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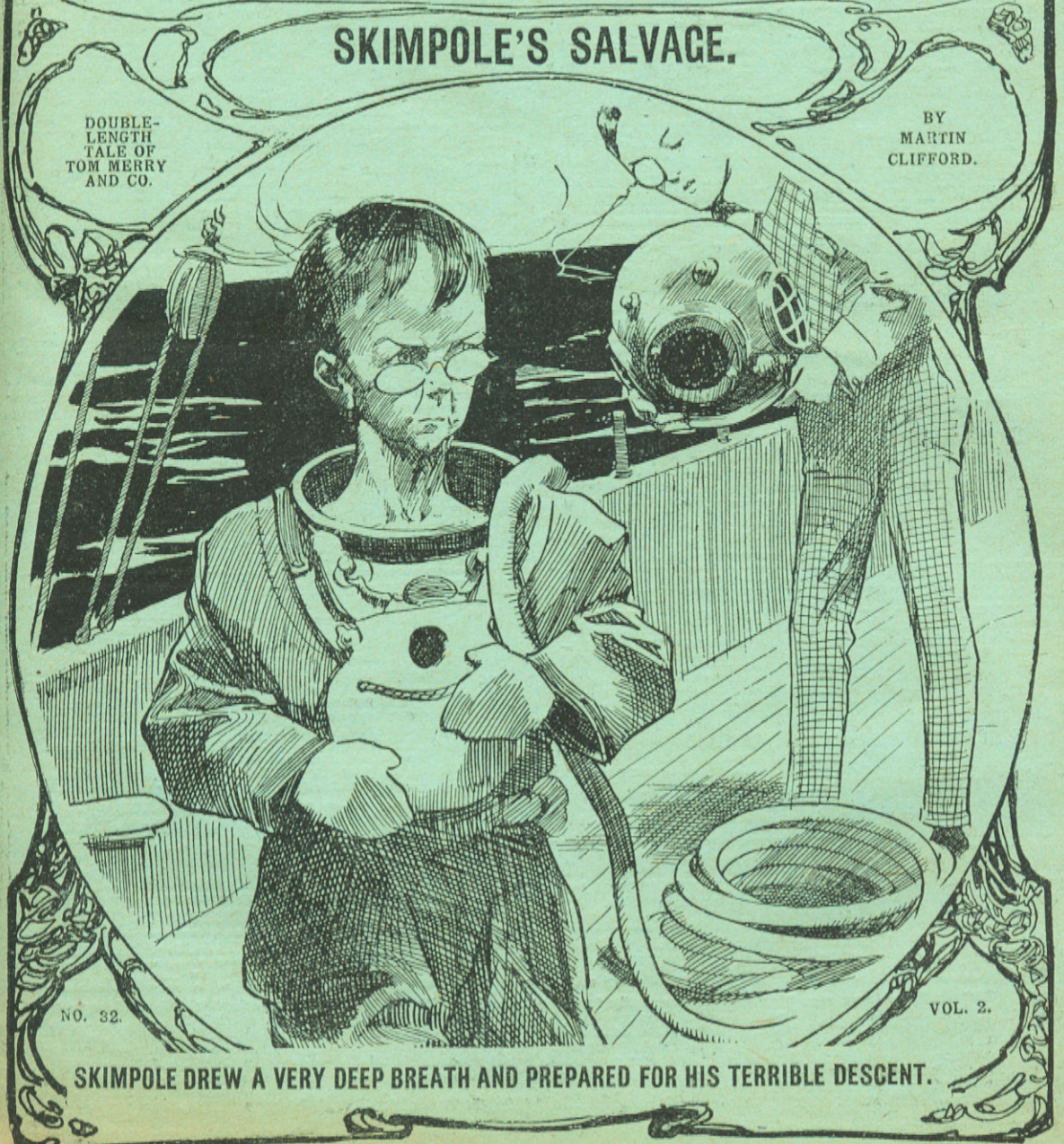
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TALE OF
TOM MERRY
AND CO.

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



NO. 32.

VOL. 2.

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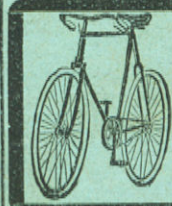
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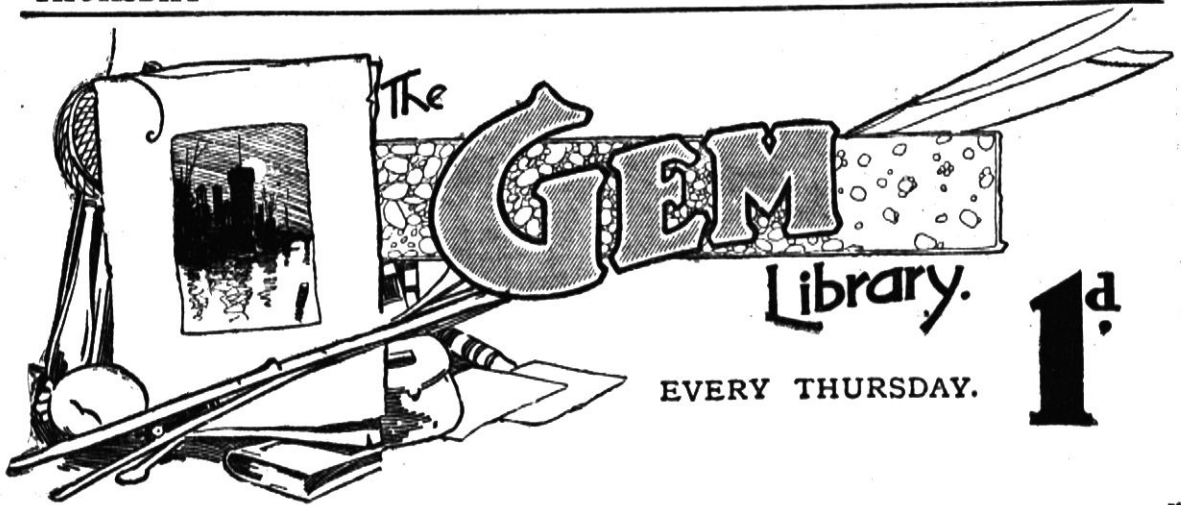
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CHAPTER 1.

A Matter of Great Importance!

"D'ARCY! Is D'Arcy here?" Skimpole of the Shell blinked into Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's. Blake, Horries, and Digby were seated round the study table, pen in hand, with their books before them, and they seemed too busy to look up. At all events, they did not look up.

"I say, is D'Arcy here?"
Scratch, scratch, went the pens.
"Who's D'Arcy?"
Scratch, scratch.

Skimpole blinked dubiously at the clumps of the Fourth Form, and came into the study. The three juniors worked away industriously, and did not seem to be aware of his entrance. Skimpole rubbed his glasses and blinked at them again.

"I say, Blake—"
Scratch, scratch.
"Digby, old man—"
Scratch, scratch.
"Horries—"

Scratch, scratch.
"I say, I particularly want to see D'Arcy. It's an awfully important matter. Where is he?"

Scratch, scratch.

Skimpole looked amazed.

"Dear me," he murmured, "a most remarkable case of deafness—a most remarkable case indeed. I ought to make a note of this to go into my chapter on the 'Deterioration of the Physical Faculties Owing to the Superabundance of Athletic Exercises.' A remarkable case indeed. I suppose I shall have to shout." He put his head close to Blake's and bawled in his ear, "I say, Blake!"

Jack Blake jumped up as suddenly as a Jack-in-a-box.

"You ass!" he roared, rubbing his ear. "What do you mean?"

Skimpole started back,

"Dear me! I thought you could not hear, as you did not reply, and—"

"You shrieking ass!"

"I regarded it as a remarkable case of sudden deafness."

"You—you dummy!" said Jack Blake, in measured tones.

"Do you see that doorway?"

"Yes. I am somewhat short-sighted, but I can see the doorway with perfect distinctness."

"Get through it."

"Eh?"

"Get out! Travel! Bunk! Disappear!"

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"But I want to speak to D'Arcy!"
 "Can't you see he's not here?"
 "Yes, I perceive that; but where is he?"
 "Can't you see we're busy?"
 "Yes. But where is D'Arcy?"
 "Go and sort him out."
 "It's an awfully important matter—a matter that really cannot wait."

"Yes, I know your important matters, you duffer. Have you got some new scheme of buzzing off some night to play amateur detective, and get a licking?" asked Jack Blake, in a tone of deep disgust.

"I am afraid I shall have to refuse to acquaint you with the business, Blake, as you would probably attempt to prevent D'Arcy from assisting me. Where is D'Arcy?"

"Travel!"
 "Where is D'Arcy?" persisted Skimpole. "I simply must see him. I cannot go alone, and—"

"You cannot go where alone?"
 "Er—that is my secret. I cannot acquaint you with the details. Will you tell me where to look for D'Arcy?"

"Yes. Look for him under a silk hat, or inside a high collar, and you'll be certain to find him."
 "Really, Blake—"

"And now travel."
 "I want to know where D'Arcy is, as—"

Blake dropped into his seat again and took up his pen. Skimpole blinked at him. Digby and Herries had gone on steadily working all the time.

"I say, Blake—"
 "Nonne nuntius tecum properavisset," said Blake, going over his work aloud.

"Eh?"
 "Nonne nuntius tecum properavisset!"
 "Really, Blake—"

"Nonne nuntius, si paganus iste eum oravisset, tecum properavisset?"

Skimpole gave the chums of the Fourth Form a final indignant blink, and walked out of the study. It was evident that he would get no information there as to the whereabouts of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. Jack Blake grinned when the door had closed behind Skimpole.

"That settled him," he remarked.
 "I wonder what he wants Gussy for?" Dig remarked, looking up. "The ass seems to have some new scheme on."

"That's what I was thinking. You remember how they scuttled off one night on a silly expedition, and we had to fetch them back, and they had a licking? I suppose Skimmy has some wheeze in his head like that again, and we shall have to look after Gussy. He'll get it worse next time if there's any more breaking bounds. We shall have to make it a point to keep an eye on Gussy, and see that he doesn't get into any mischief."

"Good," grinned Herries. "We shall be finished work by the time Gussy gets back from the village, and we can keep an eye on him."

"Yes, and keep him under our wing," agreed Digby. "It's settled that Skimpole is not to interview Gussy except in our presence."

"That's it."
 And the chums of Study No. 6 went on with their Latin.

Skimpole went down the passage with a thoughtful frown upon his wide forehead. He was thinking as he went along, and did not see three cheerful-looking youths coming up the passage till he had almost run into them.

"Where are you running to, fathead?" asked Tom Merry, seizing Skimpole by the front of his collar and bringing him to a sudden halt.

"Dear me, is that you, Merry? Have you seen D'Arcy?"

"Yes."
 "Where is he?"
 "How should I know!"

"But you said you had seen him?"
 "He couldn't very well be at St. Jim's the time he's been here without my seeing him," said Tom Merry. "I haven't seen him to-day, though."

"Really, Merry—"
 "I believe he's gone to the village," said Manners. "I saw him go out at the gates a little while back."

"Dear me! I wanted to see him most particularly. It's an awfully important matter. I suppose I had better go and wait for him at the gates."

And Skimpole moved on. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther grinned at one another. The Terrible Three were looking very sunburnt and very fit after their long holiday on the sea.

"Something on," drawled Lowther, "Skimmy's got some new bee in his bonnet."

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry laughing. "But we've got no time for Skimmy now. We've got to attend to the football arrangements."

The Terrible Three went on to their study. Skimpole lost no time in getting to the gates of St. Jim's. There he took up his stand, in the shadow of the ancient gateway—a time-worn

relic of the ancient building—and waited. There was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on the long, white, dusty road to Rylcombe, and Skimpole pulled out a pocket-book and a pencil, and started jotting things down.

He was busily engaged when three juniors came into the gateway, and took up their stand on the opposite side. They were Blake, Herries, and Digby. Skimpole glanced across at them.

"Nice weather, don't it?" said Jack Blake affably.
 "Keeps dry so long as it doesn't rain, too," remarked Digby.
 "Breezy, too, when the wind's blowing," said Herries thoughtfully.

Skimpole blinked at them, and his pencil ceased to move.
 "Really, Blake, I regard your remarks as extremely unintelligent," he said, "and I should take it as a favour if you would find somewhere else to loiter about. Your presence somewhat distracts me. I am making notes for the two hundred and fifty-seventh chapter of my book, and—"

"Keep on, Skimmy; don't stop for us. You're not exactly what one would call pretty to look at, but we can stand you as long as you don't talk."

"Really, Blake, I regard that as almost rude. Your presence distracts me."
 "Well, you see, we're waiting here for D'Arcy."

"Oh! I am waiting for D'Arcy."
 "We'll keep you company."

"Please don't take the trouble. I want particularly to see D'Arcy alone, as I have a most important matter to speak to him about—a matter the importance of which you would probably not grasp. Please cut off."

"Sorry, but it can't be did."
 "Very well, then I shall have to wait somewhere else."

And Skimpole closed his notebook and strolled into the quadrangle, and took up his position on a seat under an elm, whence he could watch the gates. Blake, Herries, and Digby strolled in too, and sat down on the seat. Skimpole blinked at them.

"Really, Blake, I wish you would keep away. I—"
 "Have you bought up the benches in the quad?" asked Blake pleasantly.

"Certainly not, but— However, I will retire myself to avoid the trouble of argument."

And Skimpole walked away with his notebook under his arm. He leaned in a thoughtful mood against a tree at some distance, and mused over the valuable things he was putting into his wonderful book. Skimpole was a remarkably brainy youth, as the huge bumps on his forehead and above his ears testified.

He was a Socialist, a Determinist, and several other "isms," and his book was destined to deal in a masterly way with at least five or six "isms." He was naturally annoyed when his meditations were interrupted once more by the three juniors strolling up and leaning against the same tree, with perfectly solemn and serious faces.

"Really, Blake—" he expostulated.
 "What's the matter?" asked Blake.

"I really wish you fellows would find some other tree to lean against."

"Oh, don't worry; this one is all right. It has stood here for hundreds of years, and will bear our weight all right."

"I don't mean that," said Skimpole, "I was referring to the fact that your presence distracts me, and diverts my thoughts from my remarkably valuable meditations on the state of the present social system."

"Sorry. I don't see how it can be helped, though," said Blake thoughtfully.

"It can be helped by your walking away."
 "Solvitur ambulandum," grinned Blake. "My dear Skimmy, I think it is selfish of you to want to make us walk about in this warm September weather."

"Very well," said the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, with a sigh, "I will walk away myself."

And he crossed over to the nearest wall, and leaned against it, and brought out his notebook and pencil again. Blake winked at his chums, and the three of them solemnly marched over to the wall, and took up their position in a row beside Skimpole. They stood there with faces as serious as owls, apparently quite unconscious of the indignant glare from Skimpole's spectacles.

"Really, Blake—"
 "Bless my hat!" exclaimed Blake. "If that chap isn't complaining again! What's the matter with you now, Skimmy?"

"I think it is too bad of you to come here and—"
 "It seems to me that you're never satisfied," said Blake.

"First you grumbled at us for being in the gateway, then for sitting down on the bench, then for leaning against a tree, and now you're complaining again. Where are three tired individuals to rest their weary backs, then?"

"Really, Blake—"
 "Bless my hat!" exclaimed Blake. "If that chap isn't complaining again! What's the matter with you now, Skimmy?"

"I think it is too bad of you to come here and—"
 "It seems to me that you're never satisfied," said Blake.

"First you grumbled at us for being in the gateway, then for sitting down on the bench, then for leaning against a tree, and now you're complaining again. Where are three tired individuals to rest their weary backs, then?"

"Really, Blake—"
 "Bless my hat!" exclaimed Blake. "If that chap isn't complaining again! What's the matter with you now, Skimmy?"

But before Skimpole could proceed further, an elegant figure entered the gateway. The shining silk hat, the lavender gloves the high white collar, the faultless jacket and the beautifully-



"Hallo, Augustus," said Gore. "What do you want? No dogs admitted here!"

creased trousers, announced that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Ah, there is D'Arcy!" Skimpole put away his notebook once more, and started towards Arthur Augustus. Blake, Herries, and Digby started after him.

"I say, D'Arcy, I want to speak to you upon an awfully important matter," said Skimpole.

"Pway pwoceed, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I think it extwomey pwob that you are goin' to talk wot, but pway pwoceed."

Blake, Herries, and Digby came up. With solemn and serious faces they stood round the two juniors, waiting for Skimpole to proceed.

CHAPTER 2.

Skimpole's Secret.

SKIMPOLE blinked at the chums of the Fourth and hesitated. D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed Blake & Co. with some surprise, but made no remark. He waited for Skimpole to proceed.

"Er—would you mind walking a short way with me, D'Arcy, before I go on?" said Skimpole. "I—or—I think I could tell you better under the trees."

"As a matter of fact, deah boy, I have walked more than a quartah of a mile to-day, and I feel wathah exhausted; but anythin' to oblige."

"It's a matter of very great importance."

"Oh, vewy well."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strolled away with the amateur Socialist. After them, with solemn and serious faces, went the three juniors, keeping pace. Skimpole stopped under one of the big elms.

"Now, D'Arcy— Dear me, here are those fellows again!" He blinked indignantly at Blake & Co. "Blake, I really wish you would not shadow me about like this."

"Have you bought up the quadrangle?" asked Blake pleasantly.

"Certainly not, but I am entitled to speak to D'Arcy in confidence—"

"Yaas, wathah."

"I should be greatly obliged, Blake, if you would walk away."

Jack Blake shook his head.

"Sorry, Skimmy, but I'm afraid it can't be did!"

"But I wish to speak to D'Arcy in confidence."

"That's just it," said Digby. "That's where we come in."

"Weally, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, in a stately manner, "I wegard this as far fwom the pwopah thing to do. If my esteemed fwiend, Skimpole, desires to speak to me in confidence, it is wathah bad form for you wottahs to be standin' about like this."

"Exactly! Under the circumstances Blake can't do anything but walk away."

"Yaas, under the cires, Blake, I weally do not see how you can do anythin' but walk away, deah boy."

"I do!" said Blake cheerfully. "You see, we're your chums—"

"Yaas, but if you are guilty of bad form, deah boys, I am afwaid it will be no longer poss. for me to wegard you as fwinds."

"Well, we shall always regard you as a silly ass," said Blake. "That can never change. You see, this is how the case stands—"

"I wefuse to be called a silly ass!"

"The case stands like this. Skimpole has some harebrained scheme afoot, and he's going to yank you into it. As your keepers, we've got to see that you don't get into anything of the sort."

"I wefuse to wegard you in the light of keepahs," exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "I shall be obliged if you will kindly take your departchah!"

"Very likely; but we're not taking any now."

"Then I shall have no alternative but to seek a more wretired spot myself," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "Come on, Skimmy!"

And the swell of St. Jim's walked off, the weedy figure of the amateur Socialist keeping pace with him. After them, keeping pace too, went Blake, Digby, and Herries. D'Arcy looked

found several times with growing indignation, but the chums of the Fourth were not to be abashed. D'Arcy and Skimpole walked over to the gym, and then crossed to the chapel, and then strolled towards the New House. Still on their track went the indefatigable three. It was evident that there would be no confidences exchanged to which Blake, Herries, and Digby would not be equally admitted.

Arthur Augustus halted at last, and turned his eyeglass upon his chums with a withering look.

"I must remark," he said, "that I regard this as wotten bad form. You chaps don't seem to have mastered the first wudiments of good manna's."

"Can't be helped," said Blake. "Let Skimpole tell us all about it, and then we'll see. Why don't you spin it out to the lot of us, Skimmy?"

"That is impossible, and you would probably attempt to dissuade D'Arcy from coming with me," said the amateur Socialist, shaking his head.

"There, I told you so," said Blake triumphantly. "It's some fatheaded scheme like the last, and we're bound to see that Gussy doesn't get mixed up in it."

"I am quite capable of lookin' aftah myself, Blake."

"That's your mistake. As a matter of fact, you're not. I've often thought of leading you about on a little chain."

"Bai Jove, I weally—"

"Go ahead, Skimpole, and unfold the giddy secret."

"Impossible."

"Good! Then we are bound to go on taking care of Gussy, and we'll guard him like the apple of our eye. He sha'n't hear a word that we don't hear."

"Not a syllable," said Digby.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"You may as well make up your minds to it," said Blake.

"You can walk all over the blessed school, and keep it up till bedtime if you like, but we mean to stick to you."

"Like glue," said Digby.

"Right-ho," said Herries.

"I regard this as wotten bad form, but undah the cires., Skimmy, I am afraid that we shall have to postpone our little talk," said the swell of the School House. "I had better meet you latah, deah boy."

"I suppose so," said Skimpole. "It is very annoying, as the matter is one of the very greatest importance, and it is absolutely necessary for it to be settled to-night."

"Vewy well, I will see you latah."

And Arthur Augustus walked off to the School House with his nose very high in the air. Blake, Herries, and Digby followed him.

"Ready for tea, Gussy?" asked Blake affably.

"Yaas, wathah, Blake, but undah the cires., deah boy, I shall wufuse to speak to you for the pwesent. I am not sure whethah I can wtain you in my list of fwriends, aftah the extremely bad form you have been guilty of. I shall turn it ova in my mind, and for the pwesent I shall cut you."

"What with?"

"Eh?"

"What are you going to cut me with? A carving-knife?"

"Pway don't be absurd, Blake. Of course I wufer to cutting your acquaintance."

"Which acquaintance?" asked Blake seriously. "I've got a lot of acquaintances at St. Jim's, you know. There's Tom Merry, and Lowther, and Manners—"

"Oh, pway don't wot. I shall wufuse to speak to you for the pwesent, that is what I mean. I regard you as a set of wottahs."

"Then you won't come up and have tea in the study?"

"Yaas, wathah, but under the cires. I think you fellows ought to keep out, as I do not for the pwesent wecognise you as fwriends."

Blake chuckled.

"Yes, I can see us keeping out of the study," he remarked.

"Especially when we've got such a ripping tea."

D'Arcy looked interested.

"Have you got a wippin' tea, deah boys?"

"Yes, rather. Sausages and ham, and cake and marmalade, and some of those nobby little wafer biscuits you are fond of—"

"Undah the cires., Blake, I think I shall not allow this little affair to make any difference to our fwendship."

"Good," said Blake with a grin. "And of course, as you special chums, whom you love very much at teatime—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"—you will promise us not to listen to that ass Skimpole without telling us all about it."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I am afraid that is impos., Blake. If Skimpole desires to make a confidential communication to me, I am bound to treat it as strictly confidential."

"Is that what you call being a chum?" demanded Blake severely. "Are you going to start having secrets from the rest of the study?"

"I weally do not see any alternative undah the cires."

