleared about it where he could sit in comfort.

Water was the next necessity. There was plenty of it all around him, but neither water-bottle nor anything else to hold it. This did not delay Hobby long, however. There were plenty of gourds hanging from the branches. One of these, which had dried, was speedily cleaned out, and filled. Thus he came to the matter of something to eat.

There were fish in the lake, but no hooks with which to catch them. Nothing dismayed Hobby sat there, and emptied his pockets of their very varied contents. Among a score of other things was the bowl of a silver-plated teaspoon.

Hobby did not remember why he had kept the thing. Doubtless, at the time he picked it up he thought he could make use of it. At all events, it proved uncommonly useful now. So did the file in his pocket-knife, and also the saw in that portable tool-chest.

For three hours he cut and hacked, and filed and hammered. At the end of that time he had produced a hook, which, if not very beautiful, speedily proved its usefulness. He had no bait, but he hoped that the glint of the thing might serve to attract some hungry fish. Making fast a line of tough fibre, he tried his luck. It was in. Almost at the first cast he hooked a three-pounder. In a little while he had enough to satisfy even his appetite. Soon the savoury smell of broiling fish stole over the lake.

When darkness came Hobby took a torch, and climbed aloft till he saw, far across the waters, the fires of the village. Above them moved another light. To and fro it wavered. Hobby understood. Tony or Billy waved that light. He responded, wagging his torch till the other light was tossed aloft, at which he threw the torch high into the air, saw it quench in the lake, and so went to sleep.

### The Keepers of the Lake.

WHEN Tony and Billy saw the eagle attack their comrade, they had a faint hope that he might perhaps disable the bird or drive it off. They gave the word to the Ariki who had hold of the kite rope, and these at once began to haul the kite in. But they had barely drawn in a fathom or two when the catastrophe happened.

The rope fell into the lake, the Ariki who had been tailed on to it fell sprawling, the kite leapt up, and drifted away, slowly descending.

"He's lost!" exclaimed Tony, in a shaky voice. "What a fool I was to let him try such a thing! He's falling into the lake. We can do nothing!"

He watched with stony eyes, while Billy, quite forgetting that he was a sort of god to the simple Ariki, burst into loud sob. Suddenly Tony seized the nearest liana ladder, and swarmed aloft to the uppermost branches, where he hung, staring.

"Billy!" he yelled. "I believe—yes, I'm almost certain—he has dropped into a tree! Over there, on what looks like a headland!"

Billy came up with a rush, accompanied by Lalo. Together they looked at the place which Tony pointed out. Lalo said something softly.

"He says dat dere is an island, Marse Tony," translated Billy. "If Marse Hobby is

stuck dere, how is we going to get him off? Us daren't go on de water!"

"If he is there, we must!" replied Tony. "What is that in the water?"

"Dat's de kite. I wishes I'd never seen de thing!" groaned Billy. "How will us ever go on dat water? All dem things with long necks is dere, without counting the gators! Ow, ow! Poor Marse Hobby! He got to stay dere till de end of de chapter!"

"Nonsense! We'll get him off!" snapped Tony. "Look! He's safe! There's smoke rising. Hurrah! Now, let's think of getting him off!"

There was no great difficulty in thinking of a way. To cross the lake a boat or raft was needed. That in itself would have been simple. But as the lake was the home of terrible creatures of great power, the craft would need to be of some size to withstand an assault, while the crew must be protected.

Again, this would have been easy enough to build, had the builders been able to work on the ground by the lake shore. But, since this was so terribly dangerous, the work would be trebled.

"We will have to build a sort of ark, Billy," said Tony. "And it will have to be made up here in pieces, lowered down, and fitted together quickly."

"Yes, Marse Tony, mighty quickly!" agreed Billy. "If one of dem brown-toes comes along, it ain't any ark that would be left, nor no one in it!"

"It's the only way, so far as I can see," replied Tony. "So the sooner you explain what we want to Lalo, the better!"

Lalo was a little hazy in his mind about the matter. It was true that he believed his ancestors had arrived in the valley in a canoe, but he had no notion of what a canoe was, or even of a raft.

He was quick-witted, however, and when Tony made a rough model, and floated it in a saucer of water, he soon grasped the idea. Then they set about making a raft, which should be so caged in that not the most powerful water beast could get at those on board.

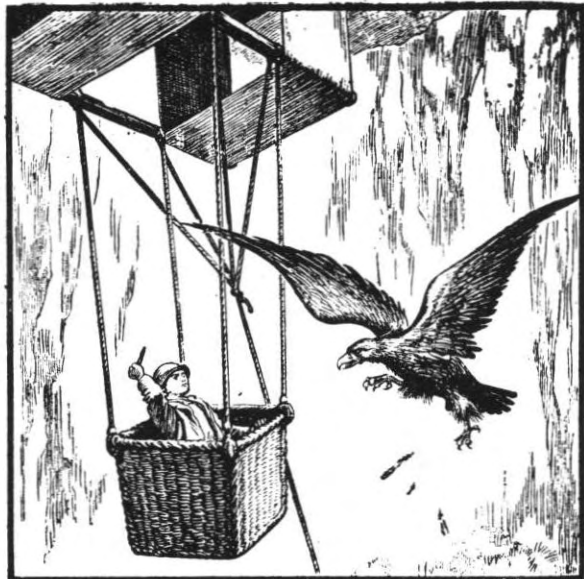
All that day the villagers worked on the thing. When night came Tony climbed aloft, and waved a torch, in the hope of getting a reply. When at last he saw an answering spark across the lake he descended. Hobby might be "uncommonly peckish," but, at least, he was alive.

