


Extra-Long School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

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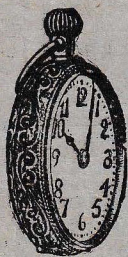
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A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by MARTIN Clifford.



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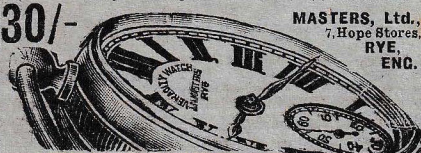
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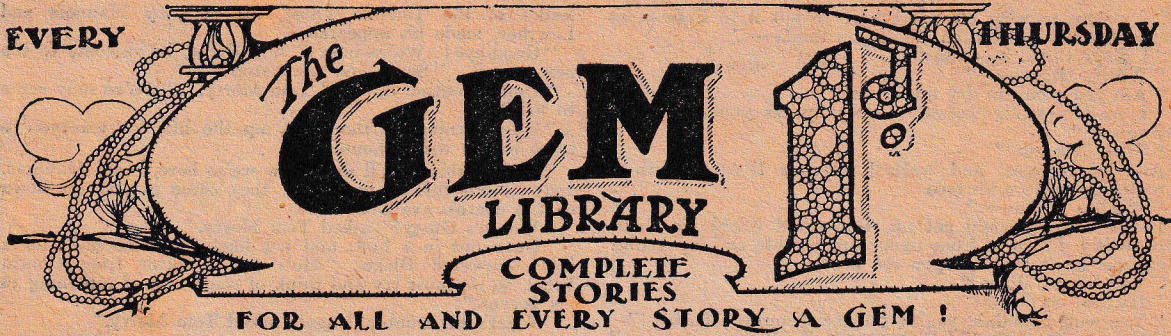


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A
Splendid Long, Complete
School Tale of
TOM MERRY & Co.
at St. Jim's.

— BY —
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Letter for Arthur Augustus.

SILENCE reigned in Study No. 6, in the Fourth-Form passage at St. Jim's—silence, that is, save for the scratch-scratch of four busy pens.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the four members of the coalition known throughout St. Jim's as Blake & Co., scribbled away furiously, with pursed lips and frowning brows.

To anyone familiar with the chums of the Fourth, such silence and such scribbling could only have one explanation—namely, impositions.

And impositions it was!

For the last few days, Blake & Co.'s behaviour, for some reason or other, had been positively lamblike.

As Blake virtuously declared, "Butter wouldn't have melted in their mouths."

But this morning, as if by common consent, the four had broken out, and had filled in the time that Mr. Lathom, the Form-master, thought to devote to English grammar, by ragging Mellish, the sneak of the Form.

The usually meek and mild little Form-master happened to be feeling somewhat less benevolent than usual that morning, and rather surprised the chums by doling out impositions with a freedom worthy of Mr. Linton, of the Shell, himself.

Consequently, by the end of morning classes, the four chums found their leisure hours already provided for in advance for some little time to come, and the weather not

being particularly inviting outside, a start had been made on the impots. immediately after dinner.

Scratch, scratch, scratch, went the four pens, and still silence reigned.

Suddenly Herries burst into a loud laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake laid down his pen, and stared at his chum hard.

"Hard luck!" he said compassionately. "Where does it hurt most?"

"You ass!" gasped Herries. "I was thinking of this morning. It really was too funny for words! I thought little Lathom would burst with wrath!"

"Yes, he certainly was ratty," said Blake thoughtfully. "But, really, it was rotten, because I'd only stuck a pin into Mellish—"

"Yaas, bai Jove!" put in D'Arcy. "And the cad actually had the audacity to tell Lathom that we had been torturing him the whole hour, whereas—"

"Whereas, we had only been torturing him for three-quarters of an hour," said Digby. "Beastly story-teller, I call him!"

"Well, let's dry up now, and get the beastly thing done," said Blake.

"Do you know, Blake," said D'Arcy, not heeding the other's remark, "it strikes me—"

"Something else will strike you, if you don't shut up!" said Blake warningly.

"Weally, Blake, pway allow me—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off. If I were to put it to Lathom as one gentleman to anothah, don't you think—"

"I don't think, so cease!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Are you going to dry up, or not?"

"I shall certainly wefuse to dwy up, as you so wudely express it."

"Then look out!"

And Blake rose, and walked towards D'Arcy, with a threatening look on his face.

"Weally, Blake—"

Before D'Arcy could get up, Blake had seized his chair, and swiftly drawn it from under him, thereby causing Arthur Augustus to sit heavily upon the floor.

"You bwute, Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wuff boundah, you've put me in quite a fluttah!"

"You don't say!" said Blake. "Well, I'll help you up, if you'll stop gassing!"

"I shall uttally wefuse your help," said D'Arcy, rising, and resuming his seat at the table, he went on with his work without another word.