"Then I am afraid we can no longer regard you as a friend," said Blake, shaking his head solemnly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I am driven to this, D'Arcy. It is very unpleasant to me to break off old ties in this manner, but under the cires. I can no longer regard you as a friend. What do you say, Dig?"

"I was just thinking the same," said Digby seriously. "I don't see how it is possible for me to regard D'Arcy as a friend any longer."

"What do you think, Herries?"

"My sentiments exactly. I cannot regard D'Arcy even as an acquaintance."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Of course, we shall always remember our late fwendship with him," said Blake sadly. "We shall always remember that he was a silly ass—"

"I wufuse to be wemembahed as a silly ass."

"We shall often think of him. Whenever we see a donkey or a monkey, we shall always think of Gussy—"

"Bai Jove!"

"How long will it be before you can remove your things out of Study No. 6, Mr. D'Arcy?" asked Blake politely.

"I wufuse to move my beastly things out of Study Numbah Six!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I am weally surprised at you, Blake!"

"Mister Blake, please."

"Oh, don't be an ass. On second thoughts, I shall drop your acquaintance. I shall go and have tea in the hall unless you apologise."

"No fear."

"Then I am goin'."

"I say, Gussy—"

"You have said quite enough, deah boy. Undah the cires. I have nothin' more to say to you. I wufuse to join you at tea in the study."

And Arthur Augustus marched off.

Blake chuckled.

"There's one circumstance that the one and only Gus has forgotten," he remarked. "Tea is over in the hall, and there won't be any left for him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on up to the study. Gussy must be hungry after walking to the village, and he'll be there soon after we are, I expect."

And the chums went up to Study No. 6, and were soon busy with their preparations for a tea that would have proved irresistibly tempting to any hungry junior who could have seen it.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy Goes Out to Tea.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS walked away in a state of great indignation, and made for the dining-room in the School House, where the boys had tea when they took their meal "in hall," which was not oftener than they could help. Every fellow, junior or senior, had tea in his study when the funds ran to it, and it was very seldom indeed that anyone belonging to Study No. 6 turned up in hall for tea. But it was a question of dignity with D'Arcy now, and that settled it.

Perhaps a regretful thought passed through his mind of the sausages and ham, cake and marmalade in Study No. 6. All that contrasted very strongly with the weak tea and bread and butter of the school table. But he kept on heroically, and entered the dining-room. The last table was just being cleared of a mountain of crockery, and D'Arcy halted in dismay.

Tea was over in hall, and there wasn't a crumb left for so late a comer.

The swell of the School House stared in for a moment, and then turned away.

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE BOY DETECTIVES."

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "This is wathah wotten! I can't go up to the study now and let these wottahs cwow ovah me. I weally doubt wethah I shall evah speak to them again. They would cwow like anythin' if I gave in now. But I am beastly hungry, and I weally must have some tea."

He thought of the tuckshop. At Dame Taggles' little shop within the precincts of St. Jim's he could get anything he liked to eat that he could pay for, and Arthur Augustus was never short of money, or very seldom so. He had the change of a five-pound note jingling in his pockets now.

But what he wanted was a comfortable tea, not a feed in the tuckshop. And tea when Mrs. Taggles made it was not like they made in the study. Some of the juniors strongly suspected that Dame Taggles never emptied her teapot, but made new tea on the old leaves from economical motives. At all events, Dame Taggles' tea was known and avoided by most of the juniors.

"Bai Jove! Fancy bein' hung up for a cup of tea!" murmured D'Arcy. "It is weally too beastly wotten, you know. Pewwaps some of the fellows haven't had tea yet, and I can get an invitation. Yaas, wathah! I'll twy Tom Mewwy first."

And the swell of St. Jim's made his way to the passage upon which the Shell studies opened, and knocked at Tom Merry's door.

"Don't come in!" called out a voice.

"I want to speak to you, deah boy."

"Can't be did."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Then why can't I come in?"

"Because we're busy."

"Oh, wats!" said D'Arcy, and he pushed open the door and entered the study. "I wegard that as wot, Tom Mewwy."

The Terrible Three were busy. There were no signs of tea in the study, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were sitting at the table with papers before them. Tom Merry had a pencil in his hand and a worried look on his face.

"I say, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, don't bother, Gussy! Can't you see we're busy?"

"I thought you might be havin' tea here," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "and I looked in to have tea with you."

"Awfully obliged, but we had tea in hall this time, as we had matters of importance to attend to," said Tom Merry. "We're making the football arrangements for the coming season. You can pay up your subscription now if you like, and save me asking you for it another time."

"I shall be vewy pleased to do so," said D'Arcy, counting out the money on the study table. "I am in wathah good form for football this season, deah boys."

"Oh, are you?" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I was thinkin' that if you wanted me to play centah-forward in the junior eleven I should accept."

"The fact is, Gussy—"

"It's all right, I accept."

"The fact is—"

"No need to say any more about it, deah boy. I say, it's wathah wotten about your not havin' tea here. I suppose you don't feel inclined to make tea now specially—"

"I suppose we don't," agreed Tom Merry. "As I was sayin'—"

"Then I suppose I shall have to seek hospitality in anothah quartah."

"The fact is, Gussy, about the football—"

"If you want any advice from me on the subject, Tom Mewwy, I shall only be too pleased to give it, although I have not been asked to take a seat on the committee."

"The fact is, I'm not sure whether you will be a playing member."

"What?"

"You remember how you disappointed us once, and Reilly took your place—"

"My dear boy—"

"Reilly is a jolly good player, and I don't see how I can leave him out. I'm afraid you will have to go into the reserves, Gussy."

"I should uttaly wefuse to go into the weserves," said Arthur Augustus frigidly.

"Well, under the circumstances—"

"Undah any circes, I should wefuse. Pway think over it again deah boy, and you will see that the eleven will be in wathah a wotten state without me. In fact, I should wefuse even to discuss the mattah. As you chaps are not havin' tea, I suppose I may as well go and look for hospitality in othah quartahs."

"Why aren't you having tea in No. 6?" asked Lowther.

"I am no longah on speakin' terms with those wottahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was vewy mubh annoyed with some of their conduct while we were spendin' the vacation on board the steamah," said D'Arcy, "but I ovahlooked it. But this time I am weally firm. I wegard them as wottahs. I think I will give Skimpole a look in."

"They're having tea next door," said Tom Merry. "I heard the kettle boil over."

"Good!"

Arthur Augustus quitted the study, and went along the passage to the next door, and tapped at it. The study was occupied by Gore and Skimpole, and a smell of fried fish that proceeded from it showed that somebody was at tea.

Arthur Augustus tapped and opened the door, and discovered three fellows belonging to the Shell seated at the table eating herrings and sardines. But Skimpole was not one of them. Gore of the Shell was entertaining Norton and Barr, and all three turned their heads to look at D'Arcy.

"Hullo," said Gore, "what do you want? No dogs admitted here."

"Weally, Goah—"

"Get along," said Barr. "Shut the door after you."

"I thought Skimpole might be here, and I came to have tea with him."

"Well, he isn't," said Gore.

D'Arcy sniffed the appetising scent of the herrings, and the fragrant odour of freshly-made tea. But no invitation was forthcoming, and he closed the door and went down the passage.

"Bai Jove! It will have to be the tuck-shop aftah all," he murmured. "I cannot go to No. 6 under any circes. Ah, there is Weilly. He has nevah tweated me with pwopah wespect, but—"

Reilly of the Fourth, the boy from Belfast, was going along the Fourth-Form passage with a kettle in his hand, which he had evidently just filled at the tap. It was a sign that there was to be some tea in Reilly's study.

"Goin' to have tea now, Reilly?" said Arthur Augustus affably.

"Faith, and I am," said Reilly.

"Got anybody coming?"

"No."

"I should have great pleasuah in havin' tea with you, Weilly," said D'Arcy. "I have dwopped the acquaintance of Blake and Howwies and Digby, which makes it wathah awkward for me to feed there. Undah the circes—"

"Faith, and ye're an ass," said Reilly cheerfully. "But ye're welcome, Gussy, though sure it's a poor spread I have intirely."

"Bai Jove, that is all wight!"

"Faith, and it's mighty poor spread, but I'll be plazed to have ye, and I take it as a great compliment, Gussy darling," said Reilly, with that perfect gravity which an Irishman always knows how to assume when he is "pulling the leg" of a friend. "Sure the honour av ye're presence will turn me poor study into a palace."

"Bai Jove, Weilly, I take that as wathah decent of you. I shall be vewy pleased indeed to have tea with you."

"Then come in, darling."

They entered Reilly's study. The fire was out, and the table was not spread. There had always been a sort of antagonism between Reilly and D'Arcy, but there was no sign of it now. Reilly was offensively friendly, and Arthur Augustus was too hungry to think of anything but gratitude for his hospitality.

"Sure and I'll have the fire alight in a minute," said Reilly.

"Will you lay the cloth, Gussy darling?"

Arthur Augustus laid the cloth. Reilly soon had the kettle boiling over a fire of sticks, and made the tea.

He had his back turned to D'Arcy as he put the tea in the pot. Then he fetched the spread out of the cupboard.

He had said that it would be a poor spread, and Arthur Augustus had been prepared for bread and butter and sardines, or perhaps bread and jam without the butter, or anything in that line.

Reilly, with a perfectly grave face, brought out a crust of dry hard bread, and placed it on a plate.

"Help yourself," he said hospitably. "I'll pour out the tay."

D'Arcy looked at the crust of bread. Then he adjusted his eyeglass and looked again. Then he looked at Reilly.

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Faith, and I tould you it was a poor spread," said Reilly.

"If—"

"Oh, that's all wight," said D'Arcy hastily. "Pway don't think me so wude as to cwiticeise a spwead, deah boy."

"I know it's rather poor."

"Not at all. I—I wathah like dwy bwead."

And Arthur Augustus cut a slice of bread, not without difficulty, for the bread was hard, and the knife was not keen. He managed it, however, while Reilly poured out the tea. He passed a full cup over to D'Arcy, who looked at it earnestly.

"Faith, and ye'll excuse my havin' no sugar or milk," said Reilly. "Sure and I tould ye it was a poor feed, me being low in funds at the prisant moment."

"It's—it's all right!" gasped D'Arcy.

He looked very hard at the tea. There was hardly any colour to it.

"But—but are you sure you didn't forget to put the tea in the pot, Weilly?"

"Don't you like it weak, Gussy?"
 "Yaas, wathah! But—"
 "Faith, and I could ye—"
 "Oh, that's all right! I—I like weak tea vewy much," said D'Arcy. "Stwong tea is vewy bad for the nerves, so the doctahs say."

"Faith, and it's right ye are."
 Reilly sipped his tea. Arthur Augustus did the same. He could not do more than sip it, for as a matter of fact it was just hot water, without milk or sugar, and the palest of pale browns in hue.

Reilly watched him with an air of beaming hospitality, and Arthur Augustus was never known to fail in courtesy. To appear as an ungrateful and carping guest was impossible to him.

"Faith, and it's eatin' mighty little ye are," said Reilly. "Aren't you hungry?"

"My—my appetite has gone off," murmured the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's. "It's—it's wathah uncertain, you know."

"Faith, and it's a poor tay I'm offerin' you."

"Not at all. Not at all."

"Help yourself, you know."
 There was nothing for D'Arcy to help himself to but dry bread, but with his host's hospitable eye upon him he could not refuse to eat. The crust was not only dry, but it had the indefinable smell of a crust that had lain about for a considerable time.

"Faith, and there's more to come, you know," said Reilly. D'Arcy felt rather relieved.

"I—I think I'll wait for the next course, then, deah boy," he remarked.

"Sure, and here it is."
 Reilly opened the cupboard again, and brought out the third part of a herring on a plate. It looked like a fragment that might have been saved for a dog. But Reilly put it on the table with quite a flourish.

"There you are!" he exclaimed. "Sure, it's satisfied with the good bread I am, and I want you to have all the fish, Gussy darling!"

D'Arcy could hardly conceal his horror. The herring was almost talking, and it was an unappetising-looking thing, anyway. But it was impossible to wound his kind host. He made only a feeble resistance.

"Weally, Weelly, I could not think of wobbin' you like that."

"Not at all, Gussy darling! Sure, and ye're my guest!"

"I would greatly pwefer to divide it—"

"Not at all!"

"I—I am not at all hungwy now—"

"Faith, and I warned ye it was a poor feed, and I suppose you—"

"Oh, no, pway don't put it like that!" said D'Arcy instantly.

"I shall greatly enjoy eatin' that excellent hewwin'!"

"Go ahead, then! Don't spare the bread."

"Certainly not, deah boy!" gasped D'Arcy.

He tackled the herring. He ate some of it, and separated the rest to make it look smaller on the plate. He munched a little dry bread, and gulped down some of the cup of warm water. He would have given a week's pocket-money to be outside the study. But Reilly's kind and hospitable eye was upon him all the time.

"Faith, and ye're not finished yet, are ye?" exclaimed Reilly, as D'Arcy rose at last. "Sure, and I wish ye'd finish the bread, Gussy darling!"

"I—I—I have had quite enough, deah boy, thank you!"

"Will you have a little more tay?"

"No, thanks," said Arthur Augustus, repressing a shudder.

"I—I weally am quite satisfied. It is vewy kind of you to— to entertain me in this way."

"Faith, and it's proud of ye're company I am!" said Reilly. "I hope you will come to tay with me often, Gussy darling!"

"Bai Jove, you are vewy kind!" gasped D'Arcy.

And he made his escape from the study. As he closed the door he thought he heard the sound of a chuckle. He dismissed the idea, however. There was no reason that he could see why Reilly should chuckle. He caught sight of Skimpole as he went downstairs, and called to him as he hastened after the amateur Socialist into the Close. It was an opportunity of hearing the secret at last, uninterrupted by the over-obliging chums of Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 4.

After Tea.

"ANOTHER sausage, Dig?" said Jack Blake, with great politeness.

There was one sausage left on the dish in Study No. 6. Blake had said that there were sausages and ham for tea, and, as a matter of fact, there were four sausages. But the absence of Arthur Augustus left one cold on the dish.

"Er—no—thanks," said Digby.

"Another sausage, Herries?"

"Well, no. Pass the marmalade."

"Another sausage, Jack?" said Blake, addressing himself.

"Yes, please. Thank you."

And Jack Blake helped himself to the last sausage. Herries attacked the marmalade, while Dig travelled into the cake. Blake took the last fragment of ham to keep his sausage company. It had been left till the last minute in case D'Arcy should turn up, but the swell of the School House had failed to put in an appearance.

"I wonder where Gussy is," Digby remarked. "I wonder at his sticking it out like this. He must have gone to the tuckshop."

Blake nodded.

"I suppose so. After we've finished tea we'd better go and look for him. Obstinate young boulder! We've got to keep a brotherly eye on him, and see that that ass Skimpole doesn't lead him into a new scrape."

"Although we've dropped his acquaintance?" grinned Herries.

"Yes," said Blake, laughing, "for the sake of old times."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seriously, though, it's some harebrained scheme Skimpole has got on, and we must keep Gussy from getting into a scrape. Hallo, here he is at last!"

The door of the study was ajar. It was pushed open as Blake spoke, and the chums of the Fourth turned round to see D'Arcy—but it was not D'Arcy. A large head, with a bumpy forehead and a huge pair of spectacles, was projected into the study.

"It's that ass Skimpole!"

"Sorry," blinked Skimpole, "I thought D'Arcy might be here."

He dodged back into the passage just in time to escape the last remnant of Blake's sausage, which missed him by a fraction of an inch.

"Get out!" roared Blake.

But Skimpole was already departing. Blake glowered wrathfully.

"Cheek of that ass coming here, after what we've told him!" he exclaimed. "He thought Gussy might be alone in the study, of course. If he puts his head in here again I'll let him have this pat of butter."

"I can hear him coming back," muttered Digby.

Blake grinned gleefully.

"Watch me, then! I'll bowl him out first time."

"Mind it isn't a wide. We don't want that stuff plastered over the wall."

"Trust me."

Blake took up the pat of butter. It might be a sinful waste, but the temptation to catch the bore of the School House in the eye with it was too great. The door was pushed open from outside, and the pat of butter flew with deadly aim.

The next moment Jack Blake gave a gasp.

It was not Skimpole who was entering, but he did not see that till the missile had left his hand, and was whizzing with unerring aim to his destination.

"Oh!" roared Tom Merry, as the butter squelched on his nose. "Oh!"

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "I'm sorry—ha, ha, ha! I—I'm awfully sorry! I thought—"

"You—you—"

Tom Merry wiped the butter off his face with his handkerchief. The handkerchief was immediately soaking with grease. The weather was warm, and the butter inclined to run to oil. Tom Merry gasped and said things.

"I'm sorry," gurgled Blake. "Oh, you do look a picture!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby. "We're all sorry."

"Ho, ho, ho!" gasped Herries. "It was a—ha, ha, ha!—mistake."

"I thought it was Skimpole," said Blake. "Ho, our bright!"

Tom Merry mopped his face. He threw down the handkerchief, reeking with grease, with a shudder.

"You unspeakable ass!" he growled. "You've greased my chivvy all over, and I can't get half of it off. You shrieking dummy! Lend me your handkerchief, Lowther!"

"No fear," said Lowther, "I'm not wanting my handkerchief buttered, thank you. Go and wipe it off on Blake."

"Well, that's a good idea."

"Here, keep off!" exclaimed Blake, jumping up as Tom Merry advanced towards him. "Keep off, you ass, or you'll get damaged!"

Tom Merry did not keep off. He chased Blake round the table, with the intention of wiping off the clinging butter upon his person, and Blake, in a state of considerable alarm, dodged him.

"Keep off!" he howled. "You can wipe it off on Dig, if you like. I tell you it was an accident. Keep off! I'll punch your beastly head if you come near me."

He was cornered, and he squared up desperately. Tom Merry ran straight at him, and knocked his guard up, and closed with him.

"Your butter, my pippin!" he said blandly. "I'm not



"I wegard you as a wottah, Blake. I wegard Digby as a wottah. I wegard Hewwies as anothead wottah. Pway do not address me when we meet in the futuah!" And as D'Arcy delivered this bombshell the three chums fell into one another's arms and wept.

greedy, I don't want it all. Have some on your chivvy. This is what you might call getting your own back."

"Ow—gerroff—gerrororoh!"

"Have some more?"

"Ow! You greasy beast! Ow!"

Blake struggled desperately, but it was of no avail. Tom Merry's face was rubbed against his till he had more of the butter than the hero of the Shell. Then Tom released him, and retreated gasping to the door.

"You—you greasy rotter!" gasped Blake. "I'll—I'll—"

"You'd better go and get a wash," grinned Tom Merry breathlessly. "Let that be a lesson to you not to sling butter about in the future. We came here to consult you about the football, but that will have to be put off till I get cleaned. Au revoir!"

And the Terrible Three, laughing heartily, quitted Study No. 6. Blake sank into his chair, breathing hard. Digby and Herries were roaring. Blake looked at them.

"Blessed if I see what you want to be hee-hawing about!" he exclaimed. "There's nothing funny in a chap getting his chivvy smeared all over with butter."

"You seemed to think it funny when it was Merry's chivvy!" grinned Dig.

"That was different, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop that fearful row!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if you two imbeciles are going to make a row like an old rooster with the croup, I may as well clear out!" grunted Blake. And he cleared out, followed by the laughter of his two chums. He made for the nearest bath-room, and when he came out, with a clean face and a clean collar, he was looking more like his usual good-tempered self. Digby and Herries were waiting for him in the passage.

"Better have a look for Gussy!" suggested Digby. "We don't want to have him chow-chowing with Skimpole without our being on the spot."

"Certainly not. It was impossible to miss our tea, but now we ought to be on the watch again."

The chums of Study No. 6 went downstairs. They passed Mellish of the Fourth, and Blake stopped to ask him if he had seen D'Arcy lately. Mellish grinned.

"He's been having tea with Reilly," he replied. "Reilly's in the hall, telling the chaps about it. You'd better go and hear him."

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

NEXT
THURSDAY

"THE BOY DETECTIVES."

A Splendid Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

"Better go and ask Reilly," said Mellish, grinning.
 "Come on, kids!" said Blake shortly. The chums of the Fourth hurried downstairs, and found Reilly standing in the hall, the centre of a crowd of grinning and chuckling Fourth-Formers. Reilly was relating a story for the tenth time, and it seemed to tickle his audience immensely.

"Faith, and there wasn't more than a smell of tay in the taypot!" said Reilly, with a huge grin. "Not more than a smell of ut, me darlings! But did Gussy complain? Not a word—not a blessed worrud!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There was only a dry crust on the table—but did he complain? Wasn't he intirely polite? He was."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And for the second course, faith, I brought out a bit of a herrin' that I had put by a couple of days before to give to Herries' bulldog, and forgotten, but, faith, D'Arcy never turned a hair! Sure and it's a broth av a boy he is for politeness intirely!"

"Did he eat it?" yelled a dozen voices.

"Faith, and he did that, or a good bit of it, and he thanked me for the tay intirely, and sure he——"

A yell of laughter interrupted the speaker. D'Arcy's un-falling politeness was proverbial in the School House, and the idea of him under such a test, remaining still the pink of courtesy and never suspecting that he was being "rotted," made the juniors shriek with merriment.

Jack Blake could not help grinning, but his face soon became severe again. Arthur Augustus belonged to Study No. 6, in spite of a temporary estrangement. The honour of Study No. 6 had to be vindicated. Blake exchanged a glance with Herries and Digby, and they pushed their way through the crowd of juniors.

"Faith, and he says, says he, haven't you forgotten to put in the tay, says he."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he drunk the warm water, too, loike—hallo—oh, tare and ounds, and phwat are you doin' intirely!" roared O'Reilly, as the chums of Study No. 6 grasped him.

They did not reply. They collared the cheerful youth from Belfast, and bumped him over. They bumped him on the floor, and they bumped him along, and Reilly in vain struggled in their grasp. And the juniors laughed as heartily at his vain struggles as they had before laughed at his narrative.

"Faith, if he—ow—ow—ow——"

A final bumping along the floor, and Reilly was deposited on the mat, dazed and bewildered, with his collar hanging by one end, his necktie across his knees, his waistcoat stripped of half its buttons, and his jacket split up the back. And Blake, Herries, and Digby walked on into the quadrangle with the proud satisfaction of a good deed well done.

CHAPTER 5.

Towser Takes an Outing.

"HAVE you seen our Gus?"
 Jack Blake asked the question of everyone he met in the quadrangle, where the September dusk was gathering. No one seemed to have seen Arthur Augustus since he had had tea with Reilly. Figgins of the New House was crossing the quad from the direction of the tuckshop with a bundle under his arm, and the chums of the School House bore down upon him. Figgins caught sight of them, and expecting a House row, put his parcel on the ground under a tree, and put his back against the trunk. Blake burst into a laugh.

