

TOM MERRY'S CONQUEST

A Splendid NEW Long, Complete Tale of School Life at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Author of the long, complete tales of this popular schoolboy now appearing every week in the "Gem" Library. Price One Halfpenny.



"Hallo, Monkey!" "Hallo, fatheads!" Frank Monk grinned at his old enemies as he shook hands .

INTRODUCTION

These two copies of the Boys' Friend Library were originally published a long time ago, No. 30 in November 1907 and No. 38 in January 1908. They appeared in the era of the halfpenny Gem when Tom Merry reigned supreme and the Magnet had never been heard of.

They were an astonishing tribute to the popularity of the St. Jim's stories which at that time ran to a mere seven or eight chapters each week. These monthly volumes were new stories each of 120 pages, and even today the zest and vigour of the writing sweeps the reader along with it. It is easy to appreciate that Charles Hamilton himself relished the elbow room provided by this format, and there is not the slightest suspicion of padding. It is a known fact that the readers of the day also appreciated these two stories, for they were quickly sold out, and they have now become collectors' items.

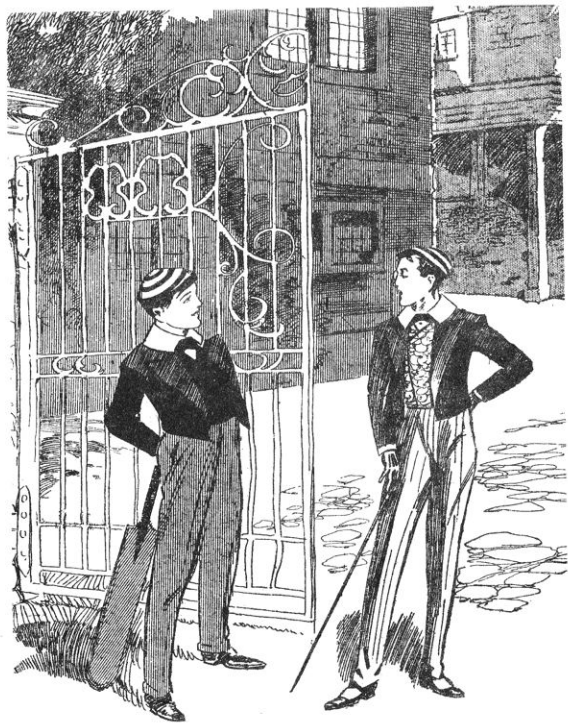
In a way they bear comparison with the two Highcliffe Boys' Friend Libraries which were republished by the Museum Press some years ago. "Tom Merry & Co.", like "The Boy Without a Name", is complete in itself. Nevertheless, public demand necessitated a sequel in each case, and "Tom Merry's Conquest", like "Rivals and Chums", cunningly utilised the

earlier theme and extended and renewed it in an unexpected fashion. There, however, the comparison ends. The Highcliffe stories were dramatic, full of tension and even painful moments, whereas these St. Jim's stories struck an entirely different note. They introduced Rylcombe Grammar School into the St. Jim's saga, a hardy annual that survived to bloom and blossom again and again in future numbers of the Gem. These stories are a light-hearted account of a competitive jockeying for position, an essay in one-upmanship, though they do possess some serious undertones. Perhaps their most interesting aspect is the development of the characters of the St. Jim's juniors, particularly Gussy and Tom Merry, whose sunny untroubled nature (before the arrival of Lumley-Lumley and Levison and Talbot) was never better exemplified.

If you wish to have a glimpse of those halcyon days when the world was young, just open these pages and read on. I guarantee you will be entranced.

ROGER JENKINS.





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CHAPTER 1.

The Wonderful Idea of Figgins & Co.

TOM MERRY was looking out of his study window in the School House at St. Jim's, when he spotted Figgins and Co. coming across the quadrangle. There was a shade of unusual seriousness on the brow of the great Figgins, and the "Co." were looking extremely thoughtful and solemn, so it was not difficult for Tom Merry to guess that something out of the common was in the wind.

Tom Merry turned his head from the window for a moment, to glance at Manners and Lowther, his chums and study-mates, who were busily at work at the table. Manners, with a pen in his right hand, and the fingers of his left buried in his hair, was wrestling with a passage in Virgil, which he seemed to find a little above his weight. Lowther's pen, on the other hand, was travelling away over the foolscap at express speed. Lowther was "knocking off" an imposition, and certainly Schiller had very seldom been transcribed at such a rate before.

"I say, you fellows——" began Tom Merry.

"Don't!" said Lowther, without looking up.

"Don't what?"

"Don't say—don't say anything! Don't interrupt! Be quiet! Run away and play! Look out of the window, like a good boy! Shut up! Don't!"

Monty Lowther jerked out these sentences without his eyes once leaving his work or his pen stopping for a moment. Monty was writing against time, and he had none to waste.

"Yes, but——" said Tom Merry.

"Shut up!" said Manners, digging his pen into the inkpot. "I believe I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"The meaning of this rotten thing. I think—yes——" Manners began to write.

Tom Merry laughed.

"My dear kids, Figgins & Co. are coming over from the New House——"

"Blow Figgins & Co.! Don't interrupt!"

"But——"

"Can't you see we're busy?"

Tom Merry gave it up, and turned to the window again. His first idea, that Figgins & Co. were coming to the School House, was certainly correct. They had nearly reached it. Naturally, Tom Merry was very curious. School House and New House at St. Jim's were deadly rivals, and Figgins,

Kerr, and Wynn were the chiefs and leaders of the New House juniors. What did they want in the School House? They looked as if they meant business.

"Some new wheeze on, perhaps," murmured Tom Merry. "Anyway, may as well let them know we're here."

He took a pea-shooter from a shelf and leaned out of the study window. He had a good view of the three New House juniors as they came up. They were talking, and some of their words floated up to Tom Merry's ears.

"Suppose he doesn't agree!" said Kerr.

"He'll have to agree!" said Figgins rather aggressively. "I'll bet you the others will agree fast enough, and then Tom Merry— Oh!"

Something had suddenly stung Figgins on the left ear. He clapped his hand to the place, and glared at Wynn, who was on the left of him. Fatty Wynn, the Falstaff of the New House at St. Jim's, stared at him in turn.

"What did you do that for, Fatty?" growled Figgins.

"Eh? What did I do what for?" demanded the amazed Fatty Wynn.

"You flicked me on the ear."

"You're dreaming! I— Oh!"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Something caught me in the mouth. It was just like a pea from a shooter. I—"

"Oh!" yelled Kerr, clapping his hand to his nose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The ringing laugh from above warned Figgins & Co. whence the mysterious pellets had come. They glanced up at once, and shook their fists at the laughing face of Tom Merry.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "Is that how you like it done?"

"You School House rotter!"

The shooter went to Tom Merry's mouth again, and Figgins promptly dodged.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "We're coming to see you—you and the other wasters. We've got something to say."

"You generally have, Figgy, though whether it's worth listening to is another question. But come up into the study, by all means."

Figgins & Co. disappeared into the porch of the School House. Tom Merry turned from the window to the two juniors, who were writing away at the table.

"I say, you two—"

"Shut up!"

"Ring off!"

"Figgins & Co. are coming upstairs to see us," went on Tom Merry imperturbably. "They've got something to say; some rot, I expect."

"Kick 'em out! I'm busy."

"Can't be did! You ought to be finished, and if you're not—"

The opening of the study door interrupted Tom Merry. It was opened by the simple method of planting a sufficiently hard kick against the panels. It flew back with a jerk and a crash, and Figgins & Co. came in. Tom Merry nodded a welcome.

Manners and Lowther looked up with a glare. Figgins & Co. came into the study, and Figgins closed the door in the same gentle way. Tom Merry looked at them curiously. Figgins, long-limbed and lean, Kerr, the canny Scotsman, and Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the "Co.," were three of the best, and though they were always at loggerheads with Tom Merry and his chums, at bottom there was a real liking and esteem on both sides.

"We've come to talk—" began Figgins.

"You haven't!" said Manners aggressively. "Do you think I can construe Virgil while you are talking, Figgins?"

"Do you think I can write out Schiller by the yard while you are talking, Figgins?" asked Lowther. "Don't, old fellow!"

"It's an important matter."

"Rats! Come again another time! Scoot!"

"Can't be did!" said Figgins. "It's an important matter, and it's got to be settled. The fact is, I've thought of an idea——"

"Excuse me, Figgy," said Kerr, "but as the idea was mine——"

"Rats!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn warmly. "It was mine! Didn't I say to you first of all——"

"Look here, Wynn, you're not going to claim——"

"I'm going to have the——"

"I tell you plainly——"

Monty Lowther clutched his German dictionary, and turned a desperate eye upon the three disputants. Tom Merry was laughing like a hyena.

"Are you going to shut up?" bawled Lowther. "Go and settle the question in your own measly house—that rotten old casual-ward you call a house! Get out!"

"Travel!" growled Manners. "How on earth can I——"

"I tell you it's an important matter!" exclaimed Figgins. "As Tom Merry is the leader of this study, I appeal to him. Do leave off laughing, Merry, and attend to me. Am I or am I not to explain my idea——"

"My idea!" interjected Kerr.

"My idea!" hooted Fatty Wynn.

"Scissors!" gasped Monty Lowther. "I'm not going to stand this! Will you fellows clear out or shut up? Und einmals, als ich eine lange Nacht in frommer Andacht——" he went on aloud, as he wrote.

"Dry up!" howled Manners. "Namque, sub ingenti lustrat dum singula templo, Regiam operiens, dum, quæ——"

"... unter diesen Baum gessessen und dem Schläfe widerstand——" shouted Monty Lowther, his pen travelling away.

"... fortuna sit urbi, artificumque manus inter se operumque——" hissed Manners.

"My only pyjama hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, the tears of laughter running down his cheeks. "Shut up, some of you, or the chaps will think we've got Bedlam here on a visit.

"Done!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, flinging down his pen. "That's the last of the fifty. I don't mind if you New House duffers chatter now."

"But I do!" exclaimed Manners. "I'm not done! I——"

"Now, don't be unreasonable, Manners," said Monty. "You ought to be finished by this time. If Figgins has got anything to say, let's hear it."

"I tell you——"

"I appeal to the majority," said Lowther. "Tom Merry, isn't Manners to shove that piffle away for a bit?"

"Yes; certainly!" said Tom Merry. "You're in a minority, Manners. Shove it away!"

Manners growled, but he realised that there wasn't much chance of getting on with his work under the present circumstances, and he put it away.

"That's right!" said Figgins. "Virgil is all very well in his way, but it's no good sticking to that sort of thing when there's something serious on the carpet. This idea I've got is a really ripping, A 1, first-class——"

"It just occurred to me," Kerr explained—"we were talking about the Grammar School chaps, and——"

"We were talking about the Grammar School chaps," said Fatty Wynn, "and it occurred to me that it would be a good idea——"

"Shut up, both of you!" exclaimed Figgins, in the voice of authority. "How you can come into another fellow's study and show off your egotism in this way, I can't imagine! I shall never get my idea explained at this rate——"

"You mean my idea——"

"I never saw such cheek!" Fatty Wynn observed, addressing himself indignantly to the Terrible Three. "Of course, it was my idea from start to finish——"

"Rot!" said Figgins, with great warmth. "Didn't I say to Kerr——"

"Didn't I say that if the Grammar School——"

"But when you were saying——"

"I've heard something like this before," Monty Lowther remarked, in a thoughtful sort of way. "It was in a phonograph shop, and two or three phonographs were going at once. Keep it up, Figgy! You're awfully funny!"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Manners. "I'll cut off to Study No. 6 and fetch in Blake and Herries and D'Arcy to see them doing it."

"Here! Stay where you are!" said Figgins, and the "Co." realised that they were cutting a ridiculous figure in the eyes of the School House chums. "I want to explain my—our idea——" he amended.

"That's it!" said Kerr. "It really belongs to all of us. It sort of came to all of us at once when we were talking over the matter."

"Never mind whose the idea is!" suggested Tom Merry. "You can fight over that in the New House, if you like. Let's hear the idea."

"Well, you see——" began Figgins.

"It's like this!" said Kerr.

"I'll explain——" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins gave the Co. a withering glance.

"Will you two conceited asses shut up?" he exclaimed. "Who's the head of this firm, I'd like to know? If I'm interrupted again there will be a row."

"There's been a pretty good big row already," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Don't mind us, you know. We like to see you in your funny act. It's as good as a play, and——"

"Oh, ring off," said Figgins. "Now, this is my——"

"Our!" corrected the Co., with one voice.

"Our idea," went on Figgins. "Not so long ago, after the Rylcombe Grammar School was opened, and we got to fighting terms with the Grammarians, we formed a Co.——"

"Tom Merry & Co.," assented the hero of the Shell, with a nod.

"Well, we called it Tom Merry & Co.," said Figgins rather disparagingly. "We let you be leader, because——because——"

"Because I was the only one that could lead."

"Nothing of the kind. But——anyway, the Co. busted up."

"Yes, we gave the Grammarians the kybosh, and made them sign a paper acknowledging that they were licked, and there wasn't any use for a Co. after that."

"That's all very well, but the Grammar cads have got over it, and they're bucking up again. They're going to try their luck in the football-field with us again, and they're going to have that document of surrender back again. So they say."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Let them say it, then. They won't find it so easy to do it."

"I don't know. They've been ragging a lot of our fellows lately. There was D'Arcy, of your house—they captured him in Rylcombe, and marched

him up and down the main street with a donkey's collar round his neck, and a bunch of carrots tied on his hat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well to laugh, Tom Merry, but it's one in the eye for St. Jim's, and we ought to put the Grammar rotters in their place. That's what I say."

"Right enough," said the Co. "We ought."

"Then you want to revive the Co.?" said Tom Merry, thoughtfully. "It's a good idea. I have been thinking of it myself lately, since the Grammarians have been getting up on their hind legs and putting on airs again. I don't mind leading you again—"

"Perhaps you don't," said Figgins, with emphasis. "But we do."

"Oh, I see—you've thought of a new leader, have you? Now, we thrashed out that subject before, and settled that there was only one possible leader—"

"Rats! My idea is certainly to revive the Co.—you three, and us three, and Study No. 6—and there'll be another in it this time—"

"Who is that?"

"Marmaduke Smythe, who used to be in our house. He's coming down to St. Jim's for a few weeks while his father is abroad, and he's going to take his old place in our study. Of course, he'll be in the Co. But about the leader—"

"Yes—about the leader—" said the Co.

"That's where my idea comes in—"

"My idea, Figgy—my idea—"

"You mean my—"

"Oh, hang it, our idea then!" said Figgins. "For goodness' sake shut up, and give a fellow a chance to say a word! Now, our idea is this, that we're not going to have any special leader all the time, but—"

"Take it in turns—," said Kerr.

"The old Athenian method," said Figgins. "Why should one chap be leader more than any other? It's all very well to say that Tom Merry led us to victory over the Grammarians last time. They've revived again, and are as cheeky as ever, and we've got a tussle before us. Besides, I believe I could have led quite as well—"

"I know I could," said Kerr.

"And I'm certain I could have," Fatty Wynn remarked.

"The chaps in Study No. 6 think the same," Figgins went on. "They never had a chance. They tried what they could do singly against the Grammar cads, and so did we, and we got it in the neck. But as leader of the alliance, only Tom Merry had a chance, and I can't say that I think he did anything extraordinary—"

"Not at all," said Kerr. "Far from that."

"Very ordinary," said Fatty Wynn, shaking his head. "Extraordinarily ordinary. I mean—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "I think Figgy's idea—or Kerr's idea—or Fatty's idea—whichever it is, simply rot. If there is to be a Co., of course it will be Tom Merry & Co., the same as before, and I shall be leader. What do you say, Manners?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm rather inclined to agree with Figgy," was Manners' somewhat unexpected reply. "If every chap takes the lead in turn, it will give everyone a chance to show you what he can do. If we don't find it answer, we can go back to the old arrangement. What's your idea, Lowther?"

"Same here," replied Lowther. "It's a good wheeze, and worth trying,

with the amendment that an unsuccessful captain is sacked on the spot. But if Tom Merry doesn't like it——"

Tom Merry laughed.

"My dear kids, I don't mind in the least. If you like to try the idea, we'll try it, and I'll make as good a follower as I made a leader, at all events."

"Well said," exclaimed Figgins heartily. "That's just what we should have expected you to say, Tom Merry. It's agreed upon, then?"

"Certainly. But what about Blake and the others?"

"We'll have them in and talk it over with them," said Figgins. He opened the door. A Third Form fag was coming down the passage, and Figgins called to him. "I say, young Gibson, cut off to Blake's study, will you, and say that Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy are wanted in Tom Merry's study on important business."

"Right-ho!" said Curly Gibson, and he cut off. He came back grinning in a couple of minutes.

"Well, are they coming?" said Figgins.

"No, they're not. Blake says he's sorry, but they're entertaining a visitor, and you can go and eat coke."

And Curly vanished, chuckling. The six juniors looked at one another.

"Well," laughed Tom Merry, "if the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain, so come on. Follow the man from Cook's!"

And Tom Merry led the way to Study No. 6, with the others at his heels.

CHAPTER 2.

A Feed in Study No. 6—Blake Becomes Leader.

STUDY No. 6 was looking unusually festive that evening.

It was always rather cosy, for Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, the occupants of the famous apartment, knew how to make themselves comfortable, but on the present occasion they had excelled themselves.

The fire burned brightly in the grate, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sitting on a hassock before it making toast, of which the fragrant smell pervaded the study. There were chestnuts roasting on the bars of the grate, too, and D'Arcy was keeping an eye on them. Blake had just made the tea, and was standing the teapot on the trivet to draw. Herries was not in the study, but there was a third occupant. He was cutting broad-and-butter, making himself useful though he was a guest.

Blake, having arranged the teapot to his satisfaction, turned back to the table. The table gleamed with a wonderfully white cloth, and there was an unusual array of crockery and cutlery, borrowed from half-a-dozen studies up and down the passage.

"That's right, Dig," said Blake. "Seems like old times, doesn't it?"

The youth who was cutting bread-and-butter grinned and nodded.

It was Digby, the old comrade of Study No. 6, who had been away from St. Jim's for a time, and had now come on a visit to his old chums at the school. The chums of the Fourth were killing the fatted calf for him, so to speak.

Tea in Study No. 6 was always a meal worth partaking of, when the juniors were in funds, but seldom had the study seen such a spread as the present one.

"Wish I were back here for good," said Digby. "It would be jolly. I

want to see Figgins & Co. before I go, too. What jolly rows we used to have with that lot in the New House."

"We did, and we do," said Blake. "We still give the New House the kybosh. The School House is cock-house at St. Jim's. But, bless you, Figgins & Co. won't admit it! It's just their obstinacy."

"They never would," said Digby, laughing. "How jolly that toast smells. You've been growing useful as well as ornamental, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah," said the swell of the School House, turning a crimson face from the fire. "I am weally a wathah clevah.chap at makin' toast, you know. It's beastly warm, don't you know, deah boys!"

"Never mind, stick to it, Gussy," said Blake encouragingly. "Another plateful will be enough. Hallo, here's Herries!"

Herries came into the study. He had been down to the school shop, and the extent of his purchases had delighted the heart of Dame Taggles. He had bundles under each arm, and parcels were bulging out all his pockets.

Digby gave a whistle.

"My hat! You're doing this thing in style! Ham—pickles—tongue—jam and marmalade—steak pies and currant cake! My word!"

"The prodigal son doesn't return every day," grinned Blake. "Shove 'em on the table, Herries, old man. Here's Kildare's soap-dish for the jam—Dig has washed it. You can put some of the marmalade in that extra tea-cup. Open the pickles—"

"All right. You pour out the tea; we don't want it stewing."

"I'm just going to. I think that will do, Dig. Buck up with the toast, Gussy, and don't forget the chestnuts."

"Yaas, wathah. But it's beastly warm—"

"Never mind that. Buck up! Hallo, what's that?"

Blake was pouring out the tea as he spoke. The door of the study was opened, and Tom Merry looked in. His friends were behind him, filling the passage.

Tom Merry smiled with a pleased expression.

"Tea!" he exclaimed. "Tea—and toast! Ham and tongue! My hat! And—Scott, is that old Digby?"

He rushed in and seized Digby and hugged him.

"Yes, it's old Dig," grinned Blake. "He— Now then, what's the matter with you, Gussy?"

A sudden yell had broken from the swell of St. Jim's.

Blake was pouring out the tea while he talked, and his eyes were on Tom Merry, and not on the teacups, with the result that his hand, having moved a little, he was pouring the tea, not into the teacup, but down the neck of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was sitting between the table and the fire, with toasting-fork in his hand.

There was none too much room in Study No. 6, and D'Arcy just about filled the space between the table and the grate.

Blake, unconscious of what he was doing, sent a stream of hot fluid down the back of D'Arcy's neck. The unfortunate swell of the School House gave a terrific yell, and jumped up as if moved by a spring.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Blake started back in astonishment, and made a sweep with the teapot, and Herries gave a whoop as the hot tea came streaming from the spout over his legs.

"Ow! You clumsy ass! Ow!"

"My hat!" said Blake. "What's the matter? It was Gussy's fault, jumping up like that and startling me—"

"You howwid bwute!" howled D'Arcy. "You have scalded the back of my neck—"

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"You shouldn't put the back of your neck under my teapot then," said Blake crossly. "There goes the tea, nearly all wasted, because——"

"My collah is winging wet, and my neck——"

"Oh, blow your neck! I'm thinking of the tea——"

"Ow, my legs!" groaned Herries. "My legs! Ow!"

"Your legs!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "I never heard such a fuss made over nothing. I'm getting fed up with your legs and D'Arcy's neck."

"You howwid wuffian!" moaned D'Arcy. "You have scalded my neck, and spoiled my collah, and wuined my necktie, and my waistcoat is wetted, too."

"Horrid," said Tom Merry. "Go for him, Gussy! Give him a thwashin'."

"I have weally a good mind——"

"Oh, get a clean collar and shut up," said Blake. "It was all Tom Merry's fault, really. If he hadn't come in I shouldn't have——"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We want to talk to you fellows, and as you wouldn't come to us, we've come to you. I didn't know there was a feed on, but now we've come, we can't do better than stay, it seems to me."

"What-ho!" exclaimed Figgins emphatically.

"I should say so," said Fatty Wynn, with a famished look at the table. "Do you know, you chaps, that I'm fearfully hungry. We had a measly tea in the New House, only a steak pie and some rashers of bacon and half a dozen eggs, and I feel nearly famished. It's very nice and proper of you to ask us to this feed, Blake."

"But I haven't——"

"So it is——very decent of him," said Figgins, pulling a chair to the table and sitting down. "That's what I like about Blake—he's generous!"

"My idea exactly!" Kerr assented, coming in cheerfully. "I like Blake's feeds. They're good, and you're always welcome."

"Look here——"

"We'll pass a vote of thanks to Blake," said Tom Merry. "I'll carve this pie to start with. Not a word, my dear fellow! The trouble's nothing."

"I wasn't going to——"

"I'll fetch the plates and cups out of our study," said Manners, and be cut off in a twinkling. "I'll be back in two ticks."

"That's right!" said Lowther. "You haven't many seats for your guests, Blake, but I can make this box do. I'll start with the tongue, I think, please, Tom."

"But I tell you——"

"Don't tell us anything!" said Tom Merry. "We understand how heartily you welcome us, and we'll take all the polite speeches for granted, and get to business. I must say," said the hero of the Shell, looking round, "that Blake is doing this thing in good style. I will always say that for Blake—that he knows how to get up a study feed."

"He does!" said Figgins. "He do! I compliment Blake."

"You set of——"

"Here's the things!" exclaimed Manners, coming into the study with his arms full of crockery. "Here you are, kids! Make room, Figgy!"

"Look here——" howled Blake.

But D'Arcy, who had changed his collar by this time, and was beaming again, interrupted him.

"Gentlemen," said the swell of the School House, laying his hand upon his gorgeous waistcoat, "you are all heartily welcome."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "That's just like you, Gussy! Very much

like you! No need to say more, Blake; we understand your feelings exactly."

"I dare say you do!" exclaimed Blake, laughing in spite of himself. "You bounders! But now you're here, you may as well stay. What do you say, Dig?"

"Stay by all means!" said Digby. "Jolly glad to see the old faces round this festive board—ahem! I see you haven't grown any better looking, Figgy!"

"You let my looks alone, and pass the ham," said Figgins.

"Certainly! Manners, too, is the same old fathead——"

"Hallo!" said Manners.

"Fatty Wynn is only a little fatter, too. I always marvelled how he got into his Etons without bursting them. It's a greater marvel than ever now."

"Here, I say!" mumbled Fatty Wynn, with his mouth full of pie.

"Don't speak, Fatty! It's a sheer loss of time when there's grub going. Wire in!" said Digby encouragingly. "What a happy family! But I'm really glad to see you all again. I hear you've got new enemies in the field since my time. A grammar school, or something——"

"That's so!" said Figgins. "A pretty rotten sort of a show, you know, but the fellows have the cheek to set themselves up as rivals to us!"

"Awful cheek!" said Tom Merry. "We beat them hollow once, and made them sign a statement that we were the top dog, but they're on the war-path again now. Have you heard what they did to Gussy?"

"It's no laughin' mattah!" said D'Arcy, rather indignantly. "I am weally surprised at you, Digby. If you had been pawaded up and down the High Street of Wylcombe with a donkey's collar wound your beastly neck, you would not have considahed it funny."

"Perhaps not!" agreed Digby. "But as it is, I consider it awfully funny. You must have looked ripping."

"They tied a beastly bunch of cawwots on my hat!" said D'Arcy warmly. "The beastly cads, you know! A beastly bunch of beastly cawwots, deah boys!"

"Did you eat any of them?" asked Digby innocently.

D'Arcy laid down his knife and fork, and looked steadily across the table at Digby.

"Pardon me!" he said, with frigid politeness. "Would you have the extreme kindness to repeat that remark, Digby?"

"Certainly!" said Digby obligingly. "Did you eat any of the carrots?"

D'Arcy rose to his feet.

"It is with extreme wegwet that I say or do anythin' to disturb the harmony of this convivial meetin," he said, "but, weally—— Blake, let go my sleeve!"

"Sit down!"

"I wefuse to sit down! I have been insulted——"

"Sit down!"

"I distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the kind! Pwaw welease me! I object strongly to bein' jerked at in that extremely unpleasant mannah. If you do not immediately welease me, Blake, I shall no longah wegard you as a friend."

"Sit down, fathead!"

"I object to bein' chawactewised as a fathead! The term is most oppwobwious! Digby has insulted me, and it is not possible for me to overlook——"

"Honour the guest that is within thy walls!" said Tom Merry severely. "Gussy, I'm surprised at you!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I did not think," said Tom Merry, looking round, "that Arthur Augustus could be so rude, so impolite, so discourteous! If Skimpole, our tame Socialist, were here, he would say that it was due to his bad bringing up, the base and sordid surroundings of his youth——"

"Oh, Tom Mewwy——"

"I think Gussy should apologise to Digby at once!" said Figgins. "It's the only thing he can do, in my opinion."

"Oh, weally, Figgins——"

"Of course!" said Blake. "Apologise—that's the only thing to be done now. We're all ashamed of you, Gussy. I'm blushing, for one."

"I'm blushing, for two," said Monty Lowther. "I never thought it of Gussy!"

The unfortunate swell of the School House looked from one face to another, wondering whether the juniors were "rotting" or not, but every face was sober and solemn.

"I'm waiting for that apology," said Digby seriously.

"I weally considah," said D'Arcy, "that, as the person insulted, I am entitled to the apology, you know, but I am willin' to suwwendah to the opinion of the majowity of the gentlemen pwsent. I apologise, Digby."

"Accepted," said Digby graciously, "but don't do it again, D'Arcy. And now you have apologised, pray answer my original question. Did you eat any of the carrots?"

"No," said D'Arcy, with stately and chilling dignity. "I did not eat any of the cawwots."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Figgins, his gravity giving way at last. "Gussy will be the death of me one of these days, I know he will."

Arthur Augustus sat with a solemn and dignified brow while the study roared.

"I weally do not see what all this absurd cacklin' is about," he remarked. "It seems to me that you fellows grow more absolutely idiotic every day. Pway pass me the jam, Blake, and twy not to be a silly ass, deah boy."

Blake chuckled and passed the jam.

"I say, what did you fellows come to talk about?" he asked. "Is it a new wheeze? We were thinking of starting a row with you, Figgins, to amuse Dig while he was here, but——"

"Rows are off!" said Tom Merry. "It's an alliance against the Grammar School again, but on new lines. I suppose you chaps don't know anything about Greek history in the Fourth——"

"Eh? What's that?"

"Well, if you do, you know their old wheeze of having a lot of generals, who took the command turn and turn about——"

"Yes; and a nice hash they used to make of it. Of all the idiotic ideas——"

"That's what I thought, but the idea comes from the New House, so you can't expect much of a thing. Figgy proposes that we should organise a Co. on the same lines, and every fellow take his turn as leader."

"Oh, I see!" said Blake, changing his tone. "That alters the case. I think it's a jolly good idea!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It doesn't take you long to change your views. Still, I don't mind. Marmaduke Smythe is coming down to the New House for some weeks and he'll be in the Co. and take his turn as leader. The captaincy lasts for one day, turn and turn about for all of us, but unsuccessful generals get the sack on the spot. You start with me as captain——"

"Excuse me," said Figgins politely, "you start with me as captain——"

"Come, no rotting!" said Blake warmly. "Of course, I take first turn as captain——"

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard the pwoposal as extwemely impertinent. In the nature of things, I must be captain first, because——"

"Oh, you take a run, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to take a wun! You wequire a fellow of gweat tact and judgment for a thing of this sort, and so I——"

"Dry up, Gussy!" said Kerr. "I don't like to disagree with the rest, but I think that any reasonable fellow will admit that if there's a Scotchman in the party he ought to take the lead first, to show the others how to——"

"Nuff said, Kerr. Don't be an unspeakable Scot, old chap," said Lowther.

"Of course, if you let the thing go by merit, I ought to take the first——"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Suppose we leave it to chance," he said. "Write all the names on slips of paper and shove 'em in a bag. Then the one that's pulled out first is leader."

"Good!" said Figgins. "And he holds the command for one day, and then another name is drawn. It's a good idea, and I agree for one. I say, I wish Dig were staying at St. Jim's a bit, so that he could join the Co."

"Can't you manage it, Dig?" said Blake. "Write to your father and tell him we want you, or something."

"I have an ideah, deah boys," said D'Arcy, rushing into the breach, as it were, with a brilliant suggestion as usual. "Suppose we wire to his governah that he is dying; then he won't expect him home——"

There was a roar.

"Oh, you howling ass!" shouted Blake. "That wouldn't bring Sir Robert Digby bowling down here by the first express train, would it?"

"Weally, Blake, I nevah thought of that——"

"And what about the truth?" demanded Tom Merry severely.

"The twuth! I hope that no gentleman pwesent could possibly suspect me of thinkin' for a moment of departin' from the twuth," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Then what do you call——"

"Pway allow me to explain. Dig is dying to stay here, ain't you, Dig?"

"Yes, rather!" said Digby. "That's true enough, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah! Therefore, if we wired to Sir Wobert that Dig was dyin', that's what the telegwam would mean, Tom Mewwy. It would lead to a misunderstandin' on Sir Wobert's part, but that's part of the game. I hope I have made myself quite clear."

"Oh, yes; clear as mud!" said Tom Merry. "I think we're all agreed that Gussy's suggestion, like Gussy himself, is no good——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, with your permish, I——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! We've got to think of a way of keeping Digby here," said Tom Merry decidedly. "The simplest way would be to get him injured in a football match. If he were to get his leg broken, he couldn't go home."

"Thanks!" said Digby, with a wry face. "I'm not anxious to have my leg broken; but I'm stayin' over to-morrow, anyway, and we'll think of a plan. I'd like to stay and join the Co., and have a go at the Grammar cads, like anything!"

"Then we shall manage it somehow," exclaimed Blake, with a wave of the hand. "That's settled! Gentlemen, the campaign opens to-morrow! Figgy, old kid, when do you expect the great and only Marmaduke down here?"

"By the afternoon train to-morrow," said Figgins. "He's made it Wednesday because that's a half-holiday."

"Good! We'll all go to meet him."

"That's a good idea," assented Figgins, very pleased. "Marmaduke's a good sort, and we want to make much of him, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! Do you wemembah what a feahful wottah he was when he first came to St. Jim's—always talkin' about his governah's millions, and puttin' on no end of side? We cured him—"

"You needn't talk!" said Figgins. "We had to cure you, if you remember, Adolphus. Don't you recollect what an absolutely funny and screamingly idiotic ass you were?"

"No, Figgins; I weally do not wemembah anythin' of the kind," said D'Arcy, with stately dignity, "and I will thank you not to—"

"Rats! I say, we may fall in with some of the Grammar cads to-morrow," Figgins remarked. "We ought to have our leader all ready in case of rows. Let's get that drawing lots business over."

Tea was finished, and the juniors proceeded to draw lots. Ten names were placed on slips of paper in a bag, and then one was drawn out by Tom Merry.

Nine heads craned forward eagerly to look at it.

"Jack Blake!"

Nine juniors read out the name in tones of disappointment, one in a voice of exultation. Needless to say, the "one" was the chief of Study No. 6.

"Well, it's all in the game," said Figgins, with a look of resignation. "Blake's leader for to-morrow, and I only hope he won't make too bad a hash of it."

"Don't expect too much," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "We must look for a bungle of some kind, and then—"

"Perhaps you are looking for a thick ear, too!" suggested Blake pleasantly. "You're mighty near getting one, the pair of you!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard these comments as bein' bad form. Blake is leadah, and we are bound to follow him to the bittah end—unless he feels the wesponsibility too heavy; and in that case I should be perfectly willin' to relieve him of it, and lead—"

"I think I can manage the job," said Blake disdainfully. "I mayn't be any great shakes as a leader—"

"Quite right," said Kerr. "You won't be."

"But I shall have the consolation of knowing that I can do the trick better than anyone else in this Co.," said Blake. "That's enough. Now then, I'm going to issue orders—"

"You're going to do what?" demanded half a dozen rebellious voices.

"Issue orders!" said Blake firmly. "You will kindly listen to my instructions and remember them, or you will hear of it! What time does Marmaduke's train come in to-morrow, Figgins?"

"Three o'clock," said Figgins.

"Very well. You will all be ready at the gate of the school to follow me down to the village at half-past two," said Blake.

"Of all the confounded cheek—"

"Oh, play the game!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Blake is leader—for the time. We've got to take his orders."

"Yes, that's all very well; but—"

"No 'buts'!" said Blake incisively. "'Buts' are barred. All of you turn up at the gate at half-past two to-morrow afternoon, and mind you don't fail!"

And the Co., with some hesitation, agreed that they would.

CHAPTER 3.

Marmaduke Arrives—The Grammarians on the Warpath.

"PORTER!"

"Yessir!"

"Take care of my boxes, please. Don't let them be banged about like that. I am very particular about my boxes."

"Yessir!"

"You need not grin, porter! If you do I shall probably not give you the half-crown I intended to give you. Let me see, I think your name is Trumble?"

"Yessir!" said the porter of Rylcombe Station, becoming as grave as a judge instantly on the mention of the half-crown.

"Perhaps you remember me," said the youth who had just stepped from the train in Rylcombe Station, languidly. "I used to be at St. Jim's, you know."

Trumble stared at him.

"Yessir! I think I know you agin, sir. You are Master Smythe, sir."

"Exactly, Trumble! I remember your carrying my box the first time I came to St. Jim's, in the same careless way, and I was compelled to reprimand you at the time."

"Yessir!" said Trumble.

"As a matter of fact, you are a careless beast, Trumble. Lift the boxes gently on the trolley and you will not damage them."

"Certainly, sir," said Trumble, wondering whether it was worth the sacrifice of the half-crown to give Marmaduke Smythe a "oner" on his prominent nose.

"Is there a vehicle waiting for me from the school, Trumble?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Dear me! That is very careless of Dr. Holmes. Place my boxes on the hack, then, Trumble."

"Yessir!"

Marmaduke Smythe followed the porter from the station. Marmaduke was a well-fed youth, and extremely well dressed, and he had a ring on his finger, a gold watchchain of great thickness across his red-striped waistcoat, and diamond pins and studs and sleeve-links. He carried a gold-headed walking-cane, and the gold head of that cane usually reposed at the mouth of Marmaduke, as though he found it had a pleasant flavour.

Marmaduke followed Trumble out, and cast a disparaging eye upon the hack. It was a very ancient vehicle, and the horse had seen better days—a considerable time ago, too. The porter piled up the boxes, and the driver of the hack left off chewing a straw and climbed into his seat.

"What an excessively rascally-looking turn-out!" Marmaduke remarked. "Very different from the equipages of my father's establishment in Park Lane. I suppose I must be content with it, though. It is very curious that at least Figgins & Co. have not come to meet the train. By the way, I hear that a Grammar School has been opened in the vicinity of Rylcombe, Trumble."

"Yessir! And rare rows the boys has with the St. Jim's fellows, sir," said Trumble.

"Yes, so I have heard. I should like to see——"

"There's some of them, sir," said Trumble, pointing to three youths who were strolling past. "They're always in Rylcombe on a Wednesday, which is a half-holiday at the Grammar School. They're looking at you, sir."

Marmaduke looked at the boys with interest.

The trio were well known to the boys of St. Jim's—Frank Monk. the son

of the headmaster of the Grammar School, and his chums Lane and Carboy. They stared at Marmaduke, and Frank Monk, catching sight of the address on the boxes, uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, that's a new kid for St. Jim's!"

Lane and Carboy fixed their eyes upon Marmaduke.

"Looks a funny sort of a waster!" said Lane, loud enough for Marmaduke to hear. "Wonder where it was dug up?"

"Let's ask him," suggested Carboy. "I say, freak, where were you dug up?"

Marmaduke stared haughtily at the three Grammar School youths as they approached him. The three were ripe for mischief, and as a matter of fact they had been in quest of some St. Jim's fellows when they fell in with Marmaduke. The chance of ragging a new "kid" destined for the rival school was too good to be lost.

"Pray do not talk to me!" said Marmaduke, with his nose in the air.

"Porter, be quicker with those boxes! I desire to be gone."

"New kid for St. Jim's?" asked Frank Monk.

"No," said Marmaduke haughtily; "I am not a new kid, as you vulgarly express it—I am an old boy returning to the school for a period——"

"Oh, so you've been there before, have you?"

"Yes, I certainly have been there before."

"Rotten sort of hole, isn't it?" said Monk cheerfully.

"No, it is not a rotten sort of hole. But I shall not argue the point with persons of your description. Porter, here is your half-crown. Driver——"

"High and haughty, ain't we?" grinned Carboy. "Shall we teach this youthful bouncer a lesson, Frank?"

"As a matter of duty, I think we ought to do so," assented Frank Monk.

"He has evidently too much cheek to live. If he puts on airs like that he will come to a bad end, and it is only right and generous for persons of our description to give him a lesson."

"You will keep your distance," said Marmaduke. "Otherwise——"

"I like his waistcoat," Carboy remarked, giving Marmaduke a dig in the said waistcoat. "There's a chap at St. Jim's called D'Arcy who goes in for fancy waistcoats, but this one beats him hollow."

"Hands off, you rude rotter, or——"

"His hat is too small for such a swelled head," remarked Lane, knocking the hat off Marmaduke's cranium. "Sorry, kid! What do you mean by putting your hat in the way of my fist?"

Marmaduke swung up his cane, crimson with anger.

"I will give you——"

"Hallo, he's getting dangerous!" exclaimed Frank Monk, in mock alarm, and dragging Carboy and Lane back as he spoke. "Let us fly!"

And Frank raced off, and Carboy and Lane, as he had a firm grip on their arms, had to go with him. They disappeared in a moment, and Marmaduke gazed after them in surprise mingled with satisfaction.

"What are you up to, you duffer?" exclaimed Carboy, struggling to release himself. "Let's go back and wipe up the ground with that rotten bouncer!"

"What are you running away for?" howled Lane. "You're not afraid of that image, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then what are you running for?"

Frank stopped, out of breath, outside the Rylcombe tuck-shop. Then he condescended to explain.