It was a dull, dreary afternoon, and the occupants of Study No. 6 had determined to forego exercise for that day, and devote all their energies to the task before them—and it was no light one—not without many grumbles and reflections on the unreasonableness of matters in general, and more particularly of their Form-master.

A quarter of an hour elapsed before D'Arcy spoke again. He had apparently quite forgotten the events just related.

"Bai Jove, deah boys," he remarked, in a somewhat horrified tone of voice, "I've just discovered a blot of ink on my forefinger, and I weally cannot pwoceed with my work until it is wemoved!"

"Very interesting, no doubt," retorted Blake. "But I wish you could keep your jaw quiet for five minutes together."

"Weally, Blake, you are most distwessingly wude! And unless you immediately withdwaw your wemark with wewefence to my mouth, I shall be compelled to give you a most fearful thwashin'!"

"You fatheaded dummy!" broke in Herries impatiently. "Go and wash your grandmother, if you want to, but for goodness' sake stop talking, and let us get on with this beastly impot.!"

"Pway don't wefer to my welations in such a diswepsectful mannah, Hewwies, or—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I shall uttally wefuse—"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Gussy? because you'll get one in a remarkably short pace of time, if you're not careful!" said Blake warningly. "We're trying to work, you know!"

"I know, deah boys. But when a chap is all covered with ink— Ow!"

He broke off with a yell, as a large dictionary, accurately thrown by Digby, who had hitherto taken no part in the scene, caught him full in the chest.

So unexpected was the missile, that D'Arcy completely lost his balance, and fell backwards, catching his elbow a sounding thwack on his chair.

"You uttah boundah—"

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

"You cacklin' wuffians!" gasped D'Arcy, picking himself up and moving towards the door. "I shall wefuse to weward you as fwends any longer!"

He was just about to go out, when there was a knock at the door, and Binks, the School-House page-boy, stood on the threshold with a letter in his hand.

"Letter for you, sir," he said, offering it to D'Arcy.

"Many thanks, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, who, in moments of the greatest excitement, never forgot to be polite. "Pway accept this small wemunewation," he added, giving the grinning page-boy sixpence, in his usual generous manner. He glanced at the letter as he was going out, and, turning round, he said, "This is a letter fwom my Cousin Ethel," and was gone.

The three remaining partners of Blake & Co. looked at one another in dismay.

"You silly fathead, Dig!" exclaimed Blake.

"You dummy!" said Herries.

"Look here," began Digby wrathfully, "it was just as much your fault."

"No it wasn't!"

"Rats!"

"Oh, dry up!" put in Blake. "It's no use abusing one another. The question is, how shall we bring him round, because we must know what Cousin Ethel says. I'm sure it's got something to do with us."

"That's true!" said Herries.

At this moment, the door opened, and Tom Merry, the

leader of the Terrible Three, attended by Manners and Lowther, made his appearance.

"Good-bye! We're busy!" said Blake, in welcome to the newcomers. "Sorry you can't stop!"

"Don't mention it," said Tom Merry. "We've only come to tea."

"First turning on the right, up the lift, for tea—you've come to the wrong house!"

"Well, I think we'll stop, now we're here," said Manners, and without further invitation, they came in and sat down on the nearest available seats.

"Where's Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Gone out in a huff, and not likely to come back for a bit," answered Blake. "He's got a letter from Cousin Ethel, so we must try and think of some way of returning to his favour."

"What's his trouble?" again asked Tom Merry.

"That fathead Digby—" began Blake.

"Look here—"

"Chucked a dictionary at him, like the silly fathead he is, and—"

"Look out!" shouted Digby, leaping up from his chair, and hurling himself at Blake.

So violent was the concussion, that Blake's chair toppled over backwards, and came with a crash to the ground. A confused mass, with arms and legs sticking out here and there, was all that could be seen. When the two combatants had extricated themselves from the chair and from one another, they regarded each other fiercely.

"Well, of all the silly—"

"Of all the fatheaded—"

"I'm sure I've broken my arm!"

"I believe I've broken my neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see there's anything to laugh at, you hyenas!" said Blake, glaring at the amused onlookers wrathfully.

"Bai Jove, Blake! Do you find it more comfortable to wepose upon the floah, than on a chair?" remarked D'Arcy, coming into the room, looking as neat as ever, at that moment.

"Don't try and be funny, ass!" said Blake, rising hastily. Then, suddenly altering his tone, he said most affectionately, "My dear Gussy, you must make some allowance for Dig—he's not always responsible for his actions."

"Look here—" began Digby.

Blake winked at him, and proceeded.

"He wants to apologise for upsetting your dignity, by knocking you over with a dictionary."

"Weally, Blake, if he intends to apologise in that manner, I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Herries.