"It's all right, Figg—honest Injun."

"Oh, all right," said Figgins, picking up the parcel. "I've got a feed here, and Fatty Wynn would scalp someone if anything went wrong with it. He's come back from the voyage on the Condor with a worse appetite than ever—I mean a more fearful one. He has tea in hall now as well as in the study, and he has proposed that we start the custom of having two teas—one at half-past six and one at half-past seven."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good old Fatty."

"I'm going about getting fellows to ask him out to tea," said Figgins ruefully. "It's the only thing I can think of to stop a famine in the study."

"Send him over to us," said Blake, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Give him my love, and tell him I want him to come to tea to-morrow evening, and he's to be sure not to have tea first, or he'll spoil it."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "Good."

"By the way, have you seen Gussy? We're looking for him."

"Gussy? Yes. He went round towards the menagerie with Skimpole just before I went into the tuckshop."

Blake gave a jump.

"With Skimpole—sure?"

"Yes, of course. What the——"

But the chums of No. 6 did not wait for Figgins to finish.

They bolted off in the direction of the menagerie. Figgins stared after them for a moment, and then walked on and entered the New House. Blake, Herries, and Digby did not lose a moment. Every moment now the secret might be told, and D'Arcy might be drawn into the scheme from which they had resolved to save him whether he liked it or not.

The "menagerie," as the boys of St. Jim's called it, was the building where the fellows kept their pets, pet-keeping in the Houses being strictly tabooed. The building was at the back of the New House, and the chums lost no time in getting there. It was growing very dark, and it was difficult to see in the shadows of the great buildings. They arrived at the pets, quarters without seeing anything of D'Arcy or Skimpole. Jack Blake gave a growl of exasperation.

"They're chow-wowing in some corner," he exclaimed. "They know we may be looking for them. They're keeping out of sight on purpose."

"That's it," said Digby, fully sharing his chum's indignation. "They're keeping out of sight with malice aforethought. The worry is, how are we to spot them in the dark?"

"I've got an idea," said Herries.

"Have you?" said Blake, who did not think much of Herries' ideas as a rule. "I suppose we shall have to look round for them——"

"But I've got an idea."

"What is it, then—buck up?"

"I've read that the Spaniards used to hunt runaway niggers with bloodhounds, in the West Indies, and——"

"Off your rocker?"

"No," said Herries indignantly. "I'm not off my rocker. The Spaniards——"

"Blow the Spaniards! What on earth have the Spaniards got to do with this matter?"

"I tell you that they used to hunt runaway niggers with bloodhounds——"

"Well, suppose they did. What on earth——"

"I mean that we could find Gussy and Skimpole the same way."

"Well, of all the chums! Where are we to get any giddy blughounds?"

"I was thinking of my dog Towser."

"Oh, I see! Why couldn't you say so before?"

"You didn't give me a chance. You never will let anybody speak but yourself. I never saw such a fellow for jaw, Why——"

"Oh, ring off. I don't suppose Towser could find D'Arcy, but we may as well try."

"I'll have him out in a jiffy."

Herries disappeared into the little building, and quickly reappeared, leading a savage-looking bulldog by a chain. Towser was the pride of his owner's heart, but he was not very popular among the St. Jim's boys. He had a weakness for the seats of trousers and the calves of legs when he was off his chain, which happened not infrequently. He had had the one free bite to which he was entitled by the law of the land long, long ago, but, like Oliver Twist, he wanted more. Blake and Digby looked rather suspiciously at the bulldog, who was tugging at his chain.

"Is that rotten brute safe, Herries?"

"He's not a rotten brute."

"Well, is he safe?"

"Of course he is. He'll find D'Arcy in a jiffy. Find him, boy! Smell him out! Go for him! Fetch him!"

Whether Towser believed that he was being encouraged to hunt for a rat or a rabbit, or whether he really had some ability in finding things out, we cannot say, but certainly he started off at a run, and tugged at his chain so hard that Herries had some difficulty in holding him in.

"Come on," exclaimed Herries. "He's on the scent."

"Rats," said Blake. "I don't believe——"

"Oh, don't jaw; come on."

And Herries disappeared in the gloom with the tugging bulldog. Blake and Digby followed. Herries' voice could be heard in the darkness.

"Fetch 'em! Good dog! Fetch 'em!"

Round the "menagerie" they went, and along the wall of the New House, and then back into the railed ground behind the chapel, and then there was a sudden yell.

"Keep him off!"

"Ha, ha!" roared Blake. "That's Gussy!"

The chums dashed on. In the shadow of the chapel two juniors had been standing, and Skimpole, who had just started to explain to D'Arcy, had been interrupted by the sudden appearance of Towser, tugging at the hard-held chain. At the sight of the two juniors Towser plainly made up his mind that they were the quarry his master intended him to fetch, and he leaped at D'Arcy with open jaws.

"Keep him off!" yelled the swell of the School House, pressing back against the chapel rails. "You uttah wottah, keep that feahful beast off!"

Herries dragged desperately on the chain.

"I—I can't," he gasped. "You—you'd better run."

"Bow-wow-wow-gr-r-r-r!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Wun, Skimmy, deah boy; wun like anythin'!"

And he set the example. The amateur Socialist was not long in following suit. The two juniors dashed away at top speed, and Towser barked furiously and dragged at his chain in his eagerness to pursue. Blake and Digby came dashing on, and ran into Herries in the dark and fairly bowled him over. Herries bumped on the chapel rails and slid to the ground, and a savage jerk by Towser dragged the chain from his hand. It whisked away like a snake, and the bulldog was free.

"My—my hat!" gasped Herries. "He's gone."

"What's gone?" cried Jack Blake.

"Towser!"

"My only aunt!"

They dashed in pursuit. There was no telling what Towser might do now that he was free. He was no respecter of persons, and even a housemaster's calves might not be safe. But Towser was gone, with the loose chain clinking behind him.

Arthur Augustus ran on desperately, holding his silk hat with one hand. He paused at last near the School House, panting for breath.

"It's all wight, Skimmy," he gasped. "We're fah enough away now, deah boy!"

"Bow-wow-wow-gr-r-r-r!"

That remark was made by Towser. The clink of the loose chain came to the ears of the juniors at the same moment. Skimpole gave a jump.

"He's loose!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Here he comes," yelled Skimpole. "Run for your life!"

"Bow-wow-wow-gr-r-r-r!"

And they ran. Towser ran too, and it was a very close thing. D'Arcy and Skimpole dashed into the School House at top speed, and Towser chased them up the steps, and stopped as the heavy door was crashed in his face. Disappointed of his prey, he set up a terrific barking on the School House steps.

"What on earth is that fearful row?" exclaimed Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, rushing out of his study. "Where is that dog?"

"He's outside, Kildare," gasped D'Arcy. "We have had a feahfully nawwow escape. He is a fewocious beast. Pway don't open the door."

"Is that Herries' beast again? I'll have the brute drowned if he gets loose any more," exclaimed Kildare. "I'm getting fed up with Herries' bulldog."

"He'll get fed up with you, deah boy, if you open that door," said D'Arcy. "Pway be careful, Kildare."

"Oh, bosh."

Kildare swung open the door, and Towser ceased his solo on the steps. He looked at Kildare with a growl, but as the captain of St. Jim's did not show any sign of fear, Towser did not attack him. Kildare picked up the loose chain. Blake, Herries, and Digby came tearing up.

"Here he is," shouted Blake. "Er—hallo—Kildare."

"Hallo," said the Sixth-Former grimly. "Which of you young rascals let this brute loose?"

"He got away by accident," said Herries. "I was holding him—"

"You shouldn't have brought him out if you couldn't keep him safe."

"It was all D'Arcy's fault. We were hunting him down with Towser for a bloodhound, and if he hadn't cut and run—"

"Bai Jove, if I hadn't wun that fewocious beast would have wun my twousahs."

"Well, take him away," said Kildare, "and take twenty lines as well. Get off."

Not sorry to escape so cheaply, Herries dragged his bulldog away. Towser went very unwillingly, jerking at the chain, and showing a strong inclination to snap at the legs of Blake and Digby. He evidently considered that he had been defrauded of the bite he was entitled to after his run.

"Get the beast in," said Blake, prudently giving Towser's jaws a wide berth. "I wish you'd sell that beast, Herries."

"Well, Reilly wanted to buy him—"

"Rats! Sell him outside the school, I mean."

"Rats to you," retorted Herries. "He's a jolly good dog. I wish I could have had him on board the Condor during the vac. I'm not going to part with him. Better keep out of his reach, or he may bite."

"Yes, the beast looks like it. If he bites me there will be a dead bulldog picked up one of these times, so I warn you."

"Well, keep out of his reach, then. Hallo, who's that?"

"Hold on! It's Ratty."

The juniors halted. They were passing the angle of the New House when the thin, meagre figure in cap and gown came along. It was Mr. Rateliff, the housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's. There was no more unpopular master in the old school. During the vacation spent by the boys of St. Jim's on board the steamer Condor, Mr. Rateliff had been senior master on board, and he had shown his power by making things uncomfortable for everybody. There was a long, long

grudge between the New House master and the chums of No. 8 in the School House. The juniors drew back into the darker shadow of the building and waited for the housemaster to pass. But Mr. Rateliff had apparently heard the snapping of Towser, for he stopped and turned his head to look in their direction.

"Who is that?" he exclaimed. "Who is there? Come and show yourself."

Perhaps something about the New House master irritated Towser. Perhaps he simply wanted the bite he had been basely deprived of. At all events, he made a sudden leap forward, and the jerk dragged the chain from Herries' hand.

"My—my hat!" panted Herries. "Ho's—he's gone again."

Blake chuckled.

"I don't care! It will give Ratty some exercise! Hark!"

A wild and horrified yell broke from the New House master as the flaming eyes and red jaws came leaping out of the dusk.

Mr. Rateliff stared at the dog for a second, petrified, and then he turned and bolted, his cap on the ground, his gown flying in the wind.

And Towser, encouraged by his flight, darted after him, with a growl that made the housemaster's blood run cold as he heard it.

"My word!" muttered Digby. "There will be a row over this."

"We must stop him."

Blake darted after the bulldog. The chain was trailing and clinking along the ground. Blake threw himself forward and his hands plumped on it, and he grasped it. The tug on it the next moment almost dragged him along the ground, but he held it fast. The dog barked savagely and swung round on the chain.

"Come on, Herries!" gasped Blake.

"Bow—wow—wow—gr—gr—r—r—r!"

"Good dog!" said Herries. "Quiet! Good dog!"

"I've got the chain."

"Good! Hand it over—what on earth's the matter?"

"Ow! He's got my trousers."

"Good dog! Good dog! Come off! Good old doggie!"

Blake kicked at the bulldog, and Towser let go, and Herries dragged him away. Blake breathed hard for a minute.

"That bulldog will be found drowned one of these days," he panted. "Come on; let's get in, for goodness' sake, before Ratty starts inquiring after us."

But Mr. Rateliff was not feeling like inquiring after anybody just then. He had run his hardest to the New House, and bolted in, and made a dive into his study. The barking of the bulldog was still ringing from the quadrangle, and to the terrified New House master it seemed close at hand. He slammed the door and locked it, and pushed the table against it, and then sank breathless into a chair. And it was not till a good five minutes after Towser's last bark had died away in the distance that Mr. Rateliff ventured to open his door.

CHAPTER 6.

For Auld Lang Syne.

"BAI JOVE, what a feahfully nawwow escape!"

"Yes, rather. I was just saying to you when the bulldog interrupted us—"

"I feel in an awful fluttah still."

"Yes, so do I. As I was saying—"

"The howwid bwute would have wun my twousahs if he had caught up with us. I had a pair of twousahs wun while we were on board the Condah."

"It's about the Condor that I was going to speak to you—"

"That was due to a silly ass openin' a porthole and soakin' them with salt watah. Bai Jove, I feel absolutely exhausted with that wunnin'."

"It is very fatiguing. I was saying—"

"Weally, Skimpole, give us a wost for a few minutes, old chap. I am feelin' uttally exhausted, you know."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down on the stairs and panted. Skimpole was panting too, for the hard run home had taken most of the wind out of the weedy junior. But he had not forgotten the important matter in hand, and he was anxious to come to the point before there were interruptions.

"Yes; but you see, D'Arcy, those fellows may be in a moment—"

"Yaas, watah, I nevah thought of that."

"And, dear me, here they come!"

Blake and Digby and Herries came in. They were looking round for something—and that something was undoubtedly the swell of the School House. Skimpole blinked in an annoyed way at the chums of the Fourth.

"It is too late now, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, it looks like it, doesn't it," said Arthur Augustus. "I tell you what, deah boy. I'll meet you in the passage aftah lights out to-night—you can come out of the Shell dormitow, and I out of the Forth-Form dormitow, and we can meet in the beastly passage and have a jaw."

Skimpole brightened up.

"All right; but come fully dressed, and ready to go out."

D'Arcy fixed his monocle upon Skimpole in amazement.

"Waddy to go out, Skimmy?"

"Certainly, because——"

"But——"

"You see——"

"Hold on, those wottahs will hear you. I'll do as you say, deah boy."

"Oh, you'll do as he says, will you?" said Blake, coming up in time to hear the last sentence. "And what does he say?"

"I wufuse to inform you, Blake."

"Have you learned the giddy secret, after all?"

"No; I have not learned the secret."

"Good! Then we are in time," said Blake, with much satisfaction. "It's like your cheek, D'Arcy, to give us all the trouble of hunting you down with a blughound——"

"I should weally be considerably obliged if you would cease to take any twouble on my behalf," said Arthur Augustus, frigidly. "I have been thwown into a fluttah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah. I have been thwown into a fluttah, and compelled to wun like anythin'. I wogard it as a feahful piece of impertinence on your part, especially as I no longah wecognise you as acquaintances."

"Yes, I forgot; we don't know you, you know, Mr. D'Arcy; but you see, we're doing this for old acquaintance sake," explained Blake. "It's for the sake of auld lang syne, my dear. Because we used to know you."

"Oh, pway, don't be an ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass," said Blake. "I regard the expression as opprobrious."

Arthur Augustus turned pink. He was frequently making that remark himself, and in spite of Blake's serious face, he knew that the chief of Study No. 6 was "funning."

"I wogard you as a wottah, Blake. I wogard Digby as a wottah. I wogard Howvies as anothah wottah. I have always endavourd to keep my circ. of fwriends select, not to say swaggah. I have dropped you three wottahs out of it. Pway do not address me when we meet in the futuah."

Blake fell into Digby's arms and wept. Herries leaned on Blake's shoulder and wept, too. Arthur Augustus looked at them in amazement for a moment, and then, with an extremely indignant expression, strode away. Blake and Digby left off weeping, and burst into a roar of laughter. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came downstairs, and they stopped to inquire what was the joke.

"Gussy has dropped our acquaintance again," explained Blake. "We were weeping over the pieces. We are not to address him when we meet him in the future—all through this ass Skimpole. Lend us a hand, and we'll roll him down the steps into the quad, and jam his head on the—— Hallo, he's gone!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

"What's good?"

"You've dropped Gussy's acquaintance?"

"Yes; we've dropped each other."

"Then you won't raise any objection to his being left out of the junior football eleven this season?"

Jack Blake gave a jump.

"Eh?" he said expressively.

"You won't raise any objection to his being left out of the football eleven this season?" said Tom Merry; "as a member of the football committee, you have a voice in the matter."

"You are joking, I presume?"

"Nothing of the sort. Gussy left us in the lurch once——"

"Well, he was in love that time, so that oughtn't to be remembered against him. He isn't very often in love—not more than once a month at the outside."

"That's all very well; but Reilly played up like a Trojan in his place, and I was thinking of keeping Reilly on."

"Were you? You were thinking of leaving a member of Study No. 6 out of the footer eleven?"

"Yes."

"Looking for trouble?"

"Oh, no. But you see, that chap Reilly——"

"Oh, I've no objection to Reilly being taken in as a reserve, for the occasions when Gussy can't play. He may fall in love again."

"Just so!" said Digby. "But for a member of Study No. 6 to be left outside either footer or cricket elevens would be a deadly blow to the very foundations of the public school system."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Tom Merry. "You can leave that to Lowther. He's funny enough, goodness knows. What I was thinking is——"

"If you were thinking of leaving one of us out of the eleven," said Blake obstinately, "you can start your thinking over again from the beginning. It's impossible! Unheard-of! Rotten! Fatheaded! Just like you, too!"

"Suppose you leave Manners out to make room for Reilly," suggested Digby. "He can go round taking his rotten photographs, and——"

"What's that?" said Manners wrathfully.

"Well, Lowther, then. Leave Lowther out. We can let

him tell us a funny story as a compensation, and we'll all agree to pretend we see the point——"

"Look here," began Lowther. "If——"

"Oh, don't argue!" said Blake. "Dig has made two jolly good suggestions, and you could adopt either or both of them without going far wrong. But, in any case, I beg to state that it is impossible for a member of Study No. 6 to be left out of the junior eleven. It can't be did."

"But, hang it, what does it matter to you if Gussy is left out, when you're no longer a friend of his?"

Blake grinned.

"Oh, it's for the sake of auld lang syne!" he replied. "Anyway, just you remember! We all hang together, and——"

"I daresay you will some day," assented Lowther.

"I tell you we all stick together, and if one goes, we all go."

"When father says turn, we all turn," agreed Monty Lowther.

"Now, look here, Blake," said Tom Merry warmly, "you couldn't stick out of the footer eleven when we want you to play, just because we didn't play Gussy."

"Well, perhaps not," agreed Blake. "Still, you've got to play Gussy. It would be a blow at the prestige of our study. Besides, you know he's a jolly good player, in spite of his funny ways. He's as good as anybody in the front line."

"Yes; but Reilly is quite as good, and more reliable."

"Well, Gussy had the place first, and he ought to be given a chance. Suppose you play him until he——"

"Until he falls in love again?" asked Lowther.

"Until he fails to turn up for a match. Then I'm willing to consider the advisability of making a change."

"Well, I suppose we had better leave it at that," assented Tom Merry. "Of course, I should be very sorry to leave Gussy out. But a football captain can't always please himself. If I made concessions, and lost a match through it, you would be the first to start ragging me."

"And you'd jolly well deserve it, too," said Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"There you are, you see. Never mind; let the matter rest where it is. What's all this rot about D'Arcy and Skimpole?"

"Good! you can lend us a hand there," said Blake; "Skimpole has been hatching a scheme for another expedition, and he's trying to inveigle D'Arcy into it. We have passed a law that Skimmy doesn't tell Gussy the secret without telling us also, and we have taken a fearful lot of trouble in shadowing them about. We were even reduced to the necessity of hunting down Gussy with a blughound——"

"With a what?"

"With Herries' bulldog, and as he took a fancy to Ratty's calves as we took him home, I expect there will be a row about it. Gussy has dropped our acquaintance, and we've dropped his. But we're going to look after him all the same. The Head was very good last time he made a break, and he was left off with a thrashing. This time the matter would be more serious, and we don't want our one and only Gus flogged. It's no good arguing with him; but we're going to keep him within bounds if we have to bind him hand and foot and sit on his chest."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can lend a hand if you like, by keeping an eye on Skimpole. If you watch your duffer and we watch ours, they can't very well escape."

"Good idea! We'll do it."

And they did it. For the rest of the evening the Terrible Three haunted Skimpole. Wherever the amateur-Socialist went, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther went also. They entered into the fun of the thing, and the indignation of the victim prevented it from getting monotonous. Arthur Augustus, at the same time, was the recipient of similar kind attentions from Blake & Co.

Skimpole took refuge at last in a corner of the common-room behind a ponderous volume on the entrancing subject of Determinism, and the Terrible Three sat in a row watching him and reading somewhat lighter literature. Skimpole blinked at them through his spectacles, over the top of his big volume, at intervals, with smouldering indignation; but every indignant blink was answered by the blandest of smiles.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered into a game of chess with Walsh of the Fourth, and Blake, Herries, and Digby sat in a row watching the game. The swell of St. Jim's endured it patiently for some minutes, and then turned his monocle upon them.

"I should be greatly obliged if you would retire," he said.

"Have you bought up the common-room, Mr. D'Arcy?" asked Blake.

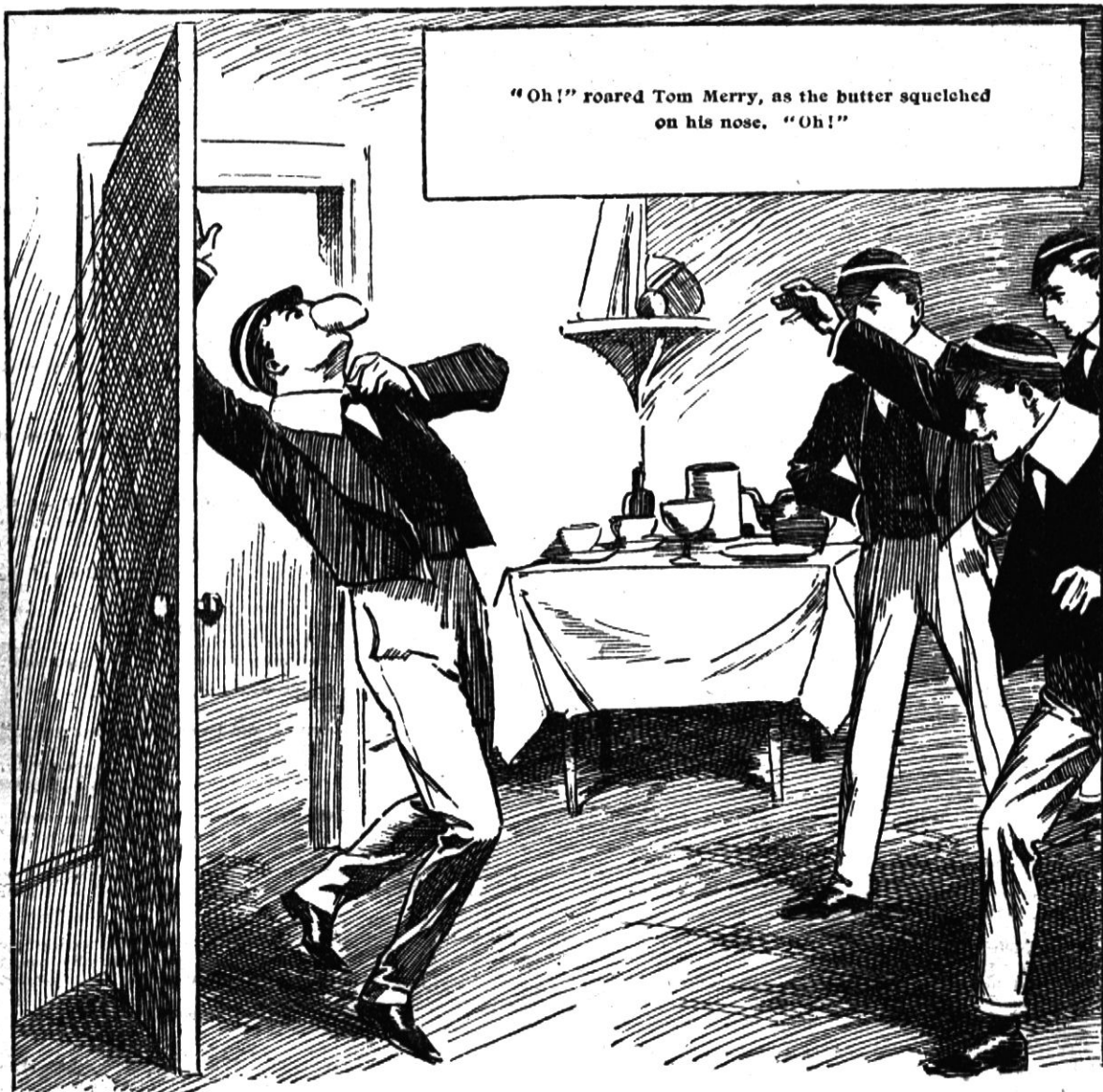
"I wogard that question as widiculous. Your pwesenoe wowwies me."