"My dear kids, I know who that chap is, now I come to think of it. He used to belong to St. Jim's, and his name's Smythe—Marmaduke Smythe,

the son of the millionaire Smythe. He belongs to those three freaks who call themselves Figgins & Co. He used to be one of the Co. We're on the warpath now, and this is our chance! No good wiping up the ground with him. I've got a better wheeze than that."

"Oh, if you've got a wheeze——" said Carboy and Lane together, mollified.

"Of course I've got a wheeze!" said Frank Monk indignantly. "Do you think I would run away from that fat-faced whipper-snapper in dead earnest?"

"Well, I suppose not; but you've given him that impression."

"He won't keep the impression long," said Frank, with a chuckle. "Come on! We're going to wait for that hack in the lane. We couldn't carry out the plan in Rylcombe, but in the lane there won't be anyone to interfere. Call two or three of our fellows out of the tuck-shop, and let's be off!"

The two or three recruits were easily found. Half a dozen Grammarians hurried out of the village, and lay in ambush among the willows in Rylcombe Lane, half-way to St. Jim's. Monk kept a keen look-out, and the rattle of the old hack and the clattering of the ancient horse were soon heard on the hard road.

"Here they come! Mind you don't let the hack get past you."

"What ho!" answered the grinning Grammarians.

The Rylcombe hack came clattering by. Marmaduke, leaning back upon the ancient cushions inside, was thinking of his coming meeting with his old chums at St. Jim's. Marmaduke had come to St. Jim's in the first place a regular "bounder," with his head filled with ideas of his own importance, and the thought of Smythe senior's millions never absent from his mind. The juniors of St. Jim's had reformed him. But it was possible that since leaving the school Marmaduke had somewhat fallen from grace.

The adulation a millionaire's son naturally received from toadies of all sorts, the spoiling by a fond mother, and the obsequiousness of a tutor, had perhaps revived in Marmaduke some of the faults which the boys of St. Jim's had ruthlessly cut out of him while he sojourned among them.

Marmaduke was sucking the gold head of his cane and thinking of various things, when the hack came to a sudden halt. He looked out of the window with an annoyed expression.

"Driver, what do you mean by stopping? I told you that I was in a hurry to get to the school. You are actually causing me inconvenience—Dear me!" Marmaduke broke off. "It is the Grammar cads again!"

Two Grammarians were holding the horse; two more were bandying words with the driver, and warning him that he would be pulled down and ducked in the ditch if he used his whip on the boys at the horse's head.

Two—Monk and Carboy—were running to open the door of the brake. They had it open in a twinkling, and before Marmaduke realised what was happening, they had jerked him out into the road.

"Hands off!" shouted Marmaduke. "Hands off, you beastly cads! I'll have you——"

"Ha, ha! Driver, go on to the school, and deliver the property of the respected Army, and tell them he's not coming yet."

The driver hesitated. He didn't like to go on without his passenger, and yet he could certainly do nothing against six Grammarians. And it is quite possible that the trace of uppishness in Marmaduke's manner had put the driver's back up, and made him far from unwilling for the heir of millions to have a lesson.

"Look 'ere, I protest against this 'ere," he said.

"That's all right, chappy; protest as much as you like," said Monk

cheerfully. "Only drive on while you're doing it, or we shall turn your rattle trap over into the ditch."

"Yes, but look 'ere, young gents——"

"Turn him over in the ditch," shouted Monk.

The threat was enough. The driver whipped his horse, and the back lumbered on. Marmaduke made a frantic attempt to rush after it, but in vain. Monk and Carboy held him fast.

"Oh, come, don't be cruel!" said Monk pathetically. "You don't want to run away and leave us just as we are growing fond of you, do you, Marmy dear?"

"Let me go! I'll have you punished! I——"

"Nice sort of critter, ain't it?" said Carboy, in tones of disgust. "Wonder how the chaps there can stand it. I couldn't. Beastly rotter!"

"All the more reason why nice fellows like us should give him a lesson," said Monk. "Go into the field there, and catch your relation, Lane."

Lane looked puzzled.

"My relation! What are you driving at?"

"There he is—you can hear him."

Hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw!

The musical notes of a donkey sounded over the hedge. Lane turned red.

"Look here, Monk, if you're setting up as a funny man——"

"I'm not," said Monk. "I mean it. That's Farmer Jones's donkey, that he lets out for rides to the village kids. I've been on his back often enough. He's as easy to catch as this brother of his we've got here. Go and catch him."

"What for?"

"My dear chap, do as you're told. What's the good of being a giddy captain if you have to give reasons? Go and bring that donkey here."

"Oh, all right," said Lane. "Blessed if I see the game, though."

"You'll see it soon enough. Buck up!"

Lane disappeared through a gap in the hedge. Mr. Jones's donkey was a very tame and quiet creature, and would eat out of anybody's hand. Lane had no difficulty in catching him, and bringing him into the road. Meanwhile, Marmaduke, wondering what was to be done with him, was looking sullen.

Sullenness had been one of Marmaduke's failings in the old days, and it seemed to have revived during his life in the luxurious mansion of Smythe senior, in Park Lane. That may have had something to do with his papa sending him back to St. Jim's for a time, though Marmaduke himself did not suspect it.

"Now," said Frank Monk, addressing himself to Marmaduke, while the eager Grammarians hung on his words, "I daresay you know we're at war with the fellows of St. Jim's, and I really wish it happened to be Blake, or Figgins, or Tom Merry, that we had hold of now. But as it isn't, you'll serve our turn. We shall score over them just the same, and I fancy I can see their faces when you arrive at St. Jim's. I hope this lesson will do you good. I hear that you are a giddy millionaire, and have more sovereigns than other fellows have tanners. Perhaps that's what made you a rotter—for you are one."

"I shall have you punished if you——"

"Hark at the cad, chaps! Fancy Tom Merry taking it like that, or Figgins. The question is, ought we to larrup him before we send him home?"

"Yes," said Carboy, promptly. "A couple of dozen with a buckle belt,

well laid on, would do him no end of good. I can recommend it in such cases."

"If you dare to——"

"It's not a question of daring," said Monk. "We can do as we like. But we'll let you off the hiding, for I'm pretty certain that you'll get plenty at St. Jim's, if you carry on like this when you get there. Mount the millionaire, kids."

Monk's plan had dawned upon the Grammarians by this time. They chuckled joyously as they seized the vainly-wriggling Marmaduke, and swung him upon the donkey's back.

"Face to the tail," exclaimed Monk. "That's right. Neddy doesn't seem to quite know what to make of it. He's never had one of his own race on his back before."

"You impertinent ruffians——"

"Fasten his legs under Neddy's tummy. We mustn't allow the dear boy to fall off. Now, tie his hands, and run that cord under Neddy, too. Do you think you are safe now, Marmalade?"

"My name is Marmaduke——"

"My mistake. Do you think you are safe now? Here's another length of rope, so you may as well shove it on him, Carboy. Nothing like making sure. Has anybody got any paint?"

There was a general murmur of regret. Nobody had any paint. The opportunity of adorning the countenance of Marmaduke had to be lost. Done in red and green, as Carboy remarked, he would have presented a unique appearance.

"But there's plenty of mud in the ditch," suggested Lane. "Nice, thick, black mud, as good as black ink for ornamental purposes."

"Good idea," exclaimed Monk, slapping him heartily on the back. "Get some, old chap."

"Get it yourself," said Lane. "I can't stick my fingers in that stuff."

"I'll stick your head in it if you don't obey orders! Who's captain?"

"Oh, all right. Wish I hadn't spoken."

"Well, you do speak too much as a rule. That's right—plaster his face so that his dearest friend won't know him. They'll have to scrape that off before they can kiss their dearest Marmaduke. Jump on his silk hat, somebody. As he's a millionaire he can easily get another. Make it as much like a concertina as you can, and stick it on the back of his head."

"You—you beasts—— I'll—I'll——"

"There!" said Monk, stepping back a pace and surveying the Grammarians' handiwork with great satisfaction. "There, I think that's about as near perfect as we could possibly get. Are you satisfied, Marmaduke?"

"You—you—you horrid rotten cad——"

"Nice way he has of speaking, hasn't he? I've half a mind to let him have that thrashing after all. He needs it. Never mind, let him go. He looks too funny to live, and I know the Saints will be pleased to see him. Lead Neddy on. We'll send him in at the gate of St. Jim's and he can trot round the quadrangle, and show the kids there that the Grammar School is on the warpath, and can knock spots off them any time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians roared at the idea. It seemed too funny for words to send Marmaduke right up to the doors of St. Jim's in that style. It would be a blow at the prestige of the college which would fully discount the defeat inflicted upon the Grammarians by Tom Merry & Co. some time back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, I won't have it!" roared Marmaduke. "Release me immediately, you cads! Let me get off this brute! I'll give you a sovereign each—"

"Hark at the rotten money-monger," exclaimed Monk, in deep disgust. "I shall really have to change my mind about this thrashing. Anybody got a stick?"

"Let me down! I won't go to St. Jim's like this—"

"Seems to me you've got no choice in the matter. Forward, Neddy!" The donkey, surrounded by the laughing crowd of Grammarians, trotted off in the direction of the school. The youngsters kept pace with him, and Marmaduke's furious protests were lost in their yells of laughter. St. Jim's came in sight, and right up to the ancient college swept the Grammarians with their prisoner.

CHAPTER 4.

Blake Maintains Discipline.

AND meanwhile, where were Blake and his merry men?

Blake, having been duly appointed leader of the Co., had given strict injunctions to his followers to be at the school gates at half-past two, ready to march down to the village station to meet the train Marmaduke was coming by.

But discipline was not yet firmly established in the St. Jim's forces.

Jack Blake arrived at the gate at half-past two exactly, reaching the rendezvous as the clock was chiming out the half-hour. He had cut across from the gym, to be there in time, but when he arrived he found nobody else there.

Herries came along a few minutes later. Blake gave him an indignant glance.

"You're three minutes late, Herries."

"Am I?" said Herries. "I'm sorry. The others don't seem to be here, so I can't see that it matters very much."

"Where's D'Arcy?" asked Blake, with a sniff.

"He was polishing his silk hat when I left him, and he said he would come along in a few minutes. He's put on a new topper to meet Marmaduke."

"I'll new topper him!" said Blake wrathfully. "I'll show you bouncers who's captain! Let him come along in a new topper, that's all."

Sure enough, five minutes later, Blake espied the swell of the School House coming up to the gate, clad in his most gorgeous raiment, with a shiny silk topper set a little on one side of his head in a decidedly rakish manner.

It was difficult to say whether the shininess of the silk topper, the gorgeous hue of the waistcoat, the brilliancy of the boots, or the spotlessness of the high collar, was the most conspicuous of D'Arcy's many beauties. But Blake looked upon the swell of St. Jim's with an eye of disfavour.

"You're eight minutes late for the rendezvous," he said grimly.

"I am weally sowwy, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "But you see, I had to get myself up in decent style to greet our fwiend Marmaduke. He comes fwiom a vevy swell place, you know, and he weally keeps up a first-class appearance, and as he lives in town he has the advantage of keepin' up with the vevy latest fashion. You see, we must keep our end up as much as we can, deah boy."

"Nobody is allowed to be late for a rendezvous while I am captain," said Blake. "Not without severe penalties."

And with a calm and considerate air he knocked the silk hat off D'Arcy's head, and it splashed into a puddle of muddy water.

Arthur Augustus gave a shriek of anguish.

"Oh, Blake, you brute! You howwid wuffian! My new silk toppah!"

"Sorry," said Blake, kindly but firmly. "Nobody is allowed to stop and put a silk topper on when I order him to the front. Discipline must be maintained. Where are those other rosters? They're not in sight."

Blake anxiously scanned the quadrangle. It was close on a quarter to three, and yet nothing could be seen of the chums of the Shell, or of Figgins & Co. But a couple of minutes later Tom Merry was sighted, scudding across the quad as if he were on the cinder-path. Blake clenched his fists and looked warlike.

"What do you mean by being late?" he demanded, as Tom Merry came up breathless.

"Sorry," panted Tom. "That brute Schneider spotted me, and kept me for a quarter of an hour. I believe he knew I had an appointment."

"Oh, if that's it, you're excused," said Blake, mollified. "You can't get away when a master collars you, I admit. Hallo, here's Digby. What makes you late for the appointment, Dig?"

"Sorry," said Digby, coming strolling up with his hands in his pockets. "Young Curly has been showing me his white mice— Ow!"

Blake's right had suddenly lashed out, and Digby received it on his nose, and he sat down in the puddle where D'Arcy's silk hat had reposed. The swell of the School House was standing near, mournfully wiping his silk topper with a cambric handkerchief. Digby's flop into the puddle sent up a splash of muddy water, which spotted all over the beautiful and immaculate attire of Arthur Augustus.

"Ow!" repeated Digby, sitting in the puddle and staring up at Blake as if he thought the chief of Study No. 6 had suddenly gone mad.

"You howwid ass!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You have splashed my twousahs."

"Oh, blow your trousers!" said Digby, getting up. "What did you do that for, Blake? Have you gone right off your silly rocker, or are you hunting for a black eye?"

"Neither," said Blake severely. "I'm maintaining discipline. Everybody who comes late for the rendezvous gets a dot on the nose."

"Look here, I'm not going to—"

"'Nuff said. Here comes Lowther. I wonder what's detained him?"

Monty Lowther could be seen making his way towards the gateway. He was walking easily, with his hands in his pockets, and apparently did not consider his unpunctuality a matter of moment at all. That got Blake's back up at once. It really looked as if the Shell boy did not much respect a captain selected from the Fourth Form.

"You are late, Lowther," said Blake, with ominous calm, while the others grinned and looked on. "What made you late, may I inquire?"

"Blessed if I know," said Lowther cheerfully. "I expect I'm late because I'm late, or else I'm not early because I'm not early, or else— O-o-o-o-o-h!"

Blake's right came out like lightning, and Monty Lowther staggered against the gate, and slid down to a sitting position.

"Every kid who is late for the rendezvous gets a dot on the nose," explained Blake.

"Does he?" yelled Lowther, jumping up. "Then the captain gets two or three dots on his chivvy in exchange."

And Lowther rushed at Blake. But Herries and Tom Merry held him back.

"Discipline must be maintained," said Tom Merry. "I agree with Blake. We're all going to be captain in turn, and we shall expect to be obeyed."

"Let me go! I'm going to wipe up the ground with him."

"No, you're not. Quiet, Monty. Blake is quite right."

"Hallo, here's Manners," said Blake. "Well, Manners, you're nearly twenty-five minutes late for the meeting. What's the reason?"

"I thought I'd better write out an impot first, and get it done—
Ow!"

Manners fell to a right-hander on the nose. He sprang up again, and went for Blake without waiting to ask questions. They closed and staggered to and fro in mortal strife.

But Monty Lowther, having been calmed, Tom Merry and Herries seized Manners and dragged him off Blake, and jammed him against the gate, while they explained to him that discipline had to be maintained. Blake set his collar straight, and looked out for Figgins and Co. Figgins and Kerr were coming from the direction of the New House, whistling as they came.

"You're late," said Blake, with forced calm. "Any explanation?"

Figgins was inclined to treat the question facetiously. So was Kerr. They looked at each other with exaggerated gravity.

"We are late, Kerr," said Figgins.

"We are, Figgy," said Kerr.

"Why are we late, Kerr?"

"Perhaps it's because we're not early, Figgy."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder, Blake. Perhaps it's because we're not early.
We— Oh!"

"Oh, oh!" howled Kerr.

Left and right Blake hit out, and Figgins and Kerr rolled on the cold ground. In a twinkling they were on their feet and rushing at Blake. But the Terrible Three rushed between. Whatever Manners and Lowther might think of their own treatment, they were more than ready to back up a School House fellow against New House rebels. Figgins and Kerr were promptly collared.

"Peace, my infants," said Tom Merry soothingly. "Discipline must be maintained. Blake is quite right. You've got off cheaply."

"Do you think we're going to put up—"

"Yes, I do. You'll have the same privilege when you're captain. Peace, my children. Now, where is Fatty Wynn?"

Figgins rubbed his nose, and looked daggers at Blake. But he allowed himself to be pacified. Perhaps he was thinking of the time when he would be captain, and would be on the alert for any neglect of discipline on Blake's part.

"Wynn! Oh, he's playing diablo. He's caught the bobbin ninety-eight times, and he says he can't leave off. He can't come."

"Can't come, can't he?" exclaimed Blake wrathfully. "We'll see whether he can't come. We're all here, except Fatty. We'll go and fetch him. Follow your leader!"

"But look here, Blake—"

"Obey orders. What's the use of being a blessed captain if your orders are not obeyed? Follow me, and shut up!"

"Quite right," said Tom Merry. "Follow your leader."

"I suppose——" began Kerr.

"Do your supposing presently," rapped out Blake, "and come on!"

The Co., though with rebellious looks, followed Blake. Nine juniors marched up to the New House, and marched in, and Blake led the way up to Figgins's study. He knew the way well. The door was open, and the juniors, crowded in the passage, looked in and saw Fatty Wynn hard at work. His hands held the sticks, and his eyes were fixed upon the spinning "devil," which he was tossing and catching with astonishing rapidity.

"Hundred and fifty-five, hundred and fifty-six," he said, in a sort of chant.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "That's a record for the New House."

"Hundred and fifty-seven."

"Wynn, how dare you play diabolò instead of coming to the rendezvous?" demanded Blake.

Fatty Wynn did not even look at him. His plump face was red with exertion, and his forehead wet with perspiration. His eyes were on the "devil."

"Hundred and fifty-eight——"

"Stop that, Wynn, and——"

"Hundred and fifty-nine——"

"Chuck it I say, and——"

"Hundred and sixty——"

Blake made a dive forward. The "devil" dropped to the floor, and Fatty Wynn gave a fearful yell as Blake snatched at the string.

"You've spoiled my record—you—you——"

Blake did not argue. He hit out, and Fatty Wynn sat down on the study carpet.

"Discipline has to be maintained," said Blake. "The meeting was for half-past two, and now it's nearly three. Come along. Marmaduke will be at the school before we've started to meet him."

Fatty Wynn growled wrathfully.

"You've spoiled my——"

"Rats! Come along," said Figgins; "Blake's quite right. When I'm captain, just you see how I'll keep you lot in order. March!"

"Not much good going now," remarked Manners, as they left the New House in a body. "Marmay's train has been in more than a quarter of an hour."

"Who's giving orders here?" asked Blake politely.

"Oh, rats! I only remarked——"

"Then don't remark. I'll do all the remarking that's required. Come along, and we'll meet Marmaduke on the road, anyway. How do we know that those Grammar cads haven't got hold of him. If they saw him in Rylcombe, that's just what they would do."

The ten juniors marched down to the gate. As they reached it, there was a roar from the road outside, yells and cheers and laughter. Blake gave a jump.

"That's the Grammar cads. What's up?"

"Let me go! I won't go in like this——"

"Marmaduke's voice!" yelled Figgins. "They've got him."

The next moment a startling sight burst upon the view of the amazed and indignant Co.

CHAPTER 5.

The Arrival of Marmaduke.

MARMADUKE!"

The juniors of St. Jim's shouted out the name in a kind of chorus.

The donkey urged on by the shouts and yells of the Grammarians, came careering up to the gates of St. Jim's. The figure seated upon its back, with his face to the tail, would never have been recognised as Marmaduke but for the well-known voice. When the movements of the donkey allowed the face to be seen by glimpses, the thick coating of black mud upon it rendered the features indistinguishable. And the battered tile, stuck on the back of the unfortunate rider's head, did not look much like the headgear of the heir of millions.

The sight was so utterly ridiculous that some of the Saints could not help grinning. The Grammarians, catching sight of the crowd in the gateway, gave a yell of defiance. Monk rushed the donkey right up to the gate, and gave him a smack that sent him clattering through the crowd, and the Saints, taken by surprise as they were by the whole occurrence, slithered to right and left, and the donkey and his burden tore through. That was just what Monk wanted, to send Marmaduke into the quadrangle, and display his plight to all St. Jim's.

But Tom Merry and his chums were quite as well aware as Monk was of what a terrible blow that would be to their prestige.

In a moment Tom Merry recovered himself.

"Catch the moke! Quick!"

The Terrible Three made a rush at the donkey. Figgins and Kerr were after them like a shot. Under ordinary circumstances, the catching of Neddy was a simple matter. But the rapid run, and the wild yells of the Grammarians, had startled Neddy almost out of his asinine wits, and for once in his career he was shy and skittish. He ran and dodged, and trotted away at a pace the boys could hardly equal, right towards the School House.

Tom Merry and his companions chased the donkey desperately. Marmaduke, terribly jolted in his uneasy position, was calling for help.

Blake and some of the Co. had rashly issued from the gate to attack the Grammarians. But Frank Monk and his friends, as they were outnumbered, had retreated promptly, quite satisfied with the success of the "jape." They tore off to the Grammar School to spread the tale, and throw their schoolfellows into hysterics with it. Blake and the rest hurried in at the gate, and a woeful sight met their gaze.

The donkey, with Marmaduke still sitting face to the tail, was careering wildly round the quadrangle. Tom Merry and half-a-dozen juniors were chasing him with energy, but Neddy showed a facility in dodging that would have made the fortune of a Rugby three-quarter. Neddy was frightened, and Neddy did not mean to be caught.

The quadrangle at St. Jim's was generally pretty lively on a half-holiday, and the masters and prefects usually turned a judiciously deaf ear to noises proceeding therefrom. But it was impossible for the present disturbance to pass unheeded. Seniors and juniors crowded out of both houses, from the gym and from the football field, to watch the wild antics of Neddy, and the wild-looking figure on his back. Yells of laughter greeted the unhappy Marmaduke wherever the vagaries of Neddy carried him.

"Catch him!" shouted Blake. "Why don't you catch him?"

"Why don't you?" bawled Lowther. "It's more in your line. Talk to him in his own language. You can do it."

"Head him off!"

"Collar him!"

"Now's your chance!"

"We shall have the doctor out soon."

If the doctor had been stone-deaf, he must have heard the terrific din. As a matter of fact, he was already looking out of his study window in wonder and annoyance. Mr. Railton, the house-master of the School House, came out, looking very exasperated, and Mr. Ratcliff, the head of the New House, put his head out of the door, with a scowl upon his thin, sour face. The two housemasters took the scene in different ways. Mr. Ratcliff's scowl grew blacker, while Mr. Railton of the School House burst into an involuntary laugh.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What can this mean—who can that strange-looking person be? Stop that donkey immediately, boys."

"We're trying to, sir."

"Stop that brute!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff, coming out of the New House. "Do you hear? Who has dared to play this rascally trick? Stop that brute at once!"

The boys tried to stop him. But most of them were laughing too much to be able to effect anything. And Neddy was still apparently under the impression that he was playing Rugby, and dodging an extra large number of opposing backs.

Mr. Ratcliff, aflame with anger, rushed forth to stop the careering donkey himself. He planted himself in Neddy's path, and made a valiant clutch at him. What happened next he never quite knew. Something butted him somewhere, he thought, but it was not quite clear. What was clear was that he was sitting down in the quadrangle in a very dazed condition without knowing how he got there.

"Stop him, Kildare!"

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had come off the football field in his playing garb, and was running a neck-and-neck race with Neddy. He got a grip at last on Neddy's neck, and by sheer force brought him to a halt. Then a crowd of boys closed up round the captured donkey, and he was easily secured.

Neddy stood panting, and gasping, and blowing, and trembling in every limb, apparently in fearsome expectation of a beating. And he would have got one, too, if Gore had had his way. Gore had received a kick in his attempts to stop the donkey, and he was prepared to return the painfulness of it with interest. He was one of the first to reach Neddy, and he whirled up a big stick to take summary vengeance. But before the blow could fall, Tom Merry jerked him away, and the stick swept the empty air. Gore staggered and nearly fell, and then turned furiously upon Tom Merry.

"Hands off, you cad! I'm going to lick that brute——"

"Not at all," said Tom Merry cheerfully; "or if you do I'll lick you."

"He kicked me——"

"You got in his way then."

"I'm going to——"

Gore rushed at Neddy spitefully with his stick. But Kildare caught him by the collar this time, before Tom Merry could interfere, and slung him away.

"Enough of that, Gore. Don't be a brute."

"He kicked me——"

"Serve you right. Clear back!"

There was no opposing the captain of the school. Gore slunk back scowling. Mr. Ratcliff, looking very dusty and ill-tempered, reached the spot. Kildare was soothing the frightened donkey, and Tom Merry and Blake were trying to unfasten Marmaduke. But that was not easy. The Grammarians had well secured their prisoner.

"What does this mean?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "Who are you, sir? How dare you come into the quadrangle of this college?"

It was a ridiculous question, for it was plain enough that Marmaduke had not come into the quad in that state of his own accord. But Mr. Ratcliff was too angry to be reasonable. Indeed, he seldom was reasonable.

"I'm Marmaduke Smythe——"

"Smythe! Do you mean to say that you are the boy who was coming to this school, whose boxes arrived half an hour ago? How dare you come here like this?"

"Do you think I could help it?" hooted Marmaduke.

"Don't address me like that! How came you in this state?"

"I was collared by a lot of beastly ruffians as I was coming to the school. They took me out of the hack and tied me up on the donkey."

"Infamous!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, his wrath taking a new direction. "Who were the rascals? Could you identify the dastardly scoundrels?"

"Yes, of course I could. I——"

"It seems to me that this is some boyish joke," said Mr. Railton, coming up. "It is a rough sort of joke, but I think a mistake would be made in regarding it as an outrage."

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him coldly. There was no love lost between the two house-masters at St. Jim's.

"I think it is an outrage," said the New House master tartly. "If Smythe can give the names of the ruffians, their punishment shall be secured."

"I can give you their names—— Ow, ow, ow!"

"What do you mean by making those ridiculous noises, Smythe?"

"Tom Merry pinched me, sir."

"Take more care in unfastening that cord, Merry, not to hurt Smythe. Is it very tight?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry demurely.

"Now, Smythe, give me the names of the authors of this dastardly outrage," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, with a side glance of half-concealed defiance at Mr. Railton. "They shall be found out and severely punished. Were they village boys?"

"No, sir, they belonged to the—— Ow, ow, o-o-o-o-h!"

"Is that impertinence, Smythe?" asked Mr. Ratcliff sternly.

"No, sir. That cord pinched me again."

"Will you be more careful, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. I was very careful, sir, very careful indeed."

"Then, as you are so clumsy, step aside and let Figgins unfasten Smythe. Now, Smythe, you were telling me——"

"Yes, sir. The brutes belonged to the—— Oh, my eye! Oh!"

"Smythe!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. Mr. Railton concealed a smile.

"I couldn't help it, sir," mumbled Marmaduke. "That cord Figgins is unfastening pinched my leg horribly. It felt just like a finger and thumb gripping my calf."

"Figgins, be more careful. It is cruel and inconsiderate to hurt Smythe."

"I can't be more careful than I am, sir."

"Then leave that to Blake. Blake, unfasten that cord, please."

"Certainly, sir," said Blake cheerfully, and, exchanging a wink with

Figgins as he took his place, and began industriously to unfasten the cords which secured Marmaduke to the donkey.

"Now, Smythe, I am waiting to hear——"

"I've been trying to tell you, sir. The rotters who tied me up like this were not boys from the village, they belonged to—— O-o-o-o-o-o-h!"

"Smythe!"

"It was Blake, sir. He hurt my leg fearfully."

"It seems to me," exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff furiously, as he caught a grin on several faces—"it seems to me that this is a plot, to prevent Smythe from telling me the names of the ruffians who assaulted him! Stand back! I will release Smythe myself. I——"

"Pray, what does this mean?"

It was the voice of the doctor. The crowd parted respectfully for the Head of St. Jim's. He was looking very grave.

"This is Smythe, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff. "He has been tied up in this manner by some roughts, whose names he can tell us. I think——"

"Allow me," said Mr. Railton, quietly but firmly. "I think this is another outcome, sir, of the rivalry between this school and another in the neighbourhood, and that inquiry into the matter will lead to no good result."

Dr. Holmes understood. He nodded his head slowly.

"I quite comprehend, Mr. Railton. I really think that this is carrying a jest much too far, but I know that my boys have not been blameless in the matter—and in fact have—have—really——"

"Licked the Grammarians lots of times," sir," suggested Tom Merry.

"Ahem! I do not want to cause any ill-feeling between the schools. Unless, therefore, Smythe himself complains of ill-usage, I shall not——"

Mr. Ratcliff bit his lip.

"But I do com——" began Marmaduke hotly. "O-o-o-o-o-o-h!" It was a wail of anguish. "Someone stuck a pin in me!"

"Indeed," said the Head, who saw a pin in Blake's hand, but affected to see nothing, and he looked very coldly at Marmaduke—"indeed, Smythe! Figgins, you had better unfasten Smythe, and take him to the New House. He is to share your study there, as when he was previously at this school. Let him be cleaned as soon as possible. He is in a shocking state. If he then wishes to complain to me of the treatment he has received, he can come to my study."

"Certainly, sir."

Kildare took out his pocket-knife and cut Marmaduke loose. The doctor, with a sign to the two house-masters to accompany him, left the spot. Mr. Ratcliff went very unwillingly. Marmaduke was jerked off the donkey's back. And while a couple of juniors rode Neddy away to take him back to his native pastures, Figgins and Co. escorted Marmaduke into the New House. They shoved him into a bath-room, and told him to clean himself, and when he had done so to come to the study. Which Marmaduke did. He came into Figgy's study ten minutes later looking much more presentable, and he was greeted with a chilling silence and stony stares,

CHAPTER 6. Marmaduke is Left Out.

BLAKE and his three chums looked into Tom Merry's study in the School House. The Terrible Three had taken off their overcoats, and had just decided to go over to the New House to see Figgins when the chums of Study No. 6 looked in.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "The walk to Rylcombe's off, as you fellows made

such a muck of it by turning up late. What do you think of Marmaduke?"

"Got some of his pleasant old ways back again, apparently," Tom Merry remarked.

Blake nodded with a grin.

"Yes, he was a howling bounder when he first came to St. Jim's, but we cured him. I suppose the old plutocratic surroundings have spoiled him again, and he wants another cure. He'll get it. I don't envy him his next talk with Figgins. But we're going over to the New House to see about it. Come along!"

"Eh?" said the Terrible Three simultaneously.

"I said come along," said Blake. "Are you deaf all of a sudden?"

"Yes, you said 'Come along!' and it was like your cheek."

"Cheek! What do you mean? Ain't I your leader, and isn't it my place to give orders?" Blake demanded rather excitedly.

"No, you're not our leader, and it's not your place to give orders," answered Lowther categorically. "You know the articles of agreement."

"Of course I do. Each chap takes command for one day—"

"Unless he proves himself incapable, and then he gets the order of the kick," said Manners. "That's the agreement, Blake."

Blake turned red.

"Do you mean to say that I—"

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "We agreed that a defeat was to be accounted a proof of incapacity to lead, and haven't we been defeated by the Grammarians since you started in life as a general?"

"Why, you horrid rascals, it was all your fault! If you had turned up at the rendezvous—if you had been in time—if we—"

"Oh, go easy with the ifs! Anybody can make excuses. Excuses are all very well, but they don't alter facts. We've been defeated by the Grammar cads."

"While you were leader, Jack Blake—"

"Therefore, it's perfectly plain—"

"That you're no good, and you get the order of the boot."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "I admit that Blake has causes of complaint on his side, but there's no gettin' over the fact that we have suffahed a defeat while undah his leadership, and Blake is deposed accordingly."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "I agree with Gussy. Don't you, Dig?" And Digby nodded.

"Well," said Blake, containing his wrath with a great effort, "I think you're a lot of silly asses, but I'm not going to kick against the rules. We'll see what Figgins says. Come on, and let's get to the New House!"

The seven lads crossed the quadrangle. Many glances, more or less hostile, were cast at them by the New House juniors as they entered the rival building. But they were not interfered with. When the Terrible Three were allied with Study No. 6 they made too strong a team to be lightly tackled.

Tom Merry announced his arrival by a thump on Figgins's door, and Blake backed it up with a kick, with the result that the door, which was on the latch, flew violently open.

Marmaduke had entered the study only a minute before, and he was standing uneasily, looking in a very dubious way at Figgins & Co., who still preserved a chilly silence.

The door as it flew open smote Marmaduke on the back, and he pitched forward and fell into the arms of Figgins.

"My word!" gasped Marmaduke. "What—why—how—"

Figgins jerked him off, and the heir of millions staggered against the table and slid down to a sitting posture on the floor.

"Sorry," said Tom Merry, with his sunny smile, as he came in. "Didn't see you, Marmaduke."

"I don't see how you could see me, when the beastly door was shut," said Marmaduke, picking himself up. "I've been very unlucky to-day, and I don't get any sympathy. There's Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn staring at me as if I were a stuffed dummy, instead of an old chum come back to the school."

And Marmaduke's expression as he said this rather softened Figgins & Co.

"Well, we're sorry," said Figgins. "It can't be helped. Come in, you fellows. I suppose you've come to have a look at Marmaduke and see what's to be done with him?"

"Yaas, wathah. We considah——"

"Wait a bit," said Tom Merry. "You remember the rules of the Co., Figgy. A defeat counts as a proof of bad generalship, and a bad general is chucked out on the spot. We're agreed that Blake gets the order of the push. Are you?"

"Rather!" said Figgins & Co., with one voice.

"Oh, very well," said Blake, with a sniff; "I don't mind. Let's get a new chief, and if I don't make him toe the line, you can use my napper for a football."

"We'd better draw lots again," said Digby. "It's hard cheese on Blake, but the game's the game. Shall we put down Marmaduke's name?"

"Of course you will!" exclaimed Marmaduke hotly. "I'm one of the Co., confound you! What do you mean, Digby?"

There was an uncomfortable silence.

Marmaduke looked round the study.

"I came expecting to find friends here," he said, with rather a shake in his voice. "I didn't think you would have forgotten an old chum so soon. But if you don't want me——"

"It's not that," said Figgins hastily. "All the chaps can tell you how we've looked forward to your coming, and the larks we've planned to have together. But——"

"But——" said Kerr, shaking his head.

"But——" said Fatty Wynn, and he wrinkled his brows.

"But what? Don't beat about the bush. I've got to stay here for some weeks now, while my pater is away, or blessed if I wouldn't clear out this minute!"

"Well, the fact is——" said Figgins awkwardly.

"Look here," said Tom Merry, in his frank, direct way. "It's a thorny subject, but it's no good fooling over it. Let's have it out. You acted like a cad to-day, Marmaduke."

Marmaduke Smythe turned crimson.

"Yaas, wathah. A weally wotten cad, you know!"

"You were going to give away the Grammarians," said Figgins. "You know old Ratcliff. He's always looking for trouble, and he'd been only too glad of a chance to make bad blood with the Grammar School masters. He was simply itching for an excuse to send a letter of complaint to Dr. Monk, and get the chaps flogged for tying you on the donkey."

"Serve 'em right," said Marmaduke.

"Oh, if that's how you look at it, I've no more to say," said Figgins coldly. "A nice set of sneaks the Grammarians would have thought us. Why, we've given them the kybosh many a time, but do you think they've gone sneaking to their masters and complaining?"

"Not a bit of it," said Blake. "They stood the racket like men and decent fellows, and never whined when they got it in the neck."

"We had to stop your peaching," said Figgins. "You were hurt, and it served you right. I tell you plainly we'd have wrung your neck if you'd succeeded in giving the Grammarians away over that matter."

Marmaduke's face had gradually been growing sullen during this little lecture. He probably realised that he was in the wrong, but the obstinacy latent in his nature would not allow him to admit it.

His brow was dark as silence fell again in the study.

"I don't see it like that," he replied. "I was used in a ruffianly way, and I'm not going to stand it. I——"

"Very well," said Figgins quietly. "I don't want to argue about it. You've forgotten what St. Jim's is like, I suppose; and, anyway, you've forgotten what we are like if you think we are going to chum up with a fellow who tells tales."

"I don't tell tales! I——"

"What do you call it, then?"

"Well, I hadn't time to think; and I was savage, and——"

"You had no right to be savage. You ought to take the thing in a good spirit. We've given the Grammarians worse things than that to stand, and Carboy or Monk or Lane never showed a bad temper over it. We made them write out and sign a document acknowledging us to be the top school, and they haven't cut up rough over even that. The fact is, old fellow, that you're a spoiled bounder, and you——"

"If you call me a bounder, Figgins——"

"Well, what will you do?" said Figgins disdainfully.

Marmaduke clenched his fists. His face was dark with anger, his eyes burning. His wilful and wayward nature was quite roused by this lecturing. But Tom Merry pushed him back.

"None of that!" Tom exclaimed. "It hasn't come to that, I suppose, between such chums as we've always been? Marmaduke can't come into the Co. unless he turns over a new leaf, that's pretty clear. But there's no need to quarrel."

Marmaduke turned sulkily towards the door.

"Hang the Co.!" he said rudely. "I don't want to come into it! Hang the Co., and hang you!"

And he went out of the study and slammed the door violently.

The chums looked at one another uncomfortably.

"That's rather a disappointment," said Figgins. "He can't be in the Co. I rather wish he had never come to the school. It's—it's beastly!"

"Oh, I dare say he'll see things in a better light in time," said Tom Merry. "It would be a miracle if a millionaire's son didn't become a bit of a snob, with rotters of all kinds flattering him and fawning on him all the time. I dare say we shall cure him. We did it once, and we can do it again. But now to business. Who's to be leader?"

"I'll write out the slips," said Blake.

The names, as before, were put into the bag, and one was drawn. The name upon the lucky slip was Montague Lowther.

Lowther swelled visibly.

"Any orders?" asked Blake, with mock humility.

"Yes," said Lowther, with his nose in the air. "All of you be ready to come out in a quarter of an hour, and mind you're not late. Meet me at the School House steps."

"What's the game?"

"I'll tell you that when the time comes," said Lowther. "We're going on the warpath, that's all. Just you turn up. You know what will happen to your nose if you're late, Blake!"

And the meeting in Figgins's study broke up.

CHAPTER 7.

The Generalship of Monty Lowther—Caught in the Trap.

MONTY LOWTHER did not have to complain of late-comers at the rendezvous. The quick way with laggards which Blake had adopted, it was Lowther's intention to imitate, and the Co. knew it, and acted accordingly. Lowther, as he came down the steps of the School House, was accompanied by Tom Merry and Manners, and he found Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. waiting for him.

"Glad to see you all here," said Lowther, glancing round, and rather disappointed because there was no excuse for dropping on Blake. "Come along!"

"Whither bound?" asked Digby.

"Follow your leader!" said Lowther haughtily.

They followed their leader. Lowther led the way out of the school gates and took the road to Rylcombe.

"But what's the programme?" demanded Tom Merry.

The great chief of the Co. condescended to explain.

"We're going to get our own back on those rotters!" he said. "Although Marmaduke isn't admitted to the Co., still he's one of us, and that joke was one in the eye to all of us. We're going to get our own back."

"Yes, but how? We all want to do that," said Blake. "But what's the wheeze?"

"We shall find them at the tuck-shop."

"We may find twenty of them!"

"If you're afraid of the Grammar cads, Blake——"

"Who says I'm afraid?" demanded Blake, looking warlike.

"Don't answer me back! I'm chief of this Co., and I'm going to maintain discipline. You've shown me the way yourself," said Lowther, with a grin.

"If I have any insubordination there's a dot on the boko waiting for the insubordinator——"

"For the—the what?" howled Blake.

"The insubordinator!" said Lowther defiantly. "I dare say you've never heard that word?"

"You're right—I haven't."

"Well, you kids in the Fourth Form have a lot to learn."

"More than you bounders in the Shell can teach us, I think! And if you start inventing long words that you don't understand—— Ow!"

Blake sat down in the dusty road as Lowther's fist came with a heavy thump upon his nose. He jumped up in a fury.

"Stand back," said Lowther coolly. "That's to maintain discipline. No member of this Co. is allowed to call his leader a bounder."

Blake contained his wrath. It was only fair—he had set the fashion himself. He rubbed his nose ruefully.

"Oh, all right, you bound—I mean, all right," he said hastily. "Just you wait till my turn comes round again, that's all!"