"I fail to perceive the cause of your mewwiment, Herries," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"I meant to say, Gussy dear," went on Blake, looking quite serious, and frowning at Herries, "that Dig. is awfully sorry he upset your dig. by knocking you over with a dictionary."

"Yes, my dearest Gus," put in Digby, grasping the situation, "I'm awfully sorry."

"Pway don't address me in such affectionate terms, Digby. But under the cires., I think I may accept your apology."

"Gussy, I'm overwhelmed!" sobbed Digby.

"Wats! Pway don't be absurd!"

"I've never been more serious in my life," protested Digby.

"Then the mattah may be said to be satisfactorily settled. What are these outsiders doing here?" asked D'Arcy, turning his monocle on the Terrible Three and surveying them coldly.

"Oh, we've just come in to tea!" said Tom Merry airily.

"Weally, Mewwy, I wegwet—"

"Don't! It's a bad habit—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We've got nothing to grumble at, at present," said Manners, "except that there isn't any tea yet."

"Weally, Manners—"

"Interesting letter, Gus?" suddenly Jack Blake remarked, in a most unconcerned way.

"To what lettah do you wefer, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy politely.

"The one Binks gave you a minute ago."

"And for which you paid sixpence," put in Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I fail to wemembah—"

"Oh, you old ass, Gussy, no wonder Binks brings up all your letters!"

"I wefuse to be called an old ass, and I can see no weason except his natural kindness—"

"His natural grandmother!" snorted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"



"I observes you is goin' to do yerselves well," said the tramp, "and has you hare so pressin', I don't mind 'aving a snack myself."

"Oh, stop your jaw, Herries! Anything in the letter, Gussy?" asked Blake again.

"Weally, Blake, it ought to be obvious to the meanest intellect—"

"I meant anything which might interest us?" said Blake, determined not to appear annoyed.

"I believe Cousin Ethel does mention some of you in her lettah, but—"

"Let's hear what she says."

"I was just pwepawing—"

"Well?" demanded Blake impatiently.

"Pway don't intewwupt, Blake! As I was sayin'—"

"Oh, hurry up!" said Digby impatiently.

"Come to the point!" added Herries.

"That is what I am endeavouwin' to do, if you would not continually intewwupt me!"

"Good! Let's hear it!"

"Read it out!"

"It concerns us all," went on D'Arcy.

"Why didn't you say so before?" demanded Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You giddy lunatic!"

"I wefuse—"

"Oh, hurry up and read it out!" said Digby impatiently.

"That is what I intend to do, deah boys, if you will only allow me."

"Good! Now, silence!" roared Blake.

"I wathah fancy myself as an owator."

"If the audience was deaf and dumb—" began Lowther.

"Chuck it, Lowther, you ass! Now, Gussy," said Blake, obviously restraining himself by a powerful effort.

Gussy slowly adjusted his eyeglass, and then produced the much-discussed letter from his pocket. He opened it, and began solemnly to read it aloud:

"My deah Arthur," he paused and looked round the circle of his friends. As no one made any remark, he proceeded:

"You will be pleased to heah that I have won a pwize in a "Jaggles" competition, in the "Weekly Age"—a whole five-pound note—and I have made up my mind how to spend it. I am goin' to "blue it," as you would say, all at once. What do you think of that? I want you all to come to a picnic with me next Saturday afternoon, in Wylcombe Woods.

"For once in a way, I'm going to stand tweat, and we ought to have a weally jolly time. By "you all," I mean, of course, all my fiwends, Tom Mewwy and Figgins, and all the others, and anyone else whom you like to bwing, Arthur. You must get leave off calling-over, so that we can have a good, long time togethah. I am sure Dr. Holmes will give you leave at once if you tell him the weason.

"Well, I shall expect the whole party of you on Saturday, at half-past two, punctually, by the big oak, near the boat-house.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ETHEL."

"P.S.—If it is very wet, we must put it off, I suppose. But it won't be!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 131.

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

There was a chorus of exclamations from the juniors.

"How ripping of her!"

"By Jove! I hope it will be fine."

"Come on, and tell the others!"

"Wait a mo., you chaps," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Do you think we can let a girl stand us a treat like this? It doesn't seem quite right."

"I think you are wight, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy. "It certainly would not be pwopah. It would need a fellah of tact to wite a lettah of wefusal, but I flattah myself that I could do it."

"But I don't see how we can refuse, though," said Jack Blake. "It would seem as though we didn't want to go, and then she might be offended."

"Quite wight, Blake," answered D'Arcy. "It is a vewy difficult question to decide."

"Well, let's call a meeting of the other chaps, and see what they say," suggested Manners.

"That's the idea! Come on!"

And they all trooped out of the room, chattering and making suggestions as to how they could satisfy their own honour, and not offend Cousin Ethel, at one and the same time.

CHAPTER 2.

A Study Meeting.