With morning, all hands got to work again. The main part of the raft was lashed together so strongly that it could hope to defy all the efforts of the strongest brute they might encounter.

It was so bulky that it had to be lowered to the shore of the lake, since any further additions would have made it quite unmanageable. As it touched the ground a lurking alligator appeared, but, finding nothing edible, retired hastily as a heavy stone from aloft crashed on his plated back.

Then the second part of the structure was sent down. This consisted of a sort of cage of tough boughs and canes, so closely woven that nothing bigger than a sparrow could have passed through it. It was furnished with a door and port-holes for four oars. It was carefully lowered on top of the raft. It had only to be secured in place, and the rescue-party would be able to start, with a good sporting chance of returning.

Billy, who was in charge of the construction gang, prepared to descend with his men,



Hobby sat still in his basket, a knife in his hand, whilst the great bird hovered over him, as though speculating whether or no he was good to eat.

while Tony, rifle in hand, and accompanied by several of the strongest bowmen, got into position to cover them.

"All ready?" he asked.

"All ready, sah!"

"Then go ahead!"

Down the lianas slid the working-party, and got busy. There was no loafing on the job. They were all very anxious to get it over and ascend to the safety of the upper air. The cage was hoisted into place. Swiftly the many lashings were drawn fast, and tied. Billy got into the cage, the better to drive home some pegs which helped to hold all secure.

At that moment one of the Indians on watch bawled an alarm, and at once every man scuttled aloft—every man, that is, except Billy. Drowned by the noise he was making, he did not hear the first call. Only the frenzied yells of his assistants as they climbed out of harm's way reached his ears as he drove home the last peg.

By then it was too late to retreat. With a rush that carried it far up the shore, a huge alligator—perhaps the same as that which had been intended to make an end of Tony, came swirling out of the water, its jaws snapping impotently a little below the dangling feet of the last to leave the ground.

Then it turned towards the raft, where Billy, his retreat cut off, was hastily securing the door. It moved with surprising swiftness, scenting the man within the cage.

Crash! It hurled itself upon the structure with a force that would certainly have broken it in, if it had been made of unyielding materials. But the springy green boughs, the canes and bamboo, of which it was built, gave to the shock, and rebounded, hurling the brute sprawling upon the shore.

Tony's rifle cracked, Billy's big pistol squirted flame and a solid chunk of lead into the gator's throat, as it rose and came on again with a bellow of baffled fury. Then from high aloft Lalo let fall his own particular alligator medicine.

It was a long pole, weighted with stones fastened near its sharp, fire-hardened point. Well aimed, it flashed from on high, straight to the middle of the monster's broad back, drove through the protective plates as though they had been paper, and sank into the creature's vitals, almost pinning it to the earth.

(Another fine long instalment in next week's "Gem.")

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# EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

There are no end of amazing things happening, or making ready to happen, during this New Year. One of them is to do with the new features in the "Gem." Fresh attractions are coming thick and fast.

I cannot run up the curtain on all I am intending to do this year, but I have in mind lots of good things—stories, for instance, about St. Jim's, which strike a new note. The School House juniors may have buried the hatchet so far as

the "New House bouncers" are concerned, but it is not buried very deep down. There is no such thing as the stamping out of rivalry. This will go on, and there will be more fine "ragging" stories.

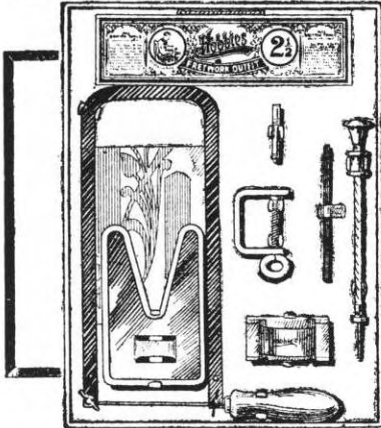
As we go on I think one gets to appreciate the character of Mr. Railton more and more. The head of the School House has just that way with him which commands respect. When he says a thing he means it; but then he never errs by saying a lot of stupid things which no man could possibly mean. Mr. Ratcliff has sobered down a bit, thanks to his sharp bout of 'flu and the rare old jacketing he received.

"He might have been a Proosian," as the old song puts it, for his autocratic manners. Ratcliff is a quaint person,

rather like a bird of ill omen as he flitters through the corridors, with his gown flopping behind him. His weak point is that he acts without thinking. Obviously he imagines that the deep respect entertained for the position of a schoolmaster goes on, whether the occupier of the post is worthy or not.

Well, it may do for a time, but the world soon finds out the truth. Then there is trouble, and missiles begin to fly. After all, it is the personality of a man which creates its own respect, and that's that.

By the way, keep your eye on the "Boys' Herald" and the ripping new school serial about Arundel College. This story is just what readers of the "Gem" like. Get this week's "Boys' Herald." YOUR EDITOR.

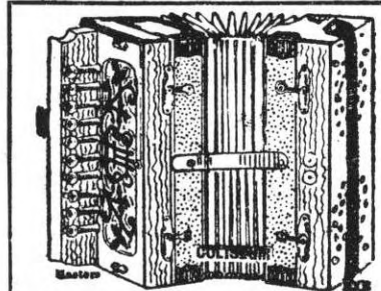


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