The juniors marched on, and soon came in sight of Rylcombe. There was a frown of thought upon the brow of Monty Lowther. Blake murmured to Herries that the Chief had no idea of what to do, and was only leading

them on with an air of solemnity to keep up appearances. And Herries nodded.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, who overheard the remark. "You are quite wight, Blake. In my opinion, Lowthah has not the faintest ideah of the best thing to do, and is simply leadin' us on a wild-goose chase, don't you know."

Monty Lowther pretended not to hear the remark. He walked straight on towards the village tuck-shop. Some of the Grammarians were pretty certain to be encountered there on a half-holiday; but whether Lowther had any definite plan in his mind was a secret. Probably he had none; but, having assumed the post of leader, he could not allow his term of generalship to pass without being signalised in some way.

They came in sight of the tuck-shop, and Lowther grinned with satisfaction. Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the heroes of the Grammar School, were leaning against the big tree outside, talking, and not another Grammarian was in sight.

Lowther turned a triumphant glance upon his followers.

"Well, what do you say now?" he exclaimed.

"You didn't know they were here alone," said Blake.

"Rats! Here they are, and here we are, and we've got them in a cleft stick. We'll make them sing small now! Surround 'em!"

The St. Jim's juniors rushed on.

The Grammarian trio saw them coming, but betrayed no symptoms of alarm. Carboy picked up his glass of lemonade from the little table under the tree and sipped it. Monk went on eating chocolate-creams.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "There's a nerve for you!"

Tom Merry was looking suspicious.

"Looks to me like a trap," he said. "Do you think it possible——"

He paused.

"Think what's possible?" asked Blake.

"Well, it looks suspicious. I'm not leader, but if I were, I should suspect that they had had a scout out on the road, and knew we were coming, and——"

"And what?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"And laid a little trap for us," said Tom Merry. "That's what it looks like to me. Those three bounders wouldn't be so jolly cool about it if they hadn't help near."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther, unwilling, like most leaders, to confess that an inferior officer saw things more clearly than he did. "Rats to all that! Come on!"

The Co. obeyed. With a rush they came up under the tree and surrounded the Grammarians. Monk nodded to them coolly.

"Good-afternoon!" he said. "Nice weather for this time of the year, isn't it? How's that old workhouse you call a school getting on?"

"Collar them!" shouted Lowther.

"Hallo! Got a new leader? My word, if you're not off! What have they given you the order of the boot for, Tom Merry? Here, hands off! Rescue!"

"Rescue!" yelled Lane and Carboy.

In a moment the door of the tuck-shop was crammed with boys in Grammar School caps, pouring out to the rescue.

Tom Merry's suspicion had been well founded.

It was a trap, and Monty Lowther had led them right into it in a way that the Grammarians must have regarded as extremely obliging.

Grammarians poured out of the tuck-shop in a crowd. They had been lying low there; but now that they showed themselves, their numbers were overwhelming.

In a few seconds twenty youths were rushing at the Saints, and Monty Lowther realised his mistake, and gave the order for retreat.

But it was too late!

Monk, Lane, and Carboy each seized a foe, and Lowther himself, with Blake and Figgins, struggled in the grasp of the Grammarians. Then came the Grammarian rush, and the rest of the St. Jim's juniors were simply swept away.

Tom Merry stood his ground nobly, hitting out right and left, and several Grammar juniors went rolling over; but he could not stem the tide of such odds.

The Saints were scattered like chaff, and each of them as he reeled or ran was pursued by two or three yelling Grammarians.

Figgins tore himself loose from Carboy, and ran, and Blake escaped from Lane. They fought their way through the Grammarians who would have recaptured them. But Monty Lowther was not so lucky. Monk would not let him go, and several pairs of hands came to his aid. The unfortunate leader of the Co. was a prisoner!

"Keep him safe!" chuckled Monk. "He's their giddy leader, and we'll make an example of him! Mind he doesn't get away. Line up! Here come those fellows again!"

The defeated and roughly-handled Co. had rallied some distance down the village street. Some of the Rylcombe folk had come to their doors to see the row, but they only grinned, and never thought of interfering. Dusty, dishevelled, defeated, the Co. rallied a hundred yards from the scene of the unequal conflict and turned upon their pursuers. The Grammarians promptly fell back towards the tuck-shop.

Tom Merry's flashing eye glanced round upon the defeated band. He noted the absence of Lowther. Only one of the Co. was missing, and that one was the leader.

"They've got Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come on! We've got to rescue him!"

Tom Merry, at this crisis, naturally dropped back again into his old position as leader of the Co. The juniors had no thought of disputing his authority then. He was the leader they needed at that moment, and they would have followed him anywhere.

Back they dashed, the nine of them, ready to try their fortune a second time. Several Grammarians who had ventured recklessly too far went flying, knocked aside like ninepins, and the St. Jim's juniors dashed into the fray again.

But they met double their number of Grammarians, lined up and ready for them. Behind that line lay Lowther, with a couple of Grammarians sitting on him to keep him safe.

Gallantly the St. Jim's party attacked. But it was in vain. The odds were too great. Back they reeled, and the rush was stopped. Then the Grammarians advanced in their turn, and the Co. was driven helplessly back.

Tom Merry snapped his teeth as he saw Monk and Lane hustle Lowther into the tuck-shop. The Grammarians crowded round the door, yelling defiance at Tom Merry & Co., and ready to repel a fresh rush. But there was less chance than ever now of an attack proving successful, and the exhausted juniors gathered on the opposite side of the street to consult as to what had better be done.

CHAPTER 8.
Held in Ransom.

FRANK MONK was laughing almost hysterically as he dragged Lowther into the tuck-shop, aided by Lane and Carboy. As many of the Grammarians as the shop would hold followed, the rest blocking up the doorway.

Mother Murphy looked on from behind her counter in amazement and alarm. Frank Monk hastened to reassure her.

"Don't be alarmed, mother," he said. "It's only a little game. We haven't come to raid the tommy, you know. There's nothing to be worried about. You'd better go back into your little parlour. Now, Lowther, here you are!"

"Rats!" said Lowther, shaking himself free, and facing the Grammarians. He had certainly fallen into a very easy trap; but, whether he was a good general or not, he had plenty of coolness and pluck. "Rats to you! Go and eat coke!"

Frank Monk laughed.

"You're a prisoner. I understand that you're leader of that precious gang now. Is that the case, my pippin?"

"What if it is?"

"I'm going to explain. How would you like to be headed up in an egg-box, and sent back to St. Jim's by carrier, 'this side up, with care'?"

"You—you wouldn't dare——"

"That's all you know! But it's possible we may let you off. You're our prisoner, and if you're good we may be kind enough to hold you to ransom."

Lowther stared at the grinning faces round him.

"You—you don't mean to say that you want tin——"

"Ha, ha, ha! No, we haven't come to that yet. We don't mean that kind of ransom. You've got to buy yourself off, though, all the same, or else we shall put you through something that will turn your eyebrows grey. Suppose, for instance, we were to mop your head into that box of eggs—all warranted old and wheezy?"

Monty Lowther shuddered at the suggestion.

"Well, what do you want?" he said. "I know when I've had enough, and I give you best, if that will satisfy you."

"But it won't," grinned Monk—"not by long chalks! Do you remember a certain occasion when Tom Merry & Co. had us cornered by the river, and made us sign a document of surrender?"

Lowther grinned, and nodded.

"If you think I'm going to sign anything of that sort, you're mistaken," he said. "I bar that! You can do what you like, but I won't, and that's flat!"

"I fancy we'd make you if we wanted to," said Carboy.

"But we don't," said Monk. "That wouldn't be any good from Lowther without the signatures of all the rest, and we haven't got them here. By the way, what are they doing?"

"Talking on the other side of the street," said Lane, from the door.

"Well, they can keep that up as long as they like," grinned Monk. "That won't hurt anybody. They can't get at us here. Now, you Lowther, you remember that document? I hear that after you got it there was a row in the Co. about who should have it, and it was torn into three, and you divided it——"

"Yes, Figgins & Co. had one bit, Blake another bit, and we had the third," grinned Lowther. "We've got them stuck up in our studies, too."

"I thought so. Well, my buck, that's your ransom—your share of the paper. We're on the warpath, you see, to get that document back. A third part of it to start with isn't so bad. Will you hand it over?"

"Can't! It's stuck up in the study at St. Jim's."

"I didn't suppose you had it about you. We'll take your word to send it by post as soon as you get back to the school. You see we trust you."

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort!"

"Very well! Mother Murphy, what is the price of those eggs?"

"Fourteen a shilling, Master Monk."

"Rats! I mean, how much for the whole box? Make it as reasonable as you can, old dear, for they won't last long."

Mother Murphy made a rapid calculation.

"You can have the whole box for six shillings, young gentlemen," she said. "And I will send them up to the school for you."

"Ha, ha! We don't want them up at the school. To judge by that broken one, they're too whiffy. I'm not sure that I shall want them at all. It depends on this bounder. Lowther, are you going to ransom yourself with that document, or are you not?"

"It belongs to Merry and Manners as much as to me, and they wouldn't agree," said Lowther, who perfectly understood the meaning of the negotiations for the eggs.

"We'll let you call to them if you like."

"Oh, rot! Of course, they would leave it to me."

"I thought so. Are we to have that document?"

"No!" shouted Lowther; and he made a wild rush for the door. The Grammarians closed round him, and he was pinned in a moment.

"Dub up, kids!" said Monk. "We've got to make up six shillings for Mother Murphy between us. A few pence each will do the trick."

"My dear young gentlemen——"

"Here you are, Mother Murphy! There's your six bob, and now the eggs are ours. Collar him by the back of the neck, kids, and let him have it."

"Stop!" yelled Lowther, struggling furiously. "Stop! I——"

"Are you going to pay your ransom?"

"No!" Lowther shouted. "No, I won't! I'll—— Oo-oo-ooch!"

At a sign from Frank Monk, the youngsters who were holding Lowther jammed his face down into the box of eggs.

It came up again smothered!

And from the whiff that arose from the egg-box, it was very evident that those eggs had seen better days, and seen them some time ago.

"Gr-r-roo-oo-oo-i-i-o-o-o-r-r-r-r-oo-ooch-gr-r-r!"

Such was the remark Lowther made. It wasn't very intelligible, but his meaning was clear. He didn't like the eggs!

"Now, then," said Monk, "are you going to pay your ransom?"

"No!" spluttered Lowther. "No, I'm not! I—— Oh, oh! Don't! I'll send you the beastly thing by post to-night! I can't stand that again."

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, confound you! Oh, I shall never get rid of this horrible niff! Beasts! Lemme go! Gr-r-r-r! Let me get out!"

"Here they come!" shouted Lane. "Look out!"

"Let them come!" grinned Monk. "Here's their giddy leader. They can have him now."

The Grammarians parted to allow Monty Lowther to pass them. They gave him plenty of room, not from politeness, but out of respect for the great strength of the eggs with which his face was plastered.

Lowther, dabbing at the sticky stuff with his handkerchief, and crimson

with rage, strode to the door of the tuck-shop and passed out, followed by a yell of laughter from the Grammarians, who were almost in hysterics.

Tom Merry & Co. had indeed made a rush towards the tuck-shop, determined not to stand idle without while their leader was in the enemy's hands, though they could not hope to effect his rescue.

They had almost reached the door when Monty Lowther came staggering out, dabbing at his face, and only half recognisable.

They halted and stared at him. Blake sniffed. Manners sniffed. They all sniffed. Monty Lowther joined them, and they drew away from him.

"Hallo, they've given him an egg-bath!" said Blake. "Don't come too close, Lowther! You are not nice."

"Nice lot you are, to leave a chap in the enemy's hands——"

"We did our best," said Tom Merry. "We couldn't do much against such odds, and we've all got something to show for our pains."

"Yaas, wathah! I have a gweat, painful bump on my head, deah boys, and it weally twoubles me vewy much. I am extwemely doubtful whethah my silk-hat will sit stwaight till that feahful bump has gone away."

"Well, they've let you off lightly," said Figgins. "They might have rolled you in the eggs, you know. Did they make you pay for 'em?"

"No," growled Lowther. "And they'd have done worse if I hadn't caved in."

"Here, come along!" said Herries. "They're coming out! We've had enough fighting one against two for one afternoon."

And the St. Jim's juniors drew off, leaving the Grammarians in possession of the field of battle, and followed by hoots and cat-calls from the victorious foe.

"What do you mean by caving in?" asked Tom Merry. "How did you get off?"

"I've agreed to the ransom they fixed."

"The what?" ejaculated the astonished Co.

"They know about that precious document of theirs being divided into three, and stuck up in the studies at St. Jim's. Our third of it——"

"You don't mean to say they had the cheek to ask for that!" said Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Yes, they had," said Lowther, "and I promised to send it by post to-night. That's the ransom."

"You couldn't promise to give away our property!" said Manners, rather excitedly. "Like your cheek! We're not going to give it up!"

"It's rather hard cheese on us," Tom Merry remarked.

"Oh, rats! What could I do when I was helpless in their hands?"

"Oh, nothing, I suppose! You ought not to have fallen into their hands, you know. It was your own fault."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther. "Perhaps you'll lead better when your turn comes."

"I hope so, weally," said D'Arcy. "He weally could not lead worse—that is one beasty comfort, you know. I have a feahful bump on my head——"

"We must stand by what Lowther has promised," said Tom Merry. "No good growling, Manners, old chap. The word of one binds all three. That's the old rule, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know!" said Manners. "But—— Well, Lowther's not leader any longer, thank goodness! I think anybody would soon get fed up with his generalship. The Grammar cads can have that card, for all I care. After all, two-thirds of it will remain at St. Jim's—enough to show anybody and everybody that we really did lick them hollow that time."

"And we'll take better care of our bit," Blake remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we of ours," grinned Figgins. "Let's get back to the school and clean up. I feel as if I had been used for a duster."

Most of the juniors felt the same. They were glad to return to St. Jim's, and they left the Grammarians victorious, for the second time since the new campaign had opened. That evening the share of the precious document belonging to the Terrible Three was posted to Frank Monk at the Rylcombe Grammar School, to the huge delight of the Grammarians when they received it.

CHAPTER 9.

The Ghost of Marmaduke Smythe.

FIGGINS & CO. sat in their study in the New House at St. Jim's. Twenty-four hours or so had elapsed since the encounter with the Grammarians, and as the dusk of evening spread once more over the quadrangle at the old school, Figgins lighted the gas in the study, and sat himself down at the table again.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were working. Marmaduke was in the study, sitting a little apart from Figgins & Co., and doing his prep. In the old days he had been a member of the Co., but those days were gone. Marmaduke was still in disgrace.

Matters were rather uncomfortable in the usually cheery study.

Figgins & Co. had looked forward very keenly to the return of Marmaduke, and their disappointment was in proportion to their anticipation.

Marmaduke felt the coldness of the Co. towards him, though the three juniors were scrupulously polite, and as kind as they could be.

They didn't dislike Marmaduke, but he was impossible! They didn't want to hurt his feelings, but the magic circle of the Co. was closed to him.

But Marmaduke's obstinacy was as strong as ever, and it was tinged with sullenness. He would not admit himself to be in the wrong, although old associations were already waking old ideas in his mind, and he realised how wrong he had been. Marmaduke had not quite learned his lesson yet.

Figgins put his books away at last with a sigh of relief.

"That job's jobbed!" he remarked. "How are you getting on, kids?"

"Nearly done," said Kerr, without looking up.

"Done!" grunted Fatty Wynn. "Where are the chestnuts? I'll roast 'em while you finish, Scotty. You can lend a hand, Figgy."

"Right you are! I say, Smythe, are you getting on all right?"

Marmaduke winced.

He had always been Marmaduke or Marmy, but now he was Smythe, and the change of appellation showed how widely he was estranged from Figgins & Co.

"I'm getting on all right!" he said sulkily.

"I'll help you if you like, you know."

"I don't want you to."

Figgins sniffed. He helped Fatty Wynn roast the chestnuts at the cheerful fire in the grate, and when Kerr had finished his work they ate them. Marmaduke was asked to join in, but he declined, and having at last put his books away, he left the study.

Figgins wrinkled his brows a little as the study door closed behind the heir of millions.

"Quite his old self," he remarked. "I can't stand that much longer, I'm afraid. Yet he has the makings of a decent chap in him, if he wasn't

so spoiled. I'm sorry. But to come to business. What about the Grammar cads?"

"We haven't elected a new leader yet," remarked Kerr. "I should think it is time the post came to one of us. Have you an idea?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Not the ghost of one yet. I think we ought to give the Grammarians another football match, but licking them on the football field isn't everything. I hear that their team is a great deal stronger than it was last time, and, naturally, they will play on the home ground, which will make things easier for them. But I suppose we should lick them."

"Of course we should," said Fatty Wynn; "but that isn't everything. The kind of wheeze I should like to work off on them would be collaring their grub some time—as we've often done to the School House kids."

"Yes," said Figgins, with a sniff, "that's about your mark—always grub! Let's take a turn in the quadrangle, and see if we can think of something."

The three New House juniors went out, and in the dusk they saw Marmaduke Smythe, with his coat on, going down to the gates. Locking-up was not yet, and it was clear that Marmaduke was going out. Figgins called after him.

"Hallo, Marmy! Where are you going?"

"Out!" replied Marmaduke, without turning his head. And he walked on. Figgins wrinkled his brows.

"The ass!" he muttered. "He's in a sulky temper, and he's going out alone. If he falls in with the Grammar cads he'll have a lively time, and serve him right."

Figgins & Co. went into the gym. They found Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three there. The juniors indulged in a little exercise, and Figgins was just showing what he could do on a horizontal bar when there was a buzz in the gym.

"Look there!"

"What's the matter with Taggles?"

The juniors looked towards the door, whither every eye was directed. Taggles, the school porter, was looking in from the gloom, and the face of Taggles was as pale as a sheet, and his eyes seemed to be starting from his head.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, ran towards him. Others crowded round, Tom Merry & Co. among the first, eager to know what was the matter.

"What is it, Taggles?" asked Kildare. "Has anything happened?"

"The—the—g-g-g-g-gh——"

"What is he talking about?" exclaimed Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. "He's frightened out of his wits, I think. Has he been drinking?"

"The—the—g-g-g-g-g——" stammered Taggles.

"Speak out," said Kildare; "you're safe here, whatever it is." The porter was casting frightened glances into the dusk behind him. "What has happened?"

The captain of St. Jim's shook the porter by the shoulder. Taggles seemed to gain courage from the touch of his strong hand.

"It's—it's—the—g-g-g-ghost!" he stuttered.

"The what?" cried a dozen voices.

"What is the fool talking about?" exclaimed Sefton. "He's gone balmy in the crumpet, I think. Give him a shake."

"It's the g-g-g-ghost!" gasped Taggles. "I s-s-s-saw it when I w-w-went to c-c-close the g-g-g-gates——"

"Oh, rats!" said Sefton. "He's drunk!"

Kildare laughed.

"Better go and have another look, Taggles," he said. "I dare say you'll find the ghost gone by this time."

But Tom Merry & Co. had already slipped out of the gym. That Taggles had seen a ghost they did not, of course, believe, but they were curious to know what he had seen. And so were several other juniors who hurried along with them.

It was very dusky in the quad. As a matter of fact, Taggles had left the locking-up later than he should have done. It was quite dark at the gates. One side of the big bronze gate was closed, the other stood open. Gore was the first to come in sight of it, and he gave a jump as he caught a glimmer of white.

"Look! L-l-look!" he stammered. "There's—there's something!"

There certainly was something, and even Tom Merry was startled.

Dinly through the glim a figure in glimmering white could be seen close up against the open half of the gate, silent and motionless.

It seemed to be the form of a boy, but the head was bare, and the face and hair were of the same ghostly whiteness as the clothes.

Not a sound came from its lips, not a movement from its lips.

"My hat!" muttered Tom Merry. "What is it?"

"It's some jape!" muttered Figgins. "Some boulder playing a practical joke on us. Shy something at it."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Gore, picking up a stone.

Tom Merry put out his hand to stop him, but too late. The stone flew, and struck hard on the body of the "ghost." It fell to the ground with a clink, and still no sound came from the figure.

The boys looked at each other in a rather scared way. The stone must have hurt the figure if it had been human, yet there had been no sound, hardly a movement.

"Here, I'm off!" muttered Mellish; and he scuttled away, followed by several others.

Tom Merry stood his ground, and, after a few moments reflection he advanced closer to the mysterious figure.

As he drew nearer, he could see that it was a boy, and also that he was bound to the gate with a rope.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Tom Merry, catching the stranger by the shoulder. "How on earth did you get like this?"

There was a faint gasp from the prisoner, but no word.

"It's all right you fellows," called out Tom Merry, "it's only a kid, and some cads have tied him to the gate. I don't know why he doesn't speak."

"I do," grinned Figgins. "Look there."

In the glimmer of the light the prisoner's face could be seen. An apple was jammed into the mouth, and held there by a handkerchief knotted round the prisoner's head. It was too large for the unfortunate boy to chew away, and it gagged him effectually.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Flour!"

There was no doubt about it now that the match was struck. The boy was smothered from head to foot in flour, and that was what imparted to him his ghostly appearance. Figgins was peering into the stranger's face by the light of the match, and he, too, uttered an exclamation.

"Marmaduke!"

"Marmaduke!" echoed a dozen voices.

Tom Merry pulled off the handkerchief and extracted the apple. The unfortunate Marmaduke spluttered and gasped.

"Is it you, Marmy?" exclaimed Figgins. "Poor old chap! I suppose

this is one last lark of the Grammarians. Taggles took you for a ghost. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't see anything to laugh at!" growled Marmaduke. "Can't you untie me, some of you, instead of standing there, cackling like asses?"

Tom Merry opened his pen-knife, and began to sever the cords.

"How did it happen?" asked Figgins curiously.

"Those rofters met me in the lane," growled Marmaduke. "The miller's cart was waiting outside the Plough and Horses, and they must have dodged behind it when they saw me coming. They rushed out and collared me, and I kicked——"

"You did what?"

"Kicked," said Marmaduke, sullenly. "They were three to one—Monk, Lane, and Carboy. I hurt Lane's shin, and then they——"

"Whatever they did, deah boy, it served you wight," said D'Arcy. "I weally think we should express our wegwets to the Gwammawians for the disgwaceful occuwnence."

"Oh, you shut up!" snapped Marmaduke. "Then they opened one of the miller's sacks, and emptied half the flour over me, and brought me here and fastened me up. The beasts!"

"I suppose they were going to jape you," said Figgins, "and you were spiteful, and they gave it to you stronger in consequence. Serve you right!"

"Serve you right!" echoed the Co.

"Yaas, wathah. Serve you awfully, feahfully wight!"

Marmaduke growled. Tom Merry cut him loose. The hero of the Shell had not said a word. Marmaduke looked round for sympathy and found none.

"I suppose you all blame me?" he said shortly.

"You acted like a cad," said Tom Merry.

Marmaduke made no reply to that. He swung away and strode off towards the New House to get the flour cleaned off. The juniors followed more slowly.

"There it is!" It was a sudden yell from the gloomy quadrangle, in the voice of Taggles. "There's the hawful hobject I saw at the gate. It's coming towards us!"

Taggles was leading a party of seniors towards the gate, to discover the terrible object that had scared him so much, and he was startled almost out of his wits by seeing the ghost coming swiftly towards him.

Some of the fellows scattered, but Kildare and Monteith and some others stood their ground. Taggles jumped behind the captain of the school.

"Stop!" exclaimed Kildare. "Who are you?"

"I'm Smythe. I've been covered with flour by a lot of cads," growled Marmaduke. "Do you think I'm a ghost, you silly fools?"

"That's not the way to speak to Sixth Formers," said Kildare sternly.

"I'll speak how I like. My father could buy up this place, and all of you, too, if he chose. I don't care for any of you."

And Marmaduke stalked off towards the New House. Monteith made a movement to follow him, but Kildare tapped him on the shoulder.

"Leave the young brute alone," he said. "I fancy he's been roughly handled; and if that's the tone he takes, the juniors will be hard enough on him."

Monteith nodded. The heads of the two houses in the Sixth were on the best of terms. They returned to the gym, and Marmaduke stalked on to the New House.

As it happened, the excitement in the quad over the supposed ghost had brought Mr. Ratcliff, the New House master, out of the house to see what was the matter. He was coming towards the gate, with a cane in his hand, when he caught sight of a figure in white advancing upon him.

Mr. Ratcliff was not a brave man. The quadrangle was dark and lonely; the ghostly figure seemed to be rushing upon him from the gloom. Mr. Ratcliff's knees knocked together, and he stood staring helplessly at the strange form. And Marmaduke, who did not see him in the darkness, ran right into him, and sent him flying.

The rough contact was a sufficient proof to the New House-master that he had flesh and blood to deal with. He regained his balance, and sprang at the ghostly figure. Marmaduke, who was dazed by the concussion, had no time to escape. He was seized by the collar by the angry house-master.

"Who are you? How dare you—"

"I'm Smythe! Let me alone!"

"You—you young scoundrel! Come with me!"

Straight into the New House Mr. Ratcliff marched the culprit, and into his study. There, slamming the door, he fixed an angry glare on Marmaduke.

"Now," he thundered, "explain yourself! What does this mean?"

Marmaduke was silent. His painful experiences had roused all his sullenness, and he would not speak. An absurd object he looked in the flare of the gas, covered with flour from head to foot, though he was not quite so floury as before, as a considerable quantity of it had come off on the house-master's clothes when they met.

Although they did not know it, there were eyes upon the two. From the darkness of the quadrangle, Figgins & Co. looked into the lighted window of Mr. Ratcliff's study. The blind was not down, and the New House trio saw clearly into the room.

"My hat!" exclaimed Figgins. "Marmaduke is in for it! He——"

"He'll complain about the Grammarians," said Kerr.

"He'll give them away to save himself a licking, anyway," Fatty Wynn remarked.

Figgins's brow darkened.

"He can't! He sha'n't! Nice things the School House would say about us—and the Grammar cads, too. Come on! Ratty's window is open, and we may be able to chip in if the fellow starts saying too much."

It did not seem very feasible. But Figgins & Co. cut across to the open window of the study, and reached it in time to hear the angry words of the house-master.

"Smythe! Answer me! I may excuse you if you tell me who put you into this state. Was it Merry, of the School House?"

And Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glinted spitefully. He would have been very glad to find so fair an excuse for complaining of Tom Merry to the master of the School House. But it was not to be.

"No!" growled Marmaduke.

"Ah, I understand. I suppose you have been the victim of the Grammar School boys again? Is that so, Smythe?"

Figgins and Co. held their breath for the reply. Was Marmaduke going to sneak? They waited and waited; but the reply did not come.

"Answer me!" thundered the master of the New House, amazed and exasperated by the obstinacy of the junior.

But Marmaduke Smythe did not speak. And Figgins & Co. hugged themselves outside the window. Marmaduke would not disgrace them, after all.

CHAPTER 10.
Marmaduke on His Mettle.

"SMYTHE!"

Mr. Ratcliff thundered out the word. Marmaduke set his lips hard together, and a gleam of defiance was in his eyes. The obstinacy, which was his chief fault, was turned into a right channel this time, and he was not to be bullied into acting as a sneak.

"Smythe, am I to understand that you refuse to answer my question?" Marmaduke was still silent.

The housemaster's hand closed tightly upon his cane. His face was white with anger, and his eyes had a deadly gleam in them. Mr. Ratcliff never could keep his temper—a very bad trait in a master at a school—and he had quite lost it now.

"Smythe!" He tried to control himself, to speak calmly, but his voice was trembling with anger. "Smythe, I am amazed by this effrontery! You have been treated brutally by some set of ruffianly boys——"

"It was only a joke!" growled Marmaduke.

"A kind of joke that it is impossible for me to approve of, and——"

"Besides, I hacked their shins, and it served me right what I got."

Mr. Ratcliff stared.

Outside the window, Figgins gave Fatty Wynn a dig in the ribs that took his breath away.

"Do you hear him?" murmured Figgins sarcastically. "Didn't I tell you he was true blue, after all? He's as obstinate as a mule, I know; but I told you all along that he was the right stuff."

As a matter of fact, Figgins had told them nothing of the kind; but the loyal Co. would not remind him of that little fact. Fatty Wynn, in fact, was in no condition to remind anybody of anything. Figgys's enthusiastic dig in the ribs had almost winded him, and he was gasping for breath.

"Smythe"—Mr. Ratcliff's voice had a grinding sort of sound in it—"I do not know whether your words are intended for deliberate impertinence. The authors of this outrage must be punished, whether you forgive them or not. Am I right in attributing the whole affair to the boys of the Grammar School at Rylcombe?" Marmaduke remained silent. "You do not answer. Listen to me, Smythe! I am determined to put down this strife and hooliganism between the two schools—I am determined that it shall cease! I intend to catch those ruffianly young rascals in the act of some hooliganism, and lay a proper complaint before their headmaster. Now, there could not be a better case than this. If you can identify the boys who attacked you and treated you in this scandalous manner, Dr. Monk can scarcely fail to inflict a severe punishment upon them. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, sir," said Marmaduke ungraciously.

"Then you must tell me all you know. Could you identify your assailants?"

"Yes, I suppose I could."

"You know them by sight and by name?"

"Ye-e-es," said Marmaduke.

"Then tell me whom they were."

But Marmaduke's lips were closed again.

"Answer me, Smythe!"

"I can't, sir."

"You can't!" The housemaster's knuckles grew white with the hard grip he was putting on the cane, showing how his fury was growing. "You

tell me that you can't, Smythe! You dare to answer your housemaster so?"

"It's not cricket, sir. I can't give them away."

"Do you know whom you are talking to?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

But his fury did not frighten Marmaduke. The heir of millions was, as Figgins said, as obstinate as a mule, and bullying could not make him yield. His face only took on a more obstinate and sullen expression.

"I give you one more chance, Smythe," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Will you give me the names of the boys who assaulted you?"

"They did not assault me; it was only a joke."

"Will you give me their names?"

"I can't."

"Hold out your hand!"

Marmaduke took a quick look at the housemaster, and held out his hand. He thought he had better. The cane came down upon it with a fearful slash, and Marmaduke gave a howl of pain. It was a blow such as no master ought ever to have dealt; but Mr. Ratcliff was too furious to care how much he hurt the junior.

"Will you answer my question now?"

"No," howled Marmaduke, hugging his hand to his breast—"no, I won't! I won't sneak, and you can cut me to pieces first!"

Mr. Ratcliff looked as if he would gladly have cut the obstinate junior to pieces. But as he could not very well proceed to that extremity, he ordered him, in a voice of thunder, to hold out his other hand.

Marmaduke obeyed, and the cane went up with a whiz and came down with a terrific slash. But Marmaduke did not leave his hand there to receive it. He drew it away quickly, more by instinct than intention, and the cane swept the empty air. And there was no stopping its force. Before Mr. Ratcliff could think of arresting his descending arm, the cane had crashed on his own shin.

He gave a howl of agony and dropped the cane to the floor.

"Ow! Oh, heavens! You young villain!"

He clasped his injured leg, hopping on the other. A sour grin came over Marmaduke's face as he watched his antics.

But Mr. Ratcliff recovered himself in a moment. He seized the cane with his right hand, and Marmaduke's collar with his left.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

Figgins sprang to his feet.

"I'm not going to stand this!" he exclaimed; and in a moment he was climbing in at the open window of the housemaster's study.

Mr. Ratcliff, who had his back to the window, and, moreover, was too excited to see anybody or anything but the boy he was thrashing, did not notice him.

Figgins had had no very clear idea in getting in at the window—he only knew that he wasn't going to stand by quietly while Marmaduke was used so brutally; but as he slid in at the window an idea flashed through his mind.

He reached up to the gas and turned it out. The study was immediately plunged into darkness, and the next moment, as the astonished housemaster's blows ceased, Figgins gripped him by the shoulders and swung him away from Marmaduke Smythe.

Mr. Ratcliff went reeling in the unexpected grip, and before he could recover his balance he crashed against the table and rolled on the floor.

Marmaduke was as much amazed as Figgins by the sudden fall of darkness and the cessation of the attack. A whisper in the gloom enlightened him:

"Bolt!"

He knew the voice of Figgins. The advice was too good to be neglected. He stumbled to the door and escaped from the study. Figgins followed him, and catching his arm, hurried him up to their study.

Mr. Ratcliff staggered to his feet in the darkened room. Exactly what had happened he did not know—only that someone had somehow gained admittance to the study, turned out the light, and dragged him away from his victim.

He was murmuring with fury, and he felt blindly for the matches, and knocked over an inkstand and sent a pile of books crashing to the floor before he found them. By the time he struck a match and lighted the gas Marmaduke and Figgins were far away.

"Who was it? Who could it have been?"

The housemaster glared out of the open window. But the Co., of course, were gone by this time. He was strongly inclined to raise a hue-and-cry through the New House for the delinquent. But he remembered that he had gone a little too far already. The terrible thrashing Marmaduke had received must have left marks upon him.

If the Head of St. Jim's knew what had happened during the last few minutes Mr. Ratcliff would have had an uncomfortable time before him, and an inquiry would make the affair noised through the school.

It was better to let sleeping dogs lie, the housemaster reflected. But he mentally vowed to find out, in a quiet way, who his assailant had been, and to make him suffer for what he had done.

Meanwhile, Figgins had led Marmaduke to the juniors' study, where they were joined by the Co. Marmaduke staggered into the easy-chair, as white as a sheet, his face drawn and haggard. Mr. Ratcliff would have been alarmed if he could have seen the victim of his cruelty at that moment.

Figgins & Co. were certainly alarmed. Figgins loosened his collar, and Kerr filled a tooth-glass with currant-wine and placed it to his lips. Fatty Wynn wildly snatched out a plateful of sausage-rolls from the cupboard, with a vague idea that they might be of use.

Marmaduke drank the currant-wine, and it seemed to do him good. He sat up in the chair and tried to grin. It was a very watery grin.

"My dear chap," said Figgins, "how do you feel now?"

"Rotten!"

"Did he hurt you much?" said Kerr.

It was rather a superfluous question; but Kerr only meant to be sympathetic. Marmaduke grinned faintly.

"Rather!"

"Will—will you have a sausage-roll, Marm?" said Fatty Wynn.

"Not just yet, Fatty," chuckled Marmaduke.

"Fatty thinks a feed is a cure for all evils," said Figgins.

"They're jolly good sausage-rolls!" said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "A fellow would feel all the better for one at any time. I—"

"He did lay it on!" said Marmaduke. "The old beast! Vicious brute! I've never had a hiding like that in my life before; though I remember I did have a rough time when I first came to St. Jim's."

The chums looked at one another.

This was more like the old Marmaduke—the Marmy they had chummed with and liked. They felt the old chummy feelings reviving in their breasts.

"He must have hurt you, the way he was laying it on," said Figgins. "Let's get your jacket off, and get rid of some of that flour. You must be feeling pretty sore. My word!"

Figgins stared at the red marks across Marmaduke's bared neck. He

pulled down the shirt and saw that the shoulders were scored in the same way. His eyes blazed with indignation.

"Get your jacket on, Marmy!" he exclaimed.

"I feel more comfy without it."

"You've got to come with me."

"Come with you? Where?"

"To the Head!" said Figgins, with blazing eyes. "Come along! We'll see what Dr. Holmes has to say when he sees those marks on you. The cowardly hound!" Figgins was referring now to Mr. Ratcliff. "The cruel beast! This will mean the kick out for him, I should think, and serve him jolly well right! Get your jacket on and come."

Marmaduke did not stir.

"Do you hear, Marmy?"

"Yes, Figgy, I hear, but I'm not coming."

"I tell you—"

"Not good enough, Figgy. I'm not going to sneak."

Figgins & Co. stared at the heir of millions. This was rather a new and surprising line for Marmaduke Smythe to take.

"Not going to sneak!" said Figgins. "But this isn't sneaking. The hound ought to be shown up. You know he had no right to strike a boy like that, and the Head would be wild if he knew about it."

"I dare say he would, but I can take my medicine without complaining. After all, it must have annoyed Ratty when he got that cut on the shin."

"Serve him right. He ought to be kicked out of the school."

"Very likely. But I'm not going to have anything to do with it. Go easy, Figgy! No good losing one's temper over a little thing like this, you know."

Figgins calmed down somewhat.

"Perhaps you're right," he said slowly. "But—but this is a bit of a change in you, Marmy. I shouldn't have exactly expected you to take this line."

Marmaduke coloured, so deeply that his blush showed through the powdering of flour upon his face.

"I suppose not," he said, in a low voice. "I—I know I was in the wrong that time, Figgy, and—and—I'm glad I didn't give the Grammar kids away, now. I know I'm a sullen beast," said Marmaduke, with astonishing frankness. "It's my nature, I suppose. But—but I'm going to play the game in future, I assure you."

Figgy raised his hand to give him a hearty slap on the shoulder, but he remembered himself in time, and shook hands with him instead.

"Good old Marmy! That's all right! I knew you were true blue. I know what Ratty licked you for, too, and I know you mean it."

"Did you see—"

"We were outside the window all the time. That is how I came on the scene just then," Figgins explained. "Ratty seems to have let the matter drop. Knows what's good for him, I suppose—the cad! Marmaduke, old chap, I take back all I said that time—you're a member of the Co., if you like."

"Right-ho!" said Marmaduke. "I won't disgrace you."

"You've done us proud this time," said Figgins, "and we're proud of you; and so will the rest of the Co. be when we tell 'em how you stood up to Ratty."

"Oh, there's no need to go talking—"

"Rats! Come and get some of that flour cleaned off. You're in a shocking state. Then we'll go over and see Tom Merry and explain to him that Marmy is a partner in the Co."

CHAPTER 11.
Captain Figgins.

TOM MERRY came out of the Shell class-room after morning school the next day with a cheerful countenance. Manners and Lowther were with him, and they looked at him with mute inquiry, guessing that something was working in the active brain of their leader.

"I say, kids," said Tom Merry, "I want to hold a meeting of the Co. in the wood-shed and expound an idea I've got in my head."

"Thought you had," said Manners. "Well, that's easily done. Monty can go and call in Study No. 6, and I'll pop over and see Figgins and Co. I hear that Marmaduke is in the Co. again now, and those New House fellows are as thick as ever."

"Yes, he seems to have stuck it out when Ratty got hold of him, and redeemed his character," said Tom Merry. "I'm glad of it. I know it was a blow to Figgy, Marmaduke turning out so rotten. Get them to the wood-shed as quick as you can. I'll be there."

Figgins and Co.—the four of them—were going down to the football field when Manners found them, but they gave the footer up at once to come to the meeting. They repaired to the wood-shed with Manners, and when they arrived they found Tom Merry waiting for them. Study No. 6 came in a few moments later, and the meeting was complete.

"Glad you're all here," said Tom Merry. "I've got something to say, and so let's get on to selecting the giddy chief for the day; unless you would like to elect me to the post, and make it Tom Merry and Co. once more."

To which ten voices in unison replied "Rats!"

"Very well," said Tom, quite cheerfully. "Get on with the drawing lots, then, and if I'm captain for to-day, I'll expound my wheeze."

The slips of paper containing the names of the candidates were put in the bag, and Monty Lowther groped for them. There were only nine names, Blake and Lowther having already had their turn at the generalship.

"Here you are," said Monty Lowther, drawing out a slip at random, and holding it up to the light. "G. Figgins. Figgy takes the cake!"

Figgins gave a gleeful grin.

"Hurrah!" said he. "Now I'll show you bounders what generalship is like. I'll make you stand up to the Grammarians this time, and don't you forget it."

"Right you are," said Tom Merry. "What are the orders? We're all ready to follow your lead, Figgy, if you've got anywhere to lead us to."

Figgins wrinkled his brows for a moment.

"I suppose I'm not supposed to get a wheeze in my head instanter," he said. "A chap must have time to think, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake at once. "Think of something or resign. When I was leader I thought of something on the spot."

"And so did I," said Monty Lowther.

"Yes, and a nice old muck you made of it, didn't you?" said Figgins.

"That's not to the point. You're not going to waste our time like this. Just you work out a wheeze, or resign the job to somebody who can handle it," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, that's all right. What was the wheeze you were speaking of, yourself, Merry?"

"That's my business."