It was decided to hold the meeting in Tom Merry & Co.'s study, it being larger and more suited to the purpose than No. 6, from which they had just come. As they were walking down the passage, they perceived Cornstalk & Co., of the end study, walking down the passage arm in arm.

"Now then, out of the way, you bounders!" shouted Harry Noble, as they approached.

"Rats!" retorted Tom Merry defiantly.

"It's your place to make room for your betters!"

"Weally, Noble, if it were not for the fact that we have important business to twansact, I should feel compelled to wemove you myself," said D'Arcy.

"Hallo! What's your little game?" asked Clifton Dane. "Mothers' meeting, or a bun-fight?"

"I wegard both suggestions as wecrankably absurd," said D'Arcy, and prepared to pass on down the passage.

"Wait a mo.!" said Blake. "We want these three fat-heads, don't we?"

"Not so much sauce, you Fourth Form kid, or—"

"Peace, my sons!" broke in Tom Merry. "We want you to come to a meeting in Study 1 immediately, if not sooner."

"What for?"

"To discuss a lettah which I have just weceived fwom—"

"From whom?"

"Wait till you come," said Tom Merry. "You'll find out then!"

"All right! We're ready!"

"Someone must go and fetch those New House bounders," remarked Blake. "I suppose they're included."

"Why not go yourself?" suggested Manners.

"I'm not a giddy messenger-boy!" answered Blake indignantly.

"Send Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "What's the good of keeping a thing like that in your study, Blake, if he won't do as he's told?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Cheer up, Gussy! Hope you'll enjoy your walk!"

"I shall wefuse to walk—"

"Try a trot, then!"

"I uttably wefuse to fetch any New House boundahs—"

"But wait one little moment!" said Tom Merry poetically. "Is it but my fancy, or do I perceive a fairy form lightly skipping up the stairs? No! Yes! 'Tis Fatty Wynn? I thought as much!"

And true enough, at that moment, the portly form of the New House Welshman appeared, flanked on one side by Figgins and on the other by Kerr.

A roar of laughter greeted the three newcomers.

"What's the cackling about?" said Figgins, who had not heard Tom Merry's remarks.

"Never mind, Figg!" said Blake. "Strangely enough, you three are the verry people we want!"

"What's your little game?" said Kerr suspiciously.

"We won't hurt you if you behave yourselves," remarked Tom Merry pleasantly. "Although it is rather nerve of you New House rotters to come to a respectable House like this, without an invitation."

"Beastly bad form, I call it!" said Lowther. "But we'll overlook it this time!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "We'll overlook the GEM LIBRARY.—No. 131.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

look it this time, as we have some important business to twansact."

"You've said that before, Gussy!" grinned Harry Noble.

"Good word—transact!"

"Look here! Do you want us or not?" said Figgins impatiently. "We're not going to stand here all day!"

"Oh, please don't put yourselves out on our account!" said Blake. "We're just going to have a meeting about a letter from Cousin Ethel, but if you haven't time—"

Figgins turned pink.

"Of course, we've got time, ass!" he said.

"Then come on!" said Tom Merry, leading the way into the famous apartment he shared with Manners and Lowther. The juniors crowded into the little room, filling it completely. However, after a little manœuvring, they all managed to seat themselves somewhere, and the meeting began.

"I'm going to take the chair," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I wathah think I should be more fitted for that important posish!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, that's just where you are mistaken, my dear Gus," answered Blake pleasantly. "So keep quiet!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rats! Another word and you'll get a cricket-stump over your head!" said Blake waving the article in question dangerously near D'Arcy's nose.

"Pway be careful, Blake," said D'Arcy, starting back.

"I think it's pretty obvious," said Figgins, "that a New House chap should take the chair, as—"

"More rats!" said Blake. "Now, does anybody else want to take the chair?" and he looked round the room, with the cricket-stump above his head.

"What about me?" inquired Tom Merry, laughing at the cool way in which the lad from Yorkshire took charge of affairs. "I'm chief of this study, you know!"

"Hear! hear!" said Manners and Lowther together.

"Oh, rats to that!" said Blake, in no wise abashed.

"Gussy's had the letter. I'm Gussy's keeper; so, of course, I take the chair."

"Weally, Blake!" protested Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And for the sake of peace and quietness, Tom Merry waived his undoubted claim to the chairmanship of the meeting, for the present.

"Well, that's settled!" said Blake coolly. "Now, gentlemen, the business on hand is with reference to a letter received by our worthy friend Gussy, from Cousin Ethel. Perhaps our aforesaid worthy friend would oblige us by reading it out aloud, for the benefit of those who have not already heard it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Certainly, deah boys!"

"Get on with the washing!"

"With pleasuah, deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus rose, jamming his monocle in his eye as he did so. He then proceeded, in his usual leisurely fashion, to open the letter.