"Well, your face worries me."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Check!" said Walsh.

Arthur Augustus moved, and the game continued; but the watchfulness of the three juniors distracted D'Arcy's attention,



and he lost. He rose with an air of considerable indignation and walked away. Three solemn juniors walked after him.

He started a game of draughts with Mellish, and lost that too, and then he settled down with the latest number of the "Magnet." Three solemn faces within a couple of yards of him prevented him from really enjoying even that.

It is possible that all the juniors concerned were relieved when bedtime came. The Fourth Form and the Shell separated to go to their respective dormitories, and Blake slapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as he said good-night.

"It's all right," he remarked. "They're safe now till morning."

And Tom Merry laughed assent.

But were they?

CHAPTER 7. Skimpole Explains.

"GOOD-NIGHT, boys!"

"Good-night, Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's left the dormitory, and the buzz of voices in the darkness gradually died away, and slumber settled upon the Fourth Formers.

Half-past nine was the bedtime of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. Ten o'clock striking from the clock tower was heard by few, and the quarter after the hour chimed out to only a single pair of ears. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed.

"I say, Blake!" he whispered cautiously.

There was only a sound of deep breathing from Blake's bed.

Arthur Augustus grinned in the darkness, and slipped out of the sheets. It did not take him long to dress himself, for once, and he quietly left the Fourth-Form dormitory.

The passage without was very dark. The light was out in the hall below, and there was only a glimmer on the staircase. Arthur Augustus turned in the direction of the Shell dormitory, and went slowly up the gloomy corridor. The sound of an opening door made him start.

"Bai Jove! That must be Skimmy!"

A figure loomed up in the gloom of the passage.

"Is that you, Skimmy, deah boy?"

"Is that D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! I am here!"

"Vewy good! I was determined to keep this beastly appointment, if only to put those wottahs in their place; but I was feahfully sleepy. I am feahfully sleepy now. How long will it take you to tell me the beastly secret?"

"Only a few minutes, but—"

"Then go ahead, deah boy."

"But I shall want you to come with me."

"Where?"

"To Norfolk."

"To—to— Norfolk," murmured Arthur Augustus, as amazed as if Skimpole had said the North Pole or the centre of the earth. "To—to Norfolk?"

"Yes, certainly. But I will explain. I hope you have not had to wait for me."

"Not more than a beastly minute or two."

"Very good. I could not get out sooner, as I was afraid that Tom Merry was awake. Those three fellows have been watching me all the evening."

"There have also been three wottahs watchin' me, but I have eluded them," said D'Arcy. "I hope you have not allowed Tom Mewwy to get on the twack."

"Oh, no, I waited till I was sure they were all asleep—"

"Hist! What was that?"

"I heard nothing."

"It sounded like a door opening."

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort! I should have heard it. As I was saying, this is a most important matter, and I want someone to assist me. Do you remember when we were on board the steamer for the August holiday, I had a microscope which I had taken with me to use for some experiments?"

"No, I can't say I wemembah."

"Well, I had it, anyway. I wasn't able to make the experiments, as no opportunity occurred, but—"

"I wemembah one experiment you made," said D'Arcy, "the expwiment with the beastly gunpowder in the hold, which blew a hole in the steamah and w'ekked her."

"Oh, no! That was quite a mistake. That keg did not contain gunpowder."

"What did it contain, then?"

"I really do not know. I was going to analyse it, and I left it there in the hold while I went to fetch a lamp."

"And left a candle burnin' near it, you ass!"

"What could that possibly matter, as it was not gunpowder!"

"But it was gunpowdah!"

"Not at all. I am sorry I was not able to analyse it, for I should have been able to convince you that it was not gunpowder. Unfortunately that inexplicable explosion followed, and the ship was wrecked, and it was then impossible. But as I was saying, when the Condor was beached on the coast of Norfolk—"

"I am sure I heard somethin' then."

"Oh, no! I am certain that Tom Merry is fast asleep in bed. Still, we may as well get into the alcove down the passage there, and speak in whispers, in case of accidents. Herr Schneider would pass us here if he came up to bed."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The two juniors went quietly down the passage and entered the alcove. A minute later a cautious footfall passed the alcove, and was lost in the distance.

"You heard that?" whispered D'Arcy.

"Yes, but it could not have been Tom Merry, as I have left him fast asleep in the dormitory. I even pinched him a little to make sure that he was asleep. As I was saying, when the steamer was beached we were in such a hurry getting the things out of her, that we most of us overlooked a great deal of our private belongings, and—"

"Yaas, wathah! I left my spotted necktie on board, aftah all."

"And I left my microscope. At least, I think I must have done so, or rather, I know I must have done so, as I have not got it with me here. It was a rather valuable microscope, but I am not anxious about the value of it really, as it is bound to be salvaged along with the other things by the divers who are at work on the wreck."

"Then what are you wowwyin' about, deah boy?"

"I need the microscope for an experiment—a most important experiment. A case has lately come to my notice which makes me feel that it is my duty to take up the role of amateur detective once more, for a time, and so for the present I am giving up my Socialist propaganda. I have discovered bloodstains—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I have discovered bloodstains upon a letter which points to a fearful murder having been committed, but it is barely possible that the stains are not of blood but of red ink or currant-juice, and in that case, of course, I do not wish to waste my time hunting down the criminal. It is absolutely necessary for me to have my microscope to examine the stains."

"But if the divahs are sure to bring it up—"

"Yes, in the course of time. I have learned that the tide has shifted the wrecked steamer further off the shore, and that she has settled under water off the edge of the beach, where there is a sharp drop. The men are doing the diving work in the diving suits, you know, with air pumped to them through a rubber pipe from above. They are salvaging the steamer, but there is no telling how long they may be in finding my microscope, or even whether they may find it at all. Besides, I must have it at once, in order to discover whether the individual I suspect has committed a terrible crime or simply spilt some red ink. It is most important."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My idea is to pay a visit to the wreck and obtain possession of one of the diving-suits, and go down into the water and salve the microscope."

"But they won't let you, deah boy!"

"As a sincere Socialist, it would be against my principles to ask anybody's permission for anything."

"But I mean they would kick you out, you know."

"Not at all, as I should choose the right moment with my usual perspicacity. I have trained my intellect by assuming the role of an amateur detective, and have made many observations that are of great use to me. I have observed that people who work always leave off in the middle of the day for an hour, while they partake of refreshment. This is known as the dinner-hour. My idea is to go down to the wreck during the dinner-hour of the persons engaged in the salvaging, and thus escape any impertinent interference."

"Yaas, that's a wathah good wheeze!"

"But I need a companion, and of course I thought of you at once."

"That is wathah flattewin', deah boy."

"I felt sure that you would understand the importance of the matter, where others would only have scoffed," explained Skimpole. "When I go down in the diving dress I shall need someone to work the air-pump, or I should be in danger of suffocation."

"But I don't know how to work a beastly air-pump."

"That is of no consequence; you will learn as soon as you see it. I rely upon you in this, D'Arcy; but if you are afraid—"

"Afraid!"

"Yes, if you are afraid—"

"If you came out of the Shell dormitory at this time of the night to look for a thick ear, deah boy, you are goin' the wight way to work."

"Then you will come?"

D'Arcy hesitated. He was not afraid. The swell of St. Jim's, in spite of his elegant and dudish manners, had rather too much than too little pluck. But Skimpole's idea was so harebrained that even D'Arcy hesitated.

"Of course, if you don't want to go against Blake and the others—"

"I pwesume that I am my own mastah, Skimpole."

"Blake seems to have made up his mind—"

"Pewwaps I had bettah come, in order to show those wottahs that I am fwee to do as I like without their feahfully impertinent intahference."

"Yes, that is a good idea. You will come?"

"Well, you see—"

"Good! I am fully dressed, and I suppose you are ready?"

"I am quite weady; but—"

"Then let us go. We shall never have a better opportunity. To-morrow those fellows will start watching us again."

"Yaas, but—"

"We can get out of the little window in the passage below stairs. It will be easy to reach it, and we need make no noise."

"But the doctah will be feahfully angwy."

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten the doctor! Still, he won't be angry till we come back, you know, and so that need not bother us now."

"Yaas, but—"

"H'm, perhaps I made a mistake in selecting you as my companion. As a bloated aristocrat, you naturally would shrink from what appears a very trivial matter to a Socialist like myself."

"Oh, wing off," said D'Arcy. "I'm comin' with you."

"You've made up your mind?"

"Yaas, wathah."

D'Arcy had made up his mind. Where Skimpole ventured to lead, it was up to a D'Arcy to dare to follow, and all hesitation was gone now.

"Good. Come on—oh, there is one other matter. I suppose you have some money. We shall have to get to Wayland and catch the express for Euston, and then change—or else King's Cross, I forget which, and get a train for—somewhere in Norfolk. We can ascertain at Wayland. It will cost money, and unfortunately I haven't any. I lent my last shilling to young Curly of the Third. As a sincere Socialist, of course, I am bound to lend to anyone who is in need. I am equally entitled to claim help from anyone who is in possession of the dross which the world calls money. Have you plenty of tin?"

"I have about three pound ten left out of my fivah."

"That will be amply sufficient. Let us go."

"Vewy well, then. But, bai Jove—"

"What's the matter?"

"I've forgotten my hat."

"You can take a cap from the rack."

"My cap is not there."

"There are plenty of caps there, and you can borrow one."

"I am afraid that I could not take a cap that might not fit me, Skimpole. Besides, I do not care about goin' on a long journey in a cap. I shall have to go to Study No. 6 for my toppah."

ANSWERS

"You don't want a topper now."

"I should certainly wefuse to go out on this expodish, without a silk hat, deah boy."

"Oh, very well. I consider you a fool, but——"

"Eh?"

"I consider you a fool, but I suppose I must humour you—ow—ow!—what are you doing?"

"I am pullin' your nose, deah boy, and I am afraid that I have no alternative but to continue to pull it unless you apologise for that most oppwobvious expression."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"I am waitin' for my apology."

"Ow! I withdraw the expression, and will not utter my thoughts aloud again."

"Vewy well, I am satisfied. I will go to the study for my top-pah, and meet you on the kitchen stairs."

"Very good."

They parted. D'Arcy groped his way to Study No. 6, where he kept his hat-box, and Skimpole went downstairs, and on the first landing three pairs of hands groped out of the gloom and seized him, and held him fast.

CHAPTER 8. Brought Back,

"GOT him, Tom Merry?"

"Yes. And you?"

"I've got him too."

"So have I," said Manners. "It's Skimmy. I can see the glimmer of his barnacles. Skimmy, you ass, we've got you."

"Dear me," gasped Skimpole, "I suppose you have. I thought you were all asleep in the dormitory. I pinched Tom Merry to make sure that he was asleep."

"Yes, and woke me, ass."

"Please release me. I am going out——"

"You are whacking?"

"I am going out, and I have no time to waste, as I have to catch the midnight train at Wayland Junction. Please——"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"You won't catch any midnight trains to-night, Skimmy. You are coming back to the dormitory now."

"I am not. I am going out. As a Socialist I claim the right to do as I please. I am going out. It is most important."

"Where is Gussy?"

"He has gone to his study for his hat. Where are you going—what are you doing?"

"We are yanking you upstairs."

"I decline to go."

"That doesn't make any difference. You're going all the same. If you make a row you will bring Herr Schneider out, and then you'll get a licking. I'm not sure that I sha'n't give you one anyway."

"I won't—oh—ow—don't be rough—I wish you wouldn't jerk me like that—as you insist, I will certainly return to the dormitory with you, but——"

"Bring him along."

Skimpole was marched back to the Shell dormitory in the grasp of the Terrible Three. There was no help for it, and Skimpole went quietly. They entered the dormitory, and Tom Merry closed the door.

"Now, then, we've no time to waste," he said, "there's the other dummy to deal with yet. Skimmy, you've got to give your word not to leave this dormitory again to-night."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Either that, or we'll tie you to your bed with a cord. You can take your choice."

"You have no right to interfere with me——"

"Everybody has a right to interfere with a lunatic," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We're saving you from a flogging."

"I am willing to risk the flogging."

"Nuff said. Are you going to promise."

"Certainly not. I am going to leave the dormitory, but as a sincere Socialist it would be impossible for me to break a promise. Therefore I shall not promise."

"Very well. Get out the rope, Lowther."

"Here you are."

"Bump him on his bed."

"I protest—ow!"

Skimpole gasped as he was bumped on his bed. With a few turns of the rope Tom Merry secured his ankles to one end, and his wrists to the other. The amateur Socialist resisted in vain.

"There," said Tom Merry, "that's a workmanlike job, kids. He won't get away from that in a hurry."

"I insist upon being set free immediately."

"No objection to that," said Tom Merry considerably. "You can insist as long as you like. We are going to look after the other ass."

"Tom Merry—Manners—Lowther—beasts!" The Terrible Three were gone, and the closing door cut off the rest of Skimpole's remarks. Tom Merry chuckled.

"One duffer disposed of," he remarked. "They ought to be awfully grateful to us for the trouble we're taking, but it's a thankless world."

"Well, Skimmy didn't seem grateful, but D'Arcy may pan out better," remarked Lowther.

"I'm afraid it's more likely to lead to his dropping our acquaintance; still, we must do our duty like Britons, whatever the consequences," said Tom Merry, heroically.

"Ha, ha! I say, Blake must be asleep, and he's let Gussy escape."

"Yes, and we shall have to take him back to the Fourth-Form dormitory. I was thinking that it would be a good idea to bump him on Blake, as a sort of warning and reminder to Jacky that he was forgetting his duties."

"Ha, ha! Good wheeze."

"Softly—I can see a light."

There was a glimmering light under the door of Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus had gone there to fetch a hat, and he had been time enough about it. No doubt he was giving it a good brush, and making some other preparations for the journey. Tom Merry opened the study door without ceremony. He turned the handle quietly, and D'Arcy, who had his back to the door, heard nothing, and did not turn his head.

The Terrible Three looked in, and grinned. Arthur Augustus was putting on a silk hat before the glass, and on the floor lay a bag crammed with articles of attire—shirts and collars and neckties being visible through the opening. The bag was not yet fastened.

"I suppose I can't cawwy an extwa hat," murmured D'Arcy. "I weally ought to have one in case of accidents, but I suppose it is impos. It is wathah wotten. I—bai Jove!" He caught sight of the grinning juniors in the glass, and turned round with a start to stare at the Terrible Three.

"Bai Jove! You—you wottahs!"

"Good evening," said Tom Merry blandly.

"Good evenin', deah boy," said D'Arcy, suspiciously. "I am surprised to see you. What are you doin' out of bed at this time of the beastly night?"

"We have come to see you home," said Monty Lowther.

"Eh?"

"We have come to see you home," said Manners.

"I pwesume you are jokin'. What have you come here for, Tom Mewwy?"

"We have come to see you home," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Are you ready?"

"Weady for what?"

"To be seen home. We're going to walk with you back to the Fourth-Form dormitory."

"I shall uttahly wefuse to walk with you back to the Fourth-Form dormitory."

"Now, Gussy, don't put us to the trouble of carrying you."

"I should absolutely wefuse to be cawwied."

"Don't be unreasonable. If you won't walk and won't be carried, how are you to get back to the dormitory?"

"I am not goin' back to the dormitoway at all."

"Your mistake; you are."

"I uttahly wefuse——"

"We've got to get back to bed ourselves, Gussy. Are you coming?"

"No, I am not."

"Collar him, then."

D'Arcy retreated as the Terrible Three advanced.

"Tom Mewwy—Mannahs—Lowthah—I wefuse to return to the dormitoway. I wefuse to be intahfeahd with. As a mattah of fact, I have an appointment to keep——"

"Oh, that's all right; Skimmy's gone back to bed."

"Wats!"

"Fact; we've taken him there, and tied him down with a cord," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He won't be out again to-night. Come along."

"I wefuse to come along. It is a question of dig. with me now, and I wegard you as intahfeahin' beasts. Pway weire fwom my quartahs."

"Collar him."

Arthur Augustus was promptly collared. He resisted gamely, but his resistance did not count for much against the Terrible Three. He was pinioned, and marched protesting out of the study.

"You uttah wottahs!" he gasped. "I will give each of you a feahful thwashin' to-mowwow. I wegard you as uttah beasts."

"Yank him along."

"I wefuse to be hurwied!"

"Tread on his toes, Lowther."

"Certainly."

"If you twead on my beastly toes, Lowthah, I shall—ow—ow ow!"

"Ha, ha! Move along, then."

The swell of St. Jim's moved along. There was no help for it, and he was marched back to the Fourth-Form dormitory, and marched in. Silence and slumber reigned in the long, lofty room. Tom Merry knew his way to Blake's bed, and to that bed Arthur Augustus was marched.

"Now, then, all together!"

"Stop—you wottahs—ow—gerrooh—oh!"

"Go!"

And D'Arcy went with a swing from three pairs of powerful arms which landed him plump upon Blake's legs, sprawling across the bed on his back in a fashion exceedingly undignified for the elegant swell of the School House. There was a gasp from D'Arcy, and a startled yell from Jack Blake.

"Oh! Wh-wh-what's that?"

CHAPTER 9.

A Note from Skimpole.

JACK BLAKE jumped, as well he might. He started up in bed, and clawed wildly at the heavy object sprawling across his feet. There was a wail from Arthur Augustus as a hand gripped in his hair, and another dug him in the ribs.

"Ow! Leggo! You uttah ass, it's I."

"Why—what—Gussy!"

"Pway release my hair! You are hurtin' me, as well as disawwangan' it."

"You shrieking ass! What on earth do you mean by sprawling across my bed in the middle of the night?" dented Blake.

"Certainly not, I—"

"Then you are off your rocker, I suppose."

"I am not off my wockah."

"Then what do you mean by it?" exclaimed Blake, jerking D'Arcy by the hair to help him to a quick answer. "What the dickens do you mean by it, eh?"

"I wefuse—"

"Explain yourself, ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three, unable to contain themselves any longer. Jack Blake gave another jump, and peered round in the gloom.

"Oh, so you're there," he exclaimed. "I'd know Lowther's hee-haw anywhere, and that is Manners's cackle too, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What little game are you playing, asses? If you don't get off my bed, Mr. D'Arcy, I shall kick out, I warn you."

"How can I get off your beastly bed when you've got hold of my beastly hair?" exclaimed the exasperated swell of the School House.

"By Jove, I never thought of that, you know," said Blake, in imitation of one of D'Arcy's frequent remarks; and he let go.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Mister Blake, please."

"Oh, you uttah ass—"

"Look here, Tom Merry, what's the little game? What are you Shell-fish doing in a respectable dormitory, anyway?"

"We came to bring Gussy home."

"Eh? Has Gussy been out?" exclaimed Blake, in amazement.

"We were on the watch, you see, while somebody else was anoring," explained Lowther.

"Well, of course, I never suspected the young ass would get out in the middle of the confounded night."

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a young ass. I—"

"Well, we thought differently," chuckled Tom Merry.

"We've taken Skimpole into our dorm, and tied him up like a turkey, and you'd better do the same with this lunatic."

"I wefuse to be called a lunatic, and I uttably and absolutely decline to be tied up like a beastly turkey."

"We ran him down in Study No. 6," said Tom Merry. "He was making a collection of white shirts and silk hats all ready for an expedition—"

"I was bwushin' my toppah—"

"And we brought him back—"

"I shall give you a feahful thwashin' to-mowwow for your feahful cheek."

"Well, you needn't have bumped him on my feet," grumbled Blake. "Still, under the circumstances, I'm glad you've brought him back. We'll fasten him up to the bedpost for the rest of the night."

"Weally, Blake—"

"We will, you young ass, unless you give your word of honour not to leave the dorm again till rising-bell."

"Undah the circs, as my friend Skimpole cannot come out, I have no real objection to givin' my word," said D'Arcy.

"Honest Injun, mind."

"Weally, Blake, I don't think you have ever known me to depart from my word," said D'Arcy, with great dignity.

"Get into bed, ass."

"I wefuse—"

"Then stay out of it. Good-night, you Shell-fish."

"Nighty-bye, little boys."

"Who are you calling little boys, you—"

But the dormitory door closed. The Terrible Three returned

to the Shell dormitory, in high good-humour with themselves. The voice of Skimpole was heard as they entered.

"Tom Merry! Is that you?"

"I believe so," said Tom Merry, cheerfully, as he threw off his clothes.

"Please loosen these cords. I am willing to give my word as a sincere Socialist not to leave the dorm again to-night."

"Oh, very well. He gives his word as a sincere dummy, chaps, so I suppose we can set him loose."

"I suppose so," yawned Manners.

So Skimpole was released, and he returned to bed, in a state of suppressed indignation at having his personal liberty interfered with by the tyrannical chums of the Shell. But he was sleepy, and he was soon in the arms of Morpheus, and dreaming that he was plunging into unknown depths in a diving-dress in the work of salving the microscope. The Terrible Three slept soundly till rising-bell, and would willingly have slept longer.

There were five juniors who looked somewhat "blinky" about the eyes at breakfast in the School House. Needless to say, they were the two would-be breakers of bounds, and the chums of the Shell. But the latter had lost their sleep in a good cause, and they were satisfied. And in the morning began again the arduous task of watching Skimpole and D'Arcy. The Terrible Three undertook to watch Skimpole, while Arthur Augustus was under the fatherly eye of the chums of No. 6.