"Now then. No insubordination. Who's captain of the Co.?" demanded Figgins.

"You are—of a sort."

"Well, then, I order you to assist your leader with advice. Tell me that wheeze, or take the punishment of a giddy mutineer."

"Oh, I say, that's not playing the game, you know—"

"You'll do as you're told, Tom Merry. Do you expect to have your orders obeyed when you become captain? Well, do as you're told, then."

"Oh, very well. I suppose you can't be expected to think of anything yourself—"

"My dear chap, a great general never takes the trouble to think for himself if he can get it done," said Figgins serenely. "Under my leadership the wheeze will be a success, and that's enough. Now, get it off your chest."

Tom Merry was fairly caught, and he made no further demur.

"Well," he said, "you may or may not know what to-day is—"

"Yaas, wathah. It's Friday," said D'Arcy.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry. "What I mean is—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass—"

"Shut up!" said Figgins.

"I wefuse to shut up if I am chwactewised as an ass. I distinctly wefuse—"

"Shut up!" howled eight or nine voices, and Arthur Augustus, finding the majority against him, relapsed into indignant silence.

"What I mean is," went on Tom Merry, "that I happen to know that to-morrow is Frank Monk's birthday, and that there are certain to be some festivities at the Grammar School. Monk has lots of pocket-money, and he always does things in style. My idea is that Monk, Lane, and Carboy will be giving a dormitory feed. I know they did when it was Carboy's birthday, for I heard about it from Carboy himself."

Figgins nodded thoughtfully.

"You know there's no school-shop at the Grammar School as there is here," went on Tom Merry, "and Dr. Monk is very strict in the matter of allowing the kids to get in extra supplies after school from Mother Murphy's tuck-shop in Rylcombe, and I haven't the slightest doubt that they will do the same to-night."

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.

"My aunt!" he exclaimed. "That's the cheese! That's what I call a ripping wheeze! Collar their grub—that's it!"

"Good old Fatty!" said Blake. "He's looking forward to making himself ill, as he did when he was staying at Tom Merry's over Christmas. But all the same, it's a good wheeze, and if Fatty is ill Merry can write to Miss Fawcett for some pills for him—"

"Oh, don't rot, Blake!" said Fatty Wynn. "There isn't a better wheeze you can work off on the Grammar kids than to collar their grub, and as they served me a trick like that once, it will only be tit-for-tat."

"Hallo, when was that. I didn't hear of it."

"Only a few weeks ago," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "They collared a dozen tarts—mind you, twelve new, fresh, beautiful tarts in a paper bag! I've never quite got over that, as a matter of fact. Twelve tarts—"

"Why, you giddy Falstaff!" said Figgins. "Didn't Kerr and I stand you a dozen tarts in Dame Taggles's shop to make up for it?"

"Yes, I know you did, Figgy, but that doesn't alter the case. You might have stood those anyway, and that would have made twenty-four. I'm a dozen tarts behind—"

"Ha, ha! See the tears in his eyes!" said Monty Lowther.

"I tell you I'm a dozen tarts behind," said Fatty Wynn, "and they'll weigh on my mind till I've done the Grammar cads for a feed."

"Well, we'll do them for a feed this evening, I think," grinned Figgins.

"I'm obliged for the information you have given, Merry. Your idea is rather good."

"Rather good!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "What the dickens do you mean with your rather good? It's the best idea that's been mooted since we started ragging the Grammar School, and chance it."

"My dear chap, it's rather good, and I've said so, and that's all the commendation you're entitled to, and you won't get any more. Under my guidance, I have no doubt that we shall be able to knock the Grammar cads into a cocked hat, and collar their tommy, and give a royal spread within the ancient and honourable walls of this college."

"To tell the truth, Figgy, I've my doubts about it. The idea is good, I admit, but I can't say much for the leadership we're going to have," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

"Yaas, wathah. That's the considewation that twoubles my mind, don't you know. I weally think that Figgins would be wise to gwacefully wewire, and leave the mattah in my hands, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"I'll gracefully dot you on the boko if you don't shut up," said Figgins. "Now then, kids, the giddy plot is laid, and it only remains to carry it out—"

"And bury it."

"And knock the Grammarians into the middle of next week, or as far along the calendar as we can make it. Gentlemen, the meeting is over."

"And now let's get down to the footer," said Kerr. "We've got to put in a lot of practice before we meet the Grammarians on their own ground."

"And we haven't sent them the challenge yet," said Tom Merry. "Never mind, there's lots of time for that. By the way, we'll make up the team all by ourselves this time. There were only nine of us when we met the Grammarians on our ground, and we had to take in French and Jimson. Now that Dig and Marmaduke are here, we're eleven."

"Good!" said Dig and Marmaduke together.

"Yaas, that is a good ideah. Have you decided yet, deah boys, whethah I am to be captain on the beastly football-field, you know," said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, "we've decided—you're not. As a matter of fact, I think you're rather out of place on the football-field at all, Gussy. Your proper place is on the front page of a comic paper."

"I object to that wemark, Tom Mewwy. I shall be sowwy to bwreak up the harmony of this meetin', but I must insist upon your withdrawin' that obnoxious wemark. I—"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry, and he walked out of the wood-shed with Manners and Lowther, and Blake, Herries, and Digby, with some difficulty, prevailed upon the swell of the School House not to follow and exact summary vengeance.

The meeting broke up. During afternoon school Figgins, the new leader of the famous Co., thought a great deal about the plan, and he had to admit that Tom Merry's idea was a good one. It was the kind of joke that the two rival houses at St. Jim's had often played on one another, but it was a new departure in the warfare with the Grammar School.

Figgins thought more about the coming expedition, in fact, than he did about his work, and, easy-going as Mr. Lathom was, he dropped on Figgins at last. When Figgins declared that the successor of William the Conqueror on the throne of England was Frank Monk, and that the reign of Queen Elizabeth was chiefly famous for a dormitory feed given by King Philip of Spain on the bowling-green at Plymouth, the little master of the Fourth thought it time to complain.

"You are not thinking of your lessons, Figgins," he said severely, as if

that was about the heaviest charge that could possibly be brought against anybody.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins. "I mean no, sir! Yes, sir."

"Will you kindly tell me what you are thinking about, Figgins?" asked Mr. Lathom, with heavy sarcasm.

"Certainly, sir," said Figgins, to gain time.

"Very well, then. What is the subject of these intensely interesting reflections which keep you from bestowing proper attention upon your work, Figgins. You may tell the class and myself, and I have no doubt that we shall all be extremely edified."

"Certainly, sir. I was thinking of—of—"

"Go on, Figgins."

"I was thinking of a plan for giving a little pleasant surprise to some friends of mine in Rylcombe Grammar School, sir," said Figgins demurely.

Mr. Lathom beamed through his big spectacles.

"In that case I can excuse you, Figgins. I am very pleased to hear that you have such a friendly feeling towards the boys of the Grammar School, especially as I understand that there has been much mutual bickering. But, laudable as this object is, you must not think about it during lessons. Not a word, Figgins. You are excused, and you will now go on construing."

So Figgins construed Virgil, and the class chuckled.

But when Herr Schneider took the Fourth in German later in the afternoon, he did not let the preoccupied chief of the New House off so lightly.

"Bin ich, als edler Junker hier," said Herr Schneider. "Vat is tat, Figgins?"

"German, sir," said Figgins, thoughtlessly.

"Ach! I tink I know tat! Vat does it mean in te English, foolish poy?"

"Mean, sir?"

"Ja! Do you not understand your own language after pefore?"

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. I understand your English, sir, because you speak it so beautifully, Herr Schneider."

But Figgins's soft answer failed to turn away Herr Schneider's wrath.

"Vat is tat line pefore, Figgins?"

Figgins scratched his head. He had heard the line only imperfectly, and he knew that it was no use to ask the Herr to repeat it, as Schneider had specially picked upon him because he was not listening as he should have been.

"It means, sir—it means— Do you want me to construe it, sir?"

"Ja, Figgins, ja, mein poy."

"Easily done, sir. It—it means— For mercy's sake tell me what the old ass said, Mellish," Figgins whispered to the boy next to him.

"Oh, it's from 'Faust,'" said Mellish cruelly—"Das ist die ewige Gesang—"

"Thanks. 'That is the eternal song,' sir."

Herr Schneider picked up his pointer.

"Figgins! You translate tat line like tat, ain't it! Bin ich als edler Junker hier—tat is vat I said—and you say it mean—"

"I—I didn't hear you, sir," said Figgins, with a wrathful look at the grinning Mellish. "You—you rotten cad, Mellish!"

Mellish only grinned. He did not like Figgins.

"Mein Gott!" said Herr Schneider. "Tat line mean 'I am here as a noble cavalier,' Figgins. Tat line vich you say comes later in te poem, and tat show tat you not listen but answer at random, ain't it. You will write out both dose lines vun hundred times and pring dem to me to-morrow afternoon, ain't it, pefore."

"Yes, sir," said Figgins, considerably troubled by the imposition, but glad at the same time that he was not detained after hours the present afternoon. "Certainly, sir."

Herr Schneider kept a watchful eye on Figgins for the rest of the afternoon, and Figgins, fearful of detention, gave his very best attention to the lesson, and escaped further calling over the coals.

It was greatly to his relief when the class was dismissed at last, and the boys poured out into the quadrangle.

CHAPTER 12

The Expedition.

FIGGINS had been thinking over the matter a great deal, as we have seen, and it had not been without result. He went over to the School House after tea to tell Tom Merry his plans. The Terrible Three were playing diablo, but they let the bobbins fall as Figgins came in, as in duty bound.

"Ready for us?" asked Tom Merry. "We're only waiting for the word, you know."

"Not quite," said Figgins. "What do you think will be the best time for catching the Grammarians on the hop?"

"Well, of course, it's impossible to be certain," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But I suppose they will go down to the tuck-shop after tea at the Grammar School to get in the grub."

"From what I hear about them, the masters there are likely to be on the watch," Figgins remarked. "I remember hearing that Carboy was nearly spotted last time. My idea is that Frank Monk is more likely to leave it till after locking-up time and calling-over, so as to be quite safe from interference."

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's right, Figgy. I think it's very likely. But in that case it makes it pretty difficult for us to lay for them."

"If there's eleven juniors missing from St. Jim's at call-over there will be a row," grinned Monty Lowther.

"I've thought of that," said Figgins. "That won't do, of course. My idea is to cut off directly after call-over, and get out of the school by the old place on the wall."

"Good! If your idea about the time the Grammar kids will do the trick is correct, it's the only thing to be done."

"Then I want you all to come down to the old spot as quickly as you can get away after calling-over," said Figgins. "You'll pass the word to Blake and his lot."

"Right you are!"

And Figgins left Tom Merry's study.

"He won't make a bad leader after all," Tom Merry remarked. "Of course, I'd rather the matter were in my hands—"

"Or mine," remarked Manners.

"But Figgy will manage it pretty well, I daresay. Anyway, we'll back him up for all we're worth," Tom Merry declared. "We'll make it a success if we can."

"Oh, yes, we'll play the game."

Promptly to time the Terrible Three turned up at the familiar spot where the juniors of St. Jim's had more than once crossed the wall into Rylcombe Lane.

Figgins was already there with Kerr and Wynn, and Study No. 6 arrived almost at the same time.

"Nobody missed you?" asked Figgins.

"No, we've been very careful," said Tom Merry. "We're not missed, and sha'n't be till bedtime, I expect. How about you, Blake?"

"Same here," said Blake. "I was careful."

"Yaas, wathah, so was I," said D'Arcy. "Mellish had the fearful cheek to ask me what I was gettin' into my ovaheot for, and I told him that it was a gweat secwet, and not to be curious about it, you know."

"So he won't be," said Kerr sarcastically. "Oh, Gussy, you ought to have a tin medal for your sagacity, you ought really!"

"Pway do not address me in that dispawagin' tone—"

"Shut up!" said Figgins. "Over the wall with you, kids."

"Give us a bunk-up, then."

The juniors, aided by the ivy, clambered over the wall. They gathered in Rylcombe Lane in the darkness, and took the road towards the Grammar School.

A huge black mass looming up through the night warned them that they were near their goal. Dark and silent was the Grammar School, and the big gates were fast closed.

"Do you think you fellows had better keep back while I do some scoutin'?" asked D'Arcy. "We can't be too beastly careful, you know."

"I think you had better dry up," said Figgins, "or else I think you will probably get a thick ear, Gussy."

"If there's any New House wottah who can give me a thick ear, I shall be extremely pleased to receive it," said Arthur Augustus disdainfully.

"Now then, no house-ragging now," said Tom Merry. "I'm surprised at you, Adolphus. Why don't you play the game?"

"Yaas, wathah. I withdwaw my wemark," said D'Arcy gracefully. "If there is any New House wottah who can give me a thick ear, I shall not be pleased to weceive it. I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean," said Figgins. "Dry up! I heard something just then."

"So did I," whispered Digby.

The juniors crouched in the dense shadow of a great tree that overhung the wall from inside the Grammar School grounds. The trunk grew close to the wall inside, and the branches spread far over the road.

There was certainly some sound audible in the darkness, but exactly what it was the juniors could not at first determine. It was a sound of scraping or scratching. But the sound that followed was unmistakable—that of a human voice.

"Let go my ankle, Lane, you silly fathead."

The juniors nudged one another.

It was the well-known voice of Frank Monk. And in reply came another voice they knew well.

"It nearly slipped, Frank. It's all right now."

"Is it? You nearly had me down."

"A miss is as good as a mile."

"Might have broken my neck."

"Not much loss if I had."

"Oh, shut up, you two," said a third voice, that of Carboy. "You'll have some beastly master hearing you and coming down on us like a sack of coke."

The voices were silent again, but the scraping sound continued.

The juniors of St. Jim's knew what it was now.

The scraping was made by the boys inside forcing a way upward to the

top of the wall, by squeezing themselves between the wall and the tree-trunk that grew close to it.

Evidently the Grammar School chums were just about to leave the place, and it was pretty certain that Tom Merry's surmise as to their movements was quite correct.

They were going to Mother Murphy's tuck-shop to obtain supplies for a little birthday celebration. The Saints were in good time.

Figgins nudged his companions, and they drew away from the spot. Crouching there in the shadow of the tree, they were invisible; but they might have been dropped on—literally—by the Grammarians from above. Three dim forms came into view on the top of the wall.

Monk sat astride, while Lane dropped into the road. Frank Monk's voice was audible again, in tones low and cautious, but which reached plainly to the ears of the St. Jim's juniors only a dozen paces distant.

"You know what you've got to do, Carboy. Don't leave the place. I know it's a bit cold sticking out of doors for half an hour, but it's the only way."

"That's all right, Frank, I don't mind."

"Keep in sound of our whistle. There's no reason why you shouldn't take a run to keep yourself warm, you know. But you must be on the spot to help us in, especially with the grub, and I can't say exactly how long we shall be."

"That's all right. You'll find me ready."

"When we whistle, get into the tree, and lower the rope for the grub. The basket will weigh pretty heavy, you know. There's no other way of getting it over the wall."

"I understand. I shall watch for you, and I expect I shall see you coming, and have the rope ready. Better not whistle if it can be helped; we don't want to run risks."

Frank Monk dropped into the lane.

A rope came dangling down after him, with a big hook on the end, to which a large basket was hung. Frank unhooked the basket, and the rope was drawn up again to the top of the wall by Carboy.

Quite unaware of the proximity of the St. Jim's juniors, Frank Monk and his companion strode away towards Rylcombe Village.

Carboy slung the rope to the inside of the wall, and looped it over a branch of the tree to be in readiness. Then he dropped into the close to take a little exercise to keep himself from freezing while he waited for the return of his comrades.

CHAPTER 13.

In Ambush.

FIGGINS drew a quick, deep breath.

"Got 'em!" he whispered.

The St. Jim's juniors drew over to the further side of the wide road, where they could speak without fear of being overheard by Carboy. They were chuckling silently with satisfaction.

"The game's ours," said Tom Merry. "We've only to wait for Monk and Lane to return, and then collar them and their precious basket."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you think of me as a captain?" said Figgins, grinning. "Of course, it was plain all along that a New House fellow would have to take the lead if we were to make any headway against the Grammar School."

"Wait and see," said Digby. "We haven't got the grub yet, Figgy."

"We've only got to wait for it and collar it."

"And, anyway, it was Tom Merry's idea."

"Oh, rats! I'm captain, and I've led you into this, and it's about the best wheeze we've ever worked off on the Grammar School," declared Figgins.

"I say, deah boys, it's awfully cold waitin' here. Suppose we have a game at leapfrog to keep ourselves warm, you know?"

"A good idea, I don't think!" said Lowther. "Carboy would hear us. We've just got to lie low and say nuffin'."

"That's it," said Figgins. "A wheeze like this is worth a bit of waiting."

The juniors agreed to that, but they found the waiting weary work. The night was bitterly cold, and a mist was creeping from the direction of the Ryll.

They stamped and exercised to keep their blood in circulation, and listened eagerly for the chimes from Rylcombe Church telling the hour.

"Half an hour," said Figgins at last, in a low voice. "They ought to be somewhere about by this time."

"Yaas, wathah! Do you know, deah boys, my extwemities are weally awfully fwozen!"

"Never mind," said Fatty Wynn. "Think of the feed we are going to have when we get that grub back to St. Jim's."

"I am not such an extwemely gweedy person as you are, Wynn, and I fail to find solace in the wefection for my fwozen feet," said D'Arcy.

"Who are you calling greedy?"

"I natuually chawactewised you as gweedy, my deah fellow. I appeal to Figgins if the description is not quite cowwect."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins.

"I wefuse to go and eat coke—I wefuse——"

"Shut up!" said Marmaduke, in a whisper. "I can see somebody on the wall."

"I wefuse to——"

Marmaduke's hand on D'Arcy's mouth effectually stopped him. In the dimness the form of Carboy could be faintly seen on the wall. The rope—a thick and strong one; probably the same that the Grammarians had sometimes used for descents from a dormitory window—was dangling over a branch of the tree that overhung the road. The end with the hook on it touched the road; the other was in the hands of Carboy.

"Silence!" whispered Figgins.

Even Arthur Augustus understood the necessity of silence. It was evident from Carboy's preparations that he had seen, from the top of the wall, the two Grammarians returning from Rylcombe with the basket of provisions for the dormitory feed.

"Ready!" Figgins murmured.

Two forms loomed up in the shadows of the school wall, carrying between them the big basket.

"Forward!" shouted Figgins. "On the ball!"

And the St. Jim's juniors rushed on.

CHAPTER 14. Not Quite a Success.

PROMPT as had been the action of the Co., Frank Monk was not caught napping; he was well on the alert, although he had no special suspicion of foes being near at hand. And Carboy, too, saw the rush of the Saints.

"Pull up!" yelled Frank Monk, instantly placing the handle of the basket over the big hook at the end of the rope.

The basket swung off the ground, and Monk and Lane turned desperately to stem the rush of the Saints before they could seize it.

They faced the odds gallantly, hitting out with all their strength, and for a moment the Co. were checked, Tom Merry and Figgins going down under the blows.

But it was only for a moment.

The two Grammarians were literally swept away and hurled to the ground by the heavy odds against them.

Fatty Wynn, who had an eye on the basket from the instant it came into sight, sprang to seize it as it swung. He clutched at the rope and caught it, and the ascent of the basket was checked.

Carboy set his teeth. He was quick to act, and his presence of mind was the only thing that could have saved the situation.

The rope, as we have said, passed over a branch of the tree, and Carboy had only to throw his weight on it to pull the basket into the air.

As Fatty Wynn hung on the rope, Carboy threw himself from the wall inside the school grounds, and his weight and the impetus of his fall dragged both the basket and Fatty Wynn into the air at the other end of the rope.

Fatty gave a gasp as he shot up into the air. He did not even think of letting go of the rope, which meant the loss of the basket.

Fatty Wynn did not mean to lose that feed, into whatsoever perils the pursuit of it might lead him.

"Help!" he gasped faintly.

And, clinging to the rope with one hand and the basket with the other, he shot up to the overhanging branch of the tree.

Carboy knew by the tug of the rope what had happened, and he was quick to take advantage of it. The moment he touched the ground inside the wall he took a turn with the rope round the trunk of the tree, and by his swift action prevented the weight of Fatty Wynn from dragging it back again.

The grip of the rope on the rough bark prevented it slipping, while Carboy knotted it, and thus made assurance doubly sure. Then he was free to think of his comrades.

The sudden flying away of Fatty Wynn naturally amazed his chums of the Co. Figgins made a hasty snatch at his leg and missed. Marmaduke jumped valiantly after him, and received Fatty Wynn's final kick on the chest, and dropped into the road with a bump and a loud gasp.

Tom Merry sat up, rubbing his nose, which had been rather flattened by a terrific right-hander from Frank Monk.

"Where's the grub?" he exclaimed.

"Look!" said Kerr. "They've got the grub and Fatty Wynn, too!"

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

High up against the branch of the tree swung the big basket and Fatty Wynn, the legs of the latter flying about spasmodically.

"Hold on!" shouted Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn did not need telling to hold on. He was thinking only of the endangered feed. But, as a matter of fact, he would have been considerably hurt if he had let go the rope at that height from the ground.

"Great Scott!" gasped Figgins. "We must get him down. Hold on, Fatty! You'll break your giddy bones if you fall!"

"Help! I'm holding on! Help! They'll have the grub!"

"I say, you fellows, let him down!"

Carboy reappeared on the top of the wall.

"Rats!" he replied cheerfully. "He can let go if he likes."

"Where are those other rotters?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There were two of them here! Where are they?"

Where, indeed, were they?

Frank Monk and Lane had lost no time in making themselves scarce. Scarce a minute had elapsed since they were bowled over, and already they were out of sound and sight.

"They're gone!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You asses to let them go!" howled Figgins.

"You ass to let us let them go!" retorted Monty Lowther. "What sort of a leader do you call yourself? Whose business is it to look out for things like that? If I were leader——"

"You'd act the giddy ox, just as you've done now."

"Lowther's right!" exclaimed Digby warmly. "It's your business as leader to lead, Figgins. If you find the job too big for you, chuck it up!"

"Just so," said Blake. "Dig's right. And as I always said——"

"Oh, rats to what you always said!" snapped Figgins. "Look for those bounders. They mayn't be very far away."

Tom Merry was already looking for them. But the Grammarians were gone. The search was soon over, for the voice of Frank Monk was heard on the top of the school wall. It was evident that Monk and Lane had found another way into the school grounds.

The juniors of St. Jim's gathered again under the tree. Frank Monk and Lane were on the wall beside Carboy chuckling with glee. It had not taken them long to get into the Grammar School grounds after escaping from the enemy.

"Oh," growled Figgins, "so you're there!"

"Yes, here we are!" said Monk cheerfully. "I say, what's that curious-looking object hanging on to our basket? Is it the Fat Boy of Peckham, or a baby walrus?"

"A sorter cross between the two, I think," said Carboy. "It's a thing called St. Jim's, or anywhere where there's any grub going."

"Help!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "I can't hold on much longer!"

"You'll be hurt if you fall," said Frank. "Better get on the wall here. I'll lend you a hand, Fatty. There you are!"

Fatty Wynn was close to the wall, and his wagging feet had kicked it several times. Monk seized him and dragged him on the wall, where he was promptly collared by Lane and Carboy.

"Let me get down, you beasts!"

"Not so fast!" said Frank Monk coolly. "You're a prisoner of war, my beautiful Falstaff! We're too fond of you to let you go."

"Let him come down!" howled Figgins angrily from the road.

"Go and eat coke, Wiggins! Or is your name Higgins?"

"Figgins, you cad! Let him come down!"

"Sorry, Figgins, but I couldn't think of it. You're rather unreasonable, Biggins. We're too fond of this fat oyster of yours to part with him, Diggins!"

Figgins gasped with fury. Some of his followers were grinning, which did not help to calm him.

"We'll jolly soon rescue you, Fatty!" he exclaimed. "Come on, chaps! We've got to get over that wall!"

And Figgins retreated across the road to get a start.

"Don't be an ass, you know!" remonstrated Blake. "We can't get over a wall twelve feet high; and especially with those rotters on top ready to knock us down!"

"If you're funky——"

"Gr-r-r! Lead on, Macduff, and I'll show you if I'm funky!"

Figgins was not in a mood to listen to reason. His captaincy had opened so well, and was ending so disastrously, that he had lost his coolness. He was determined to get the better of the Grammarians and rescue Fatty Wynn, and, as it were, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

But it was not easily done. He took a rapid run and sprang up the wall; but his hands failed to reach the top, desperately as he sprang, and he dropped into the road, and sat down with rather a shock.

The Terrible Three tried less desperate measures. Tom Merry, exchanging a word with Manners and Lowther, planted himself against the wall, and in a twinkling Manners had scrambled up on his shoulders, and Lowther was climbing over both of them.

It was so quickly done that Lowther had his arms over the wall before the Grammarians could deal with him.

But Frank Monk was quick to act.

He squirmed along the wall to the spot, and soon had a grip on Lowther's hair, and shoved him away from the wall.

"Look out!" yelled Lowther.

He went plunging down, and dropped into the road, and the shock sent Tom Merry and Manners to the earth together.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Frank Monk.

And Lane and Carboy joined in.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Saints gathered wrathfully under the wall. It was evidently impossible to get at the Grammarians, though Figgins was loth to give up the attempt. Fatty Wynn was a prisoner in the enemy's hands, and rescue was out of the question.

Frank Monk reached out to the still swinging basket, and unhooked it from the rope in the sight of the furious Co. beneath, and slung it inside the wall.

Fatty Wynn gave a hollow groan as he saw it go. He cared little what happened to him now; the feed was evidently gone for good.

"Well, are you going to keep us waiting here all night?" asked Figgins at last. "Don't you think this jape has gone on long enough?"

"Oh, certainly! We're satisfied if you are."

"Then let Fatty Wynn come down."

"Not a bit of it, unless you ransom him."

Figgins's heart sank.

He knew what was coming now!

"What are you driving at?" he asked uneasily.

"You know what I'm driving at," said Frank Monk cheerfully. "You've got a third part of that cardboard sheet that has the surrender written on it—"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Only this—that that's Fatty Wynn's ransom."

"Beasts! You sha'n't have it!"

"Righto! We'll tie Fatty to the tree here, and sit on the wall and wait till you make up your minds to it," said Monk.

"You—you beast—"

"Don't lose its lickle temper," said Monk. "All's fair in war, you know. You had us at a disadvantage when you made us sign that paper, you know, and now we've turned the tables on you. We're going to have it back or bust something!"

"No good kicking, Figgins," said Kerr, with a heavy sigh. "They've got to have it, and we may as well own up to it first as last."

Figgins grunted.

"What do you fellows say?" he inquired, looking round at the Co.
 "Nothing," answered Blake politely. "We've got nothing to say. You're the giddy leader in this Co., and you can decide for yourself."
 "That's only fair," said Digby. "You may as well give in. You've got to, you know, unless you want to leave Fatty there all night."

Figgins seemed to gulp something down.

"All right," he said; "I agree. You shall have the rotten document by the first post in the morning, young Monkey!"

"Right you are, Figgins," chuckled Monk. "I know I can take your word. Here's your prize oyster."

And Fatty Wynn was slung off the wall by the Grammar School chums, who lowered him by the hands and let him drop.

Monk, Lane, and Carboy disappeared within the wall. They were off to the dormitory feed in great glee. The defeated Co. were decidedly glum as they took the homeward route to St. Jim's.

Not a word was spoken till they separated in the quadrangle to go to their respective houses. Then D'Arcy aired his opinion.

"My word!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "We've had two weally wotten leadahs, Figgins, but I weally think you are the wottenest of all. Weally, how a fellah like you could have the feahful nerve to set up to lead a fellah like me—"

The swell of the School House broke off there. He had intended to go on for some time; but Figgins, whose patience had been sorely tried, dotted him on the nose just then, and Arthur Augustus staggered away.

Figgins and Co. marched off to their own house. D'Arcy recovered himself, and made an attempt to rush after Figgins. Blake and Digby caught him by the arm and jerked him back.

"Welease me!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Figgins has stwuck me! He has stwuck me on the beastly nose, you know. Welease me at once!"

"Oh, come home!" said Blake. "It's too late to make a row to-night. You'll have a lot of prefects jumping on you!"

"I do not desire to make a wov; but—"

"Oh, do what your uncle tells you!" said Blake. "Come home!"

And the chums ran D'Arcy along to the School House, heedless of his objections, and his reprisals upon Figgins had to be deferred.

CHAPTER 15.

D'Arcy Rides the High Horse!

"WHAT'S the matter with Gussy?"

Blake asked that question of Herries, and Herries asked it of Blake. Both of them asked Digby, who couldn't answer. Then all three questioned Tom Merry, who shook his head and gave it up.

The chums of Study No. 6 were puzzled, and so were the Terrible Three.

It was the morning following the expedition under the leadership of Figgins, which had resulted so disastrously for the Co.

It was soon after breakfast that Blake had noticed something peculiar about D'Arcy.

The swell of the School House had a thoughtful and preoccupied air, and gave extremely absent answers when the simplest observation were made to him.

Herries and Digby soon spotted the fact that something was up, but what it was they had no idea. Digby, in fact, had some business of his own to think of. His father had written twice to ask when he was returning from his visit to St. Jim's, and as Dig was determined to stay until the

dispute with the Grammar School was terminated, he was at his wits' end how to satisfy his troublesome "governor."

The chums of Study No. 6, of course, took a deep interest in the matter, including D'Arcy—until this morning. Then Arthur Augustus had shown that strange preoccupation.

The Terrible Three observed it in time. They exchanged notes with Blake, Herries, and Digby, but none of the six could throw any light on the subject.

They were talking about it after early chapel, when Arthur Augustus passed them, walking alone with a pensive brow.

The swell of the School House evidently did not see them staring at him. He walked by with his nose in the air, a far-away expression in his eyes, and what Blake described as an idiotic smile upon his chivvy.

"What's the matter with him?" muttered Blake. "Can he have gone off his rocker in the night?"

"Perhaps it was that biff on the nose that Figgins gave him?" Tom Merry suggested.

"His proboscis looks rather bulbous this morning," Monty Lowther remarked. "But I suppose that wouldn't turn his silly brain. Perhaps he's thinking out some terrific wheeze for bringing the Grammar cads down on their marrowbones?"

"Possibly. Let's ask him."

"If he is," said Digby, "he won't tell us what it is unless he's elected captain. You know what an obstinate mule he can be when he likes!"

"Well, let's ask him, anyway!" exclaimed Herries. "He looks as if he'd got something on his chest, or was composing a poem or something. He may be making up something for the next number of the 'Weekly,' you know. Poets often look like that."

The juniors approached D'Arcy, and so preoccupied was the swell of the School House with his mysterious reflections that he did not see them until he had walked right into Tom Merry, and dropped his eyeglass with the shock.

Then he gave a sudden start.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, that is extwemely wuff and wude of you!" he said crossly. "You ought not to get into my way, and make me wun into you!"

"Why don't you look where you are going, and not wander round like a giddy moon-calf?" demanded the hero of the Shell severely.

"Eh?" said D'Arcy vacantly.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" bawled Tom Merry. "Are you deaf?"

"Yaas, wathah! I mean, no, certainly not!"

"That sounds rather mixed. Are you off your rocker?"

"No—yes—— Pway don't bothah me!"

The juniors looked at one another.

It was certain that Arthur Augustus had something on his mind, or he would not have answered at random like that.

"Are you thinking about the Grammar School?" asked Blake. "Thinking out some wheeze for knocking Monk & Co. into a cocked hat?"

"Gwammah School?" said Arthur Augustus vaguely. "What Gwammah School?"

The chums stared blankly at D'Arcy. What Grammar School? They could scarcely believe their ears. What Grammar School? Certainly D'Arcy must be right off his rocker!

"My dear kid," said Blake kindly, "if there's anything the matter with you, just confide it to your uncle. What's the trouble?"

"'Twouble? I am twoubled by a set of inquisitive ases, you know!" said D'Arcy. "I haven't any othah twouble at pweent!"

"'Look here," said Dig, "you're going to work the right way to get used as a duster, Algernon Adolphus. Do you want to be used to wipe up the quad?"

"Certainly not. I distinctly wefuse. Pway don't wowwy me!"

"Then tell us what's the matter with you? What are you mooning about?"

"Nothin'. I do not wish to be bothahed——"

"There's to be a meeting in the wood-shed after morning school——"

"Eh? Meetin'? I can't come!"

"What!"

Six voices howled out the word together.

The juniors were simply astounded. Not come to the meeting! The world was surely coming to an end!

"Are you wandering in your mind, Gussy?" asked Lowther. "If you want a doctor, say so, and we'll wire for one."

"Pway wetire and leave me in peace——"

"We'll leave you in pieces if we have much more of your rotting!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What the dickens do you mean by——"

A bell began to ring, and the hero of the Shell broke off. The juniors trooped in to morning lessons. As they went into the Fourth Form room the chums of No. 6 met Figgins & Co. Figgins looked at D'Arcy a little dubiously; but Arthur Augustus had apparently quite forgotten the biff on the nose of the previous evening.

Blake caught Figgins's eye, and acquainted him with the strange mysteriousness which had haunted the swell of the School House that morning.

Figgins grinned expressively.

"I say, you don't know what's the matter, do you?" asked Blake, in astonishment. "We can't get on to it ourselves."

"Ha, ha! I think I can form a guess."

"Well, what is it you guess, then?"

"Don't you remember the time when the doctor's niece was staying at the school?" grinned Figgins. "D'Arcy fell in love with her. He looked just like that then."

Blake gave a start.

"My hat! Do you think, then——"

"Well, it looks like it. You can see that for yourself."

Blake rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I remember that time, of course. Gussy was mooning about like a calf. But who is there at St. Jim's for him to fall in love with? It can't be Mary, the housemaid, can it?"

"Ha, ha! Perhaps it's Mrs. Mimms, the house dame."

"Take your seats, boys," said little Mr. Lathom mildly. "You must not talk in the class-room. D'Arcy, you are late."

"Yaas, wathah! I mean, I am sowwy, sir."

Arthur Augustus took his place. Figgins watched him curiously. Under cover of his books the swell of St. Jim's drew a letter from the inside pocket of his jacket, and began to read it, evidently not for the first time.

Figgins nudged Blake as he saw D'Arcy's action.

"You see that, Blake?"

"My word! Yes. I remember he had a letter this morning."

"That's it, then," chuckled Figgins, "and it's from some lady. My hat! There's going to be some more fun, I think. Gussy was excruciating the

last time he was in love, and if he's got another attack, it will be something to keep us cheerful in the winter evenings."

The swell of St. Jim's was so absent-minded during morning school that any master but Mr. Lathom would have been extremely exasperated. As it was, he escaped with an imposition, which he forgot before the class was dismissed.

The chums watched him go out into the quad. He drew the letter from his pocket again, and read it under the elms. The idiotic smile Blake had remarked upon was seen to play once more over his face.

"Hallo, look there!" exclaimed Digby suddenly.

Gore, of the Shell, was approaching the swell of St. Jim's from behind, with the creeping motion of a cat, and all of a sudden he reached out and snatched the letter.

Arthur Augustus gave a shriek of rage.

Gore tore off with the letter, and D'Arcy started in hot pursuit. Gore was giggling as he ran, and the chums could not help laughing, too.

"Stop!" shouted D'Arcy. "Stop, you wascal! I say, stop him, dear boys! The wottah has stolen my beastly lettah, you know."

Tom Merry ran into Gore's path.

"Get out of the way!" shouted Gore.

Tom Merry, without replying, caught him by the collar. D'Arcy came panting up, and he tore the letter from Gore's hand.

"I have a good mind to give you a feahful thwashin', Gore," he exclaimed. "You are a weally wotten wascal, you know. I weally believe that you would have wead my letter."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Gore, walking away ill-temperedly. He had intended to read that letter out to a select circle of juniors, and he was disappointed.

D'Arcy put the letter into his pocket with a great sigh of relief.

"I am extremly obliged to you, Mewwy," he said. "That wascal would have wead the letter out, and it would have been vewy compwomisin', you know."

"What the dickens does it all mean?" asked Tom Merry. "Why can't you explain like a sensible, sane person? Who is that letter from?"

"From a lady," said D'Arcy—"a lady in gweat distwess. I cannot tell you more, as it would be bweakin' the confidence the fair cweature weposes in me."

"Ha, ha! Beauty in distwess, and you're going to rescue the fair damosel from the wicked enemy!" exclaimed Lowther. "Gussy, you're too funny to live."

"I uttahly fail to see anythin' at all funny in the matter," said D'Arcy frigidly. "There is nothin' funny in beauty in distwess."

"My word, if you're not off!" said Blake, coming up. "Tell us who the letter is from, Gussy. Is it Mary, the housemaid?"

"Pway do not make such fwivolous wemarks on such a sewious subject, Blake."

"No, I know who it's from," said Lowther, shaking his head.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Weally, Lowther, I fail to see how you can possibly know——"

"But I do. It's from the girl in the confectioner's shop in Rylcombe——"

"Lowthah, I am uttahly disgusted with the fwivoly of the suggestion."

"Then who is it?" exclaimed Digby. "Is it from Tom Merry's old governess?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Herries.

"Here, draw it mild!" said Tom Merry. "No jokes on that subject, please."

Digby made a graceful bow.

"Sorry, that was a slip. You know we all respect Miss Fawcett, Tom, especially as she did us down so well at Christmas. But who can the lady be?"

"The doctor's niece isn't here——"

"Pway don't make such wemarks, deah boys. You pain me."

"Then you won't tell us?"

"Certainly not."

"Gussy, are you looking for trouble?" asked Blake. "Are you yearning to be used as a duster to clear up some of the mud in the quad?"

"My dear chap, can you ask me to bweak a confidence?"

"No, of course not, but we know that's all rot."

"I hope," said D'Arcy, with emphasis, "that no gentleman pwesent doubts my word?"

"My dear lunatic——"

"I stwongly object to bein' addressed in that oppwobwious mannah."

"Never mind; you'll get used to it. We don't doubt your word, you know, but we think you are being hoaxed. In a word, the fair one is rotting."

"I have no more to say to any of you on the mattah," said Arthur Augustus haughtily. "A suggestion that the lady who has written to me is wotting is simply unpardonable. I no longah wegard any of you as my fwends."

The Co. gasped in unison.

Arthur Augustus was riding the high horse with a vengeance now.

"Then you won't come to the meeting?" asked Tom Merry.

"I wepeat that I have no time to attend to such twivial mattahs undah the pwesent circs."

"Suppose we made you captain——"

"Anothah time, deah boy. At pwesent I am occupied with more important affairs. Pway wun away and play."

And D'Arcy walked off with his nose in the air.

The Co. stared after him, and at one another. There was nothing to be made of Arthur Augustus, that was clear. The meeting would have to be held without him.

CHAPTER 16.

The Persecuted Maiden.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS, having escaped from his inquisitive friends, proceeded to a quiet corner of the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, and proceeded to read the letter over again.

It was written in a small and delicate hand, evidently that of a female, and it was couched in the most engaging terms.

No wonder it had made so deep an impression on the swell of the School House. It ran as follows:

"Dear Friend,—Will you pardon the boldness of one who admires and esteems you in thus venturing to address you without an introduction.

"I am in great distress of mind, and need a brave and gallant friend to help me, and the moment I saw you I knew that an appeal would not be made in vain to your noble heart.

"You are so distinguished from your schoolfellows that my eye sought you out at once, and my heart told me that here was the friend I needed.

"Will you help me? Will you try to help me? What my trouble is I cannot tell you in writing, in case my persecutor should—but I must not say more. I dare not. Will you meet me and let me confide all to you?"

"I rely upon you. I know that you are courage and generosity personified. Take pity on an unhappy one who has no one but yourself to help her, and meet me at the stile in Rylcombe Lane at half-past three this afternoon.

"Yours imploringly,

"A PERSECUTED MAIDEN."

D'Arcy had read the letter through a dozen times already, but his eyes flashed and his fists clenched as he read it again.

"A persecuted maiden!" he muttered. "Howwible! I am just the wight fellow to help her. I will dwop on the persecutah like a sack of bwicks, and give him such a feahful thwashin' that he won't be able to crawl about for a week. Yaas, wathah!"