"I beg to move that our aforementioned worthy friend be made to hurry!" proposed Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" came from them all simultaneously.

Blake, the chairman, made no answer, but stuck his cricket-stump into D'Arcy's ribs violently.

"Ow! You wough boundah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you shwiekin' duffah!" gasped D'Arcy. "You have put me in quite a fluttah!"

"You are requested to proceed," said Blake solemnly.

"And at once," he added, with a suggestive glance at the cricket-stump.

"If you consent to wefwain fwom jabbin' me with the cwicket-stump," said D'Arcy with dignity, "I will wead the lettah aloud."

"Silence for our aforementioned friend!" shouted Blake.

There was an immediate hush, and slowly and deliberately Arthur Augustus read the letter out.

"How ripping of her!"

"What sport!"

"Good egg!"

These and other expressions of a similar nature came from those who had not already heard the letter.

"Yes, that's all very fine and nice," said Blake, "but I, for one, don't think we could let ourselves be treated by a girl, like this. It doesn't seem right, somehow."

There was silence for a moment at Blake's words, and the juniors looked at one another doubtfully.

"That's true!" said Bernard Glyn dejectedly.

"Yes, but we can't refuse without offending Cousin Ethel," chimed in Kerr.

"That's true, again!" said Figgins.

"Well, what are we to do?" asked Tom Merry of the company in general.

"I believe I have an idea, deah boys!" D'Arcy said, after a pause.

"You don't say!" said Blake, feigning extreme excitement.

"You'll break a blood-vessel, Gussy, if you aren't careful!" Pway twy to be more sensible, Blake," answered D'Arcy. "I wathah flattah myself that I have solved the problem."

"Well, get over it quick, and then we'll try and think of something sensible," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Mewwy, if you mean to insinuate that——"

"Now, don't waste any time, you ass!"

"I wefuse——"

"Come on; out with your 'ideah,' as you call it!" said Manners, imitating D'Arcy's beautiful accent.

"Well, deah boys," said D'Arcy, "I've been thinking the mattah ovah."

"Did it hurt you much?" inquired Lowther anxiously.

"Pway don't be absurd, Lowther. As I was sayin', I have been thinking the mattah ovah, and agree that it is impos. to accept the invitation of a girl to stand us tweat——"

"By George, Gussy, how ever did you manage it?"

"Weally, Noble——"

"Your brain power must be stupendous, old boy!"

"Weally——"

"Is that all, or have you any more of these astounding suggestions to make?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I cannot pwoceed with my suggestion if I am continually intewwupted. Pway call the meeting to ordah."

"Hear, hear!"

"Order!" shouted Blake. "Now, Gussy, for goodness' sake, hurry up and get it over!"

"I shall uttably wefuse to huwwy. As I was sayin' when I was intewwupted, I agree we cannot allow ourselves to be tweated by a girl. But if we were to make some weturn, pewhaps in the shape of some little gift or othah, I think we should be justified in accepting Cousin Ethel's invitation."

There was a chorus of approval from the juniors.

"Good old Gussy!"

"Well done, Beau Brummell!"

"Good for you, Gus!"

"I always thought you weren't as bad as you looked!" said Lowther, with a note of triumph in his voice.

"Weally, Lowther——"

"Silence!" shouted Blake, waving his cricket stump furiously. "I really think the proposal is quite rational, in spite of its having come from Gus."

"Weally, Blake——"

"I will now put it to the meeting," went on Blake, taking no notice of D'Arcy's interruption. "Those in favour of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's proposal, hold up your hands."

Every hand in the room shot up, some even holding up both in their excitement and delight at the solution of the difficult problem.

"Carried unanimously!" cried Blake. "The only thing to be done now is to get the Head's permission. We'll take the letter to him, and then I bet he won't refuse."

"Rather not."

Dr. Holmes was very fond of Cousin Ethel, and very seldom went against her wishes, when it was in his power to do what she wanted. The juniors were very well aware of this fact, so they anticipated no difficulty from that quarter.

"There's one other thing, though," said Tom Merry suddenly. "We've got to decide who is to take the letter in, because we can't all go trooping into his study like a flock of sheep. If you ask me, I think I should do it as well as anybody."

"But we didn't ask you," put in Blake, "so don't worry about that. It's obvious to me that the chairman ought to do it."

"As a matter of fact," said Figgins, "a New House chap——"

"Weally, deah boys, you are all vewy absurd," said D'Arcy. "As the lettah is addressed to me, it is vewy obvious that I must take it in. In any case, a fellah of tact and judgment is required, and I flattah myself——"

"Oh, we know all about that, you ass!" said Blake. "All the same, I suppose you are right. You'll have to be one, anyway, unfortunately."

"Weally, Blake——"

"We'll take you in, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "if you're very good."

"I wefuse to be good! I—I mean——"

"Then you won't come in with us!" said Blake decisively.