It happened to be a Wednesday, and a half-holiday. D'Arcy was wanted in the afternoon for the first football practice of the season, in which, of course, Tom Merry & Co. were to figure.

"Blessed if I know how we're going to keep an eye on them this afternoon, Merry," Blake remarked. "We'll shall all be too busy."

"Well, Gussy will be playing."

Blake looked a little dubious.

"Well, it's just like him to cut the practice, for the sake of buzzing off on this idiotic expedition, whatever it is."

"If he cuts the footer, the footer will jolly well cut him, I can tell you," said Tom Merry, with all the warmth of a junior football captain.

"Yes, but even if we keep hold of Gussy, there's Skimmy. But I suppose it's no good watching him. It doesn't matter so much if he makes a break."

"Well, we ought to keep him within bounds."

"I don't see how we're to do it unless we shut both of them up in the wood-shed or the old tower, and lock them in."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, we'll see. It's rather a bore, I know, but we can't let them go, especially after all the trouble we've taken."

"Hallo, Blake," said Fatty Wynn, of the New House, strolling up in the quadrangle. "I've had your message from Figgins."

"My message from Figgins?" said Blake.

"Yes. He says you've asked me to tea this afternoon."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Blake, grinning. "I hope you will be able to come, Fatty."

Fatty Wynn smiled expansively.

"Certainly, Blake. I shall be very pleased. Do you know, I have come home from that voyage on the Condor feeling fearfully hungry. My appetite has improved."

"It didn't need it," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, I don't know. You fellows always made jokes on that subject, but I never did really eat much," said Fatty Wynn.

"I get so jolly hungry in this September weather, though, and that sea voyage has given a sort of edge to my appetite. What time shall I come to tea, Blake?"

"Oh, half-past six."

"Good. Then I'll have tea in hall before I come, and I'll ask Figgys to leave our study tea till half-past seven. I can manage the three."

"Hadn't you better have a feed at the school shop on your way over?" asked Tom Merry, sarcastically. "You'll feel faint, you know."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Some sandwiches or pemmican in your pocket, though, would sustain you—"

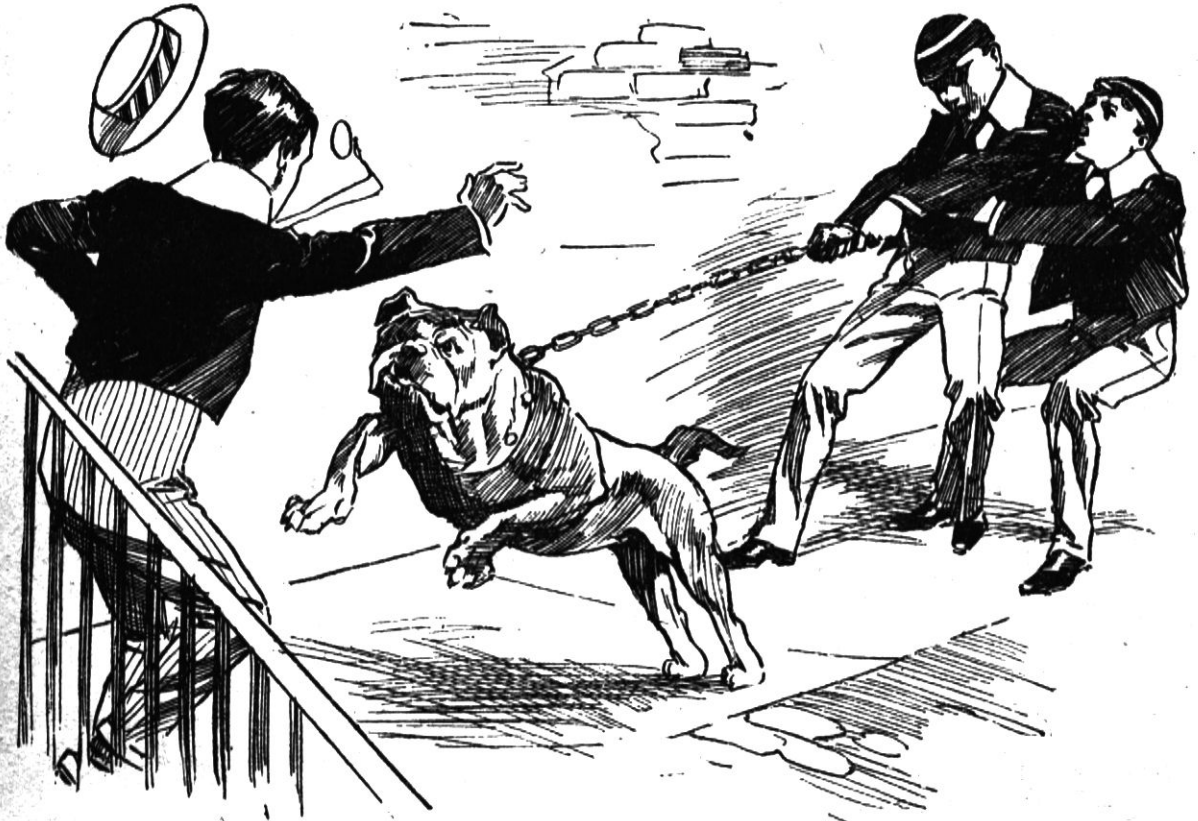
"Wish I had some now," said Fatty Wynn. "I've had hardly any breakfast,—the usual House grub, you know, and a few little things I took in myself—some sausages and ham and tongue, and half a cold chicken, and some cakes and pastries and half a jam roll, and one or two trifles. Have you any toffee about you? It's time for chapel, and I could eat a little toffee in chapel."

"I don't hold with eating toffee in chapel," said Tom Merry solemnly. "Besides, I haven't any toffee."

"Well, you can expect me at half-past six, Blake," said Fatty Wynn, and he strolled away. Tom Merry looked at Blake inquiringly.

JUST HAND THIS COPY TO A FRIEND OF YOURS WHEN YOU'VE FINISHED WITH IT WILL YOU?

—THANKS VERY MUCH!—THE EDITOR.



"You uttah wottah, Hewwies, keep that fearful beast off!" yelled D'Arcy. Herries dragged desperately on the chain. "I—I can't!" he gasped. "You—you'd better run for it!"

"I say, you've taken a job on," he remarked. "You'd better get the grub in by the hundredweight before tea-time."

Blake chuckled.

"It's a little joke," he explained. "I've got a ripping feed in the study cupboard, as far as that goes: but the idea is to rot Fatty. You heard how Reilly served Gussy. Made him feed on a dry crust and warm water."

"Yes," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Of course, it was like his cheek to jape a member of our study, and we jolly well bumped him for it," said Blake. "Still, it was a good wheeze. That's what we're going to work off on Fatty Wynn. We're going to have him in to tea, and shove some stale rolls on the table, and a jug of cold water. It will be the shriekingest joke of the season to see Fatty's face."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"I think it will be funny," grinned Blake. "We shall all have tea before he arrives, so the rolls and water will do for us. We'll tell him we're short of grub—so we shall be after tea. See? Hullo, there's chapel bell."

The juniors were hurrying in for morning prayers. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went in with the Fourth Form, and as he was going in, Skimpole brushed against him, and slipped a paper into his hand.

Arthur Augustus understood, and he nodded with a smile. It was a secret communication which had escaped the keen eyes of the shadowers.

D'Arcy felt that the eyes of Study No. 6 wandered towards him every now and then, and he did not venture to open Skimpole's note till he was in the class-room, when he did so under cover of his Latin Grammar.

"Dear D'Arcy," he read; "it is exceedingly difficult to elude the impertinent vigilance of the fellows who have imposed upon themselves the task of preventing us from effecting our purpose. I think, however, that it may be managed in this way. When you leave the class-room for the morning recess, go straight to the bike shed and take out your machine. I will do the same with Tom Merry's machine, which just suits me. Then we can make a dash for it. We shall very probably escape unnoticed, but in any case we can baffle pursuit. We can leave the machines at the station, and catch the 11.50 express for King's Cross, changing there for Yarmouth.—H. S."

Whenever Skimpole wrote a letter, it read half like a lecture and half like a detective story. But the meaning was quite clear

in this case. The plan seemed a good one; and Arthur Augustus smiled at the thought of Blake's look when he found that the birds had flown.

Jack Blake happened to look up, and he caught that smile on D'Arcy's face, and saw him thrust the paper into the back of his Latin Grammar, and put the latter away in his desk. He did not attach much importance to it at the time, the thought crossing his mind that D'Arcy was sketching out some comic contribution for the next number of Tom Merry's weekly.

When the boys left the class-rooms for the recess at eleven o'clock, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy strolled away with a careless air towards the gymnasium. Blake saw him go, and concluded that he was safe there. But the astute swell of the School House entered the gym by one door only to leave it by another, and then he walked quickly to the bicycle-shed. Skimpole was already there.

CHAPTER 10.

Off at Last.

SKIMPOLE had taken Tom Merry's bicycle off the stand, and was unfastening the head-lock when D'Arcy entered. The School House swell looked at him curiously.

"Bai Jove, Skimpole, that's wathah a liberty to take with a fellow's bike," he remarked.

"Not at all," said Skimpole airily. "I was prevented from leaving the school by Tom Merry, and he must naturally expect to take the consequences. Besides, I think we shall probably nationalise bicycles under Socialism, and so I shall have as much right to this machine as Tom Merry has. I can't use my own, as it is punctured in both tyres; but Tom Merry is welcome to use it if he mends the punctures. Are you ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Where's your cap?"

"My cap? Hangin' on the peg on the wack, I believe."

"You don't mean to say that you're coming out on a bicycle in a silk hat?"

"I am afraid that I have no alternative in the mattah. You see, we have a long twain journey before us, and I must have a toppah. We might meet somebody we know, you know. I couldn't wide in a cap and cawwy a toppah in my hand, that would look wathah widiculous; and, besides, it would waise suspish that we were goin' to bolt."

"But——"

"It's all wight, don't waste time. My machine is quite weady."

"We'll go separately," said Skimpole. "We'll pretend to be riding round the quad, and all of a sudden when I am near the gates I'll scorch off. You follow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Skimpole wheeled Tom Merry's bicycle out of the building, and mounted it. He was not a good rider, but he could manage a machine; and the bicycle was a very fine one, a present from Tom Merry's loving governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. Skimpole rode boldly down the path. It happened that the chums of the Shell were taking their sprint exercise just then, and they had momentarily lost sight of Skimpole. The amateur Socialist was unwatched, and he did not neglect the opportunity. A minute more, and he was on the road to Ryleombe. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy followed him, Blake still under the happy impression that the swell of the School House was in the gymnasium. Figgins & Co. were lounging near the gate, and they looked at D'Arcy as he passed them with three huge grins.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "I say, Gussy—"

"Sowwy I haven't time to stop, deah boys."

"Do you usually take your spins in a silk hat?"

But Arthur Augustus did not reply. He pedalled on, and overtook Skimpole, and then they both put on speed, and vanished in a cloud of dust from the astonished gaze of the New House chums.

"What on earth's up!" exclaimed Figgins. "They're not allowed outside gates now."

"Some new wheeze," said Fatty Wynn.

"They may have a pass to go down to the village," Kerr remarked.

Figgins shook his head.

"There's something on, I imagine."

Little caring what comments were passed upon his hurried departure, Arthur Augustus scorching on, fagging the woody Skimpole to keep up with him.

"Bai Jove, we won't go to Wylcombe at all," said D'Arcy.

"We may as well wide stwaight to Wayland Junction, deah boy, and catch the twain there. That will put the wottahs off the twack if they follow us."

"Certainly, D'Arcy. But—but please don't ride quite so fast!" gasped Skimpole. "I—I am not a very rapid cyclist."

"There's no time to lose, deah boy."

"No; but please don't ride quite so fast. I—I am not an athlete. I have developed my vast brain at the expense of my body to some extent."

"Yaas, you're wight there, Skimmy." And the swell of St. Jim's slowed down. "Turn to the wight for Wayland, deah boy."

The adventurers took the turning for the market town where the London expresses stopped, and reached it in half an hour. Arthur Augustus took the tickets for King's Cross, and they had to wait ten minutes for the train. They waited on tenterhooks, fearing the appearance of their over-obliging friends every moment; but neither Tom Merry nor Blake appeared. D'Arcy put the machines up at the station, and the train came roaring in at last.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Skimpole, with a gasp of relief. "Safe now."

"Yaas, wathah! They will never guess where we are gone."

"Oh, no. I suppose you destroyed that note I sent you," said Skimpole, as he took his seat in a third-class carriage. D'Arcy had taken third tickets, the difference on the fare being considerable, and many expenses lying ahead for him.

"Bai Jove! No, I didn't, deah boy."

Skimpole looked annoyed.

"Really, D'Arcy, suppose it were found—"

"That's all wight. I left it inside my Latin Gwammah in my desk in the class-woom. It's impos. for anybody to find it there."

"Good! Nobody is likely to look into your Latin Grammar. Still, it would have been safer to destroy it. However, that cannot be helped now. Ah, we are starting."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The train jerked and puffed, and steamed out of the station. D'Arcy looked out of the window, but there was no sign of pursuers in the station. The express swept on, and D'Arcy settled back in his seat.

"These are wotten uncomfy seats," he remarked. "Nevah mind; I suppose a fellow ought to be always weady to wuff it. We shall be at King's Cross in fifty minutes, deah boy, accordin' to the time-table."

"And it will take over two hours to get to Yarmouth," said Skimpole. "It's a long journey, but it is worth it."

"Weally, upon woffection, it hardly seems worth while for the sake of a wotten microwscope."

"That microscope will enable me to decide whether a terrible crime has been committed, and whether a fearful criminal is to be brought to justice, D'Arcy."

"Vevy good."

"We shall arrive at the scene of the wreck too late to take advantage of the dinner-hour," Skimpole remarked. "But there is a recess for tea, I believe, among the people who work, and so we shall find an opportunity."

"Bai Jove! I've forgotten to bwing a book with me, and I have nothin' to read in the twain," said Arthur Augustus.

"That does not matter. I have with me my notes for my great book on Socialism, and I shall be very pleased to read you a few extracts."

"Oh, pway don't twouble."

"No trouble at all," said the obliging Skimpole; "in fact, I shall be only too pleased."

"Yaas, but—"

"I am very glad to have so excellent an opportunity of converting you from your present base and sordid views—"

"My—my what?"

"Your present base and sordid views to the glorious truths of Socialism. Mind, I do not blame you for being stupid and ignorant and narrow-minded. As a Determinist I recognise the fact that every effect is due to a cause, and consequently the cause is the agency by which the effect is produced. This is the great Determinist truth which the world refuses to recognise. Therefore I should not think of blaming you for your narrow-mindedness, your stupidity, or your obstinate refusal to admit evident facts. I trace those defects of your understanding to the base and brutal surroundings of your youth."

"You uttah ass!"

"Reared in an atmosphere of poverty and crime, how is a child of the slums to be anything but a weak, degraded, degenerate—"

"You shwiekin' idiot, do you think I was weared in an atmosphere of beastly poverty and crime?"

"I was speaking generally. Reared in an atmosphere—"

"Oh, wing off!"

"Reared in an atmosphere—"

"Will you shut up, you uttah ass!"

"Reared in an—"

"Bai Jove! If you don't wing off I'll get out at the first stoppin'-place and return to St. Jim's," said D'Arcy. "I don't mind bweakin' the wules of the coll. to oblige a fellow, But when he wants to bore me all the way to King's Cwoss, the posiah. becomes intolewable."

"Oh, very well," said Skimpole, with the patience of the true propagandist who knew how to bide his time. "Very well. I only meant to explain that I did not blame you for your obstinate prejudices against the glorious truths."

"Oh, wing off, deah boy; pway wing off!"

"Very good. But to pass the time I shall be very pleased to read you some extracts from the hundred and seventy-fifth chapter of my book."

"Don't bothah."

"It will be a real pleasure to me. I should like to have your opinion upon that chapter, too. It deals with the degeneracy of the modern aristocracy, and traces their undoubtedly feeble intellects to the unjust possession of the wealth of the country—"

"Their feeble what?"

"Intellects. Take, for instance, yourself as an example—" Skimpole broke off suddenly. "What are you getting up for, D'Arcy?"

"Only just to give you a foahful thwashin'!"

"Really, D'Arcy—keep off, please. I—I will not read you any of the extracts if you do not wish—really, D'Arcy—"

"Then shut up," said the swell of the School House. "Mind, anothah word, and I shall punch your silly head, and change cawwiages at the next stop."

"Oh, very well. If you prefer to remain in the dark depths of dense ignorance—"

"Wing off!"

And Skimpole rang off at last, and the journey was pursued in silence till the train dashed into the great station at King's Cross, and the juniors alighted to change for the Yarmouth express.

CHAPTER 11.

Stolen Away.

"WHERE'S Gussy?"

"Haven't seen him."

"He went into the gym," said Blake, looking worried. "He's not there now. He can't have bolted, surely? I say, Tom Merry, have you seen Gussy?"

"No. Have you seen Skimpole?"

"No. You don't mean to say he's missing?"

"Well, we can't see him anywhere."

"My only hat! Then they've done it."

The chums looked at one another in dismay. After all their care, a few minutes of negligence had undone everything. The birds were flown.

"Well," said Blake, "I feel like kicking somebody. I suppose I had better kick Tom Merry."

"I suppose you'd better not," said Tom Merry. "Why couldn't you keep your eyes open!"

"Why couldn't you keep yours open?"

"Well, we only let the silly ass out of our sight for a minute."

"I thought Gussy was in the gym. He went in there."

"Well, they've bolted," said Digby, "and there isn't much chance of finding out where they're gone. There's the bell."

"Hallo, Figgins!" exclaimed Blake, as the fourth crowded towards their class-room for the resumption of morning lessons, "I suppose you haven't seen Gussy?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes, I have, rather," he replied. "Hasn't he come in?"

"No. Did you see him go out?"

"Yes. He was on his jigger, and he had a silk hat on. Skimpole was with him."

"And he was on a bike?"

"Yes."

"They're gone," said Herries. "There will be a row, I expect."

Herries' expectation was fulfilled.

When Mr. Lathom glanced over the Form he noted the absence of Arthur Augustus, and inquired for him. No one volunteered any information, and D'Arcy was marked down as absent, and Mr. Lathom's expression showed that things would be warm for the swell of the School House when he appeared again. In the Shell, Mr. Linton was equally solicitous about Skimpole.

"Does anyone know where Skimpole is?" he asked.

No one knew.

"Very well. I shall have to impress upon Skimpole that he cannot miss lessons with impunity," said Mr. Linton, with a close tightening of the lips.

"Something warm for Skimmy when he comes back, Tom," Monty Lowther whispered.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Well, I must say it serves him right. We did our best to save the silly ass, but he gave us the slip."

When morning lessons were over, the Terrible Three and the chums of No. 6 Study met to discuss the matter. Skimpole and D'Arcy were still missing, and the two Form masters were looking very angry about it. It was plain, of course, that the two juniors had gone off on some excursion without asking permission.

"It's a half-holiday to-day," Tom Merry remarked. "It wouldn't have been so serious if the bounders had broken bounds this afternoon. But to cut morning lessons—"

"It will mean a row, of course."

"The worst of it is that they must be gone a long way, because they intended, as we know, to catch a train at Wayland last night. They may stay away two or three days, perhaps."

Blake looked worried.

"It would be just like them. That would mean a flogging, if not worse. Fellows have been expelled for as much as that."

"If we only knew where the rotters were gone," growled Digby, "we might cut the footer practice this afternoon and follow on. But—"

"But we don't."

Jack Blake gave a sudden start.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Why, it's just struck me—how did they arrange about sloping to-day, when we've been watching them so closely? I've hit it."

"Hit what?"

"Gussy was reading a paper and grinning over it in the class-room this morning. I thought at the time it was some piffle he was concocting for the 'Weekly,' but now it looks to me as if it were—"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry, catching Blake's meaning at once. "It's very likely. Skimpole may have sent him a note!"

"It would be easy to slip it to him without our noticing, and then—"

"Well, it's too late now," said Monty Lowther. "It doesn't matter much how they arranged it—they've done it, and they're gone."

"Wait a bit. I saw Gussy shove that paper into his Latin Grammar, and he put that in his desk. Now I come to think of it, he was grinning a great deal over it; and, of course, it was something up against us. We might have guessed it if—"

"If you had had the sense," suggested Lowther.

"Oh, rats! If the paper's still there, we may learn something from it, anyway. I'll cut off and see."

Blake hurried into the empty class-room. It did not take him long to bang the Latin Grammar on the desk so that any paper inside could not fail to fall out. The note from Skimpole fluttered to the floor.

Blake picked it up with a crow of triumph. He rejoined the group of juniors with the note in his hand.

"Get it?" asked Digby.

"Here it is."

"What does it say?"

"I—I suppose we're justified in reading it under the circumstances," said Blake. "It's for Gussy's own sake, you know."

"Of course we are. Read it out."

"Very well."

Blake read the note aloud. Tom Merry gave a whoop.

"The young villain! My bicycle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My jigger! The young brigand!"

"Listen to the finish," said Blake. "He says 'change for Yarmouth.'"

"My hat! What in the name of wonder does he want to go to Yarmouth for?"

"I think that's pretty clear," said Lowther, after a moment's thought. All eyes were turned upon him at once.

"Well, if it's pretty clear, you'd better explain," said Blake. "Blessed if I can see what they should want to bolt off to Yarmouth for."

"It's in Norfolk—"

"I don't want you to teach me geography, Monty Lowther: What I want to know is—"

"Dry up a minute. Yarmouth is in Norfolk, and not far from the spot where the Condor was wrecked."

"My hat!"

"I'll wager that's it," said Monty Lowther confidently. "They've gone to the wreck."

The juniors looked at one another. Now that Lowther pointed it out, it seemed pretty certain. The fugitives could have no other conceivable motive for making this sudden break into a distant county. Where the steamer had been run aground she still lay, and the divers were at work upon her. For some reason Skimpole had wanted to revisit the wreck, and he had taken D'Arcy with him upon the harebrained expedition.

"I suppose that's it," said Tom Merry. "Why, it will take them a fearfully long time to get there, and if they're looking for anything—"

"Now I remember," said Manners. "Skimpole was saying something yesterday about having lost a microscope."

"He lent me a microscope a few days ago," said Lowther. "I forgot to return it to him, and it's in the study now."

"It would be just like Skimmy to forget that, and to think it was on the wreck, and go there to look for it," grinned Blake.

"I say, we ought to tell Mr. Railton, I think," said Tom Merry. "The young asses may be away for days. Either that or we must go and fetch them back."

"We'll fetch them back," said Dig.

"What about the fare? I don't know how much it is, but it must be pretty heavy."

Blake whistled.

"It won't be possible for us all to go, that's certain," he remarked. "I shall have to go, and you'd better come, Merry."