Then his face softened.

"Distinguished from my schoolfellows!" he murmured. "Yaas, wathah! Women have such keen eyesight, wathah, and they can see these things. I should nevah get Blake or Tom Mewwy to admit it, but this lovely girl can see it at once. I will wush to the wescue! Wathah!"

He put the letter in his pocket at last.

Then he went into the School House with a slow step and a thoughtful brow. He saw the members of the Co. making their way towards the woodshed, and smiled in a pitying way. He had something of more consequence than a row with the Grammarians to think of now.

He looked at his watch. It wanted an hour and a half to the time of the meeting, and as the walk might take half an hour, it was time to dress.

D'Arcy snatched a hurried dinner, and repaired to his quarters to dress. The place was littered all over with shirts and ties, hats and spats, waistcoats and collars, before he had finished.

He was going to meet a lady in distress, and it was, of course, requisite to put on his very best gear, and D'Arcy did not fail to do it.

When he had finished dressing, he certainly looked as neat as a new pin, and quite fit to win the heart of any lady, distressed or otherwise, in the United Kingdom.

He surveyed himself in the tall glass which had been brought into Study No. 6 at his own expense, pier-glasses not being as a rule furnished in Fourth Form studies.

The result was quite satisfactory.

From the summit of his high, shining topper to the soles of his shoes, from his beautifully set tie to his nobby spats, from his diamond sleeve-links to his gold-rimmed eye-glass, from his fancy waistcoat to his lavender kid gloves, Arthur Augustus was a picture.

"Yaas, I weally think I look wathah nice," he murmured. "Distinguished from my schoolfellows! Yaas, wathah! What keen insight the girls have, wathah!"

He donned his elegant overcoat, and took his gold-headed cane, and walked out of the School House.

Many an admiring eye watched him go.

"My word," said Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, to Kildare. "Gussy looks more ripping than ever! That kid ought to be in a shop window."

Kildare laughed.

"Whither bound, Gussy?" he inquired, as the swell of the School House passed.

D'Arcy looked at him languidly.

"I am goin' out for a little wun," he said.

"Going out for a little one," said Monteith, looking puzzled. "What little one? Whose little one? You're not going to mind a baby, are you?"

D'Arcy gazed at the New House prefect with a perfectly withering expression.

"I am going for a wun," he replied coldly.

And he walked on with his nose held high.

He passed out of the gates of St. Jim's as the clock in the tower boomed out the quarter past three.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"A quartah past!" he murmured. "Weally, it has taken me longah to dwess than I expected. I shall have to wun like anythin'."

And he started at a trot down the lane.

It was impossible to "wun like anythin'," however, as the wind showed a strong inclination to blow his silk hat off, and it was impossible to look after it and to keep his eye-glass on at the same time, especially as he had to carefully avoid the mud in the lane for the sake of keeping his beautiful spats clean.

That run along Rylcombe Lane was in fact a torture to Arthur Augustus, but he faced it manfully in the cause of chivalry.

The stile came in sight at last, and D'Arcy could now hear the village church clock, which chimed out the half-hour.

He was just in time at the rendezvous. He stopped breathless at the stile, and was rather relieved to see that no one was there. The lady was not on the spot yet. It gave him time to look himself over and remove all traces of his hurry.

He rubbed two or three spots of mud from his trousers, and wiped his eye-glass and adjusted it. He settled his collar and tie to his satisfaction. Then, five minutes having elapsed, D'Arcy looked up and down the lane.

But there was no beauty in distress to be seen.

D'Arcy's heart sank a little. He remembered the immemorial privilege of the gentle sex, to be as late for any appointment as their humour might dictate. How long was he destined to wait at the stile in Rylcombe Lane?

It was very cold weather, and a keen wind was blowing from the wood. D'Arcy was warmly clad, but it was cold work standing still. He looked this way and that way, hoping that the fair damsel whose wrongs he had come to right would soon appear on the horizon. He was so engaged when a sudden sound of sobbing broke on his ears.

It came from the other side of the stile, and in a moment D'Arcy whirled round and glanced along the footpath which led into the wood.

Under the trees, half-hidden from view, he could see a form, and the garb showed that it was a member of the superior half of humanity. D'Arcy could have kicked himself. Of course, the persecuted maiden was waiting under the trees to escape general view from the passers-by: just the thing a modest and retiring persecuted maiden would do!

Arthur Augustus crossed the stile and approached the female form under the trees. The persecuted maiden was wearing a long cloak, which covered her to the feet, and a very large hat. Her handkerchief was held to her face, and so D'Arcy could not see it, and the sound of sobbing increased as she heard the footsteps of the swell of St. Jim's. Although her face was covered, she had doubtless had a peep at the junior from behind the handkerchief.

"My dear young lady——" said D'Arcy, raising his topper in the most graceful way—a salute which was quite lost on the maiden, as she did not look up.

The sobbing increased in violence, and Arthur Augustus, who fully understood how his voice must have made the lady's heart beat, was quite concerned.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I—I weally wish you would twy to

calm yourself! You are in no dangah now. If your persecutah should come along, I will give him a feahful thwashin'!"

A gurgling sound came from under the handkerchief.

But for the fact that the fair unknown was stricken with grief, D'Arcy would have imagined that she was laughing. But that, of course, was impossible.

"You are quite safe with me," said Arthur Augustus, approaching nearer. "Pway calm yourself! I weceived your lettah at the school. It was you who wrote that charmin' lettah, of course?"

"Yes," came in a faint whisper from under the handkerchief.

"I was weally extwemely honahed by your confidence," said D'Arcy. "I made up my mind at once to wush to the wescue, and I hwdwied like any-thin'. But I do not think that I know your charmin' name."

"I—I will tell you later."

The words were murmured in broken tones.

"Pway do not cwyl!" said D'Arcy. "Pway wemove that handkerchief so that I may see your beautiful face, my dear fwieud!"

Again that gurgling sound.

"No, no, I cannot! I must remain unknown," said the maiden, in a hurried whisper. "If you should see my face all would be lost."

"I weally do not compwehend."

"I will explain afterwards. Even now my enemies may be on the track, and they may find me here at any moment. Suppose they should find me with you?"

And the fair unknown trembled violently.

The swell of St. Jim's grasped his gold-headed cane and looked decidedly warlike.

"Let them all come!" he exclaimed. "I do not care if they come, my fair fwieud. You are quite safe with me. I will pwotect you. I should weally and twuly like to meet your base persecutah at this moment. I would give him a feahful——"

"Yes, yes; but I am afraid—I am afraid!"

"There is absolutely nothin' to be afwaid of," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "There is no one in sight. And if there were, am I not here to pwotect you to the last dwop of my blood? Pway weassure yourself!"

"But—but I tremble—I tremble!"

"Pway do not twemble!"

"But I do. And—and, oh, come farther into the wood, where I may tell you my terrible story unseeh!"

"With gweat pleasuah!"

With the handkerchief still held to her eyes, its folds quite concealing her face, the persecuted maiden led the way further into Rylcombe Wood. In spite of the handkerchief, she seemed to see her way pretty well.

D'Arcy followed, feeling rather nonplussed. He had come there to rescue a distressed beauty from some terrible danger, but how was he to do it unless he knew what was the matter? And a horrid fear was weighing on his mind that the persecuted maiden might go into hysterics.

The persecuted maiden stopped under the thick trees, some twenty yards from the lane. There was a sound of sobbing again.

"How brave, how noble of you to come to my aid!" she murmured. "But I knew the appeal would not be made in vain—I knew that you would come! Are you not distinguished from all your schoolfellows by your courage and your noble bearing?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you not the bravest and the handsomest of all the juniors at St. Jim's?"

"You weally flattah me."

"Not at all. Could I fail to see how you stand, in every respect, head and shoulders above any other fellow at St. Jim's?"

"Well, no, pewwaps not," said D'Arcy.

Then he looked round quickly.

A sound had come from under the trees, and it sounded so remarkably like a suppressed chuckle that D'Arcy was alarmed. But there was no one in sight.

"Could I," went on the persecuted damsel enthusiastically—"could I mistake that noble bearing, that haughty glance, that fiery eye, which seemed to tell me that a Paladin had revisited the earth in—in an Eton suit?"

"You are vewy flattahin'," said D'Arcy. "I weally—"

Then he swung round again.

This time he was certain he had heard a chuckle behind him. He screwed the eyeglass into his eye and stared among the trees. The colour mounted to his face as he distinctly saw a foot showing from behind the trunk of a big oak.

It was a boy's boot he saw, and he could not have any further doubt that the scene had witnesses—probably from the Grammar School.

And a terrible suspicion shot into his mind. Was it all a hoax? The persecuted damsel—was she a humbug, and had she led him into a trap? It was curious that she should have persisted in keeping her face covered all this time.

"No," went on the maiden—"no, I could not be mistaken! When I saw your gallant form and imposing brow I knew that I was saved, and that I had only to—to write you a note, to make you 'wun like anythin' to the wescue.'"

D'Arcy gave a jump.

It was certainly not in keeping with a persecuted maiden's character to parody his exquisite style of speech in this way.

"Weally—" began D'Arcy haughtily.

There was a shout of laughter behind the trees. The spectators could contain it no longer. D'Arcy turned crimson.

"I am afwaid that a deception has been practised on me," he said. "I am weally surprised at your conduct, madam!"

"Oh, say not so!" cried the persecuted damsel, in great distress. "If you look upon my face you will know why I have led you hither."

"Then pway let me see your face!" said D'Arcy, relenting a little.

The handkerchief was lowered at last. D'Arcy looked at the face under it—and nearly jumped off the ground.

It was not a grief-stricken female face he saw—it was the grinning countenance of Frank Monk, the chief of the Grammar School juniors!

"Fwank Monk!"

CHAPTER 17. The Price of Silence.

"A, ha, ha!"

It was a yell of laughter from the wood.

"Fwank Monk!" repeated Arthur Augustus dazedly.

He could only stare helplessly at the persecuted maiden, who had turned out in such an unexpected manner to be the Grammarian leader.

Monk was nearly hysterical with laughter, long suppressed.

"Fwank Monk, you are a beastly cad!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "So you wrote me this wotten, beastly lettah, did you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Monk. "I got my sister to write it for me!"

"And you bwrought me here for nothin', did you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a cad—as a beastly wottah! I considah you a wank ousidah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I despise you feahfully!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I would give you a feahful thwashin', but you are not worth it!" said D'Arcy; and he turned to stalk away majestically.

But half a dozen Grammarians were crowding out from their ambush, and Carboy and Lane blocked the path of the indignant swell of St. Jim's.

Frank Monk, hiccoughing with laughter, threw aside the cloak and hat and stood revealed in his proper person.

"Stand aside!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as the Grammarians stopped him. "Stand aside, or I shall pwobably lose my tempah and stwike you with violence!"

"Collar him!" shouted Frank.

"We've got him!" grinned Carboy, and he laid his hand on D'Arcy's shoulder.

But Arthur Augustus was in earnest, and his fist crashed on Carboy's nose with a force that made the Grammarian roll over on the ground, and split D'Arcy's glove.

"Ow!" roared Carboy. "He's nearly busted my boko! Hold him!"

Lane was already holding him. Several other Grammarians came to his aid, and Arthur Augustus was secured. He did not resist very much. A rough-and-tumble scramble would have spoiled his clothes.

"Pway do not lay your unpleasant paws on my collah!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I am your beastly pwisonah, but I stwongly object to havin' my collah soiled!"

"I'm afraid you're going to get the collar and the rest of you soiled," said Frank Monk. "What price rolling him in the pool in the wood?"

"Good!" said every voice at once.

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"Pway do not do anythin' so extwemely beastly!" he exclaimed. "You are a beastly set of wuffians, I know, but you should dwaw a line some-whah!"

"Lemme see," Frank said, considering. "Of course, you know what we've played this little jape off on you for, Gussy Adolphus?"

"My name is not Adolphus!"

"Well, Algernon, then. You know what we want?"

"Yaas, wathah! You want a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha! I don't mean that. We want that part of the surrender document which you fellows have in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's."

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Ah, is that the weason of this wascally pwocedin'?" he said. "Well, I assuah you that you will be disappointed, you know."

"I don't think so. We haven't taken all this trouble for nothing."

"Let's souse him in the pool!" said Lane impatiently.

"I wefuse to be soused in the pool!"

"Wait a bit," said Frank. "Where's that letter? He's got it about him. Now, Gussy, how would you like that touching epistle made public property at St. Jim's, and the story of this pathetic meeting in a wood told to all the chaps?"

D'Arcy turned pale at the thought. He stood a great deal of chipping from the boys of St. Jim's with great serenity. But this would be a different matter. If the whole school knew how he had been taken in, he felt that he could never face the fellows again.

His ears burned at the thought of the chaff he would have to undergo. Figgins & Co. would get hold of it, and never let him hear the end of it. There would be endless references to it in "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Frank Monk watched the expression of D'Arcy's face, and knew that he had won.

"Now, make up your mind," he said. "We're after the document, and we're going to have it. We've got two-thirds of it, and we want the other third. Then we're going to paste it up together, with an inscription on it to the effect that we licked St. Jim's hollow, and got it from them as a trophy of victory, and we shall keep it hanging up in the common-room. See the idea? We've got to have that document. If you don't let us have it, Gussy, you'll get chipped to death."

"I should wogard it a bweach of confidence to tell any of these circs to the fellows at St. Jim's—"

"Rats! Pay up your ransom, and we'll keep mum, of course."

"Weally, Fwank Monk—"

"Come, yes or no. If you don't agree, we'll send this letter to Gore at St. Jim's, with a full explanation of the whole thing. He's the chap to spread it over the school and make the most of it."

"Pway don't do anythin' of the kind—"

"Are we to have our document, then?"

"It is weally not my pwoperty. It belongs to the whole study, and there are three of us—or, wathah, four now that Digby is back at the school."

"Yes, I know; but the word of one binds the lot," said Monk. "I know your rules. If you promised to give up the document, Blake would let you do it."

"Yaas, wathah; but they might give me a study lickin' for pwomisin'."

"I shouldn't wonder. That's your look-out. Are you going to send us the document, or are you going to be shown up at St. Jim's, and rolled in the pool into the bargain?"

"I am in your hands—"

"You agree?" demanded Monk.

"Yaas, wathah!" said the swell of the School House, with a sigh. "But I considah—"

"Never mind what you considah—you promise?"

"Yaas, wathah! Honah bwight!"

"Good!" said Monk, with much satisfaction. "Let him go."

The Grammarians escorted Arthur Augustus to the stile, and saw him down the lane to St. Jim's. The swell of the School House walked away looking very crestfallen. The Grammarians howled with laughter as he went, and that sound was the last D'Arcy heard of them.

In a dejected mood the swell of St. Jim's entered the old gates. There he ran right into the Co. They stared at him, noting his changed demeanour instantly. They surrounded him, and asked questions, and there was no escape for Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Have you rescued the damsel in distress already? You haven't been long gone."

"Gussy has established a record for rescuing damsels in distress," said Louthier. "Have you restored her to the arms of her sobbing parents, Gussy?"

"Oh, pway don't wot! Let me pass!"

"Nonsense!" said Blake. "Haven't you any thrilling adventure to tell us about?"

"Certainly not."

"No hairbreadth escapes in the imminent deadly breeches—I mean, breach——"

"Pway don't make such fwivolous wemarks——"

"Haven't you slew the traitor? Haven't you slain the Jabberwock?"

"I wefuse to discuss the mattah at all," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway let me pass, or I shall pwobably lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"Rats! We've had a meeting, and elected Marmaduke captain. Marmaduke, order him to explain what deadly perils he has been in!"

"Rather!" said Marmaduke. "Explain instantly what deadly perils you have been in, Gussy!"

"I haven't been in any beastly deadly pewils," said D'Arcy. "I want to speak to you thwree fellows—Blake and Hewwies and Digby—on an important mattah. Let these othah boundahs go and play at marbles!"

"Come along, then," said Blake. "You other boundahs go and play at marbles."

The chums of the Fourth marched off to their study with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, leaving the rest of the Co. considerably puzzled.

D'Arcy did not speak a word till they were within Study No. 6, and then he closed the door carefully and turned to his comrades.

They watched him in some surprise. D'Arcy seemed to find some difficulty in beginning.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Blake at last. "Have you something to say, Gussy? If you have, old fellow, say it, and don't keep us here all the afternoon!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come, get it off your chest, Gussy. Did you find that the damsel in distress had changed her mind and run away with a soldier?"

"Pway be sewious, Blake. This is a sewious mattah. I hardly know how to begin——"

"The beginning is a good place," said Blake.

"Or you could tackle it in the middle if you found that come easier," suggested Digby.

"Or begin at the end and work backwards," said Herries, "if you fancied it that way."

"Pway allow me to speak. I have had a most unfortunate encountah with the Gwammah School cads, you know."

"Have you? And what happened?"

"I was a pwisonah, you know, and I have pwomised to send them the fwagment of that document of suwwendah, you know, which we have in the study——"

The swell of the School House was interrupted by a howl from three throats simultaneously.

"What!" roared Blake, Digby, and Herries.

"I have pwomised to send them——"

"You—you—you howling bounder——"

"You utter ass——"

"You frightful lunatic——"

"I wefuse to be called a fwightful lunatic! I wefuse to be chawactewised as a howlin' boundah! I uttahnly wefuse to be designated as an ass——"

"You—you—you— Oh, there ain't a word!"

"The—the villain! The wretch! The crocodile!"

"I wefuse——"

"Monster!" howled Blake. "Don't you know that that scrap was all St. Jim's had left to show that they had licked the Grammarians?"

"Yaas, wathah! I was quite aware of that——"

"Don't you know that Tom Merry's share is gone, and Figgins's share is gone, and that we've been crowing over them because we were taking better care of our little bit?"

"Yaas, wathah——"

"And now you've been and given it away——"

"It couldn't be helped, you know——"

"Gr-r-r-r! There are times, Gussy, when you need killing, and need it awfully bad. When that last bit is gone, what is there to show that we ever licked the Grammar School?"

"It can't be——"

"You ought to have helped it! Have you promised, honour bright?"

"Yaas; I have weally pwomised, honah bwight!"

"Then it will have to be done," said Blake. "We're diddled, dished, and done. The trophy of victory will depart from the walls——"

"All through Gussy playing the giddy ox!" said Digby.

"Well, he knows what to expect," said Herries. "A study licking is a light punishment for this. He wants boiling!"

"Boiling in oil," agreed Blake. "We can't do that, but a study licking is quite in order. Gussy, are you ready?"

"Certainly not! I wefuse to have a study lickin'! I——"

"You can refuse till your hair turns ginger, but you are going to have it all the same. You horrid image!"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Digby. "You helped to give Blake one when he let the study down one time, I remember, and we made him fairly squirm!"

"That was a vewy diffewent mattah. Blake can be handled wuffly if you like. But as for myself, I have to considah my dig, and it would go against my conch to allow you to tweek me with diswespect!"

"Collar him!"

"I wefuse——"

But D'Arcy's refusal did not save him. His chums seized him, and for the first time in his career D'Arcy experienced a study licking.

He did not enjoy it!

Exactly what happened he did not know then, and never quite knew; but it seemed to him as if an earthquake or a cyclone had suddenly struck Study No. 6.

When it was finished D'Arcy sat in the middle of the floor, looking round him, and wondering whether the world had come to an end.

His clothes were dishevelled and dusty, his hair ruffled and wild, his collar torn out, and his tie hanging over his shoulder. His face was streaming with a mingling of red and black ink. He was sitting on his silk hat, which was crushed into the shape of a concertina.

The chums had left the study. Arthur Augustus rose slowly to his feet. He had never felt such a wreck in all his natural life.

"I—I weally feel quite exhausted!" he murmured. "And I shall nevah speak to those feahful wuffians again! I no longah wegard them as fwends!"

CHAPTER 18.
Marmaduke & Co.

MARMADUKE & Co. met Blake, Herries, and Digby as they came out of the School House, after administering that little correction to the swell of St. Jim's.

Blake was breathing hard, and Herries and Digby looked a little dusty. Tom Merry looked at them curiously.

"You chaps look as if you had been working, or something," he said. "Have you turned over an entirely new leaf? You shouldn't do these things too suddenly."

"We've been correcting Gussy," said Blake. "The villain has undertaken to send over to Frank Monk our bit of that valuable document."

"My word! Then the last bit will be gone, and we shall have nothing to show for our victory over the Grammar School!"

"Yes, that's it. All the work to do over again. We've given Gussy a study licking, and he's really been asking for one for a long time."

"Well, I hope it will do him good, old chap. But what made Gussy promise such a thing?" asked the hero of the Shell.

Blake shook his head wrathfully.

"Blessed if I know! The Grammarians seem to have got hold of him somehow, and made him do it—same old game, you know, that they worked off before."

"I suppose that letter he had was a hoax, got up by the Grammar cads?" Figgins suggested. "That's what it looks like to me."

"Shouldn't wonder. But there's no getting a word out of Gussy. He refuses to explain, and when he likes he can be as obstinate as a mule or Marmaduke—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Marmaduke, colouring. "Don't pile it on, Blake. Are you ready to come out?"

"Oh, yes, we're ready! Anything on?"

"Yes. It's freezing—"

"My dear Marmy, I believe I made that remark to you this morning. And it's pretty evident, anyway, as the water is frozen in the fountain over there."

"Yes, I know it is; and that's why I—"

"And it's jolly cold, too," said Digby. "If we're going out, I shall go in for my coat."

"Certainly. We shall—"

"I think I'll get a muffler," said Herries. "Wait for me."

"Will you listen to me?" exclaimed Marmaduke. "What the dickens do you mean by interrupting your leader, you insubordinate bounders?"

"That's all right, Marmalade—I mean, Marmaduke. You—Ow!"

Blake sat down on the steps of the School House as Marmaduke Smythe's right plumped on his chest.

"What did you do that for?" he roared.

"Maintaining discipline," grinned Marmaduke. "Any member of this Co. is not allowed to make idiotic puns on his leader's name!"

Blake looked decidedly warlike, but the Terrible Three closed round him and held him back.

"Marmy's right," said Tom Merry—"quite right. You set the example of maintaining discipline yourself, Blake, and you've got nothing to grumble at!"

"That's all very well; but—"

"Exactly; so let's get on with the washing. Marmaduke has been looking very thoughtful for a long time, ever since the meeting in the wood-shed, and I believe he has got some wheeze. If you have, Marmy, spout it out!"

"Out with it, Marmy!" said Figgins & Co. encouragingly.

"Right you are," said Marmaduke. "You remember when we skated down the Ryll the other day we found the Grammarians skating on the part of the river opposite their school?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"It's very likely that they'll be out there to-day, as the river's frozen harder than ever, and it's a half-holiday."

"More than likely. It's pretty certain."

"Well, that's where we come in," announced Marmaduke. "They'll be doing figure-skating and that sort of thing, and having a high old time. We may as well send a chap along to make sure that they are there, but it's pretty certain. Now, my idea is to get up a big party—ourselves at the head, of course—and get down the Ryll on skates, and simply sweep them off the ice. We've got lots of good skaters at St. Jim's, you know, and we should at any time make a better show on the ice than the Grammarians. If we go in strong force we shall have things all our own way, and it would be ripping fun to lick the Grammar cads in sight of their own school, with their friends looking on."

Figgins gave Marmaduke a mighty thump on the back.

"Good old Marmy! It's a splendid idea."

"Well, that's it," said Marmaduke modestly. "Let's get a move on."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brow thoughtfully.

"We'd better send a scout along," he remarked. "Digby can get there and back on his skates while we're getting up a party. We'd better take most of the Shell and the Fourth Form of both houses along, to have plenty in case the Grammarians rally."

"That's the idea."

"I'll go and scout willingly," said Digby. "It may be the last time I'll have a chance to take a hand in the game, as my governor insists upon my going home on Monday."

"Never give up hope," said Blake encouragingly. "You may break your leg on the ice, and have to stay at St. Jim's while you get it mended—"

"Or you may get drowned—"

"Or you may—"

Digby did not wait to hear any more of the cheerful suggestions. He went into the School House for his skates, and soon reappeared with them.

"Mind, you know what you've got to do," said Marmaduke. "Don't get into a row with the Grammarians if you can help it. Just see what they're at, and come back and report."

"Right-ho!" said Digby.

And he was off. Marmaduke & Co. proceeded immediately with the recruiting. It was easy enough to gather a strong force of juniors to take the field against the Grammar School. The New House youngsters would have followed Figgins anywhere, and Tom Merry and Blake were the acknowledged chiefs of the School House. Their call to arms was immediately answered, though some of the juniors looked askance at Marmaduke as a leader. But where Figgins, Blake, and Tom Merry were content to follow, it was not for the lesser lights to complain.

Forty sturdy youngsters followed Marmaduke and Co. down to the Ryll with their skates. Skating was a popular winter pastime at St. Jim's, and the Co. would allow only good skaters to join in the enterprise. It was worse than useless to be encumbered with bad skaters in a brush with the enemy. As the band, numbering over fifty in all, sat on the bank putting on their skates while they waited for Digby's return, Arthur Augustus came down the bank with his skates in his hand.

"Hallo," growled Blake, "what do you want?"

"I am comin' to join in the attack on the Gwammah cads," said D'Arcy.

"I thought you had left the Co.?"

"I have wejoined it."

"That's all very well, but you're such an ass, you know. You'll only make a muck of the whole thing. You had better go and eat toffee."

"I wefuse to go and eat toffee. I am comin' to attack the Gwammah cads. I owe them a feahful gwudge, and, besides, I knew vevy well that you fellows will get into some wiculous fix if I don't come to look aftah you."

"But you can't skate," said Herries. "You remember what a guy you made of yourself on the ice at Christmas-time, at Tom Merry's."

"I have practised considerably since then," said D'Arcy, "and I weally do not considah in the least that I made a guy of myself, deah boy. I wemembah that you were an uttah ass at the time, but as for myself—"

"Hallo, here's Digby!" exclaimed Kerr, looking down the river, where a skater came in sight. "He's in a hurry, too."

Digby certainly seemed in a hurry. He came flying along at such a rate that he could not stop himself, and he had to execute a number of figures in front of the bank where the juniors were sitting, in order not to be carried on past them.

The cause of his haste was soon apparent.

Round the bend of the stream came three swift skaters, and a shout went up as Monk, Lane, and Carboy were recognised.

"The Grammar rotters!"

The three caught sight of the St. Jim's crowd, and already received a volley of fragments of turf, as they turned round on the ice and hurried back. They turned at once like clockwork, and so swiftly that there was only time for that one volley ere they disappeared round the bend of the Ryl again.

Digby came to a stop at last, gasping for breath.

"They nearly had me," he spluttered, "but I did them! It was a close shave, though! I came on them suddenly: there's about thirty of them out on the ice, and a lot of people on the bank watching them, you know. They're having a high old time. Monk and those rotters chased me the moment I came in sight."

"Well, it's our turn to do the chasing now," exclaimed Blake. "Get on the ice—"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Marmaduke. "What's that you say?"

"I said get on the ice."

"Who's leader of this Co.?" demanded the heir of millions.

"I forgot—but if you're a giddy leader, why don't you give orders then?" demanded Blake. "What are we to do, Marmalade—I mean Jam—that is to say, Marmaduke."

"Get on the ice," said Marmaduke. "Get your skates on, all of you."

"Yes, rather!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! I'm quite weady, for one."

"Keep together," commanded Marmaduke. "Form six abreast, in files, and each fellow put his hands on the shoulders of the chap in front of him."

The order was obeyed.

The front line was composed of the Terrible Three, Marmaduke, Figgins, and Blake. The second rank contained the rest of the Co. Behind them the juniors stood rank on rank, and the whole formed a phalanx there would be no resisting when once it got going at a good speed.

"Now you know what to do," said Marmaduke, looking over his forces. "You're to stick together, and get up a good speed, and we shall sweep down the river and sweep all the Grammarians away like chaff. You understand?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then start."

They started. Then something went wrong. It was not easy to start in that position, and every skater there was a bit different in style from the others. The next thing that happened was that the whole body was staggering and reeling and sliding about, and finally piling themselves in sprawling heaps on the ice.

Marmaduke squeezed himself out from under Figgins and Tom Merry, and sat up.

"You set of asses!" he shouted.

"Set of asses yourself!" howled Lowther. "I mean—you're an ass! It's all your fault! I've got somebody's silly boot banging on my left ear."

"And I've got a silly duffer's elbow on my nose," said Arthur Augustus plaintively.

"Oh, blow your nose!"

"I wefuse to blow my nose. I——"

"Get up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I say, I think we'd better start separately, and come together in a phalanx afterwards——"

"In a what?" inquired Kerr.

"A phalanx," said Marmaduke. "This is the Macedonian phalanx, you know—that's what I meant all along, only I couldn't think of the word. Form up!"

"Better start separately——"

"Who's captain of this turn-out, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, you are Marmy, but——"

"Then shut up while I give orders! Form up, kids, and start separately; it will come easier," said Marmaduke, with a severe look at the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry laughed; his idea was adopted at all events. The juniors picked themselves up and sorted themselves out. Then they started, rank after rank, and it was easy for the ranks to close afterwards, and the boys behind to place their hands on the shoulders of the fellows in front.

The phalanx, being in good going order, it increased in speed as it swept down the river. It rounded the bend of the Ryll, with scarves and coat-tails flying, and caps scattering in all directions. Little cared the juniors for that. They were brimming with the excitement of the rush and the coming conflict.

Marmaduke's idea was really a good one. The St. Jim's phalanx was certain to sweep away anything it met on the ice. The crowd of juniors burst into a ringing cheer as, rounding the last bend, they came in sight of the Grammar School.

CHAPTER 19.

A Tussle on the Ice—Danger.

THE Grammarians were disporting themselves on the ice of the frozen Ryll in complete ignorance of the impending avalanche of Saints.

Monk, Lane, and Carboy had rejoined the juniors, and were cutting figures on the ice, and there were a score or more of them there, as well as at least a dozen senior boys. Among the latter was Hake, the bully of the Grammar School, with whom the St. Jim's juniors had had a memorable encounter on one occasion in the tuck-shop in Rylcombe.

Seniors or juniors, it was all the same to the Macedonian phalanx as it came sweeping at top speed down the frozen river.

It was the shout of the Saints—the war-cry of St. Jim's—that gave the Grammarians the first warning of danger.

Monk looked up the river, and gave a start.

"Look out!"

There wasn't much time to look out. The spectators on the bank, including some of the masters and upper form fellows, shouted a warning, too. But there was no time.

"Forward!" yelled Marmaduke excitedly.

The order was hardly needed. The skating party were going at top speed, and they could not have stopped if they had wanted to.

Right on they swept into the scattered Grammarians.

The latter were literally swept away.

The front rank of the Saints smote them like a battering-ram, and the front rank was so backed up by the weight of those behind, that it was irresistible.

Monk, Lane, and Carboy were smitten and carried away, and they went skating along on their backs, and the rest of the Grammarians were hurled right and left by the shock.

Seniors and juniors were carried away helplessly, flying in all directions, and the St. Jim's phalanx swept on like an avalanche.

The phalanx had not wholly escaped the result of the shock, however.

Manners was sitting down, and forced onward at the same speed by the press around him, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing on one leg, the other high in the air, quite helpless to right himself.

Right past went the phalanx, and Marmaduke shouted an order to slacken down. That order was not easily obeyed, but the juniors separated at last, and gathered on the ice at a standstill.

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake. "It's a giddy victory! We simply swept them away! Hallo, here comes a chap who wants more!"

Hake, the Grammar School bully, was speeding down the ice at a furious rate, his face convulsed with rage.

He had been hurled into a clump of frozen willows, and was considerably hurt, and he meant to take prompt vengeance upon the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Form up!" shouted Tom Merry. "Prepare to receive boarders!"

"Shut up, Tom Merry! Form up, lads!" shouted Marmaduke.

The Saints had little time to form up, but the Co. were quicker than the rest, and they were ready to receive the Grammar School senior. Hake, hardly thinking that the juniors would venture to handle him, came rushing on at full speed, and he rushed right into the Co. The next moment he was over, and sliding along on his back, and three or four of the Co. were sliding along with him, clinging to him.

"Got him!" roared Manners.

They had got him, indeed. Hake struggled furiously, but the odds were too great. The juniors swamped him with numbers.

"Let me gerrup!" he roared, struggling under a heap of youngsters. "I'll break every bone in your body, Tom Merry! I'll wring your neck, D'Arcy!"

"I wefuse to let you get up, Hake."

"I'll—I'll be the death of you! I'll—I'll——"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "We've got you, and we're happy now. We must give him some proof of our regard before we send him back."

"Break a hole in the ice and duck him!" suggested French.

"Good idea!" exclaimed Jimson. "You can use his head to break the ice with. It would do for a mallet very well."

"If you dare to——"

"Oh, ring off, Hake! We're doing the talking. I say, he's swearing!"

Hake, I am surprised and shocked. Our innocent ears must not be contaminated in this manner. Roil him in those frozen rushes, kids, and perhaps he will shut up!"

"That's wight! Woll the beastly wascal in the wushes, dear boys!"

"Lemme go!"

"Over with him! Roll the brute along!"

"Ovah with the bwute, deah boys!"

Hake, in spite of his struggles, was rolled into a mass of rusty, musty, ancient rushes by the riverside, and rolled over and over there, till his savage voice died away in gaspings. When he was silent he was dragged out again. And he was a pitiable object! He was smothered with dirt, his face was as black as a sweep's, his collar was torn out, and his hair was ruffled and wild.

"My word, if you're not off!" exclaimed Monty-Lowther. "What a fearful-looking scoundrel! I shouldn't like to meet him in a lane on a dark night."

"Yon young scoundrels!"

"I think that's enough," said Tom Merry. "Let him go."

"Shut up, Tom Merry! He's had enough, chaps. Let him go," said Marmaduke, giving orders. "Now, Hake, off with you! If you're not gone in five seconds you'll get a second dose!"

Hake was not likely to linger. He skated off at full speed as soon as he could get on his feet, and he cut such a ridiculous figure that the juniors sent a yell of laughter after him, and a perfect roar from the Grammarians greeted his return.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hake made straight for the bank to escape the general merriment, and went ashore. Even the Grammar schoolmasters laughed as he passed them. Hake went up to the school in a towering rage. Meanwhile, Frank Monk and his comrades were busy.

The Grammarians were intent upon measuring strength with the Saints, and Monk was rallying his forces to meet the enemy when they came past again, as they were certain to do. Hake had delayed them a little, but Captain Marmaduke was well aware of the necessity of getting back to St. Jim's before the Grammarians could rally in force to oppose the return.

"Form up!" he shouted.

And the Saints formed up as Hake disappeared from view, and prepared for the rush back past the Grammar School grounds.

"Come on!" commanded Marmaduke. "Same as before!"

"Same old game!" said Blake. "Follow your leader!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the Saints started again, coming together in a phalanx as before, and sweeping up the river again in a compact body.

Right on they went at top speed, and came in sight of the Grammar School once more. But there were few of the Grammarians on the ice. Two or three were there, and they scuttled at once for the bank as the Saints came in sight. The Co. roared with laughter as they swept on. The Grammarians were evidently licked.

But a moment later their laughter changed to a yell of dismay.

Tom Merry caught sight of a black streak across the frozen river, and tried to stop. But there was no time. He knew that the cunning Grammarians had stretched a rope across the ice, from two trees on the banks. But the rest could not see it; nor could they have stopped themselves if they had.

The rope was about six inches above the ice. The ankles of the front rank caught in it, and over they went. Tom Merry was the only one who escaped it, and he only escaped by the skin of his teeth.

Disaster fell upon the rest of the phalanx.

The front rank being down, the rest, unable to stop themselves, and having no time to stop any way, piled over them helplessly.

In a twinkling the whole of the numerous band were sprawling on the ice, utterly disorganised, and at the mercy of the foe.

And the foe were ready!

On either bank waited the Grammarians to pounce upon the Saints if they fell into the trap. And they had fallen into it blindly.

As the juniors reeled and sprawled in every direction the Grammarians rushed forth and fell upon them, and smote them hip and thigh.

"Give 'em socks!" shouted Frank Monk.

"Go for 'em!" yelled Lane and Carboy.

And the Grammarians did go for them! They hustled them, and tussled them, and hustled them, till the unhappy Saints did not know whether they were on their heads or their heels.

Tom Merry put up a good fight, but the rest were so confused and dismayed that there was no fight in them, and they fled in twos or threes as fast as they could get away. Tom Merry was the last to strike off, and to some extent he covered the retreat. Some of the Grammarians, in the flush of victory, pursued, and Tom Merry at last skated off, with Carboy and three or four others on his track.

Tom was fagged with the long tussle, and the pursuers rapidly gained on him. He looked back and saw Carboy coming up hand over hand, as it were. He set his teeth and changed his course. At this part the Ryll was very wide, and on the southern side very shallow, and the ice there was thin, and a notice-board gave warning that it was dangerous for skaters. But Tom depended on his speed, and he did not think for a moment that the Grammarians would follow him there.

He made for the thin ice, and shot across it like a flash, and kept on his way on that side of the river. Twice he heard a creak under him, but his speed saved him. He rushed on fearlessly, and there was a sudden shout from the Grammarians:

"Come back, Carboy!"

Tom Merry turned his head in dismay.

All but one of the Grammarians had stopped at the sight of the notice-board. But Carboy, too excited to think of danger, was speeding on. The shout of his comrades came too late. The Grammar School junior was already speeding across the danger zone. To stop would have been more dangerous now than to keep on.

"Come back!"

Carboy realised his peril, but he kept on. It was the only thing to do. But the ice which had borne the weight of one would not bear two; it had creaked ominously under Tom Merry, and under Carboy it cracked—and broke!

Cra-a-a-ack!

There was a gasp from Carboy, a shout of horror from his friends—a splash! Tom Merry stopped, in horrified dismay. He swung round. Carboy was in the water, clutching wildly at the ice, which broke and crumbled in his hands as he clutched at it.

CHAPTER 20.
in Sight of Death.

"HEAVENS!" gasped Tom Merry. He stopped, staring in dismay at the black hole in the ice, and the white face of Carboy looking from it.

The Grammarians who had been left behind by Carboy seemed stricken with dismay. One of them dashed off to get help, the rest seemed unable to move. They could only stare in horror at the gap of black, swirling water.

Tom Merry did not remain still more than a few seconds. Then he skated back towards the hole in the ice, and as he reached the crumbling edge it sank under his feet, and he plunged in beside Carboy.

He was none too soon.

The Grammarian could swim, but not particularly well, and the icy coldness of the water was gripping his limbs. His frozen fingers were already failing to grip at the ice.

"Keep up!" gasped Tom Merry. "Ugh! It is cold! Keep up, old chap! I—I had no idea you'd follow me on the thin ice, you know."

"My fault!" gasped Carboy. "I ought to have noticed the board. I—I can't keep up!"

Tom Merry grasped him by the collar.

"Yes, you can! You've got to! Help! Help!"

The shout rang over the frozen river and the desolate banks.

Tom Merry looked round wildly.

That they would be at the bottom of the river long before help could reach that lonely spot seemed certain. His eye caught the danger-board, and he uttered an exclamation. The thin ice would not bear their weight. But the post in the water would!

"Do you see that, Carboy? If we can get to that post——"

Carboy's eyes gleamed with hope.

"Let's try!"

Tom Merry crashed his arm on the thin ice, smashing it, and after a desperate effort lasting over many minutes they reached the signal-board, exhausted, and clung to it. Tom Merry helped Carboy up till he was hanging over the board, shuddering in every limb with cold. Tom clung to the post.

There was a shout from the terrified group of Grammarians on the ice. The boy who had gone for help was returning, and he was followed by a couple of farm labourers bearing a long plank.

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation of relief.

"Do you see that, Carboy?"

Carboy's teeth chattered.

"Ye-e-es, Merry. But—but I can't hold on!"

"You must!" cried Tom Merry anxiously.

"I—I can't!"

Carboy's hold upon the board relaxed, and he slipped into the water again. Right under he would have gone but for the grip of Tom Merry.

Tom was exhausted himself, and his brain was swimming, but he held on to the post with one hand, and Carboy with the other, and shouted through his frozen lips for help.

"We're coming!"

"Buck up!"