"Now, who else? I should think we had better have one from every study, and Gussy thrown in for luck."

Eventually, after much discussion, it was decided that Study No. 1 should be represented by Tom Merry, Study No. 6 by Blake and D'Arcy, the end study by Noble, and the New House by Figgins.

These five juniors immediately betook themselves to Dr. Holmes's study, that dread apartment which juniors, as a rule, were only too anxious to avoid.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy's Brilliant Suggestions.

"COME in!"

Blake pushed open the door and entered, followed by the other four petitioners.

Dr. Holmes did not look up immediately. He was busy writing a letter, and hardly realised that anyone was in the room, in spite of his having given permission to the boys to enter.

Blake gave a little cough. The head-master glanced up.

"One minute, please," he said, and went on writing. Blake nudged Tom Merry. They seemed to have come at rather an unpropitious moment. At last Dr. Holmes laid down his pen. "Now, my boys, what is it?" he said quite pleasantly.

"If you please, sir——" began Blake.

"We wished to know, sir——" broke in Tom Merry.

"Pway leave it to me, Tom Mewwy!" said D'Arcy, who, to do him justice, was by far the most composed of the party. "This is obviously my duty, as the lettah was addressed to me. I have weweived, sir, a lettah from my Cousin Ethel, inviting us all—that is to say, myself and friends——"

"Yes, yes!" broke in Dr. Holmes impatiently. "Please be quick, as I am very busy."

"Certainly, sir," said D'Arcy, quite unmoved.

"Buck up, you ass!" whispered Blake, who was inwardly marvelling at the confident manner in which his chum was speaking.

"As I was sayin', sir," went on D'Arcy, "my cousin, Miss Ethel Cleveland, has w'ritten a lettah, inviting myself and friends to a picnic in the Wylcombe Woods on Satahday, and she wishes us to get—ah!—that is, sir, to ask——the doctor smiles—"your permission to be excused callin' ovah."

"Really, D'Arcy, it is very kind of your cousin to invite you," said the head-master, smiling. "If you would like to accept the invitation——"

"Wathah, sir!"

"I know no reason why——"

"I have the lettah here, sir," broke in D'Arcy, "if you would care to see it."

"I do not think there is any necessity for me to see it, thank you," said Dr. Holmes. "I am certainly inclined to give you my permission. You must promise me not to get into any mischief—but Miss Cleveland will, no doubt, see to that—and you must be back before preparation. I think that is all. Oh, just give me the names of the others who will be going?" added the doctor, taking up his pen again.

Blake hastened to comply with this request, and Dr. Holmes raised his eyebrows somewhat at the number of the names.

"Are you sure Miss—ah—Cleveland intended so many to go?" he asked doubtfully, when the long list was complete.

"Quite, sir," answered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" chimed in D'Arcy.

The doctor broke into a smile again, and, to the juniors' relief, made no further comment on the matter.

"You may go now, boys," was all he said.

"Thank you very much, sir," said the juniors simultaneously as they went out.

"How ripping of him!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically after they had closed the door, and were on their way back to the study.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Dr. Holmes as an old sport!" remarked D'Arcy.

As he made this observation with regard to the head-master's character, they arrived at Tom Merry's study, where the other juniors were eagerly awaiting them.

"Well, what luck?" asked Manners.

"How did the doctor take it?" chimed in Bernard Glyn.

"All serene!" answered Tom Merry cheerily. "He was a bit doubtful at first, but it was all right, as the invite was from Cousin Ethel."

"Good!"

"The Head's an old sport!"

"What a ripping time we shall have!" said Herries enthusiastically. "It will do my dog Towser no end of good to have a run in Rylcombe Woods."

"Rats!" retorted Blake rudely. "If you think you are going to take that ugly brute——"

"You shut up, or——"

"Why, it would be dangerous," said Tom Merry.

"Besides, the beast isn't invited, so that settles it."

"I don't care!" persisted Herries. "Towser is a jolly fine dog, and——"

"Beastly mongrel, you mean!" put in Manners.

"Look here——" began Herries wrathfully.

"Peace, my children!" broke in Blake. "If Herries wants to take his beastly dog, he'll have to get a strong cage, and put it on a wheelbarrow."

"Weally, Blake," said D'Arcy, "I should uttably wufuse to go out with a person pushin' a wheelbarrow!"

"Oh, rats, Gus!" said Blake. "I should think you had better be put in the cage yourself!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"And have it labelled 'Dangerous. Please do not touch,'" suggested Lowther.

"Weally Lowthah, I should wufuse——"

"That wouldn't make much difference."

"Weally, Lowthah, I shall be compelled to give you a most feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, please forgive me!" wailed Lowther, in mock fear.

"I'll never do it again if you will let me off this time!"

"Pway don't be absurd!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"If you weally apologise, I shall, of course, be satisfied."