"Two will be enough," said Tom Merry. "If we have a whip round we sha'n't raise more than enough cash to pay our expenses."

"That's very likely."

"Oh, rats!" said Digby, warmly. "I must come, of course."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "And I don't see how I can stay behind. Suppose you get into mischief?"

"What about the cash?"

"We can borrow it. We'll make Gussy pay it all back," said Digby, struck by a brilliant idea. "We'll make out a bill for him to pay, see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a ripping idea," said Lowther, "and if Gussy is going to foot the bill we may as well all go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's only fair," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He shall pay the out-of-pocket expenses, and we'll put in the time for nothing. We should be quite within our rights to charge for our time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, then," said Blake briskly. "Our credit is good enough, and we can borrow the tin. It will be a lesson for Gussy. The footer will have to go for this afternoon, and we can catch the next train from Wayland."

And they did.

CHAPTER 12.

Amateur Divers.

"**B**AI Jove, there's the Condah!" It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who uttered the exclamation.

The two explorers from St. Jim's had arrived. They had left the train at Yarmouth, and taken a local for the village by the headland where the wreck of the steamer lay.

From the village was a walk of a quarter of a mile to the shore, and coming round the path by the headland, the sea had suddenly burst upon the view of the juniors from St. Jim's.

Where the billows of the North Sea broke upon the long stretch of sand, the funnels of the steamer could be seen above the creaming water.

The steamer, when disabled by the explosion in the lower hold, had been run ashore by the captain, and all her passengers and most of their personal effects had been saved. But the tide had shifted the hull off into deeper water, and now only her funnels were showing at low water. The great mass of the steamer was hidden below the blue waves.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, "it makes you feel wathah wotten, you know, to see her undah the wathah like that. We had some mewwy times on board, Skimmy."

"Yes, you are right," said Skimpole; "though things might have been better. If you fellows had backed me up we could have set aside the officers, and run the ship on Socialistic lines."

"Oh, wats! Don't begin that again. The ship might be sailin' now if you hadn't blown a hole in her timbaws with your wotten expewiments."

"That is quite a mistake. The explosion was not due to my experiment in the lower hold. Besides, the ship could not be sailing now, as she is a steamer, and is propelled by—"

"Let's get down to the week," suggested Arthur Augustus. "There seems to be no one about, and now's the opportunity, deah boy."

"Come along, then. The place certainly has an aspect of being deserted. You can see that they have been at work recently. It is in a case like this that you find my observations of manners and customs most useful. It is undoubtedly the time now when the divers have retired for rest and refreshment, which they call knocking off for tea."

"Then we have awwived just at the wight time."

"Apparently, yes."

The two juniors made their way down to the beach.

There was no one in sight, but that was not remarkable, for the coast was rugged and very rocky, and there might have been an army camped there among the rocks and not a soul in view from the beach.

The men engaged in the salvage work were doubtless having their tea in the shelter of some big rock near at hand, out of the blaze of the sun.

That the work had been proceeding actively was shown by the piles of various kinds of property on the beach, above the reach of high water.

The work of clearing out the steamer was first being effected; and that, to judge by the piles on the shore, was almost completed.

The divers had left their apparatus just where they had used it last, never dreaming that there was any chance of its being interfered with.

Skimpole looked cautiously up and down the shore. On the headland could be seen part of the walls of Headland School, where the boys of St. Jim's had spent the night after the wreck the previous week. But there was no one in sight. Skimpole grinned with satisfaction.

"This is excellent," he exclaimed. "Don't make a row, D'Arcy."

"I am not makin' a row."

"I mean, we must be cautious, as the salvage men are undoubtedly near at hand, behind some of those rocks, and they would probably interfere with us if they saw us taking a diving-dress. You see, Socialism has not permeated their stupid heads yet, and the rights of every citizen to use anything he likes—"

"Are you goin' to get into a divin' dress?"

"Certainly. Let us get to work, and not waste time in talk. It is a great mistake to stand talking when there is something to be done. In the hundred and eighty-fourth chapter of my book I point out the mischief that accrues from such thoughtlessness. Want of punctuality and promptness, and—"

"Are you evah goin' to leave off talkin', Skimpole?"

"I was pointing out that it is very foolish to waste time in talk—"

"What are you doin' at the pwsent moment, ass?"

"Pointing out to you that it is foolish to—"

"Oh, pway let's get to work!"

"Certainly. I am waiting for you. Lend me a hand. You see, these boots are over-weighted with lead to make the diver sink to the bottom, to overcome the resistance of the water. This helmet is weighted, too, and would be jolly heavy to walk in, but under the water—"

"Undah the water it's all wight. I know as much about it as you do, Skimmy; so pway get to business."

"You observe this tube attached to the helmet," said Skimpole, unheeding. "Through this air is pumped to the diver by means of this hand-pump. If the supply of air should fail, the diver would undoubtedly be asphyxiated."

"He would be whatiated?"

"Asphyxiated—die of suffocation, you know."

"Then why can't you say so. Or, wathah, what do you keep on talkin' at all for? Are you goin' to get into that divin'-dress before we are collahed by the divahs, or are you not?"

"Certainly," said Skimpole. "Pray assist me. These boots are very heavy. Mind you pay out the rope and the tube carefully, as if they became entangled I should undoubtedly be asphyxiated."

"Oh, wats! Pway get on."

"I suppose you don't want me to be asphyxiated—"

"I woally don't think it would mattah vewwy much. It would pwobably stop you jawin'. If you don't buck up I shall wotire."

"Oh, very well!"

Skimpole got into the diving-suit easily enough. It was large enough for a full-grown man, and Skimpole was only a boy, and a rather weedy one. His feet did not go down so far as the boots, and his chin continually threatened to slip down through the neckband to which the helmet was fastened.

"One last word before you fasten the helmet, D'Arcy—"

"Pway huwvy up, then."

"You will be careful not to get the tube entangled—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Or I should undoubtedly be asphyxiated—"

"Oh, keep your head in!"

"Yes, but—one more moment—just a word."

"What is it?"

"Be very careful indeed with the pump, as if the supply of air should fail I should undoubtedly be asphyx—"

Arthur Augustus sniffed impatiently and closed the helmet. He fastened it up, and gave Skimpole a push to signify that all was ready. Through the glass in the helmet he could see only the tufty hair on the top of Skimpole's head.

Skimpole, shut up inside the diving-dress, felt a momentary regret that he had left St. Jim's in search of the missing microscope.

Diving for salvage seemed a much easier and pleasanter thing at St. Jim's than it did in a diving-dress on the spot.

But it was too late to retreat now.

Besides, he remembered the great importance of recovering the microscope, and the sensational detective case which would probably follow his investigations with its aid of the mysterious stains.

And, screwing up his courage to the sticking point, he plunged in.

He went under the water feet first, the heavily-weighted boots taking him down, and D'Arcy paid out the rope from above.

Skimpole had judged by the position of the funnels the way into the ship, but under the water he found it was not so easy to tell his direction.

In the first place, his head was too low down in the helmet for him to see through the glass, and so he was, as a matter of fact, completely without sight to aid him.

He blundered on, and suddenly felt himself going.

There was a gasp inside the hollow helmet.

Down he went, and he knew that he had passed over the side of the wreck, and was sinking into the deeper water on the seaward side.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole, "this is most—most—oh!"

His feet jammed in thick soft sand. At the same moment there was a jerking on the air tube, and Skimpole shuddered.

The tube was caught on something, undoubtedly pressing against the side of the sunken steamer.

"Dear me," gasped the amateur diver, "I—I shall undoubtedly be asphyxiated!"

There was a sharp jerking on the rope.

Skimpole felt it, but he could not rise.

His leaden-weighted boots were jammed in the soft sand, and he could not pull them out.

He succeeded in extricating one, but in the effort he drove the other further in, and when he started to drag out the other, the first one had sunk again.

Meanwhile the rope was jerking and jerking.

Arthur Augustus was getting anxious.

He could see dimly the diver's form as Skimpole groped over the sloping deck of the sunken vessel, and he had seen the diver slide over into the water beyond.

"Bai Jove," he murmured, "I wondah what Skimmy has gone there for! I woally undahstood that he was goin' inside the ship."

And he jerked on the rope as a signal to the junior to come back.

Skimpole would willingly enough have done so, but it was impossible, and as the moments passed, and he did not reappear, D'Arcy's anxiety changed to alarm.

"Bai Jove, there's somethin' w'ong!" he muttered.

Skimpole remained invisible on the other side of the wreck. Arthur Augustus cast a wild glance round. It fell upon the air-pump.

"Bai Jove, I'd forgotten that!"

In a moment he was working away frantically at the pump. But the tautness of the tube where it disappeared under water warned D'Arcy that it was caught somewhere, and his hair stood on end. It might be caught against the timber without being blocked, but D'Arcy did not think of that at the moment. He pictured the hapless diver gasping in vain for air in the heavy helmet, slowly yielding to the horrors of asphyxiation.

"It's—it's the howwid!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

The perspiration was pouring down his face as he worked at the pump. His hat fell aslant, and his collar burst its stud.



"There you are," exclaimed Relly to the discomfited D'Arcy. "Sure, it's satisfied with the good bread I am, and I want you to have all the fish, Gussy darling!"

The water washed over his beautiful boots, and slopped his immaculate trousers. Even that passed unnoticed.

"Help! Help!"

Arthur Augustus shouted as he worked.

The salvors must be near at hand, he knew, and he would have given anything to see them on the spot at that moment.

"Help! Help!"

A face rose into view behind a rock, then another, and another. A gruff voice bawled across the beach to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Leave that alone, you young rascal!"

"Help! Help!"

Arthur Augustus worked away with one hand, and waved the other frantically.

The men on the beach stared at him.

He was indeed a curious sight, with his burst collar, his flying necktie, his hat on one side, one hand at the pump, and the other wildly waving.

"Help! Help!"

"Let that pump alone!"

"Help! Help!"

"You 'ear me?"

"Help! Help!"

"Cut off, I tell yer!"

"Help! Help!"

They seemed to realise at last that something was wrong. Three or four men came up at a run, some of them still eating their tea.

"Now, what's the matter, you young, cheeky rascal?" demanded the gruff-voiced man.

"My friend—he is dyin'—"

"Hey?"

"He is in the divin'-dweess on the othah side of the w'eck, and the tube is blocked, and—"

"You mean to say you've 'ad the bloomin' check—"

"Save him!"

"You've 'ad the cheek to—"

"Save him before he is suffocated, you wottahs!"

"You young idiot! He's all right even if he's down there, the pipe is clear, and 'e won't be 'urt."

"Bai Jove!"

"Get into your things, Thompson, and go down and fetch him up," said the gruff-voiced man. "This 'ere is a matter for the police. My word, an attempt to rob the salvage in broad daylight!"

Arthur Augustus was too agitated to explain. He sat down on the sand, and pushed his silk hat on the back of his head, and fanned himself with his pocket-handkerchief. He was gasping for breath, and he continued to gasp while Thompson descended into the water and dragged Skimpole out of the sand.

The unfortunate amateur diver came into view, and was bumped unceremoniously on the beach, and his borrowed plumes were ruthlessly stripped off him, and Skimpole was

revealed. He adjusted his spectacles and blinked at the angry divers.

"Dear me, there seems to be quite a crowd here!" he remarked. "I am afraid that you have not been so quiet as I warned you to be, D'Arcy."

"And now," said the gruff-voiced gentleman, who was in charge of the salvage operations, grimly. "Now, have you young rips got anything to say for yourselves afore we march you off to the lock-up?"

CHAPTER 13.

Rescued.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY groped for his eye-glass, rubbed it on his handkerchief, and screwed it into his right eye, and then proceeded to favour the gruff gentleman with a long and cool stare.

"Weally, my deah sir, I fail to undahstand you," he remarked. "We came here with strictly honourable intentions, to wescue a miwescopie belongin' to my friend Skimpole."

"You see—"

"A likely yarn. What do you think of that yarn, Thompson?"

"Gammon, Mr. Fish!" said Thompson promptly.

"I wefuse to have my remarks chawcterised as gammon!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "We belong to the school that had a holiday on that steamah, and when it was w'eked, my friend Skimpole left his miwescopie on board."

"Exactly," said Skimpole. "We came here to recover it. It is very unfortunate that you should have interrupted us, but really I owe you my thanks, as I was stuck in the mud and could not move. If I had any money I should present you with a gratuity, but as it is I can give you nothing but my thanks. And now, will you kindly lend me a diving-dress—"

"Eh?"

"Will you kindly lend me a diving-dress, as I wish to go down in search of my microscope? It is very important for me to have it at once."

Mr. Fish chuckled.

"Off his onion," he said. "Off his onion, or else a vory clever thief."

"I am not off my onion, as you vulgarly express it. I unfortunately left my microscope on board the steamer, and it is absolutely necessary for me to recover it at once. If you will therefore lend me a diving-dress—"

"Haw, haw!"

"There is nothing to laugh at in my exceedingly reasonable request. Still, if you would prefer to go in search of the microscope yourself, I should like that just as well, and if I had any money I would present you with a gratuity."

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"Now, I think of it, my friend D'Arcy has plenty of money, and he—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Take 'em to the police-station, sir," said Thompson.

"This 'ere is all gammon."

"Weally, my good fellow—"

"Perhaps it would be better to give them a good licking," said Mr. Fish; "that would save trouble."

"I should uttahly wefuse to be licked."

"I object vory strongly to anything of the sort," said Skimpole.

Mr. Fish grinned.

"Your objections won't count very much, you young rascals," he said. "You've got to learn not to meddle with other folks' property. You take the skinny one, Thompson, and I'll take the other, and spank 'em."

"Ay, ay," said Thompson.

And he promptly collared Skimpole, whom Mr. Fish had irreverently alluded to as the skinny one. Mr. Fish took hold of Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove—"

"Now, then, better take it quietly."

"I uttahly wefuse to take it quietly. I wefuse to be wussly handed by you, you feahful wottah! Wefuse me at once!"

"Haw, haw!"

"Wefuse me at once, or I shall lose my tempah and stwiko you."

"Haw, haw!"

The unfortunate swell of St. Jim's was an infant in the powerful grasp of Mr. Fish. He was twisted across a huge knee, and a huge hand rose in the air and fell.

"Ow! You beastly wottah! Help! Wescue!"

There was a shout from the path over the headland. It came as music to the ears of the swell of St. Jim's, for he knew the voices of his chums.

"Wescue!" he shouted. "Wescue, St. Jim's!"

There was a trampling of feet on the beach. The pursuers had arrived; and Tom Merry and Blake, running hard, were the first to reach the spot. Lowther and Manners, Digby and Herries, came panting on behind.

"Wescue! Blake! Dig! Wescue! Hewwies, wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

And the six juniors from St. Jim's sat down on the sand and laughed themselves breathless.

Smack! smack! smack!

"Wescue!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, hold on," gasped Blake. "That will do. I dare say Gussy deserves it—in fact, I know he does—but hold on!"

"Mind your own business!" said Mr. Fish gruffly.

"Rats! This is my business."

"Wescue!" wailed D'Arcy.

"Line up, St. Jim's!" shouted Tom Merry. "Charge!"

The juniors rushed to the rescue. But Mr. Fish did not want trouble. He released Arthur Augustus, with a broad grin, and the swell of St. Jim's squirmed away. Skimpole was released, too, and he stood gasping, pressing his hands to the place where he had received the punishment.

"Take 'em away," said Mr. Fish, grinning. "They came here meddling with our apparatus, and we've spanked them. If they belong to you, take them away and chain them up."

"Come on, Gussy."

"I cannot wefuse from this spot yet, Blake."

"Haven't you had enough?"

"I have been gwossly insulted. I cannot leave this spot until I have given this wuttah a feahful thwashin'."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mr. Fish.

"Oh, come on, Gussy."

"I uttahly wefuse. Undah the circo, as you have so bwavely come to my wescue, I wescue you to my friendship, and shall atah my mind about dwoppin' your acquaintance. But I cannot wefuse from this spot without thwashin' that wottah."

"Oh, come on! Take the other ass, Tom Merry."

"Right-ho," said Tom Merry. "Are you coming, Skimmey, or shall we carry you?"

"I cannot come, after taking all this trouble, without recovering my microscope from the wreck. It is of the first importance."

"You ass!" said Lowther. "Your microscope is safe at St. Jim's. You lent it to me the other day, and it's still in my study."

Skimpole rubbed his bumpy forehead.

"Dear me, now you mention it, I recall that I did!" he exclaimed. "It was a lapse of memory, such as frequently occurs in the brain of a great genius."

"Ha, ha, ha! A great idiot, you mean."

"Not at all. I will explain."

"No, you won't. Come on!"

And Tom Merry and Lowther took Skimpole by the arms and marched him off. Blake and Digby did the same for D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's struggled.

"I insist upon bein' wescued, Blake! Let me go, Dig! I insist upon thwashin' that wottah before I wefuse from this spot."

"You young ass!" said Blake severely. "as a matter of fact you owe him an apology. What do you mean by meddling with his property without permission?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that, you know." Arthur Augustus turned towards the grinning Mr. Fish. "My deah sir, undah the circo, I apologise for havin' used your p'perty without permish."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

And Arthur Augustus suffered himself to be led away.

CHAPTER 14.

Fatty Wynn Takes the Cake.

TOM MERRY & CO. marched the recaptured adventurers to the railway-station, and did not take their eyes off them till they were safely in the train. When they changed at Yarmouth, Blake linked his arm in D'Arcy's, and Tom Merry his in Skimpole's, and the same again when, later on, they changed at King's Cross. They did not mean to run any more risks of losing their quarry.

"Bai Jove!" D'Arcy remarked, as the express tore along southward, "this must have wun you into a feahful expense, deah boys."

"Not at all," said Jack Blake. "We don't mind the expense in the least."

"But there are six of you, and the wailway fares are vory high," said Arthur Augustus. "I was vovy glad to be wescued from that wuff bwute, but it was like you feahfu cheek to follow me, you know. Undah the circo, it serve you wight to be stuck for a large amount of money."

"But we're not."

"I suppose you've not been twavellin' without tickets, deah boys?"

"Not at all."

"Then it will cost you—"

"Nothing," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I weally fail to see how that can be, Tom Mewwy."

"Easy enough. We borrowed the tin, and we are going send the bill in to you."

Arthur Augustus jumped,
 "To me?"
 "Certainly."
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
 "You see, as this journey was undertaken on your behalf, you naturally have to allow expenses. We charge nothing for our time."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry with a withering look.

"You—you charge nothin' for your time?"
 "Nothing at all," said Tom Merry generously. "Blake will make out the bill for the fares, and you can settle up when you get another fiver from your governor."

"I should uttaly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."
 "Very well, if you insist upon evading your liabilities, we shall post you up as a defaulter," said Blake.

"Me—as a defaultah!"
 "Certainly. We shall shove your name up in the hall and the common-room as a defaulter, a fellow who's not to be trusted again by anybody."

"Weally, Blake—"
 "And then, of course, you'll have the grace to change out of our study, as it will be impossible for us to continue the acquaintance of a defaulter."

"You—you uttaly wottah!"
 "Think it over," said Blake, with a wave of the hand. "It's a bad system to start evading your just debts at so early an age."
 "I—I—I—"

Words failed Arthur Augustus. The express tore on through the dusky September evening.

"By Jove, I shall be glad to get in and get some supper," said Blake, as the train drew near to Wayland Junction.

Tom Merry laughed.
 "We shall be late for supper, I'm afraid—even if we're allowed any after missing afternoon and evening roll-call like this."

"Oh, when we explain—"
 "Gussy and Skimmy will get a licking. We shall get lines as thick as the leaves in Vallombrosa."
 "Gussy and Skimpole will write out our lines, of course."
 "Bai Jove—"

"That's only fair," assented Tom Merry. "Hallo, here's Wayland!"

It was the last change. The local train bore them to Rylcombe, and they walked to the school. Taggles grinned anticipatively as he let them in. Mr. Railton was waiting for them in the School House. They explained, but their explanation did not seem to wholly satisfy the House master that their conduct had been highly judicious and exemplary. At all events, he took down his cane.

"I am afraid that an infraction of the college rules like this must be severely dealt with," he said. "I shall give each of you four strokes, and D'Arcy and Skimpole twelve. Hold out your hand, Merry."

"Weally, Mr. Wailton—"
 "Silence!"

Tom Merry & Co. went through the punishment with fortitude. They had risked it, and when it came they were not the fellows to complain. Skimpole was the only one to do that, but it made no difference. He had his twelve cuts all the same, and he was wriggling as he left the study.

"And now you will go to bed," said Mr. Railton. "Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said the juniors, as cheerfully as they could. And they went upstairs.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, "he laid it on that time; Never mind; I wouldn't care if only we weren't late for supper. I'm famished."

"So am I," said Blake. "Got anything in your study?"

"Not a thing."
 "Then it's lucky we have in ours. We had a jolly spread in the cupboard, and as we weren't in to tea, it hasn't been touched. By Jove, that reminds me; we've missed that little joke on Fatty Wynn. He was coming over to tea to-day, you know, and we were going to work off on him the same wheeze that Reilly played on Gussy. Never mind, it will keep till to-morrow. Come on!"

The juniors quietly entered Study No. 6, and Blake lighted the gas. They had had nothing to eat since leaving Yarmouth, and they were very hungry. Blake looked surprised as he glanced at the table. The cloth was spread, and the crockery was there, and there were plain signs that someone had been feeding.

"Why, what the—who the—"
 "Somebody's been having tea here!" exclaimed Digby.
 "My hat!" said Herries, "where's our grub?"

Blake tore open the door of the cupboard. It was empty! Every single article of diet had been transferred to the table and consumed—with the exception of a portion of a loaf and a fragment of butter and jam. Pies and sausages and ham, eggs and bacon, marmalade tarts and cream puffs, and the big currant cake which was to have lasted Study No. 6 a week or more—all, all were gone!

"My—my hat!"
 "Here's a note for you on the table!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
 "A—a note!"

"Yes, and it's in Fatty Wynn's writing."
 Blake mechanically took the note and read it. Then he gave a whoop. Fatty Wynn's note was brief, but to the point.

"Dear Blake,—I came over to tea, as you asked me, and found that you were gone out with Herries and Dig. I didn't want to disappoint you, so I had my tea all the same. Don't think I feel neglected at all. I suppose you had important business on hand, and hadn't time to leave a note for me. I have had a ripping tea, and thank you very much. I have enjoyed myself thoroughly.

"Yours very sincerely,
 "WYNN OF THE NEW HOUSE."

The juniors looked at one another as Blake re-read that note aloud. Tom Merry broke into a chuckle.

"The joke seems to have worked out the wrong way, doesn't it?" he remarked. "I say, Blake, old chap, you're playing with edged tools when you invite Fatty Wynn to tea. Good-night."