The plank was sliding along the ice towards them. Frank Monk and Lane were on the spot now. It was clear that Tom Merry was too exhausted to take the chance of safety now that it was offered, and Frank did not hesitate.

In a twinkling he had slid forward, and was in the gap beside the two juniors.

"Courage, old fellow!"

"Take Carboy!" gasped Tom Merry. "I'm all right!"

"Hold on!"

Monk drew the half-unconscious Carboy from Tom Merry's grip and dragged him along the plank. The ice creaked under it and cracked again; but the other end held firm, and Frank dragged himself and his burden to safety. There willing hands seized him, and they were carried on to the safe ice.

"I'm going back for Merry," said Frank. "He——"

"No, you're not," said Lane coolly. "I'm going."

And he went. Tom Merry could never have escaped from the freezing waters without help, but with Lane's assistance he got along the plank. From the crowd gathering now round the spot rose a loud cheer as the rescue was effected.

"Get to bed as quick as you can, you kids!" exclaimed Figgins. "We'll take care of Tom Merry!"

Monk, Lane, and Carboy were carried off in next to no time. Figgins and Lowther seized Tom Merry and rushed him off. At the sight of the accident most of the St. Jim's juniors had returned; but all combat was, of course, at an end. Tom Merry was too exhausted to stir a limb, but the Co. had him off the river and tearing up to the school in no time. Almost before he knew where he was, they were rushing him up the stairs of the School House, and he was plumped into bed, with a hot-water bottle at his feet and blankets piled on him a foot thick. Then Figgins and the rest, satisfied that they had done all they could, left him to the care of the house-dame.

"My hat!" said Figgins, as they went downstairs. "We started in fun, but it might have ended in something very far from funny but for Tom Merry's pluck!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Tom Merry was the right fellow in the right place; but what I want to know is—where was our precious leader?"

"Yaas, wathah! Where was our pweicious leadah?"

"Certainly," said Monty Lowther. "We're entitled to know that. Tom Merry went to the rescue, and fished Carboy out of the water; but what was our valuable leader doing all the time?"

"Oh, rats!" said Marmaduke uneasily. "What could I be doing? I didn't even see Carboy go through the ice, did I?"

"Why didn't you?" said Manners. "That's the question. You see, a leader ought to see the things that happen, or else he's not much good."

"Oh, it depends on the view one takes of the matter, you know!" Lowther remarked. "Perhaps Marmaduke thought a leader's business was to lead the retreat."

"Yaas, wathah! Though I noticed that you did some wapid wunnin' yourself, Lowthah."

"Well, we all ran," said Marmaduke. "There was nothing else to do under the circumstances."

"Tom Merry found something else to do."

"How was it Tom Merry was behind all the rest?" demanded Digby. "Because he ran the last? That was just like Tom Merry! Chaps, Marmaduke ought to have been the last to run, and as he skedaddled so fast——"

"I was later than you, at any rate."

"That's nothing to do with it. I'm not a giddy leader. Chaps, Marmaduke is no good, and I vote that he be immediately deposed from his position as leader of this Co.!"

"Agreed!" said Manners and Lowther, with one voice; and Blake and Herries said the same. And Arthur Augustus chimed in with an emphatic "Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you say, Figgins?"

"Well, we've been defeated, so the rule holds good," said Figgins. "Marmaduke gets the order of the boot, and we select a new leader!"

"Oh, all right!" said Marmaduke. "I don't mind. I've done my best, and a fellow can't do more. It was a jolly good wheeze, anyway. We'll wait till Tom Merry's up, and then elect a new captain, and be hanged to you!"

So ended the brief command of Marmaduke Smythe. And D'Arcy confided to the chums of Study No. 6 that he had wathah a feelin' that if he were elected captain next he would make things hum for the Gwammawians.

CHAPTER 21.

Digby's Difficulty—Tom Merry has an Idea.

TOM MERRY was little the worse for his adventure on the ice. He had a splendid constitution, and it would have stood far severer strains. He found now the benefit of always being perfectly fit. He did not even catch a cold, and the next day—Sunday—he was in his place in chapel with the rest of the juniors of St. Jim's.

He looked a little pale, perhaps, but that was all. He had a good many congratulations to receive. His chums made much of him, and there was no doubt that Tom Merry could have had the permanent captaincy of the Co. for the mere asking.

But that was not in his mind at all. He was the last fellow in the world to wish to benefit by his act. Figgins even proposed that it should be so at the next meeting of the Co.; but Tom promptly negatived the suggestion.

"I'll take my chance with the rest," he said. "No favouritism. It's a bad thing, even with a good motive for it."

And so the idea was given up.

Tom's modesty in this respect enhanced his fame. He had never been so popular in the school, or in the Co. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, shook hands with him the next time they met, with words which brought a blush of pleasure to Tom's cheek. Praise from Kildare, the hero of the youngsters, was praise indeed. And even Dr. Holmes had a word of commendation to say.

"It's sickening," Gore confided to Mellish—"positively sickening, the fuss they are making of that fellow Merry! He'll be getting a fearfully swelled head!"

"Sure to," said Mellish. "I don't hold with making such a fuss of anybody! After all, what did he do? Just went into a hole in the ice!"

"Mere nothing. You or I would have done the same!"

"Of course we would," said Mellish, a little dubiously, however. "I dare say there really wasn't any danger at all. Besides, if there was, Merry brought it about himself by skating over dangerous ice."

"Yes, it was all his fault! Lot of rot, I call it, this fuss!" said Gore. "He'll be getting a record swelled head—you mark my words!"

But, in spite of Gore's prediction, Tom Merry showed absolutely no signs of getting anything like a swelled head.

He was his usual modest, serene self, and, indeed, did not seem to realise in the least that he had done anything out of the common.

On the Monday he took his usual place in class, quite his old self. A letter had arrived at St. Jim's that morning from the Grammar School,

acknowledging the receipt of Study 6's share of the famous surrender document—which had been posted by Arthur Augustus, as in honour bound—and also informing the chums that Monk, Lane, and Carboy were none the worse for their ducking. Carboy had remained in bed all day Sunday, that was all. It was good news to the hero of the Shell, who had been rather anxious for the Grammarians.

"They're all right," he said; "and I'm glad to hear it. We'll be having rows with them again soon. Any more, Blake?"

Blake was reading out the letter, which had been addressed to Study No. 6. He nodded, with rather a curious expression.

"Yes," he said. "There's a postscript. Listen!"

"Go on!"

"P.S.," read out Blake. "Under the circumstances, we, the juniors of the Grammar School, are quite willing to allow the warfare to lapse between us, on the understanding that the position is perfectly equal. Having won back the document you won from us, we are satisfied; and, in view of Tom Merry having saved Carboy's life, we're willing to bury the hatchet if you are. Now that we have got our own back, and proved that the Grammar School is top dog, we are willing to admit you to terms of equality."

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, of all the cheek!" he exclaimed. "Top dog—eh? That mouldy old Grammar School top dog! I like that!"

"We're not going to agree?" said Figgins.

"Not much! When they acknowledge us top dog we'll make peace. Besides, I don't want that affair on Saturday to make any difference either way."

"No," Blake remarked thoughtfully. "This is very nice of Monk, Lane, and Carboy; but lots of the Grammar kids might think that we were afraid of them, and were just sheltering ourselves behind what Tom Merry did for Carboy."

"Which," said Fatty Wynn, "would be—"

"Intolewable, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "I weally think we had bettah wepily in stwong terms to Frank Monk, you know."

"We'll write the letter after morning school," said Tom Merry; and then the juniors went in to lessons.

And after dinner the letter was concocted. The whole of the Co. met in Tom Merry's study, and eleven heads were put together over the matter.

"Let me see," said Tom Merry, taking a pen, "how shall we start—Dear Monkey—"

"That sounds wude," said D'Arcy. "In a case like this I should wecommend a dignified style, and I weally think you had bettah let me write the lettah, Tom Mewwy."

"Rats! 'Dear Monk,—Yours to hand.' That will do. 'Many thanks for your kind suggestion, but we are far from admitting that the Grammar School is top dog—'"

"That's all right," said Monty Lowther. "Tell 'em we consider it bottom dog, and a low-down sort of a mongrel of a bottom dog at that!"

"That would be diswespectful—"

"Far from admitting that the Grammar School is top dog," went on Tom Merry; "and, as a matter of fact, we consider it a bottom dog, and a measly, mongrelly sort of one into the bargain—"

"Good!" said several voices.

"As for the document you have managed to collar on the instalment plan—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

" 'We're going to get it back again, unless you destroy it; and if you do that, we shall take it as a confession that you're afraid we shall get it back—'"

" Yaas, wathah!"

" 'I hear that you are framing it, and putting it up with an inscription—'"

" Yaas, that wottah Monk told me so, you know."

" 'And keeping it as a trophy. You won't keep it long. We are going to collar it back again, unless you lose your nerve and make it safe by burning it.'"

" 'Good!' said Figgins. "That'll make it all right. Monk would as soon burn off his eyebrows as burn the document after that!"

"That's the idea, of course."

" 'But how are we going to get it back?'" said Marmaduke doubtfully. "That ransom business wouldn't work, you know. They wouldn't give it up."

" 'Oh, wait till I am captain, deah boys!'" said D'Arcy. "I shall think of a wippin' plan when the time comes. Only wait—"

" 'Wait till you've done it before you start gassing, Gussy—'"

" 'If any gentleman pwsent accuses me of gassin'—'"

" 'Oh, dry up while I finish this letter!'" said Tom Merry. "Let's get it posted and done with. You can take it to the letter-box, Gussy."

So the letter was posted, and, as the Co. expected, it brought a prompt reply from the leader of the Grammar School juniors, in which Frank Monk declared that the document in question would never be destroyed, and that it was hanging in a frame on the wall of the common-room at the Grammar School, ready to be taken by the juniors of St. Jim's if they could get at it.

" 'And you won't be able to work the ransom business,' the letter went on, "because I've made all the fellows swear that it shall never be given up under any circumstances whatever. And they won't go back on their word. So you can get it if you are able. You're welcome to try, if you like."

" 'We'll try,'" said Tom Merry: "and we'll do it, too."

But how it was to be done was a question that remained to be answered.

Tom Merry was thinking it out, but he had not hit upon any idea yet, and the others confessed that it was too much for them.

And just at present there was another matter occupying the minds of the Co. Digby's father was coming down to the school, and Dig was to return home with him. Unless something could be done, Dig would be gone on the morrow, and unable to take any further part in the campaign against the Grammar School.

" 'We've got to persuade Sir Robert to leave him here,'" said Tom Merry decidedly. "The only question is—how's it to be done?"

Digby shook his head dolefully.

" 'You see, my governor won't understand the importance of our giving the Grammar School the kybosh, and my being here to lend a hand,'" he remarked. "I've often noticed that grown-up people don't attach sufficient importance to the things that really matter."

Tom Merry nodded. He had noticed that himself.

" 'Let's think of a jolly good reason why Dig should stay,'" he said. "I suppose your governor is a reasonable chap, Dig, and will listen to reason. I dare say he wouldn't understand about the Grammar School, as you say; but—"

" 'Blessed if I can think of anything!'" said Blake. "We could say that Dig ought to stay because we want him—"

"But Sir Robert mightn't think that convincing enough," Lowther remarked.

"Exactly. So what's to be done?"

"I don't know about that," said D'Arcy. "As a gentleman, Sir Wobert Digby would be bound to respect the wishes of othah gentlemen, and if we put it to him politely——"

"My dear Gussy, your politeness would be absolutely wasted on a chap's obstinate governor," said Tom Merry. "We've got to think of a good gag."

"I think you are quite wrong, Tom Mewwy. I weally think I could pwevail on Sir Wobert to allow Dig to remain if I tried," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"I'm afraid you couldn't, Gus," said Digby despondently.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows. He thought hard, and when Tom Merry thought hard he usually succeeded in getting some result from it. A sudden smile broke over his face, and the Co. knew that he had thought of an idea.

"What's the wheeze?" demanded ten voices at once.

Tom Merry grinned.

"I say, Dig, your pater is an old sport, isn't he?" he said. "He thinks a lot of cricket and football, and that kind of thing?"

"Rather!" said Digby, somewhat surprised by the apparently irrelevant question. "He's an old Blue, and he never misses a cricket match in the summer, or a football match in the winter, if he can help it."

"Good! I've got a plan. It's been mooted about meeting the Grammarians in a football match again, on their own ground this time, and, of course, you will play for St. Jim's if you are here."

"Of course. But——"

"When is your governor coming down?"

"To-morrow afternoon. He was coming on Saturday, but he left it over the week-end. But I'm blessed if I can see what you're getting at, Tom Merry."

"Listen to the words of wisdom, then. Before your governor arrives at St. Jim's, I'll buzz over to the Grammar School, and fix up about the match. I can whizz over on my bike after morning school, and take a flag of truce, you know. There's no time to write, as we must have the thing settled before your governor comes. We'll fix up the match with Monk for next Saturday if possible. When Sir Robert comes we'll wait on him in a body, and explain to him that you're in the eleven, going to play on Saturday in an important match, and that we can't spare you."

Digby gave a jump.

"My hat! That's a ripping idea. I don't know if it will work, but if anything would persuade the pater, that's it."

"Then we'll fix it up with Monk, and trust to luck," said Tom Merry.

"If Sir Robert is a sportsman, he couldn't refuse to let you remain till the end of the week for the sake of playing for us. And by the end of the week, kids, we'll have had that paper back from the Grammarians, and given them the giddy kybosh!"

CHAPTER 22.

In the Enemy's Camp.

BUZ-Z-Z!

It was a bicycle-bell, buzzing loudly and imperatively, and Lane, who was standing at the gates of the Grammar School, turned his head to look. He had just time to jump aside as a bicycle, with Tom Merry in the saddle, came dashing up from the direction of St. Jim's, and turned into the gateway.

"Hallo, you rotter!" yelled Lane. "What are you up to? You nearly ran over me! You——"

But Tom Merry was gone. He was cycling at top-speed right through the playground. The ground was pretty well crowded with Grammarians, and a shout went up at sight of Tom Merry.

"Hallo, a St. Jim's rotter!"

"It's Tom Merry! Collar him!" And there was a rush to get hold of the bold cyclist. But Tom Merry, ringing his bell furiously, dashed right up to the steps of the school, and there he sprang to the ground, and leaned his bicycle against the balustrade. He faced round quite coolly, and waved a white pocket-handkerchief in the faces of the excited Grammarians.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "Stand off! I'm a flag of truce."

"You're a what?"

"A flag of truce. I've come with a message to your giddy chief. Keep your distance, and respect the white flag, my infants!"

The Grammarians looked rather puzzled.

They did not like being bearded in their own den, as it were, by the chief of the St. Jim's juniors, but Tom Merry's evident faith in their honour could not fail to appeal to them.

They hesitated, and looked round for their leader. Carboy and Lane were soon on the scene, the latter very red and indignant.

"What are you doing here, you outsider?" demanded Lane. "You nearly ran me over just now."

"Well, I've cycled over lots of Lanes before now," said Tom Merry. "What's a lane for?"

Some of the Grammarians chuckled. Lane turned redder.

"I can see that you have come here for a hiding," he remarked. "You've come to the exact right spot to get one, and——"

"Can't you see the white flag? I'm a messenger. I've got a message for your giddy chief. Where's Monk—the young Monkey, I mean?"

"Here I am," said Frank Monk, pushing his way forward. "What have you got to say for yourself before we frog's-march you, Tom Merry?"

"You can't do it; you must respect the white flag," said Tom Merry coolly. "I've come to bring you kids a challenge from St. Jim's."

"We'll accept it, whatever it is," said Monk instantly.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I believe you kids fancy you can play football?" he observed.

"Yes," said Monk. "I believe we fancy something of that sort. We fancy we can play it better than any of you young asses over at St. Jim's, too."

"I don't see what could put that idea into your head. I've seen you play, and it was enough to make a Hottentot weep to see you; it was, really," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

Frank Monk breathed hard through his nose.

"If you keep on like that, that giddy flag of truce won't protect you long," he remarked. "What message have you got for us, kid?"

"First of all, we're glad to hear that you kids aren't any the worse for that ducking on Saturday afternoon," said Tom Merry, in his frank way.

Frank Monk impulsively held out his hand.

Tom Merry gripped it with equal cordiality, and then shook hands with Carboy. The latter gave him a hard grip, and then Lane, not to be left out, followed his example.

"It would have been a serious business for some of us if you hadn't been so plucky, Tom Merry," said Monk. "You saved Carboy's life, there's no doubt about that. We should never have got to him in time to be of any use."

"Oh, that's all right," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I'm glad Carboy isn't any the worse for it, and I must be allowed to remark that he really looks all the better for a wash."

"Oh, no rotting," said Frank Monk. "It was really plucky of you, and we meant what we said in that letter, too, if you liked to accept the situation."

"Couldn't be done, my dear fellow," said Tom Merry, with a decided shake of the head. "We're going to have that giddy document back, you see, and we sha'n't be happy till we get it; and, besides, you've got to admit that we are top dog, you know. But to come to business, kiddies, we want you lot to meet us in a football match. I thought I'd come over and tell you instead of writing, as I wanted to get the matter fixed up at once if possible."

"Oh, that's all right. We'll meet you anywhere you like, and give you as big a licking as you require," said Frank Monk. "Anything else you want?"

"No, not at present. Shall we say Saturday next for the match, on your ground, kick-off at half-past two? We've got that date still open, if you have?"

"We can fix it. We have only a practice match on for that afternoon."

"Then it's settled?"

"Certainly. Come, and we'll wipe up the ground with you to your heart's content," said Frank. "I've often thought it would be a good thing to teach you college youngsters how to play football, and now we'll give you a lesson. You beat us once—by a fluke."

"Look out for another fluke, then," grinned Tom Merry. "We'll come over in good time, and I expect most of our chaps will come over to look on. It will be pax for the afternoon, except on the football-field, of course."

"Right you are!" said Carboy, with a grin. "We want a lot of you here to see you licked."

"I don't suppose they'll see much in that line, kid," Tom Merry remarked. "But we shall see about that. We licked you on our ground, and we're going to do our best to lick you on your own, and I think we shall do it. That's about all I've got to say."

"Good!" said Frank. "It was like your cheek to come here like this, Tom Merry, but we'll respect the flag of truce. I'll walk down to the gates with you."

Tom Merry wheeled his bicycle down to the gates, accompanied by Monk, Lane, and Carboy. They chatted amicably on the way, and not at all like deadly foes.

"Hallo," exclaimed Carboy suddenly, "there's Hake! Look out!"

Hake, the senior Grammarian, with whom the St. Jim's juniors had had such an extremely rough encounter on the ice of the frozen Ryll, was coming towards them. The expression of his face showed that he recognised Tom Merry, and, besides, the St. Jim's boy was at once known by his cap.

He came quickly towards the four, and planted himself in the way of the bicycle. Tom Merry came to a stop, looking on the alert for trouble.

"What are you doing here, you young rascal?" was Hake's polite greeting.

"Chuck it, Hake!" said Frank. "He came on a message, and we're seeing him out."

Hake gave him a black look.

"Who asked you to speak?" he said. "Keep your lip to yourself, young Monk. You can't put on airs towards a senior because your father is head-master of the school, I assure you."

Frank flushed angrily.

"It's never crossed my mind to do so, and you know it," he exclaimed. "Only a cad like you would suggest such a thing, Hake!"

"Cad, eh?" The big Grammarian made a step towards the junior. "I shall have to teach you manners, you whelp. I'll see to you first though, Tom Merry," he added. "I owe you something that I can pay now. You have come into the lion's den by coming here."

Tom Merry sniffed.

"More like into the dog's-kennel," he remarked.

Hake reached out to clutch hold of him. The three Grammar School juniors at once lined up with Tom Merry to stand by him. Hake looked at them in amazement and rage.

"Clear off, you youngsters!"

"Sha'n't!" said Frank Monk determinedly. "He's under our giddy protection, and you're not going to touch him, Hake. You ought to know better."

Hake gritted his teeth.

"Mind what you do, Monk. I'm a monitor, and I'll make you smart for this. Clear off, you three; I give you the chance."

The three Grammar juniors did not stir.

Tom Merry looked uneasy.

He knew that it would be a serious thing for the Grammar juniors to defy a monitor, and that it would probably have very unpleasant consequences for them.

He did not want the trio to get into trouble on his account, but Hake was evidently in a determined temper.

"Are you going?" shouted Blake.

"No, I'm coming!" said Tom Merry, and he rushed his bicycle forward, straight at the angry senior who stood in his path.

Hake had no time to get out of the way.

He had planted himself directly in front of the bicycle to stop Tom, never thinking that the hero of St. Jim's would venture to clear him off the track in such a drastic manner.

The front wheel of the bike struck against his legs, and he was bowled over as if he had been shot, and Tom Merry went treading over him, and the bicycle was wheeled across him as he lay dazed on the ground.

Tom Merry was past in a moment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Monk, Lane, and Carboy. "How do you like that, Hake?"

Hake staggered to his feet, red with rage.

The three Grammarians were doubled up with laughter, but the bully did not pay any attention to them. He rushed furiously after Tom Merry. He had lost his cap, his tie was disarranged, and his clothes covered with dust. His aspect drew glances from all sides, but he did not stop to think of that.

"I'll—I'll break your neck, you young hound!" he roared.

But Tom was on his cycle in a twinkling, and pedalling away towards the gates at top-speed. Hake was left behind, and Tom reached the gateway a dozen yards ahead.

Hake paused, gasping for breath. He could never overtake the cyclist, and he knew it. But in the gateway Tom Merry slackened down, and seemed to lose speed.

Hake gritted his teeth.

Something seemed to be wrong with the bike, for Tom was free-wheeling as he turned into the lane, and looking down anxiously at the crank.

Hake dashed after him again. If something was out of order with the machine, the cool junior from St. Jim's might be overtaken yet. The

Grammar School senior put on a spurt, and tore out into the lane after Tom Merry.

Tom was not more than a dozen yards from the gate, and he was still free-wheeling, and apparently still puzzled by the action of the pedals, for he was looking down at his right foot with a concerned air.

"I've got the little beast!" muttered Hake.

He dashed forward. He was only a yard behind the cycle when suddenly Tom Merry's feet began to revolve like lightning, and the bike shot forward and escaped his outstretched hand. It went on like a shot for twenty yards, and then slackened again.

Hake ran desperately forward.

Again he was close upon the cyclist, and again the bicycle suddenly shot away, the junior pedalling suddenly and strongly. Hake halted, gasping for breath. The cyclist slackened down again, and looked back.

"Come on!" he called out encouragingly. "You'll manage it this time!"

Hake shook his fist frantically at the grinning junior.

He was not to be caught again, however. He knew now that Tom Merry had purposely slackened down each time so as to tempt him to pursue, and that he had never had any chance of catching the elusive youngster from St. Jim's.

"You young hound!" he roared. "Wait till I catch you, that's all! I'll—I'll—"

"Sorry I can't wait, Hakey! See you another time."

And Tom Merry, kissing his hand to the infuriated Grammarian, pedalled off at full speed and vanished along the lane, leaving Hake to return to the Grammar School in a fearfully bad temper.

CHAPTER 23.

Digby's Governor, and How the Co. Entertained Him.

TOM MERRY, grinning gleefully over the adventure, rode his machine into the gateway of St. Jim's, and was immediately met by the Co., anxious to know the result of his mission.

"It's all sereno!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Everything in the garden is simply ripping! We're to meet the Grammarians on their own ground next Saturday afternoon, and lick them. They think they're going to lick us. But that's a detail."

"We had a hard fight last time, when they came over here to play us," Blake remarked.

"Well, we're not afraid of a hard fight again. I wouldn't give twopence for a game of football that was a walk-over! We shall lick them, and that's enough. At least, I hope so. If we're licked, we'll fall with honour."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We shall have a stronger team than last time, with Marmaduke and Digby in it," said Figgins. "We shall kick the winning goal."

"But shall I be in it?" said Digby lugubriously. "My governor is coming down to-day, you know, and he means to take me back. If Tom Merry's idea proves a success—"

"Well, let's hope it will," said Tom Merry. "We'll put it to him straight, you know, and make him see reason. That's the best we can do."

Afternoon school was almost over when the sound of wheels was heard in the quadrangle, and a little later Digby was called out of the Fourth Form class-room with the news that his father had arrived. Ten minutes later the

Fourth were dismissed; and as Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy hurried out into the passage Dig met them, looking very excited.

"Where is he?" asked Blake, in a tragic whisper.

"In No. 6," said Dig. "I persuaded him to come and look at our quarters. Go and talk to him prettily while I hunt up Tom Merry."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "Find Figgins & Co. as you come out, Herries, and bring them along. We must tackle the Jabberwock in a body."

"The what?" exclaimed Digby.

"The honourable baronet, I mean," said Blake. "Come on, Gussy! You and I will go and keep him engaged till our forces come up."

"Yaas, wathah! Perhaps you had bettah wemain outside the study, though, Blake. This is a delicate mattah, and wequires to be handled with gweat judgment. It would weally be bettah to leave it entirely in my hands, deah boy."

Blake did not seem to think so, however, for he marched straight on to Study No. 6 and entered. A tall, soldierly man was standing before the fire, looking about the study. He had a face like granite, but there was a kindly gleam in his grey eyes.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" said Blake. "How do you do, Sir Robert? You remember me, sir?"

"Certainly!" said Sir Robert Digby, shaking hands with Blake and then with Arthur Augustus. "I have seen you before, Blake, and I am glad to see you again. My son has been on a visit to you, which has been extended much beyond the time allowed."

"We don't want to part with him, sir."

Sir Robert Digby laughed.

"Perhaps not. And I am glad to find that he is so popular. But he is wanted, you know, and I must take him away with me."

"Pway considah—" began D'Arcy.

Blake trod on his toe and stopped him. D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and stared at Blake.

"I weally wish you would not twead on my toe," said he. "I fail to see any necessity for such an extwemely obnoxious action!"

The baronet looked at them curiously, and Blake looked daggers.

"My lad wished me to pay a visit to his quarters," said Sir Robert. "Cosy little place, I must say. Do you know, I was in this very study when I was at St. Jim's, forty years ago?"

"Were you really, sir?" said Blake, genuinely interested. "We—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the Terrible Three with Digby. Sir Robert knew them, and he shook hands all round. He had scarcely finished, when Herries came in with Figgins & Co., and there was more hand-shaking. Sir Robert looked a little surprised. He wondered how many more Lower Form boys were going to cram themselves into that not very extensive study.

"These are all my friends, dad!" said Digby, with a wave of the hand. "We're always having fearful rows, and we get along rippingly!"

Sir Robert laughed.

"That sounds rather contradictory," he remarked; "but I think I understand you. Now that I have seen your friends, Arthur, I think we had better prepare for our journey."

"I hope you are not in a hurry, sir," said Tom Merry glibly. The Co. had not had time to elect a captain, and Tom Merry naturally fell into the place of leader. "I really hope you are not in a hurry, sir. We—we thought that while you were here you might like to have tea in the study, just as a sort of reminder of old times, and—"

"H'm! Really—" hesitated Sir Robert.

"Of course, we don't want to bother you, sir, only we've made some preparations, and if you would be kind enough to stay to tea——"

It was impossible for an old St. Jim's boy to refuse an invitation like that. Sir Robert's face, bronzed by the burning sun of India, broke into a smile.

"Well, in that case, I must not disappoint you," he said kindly. "I will certainly stay to tea, my lads."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry, with great relief. "It is very kind of you, sir. I don't know whether you'll care for the tommy; but we'll do our best, sir. The armchair, Figgy."

Figgins pulled out the armchair for the baronet, and Sir Robert, being fairly in for it now, sat down.

"Don't lean too much to the right, dad," said Dig hurriedly. "The chair is a bit rocky on that side. So long as you bear to the left it's rippingly comfy."

"I will remember," said Sir Robert, laughing.

"Lay the cloth, Blake, while we get in the grub," said Tom Merry.

"Would you like to look at the paper, sir, while we're getting tea?"

"Certainly! Dear me! What is this?"

"Latest number of 'Tom Merry's Weekly,' sir—our magazine."

Sir Robert laughed, and began looking over "Tom Merry's Weekly," turning a studiously deaf ear to the whispers going on among the juniors.

"The cloth is rotten," Blake murmured to Tom Merry. "We haven't had a clean one this week. And Dig spilled a cup of cocoa on it yesterday, and there were some sardines upset——"

"You must get a clean one. Go and borrow one off Kildare. He's a ripping good sort, and won't say no on an occasion like this."

"Suppose he's not in his study?"

"Borrow it all the same."

Blake grinned, and went out. Digby came close to the hero of the Shell.

"There's no grub," he muttered. "We've got nothing in, and we're stony. Even D'Arcy is broke till a remittance arrives."

"That's all right. I'll go down to the shop and get all we want."

"Good! I'll put the kettle on. I say, what about crockery? We haven't anything like enough for twelve, you know."

"We'll all bring our own, and collar all we can out of the Fifth Form studies."

"And as for seats——"

"There's not room in the study for twelve people to sit down, so some would have to stand, anyway. Those who stand can be behind Sir Robert's chair, you know, and he won't notice," said Tom Merry hopefully.

"Yes; I didn't think of that."

Digby filled the kettle at the tap in the passage, and put it on the fire. Herries got out the caddy and teapot ready. Arthur Augustus cleared the table, and had it ready by the time Blake came back with Kildare's clean tablecloth. He passed the Terrible Three going out, and Tom Merry whispered to him:

"You've got it?"

"Yes; under my jacket."

"Was Kildare there?"

"No. I got it, all the same."

"Good for you!"

Blake strolled into the study, and when he was quite behind the baronet's chair he whipped the tablecloth out from under his coat. Unfortunately, Sir Robert turned his head at that very moment to make some remark

about a sketch in the "Weekly." He stared at Blake in amazement. Blake grinned rather sheepishly.

"A—a new conjuring trick, sir," he explained. "The vanishing tablecloth, you know."

"Oh, I see!" said Sir Robert, settling himself in his chair again.

The table was laid. Manners and Lowther came in with chairs, which they smuggled in unseen, as they fondly thought. Tom Merry was longer gone, and when he returned it was with Figgins and Kerr, and all three had bulging pockets.

Fatty Wynn and Herries went in and cut of the study several times, and each time they returned the store of crockery on the table grew larger.

A loud hissing and spitting announced that the kettle was boiling over, and Sir Robert drew his legs hastily away from the fender. Tom Merry made the tea, while the others opened the sardines and the jam and marmalade. Marmaduke Smythe came in with a pile of plates under his arm and a grin of triumph on his face. He had evidently been exploring in the nether regions—that sacred domain below stairs, which was sacred to Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame, and her satellites, and he had brought his plunder to Study No. 6. The plates were a windfall indeed.

The tea was made. Sir Robert laid down the "Weekly," over which he had laughed heartily, and turned politely to the tea-table. Bread-and-butter and sardines and a fragrant cup of tea were really tempting. The granite face of the old soldier relaxed more and more as boyish recollections rushed upon his mind. Forty long years had passed since, a lad of fifteen, he had given a study "feed" in that very study. The forty years seemed to shrivel away now, and he was a boy again.

"This is extremely pleasant!" he said, putting down his cup and attacking the provisions with a gusto which proved that he had not lost his appetite in India. "I feel a lad again. Same old study, too, and not a bit changed! A bit dingier, perhaps. Same old school; and I suppose you play the same old games?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "Especially footer, sir."

"Ah, there have been some developments in football in my time!" said Sir Robert. "Do you know, I've been out of England so much that I haven't seen a game played by St. Jim's since I left the school."

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.

The baronet was approaching the very topic the hero of the Shell had planned to lead up to by slow and artful degrees.

"Would you like to see a game, sir," he said—"a real good, ripping game between St. Jim's Juniors and the strongest side they ever meet?"

"Ah, yes, I should certainly like it!"

"Could you come on Saturday, then, sir, when we meet the Grammar School?"

Sir Robert pursed his lips.

"Fellows who know," went on Tom Merry, "say that the match will be as good as anything ever played by the St. Jim's first eleven—the seniors, you know, sir. Our second team is a very strong one. And the Grammarians are a powerful side, and always fight to a finish."

"Let me see. Perhaps——"

"And—and, sir, if we could venture to ask you a favour——"

"Why, of course you can, my lad!" said the baronet good-naturedly.

"What could I do for you?"

"Why, we've challenged the Grammarians to the match, sir, so naturally, we want to put our strongest possible side in the field."

"Yes, of course."

"We've picked out the best players in the Shell and the Upper Fourth, and—we're depending on Digby for inside-right, sir."

Sir Robert looked grave.

"We can't spare old Dig, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "If he's not there, we shall have to put Kerr forward, and play Jimson at half. The team will be weaker. Jimson is a good sort, but not up to Kerr at back; and Kerr isn't up to Dig in the front line, as he'll tell you himself."

"That's so," said the Scottish partner in the Co., with a nod. "It's quite right, sir. We hope you'll let Dig play, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! You can't wefuse, sir, when it's a question of the honah of St. Jim's bein' at stake, my dear sir."

"But really——"

"You'll let Dig play, sir?"

Sir Robert's face remained grave for a minute; then he broke into a laugh.

"Come, you have fairly caught me in a trap!" he said. "I don't know what I shall say to Arthur's schoolmaster in Devonshire. But I suppose I cannot refuse you."

"Hurrah!" shouted Herries.

"Bwavo! Bwavo!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"As captain of the junior eleven of St. Jim's," he said, "I thank you, Sir Robert! You've lifted a weight off our minds. Dig, you're going to stay."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dig.

Sir Robert beamed upon the juniors as he stirred his fourth cup of tea.

"And I will come down and see the match," he said. "And if you don't play up like an International, my boy, you will hear from me! Another cup of tea, please, Figgins."

Sir Robert had his cup of tea, and another, and another, the while they talked football and bygone times at St. Jim's, and after tea, as the baronet had decided to catch a later train, there was some singing. Tom Merry sang "The Land of the Long-ago" as most appropriate under the circumstances. And finally the party broke up in the highest of spirits.

And when Sir Robert had driven off to the station, leaving Arthur Digby behind, the Co. voted him a jolly good fellow, as indeed he was.

"You stay to the end of the week, Dig!" exclaimed Blake, slapping his chum on the shoulder. "And by that time the Grammarians are going to have the proper kybosh. And when you leave you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that they'll sing smaller. We shall lick them on the footer field as a proper wind-up."

"Yaas, wathah! But you haven't decided yet how you are goin' to get the document out of the common-woom in the Gwammah School."

"Where there's a will there's a way."

"Yaas, wathah! And if you choose to elect me captain, I am pwetty certain I can find——"

"Oh, rats!" said the Co. in chorus. And they parted.

CHAPTER 24.

Tom Merry Takes the Lead.

"WHERE'S Gussy?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "Haven't seen him for a dog's age. Have you Herries?"

"No," said Herries. "I believe he's gone out scouting."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, the meeting must proceed without him." He looked round the wood-shed. "Ten of us here. We're all here except Gussy."

The Co. were in conclave again, met together for the purpose of electing the captain of the day, and deciding upon further operations against the Grammarians.

Ten juniors had turned up to the meeting. Arthur Augustus was conspicuous by his absence, and, according to the rules of the Co., he lost his chance of getting the captaincy when the lots were drawn. That was his own look-out.

"Gentlemen, we are here once more upon this old familiar spot," said Tom Merry. "Only one member of the Co. is absent, and he doesn't count. We have the aid of our esteemed friend Arthur Digby, Esquire, till the end of the week, and by that time we have got to give the Grammarians the complete and crushing kybosh!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We have got to recover that precious document which they have basely deprived us of, and take better care of it next time."

"If you mean to hint that I didn't take good care of it——" began Blake.

"Well, you lost your little bit, anyhow."

"Not I! It was Gussy."

"Well, it was all in the family, anyway. If you had kept a dog-chain on Gussy it wouldn't have happened. You shouldn't allow him out alone."

"What about Lowther? When he was captain——"

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Lowther.

"Yes, we'll give you a rest as captain, Lowther, and no error! You'll have a jolly long rest before you lead us into a trap again, I can tell you!"

"Peace!" said Tom Merry. "Let there be peace, before there are pieces! It's time to draw lots for a new leader. D'Arcy will have to be left out of it as he's not here. Shove the names in the bag, Monty!"

"Right you are!"

The slips with the names of the remaining candidates were shuffled in the bag, and Figgins drew one out.

He held it up to the light of the bicycle-lantern which illumined the meeting, and the name of Tom Merry was visible to all.

"Tom Merry!" said Blake, with a sniff. "Well, you've got it, Merry. I hope you'll do better than the other rotters, that's all."

"I've no doubt I shall," said Tom Merry serenely. "But we'll see. My idea is that we ought to put our heads together, and give the Grammarians a really hot time. On Saturday we're going to wind up the campaign by giving them the knock on their own football ground. The Co. will just make up the eleven if we play D'Arcy."

Blake gave a snort.

"If!" he exclaimed. "There's no 'if' about it, Tom Merry. Of course we shall play D'Arcy."

Tom Merry looked dubious.

"Well, you know, he's such a howling ass!" he explained. "You know what a coughdrop he is yourself, Blake."

"A chap who plays footer in an eyeglass——" began Figgins.

"Oh, rats! I cured him of that last time we met the Grammarians."

"Of course, I know he's a good sprinter, and he can dribble the ball well," Tom Merry remarked; "but I've seen him stop in the middle of a rush to put his hair straight."

"Ha, ha! And do you remember how he got a penalty goal against us once by collaring a chap who charged him over?" exclaimed Manners.

"Never mind," said Blake, "Gussy's a good forward, and it's simply impossible to have a chap belonging to Study No. 6 left out of the team. As reasonable human beings, you must see that for yourselves."

"Blessed if I see it!" said Kerr. "I——"

"Well, we'll give Gussy a trial," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to play up, you know. We chip the Grammarians about their football, but among ourselves we must admit that they play a jolly good game; and we had all our work cut out last time. But now about the next move against the Grammar School. Has anyone thought of a wheeze?"

There was a general silence.

Tom Merry looked round the meeting. Apparently ideas were at a discount, for nobody was in a hurry to speak.

"Well, we didn't come here to call a giddy Quaker meeting!" Tom Merry remarked pleasantly. "I'm waiting for some of you chaps to speak. Don't all speak at once, but, on the other hand, don't leave it till next term."

"Who's leader of this giddy Co.?" demanded Blake.

"I am."

"Well, if you're leader, think of something. Blessed if I'm going to do your work for you!" said Blake. "What's the good of taking a back seat if you have to do the thinking? You're leader. Think it out."

"That's right," said Monty Lowther. "You're leader, Tom. Set your wits to work."

"Good!" said Marmaduke. "I'm not going to think out any giddy schemes till I'm leader again. It's your place to do that, Tom Merry."

"We want to keep the ball rolling," Kerr remarked. "We ought to give the Grammar cads some sort of a dig. No good getting rusty, or giving them a rest, that I can see, and so I call upon Tom Merry, as leader, to propound an idea."

"We all call on him," said Fatty Wynn. "If he's leader, let him lead. What are we going to do against the Grammarians to-day, Tom Merry?"

"Here, I say, give a chap a chance!" said Tom Merry. "I——"

"What's the wheeze?" demanded Digby, interrupting him.

"What's the scheme?" exclaimed Marmaduke.

"What's the programme?" inquired Figgins.

"I tell you——"

"You needn't tell us anything, unless it's how we're going to give the Grammarians the kybosh," said Figgins. "As a matter of fact, chaps, his mind is a beautiful blank, and he's not got any ideas—not even of anybody else's."

"That's it," said Blake. "I was afraid from the beginning that he would be no good. We've given him a trial, and he can't keep the ball rolling."

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry hotly, "you're a set of asses! You haven't given me a chance. I——"

Blake took out his watch.

"I suggest that we give him five minutes to think of an idea," he said.

"If he can't do it by that time we'll depose him, and elect another chief."

"Good!" echoed Figgins & Co. together.

Monty Lowther and Manners said nothing. Herries said "Good!" Tom Merry looked extremely wrathful. Blake held out his watch, with his eyes fixed on the dial. Digby grinned assent.

"Look here——" began Tom Merry.

Blake waved his disengaged hand soothingly.