"How can I thank you, Gussy?" answered Lowther.

"You have lifted a great weight off my mind!"

"I say, you fellows," suddenly broke in Figgins, "it's just struck me——"

"Where?" asked Noble.

"Ass!" retorted Figgins. "We haven't decided yet what we are going to give Cousin Ethel, and as there's only to-morrow to get it in, we had better look slippy."

"By Jove! I'd forgotten all about it," said Blake.

"Any suggestions handy?"

"I should think it had better be something to eat," remarked Fatty Wynn thoughtfully.

"Good old Fatty! Trust him for that."

"Well, one does get so hungry this August weather——"

"Or any other weather——eh, Fatty?" said Tom Merry.

"I believe you'd eat your grandmother, if there was nothing else going!"

"Don't be an ass!" answered Fatty. "I don't see anything to laugh at. My opinion is, it ought to be something to eat, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling fatheads!" said Wynn. "I sha'n't make any more suggestions if——"

"Then shut up, Fatty!"

"That's no good!" said Blake decidedly. "Anybody else got an idea?"

"It is wathah a difficult question to decide," said D'Arcy.

"One has to be careful what one gives to a girl. Besides——" D'Arcy paused and looked pensive.

"Besides what?" asked several of the juniors at once.

"Why, deah boys!" went on D'Arcy. "I weally do not think we can pwesent anything to her at the picnic!"

"Why ever not?" asked Herries, looking very much surprised.

"Why, deah boy," answered D'Arcy. "Don't you think it would wathah look as if we couldn't accept the invitation without——to put it straight——without paying for it?"

"I never thought of it that way before," said Blake.

"But I think you're right. But, really, this is rot!" he went on, almost angrily. "Can't anyone think of a way out?"

There was no answer. Everybody was thinking hard, but no suggestions were forthcoming. It really seemed as if the idea of giving Cousin Ethel a present must fall through.

"The only way I can think of," said Blake, after a long pause, "is to wait till her birthday, and then give her some little thing."

"I suppose we shall have to do that," assented Tom Merry, with some reluctance. "But it doesn't seem——"

"Bai Jove, deah boys! I've got it!" D'Arcy suddenly cried. "Pway forgive me for intewwupting you so wudely, Tom Mewwy, but I have just wemembowed——"

"Well?"

"That next Saturday is——"

"Oh, do get on!" said Lowther impatiently.

"I should get on much more quickly, Lowthah, if you were to wefain fwom intewwupting me so fwuently," said D'Arcy, staring very hard at the joker of the Shell through his monocle. "As I was sayin', I have just wemembahed that next Saturday is the eigt teenth!"

"You howling ass, Gussy!"

"You burbling idiot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"If you can't remember anything better than that, don't, that's what I say!" said Tom Merry emphatically.

"But weally, Tom Mewwy——"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

"What difference does it make whether it's the eighteenth or the eightieth?"

"Why, a gweat deal," said D'Arcy, "if you will allow me to finish what I was going to say, I will inform you of the weason. Cousin Ethel's birthday is not on the eightieth of this month, whereas——"

"You don't mean to say——" broke in Tom Merry excitedly.

"Whereas it is on the eighteenth!"

"Why didn't you say so before?"

"The weason is obvious," retorted D'Arcy with dignity.

"I only just wemembahed the fact about ten minutes ago."

"Well, why didn't you tell us, then?"

"Weally, Blake, you are wemarkably dense. I have been endeavowin' to tell you for the last ten minutes, but owin' to numerous intewwuptions——"

"Well, Gussy, we'll let you off this time, as you have got us out of our difficulty."

"I shall wufuse to be let off!"

"You'll go off like a 4.7 gun without any help, if you get so excited!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowther——"

"I say, you chaps," said Blake. "As chairman of this meeting, I propose a vote of thanks be passed to Mr. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for his suggestions this afternoon. He has absolutely surpassed himself, and I am really rather afraid that the strain will be too much for him."

"Hear, hear!"

"I shall be vewy pleased to accept the vote of thanks!"

"Go hon!"

"I wathah think that, without my suggestions, you would have been vewy much up a tree."

"We are fearfully indebted to you," said Tom Merry.

"Pway don't mention it, deah boy," went on D'Arcy graciously. "I am only too pleased——"

"Well, now, that's all settled," broke in Tom Merry.

"What shall we give her?"

"I can't think of anything better than a nice, big box of chocolates," said Fatty Wynn, his eyes glistening at the thought.

"Just about all you're good for!" said Blake sarcastically.

"Look here, Blake——"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "That sort of thing is no good. We must think of something much better."

"I don't see how anybody can want anything better than a box of chocolates," said Fatty, in an aggrieved tone.

"I tell you what," said Herries suddenly. "Why not give her a young bulldog?"