And the Terrible Three, hungry as they were, chuckled as they went off to their dormitory. Blake cast a last look over the table.

"All the fault of that utter ass, Gussy!" he grunted.
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Oh, get to bed!" said Blake.

And they did. And never was a breakfast-hour more eagerly welcomed than it was by eight juniors the next morning in the School House at St. Jim's!

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Night on the Moor.

A YORKSHIRE moor with a bleak wind blowing over it is not exactly the place where one would choose to spend an autumn night; and David Steele, turning up the collar of his coat, shuddered a little as he looked round on the bare, desolate space to which his long day's tramp had brought him.

He was dog-tired, and—though even to himself he sturdily denied the fact—more than a bit homesick; as it is no disgrace for a boy of fifteen to be when, for the first time in his life, he had left the little North-country village which had been home to him for all his days.

It was more than a boy's desire to see the wider world—stern necessity itself—that had brought David Steele away from the little farmstead which had been his father's property, and his grandfather's before him. A succession of bad years had depreciated the value of the land; and when a fever had carried off John Steele, after only a few days' illness, debt and mortgage had claimed nearly all he had left behind him, and his widow and child found themselves practically penniless.

Mrs. Steele, a capable North-country woman of the best type, lost little time in repining. Within a week of her husband's death she had obtained a situation as laundrywoman in the house of one of the neighbouring gentry; and the old home being broken up, it only remained to find employment for David. There was little opening for an ambitious lad in quiet Thorpe Western, and the boy soon decided to try his fortune in Wrexborough—that busy centre where work could not long be lacking to one who was willing to put his shoulder to the wheel.

Thus it came to pass that Mrs. Steele parted one morning from her son; and, having tied up his little bundle of carefully-mended clothes with her trembling fingers, pressed into his hand the few shillings that were all that remained to her.

Those shillings were so few in number that a railway ticket to Wrexborough would have absorbed them nearly all, leaving little for the board and lodging that must be paid for until work was obtained. David decided, therefore, to tramp the thirty or forty miles that lay between Thorpe Western and his destination, economising his little hoard for use at Wrexborough. To a sturdy country boy a day or two in the open was nothing to be afraid of; and, in fact, the first half of his journey passed enjoyably enough. On the second day, however, fortune was less favourable. An officious rustic policeman discovered him in the early morning asleep under a rick, and David only escaped arrest by the fleetness of his heels.

Nor was this his only misadventure. When the road entered the moorland country, where it was possible to tramp for miles without meeting a soul, he took a wrong turning, and went so badly astray that, before he reached a house whose inhabitants set him right again, he had added six or seven miles to the length of his journey. Thus, when darkness fell, instead of having arrived at Wrexborough, he was still making his way along the moorland road, weary, sore, and not a little dispirited, and, as far as he could guess, some four or five miles yet from his destination—supposing, that is to say, that he had not again wandered off the right track in the darkness!

The prospect was a cheerless one. The wind was beginning to rise, and flying clouds from time to time obscured the face of the moon. Utterly tired out, David longed only to find some sheltered place into which he could creep until morning.

Suddenly a roar and a rattle broke through the night. Two fiery points showed themselves, like glowing eyes, against the darkness; and then, with a trail of scattered sparks and shining steam, a train rushed across the moor.

The sight was a welcome one to David. He knew that his road must strike the railway this side of Wrexborough—the

passing train assured him, therefore, that he was going in the right direction. Another half-mile, and, too weary to drag himself a step further, he had reached the foot of the railroad embankment.

A clump of dwarf bushes growing in the shelter of the slope offered some little shelter against the night wind; and, sitting down beneath them, David drew out all that remained to him of his day's provisions—a thick slice of home-made bread, into which he was glad enough to set his teeth. Almost at his feet ran the black, sluggish water of a canal, which at this point intersected the railway, the track being carried over it by an arched stone bridge.

Too worn out to take much note of his surroundings, David had barely swallowed his last mouthful of crust when water, sky, and moor began to swim in an incoherent mist before his eyes; and, curling himself up on the short, healthy turf, he slept as soundly as—a weary boy.

An hour or two passed, and still he slept, indistinguishable from the shadow in which he lay—and then he began to dream.

He dreamed that his mother was standing over him, telling him to get up, and that as he did not obey, she tapped him smartly on the cheek.

"Don't do it, mother!" he muttered drowsily.

But again the blow was repeated—only this time it felt like a stone dropping on to his face.

He opened his eyes.

They fell, not upon the mother of his dreams, but upon the sky above him; but there was no mistake about the stone. A little shower of stones and gravel was pattering down the smooth slope of the embankment; and it was doubtless some of these which had first entered into his dream and then awakened him.

As he raised himself upon his elbow, David perceived whence they had come. Outlined against the cloudy sky, on the top of the embankment, some few feet above him, stood the figure of a man. He it was, no doubt, who, in scrambling up to his present position, had dislodged those loose stones which had awakened the boy.

A desire to avoid a second adventure like that of the day before with the policeman kept David quiet; and he lay without moving a finger, trusting that the sheltering shadow of the bushes would hide him from the eyes of the now-comer, should that new-comer by an unlucky chance prove to be a minion of the law.

He started involuntarily, however, when, as it seemed from just behind him, a hushed and impatient voice asked eagerly:

"Well, is it all clear?"

"Yes; all clear. Not a soul in sight—there never is at this time of night," returned the man on the embankment.

"Come down then," went on the voice, whose owner was completely screened from David's view by the intervening bushes. "Come down, then, and help me to carry him up. Don't dawdle, man. We've barely five minutes to do the job in if the eleven-nine's up to time—and it always is. Hurry up!"

With something that sounded to David's ears like a muttered curse, the man addressed turned and descended the slope of the embankment.

"It's a fair night's job we're doing," he said surlily, "and one that'll hang us both if we're caught at it!"

"Certainly—if we are caught at it," came the cool reply. "Don't alarm yourself unnecessarily, my friend; for my own sake I have taken every precaution for your safety—so make no more objections, and catch hold of his feet. That's right! Now—"

And from behind his screen of darkness, David heard the sound of something heavy being dragged along, and then, as it seemed, hoisted to the ground.

What that something was he could hardly doubt after the words which had fallen upon his ears; and the boy's flesh

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crept at the thought that, separated from him by only a few feet, stood two men who had committed a murder, bearing with them the corpse of their victim. Less at the idea of his own personal danger, should they discover that they had a witness to their guilt, than at the horror of the situation on that lonely moorland, he trembled from head to foot. Crouching down to the earth, he peered round the bush with staring eyes and open mouth as the two men came into sight, staggering up the slope.

Their words had not misled him. It was indeed a man that they carried between them—a man upon whose hanging head the moon sent a shaft of light before she was again veiled by drifting clouds—a man who, if not dead, was so in all seeming—a helpless log in the hands of his captors. What were they about to do with the body, wondered David, as he listened to the excited beating of his own heart, fearful lest its loudness should betray him.

Slowly, and with one or two stumbles, the two men gained the top of the slope. One of them, the boy saw, carried a dark lantern suspended from his wrist; but of neither of their faces could he catch a glimpse. At the top they paused and laid down their ghastly burden; and one of them, bending over it with the lantern, seemed to be carefully adjusting the body in some particular position.

"Right!" said the latter at last, rising from his recumbent attitude, "he will be disfigured all right, and no trace of that workman-like blow of yours will be left! You can set your mind at ease! If the coroner's jury don't return a verdict of suicide whilst of unsound mind, I'm a Dutchman!"

At the cool indifference of the tone, David shuddered; it appeared to have something of the same effect upon the speaker's companion—the man whom David had first seen—for his reply was muttered in low, uneasy tones.

"Nonsense!" came the answer promptly. "I gave you your choice of helping me in this job, or—well, you know which alternative you took! And now we must get out of the way. The train is all but due"—he drew out his watch as he spoke and held it to the lantern—"and we don't want the moon to flash out and show us as it passes! Come along!"

And the next moment, to David's intense relief, the two disappeared from sight over the railway track. For a short time the wind brought the sound of their voices towards him; then silence succeeded—a silence broken, an instant later, by the hooting whistle of a locomotive and the nearing rattle of an express train!

It was the eleven-nine!

CHAPTER 2. The Rescue.

The sound brought David to his feet!

Until that moment, suddenly awakened from sleep as he had been, he had scarcely realised that what had been passing before him was not part of some terrifying dream; but the hoot and clamour of the train roused him to the consciousness that a life might depend upon his promptitude!

Already two yellow lights were in sight, swinging smoothly round a curve, and the ground was beginning to vibrate beneath the tread of the iron horse!

It was no time to weigh the risk of whether or no he might be seen by the pair who believed that they had successfully accomplished their nefarious work. Up the bank he sprang, his eyes on the advancing train—too intently perhaps, for, just as he reached the top of the smooth, green slope, his foot slipped, and with a crash he rolled over and nearly fell to the bottom again!

He was on his feet in an instant, but a cry burst from his lips as he saw what even that short delay had cost him! Up the bank he rushed again like a madman to where, face downwards on the permanent way, a man's body lay out-stretched, indifferent to the fate approaching nearer with every feverish breath of the panting, rushing monster. Would he be in time, or would he himself be crushed beneath the wheels in a vain attempt to save a body that was, perhaps, already extinct?

How he accomplished the task he had set himself, David never knew! He was conscious only of a sensation that a train was leaping at him—of a superhuman effort—of a rush and a roar as he fell at the side of the track over the helpless body he had dragged from the path of the locomotive—of a feeling of dizzy exhaustion—and then of a wonder that he was still alive and unscathed! Trembling, he pulled himself up on to his knees and looked down at the face of the man who lay still as death before him. Even in the dim light he could see that it was that of a young man—a gentleman, judging by his dress, with a dark mark on his forehead the blood was slowly oozing; for the moment, David imagined that he was, indeed,

As he laid his hand on his chest, however, he felt a violent movement of the heart.

The man lived—he had not risked his life for him in vain! David felt a throb of relief at the thought!

It was followed by one of terror.

On the breeze, there came towards him the sound of voices that proceeded from the other side of the railway

—the direction in which the would-be assassins had disappeared from sight!

David's heart stood still! Were they returning? He had not counted upon an eventuality fraught with such peril both to the wounded man and to himself. Yet what more likely than that, having seen the train go by, they should come back to convince themselves by ocular proof of the success of their hideous plan?

He held his breath and listened!

The voices drew nearer!

What was he to do?

To remain by the unconscious man would only be to involve himself uselessly in the same danger; and yet all the manliness in the boy revolted at the idea of finding an easy refuge for himself by flight into the darkness, leaving the man whom he had just rescued from one form of death exposed to another! For what doubt could there be that the scoundrels, finding that their first plan had miscarried, would fall back on some second and more deadly expedient? All these thoughts passed through David's mind with the rapidity of lightning, as he cast a despairing glance around over his limited horizon of bleak, black moor.

Suddenly, as his eyes rested upon the dark outline of the railway arch, an idea flashed into his brain—a plan that to be successful must be acted upon without the delay of a single instant.

Seizing the wounded man round the body, he dragged him to the edge of the embankment; then, grasping him tightly so as not to allow him to roll violently down, he began to slide down the slope, guiding his inanimate burden as noiselessly as he could towards the bottom, which he reached in safety, just as a couple of figures appeared against the sky-line above him. In another moment they would arrive at the actual spot where they had left their victim, and make the momentous discovery that he had disappeared. After the first shock of amazement, they would doubtless search every yard of the moor to which the wounded man could by any possibility have crawled—for they would certainly believe that, contrary to their expectations, he had recovered his senses in time to creep out of the way of the on-coming train. Thus, David hoped, that the refuge for which he was making might remain undetected.

That refuge—that hiding-place—was beneath the arched stone bridge that carried the railway across the canal. Under it, the water lay black as pitch. Could he once attain the shelter of that inky shadow, he and his unconscious charge might well hope to pass unseen. But the success or failure of this plan depended not only on the utmost noiselessness but on the depth of the canal at that point; for, the towing-path being on the opposite side, he could only attain the shelter of the archway by wading, should the water be shallow enough to allow him to do so.

Cautiously he lowered himself from the bank. Even at the side the water almost reached his neck. It was deathly cold, too, and the boy shivered at the chill it struck through him. Then came the most difficult part of the task—to drag the helpless man into the water without arousing attention by a splash.

Fortune favoured him. A sudden cry from above showed that the pair on the embankment had realised that the wounded man had vanished. As their voices rose in a hurried interchange of mingled anger, alarm, and astonishment, David, taking advantage of the noise they made, drew his companion's body towards him and literally rolled it into the water, supporting the unconscious head on his shoulder, so that the face was not submerged. A slight, convulsive movement showed that the chill of the canal was aiding returning consciousness; and, fearful lest some sound from the pale lips should betray him, David began to wade as quickly as was compatible with absolute silence towards the arch.

The distance was only a few yards; but besides the necessity of keeping his companion's face above the surface, and avoiding the slightest splash or ripple, David found his difficulties increased at every step by the gradual deepening of the water. Before he had gone half the distance it nearly reached his chin; then, only by throwing back his head could he keep his mouth clear. A foot or two from the arch he paused, hesitating as to whether he dared venture upon another step. How in that moment he longed to be able to swim!

To remain where he was, was to court discovery so soon as the moon should once again be free of the clouds which, for the time, obscured her light. In that case he would be plainly visible to anyone on the bank. Perhaps the depth would not increase, he thought, as he looked despairingly round for something to cling to. He saw nothing, however. The banks of the canal were faced at that point with smooth stone, and, as they approached the arch, rose sharply to a considerable height above the water. There was no help for it.

With a beating heart, David made another step forward; and as he did so, whether because the bottom of the canal shelved suddenly, or because he lost his footing, he felt the water close over his head.

It is said that drowning is an easy death; and so it may be in its later stages. But the first moment of immersion, when the water rushes into ears and mouth, is a horrible one. It was only chance that saved David and his companion from drowning under the black waters beneath the archway. Fortunately, as the boy's hand shot out above the water, in an agonised attempt to grip the surface of the wall, it came in contact with the stem of one of those hardy plants which, here and there, had rooted themselves between the brickwork. Round this his fingers closed with the despairing grasp of the drowning; and as, trembling and gasping, he shook the water from his eyes, he found that his plunge had been so far fortunate that it had brought him to the goal he desired. He was now just inside the archway, and sheltered from view by the opaque blackness of its shadow. Instinct rather than design had

"Not a sign of him!" came to David's strained ears. "Seems to me he's been clean spirited away!"
 "Nonsense!" was the sharp rejoinder. "I tell you he must be close at hand. He was as good as dead when we left him; and if he did recover his senses—as I suppose he must have done, incredible as it seems—he could not possibly have staggered more than a few yards. We shall stumble over him in a minute!"
 "Your fine plan don't look quite so clever as it did half an hour ago," came the growling reply.
 "You mean that crack on the skull of yours was not quite such a neat one as we thought!"
 "It's no good quarrelling over whose fault it is; he's got away," retorted the first speaker sulkily. "The fact is, he's gone. I'm not particular sorry myself, and I should think

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prompted him to cling to his helpless burden, and, for the moment, they were safe.

For the moment only!

Even supposing they were not discovered, how long could he cling to the frail root, which seemed scarce strong enough to support the strain upon it? How long would it be before his chilled fingers slipped, and he sank back, struggling, into the black depths, from which he had just emerged?

Meanwhile, the sounds of hurried and agitated voices came to him through the darkness—now nearer, now farther off, as the pair, who had been so strangely and unexpectedly balked of their purpose, moved up and down, pursuing their ineffectual search. Gradually their tones became more distinct, and at length first one and then another figure appeared on the bank of the canal, actually only a few feet from where their prey was hidden!

the best thing we can do is to make ourselves scarce likewise. How do we know that someone didn't come along, find him lying there, and help him off the line?"

"You're a fool! Even if that was the case, do you think he would be in a condition to run away, or that anyone else could run with a man on his back? When the moon was out just now, I had a good look from the embankment, and there wasn't a soul in sight, not a bush for one man, let alone two, to hide behind!"

"Well, then, maybe he has fallen into the canal!"
 "Possibly," returned the other thoughtfully. "In fact I very probably that is what has happened. Supposing that I recovered his senses enough to move out of the way of the train, it is quite likely that, in doing so, he might roll down the slope and fall into the water. In that case—"

(Continued on page 26.)

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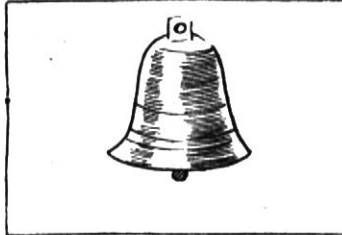
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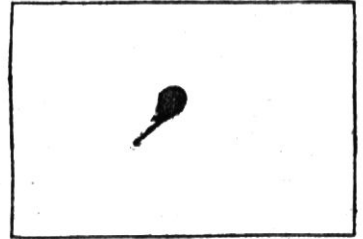
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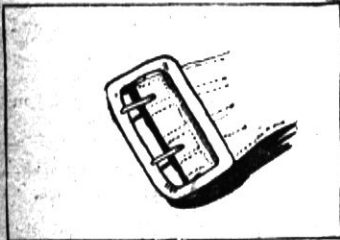
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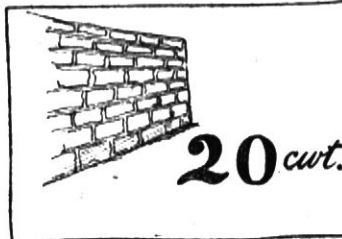
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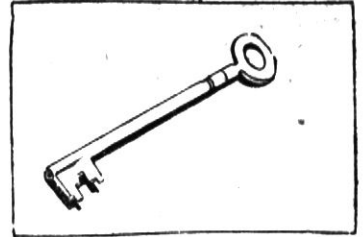
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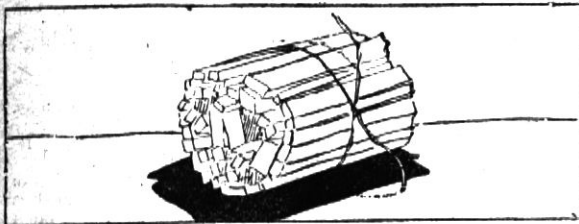


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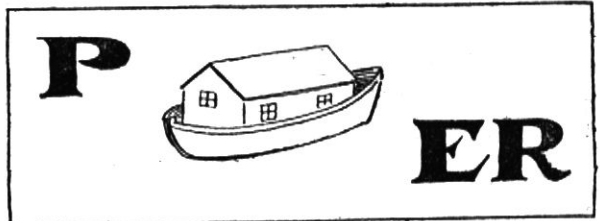


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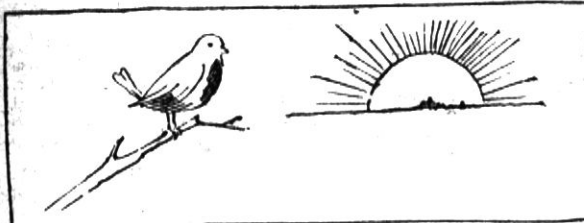
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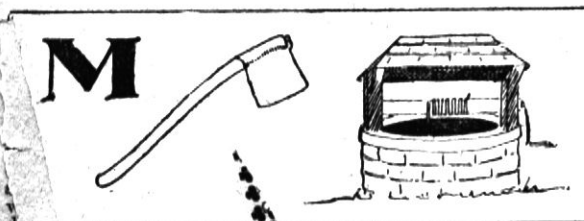
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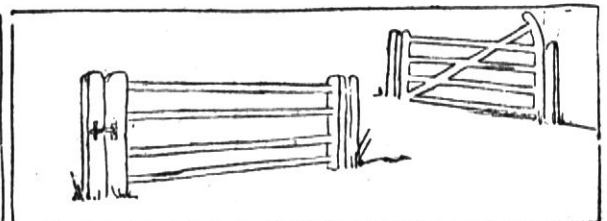
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KEEP THESE PICTURES BY YOU UNTIL NOTICE IS GIVEN TO SEND IN.

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(Continued from page 24.)

"In that case you've got what you wanted, and we may as well be off!"

"I shall have got what I wanted, certainly—certainly, my friend. But you forget that there will be disagreeable suspicions of foul play to beware of. William Scott might fall into the canal on his way home, without the police feeling called upon to interfere; but when they see that William Scott has a big bruise upon his forehead, they will begin to talk about murder. If your theory is right, we shall have to be careful—very careful indeed!" he concluded, with a jarring laugh. "Don't leave that stick of yours about, for instance; it is well known, probably, and there is sure to be a bloodstain on the knob!"

Some sudden impulse of horror at his words made the man whom he addressed raise the stick, as if to fling it from him into the canal; but his companion caught his uplifted arm before he could accomplish his purpose.

"Idiot!" he said. "Talk of a man tying a rope round his own neck! The first thing that will be looked for will be that stick; and where easier to find it than floating down the water of the canal?"

Not a word of this conversation had been lost upon David so close to him were the two men, whose figures and movements, though not their faces, he could plainly distinguish as they peered around them, now and again bending to gaze into the sluggish water at their feet.

If only they would go, one source of peril, at least, would be removed. Once they were out of hearing, he would, at any rate, dare to shout for help. And, from the drift of their words, he was not without hope that they were about to give up the search—none too soon, for every instant the grasp of his chilled fingers upon the tiny plant that alone stood between him and death was growing weaker and weaker.

For a moment or two after the last speaker had concluded there was silence; and then a brilliant streak of light flashed out on the water.

David's heart stood still. He had forgotten the bullseye lantern carried by the man whom he mentally dubbed the leader of the two scoundrels. If it should be turned in his direction!

Fascinated, he watched the progress of the yellow line as it travelled slowly from one bank to the other, resting for an instant, now here, now there, and then passing on again. Nearer and nearer it came, till it stopped almost at the entrance of the archway. A slight movement of the guiding hand, and its light would fall full upon him, and—

Ah!

A blinding glare that dazzled his eyeballs—a shout that told him he was discovered at last—then the light had revealed his own presence and that of the senseless man whose white face rested upon his shoulder!

The boy's terrified eyes were raised in mute appeal for mercy to the two dark figures—so close to him that, by leaning forward from the towing-path, they could almost have touched him with their hands.

Surely they could not be so utterly devoid of mere human pity as not to relent at the thought of consigning two of their fellow-creatures to death, when an outstretched arm might save them!

He was soon to learn upon what small foundation such hopes were built.

The man who held the lantern snatched the stick from his companion's hand, knelt down, and, leaning forward as far as he dared, aimed a stroke with it at the boy's upturned face!

The blow did not reach its mark. Involuntarily David jerked himself backwards to avoid it, and, in doing so, snapped the slender stalk to which he had been clinging. The cry that rose to his lips was choked beneath the waters of the canal!