"Don't waste time, old chap. You've got nearly five minutes before we fetch you down off your giddy perch. Make the best of it."

"I'm not going to——"

"Make the best of it," said Figgins & Co. solemnly.

"But, confound you, I tell you——"

"Hallo, deah boys! I was wathah afwaid I should be late for the beastly meetin', don't you know!" a familiar voice broke in at the door of the wood-shed.

Blake looked round as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered.

"Hallo! Here's the image!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been, Adolphus?"

"I have so often wemarked, Blake, that my name is not Adolphus, that I weally wondah that you continue to address me in that widiculous mannah."

"Oh, rats! Where have you been? Why didn't you come to the meeting?"

"I have been scoutin'," said D'Arcy.

"Found any mare s nests?"

"No, certainly not, Lowther! I have been on the twack of the Gwammah cads."

"Didn't they go for you?" asked Dig.

"They did not see me. I twacked them like an Indian bwave," explained D'Arcy. "I am an awfully deep fellow, you know, sometimes, and I weally flatah myself that I did this little twick in a mastahly mannah."

"Well, what's the result of it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Two more minutes, Merry," said Blake solemnly, looking at his watch.

"Oh, rats! What's the upshot of your scouting, Gussy?"

"I have made a gweat discovevy."

The Co. looked rather sceptical. They had very little faith in Arthur Augustus and his skill in the Buffalo Bill line. But the swell of the School House was looking very serious and earnest. He adjusted his monocle and beamed upon the assembled Co. with the air of one who had reason to be very well satisfied with himself.

"Well, get it off your chest!" said Tom Merry. "Can't you see that we're all simply on tenterhooks of curiosity, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! That is only natuwal, under the circs," assented D'Arcy. "Vewy well, Mewwy, I will welieve your cuwiosity. I have been scoutin'——"

"I fancy I heard you say that before," Figgins remarked.

"Don't intewwupt, Figgins. If there is anythin' I weally can't stand, it is these constant intewwptions fwom you wude youngstahs. I was scoutin', when I fell in with a vewy unpleasant chawactah fwom the Gwammah School. It was not one of our fwriends the enemy, but that overgwown person whom we wagged on the wivah, named Salmon or Codfish or something——"

"Do you mean Hake?" asked Tom Merry, with interest.

"Yaas, wathah! I knew it was something fishy," said D'Arcy. "Well, I met him, and he acted most wudely. He actually had the feahful impertinence to lay hands upon me and push me into the hedge in a wuff and violent mannah!"

"He did, did he? The horrid bounder! He couldn't have known whom you were," said Tom Merry gravely. "If he had known that you were the one and only Gussy——"

"Oh, pway don't wot, Tom Mewwy! I wegard this as a serious mattah. He pushed me with such extweme violence that I bwoke thwough the hedge, and fell with gweat wapidity into the ditch on the othah side. Fortunately, the ditch was a dwy one, or I should have spoiled my coat and waistcoat; but as it was, my twousahs were howwidly wumped, and I was in a state of extweme wage. I was so enwaged, in fact, that I quite lost my

tempah, and I scwambeld ffrom the ditch and washed upon Codfish to stwiko him!"

"Ha, ha! And was he stwuck?"

"No; he had the feahful cheek to take me by the collah, and sling me through the hedge again," said D'Arcy. "I fell into the ditch with gweat violence, and he looked down on me, and gwinned, and said that if I got out again he would jump on me!"

"The wretch! It makes me almost weep to think of your trousers at that terrible moment!" said Tom Merry, with a sob.

"Pway be sewious, Tom Mewwy! I was feahfully enwaged, but I thought upon the whole it would be bettah to wemain where I was till the shockin' wuffian was gone. I was weally feelin' most exhausted. I was not afwaid, of course, but I knew that he was quite capable of wuinin' my waistcoat if I pwovoked him. So I considahed it vewy much wisah to wemain there till it was safe to scwamble out."

"What a thrilling tale of adventure!" said Monty Lowther. "It is awfully interesting, but what has it got to do with the washing, Gussy?"

"Pway allow me to explain. While I was westing in the ditch three persons passed along on the othah side of the hedge, and they were talkin'. They were the three boundahs who tied Marmaduke to the college gates the othah night."

"Monk, Lane, and Carboy?" asked Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah! Now, you see, I knew their voices, and I immediately caught on to what they were saying. Some fellows wouldn't have thought of it, but you know I am awfully deep——"

"Yes; we know how awfully deep you are, Gussy. Go on."

"Monk was saying that to-night would be the vewy time, as it was misty, and it would be easy to slip into the gwounds of St. Jim's without bein' noticed."

Tom Merry gave a start.

Up till now he had preserved rather a sceptical countenance, but just then he became really interested. It looked as if Arthur Augustus had really discovered something, after all.

"Go on!" said Tom quickly.

D'Arcy saw the impression he had made, and purred.

"Yaas, wathah! When Monk said that, I was awfully careful, you know, to wemain quite still, and see if I could discover anythin' else. Of course, you all know that as a gentleman I would despise a fellow who listened to a pwivate conversation——"

"Yes, yes; go on!"

"But as a scout in the enemy's countwy I was bound to gathah all the information I possibly could as to their movements——"

"Yes, yes; we've threshed all that out before. Go on!"

"Therefore," went on D'Arcy obstinately, "I considahed it quite en regle to hear all I could that the wascals were sayin'——"

"Of course. What else did they say?"

"Oh, I didn't hear anythin' else!"

"You—you utter ase! Then what have you been giving us this long rigmarole about?" exclaimed Marmaduke, in disgust.

"I was explainin' my views and scwuples——"

"Blow your views and scwuples!" ejaculated Blake. "You ass! What do your views and scwuples matter if you didn't hear anything more? Gussy, you're wearing me out!"

"Wate!" said D'Arcy. "I didn't hear any more, though I listened like anythin'. But it's persectly plain that the Gwammah cads intend to come into our quartahs to-night to play some trick on us."

"Looks like it," said Digby. "Pity you couldn't learn more. Did you let them see you there?"

"Certainly not, Digby. I waited till they were quite gone, and then scrawbled out of the ditch. I only stopped to bwush the dust off my twousahs, and then huwried here as fast as I could wun, deah boys!"

Tom Merry was looking very thoughtful. It was evident that he attached the greatest importance to the information brought in by the scout.

"Well, if they come, we'll be ready for them," said Blake. He looked at his watch. "Time's more than up, Tom Merry. But, as Gussy has taken it all up with his thrilling stories of hairbreadth escapes, we'll allow you an extension. If you've got an idea, spout it out. If you haven't, own up!"

Tom Merry's eyes were sparkling now.

It was pretty plain that he had a "wheeze" in his mind, but he did not seem to be in a hurry to communicate it to the impatient Co.

"Well, what is it?" demanded half a dozen voices impatiently. "Out with it, Merry!"

Tom Merry shook his head calmly.

"Not at all. I've got an idea for making the Grammar kids wish they hadn't thought of invading our territory. but for the present I'm keeping it to myself."

There was a simultaneous howl of indignation from every member of the Co.

"What the dickens do you mean, Tom Merry?" exclaimed Blake. "Do you think we are going to stand that? Come off your perch, you rotter, or we'll yank you off!"

"My dear chap, you were telling me just now that I was captain of the Co.—"

"So you are; but, of course, we're entitled to know all about the operations against the enemy," said Blake hotly. "Do you think we're going to have you riding the giddy high horse?"

"A wise and experienced general," said Tom Merry calmly, "never explains to his troops in advance what his operations are going to be. For military reasons, you see, it's necessary for a leader to keep the secrets from the common or garden rank-and-file—"

"Look here!" said Blake and Figgins together. "We're in this beastly Co., and we've a right to know the beastly plans. Just get it off your silly chest, you bounder!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't! For military reasons I cannot allow my plans against the enemy to become known until the time arrives for putting them into execution."

"Military humbug! Execution hosh! Tell us what the wheeze is! We're going to know before this meeting breaks up!" said Kerr warmly.

"Yaas, wathah! As the plan is founded upon the news of the enemy's movements brought in by me, I at least have a wight to know all about the beastly ideahs!" said D'Arcy.

"Quite so!" exclaimed Blake. "Now, Tom Merry, get it off your chest. If you've got such a first-class plan for bringing the Grammar cads off their perch, let us know it. We shall all have a hand in it, anyway. Why don't you speak, you bounder?"

"I've got nothing to say."

"It's all rotting, then! You haven't an idea in your head?"

"Oh, yes, I have—a first-rate, ripping one!"

"Then tell us!" howled the Co.

"Can't be did! For military reasons—"

"You—you humbug! You ass! Tell us!"

"Explain!"

"Rats! For military reasons I can't——"

"Oh, he's as obstinate as a mule!" growled Blake. "There's no getting anything out of him! I believe it's all humbug, and he's pulling our leg!"

"My dear chap, I wouldn't pull your august leg for anything!" said Tom Merry. "I've got an idea in my mind which I believe will make the Grammar cads wish they hadn't entered here. A great general never confides his plans to his followers. You will be called upon to help, but you're not going to be told the plans. You can't expect it. For military reasons——"

"Blow your silly military reasons! I tell you what, chaps—we'll give him the chance, and if he doesn't live up to this we'll depose him, and elect a new leader!" said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"You understand, Tom Merry? This is not going to be merely a jape on the Grammarians, but you're on your trial. If the joke doesn't come off in first-chop style, you get the order of the boot instanter, and you're incapacitated from ever leading the Co. again!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Co., in unanimous approval.

"I'm agreeable," said Tom Merry, smiling serenely.

"Then we'll let it go at that. About time this beastly meeting broke up, I fancy. I'm getting hungry. Come on, kids!"

"Yaas, wathah! But wait a moment, deah boy. Tom Mewwy, I quite admit that you have ewery wight to keep the secwet of your intentions, as a gweat general, but as I bwought in the information of the enemy's movements——"

"Sorry, Gussy! You'll know all about it in good time."

"But, weally, Tom Mewwy, I must insist upon my wight——"

"Travel along, Adolphus! You are making me tired."

"Tom Mewwy, as I bwought the information, I must once for all insist upon my wight to share this secwet!" said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis. "It is extwemely pwob that I can give some advice upon the subject, as you must admit that two heads are bettah than one, especially when one of them is mine. I——"

"Blake, that thing belongs to you. Take it away!"

"Come along, Gussy. It's time to go!"

"I wefuse to come along," said Arthur Augustus. "It is a question of dig with me. I am not bein' tweeked with pwopah wespsect, and I must wesent it. Tom Mewwy, I have stated——"

"Good-night, Gussy! Come along, Monty—Manners!"

"Stop, Tom Mewwy! I insist upon your stoppin' and hearin' what I have to say! Unless you suwwendah on this point, I shall have no alternative but to thwash you!"

Tom Merry looked terribly alarmed.

"Oh, Adolphus," he exclaimed, "unsay those fearful words!"

"I wefuse—I distinctly wefuse! I shall give you such a feahful thwashin'——"

"Hold him while I run away and lock myself up somewhere!" gasped Tom Merry, apparently in a state of terror. "Hold the dangerous ruffian!"

And Tom Merry dashed off towards the School House. D'Arcy attempted to pursue, but was promptly collared by Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"No, you don't, Gussy," said Blake.

Figgins & Co. walked away laughing. Monty Lowther and Manners followed Tom Merry at a more leisurely pace, chuckling to themselves. But

the swell of the School House was in deadly earnest. His dignity was involved, and that was always a matter of great importance to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Blake, let me go! Hewwies, welease me! I no longah wegard you as fwends!"

"Now, don't be a bigger fathead than you can help, Gussy——"

"I wefuse to be chawacterised as a fathead! I wefuse to wemain here! Welease me at once, or I shall get angry and stwike you!"

The three juniors staggered away in affright. Arthur Augustus bolted from the wood-shed on the track of Tom Merry. Blake sat down on a pile of faggots, and laughed till he was out of breath.

"That chap will be the death of me!" he gasped. "Here, let's follow him and see what he's up to. Come on!"

And the chums of the Fourth followed on the track of the indignant swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 25.

Arthur Augustus Catches a Tartar.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was really excited. He bolted across the dusky quadrangle, and passed Manners and Lowther like a flash. Manners uttered an exclamation.

"There goes Gus! Oh, my hat! That chap ought to be in a museum!"

"Ha, ha, ha! There are going to be ructions!"

"Come on; let's follow the ass!"

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was already out of sight. He ran up the steps of the School House, and bolted into the hall. The dusk was thick, and the gas had not yet been lighted. There was a yell as the swell of St. Jim's dashed blindly into someone who was coming out of a study.

That someone went flying, and sat down gasping for breath. D'Arcy staggered away, and caught at the hat-stand for support. He gave it a violent jerk, and a shower of hats descended upon him.

"My word!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Deah me! My deah fellow, I hope I have not hurt you! Gwacious goodness, where are all these hats comin' fwom?"

The injured party jumped up, and promptly collared Augustus.

"You young ass! What do you mean by bolting into me like that?"

It was the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Pway excuse me, Kildare. It was a most unfortunate accident. I weally did not see you, and it is so extwemely dark here."

"What do you mean by bolting about in the dark like a mad bull?" demanded Kildare, shaking the swell of the School House till he squirmed.

"Pway do—do—not—not—sh-sh-shake me, Kildare," gasped Arthur Augustus. "You disturb my nervous system, you do weally. I wegwet this catastwophe vewy much, and it is weally all due to the carelessness of the servants in not lightin' the gas, you know. How was I to see you in the beastly dark, deah boy! I am vewy sowwy. Have you seen Tom Mewwy pass?"

"No, I haven't!" Kildare administered another shake. "Are you looking for Tom Merry?"

"Yaas, wathah. He has been wude to me, and I am going to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"Ha, ha, ha! I think I can see you doing it. Well, don't start bolting about like that again, D'Arcy, or you will get shaken a bit harder next time, and licked into the bargain."

"I will be more careful, Kildare. Pway welease my collah. I am sure you are soilin' it, and I know you are cwumplin' it feahfully. I shall have to change it, I am afraid. Pway welease me, deah boy. I should be sowwy to stwike you, as I have a gweat wespect for you, but weally——"

Kildare let him go. The captain of St. Jim's was a good-tempered fellow, and he soon regained his good-humour, though he had had a startling shock.

"Get off!" he said. "Travel, ass!"

D'Arcy travelled. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and mounted the stairs three at a time. He reached the door of Tom Merry's study and pounded upon it.

The door was locked. Evidently the hero of the Shell was in a state of terrible affright, and desired to escape the vengeance of Arthur Augustus.

"Open this door, Tom Mewwy!"

A gasping, scared voice came from within.

"Who is there? Oh, who is there?"

"It is I, D'Arcy. I have come to give you that thwashin'."

"Oh, Gussy! Oh, Gussy! Don't!"

"I am sowwy, but I have no alternative. You may as well have it now, Tom Mewwy. If you don't open this door, I shall wait till you come out, and stwike you."

"You won't let me off, Gussy?" came that quavering voice from within.

"Certainly not. I am sowwy, but I am compelled to considah my dig. You have insulted me, and I have no alternative but to thwash you."

"Then—then I may as well let you in, as you are so fearfully determined."

"Yaas, wathah."

There was a sound of the key turning back in the lock. Arthur Augustus tried the door again, and it opened to his touch. The swell of St. Jim's rushed in. The study was pitch-dark inside, for the blind was down, and there was no light. D'Arcy dashed recklessly in—and the next moment gave a yell.

His foot had caught in something, thoughtfully placed there in readiness for him, and he measured his length on the carpet.

He went down on his hands and knees, his eyeglass dropping off, and for a moment he remained there, too startled to move.

That moment was enough for the hero of the Shell.

D'Arcy felt someone drop astride of him, a good deal as if he were a rocking-horse, and his wrists dragged up behind him.

"Welease me!" gasped D'Arcy, squirming on his face. "Welease me! I forbid you to tie my w'ists togetah! I wefuse to be tweated like this. Welease me, you howwid wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a twinkling the looped cord Tom Merry had ready was over Gussy's wrists, and tightened and knotted, and the swell of St. Jim's wriggled on the floor with his hands secured behind his back.

But that was not the end. He sat up, furious, and as he did so, a large bag was slipped over his head, and drawn tight and fastened round his neck.

"Welease me! What silly twick is this! I ordah you to welease me!"

D'Arcy's voice became faint and muffled from the interior of the bag.

Tom Merry gave a shout of laughter. He jumped up and lighted the gas. Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. He looked a curious object with his hands fastened, and the bag covering his head down to the neck.

"Is that all right, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry anxiously. "Anything more I can do for you, kid?"

"Welease me! Welease me at once, Tom Mewwy!"

"I—I—I'm afraid. You're too dangerous. I'm afraid for my life," said

Tom Merry. "I don't think you'll get suffocated, Gussy; I've cut some holes in the bag to let in the air. It's your own bag. I fetched it out of Study No. 6, so that doesn't matter."

"You—you feahful beast! You wuffian!"

"You see, you're too dangerous to be let loose. I'm so afraid of you when you get into a fearful temper, Gussy. Come along!"

"Welease me immediately!"

"Certainly not! Now I've captured you, I'm going to exhibit you," said Tom Merry, fastening a cord to Gussy's tied wrists. "Follow me. Tread carefully, or you'll take a tumble. I should really be sorry if you broke your neck, or anything like that."

"I wefuse to stir from this study," came the muffled voice from the bag. "I wefuse to appeah such a widiculous sight! I distinctly wefuse!"

"It doesn't sound very distinct, Gussy. Come along!"

"I wefuse—I——"

But Tom Merry was pulling on the cord, and Gussy had to go. He stumbled blindly down the corridor, and fellows came to their study doors to look on in amazement and merriment.

"I say, what have you got there, Tom Merry?" called out Gore.

"My latest capture," said Tom Merry. "Gentlemen, this is an ourang-outang of the species *Gustavus*. It is a peculiar animal, and its native habitat is any old study——"

"Tom Mewwy, if you do not instantly welease me——"

"Ha, ha, ha! It's D'Arcy! I thought I knew those trousers!"

"I ordah you to welease me at once, Tom Mewwy!"

"The animal is found wild in the wood-shed," continued Tom Merry, with the air of a showman, as he led the reluctant Gussy along the corridor, between two rows of open study doors and grinning faces. "On the least attack upon his dig, he becomes ferocious, and has then to be tied up, in the way you see. Its face is covered out of consideration to the spectators, who would otherwise suffer considerably from the sight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Mewwy, I wegard you as a beast! Welease me!"

"Come on, Gussy! This animal, gentlemen, when in a ferocious state as at present, has to be confined in the cellar, and left there for a few hours to cool."

"Take him along! Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy marched on perforce behind his leader. Tom Merry led him directly to the corridor upon which the Fourth Form studies opened.

"Tom Mewwy, if you dare to put me in the beastly celloh——"

"It's the only place where you're safe, Gussy."

"I wefuse to be shut up in the celloh! I wefuse——"

"Well," said Tom Merry, with an air of thoughtfulness, "there's that old disused box-room on the top landing. Would you prefer that?"

"I wefuse to be shut up anywhere. I ordah you——"

"The box-room will do. There are lots of rats there, but you will not mind that, will you? Come along! Get a move on!"

Blindfolded as he was, Gussy could not see or guess in what direction Tom Merry was taking him. Tom marched him up some stairs, and down others, until he had lost every clue to his whereabouts. Finally, he marched him into Study No. 6, his native quarters, D'Arcy at the same time being fully persuaded that he was being led into the disused box-room at the top of the School House—a room far from the studies, and seldom entered by anyone.

"Here we are," said Tom Merry, striking a match, and lighting the gas.

"Here we are Gussy. Ugh! How cold it is! Can you hear those beastly rats scuttling!"

"Tom Mewwy, if you dare to leave me in this feahful place——"

"Yes, it is a rotten hole of a place," said Tom Merry. "Never mind, there's a chair here, and you can sit on it. Sit down!"

"I wefuse to sit down. I distinctly——"

"Rats! There you are!" Tom Merry pushed Gussy into a chair, and in a few seconds fastened him there, in spite of his struggling and wriggling. "There that will do. Now, you won't be able to get out kid. You'd better remain in this box-room all night, I think, and you will be in a better temper by the morning."

"If you leave me here, Tom Mewwy, I shall shout for help," mumbled Gussy. "I shall shout for help with all my stwength, so I warn you."

"You can if you like, Gussy. Nobody will hear you. Good-bye!"

"Tom Mewwy, I wegard you as a bwute. I nevah thought you could be so feahfully bwutal as to shut a fellah up in a beastly box-room like this. I insist upon your weleasin' me this very moment, Tom Mewwy!"

"Sorry that it can't be did, Gussy. You're too awfully, fearfully dangerous, you know."

"I will let you off that thwashin'. I will pardon you for your extweme impertinence. I will allow you to go scot-fwee, if you——"

"Good-night! See you again in the morning."

The door closed.

Arthur Augustus was alone. He wriggled in the chair, and called to Tom Merry, but there was no reply—only the muffled echo of his voice.

"The howwid bwute has weally gone and left me," murmured the swell of the School House. "How vevy bwutal. I weally nevah thought it of Tom Mewwy. He has nevah weally tweated me with pwopah wespct, but I nevah suspected him of bein' such a feahful wuffian as this. Fancy leavin' a chap shut up in a beastly box-room among the beastly wats! Howwid!"

And Arthur Augustus began to shout for help.

He wasn't going to be left in that lonely box-room all night, if he knew it, and if Tom Merry meant to carry out his threat, the only way to escape was to attract attention. If there was a row, that was Tom Merry's lookout. Gussy could not be expected to think of that now.

"Help!"

He shouted as loudly as the muffling bag over his head would permit.

"Help, help, help!"

CHAPTER 26.

Tom Merry Takes His Licking.

TOM MERRY joined Manners and Lowther when they came in. The hero of the Shell was grinning, and his chums grinned, too.

"Where's Gussy?" demanded Monty Lowther. "Has he slain you?"

"I think he's gone to his study."

"What's the little game?" asked Manners. "I can see you're up to something."

"D'Arcy fell over a cord stretched between two chairs when he chased me into my study," explained Tom. "Then somebody tied his hands, and fastened a bag down over his head, and walked him off to Study No. 6. He's fastened up to a chair there now——"

"Help! Help!"

It was a faint, distant, strangely-muffled shout from upstairs.

Monty Lowther and Manners started simultaneously as they heard it, and

looked at Tom Merry. Faint and far-away as the sound seemed, they thought they knew the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, that's Gussy," he said. "He fancies he's tied up in the disused box-room on the top floor. He must have come to that conclusion from some words I let drop. Curious, wasn't it? I never told him anything of the kind, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha! Awfully curious!"

Blake, Herries, and Dig came in, and looked at the Terrible Three.

"I say, where's Gus?" asked Blake. "You don't look as if he had slain you, Tom Merry. Where has he got to?"

"I think he's in your study, Blake."

"Help! Help!"

Blake gave a jump. Herries and Digby stared.

"Why, that's his voice! It sounds peculiar, as if he'd got his head in a box. Come along, kiddies. Let's go and sort him out."

The chums of the Fourth ascended the stairs. A shout of laughter followed them. They found a good many Fourth Formers making for Study No. 6. The muffled shouts of Arthur Augustus had fallen upon many ears.

"Hallo, Blake!" exclaimed Mellish. "There's something wrong in your study. That's the sweet voice of your pet lunatic."

Blake nodded shortly. He opened the door of Study No. 6. Tom Merry had turned the light out before leaving, and the place was pitchy dark.

"Help! Help!"

Blake struck a match. The light glimmered upon Arthur Augustus, fastened to the chair, with the fastened bag completely concealing his aristocratic features.

D'Arcy heard the scratch on the box, and gave a gasp of relief. His shouts had brought help at last. Blake lighted the gas.

"Help!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Whoevah you are, pway welease me! Who is it? Pway welease me-at once, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Blake! I'm glad you've come. I've been shoutin' for hours!"

"How on earth did you get like this?"

"Tom Mewwy did it. He made me a pwiseonah by a twick in his study, and then brougnt me to this beastly box-room, and left me here, among the wats. They have been cwawlin' all over me for hours, the howwid bwutes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the group of Fourth Formers at the door, and Blake laughed, too, till the tears ran down his cheeks. It seemed too funny for Arthur Augustus to imagine that he was in the disused box-room at the top of the house, when he was really sitting in his own chair within the familiar walls of Study No. 6.

The swell of the School House spluttered with indignation inside the thick bag as the sounds of merriment penetrated to his ears.

"You feahfully heartless wuffians!" he gasped. "I do not see anythin' to laugh at. I have been tweated with frightful diswespect. I have sat here for hours with the howwid wats crawlin' all ovah me, and bitin' me all ovah in the most cwuel way."

"My hat! You ought to be a poet, with an imagination like that, Gussy!" Blake exclaimed. "It is only ten minutes or so since the meeting broke up in the wood-shed."

"Nonsense! How can you tell such a feahful whoppah, Blake? I am surprised. I have been here at least two hours, sufferin' feahfully."

"You've been here about two minutes, I suppose," said Blake. "Where do you think you are, Aldolphus Aubrey Algernon?" He was unfastening the bag with deft fingers.

"In that beastly box-woom," mumbled D'Arcy. "Those feahful wats have been cwawlin' ovah me, and I am afwaid have soiled my clothes."

Blake jerked the bag from his head.

D'Arcy looked round him—at the familiar room, and the group of almost hysterical juniors in the doorway. He was utterly amazed.

"Why—what—how—— This is our study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Oh, Gussy, you are the champion ass!"

"How—how did I get here?"

"You've been here all the time. Those rats—— My hat! Gussy, your imagination would do credit to a patent-medicine advertiser!"

"But I distinctly felt them cwawlin' ovah me," said the bewildered swell of St. Jim's. "I believe I felt them bitin' me cweuelly."

"Imagination, deah boy." Blake released the swell of the School House, who was still looking round him like one in a dream. "There you are! Now, I think you've had enough war-path for one night. You kids there can travel along; I don't want a whole flock of geese cackling in my doorway."

The juniors were screaming with laughter. Gussy's expression was funnier than anything else. He evidently could not yet make up his mind quite where he was.

"Clear off!" said Blake. "Go and cackle in your own studies. Herries, get me my squirt, will you, and shove some ink in it!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

The laughs at the door melted into thin air. The chums of the Fourth were left alone in their study. D'Arcy dusted down his trousers with a rueful air.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Gussy," said Blake severely. "Let dogs delight to bark and bite, it is their nature to. Let Kerr and Figgins growl and fight, they've nothing else to do. But Gussy, you should never let such angry passions rise, your little fists were never meant to black Tom Merry's eyes."

"I shall certainly considah it my duty to give Tom Mewwy the thwashin' of his life," said Arthur Augustus. "This insult can only be wiped out by——"

"By getting a licking?" asked Blake. "That's what you'll get, ass. Now, don't be a bigger lunatic than you've been already, Gussy——"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a lunatic. I wefuse to let Tom Mewwy off that thwashin'. He must give me satisfaction. I am goin' to look for him now."

"Will you never know when you've had enough?" said Blake. "Hallo, here he is. Tom Merry, what do you mean by tweatin' Gussy with diawespect?"

The Terrible Three were looking in at the door. They were laughing like hyenas, and Gussy turned red with indignation at the sight of them.

"You wude bwutes!" he exclaimed. "There is nothin' to laugh at in this extremely unpleasant and diswewspectful twick. Tom Mewwy, take off your jacket. I——"

"My dear Gussy, don't get excited. It was really funny, you know. You don't know how much you add to the gaiety of existence."

"Tom Mewwy, I am determined to thwash you. It does not mattah a little bit what you say; you have insulted me too fearfully for pardon. Nothin' but a thwashin' will wipe out the insult. Are you weady?"

Tom Merry bestowed a wink upon the company in general, which Arthur Augustus was too excited and indignant to see.

"Ye-e-es," said Tom Merry, in a tremulous voice. "If you won't let me off, Gussy, I suppose I must stick it out. But you'll have the gloves on?"

"No, I will not have the gloves on. This is a sewious mattah, and I am compelled out of consideration for my dig to give you a feahful thwashin'." "Rot!" said Blake decisively. "You're not a giddy prize-fighter, Gussy. You're going to have the gloves on, and to have it out here, where we can all see fair play." Blake had caught Tom Merry's expressive wink, and was ready to join in the joke. "I'm going to be time-keeper and referee, and I'll see you through."

"I wefuse to have the——"

"You know perfectly well that you can't buck against the decision of the referee," said Blake severely. "I am surprised at you, Augustus!"

"Oh, vewy well. I weally do not wish to hurt Tom Mewwy, but it is stwictly necessary for me to inflict a severe thwashin' upon him. I will have the gloves on, deah boy."

"Thank you, Gussy," said Tom Merry, almost tearfully. "In after years, when you are a white-haired, doddering grandfather, you will look back upon this hour in the vine-clad study where your boyish years were passed, and be thankful that you tempered justice with mercy, and spared the——"

"Oh, don't wot, Tom Merry! Take your beastly jacket off, and stand up and take your beastly licking. I am in a feahful wage."

"Who's going to be my second?" asked Tom Merry, looking at his chums. "I must have somebody to back me up in this awful encounter."

"We'll both be your seconds," said Monty Lowther promptly. "You'll need two seconds, to back you up against a fearful fellow like Gussy."

"That's so," said Manners solemnly. "We shall have to pick you up off the floor a lot of times, I expect, Tommy, and we can take it in turns."

"Thank you," said Tom, with deep feeling, "that is very kind of you. And—and if anything should happen—— If Gussy should let himself really go, and I should fall a giddy corpus at his feet, you'll—you'll—you'll take the news to—the old folks at home, and plant a sprig of mistletoe on my grave?"

"We will, we will," said Manners and Lowther together, with great solemnity, and the Terrible Three shook hands upon it with a perfectly owl-like gravity.

Arthur Augustus sniffed indignantly.

Serious as the chums of the Shell looked, D'Arcy had a feeling that he was being made fun of, especially as Blake, Herries, and Digby were cackling away like a trio of excited geese.

Blake jerked off D'Arcy's jacket, and rolled up his sleeves for him. Then he produced a sponge and a bowl of water, and a pair of boxing-gloves.

"Choose your weapons, Tom Merry," he exclaimed, throwing the gloves to Tom. "Ah, sorry, I didn't mean them to land on your nose!"

Tom Merry donned a pair of gloves, and then Gussy did the same. The swell of the School House was looking awfully warlike.

Blake took out his big silver watch to act as timekeeper. Herries was ready with the sponge, and Manners and Lowther sat down on the table to watch.

"Time!" said Blake. "Gentlemen, the performance will now commence."

The combatants advanced and shook hands, with the gloves on, but instead of letting go, Tom Merry retained his grip on Gussy's right hand, and held it as in a vice.

D'Arcy struggled in vain to release it. He fixed a withering glance upon the hero of the Shell.

"Tom Mewwy, welease my hand! Blake, I appeal to you."

"Mewwy, welease his fin," said Blake, with an air of severity. "What do you mean by capturing the fin of Arthur Adolphus Algernon? Welease his aristocratic fin immediately."

"I'm—I'm so frightened!" sobbed Tom Merry.

Tom Merry jumped back in alarm, and the fin was released. D'Arcy brandished his fists, and advanced upon the hero of the Shell.

The great combat had commenced.

Monty Lowther and Manners, sitting on the table, clung to one another, apparently overcome by the awe of the scene. Tom Merry was driven round the ring by the warlike Gussy, and his defence was very feeble. Tom Merry had licked the best fighting-men in the Shell in his time, but now he certainly seemed nothing like a match for the swell of the Fourth Form.

Certainly, none of Gussy's blows reached him, except for a light tap or two on the chest. But he got in nothing in return, and he was driven round and round.

"Pway remain still!" exclaimed D'Arcy, gasping for breath. "What do you mean by walkin' wound and wound when I am twyin' to thwash you? Pway remain still."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Why don't you stand still and put your hands in your pockets, Tom Merry? That would make it much easier for Gussy to thwash you."

"Go for him, Gussy!" exclaimed Herries encouragingly. "He's weakenin', you know. Give him the kybosh in the first round!"

D'Arcy took the advice. He made a terrible rush at Tom Merry, and his fists beat the air like Indian clubs. Tom Merry went right over, and dropped on his back. Gussy's fists had not touched him, but he was down on the floor all the same.

"Bravo!" shouted Blake. "Bravo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus stepped back. A smile of satisfaction illumined his face. He allowed Herries to sponge his heated countenance.

"Stwictly speakin'," said Arthur Augustus, "I should be entitled to keep on, and not give Tom Mewwy a west until time is called, but I am lettin' him down lightly."

Manners and Lowther ran forward and picked up Tom Merry. He hung a heavy weight upon them. They dragged him to a chair and sat him in it, and moistened his face.

"Feel fit to go on, Tom?" asked Monty Lowther anxiously.

"Ha, ha—— I mean oh, dear! Yes, I think I can stick another round," murmured Tom Merry. "I think I will try, kid."

"Time!"

The adversaries toed the line again. Arthur Augustus, much encouraged by his great success, resumed his forcing tactics, and went at Tom Merry like a bull. Tom was driven right round the ring, and went down upon his back again with a thump.

"Get up!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, dancing excitedly round him. "I insist upon you getting up, Tom Mewwy, so that I can knock you down again!"

Tom Merry seemed to be suffering from some internal complaint for a few moments. Then he got upon his feet. Again the swell of the School House rushed upon him, and again the hero of the Shell flopped on the floor.

D'Arcy's boxing-gloves had just touched him, that was all, but a mere touch seemed sufficient to floor Tom Merry in this extremely peculiar encounter.

"Jump up!" shouted Gussy excitedly. "Jump up! Tom Mewwy, get up immediately!"

Up jumped Tom Merry, only to be floored again in the same easy manner. Then Blake called time, and the second round was over.

Manners and Lowther picked up Tom Merry. They were grinning and

cackling now, which was certainly very heartless considering the licking their chief was getting.

"Can you—ha, ha!—go on any longer, Tom?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he replied. "Gussy has licked me. Oh, Gussy, I never thought you had it in you! I have had a most feahful thwashin'!"

Blake and Herries shrieked. Arthur Augustus peeled off the gloves, and came over to Tom Merry. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and regarded the chief of Tom Merry & Co. with a placable gaze.

"My deah fellah," he exclaimed, holding out his hand, "I have been compelled to thwash you, as it was a question of dig, but I have weally no ill-feelin' on the mattah. I was in a tewwible wage, but that is all ovah now. I am perfectly satisfied, and I am willin' to be good fwriends again!"

"Ha, ha! That is to say, bravo! You're a good little ass, Gussy," said Monty Lowther, as Tom Merry shook hands cordially enough with the swell of the School House.

"I object to that remark, Lowthah. It is extwemely diswespectful to chawactewise any gentleman as an ass—"

"I withdraw the words," said Monty Lowther, with affrighted haste. "Don't give me a thwashin', Gussy! Pway don't!"

Tom Merry staggered to his feet. Manners and Lowther each took one of his arms to help him away. Gussy looked concerned.

"I say, Tom Mewwy, I hope I haven't weally hurt you vewy much!" he exclaimed. "I should be vewy sowwy, you know, old chap!"

Tom Merry gasped.

"That's all right, kid. I shall recover in the morning," he gasped. "You can't expect a chap to get over a feahful thwashin' like that in a hurry. Help me home, kids!"

Manners and Lowther helped him out of the study, and he went along the corridor leaning heavily upon them. D'Arcy watched them go, and then turned back into the study. To his surprise, he saw Blake, Herries, and Digby rolling on the carpet, screaming with laughter.

"Oh, I say," exclaimed D'Arcy, "that is vewy unfeelin', you know, when Tom Mewwy is so cut up, you know! I weally wish I had not been in such a feahful wage, and not hit him so feahfully hard, you know. Pway stop that untimely mewwiment!"

But Blake, Herries, and Digby seemed quite unable to stop their untimely merriment.

They rolled on the carpet, laughing like hyenas. The swell of the School House fixed them with an indignant glance. It was absolutely without effect. They went on shrieking, and Arthur Augustus walked out of the study with a scornful sniff.

CHAPTER 27. Caught in the Act.

TOM MERRY then made his way down to the gates, leaving the others, for he had a deep scheme on hand. He knew that if the Grammar juniors intended to enter the territory of St. Jim's, they would leave it as late as possible, so that the quadrangle would be clear; but as they knew the time the gates were locked, they would have to come before then. As a matter of fact, nothing was easier than what Frank Monk designed to do, and Tom Merry wondered that it had never occurred to him to carry the war into the enemy's country in the same way.

Within the house the lights were shining, but in the quadrangle it was hardly dark yet. The mists of the winter evening made it seem darker than

it was. Tom Merry went down to the gates, and took up his position to watch. The mists which Frank Monk had counted upon to favour his design concealed Tom Merry also.

"All serene!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath as he heard the whisper in the ancient stone gateway.

He had calculated well, and he had not been on the watch more than ten minutes when that whisper warned him that the foe were at hand.

"It's all serene, kids!" whispered the voice again; and Tom Merry knew the tones to be those of Frank Monk. "The coast is quite clear!"

There was the sound of a suppressed chuckle.

"They're not expecting this, Frank!"

"Of course not. It hasn't crossed their minds that we might carry the war into Africa like this," chuckled Monk. "We shall have to see that they don't return the compliment, when they're put up to the wheeze!"

"Yes, rather. It will be a bit of a surprise for them!"

"Come in! We've got to get out again, if possible, before the gates are locked. We could get out over the wall, I dare say, if we had to. But we don't want to be late for calling over at home."

"That's so. Come along!"

Three dim forms loomed up in the gloomy fog.

Tom Merry, keeping well back into the shadows, knew that the forms were those of Monk, Lane, and Carboy.

The three Grammarians stole out of the shadow of the deep old gateway, and crossed the quadrangle with quick, silent steps.

Tom Merry stepped quickly to the gates. He drew a length of thick, strong wire from his pocket, and wired the lock fast, so that the gate could not be opened. It was quite as secure now as if Taggles had been there with his keys.

Then, grinning to himself, the hero of the Shell hurried on the track of the Grammarians. He was curious to know what they intended to do. He had his whistle all ready for calling up the members of the Co. as soon as they should be needed.

He quickly came in sight of the three invaders again. He saw that Frank Monk was carrying something under his arm—he could not quite make out what. Once a chuckle floated back to him from the Grammar chums.

"What the dickens is the little game?" murmured Tom Merry. "Hallo! They've stopped!"

Monk, Lane, and Carboy had stopped under the huge old elm that grew close to the steps of the School House, and in summer shaded them with its foliage. Tom Merry, keeping the tree between him and the enemy, drew nearer.

Close as they were to the house now, the three Grammarians were quite safe from observation in the mist. But for Tom Merry being on the watch, they would have carried out their plan, whatever it was, with perfect ease and impunity.

Monk opened the parcel he had been carrying under his arm, and Tom Merry, straining his eyes through the fog, saw, to his utter amazement, that it was a funeral-wreath that came to light.

Tom was bewildered. What on earth the Grammar juniors could have brought a funeral-wreath to St. Jim's for was past his comprehension.

"Got the card, Laney?"

"Rather! Here it is."

"Pin it on the tree, and I'll fasten up the wreath round it."

"Ha, ha! That's soon done."

Lane produced a mourning-card from his pocket, and pinned it upon the trunk of the elm facing the School House door. Then the funeral-wreath was fastened upon the tree encircling the black-edged card.

"Read it out," said Frank Monk, with a catch in his voice. "Read out the mournful inscription, Lane, and let us weep."

"Certainly," said Lane, deeply affected. "'In loving memory of Tom Merry & Co., licked out of existence by Rylcombe Grammar School. Let them R.I.P.'"

Tom Merry could hardly help breaking into a chuckle.

It would have been an extremely telling wheeze—if it had worked. The mists of the winter night hid the wreath and the card on the tree, and they would not be discovered until the morning, when they would be on view to the whole of St. Jim's.

The fact that the Grammarians had penetrated into the very school, and there erected a memorial to the memory of Tom Merry & Co., would have been about the hardest knock the Co. had had, and Tom turned red as he thought of the utter ridicule which would have fallen upon them.