Down he went; and as he did so he felt two arms flung tightly around his neck.

The sudden immersion had brought back consciousness to the wounded man. He awoke to life, only to find himself struggling for it in the water; and instinctively his arms closed about David in the terrible grip of the drowning.

Even had the boy been able to swim, and swim well, he would have been utterly powerless in that hold—the fierce, unreasoning clasp of a drowning man. Locked together, the two were swept through the arch, and out into the open water beyond.

Meanwhile, with a grim smile upon his lips, David's assailant had risen to his feet, and stood peering down into the black depths and flashing the light from side to side of the arch. His companion had covered his face with his hands and turned away; but he himself stood, without moving a muscle, even when a swirl of the oily water and a hand protruding for a second marked the spot where two human beings were sinking into eternity.

Then, closing his lantern, he turned away.

"Come along!" he said curtly.

And, followed by his companion, who said no word in reply or remonstrance, he proceeded with rapid steps across the moor.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Introducing Micky Jones.

If John Jones's fat grey horse had not suddenly developed an unseasonable lameness one September afternoon, this history would never have been written.

The old grey was drawing the barge Annie May along the canal "five miles from anywhere," as Mr. Jones wrathfully expressed it, when it unexpectedly fell dead-lame.

Mr. Jones was annoyed. He showed his annoyance by boxing the ears of his son Micky, a usual proceeding with him when things went wrong. Micky gave vent to his sense of injury in a plaintive howl that appeared to afford his parent some satisfaction. At any rate, by the time Micky's howls had subsided into sobs, he had come to a decision.

"I'm going to take the grey into Mortcombe to see what's the matter with it," he said, sternly eyeing his offspring, who sat in the fore-part of the barge wiping his eyes with the sleeve of a decrepit coat. "It's only a couple of miles over the moor, and there's a farrier there I know. Bless if I can find out what's wrong with the animal. However, we can't work him like that, and I expect I'll have to leave him there and get another beast for this trip. Anyway it'll be too late to start again this evening; so, as the landlord of the Fox and Grapes at Mortcombe is an old pal o' mine, I expect I'll put up there for the night, and leave you in charge of the boat. You hear what I'm a-saying?"

"Yes, dad, I hear," replied Micky, giving a fine polish to his dirty face with the coat-sleeve.

Mr. Jones blew a cloud of smoke from his pipe as he rose and prepared to depart.

"If I was you," he said pleasantly, "I wouldn't leave the Annie May not for a minute. I'd stop here and do my dooty a-looking after her, as my father told me to. Because if you don't, you imp," he continued, with a sudden change of tone "your father'll know how to do his dooty by you to-morrow morning with the tickler!"

Micky shuddered. The tickler was a short ash-stick that always stood conveniently at the foot of his father's bed-place.

"I'll stop aboard, dad," he said meekly.

"You'd better!" roared Mr. Jones, shaking his fist warningly in his son's face. "And when you feel inclined to do anything what you know you oughtn't, why, think of the tickler, and then you won't! See?"

With this piece of advice, he stepped ashore, and, taking the grey horse, soon disappeared along the towing-path.

Micky watched him out of sight, and then heaved a sigh of relief. As may have been gathered from the above conversation, the relations between father and son were not altogether ideal. Mr. Jones's principal theory regarding the education of boys being a liberal use of the stick, especially when he had been spending a convivial evening.

As long as there was any possibility of his father being in sight, Micky obeyed orders and remained aboard; but when the grey horse and its master had vanished for a full ten minutes, he arose, with a grin, and went blackberrying on the moor.

The blackberries were plentiful, and he returned to the barge towards evening with a smeared mouth and a plentiful load as well. The latter he proceeded to stew, after a peculiar fashion of his own, on the little stove in the cabin. The fastidious might have fought shy of Micky's supper, but the person chiefly concerned found it excellent.

"Wish the old man 'ud leave me in charge every day," he said to himself, as he laid down the well-scraped dish.

He cast about for further enjoyment before he turned in. Unluckily, his eye fell upon one of his father's pipes. The sense of emancipation was strong upon him, and he resolved to try it.

Mr. Jones's tobacco was powerful, and his pipe badly wanted cleaning. Micky took a few pulls, and wished he hadn't. His essay in manliness came to an abrupt end, and he crawled into bed feeling rather shaky.

Micky was a sound sleeper. The rising wind did not trouble him at all, as it ought to have done, seeing that he had neglected to make the barge fast to the bank, with the result that she presently began to swing out into the canal.

By and by, the wind catching her, drifted her round a little, and her nose grounded in the soft mud under the bank of the canal. The natural result was that, her bows being fast, her stern swung gradually round until it touched the opposite bank, where, too, stuck, and the Annie May lay right across the canal a little below the railway arch, effectually blocking navigation if there had been any to block!

And this was how it happened that Mr. Jones's absence his son's carelessness saved two lives.

For David's senses had almost left him—he was sinking into nothingness—when his companion's head grazed the end of one of the arms that had been clutching him so, relaxed its hold and shot upwards; and then the man himself drawn up to the surface, and his lungs were filled with blessed draught of air.

(An extra long instalment of this splendid next Thursday. Please give this copy of the Library to your chum so that he may read opening chapters.)

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE BOY DETECTIVES."

A Splendid T
Tom Merry

CONCLUSION.

JOE

A SPLENDID TALE OF CIRCUS LIFE.

By S. CLARKE HOOK

"I sought an interview with your uncle," went on Mr. Mackie to Joe, "and arranged that he should call at this office on the following day. He never came, and subsequently I learnt that he had sailed for South America, and on making further inquiries I learnt that he had taken all that remained of your money with him."

"Well, it is all for the best," said Joe. "He is never likely to trouble me again, and I don't care about the money. And it is better to know that you have earned your own living, than that your father had to work hard to make it for you. I can always get a decent screw with Rubby; in fact, I am going to accept the rise he offers me, now that we are all square."

"You seem to overlook the fact that it was through your own brave action that we were able to get that money, Joe," said Rubby.

"And you appear to overlook the fact that it was through me that your circus was burnt down. I don't believe Muerte would have committed the vile deed had he not hoped to catch me in the fire."

"Well, what I want to explain is the history of your uncle," said Mackie. "When near the east coast of South America they were caught in a heavy storm, and your uncle, who was on deck, was swept overboard by a heavy sea and drowned. It is supposed that he had the money on his person, for nothing was found in his belongings. I learnt this through the British Consul, and the knowledge has only just reached me."

"Well, it was a sad fate," exclaimed Joe, "but I should be a hypocrite to pretend that I feel grief at his loss. Of course, I regret to hear it, but no one knows how brutally he treated me during the whole of my early life. However, that is all forgiven now, although, of course, it can never be forgotten. The loss of the money I do not mind."

"Well, young man," exclaimed the old lawyer, "I am glad you look at it in that light. I know that you are a brave fellow, and saved Rubby's life. He told me so."

"Did he tell you that he had saved me from a terrible death?"

"No, he did not tell me that."

"Just as I expected. All the same, he did so."

"Well, that is as it should be. Now, Rubby, I believe you want to speak to the lad."

"Yes, Joe," exclaimed Rubby. "You know without my telling you all the use you have been to me in the circus. We have a splendid paying concern now, and if it had not been for you I certainly never could have found the money to restart. Well, we have paid off every penny of the thousand pounds Mr. Moss advanced, and I feel certain we have surprised that gentleman, because he never expected a halfpenny back. We have paid Bunting his money, and I am very thankful for that, because he is a downright good fellow. Well, we have lived comfortably during these three years, and I think we have enjoyed life. You see, Mr. Mackie, we both take a deep interest in the business, and we are always scheming to make it go. It is going now splendidly, and there is no reason why it should not continue to do so. Very well, this success I attribute to Joe, and it is only justice that he should participate in it. Joe, my dear fellow, I have decided to take you into partnership on equal terms. Mr. Mackie has drawn up the deed of partnership, and it now awaits our signatures. In future you and I share and share alike. We have stuck to each other through adversity; now I hope we shall stick to each other through affluence."

"My lad," exclaimed Mackie, as Joe was about to speak, "I may tell you that this is entirely Rubby's wish. I pointed out that you were young, and that if he gave you a fourth share for the commencement he would be acting generously; but he would not have it so, and I feel sure that you will be acting as he wishes to accept his munificent offer."

"Pooh, dear boy," exclaimed Rubby, "it's not so munificent, all said and done! There's a lot of hard work attached to it. Joe does not mind that, neither do I, when someone else does the hard work. What? But I mean Joe will work on, and so he is only really getting what he deserves. He will be able to save money and retire, or go into some other business. However, that is looking ahead, and there's not much sense in doing that in this world. Where do I go, dear boy?"

"Wait a moment," exclaimed the old gentleman, touching the bell, "we need witnesses. That's where you go. Put your proper name. Rubby won't do for legal documents, you know, and Rubino is far too high flown."

"There you are, and I feel rather proud of that signature."

"You have cause," said the lawyer quietly, "considering the document it is attached to. Now, Joe, you had better sign in full."

"But really—"

"It is useless, my lad. You are not of age, and so you can repudiate this hereafter if you like. Still, I have arranged that little matter, and the document will really be binding on both parties. Now, then!"

Joe signed, and then they took leave of the lawyer, while Rubby chatted away in the most lighthearted style.

"Rubby, old friend," exclaimed Joe, "I don't much believe in words, but indeed I'm very grateful."

"What nonsense! I'm jolly glad to have such a partner. Now let's come and have something to eat, and then I want to skip out and buy Vera her present."

They dined at a restaurant, and after the meal Rubby went out by himself for about an hour.

After that they had some coffee, as it was raining hard, and as the night grew later a mist arose.

"Suppose we skip along the Embankment," exclaimed Rubby. "This rain is not going to stop, but it isn't far to the hotel."

Joe agreed, and they strolled along in a very leisurely manner, considering that it was still raining, although now it was little more than a drizzle.

The Embankment looked very gloomy, and save for one spot by the steps it was practically deserted. Here a little crowd of about a score of people were assembled, and they were watching a form being borne up the steps by a waterman and two policemen.

The light from the lamp fell on the white, lifeless face. Joe forced his way through the crowd.

"Muerte!" he exclaimed.

"It is Muerte," added Rubby; "and muerte is the Spanish word for death."

"Do you know him, sir?" inquired one of the constables.

"Yes," answered Rubby. "How did it happen?"

"Suicide. He jumped over the parapet, and was carried away by the tide."

"Are you sure he is dead?"

"Yes; he fell headfirst on one of the steps. His neck is broken. Who was he?"

"A circus proprietor."

"Are you sure it is the same. This man seems to have been in a state of poverty. He is in rags, and has scarcely a shoe to his feet."

"It is the same," answered Rubby. "He failed. We have known him for many years. There is my name and address. You will find my friend, who is my partner, at the same address, if you require our evidence for identification. Good-evening!"

Then Rubby and Joe hurried away, but they remained in London for the inquest, and it was they who paid the cost of their lifeless enemy's funeral.

"It is a terrible ending, Joe," exclaimed Rubby, when all was over.

"Yes; and he does not appear to have had a friend in the world. It is strange that his foes should be the ones to have attended his funeral. I hope I would have helped him had I known his awful need."

"I'm certain you would have done so, Joe. So would I. Now, we must get back to the circus as soon as possible, because it won't do for us to neglect work now things are all comfortable. What we want to do is to make hay while the sun shines."

"Right you are, Rubby! I'm quite ready for work. We shall be able to open to-morrow."

It was late that night when they reached the circus, and the following morning Joe went into his partner's caravan for breakfast, which he prepared as he had done for years.

"Now, then, Rubby, up you get!" he cried; and, to his amazement, Rubby appeared from behind the curtain all dressed.

The breakfast was just over, and Joe had cleared the things away, when Vera entered the caravan.

"Look here, Rubby," she exclaimed, "I want you to let me out till this evening."

"Then you can't go. The girl is always wanting something. Who are you going with?"

"You said I couldn't go."

"Well, whom did you want to go with?"

"Three of the others girls. We are going to have a picnic."

"You have no food."

"Yes, we have. I have got a bottle of pickles, and—"

"Hark at the girl! Going to have a picnic with a bottle of pickles!"

"I have made a steak pie."

"It will kill them all."

"You are horrid, Rubby! It is a beautiful crust! Still, thanks for your consent. We shall be back in plenty of time for the performance."

"Here, come back! I didn't give my consent. Now, Vera, I bought you a little present in London yesterday. It is of no great value, and I do not feel at all sure that you will care for it."

"I'm sure to do so."

"Well, you may tell me that you do, but I can change it for another present if you don't like it. I made that stipulation with the shopman, and he said that if I sent it back he would send any other article you fancied more; so, you see, I do not want you to say you like it if you do not."

"All right, Rubby!"

"You see, Vera," exclaimed Rubby, feeling in his pockets, "I didn't know exactly what you would like, and—and—"

"Oh, I hope you haven't lost it, Rubby!"

"What?"

"I say, I hope you haven't lost it."

"No, but I— What?"

"I believe you have lost it, Rubby."

"No, it is here, and I don't quite know whether you will like it."

"Well, let me look at it, and then I will tell you."

"Will you tell me truthfully, Vera?"

"Yes! Honour bright!"

"It's of no particular value, and I would not like you to say you like it just to please me."

"Well, I will say I don't like it if I don't."

"I can change it, you know."

"So you said before!" exclaimed Vera.

"Do you know, Vera, I have taken Joe into partnership?"

"I did not know it, but I'm glad. I'll make him raise my screw straight away. Joe, I want another five shillings a week."

"Granted!" laughed Joe.

"Now, Rubby, will you show me that present? You are a dear, Joe! Am I to have the five shillings, Rubby?"

"Certainly! My partner has agreed to it. There is the present. What?"

Vera looked at Rubby in mute surprise, and he watched her closely. Her face turned white, and then the colour stole to her cheeks, and she lowered her pretty eyes.

"Why, Rubby, it is a wedding-ring!" she murmured.

"I know it is, Vera, and if you will accept it, you will have to accept the old showman with it."

"You are not old, Rubby."

"Well, I am not so young as I was twenty years ago."

"Neither am I."

"Vera," exclaimed Rubby, "I have loved you for a very long time, though I have not dared to tell you so. I know you like me, but that is a very different thing to love. You see, dear, I have brought you up since you were a tiny child, and no one could help liking you; therefore it is quite reasonable that you should like me. Don't go, Joe!"

"And I have always liked you, Rubby. I liked you till quite lately, and then—then—"

"What?"

"I knew that I loved you. Oh, Rubby, don't forget that Joe is watching you."

"You will be my wife, Vera?"

"Of course I will, dear, and I believe I shall have the kindest-hearted and best husband on the face of the earth."

"I know I shall have the dearest and prettiest wife."

"I congratulate you both!" cried Joe, grasping Rubby's hand. "You ought to have told me this, though, Rubby, before I signed the deed of partnership."

"No. I thought you would not sign. It is only right, Vera, that he should be my partner, for it was through him that the circus restarted."

"I am very glad. He saved your life, and that was more than enough."

"You have made me perfectly happy, Vera. Now, let me see, this is the engagement ring, diamonds and rubies, because you said once you liked them. There you are, little one. Just fits your dainty finger."

"If Joe isn't looking, you may kiss me again, Rubby," said Vera, smiling at him. "It is a lovely ring, and you are very, very kind. I sha'n't go to the picnic, now."

"Don't disappoint the girls, Vera."

"Then you and Joe come, too."

And so they did, and a very enjoyable day they had, for Rubby and Joe supplemented the fare with all sorts of good things. Then Rubby told them of his good fortune.

They got back in good time for the evening performance, and Rubby and Joe were talking about a few matters in the caravan when Vera tapped at the door.

"Oh, Rubby, dear," she exclaimed, "I want to know if I may ride the cream horse to-night. He is quite quiet now, and—"

"Bless the girl, whatever she is thinking of?" exclaimed Rubby. "You surely don't think that I'm going to allow you to ride in the circus again."

"Why not, Rubby?"

"Why not? Why, because you have worked far too hard all your life up to now, and I won't allow you ever to work again. Joe and I are pretty well off, I can tell you, Vera. My share of the profits will keep us in luxury, and that is how I want to see you live for the rest of your life. I am going to buy a nice little carriage for you, and we will drive the cream in that. No, Vera, not one more day's work for you, my dear. You have done with circus life, except as the wife of the proprietor. Of course, we shall have to travel about, but we can always put up at hotels. I'm going to work at the circus just the same as before, but you are not. You can amuse yourself driving about, and shopping. I know you are fond of that. You remember the hats, Joe?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes. And you are likely to remember one of them."

"Quite so. Oh, yes! Look here, Joe, you will have to be my best man. We will have a slap-up wedding, and such a cake, Vera!"

"But, Rubby dear, I really don't mind performing, and if Joe is going to do so, why—"

"That's quite a different thing, Vera—I mean—" began Joe.

"Nonsense, Joe!" exclaimed Vera. "Of course, you will always call me Vera, and so will all the girls. I won't be called anything else. If I don't perform, I want the performers to know that I am still their friend. All the same, if you don't want me to perform, Rubby, dear."

"I don't, and, what's more, I won't have it. I mean you to have a life of ease, now. No married woman should have to earn her living, and I will take particular care my wife does not. I shall want you to go to London to-morrow, Vera, so you had better take Mrs. Biggs, and she will help you to make purchases. You will have plenty of shopping to do the next three weeks. I don't know whether there will be any shopmen driven into the lunatic-asylum. Ha, ha, ha! Fancy Vera buying, say, a hundred pounds' worth of dresses and things, Joe. I'm going to put the banps up next Sunday, Vera, in case you change your mind, you know. What?"

"I didn't say anything, Rubby. I sha'n't change my mind."

"It would be nice to be married on Joe's birthday," observed Rubby, who knew that it was three weeks and three days hence. "May I fix that day, Vera?"

"Yes," answered Vera.


And so the day was fixed, and on Joe's birthday Rubby and Vera became man and wife.

And here we must take leave of Joe.

THE END.

There will be a splendid complete story of Tom Merry & Co. in next Thursday's GEM Library and also an extra long instalment of "A Pit Hero."

How do you do?



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Stories founded on fact are very often considered dry, despite the old adage to the effect that truth is stranger than fiction.

However this may be, I can promise you one thing; you will find next Thursday's tale of the chums a jolly good one. One that will not only interest but amuse.

The EDITOR.

P.S.—Don't forget that £1 a week for 13 weeks.

A WATCH FOR SKILL.



In the Central Square of the Diagram we have placed the figure 5. Arrange the figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9 in the remaining squares in such a manner that the columns add 15 up and down, across, and diagonally from corner to corner. If correct, and you carry out our simple conditions in accordance with the generous offer we shall send you, A **MAGNIFICENT WATCH** (Lady's or Gent's) will be sent to you entirely free of charge. Write your solution on a plain sheet of notepaper, with your name and address clearly written underneath. Enclose your solution and stamped addressed envelope for reply to **THE F. R. IRONMONGER CO.** (Dept. P.P.), Station Road, **LLESTON**.

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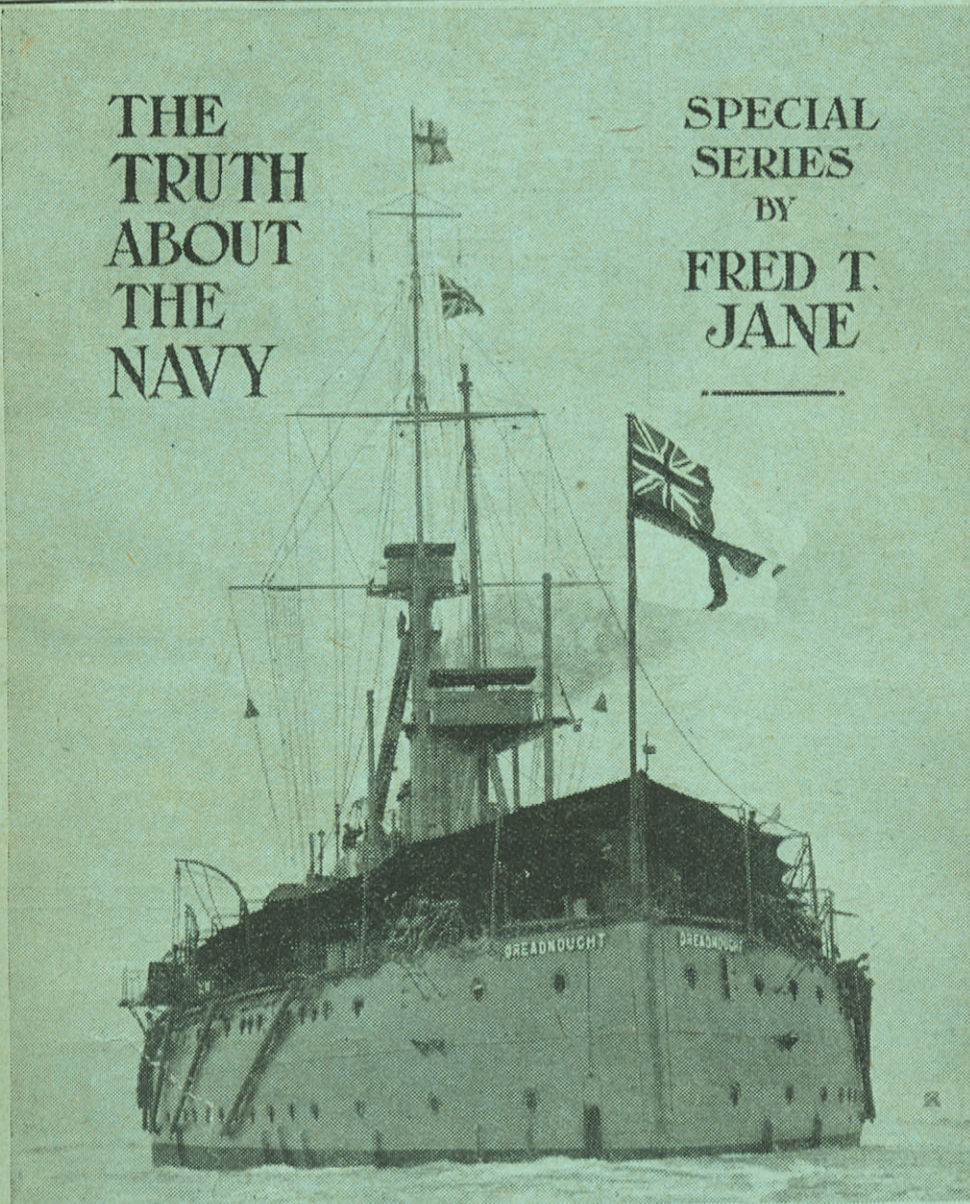


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