The joke would have appealed to the whole school, and Tom Merry & Co., instead of being the respected leaders of the juniors, would have been scoffed at by the smallest fags in the lower forms.

"My word!" murmured Tom Merry. "It was lucky we got on to this! I fancy the jape won't seem quite so funny to those bounders before they're through with it!"

Monk was pressing his handkerchief to his eyes.

"P-p-poor fellows!" he murmured. "So young, too, and so silly! Licked out of existence! Ain't it awfully, fearfully sad?"

"Ha, ha! St. Jim's will think it funny to-morrow! Tom Merry will feel inclined to kick himself hard," said Lane.

"Shouldn't wonder if it busts up the Co.," grinned Carboy. "It's about the most screaming wheeze we've given them; so far. It's a simply ripping idea! If the Co. don't hide their diminished heads after this, it will be funny!"

"Come on!" said Monk. "We've done the trick, and it's no good hanging on! But I should like to be here in the morning when they find this, that's all!"

Chuckling softly, the three Grammarians stole away into the mists.

Tom Merry waited silently for them to go. He knew that they could not get out of the gates. He hurried up the School House steps, and ran into Arthur Augustus in the hall.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wish you——"

"Get a move on, Gussy," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "Go and fetch Blake and the rest, quick! There's not a second to be lost!"

"Weally, what is the mattah?"

"The Grammar cads are in our hands, that's all."

That was enough for D'Arcy. He dashed up the stairs.

"Wight you are, Tom Mewwy!" he called back. "I'll wun like anythin'!"

"Call Manners and Lowther, too."

"All wight."

Tom Merry ran down the steps again. The shrill blast of the whistle rang through the foggy quadrangle, carrying the alarm to Figgins & Co. Monk and his comrades heard it as they went down to the gate.

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Frank Monk, stopping.

"Only a whistle," said Lane. "Nothing to do with us, I suppose."

"I wonder if it means——"

"Don't see how it can matter to us. Anyway, let's get out. If there's anything found out, we're safer on the other side of the gate," said Carboy.

"Yes, that's true enough."

And the three Grammarians broke into a run.

They reached the gate, and Frank Monk tore at it. It remained fast, and he dragged and dragged again—in vain! Carboy uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"My hat! Have they locked up already?"

"No," exclaimed Monk. "I know it's not the usual time yet—the clock hasn't struck. The gate has got jammed somehow. My word! There's a lot of wire twisted round the bars."

"Wire! Somebody has fastened it up on purpose!"

The three Grammarians stared at one another in the mist.

"Trapped!"

The word broke from three mouths at once.

There could be little doubt about it now. They had been seen to come in, and the gates had been fastened behind them.

Frank Monk tore desperately at the wire. The joke played off on the St. Jim's fellows was a good one, but it would be a poor ending to it for the Grammarians to be caught on the enemy's ground and made an example of.

But Tom Merry had done his work well with the wire. With time Monk could have untwisted it, but he was not given time. Forms were already looming up in the gloom.

"They're at the gate!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry. Tom's whistle had brought Figgins & Co. out of the New House in a twinkling. In spite of their captain's refusal to take them into his confidence, the loyal Co. held themselves in readiness for his signal. The whistle had been immediately followed by the arrival of Figgins & Co.—Figgy, Kerr, and Marmaduke first, and then Fatty Wynn, who had delayed a moment or two to remove a pan of frying sausages from the fire.

As they joined Tom Merry at the School House door, Study No. 6 came out, followed fast by Manners and Lowther. The whole Co. met together round Tom Merry, full of eager inquiries.

"What is it?"

"Have they come?"

"What's the row?"

"What's—"

"Look at that!" said Tom Merry, pointing to the card and the wreath on the trunk of the elm-tree facing the School House steps.

The Co. looked, and looked again, and grinned rather sheepishly.

"In loving memory of Tom Merry & Co., licked out of existence by the Rylcombe Grammar School," read out Figgins. "'Let them R.I.P.' My only pyjama hat! What astounding cheek!"

"Nice if all St. Jim's had woke up in the morning and found that there!" said Blake, as Tom Merry tore the wreath down and jumped on it.

"Yaas, wathah! If I had not scouted, deah boys—"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, snatching the mourning-card from the tree. "They're not gone yet, and we're going to make them eat their words!"

"They're bound to have scuttled off—"

"I've fastened the gate, and they can't."

"Hurrah! Come on!"

And the Co. swept down to the gate through the mist. Tom Merry's voice rang through the fog as he caught sight of the figures wildly tearing

at the wire on the gate. It was half undone, and a few minutes more would have seen Monk & Co. at liberty. But Tom knew that he had them.

"Got 'em?" yelled Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar the cads!"

"Wipe up the ground with 'em!"

Carboy and Lane faced desperately round to stop the rush, while Frank Monk went on tearing wildly at the wire. It was twisted together in a baffling way, and his hands were cold. Carboy and Lane hit out furiously, but they could not stem that rush.

The Saints came on irresistibly, and fairly jammed up the Grammarians against the closed gates.

Two or three pairs of hands seized each of the Grammar School trio, and Monk & Co. were helpless prisoners.

They struggled, but in vain, pinioned by such long odds.

"Chuck it, chaps!" said Monk at last. "They've got us. I say, whose idea was it wiring up the gate like this?"

"Mine," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, it was a neat dodge. We had no idea the gate was fastened. You must have known that we were coming."

"Yaas, wathah! I have been scoutin', you see, and I learned the plans of the enemy, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "You weally owe all this to me, Fwank Monk. It is a return for your little joke about the persecuted maiden, you know, deah boy."

"Ha, ha! Well, we can afford a reverse after all the lickings we've given you," said Frank Monk coolly. "I suppose you've found the wreath?"

"Yaas, wathah! And it's bwoken to bits."

"Got the card, too? 'In loving memory'—ha, ha, ha!—of Tom Merry & Co.' Ha, ha—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Carboy and Lane.

"The rotters are taking it pretty coolly," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Why not?" said Lane. "You can't eat us! We've come into your quarters and japed you; and you can't get out of that, anyhow."

"Yes, you've come into our quarters," said Tom Merry, "but you're not out again yet, my pippins! I've got that mourning-card here. I regard the words as a libel on Tom Merry & Co."

"Yaas, wathah! A weally pwovokin' pwevariation."

"When a chap libels another chap," said Tom Merry, "the proper thing for the chap to do is to make the other chap—"

"My hat! What a lot of chaps!"

"Silence, prisoner at the bar! When a chap libels another chap," repeated Tom Merry severely, "the libelled chap ought to make the libeller eat his words!"

"Possibly. But you couldn't do it!"

"My dear fellow, that's just what we're going to do. Here's your words, written on this giddy mourning-card. If you eat the card you'll eat the words, too. That's as clear as anything in Euclid."

"Do you think we are going to—" broke out Monk hotly.

"I don't think—I know," said Tom Merry tersely. "Bring them along to the wood-shed, kids, and then gather the clan to see them do the trick! Come along!"

And the Grammarians were hustled along by their captors.

CHAPTER 28.
The Grammarians Eat Their Words.

THE glimmer of a bicycle-lamp broke the darkness in the interior of the wood-shed. In the light of the lamp Tom Merry & Co. had met. In the middle of the shed stood the three prisoners of war, looking decidedly sheepish and uneasy.

The door of the wood-shed was open, and juniors were pouring in in twos and threes. The word had gone forth that the Grammar School trio had been captured on the St. Jim's ground—within the entrenchments, as Blake put it—and the followers of Figgins and Tom Merry were pouring in from New House and School House to see the fun.

The wood-shed was a pretty large place, but it was soon crammed. Round the prisoners Tom Merry & Co. had formed a circle, to guard them. Outside the circle the rest of the juniors of St. Jim's were at liberty to pack themselves; and they did so, in a thick crowd, which completely cut off any chance of the unfortunate Grammarians' escape.

Tom Merry held the mourning-card in his hand. He waited till the shed was pretty well packed, and then held it up to view.

"Gentlemen of the Shell and the Fourth Form at St. Jim's——"

"Excuse me," said D'Arcy politely. "The Fourth Form takes pweccence of the Shell."

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to shut up! I——"

Two or three pairs of hands seized D'Arcy and shook him, and Tom Merry went on:

"Gentlemen, you are called together to see three animals which have been captured within the borders of St. Jim's. These three reckless bounders have come within our walls for the purpose of erecting a memorial to Tom Merry & Co., upon the pretence that they have licked us out of existence. They look like licking anybody out of existence just at present, don't they?"

There was a laugh.

"We've caught them in the act," went on Tom Merry. "And as we regard this card as a libel on the honourable firm of Tom Merry & Co.——"

"What's on the card, then?" demanded Gore. "You haven't told us that yet, fathead!"

The hero of the Shell read out the inscription on the mourning-card. There was some grinning among the juniors; the joke appealed to their sense of humour. But the laugh was decidedly against the Grammarians, as it had turned out.

"Now," said Tom Merry, "Monk, Lane, and Carboy having libelled Tom Merry & Co., they are going to eat their words!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"They do not like the idea, but it's got to be done, all the same. They will eat their words by the simple and effectual process of eating this mourning-card."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze!"

Tom Merry divided the card into three equal portions. The crowd of juniors watched him with breathless interest. Would the Grammarians submit to the ordeal? It would be a more crushing defeat than they had yet sustained if they actually did eat their words in the presence of the assembled juniors of St. Jim's.

Their looks were not very promising. Monk's brow was clouded, Lane was frowning darkly, and Carboy had set his teeth like a vice.

"Are you ready, my children?" asked Tom Merry.
 "If you think we're going to eat that card," said Monk, "you're jolly well mistaken, Tom Merry! We're going to do nothing of the sort!"
 "Nothing of the sort!" echoed Lane and Carboy.

Tom Merry smiled sweetly.

"Do you refuse?"

"Yes, we do, and be hanged to you!"

"Very well. Figgins, kindly bring out Taggles's tar-pot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Figgins; and he dragged a fearsome-looking pot, half full of sticky tar, into the circle.

There was a large brush in the tar. Tom Merry took it by the handle and stirred the sluggish mass.

"Do you see this tar, my dear infants?"

"Yes, confound you!" growled Monk apprehensively.

"Do you particularly desire to be anointed with it?"

"Hang you, no!"

"Well you will be if you don't eat that card, and sharp!"

"You—you won't!"

"Oh, yes, I will!" Tom Merry dragged the brush out of the tar.

"Now, then, hand them their pieces, Digby. Monk first."

Dig handed a scrap of the mourning-card to Frank Monk, who took it gingerly.

"Eat away!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I won't!" yelled Monk; and he made a bolt for the door.

He might as well have tried to run through a stone wall. The thick crowd of juniors was impenetrable. He was collared and dragged back in a moment, and Lane and Carboy were pinioned at the same time.

Tom Merry advanced the tar-brush to within an inch of Monk's nose.

The eyes of the Grammar School leader were fixed upon it in a sort of weird fascination.

"D-d-d-don't!" he gasped. "Play the game, you know!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"My dear kid, we're playing your own game. Do you remember how you handled Marmaduke Smythe, our tame millionaire, the other day?"

"Well, he was a rank rotter!"

Marmaduke coloured.

"Don't rub it in, Monk," he said. "Perhaps I didn't take the thing in the right spirit. But you'd have coloured me up, all the same, anyway."

"Then do you remember how, on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion, you inked the noble and aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus Adolphus Algernon FitzPercy de Vere—"

"Oh, draw it mild, Tom Mewwy!"

"And can you recall the tuck-shop where you biffed the noble features of Montague Lowther, Esquire into a box of stale eggs?" Monk could not help grinning at the recollection. "So you see," said Tom Merry, "we're more than justified in using strong measures with you, my Grammarian beauties. And we're going to tar you till you're as black as niggers unless you eat your words—and the mourning-card!"

"I won't! I— O-o-o-o-o-och!"

The tar-brush had dabbed in Monk's face, cutting short his speech. He gave a horrified gasp at the taste of the tar. A yell of laughter went up as his face was seen smeared over with black. Lane and Carboy shuddered.

"Are you ready for that little feed now?" inquired Tom Merry politely.

"There's no hurry. We've got plenty of time—and plenty of tar."

"I—you—you beast! I'll—I'll wring your beastly neck!" mumbled Monk. "And I won't eat the card, so there! O-o-o-o-ow!"

A second dab fairly smothered his face.

"Are you going to eat your giddy words? Yes or no?"

"Ye-e-e-e-es!" growled Monk.

"Eat away, then, and buck up about it!"

There was no help for it. The Grammarians were fairly in the toils. After the example they had set, they had no right to complain. Frank Monk, with immense reluctance, slowly put the fragment of the mourning-card into his mouth and masticated it, to the intense delight of the St. Jim's juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wood-shed rang with laughter. Frank Monk having satisfactorily eaten the fragment of card, Lane and Carboy followed the example of their leader. The morsels were too small for the prisoners to care much about the actual eating; it was the humiliation of eating their words in public at the bidding of Tom Merry that made them wild.

The last fragment having disappeared, Tom Merry replaced the tar-brush in the pot with a cordial smile.

"Well, you've done it," he said, "and you might as well have done it first as last, and saved wasting Taggles's tar."

"You—you horrid, beastly bounder!"

"Ha, ha! What price St. Jim's now? Who's top dog?" demanded Blake. "Let's see them to the gates, chaps. Taggles will be locking up any minute now."

The prisoners were escorted down to the gates through the mist by fifty or sixty laughing juniors.

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

"Rats!" said Monk. "You haven't got back the surrender document, anyway. We've got that safe, and we show it to visitors as a proof of how we licked St. Jim's."

"Oh, we'll have it before long!" said Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 29.

Autnur Augustus has a Good Idea for Once.

THE winter mists were dim and shadowy on the old school. The morning sun gleamed a yellow ball through the fog, and the gas was lighted in the class-rooms.

"Jolly nice weather this for a half-holiday!" Blake grumbled, as the Fourth Form came pouring out after morning lessons. "Hope it will be a bit better on Saturday, or the game with the Grammar School will be a muck-up after all!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, who had an unusual shade of thought upon his face. "I say, Blake, deah boy, is there a meetin' of the Co. this afternoon?"

"Of course there is, image! Do you think we shall allow a half-holiday to pass without improving the shining hour? We're to meet in the haunted priory, at the solemn hour of midnight—I mean, we're to buzz off to the wood-shed after dinner."

"Vewy good! I have a pwoosition to make——"

"Gussy, don't make it. We're fed up with your pwopositions. Blessed if they're not more bother than the pwopositions in Euclid. Don't do it!"

"But this is weally——"

"Oh, I'm off!" said Blake

And he strolled away.

"You are!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "Off your silly wockah! I say, Hewwies, I have weally a wippin' pwoosition to make—"

"Another time, Adolphus," said Herries, following Blake.
 "Wude—vey wude!" said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "I say, Digby—Dig! My word! He's gone, too! These boundahs do not tweek me with pwopah wewpect. I shall have to weserve that weally wippin' pwoosition till the meetin' in the wood-shed."

After dinner the Co. gathered in the place of meeting. They were all there—eleven good men and true, as Blake put it.

"Gentlemen," said D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle, and taking a survey of the meeting, "befoah we pwoceed to the business of electin' another beastly captain, you know, I have a pwoosition to make. My ideah is this—that as a captain gets the ordah of the boot as soon as he is defeated, he ought to be allowed to wetaim the command so long as he is victowious. I think that's a weally wippin' ideah!"

"Hear, hear!" said several voices.

"Of course, when I become captain, that would lead to my being permanent captain," said D'Arcy modestly. "But at pwesent Tom Mewwy is captain, so you cannot wegard my pwoosition as bein' in the slightest degree self-seekin'. I put it to you."

"Well, I approve of the idea, of course," said Tom Merry. "It can't be denied that when this gang was Tom Merry & Co. it was successful, and that since Figgy's idea of a continual change of leaders was adopted we have been knocked sky-high by the Grammar School. I don't want to brag, you know, but I really think I manage you silly asses pretty well, considering what asses you are!"

This tribute from Tom Merry was not very well received. But D'Arcy's idea was taken up, and discussed fairly. The general opinion was that it was a good one.

"You see, it's a poor wule that won't work both ways," said D'Arcy. "I weally think you will find this a good idea, like most of mine. Let the leadah continue leadah so long as he defeats the enemy—that's the idea!"

"Well, it's not a bad wheeze," said Blake. "I admit that circumstances were against me when I was leading, and Tom Merry has made the best of it so far."

"Circumstances were against me, too," said Lowther thoughtfully.

"I—"

"Oh, no; you can't say that, Lowther! It was your fatheaded—"

"Eh?"

"Circumstances were against me," said Figgins. "You admit that—"

"Not much," said Manners. "A good leader makes his own circumstances."

"Something in that," said Marmaduke—"except in my case. That couldn't be helped—"

"I don't see it," said Lowther. "You were pretty rotten as a leader. But Gussy's idea is good, and it has one great advantage that Gussy hasn't thought of."

"What is that, pway?"

"Why, my dear Gussy, so long as Tom Merry is leader, we sha'n't have to draw lots again, and we escape the terrible danger of getting you for a captain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the Co. "Gussy's idea is better than he thought. Adopted!"

"Adopted!"

"Adopted!"

"Weally, I did not look at it in that light. I—"

"Ha, ha! Gussy's idea is adopted," said Lowther, grinning. "You've been and gone and done it now, Adolphus. I move that the meeting pass a vote of thanks to Arthur Augustus Algy, in recognition of his having saved them from a terrible danger—the danger of getting him for a leader!"

"Wats! I weally pwotest——"

"Passed!" shouted the company. "Passed unanimously!"

D'Arcy's face was a study. The Co. adopted the proposition without a dissentient voice. Tom Merry made his bow.

"Gentlemen, so long as you are satisfied with me as a leader, I'm willing to keep the post," he said. "I thank you for this proof of confidence, and I thank Arthur Augustus Aubrey FitzPercy for his invaluable suggestion."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And now let's get to business, as the important question of the leader is settled," said Tom Merry. "Have you noticed that it is a trifle foggy this afternoon?"

"I think I've noticed something of the sort, Tom Merry," said Blake.

"What the dickens are you getting at?"

"You haven't forgotten that the Grammarians invaded our quarters last night?"

"Are we likely to forget it?" exclaimed Kerr. "Get on with the washing, and cut the cackle!"

"Yaas, wathah! Cut the beastly cackle, deah boy!"

"Patience, my infants. I have thought over the matter, and I have compiled a wheeze. We can't possibly be put in the shade by the Grammarians. If they come within our sacred borders, we must penetrate within theirs!"

"I suppose you're not going to suggest an attack on the Grammar School?" ejaculated Figgins. "I should think that rather too tall an order even for Tom Merry & Co.!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; I'm not thinking of anything quite so heroic as that," he said. "I'm thinking of that document the Grammarians have boned from us. We can't get it back without going into the Grammar School. The fog this afternoon favours the enterprise, as well as the fact that most of the Grammarians will be out of gates."

Blake gave a whistle.

"But a gang of us could hardly think of going into their quarters without being spotted!" he exclaimed. "Tom Merry, I'm afraid that you're talking out of the back of your head!"

"You haven't heard all yet," said the captain of the great Co. serenely. "Have you forgotten the wheeze that was worked off on the Grammar School some time back, when we were first rowing with them? Kerr made up as Dr. Monk, the Head of the school, and took the kids out for a walk, and caned some of them!"

"Ha, ha! No! But you don't propose to have an old wheeze worked over again? It would never answer a second time!"

"No; I simply mentioned that to recall to your minds the possibilities of the case. Kerr is a champion at personating. He has made up as Dr. Monk and as Mr. Lathom in a way that would have deceived their own grandmothers. Why shouldn't a couple of us—Kerr and myself—get into the Grammar School in disguise?"

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Kerr instantly.

The rest of the Co. remained silent in sheer astonishment at the boldness of the idea.

"Kerr is wonderful at making up," went on Tom Merry, "and I've had a lot of practice in private theatricals. The weather is so dull and foggy that

nobody would get a really good look at us. What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Ripping!" said Kerr.

"Jolly good," said Figgins slowly, "if it can be worked. But if they found you in their quarters they'd simply skin you, after the way we wiped them up last night!"

"They won't find us out; but if they do we'll stand the row," said Tom Merry. "I'm game, and I know Kerr is."

"Rather," said the Scottish partner in the Co. promptly. "We'll stick it out if they collar us; but they won't."

CHAPTER 30.

"Rate!"

"RIPPING!"
"Great!"
"Marvellous!"

Such were the comments of Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Marmaduke, as Kerr and Tom Merry completed the process of "making up," and stood up for inspection.

The metamorphosis was really wonderful.

Kerr was a born actor, and his skill in impersonation had often afforded fun to his chums of the New House. He had played many parts in his time. Tom Merry was quick and clever, and Kerr willingly gave him the benefit of his experience. The result was really worthy of the commendation bestowed by Figgins & Co.

There had been some doubt in deciding what characters to adopt. Fatty Wynn had suggested capturing a couple of Grammarians and personating them. But the idea was given up as impracticable. It was Tom Merry who decided upon a plan. It was simply to enter the Grammar School with perfect boldness, and if questioned to assume the name of Smith, and state that they had come in the half-holiday to see their cousin of that name at the Grammar School.

"You see, I know there are five different Smiths at the Grammar School," said Tom Merry; "and if we happen to be questioned by one of them, he'll suppose that we're the giddy relations of one of the others. I don't see how the wheeze can be found out, so long as they don't recognise us."

"And they won't do that," said Kerr.

And Figgins & Co. agreed that they wouldn't. The disguise was made by only a few light and artistic touches, but it was perfect. The skins were darkened, the eyebrows and lashes blackened, colour added to the cheeks, and a dark tint to the hair. The two boys then had the appearance of lads of a somewhat foreign aspect, and no one would have dreamed of recognising Tom Merry's fair skin, or the sandy complexion of Kerr. They put off the Eton suits and dressed in tweeds, with ordinary caps. Figgins & Co. hardly knew them when the disguise was finished.

"Ripping!" repeated Figgins enthusiastically. "I never thought that even Kerr could do it so well! It's safe as houses!"

"Rather!" said Marmaduke. "If I came into the study now, I shouldn't know you!"

"And I— Hallo, Monteith!"

The head prefect of the New House opened the door of the study.

"I want you, Figgins— Hallo!" He broke off as he saw the two strangers. "If you're entertaining company, never mind!"

"Ha, ha!" howled Figgins. "Don't you know two St. Jim's kids when you see them, Monteith?"

The prefect stared.

"What do you mean, Figgins? These kids don't belong to St. Jim's. Are they new boys?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who are you?" asked Monteith, turning to Tom Merry, but without the slightest recognition in his face.

"If you please," squeaked Tom Merry, "I'm William Arthur Smith, and I've come to see my cousin. This is my young brother Alfred."

"Well, you can go and see your cousin, for all I care," said Monteith.

"What are you kids cackling at? Do you want your ears boxed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "Don't you know Tom Merry and Kerr?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the brothers Smith. "It's us, Monteith!"

The prefect stared, and then grinned.

"What is the meaning of this nonsense?" he asked.

"Only a little joke," said Figgins. "It's not going to be played in our house, so you needn't come down in your wrath, Monteith."

The prefect laughed.

"Well, you can come with me, Figgins, then."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "I'll see you kids when you come back, and don't forget to bring the missing document with you."

Tom Merry and Kerr left the New House, and went down to the gates. A good many glances were cast at them, but nobody recognised them. They left the school, and walked down the lane towards Rylcombe.

A few minutes more brought them to the gates of the Grammar School.

Misty as the afternoon was, most of the Grammarians were out for the half-holiday, in the fields or on the frozen river. There was some practice going on on the football-field, but this was some distance from the school, and so it caused the coast to be clear. Tom Merry and Kerr marched boldly in at the open gates into the playground.

Tom Merry looked round him keenly.

He did not know the lie of the land, as it were, within the walls of the Grammar School. The valuable document he had come to capture was framed and hung up in the junior common-room, he knew that. But where was the room?

There was a tap on his shoulder. He turned his head and saw Mr. Phipps, one of the masters of the Grammar School.

"Are you looking for anyone, my lad?" asked Mr. Phipps. "You are a stranger here, I think?"

"Yes, sir, thank you," squeaked Tom. "I am William Arthur Smith, and this is my young brother Alfred. We have come to see our cousin. Can you kindly direct me to the common-room, sir?"

"Your cousin is a lower form boy, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir."

"Then that is your way. You expect to find him in the common-room?"

"Well, we haven't been able to find him out of doors, sir."

"Well, that is your way—down that passage, and the last door, facing you."

"Thank you, sir."

"Thank you, sir."

And the brothers Smith marched down the passage.

They entered the common-room, and, as Tom Merry expected, found it empty. It was not likely to be occupied on a half-holiday which was fine enough for the boys to be out of doors. Tom closed the door.

Then he broke into an irrepressible chuckle.

"My word!" he said. "What would Monk & Co. say if they knew we were here? But don't let's lose a second. Somebody may come in at any moment."

"It won't take us long to find the thing," said Kerr. "If they've framed it and hung it up in the room, as they said, it's easy enough."

The two juniors from St. Jim's made a hasty examination of the room. It was a large white-washed apartment, with a fire-grate at one end, and there were several pictures and maps hanging on the white walls.

It did not take the juniors long to find the one they were in search of. A gilt frame was hanging directly over the mantelpiece, as the most prominent spot in the room, and in it, nicely mounted, was the document they sought.

The original confession of surrender, extorted from the Grammarians, had been written out on cardboard, and signed by Frank Monk and his chums. The St. Jim's juniors had not agreed as to the possession of it, and in the struggle it had been torn into three pieces. How the three successive fragments had been won back by the Grammarians our readers know. They had been carefully pasted up on the mount, and now made a whole document again, but over the writing on the card was an added inscription in red ink, daubed on with a brush in letters of a size that quite put the writing in the shade: "Won back from St. Jim's, and preserved as a trophy of the licking we gave them."

Tom Merry grinned.

"There'll be another inscription on that card when we hang it up in the School House," he remarked.

"In the New House, you mean," said Kerr pleasantly.

"Give us that chair, and I'll get it down. We may be interrupted at any moment."

Tom Merry stood on the chair and reached down the frame. To take the back out and remove the mount was the work of a very few moments. The valuable document was pasted there, but Tom Merry soon had it off with his penknife.

"Got it!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

He thrust it into his breast pocket.

"Here, I say, hand it over——"

"I tell you we'll settle that at St. Jim's. Let's shove the frame up again. But wait a tick. We ought to leave them a message."

Kerr grinned. The idea was a good one.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought for a moment. There were pens, ink, and papers on a table at hand. Tom picked up a pen, and traced a word in large letters on a sheet of paper, and Kerr grinned approval. The word was quickly blacked in, and then Tom blotted it, and the paper was flattened over the glass, and the back of the frame put in place again.

Then Tom hung it up in its former place over the mantelpiece.

From the gilt frame, instead of the trophy of victory, a single aggressive word stared in bold, black letters from white paper.

RATS!

"My hat!" murmured Kerr. "I would give a week's pocket-money to see Monk's face when he reads that."

"Ha, ha! So would I, but we can't stop! The thing now is to get safe away with the giddy document."

"Come on, then!"

They went to the door. Tom Merry's hand was on it to open it when it was opened from the outside, and Monk and Lane, coming in, nearly ran into the two juniors.

CHAPTER 31.

Neck or Nothing.

FRANK MONK stared at the two strangers.

"Hallo you're in the wrong kennel!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

Tom Merry had been startled for a moment by the sudden appearance of the enemy, but he was quickly himself again.

"If you please," he squeaked, "I'm William Arthur Smith, and this is my young brother Alfred. We've come to see our cousin."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Frank Monk. "Then go and see your cousin, or go and eat coke, or anything you like."

"Certainly. Thank you very much."

"Wait a tick, though," said Monk good-naturedly. "You don't know your way about the school, I suppose, do you?"

"Thank you, not very well," squeaked Tom Merry.

"Well, I'll help you find the chap, then. You can get that letter out of my desk, Lane, and bring it to me. Come along, you kids! Now, which Smith is your cousin. There are five kids of that name at this school."

Tom Merry's eyes met Kerr's with a glance of dismay.

"He may use any of his Christian names here," suggested Tom Merry, struck by an inspiration. "His full name is John Henry Frederick William Sydney Smith."

"Well, there's enough of that," said Frank Monk. "I dare say it's Sid Smith you want. There's a chap of that name here. But it's very queer!"

And something like suspicion came into Frank Monk's eyes. It occurred to him that these innocent-looking youngsters might be having a little game with him, though not for a moment did he suspect the full facts.

"Can you tell us where Sid is?" asked Tom Merry, anxious only to get out of the school, so that there would be a chance of making a cut for the gate.

"Yes, he's playing fives now, I believe. Come along!"

They followed Frank Monk down the passage. Lane was in the common-room, looking in Monk's desk for a letter, which was what had brought the two juniors into the room at that unlucky moment.

Tom Merry and Kerr drew a deep breath of relief as they came out into the open air again. They were nearer to freedom now, at any rate.

"This way," said Frank, turning off to the right.

"Hook it!" whispered Tom.

The Saints broke into a run. Frank Monk turned round in amazement.

"This is the way to the fives-court," he bawled. "Where are you going?"

"It's all right," squeaked Tom, turning his head. "I can see my cousin now."

"Oh, all right—Hallo, Lane, what's the matter?"

Lane came out of the house with his mouth wide open, and his eyes staring. He looked as if he had seen a ghost. He held a picture-frame in his hands. Tom Merry saw him, and knew that all was up.

"Run for your life!" he gasped.

The two St. Jim's juniors cut across the playground to the gate with a speed they had seldom shown even on the football-field or the cinder-path.

"What's the matter, Lane?"

"Look!" gasped Lane. "I've brought it for you to see."

He held up the frame which had contained the valued trophy of victory.

Frank Monk gave a jump.

"RATS!"

That word, in bold, black, aggressive letters stared him in the face.

"What—what does it mean?" he stammered.

"Can't you see? It was hanging in its usual place, and I just noticed it as I glanced up from your desk. The document's been taken, and they've left this in its place."

"Who—who—which—what—"

"The St. Jim's kids have been here!"

Light flashed upon the bewildered brain of Frank Monk.

"I know!" he fairly yelled. "Those Smith kids! I see it all now! They've just done it! After them!"

He broke into a run. Lane followed him, though only half comprehending. But all was clear to Monk now.

"Stop them!"

He yelled out the words as he ran. Tom Merry and Kerr had just reached the gate. There were a group of Grammarians standing there. They looked round at the sound of Monk's frantic shout, and seeing two strangers running, and their own leader in pursuit, they closed up to bar the gateway.

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"Shoulder to shoulder, Kerr!"

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

And shoulder to shoulder they charged.

The Grammarians were not quite prepared for that. They had no time to brace themselves against such a charge as that. The two sturdy juniors, going at full speed, smote them like a steam-hammer, and they were hurled to right and left.

Right through went Kerr and Tom Merry.

They staggered a moment from the shock. Three Grammarians were sprawling on the ground, the others staggering drunkenly. But some of them were reaching out for the fugitives. Monk and Lane put on a spurt and reached the gate.

"Come on!" panted Tom Merry. "It's neck or nothing now!"

They ran on down the lane for St. Jim's.

Out of the gate came Monk and Lane at full pelt. After them came a half-dozen Grammar juniors.

Tom Merry glanced back over his shoulder. "They're gaining!" He gasped out the words.

Kerr's eyes swept anxiously along the road. He expected to see the Co. somewhere on the road to St. Jim's; but they had been instructed not to come too near the Grammar School for fear of exciting suspicion in the Grammarian minds that something was "on." The two comrades would have been very glad to see them now.

"Gaining! Run for your giddy life!" gasped Tom Merry.

Kerr glanced back. Monk, Lane, and two others were certainly gaining; they were overhauling the St. Jim's juniors foot by foot. Kerr's eyes gleamed.

"Keep it up!" he muttered.

The chase swept on. One of the Grammarians dropped behind, but Monk, Lane, and Hayes were coming on like racers. Tom Merry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Carboy, by all that's rotten!"

Carboy it was, coming up the lane in all unconsciousness of what was going on, coming directly towards the fugitives, directly in their path.

Monk sighted his chum almost at the same moment. He gave a yell.

"Carboy! Look out! Stop 'em!"

Carboy gave a start, and looked out. He took in the situation at a glance. He recognised the two boys who had asked him the way to Rylcombe Grammar School when he had passed them in the lane. What their quarrel was with Monk he did not know or care. He planted himself in the centre of the lane to stop them.

"Stop them!"

Tom Merry set his teeth hard.

"Knock him over, Kerr! One chap can't stop two of us!"

"No," gasped Kerr, "don't! You've got the paper. You get clear. I'll collar this chap and hold on to him! The trophy of victory must be saved!"

"Kerr, you're a trump! I'll do it!"

They dashed on. Right at Carboy went the Scottish partner in the Co., and he tackled him like a Rugby back collaring a charging three-quarter. The two rolled in the lane together, and Tom Merry passed them, and ran on like the wind. A few seconds later the Grammarians were tumbling over the two struggling forms.

"Has he got the document?" gasped Monk, picking himself up. "They've been in the school and collared it! Has he got it?"

Kerr was fighting like a demon, to waste time and delay the pursuit of Tom Merry. Anything to save the trophy! But Monk was as keen as Kerr, and he guessed the truth.

"Search him, while we get the other bounder!" he muttered. And leaving Kerr wriggling in the hands of a couple of Grammarians, Monk, Lane, and Carboy darted off on the track of Tom Merry.

Tom Merry had gained ground, and he was running hard. St. Jim's was in sight, and at any moment the Co. might appear. Monk knew it, too, and he put on a desperate spurt. His outstretched hand touched the shoulder of Tom Merry. But the touch acted as a spur to the hero of the Shell. He shook it off and ran harder.

"It's Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry gave a gasp of delight. The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was music to his ears.

"Rescue," he shouted—"rescue, St. Jim's!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus was standing in the middle of the road, waving his hand wildly to the Co., who were coming on. The swell of St. Jim's had been strolling on ahead. The Co. heard and understood, and came on with a run.

None too soon. Frank Monk had clutched at Tom Merry again, and this time his grip closed on the junior's shoulder and fastened there.

Tom was almost too spent for a struggle. Monk, Lane, and Carboy were scrambling over him, eager to regain the document. But D'Arcy had reached the spot now, running hard, his eyeglass trailing behind him at the end of the cord. He hurled himself upon the Grammarians without an instant's hesitation.

"Rescue!" bawled Tom Merry.

"Here we are!" shouted Figgins, the first to reach them. The rest of the Co. were only a moment behind. They simply piled themselves on Monk, Lane, and Carboy. The three Grammarians were yanked off Tom Merry in no time, and rolled in the road. Monty Lowther and Manners helped Tom to his feet.

"Good old Tommy! Got it?"

"Yes. Go and help Kerr!"

Figgins & Co. were already racing up the lane. Frank Monk gave a gasp. "Merry! Kerr! My only hat! How we've been done!"

Done the Grammarians certainly had been—completely done. The trophy of victory was safe in Tom Merry's possession, and he was safe in the midst of the Co. Monk, Lane, and Carboy wriggled out of the grip of the juniors and fled through the hedge, cutting across country to escape. The Saints were content to let them go without pursuit.

They turned back towards St. Jim's. Tom Merry drew the captured trophy from his breast, and they feasted their eyes upon it.

"Hurrah!"

"Shoulder high!" exclaimed Figgins, and the idea was seized upon at once. Tom Merry and Kerr, rumped and dusty, but triumphant, were hoisted upon the shoulders of the Co. and borne in state through the gates of St. Jim's.

Right across the quadrangle went the triumphal procession, while ringing hurrahs notified the whole of St. Jim's of Tom Merry's Conquest.

CHAPTER 32.

The Last Licking.

SIR ROBERT DIGBY stepped from the station hack and shook hands with his hopeful son on the steps of the School House, and then with the rest of Tom Merry & Co. It was Saturday midday—the day of the final match with the Grammar School.

Morning lessons were over, and glad enough had the juniors of St. Jim's been to be dismissed that morning. They were thinking of the afternoon, and the visit to the Grammar School.

Besides the eleven—of which Tom Merry was the captain—nearly every junior at St. Jim's had made up his mind to go in order to see the match, and some of them started walking over immediately after dinner.

It was "pax" between the two schools for the day, and the Saints were given a cordial welcome on the Grammar School ground.

"A fine afternoon for your match!" said Sir Robert, as he shook hands with Tom Merry. "I hope I shall see you beat the enemy."

"We're going to try, sir!" said the hero of the Shell cheerfully.

"Yaas, wathah! We're goin' to beat them to the wide, Sir Wobert!"

The baronet smiled, and passed in. Dr. Holmes and some of the masters were going over to see the match, and Sir Robert was going in the doctor's carriage.

Tom Merry and Co. were in high spirits.

The afternoon was fine, cold, and clear, and the late mists had quite cleared away. The sky was of steely blue, the weather quite dry. Never had the second eleven of St. Jim's been in better form for a match.

The brake rolled up to the Grammar School ground. A couple of dressing-tents stood there, and Frank Monk and his friends came to welcome the Saints and show them to their quarters.

Tom Merry shook hands cordially with Frank.

"You did us brown that time, Merry," grinned the Grammar School leader. "It was a ripping wheeze, and we didn't catch on till too late. But we'll give you the kybosh this time to make up for it, my pippin!"

"We'll take all the kyboshing you can give us," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

A cheer greeted the appearance of the teams in the field. The ropes round the football-ground were lined with eager faces. Grammarians and Saints seemed to be there in almost equal forces. The two captains tossed, and Monk won the choice of goals, and St. Jim's were given the kick-off against a stiff breeze.

The ball rolled from the foot of Tom Merry. The play was hard and fast from the start.

Presently, the Saints seemed to get more into their stride, and a fine run up the field by Marmaduke resulted in a goal from the foot of Figgins, the first scored in the match. But just before half time the Grammarians responded with a goal, taken by Frank Monk, and the first half closed with the score equal.

After the brief interval, the sides renewed the contest with undiminished energy. Play was hard and fast, fast and furious. The spectators continually cheered fine work, but on each side the defence was sound, and the best efforts of the forwards—good as they were—seemed to fail.

But the change of ends had given the Saints an advantage of which they slowly but surely made full use, gaining the upper hand by degrees. By luck and pluck Carboy sent in a shot that baffled Fatty Wynn, and the Grammar School stood two to one, with twenty minutes more to play.

But it was the last score for the Grammar School. St. Jim's bore all before them new. With a fine, combined rush up the field they forced the home backs to concede a corner, which materialised in a goal from Tom Merry.

Two to two! And fifteen minutes more to time.

Five minutes later St. Jim's were yelling themselves hoarse over another goal, the result of a splendid dribble right up the field by Figgins, who kicked the ball at the end of the run with two backs almost upon him, and beat the goalie all the way.

Dr. Holmes clapped his hands with the rest, and Mr. Railton cheered. Sir Robert Digby was on his feet, cheering with the loudest.

But St. Jim's triumph was not ended yet.

The Grammarians played up splendidly, but the Saints were too much for them. The Co. and Tom Merry worked like clockwork. Another rush besieged the home goal, and from a press of players the ball suddenly popped out like the pip from an orange, and took the home goalie quite by surprise. It was in the net before he knew that it was coming.

It was Digby's goal. Sir Robert shouted himself hoarse. The Co. slapped Dig on the back as they walked back to the centre of the field.

"Four to two!" grinned Tom Merry. "Give 'em another one for luck!"

And the Co. played up for another goal. And they captured it, too, Tom Merry sending the ball into the net with a terrific shot almost on the stroke of time.

Then the whistle went.

Five goals to two!


The Grammarians had played a good game, but the Saints had played a better one, and there was no getting out of that.

It was dusk when Tom Merry and Co. arrived at St. Jim's on their return from that memorable match on the Grammar School ground.

The studies were lighted up in the houses; but in Figgins's study in the New House, and Sudy No. 6 in the School House, the windows were dark.

For the whole of the Co. had gathered in Tom Merry's quarters for a feed in celebration of that crushing victory over the Grammar School, and they enjoyed as jolly an evening as had ever been spent within those walls, in honour of Tom Merry's Conquest!

THE END.

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