"Why not give her a young hippopotamus?" said Tom Merry. "Fancy giving anybody a thing that might grow to be anything like Towser!"

"It's a jolly good suggestion, anyway," retorted Herries indignantly. "Towser is a ripping good dog, and——"

"Weally, Hewwies," said D'Arcy, with a horrified expression on his aristocratic countenance. "I should absolutely wufuse to allow such an animal to pass into the possession of a membah of my family!"

"I should think it had better be a brooch or a bracelet, or something like that," said Tom Merry, before Herries could think of anything to say in answer to D'Arcy's last remark.

"That's much more like it," agreed Blake. "I should think that would do jolly well."

"Yes, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I was just about to suggest it myself."

"Only you thought it might be too much for you, after your other brilliant suggestions?" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, can anybody think of anything better?" said Tom Merry.

There was no answer.

"Well, then," he went on, "I should think we had better make it that. What do you think, Blake?"

"I don't think we shall do better than that."

"Right, then! That's decided," said Tom Merry. "We'll send for some on approval, and choose the nicest."

"If you like, deah boy," said D'Arcy pleasantly. "I could write and ask my brother Conway to get something for us. He is wathah a good hand at that sort of thing, I believe."

"Excellent, Gussy! The very thing!"

"Yaas, I wathah flattah myself it's a vewy good suggestion. I think we may wely on him to get the pwopah thing."

"By the way, you chaps," said Noble. "How much are we going to give for this?"

"Oh, we'll leave that to Lord Conway! Eh, Gus?" said Tom Merry.

"Certainly, deah boy!" answered D'Arcy readily. "We'll settle up with him later!"

"Good! Now, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "you've got to write a nice letter to Cousin Ethel, thanking her awfully for her invitation, and saying that we shall be awfully pleased to accept it."

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"Bai Jove" murmured Arthur Augustus, through the lather of soap. "I can hardly feel a bwistle on my chin now."

"Twust me to do it, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, mind you do it nicely. Try and rise above yourself for once, and put yourself on a level with me, for instance."

"I am afwaid that would be imposs.—" began D'Arcy.

"I know, old chap," said Tom Merry sympathetically; "but don't be downhearted. You can't expect to do it all at once."

"Weally, Mewwy, you misunderstand me. I meant that—"

"Yes, yes, we understand," broke in Tom Merry. "Now, you chaps, git, because it's nearly prep. time, and I've got a fearful amount of work to do."

"It will be a strange experience for you, old chap!" said Figgins.

"Rats! Move, or you'll be moved!" said Tom Merry.

At last they had all gone, and there was quiet and peace in Study No. 1.

"I say, won't it be ripping?" said Tom Merry.

"Rather! Simply A1!" agreed his chums enthusiastically.

CHAPTER 4.

A Jape against the Grammarians.

THE next day was lovely. The sun shone brightly overhead. It was neither too hot nor too cool, and some of our young friends—to wit, the Terrible Three and Blake & Co.—had decided to go out for a spin on their cycles. They had started immediately after lunch, in order to make the most of the afternoon, and were now some way from St. Jim's. D'Arcy was slightly ahead, on his beautiful bicycle.

"I hope I'm not goin' too fast, deah boys?" he said pleasantly. "I'm afwaid I'm wathah leavin' you behind!"

"My dear Gussy," answered Blake suddenly, shooting up to the swell of St. Jim's side and laying a somewhat heavy hand on his shoulder, "you'll find yourself behind in a minute, lying on your back in the ditch!"

"Welease me, wuffian!" exclaimed D'Arcy, swerving dangerously. "You vewy nearly upset my equilibwium!"

"That's what I shall do quite, if you aren't more polite, you animated dummy!"

"I wefuse to be addressed as an animated dummay!"

"All right, then, you howling fathead! Anything to oblige."

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NEXT THURSDAY "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

"Weally, Blake, I have an equal objection to be called a howlin' fathead!"

"I can't do anything better just for the moment."

"And unless you immediately withdwaw your oppwobious wemarks, I shall be compelled——"

"I say, look there!" exclaimed Tom Merry, who was now in front, as they rounded a bend in the road. "I wonder who they belong to?"

The objects of this remark were three bicycles, which were leaning up against the hedge, glittering in the sunlight; but there was no person in sight.

The juniors all dismounted as they came up to the other bicycles.

"I know whose that is!" exclaimed Lowther, pointing at the newest-looking of the three. "It's Frank Monk's, of the Grammar School. I know it by its funny shaped handle-bars."

"What a giddy chance!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We've fairly got 'em now! These other two bikes belong to Lano and Carboy, his chums, I'll bet."

"What a ripping jest!" said Blake, in a sort of stage whisper. "How can we score off them?"

"I've got it!" said Tom Merry. "We'll let the wind out of their back tyres, and then hide their pumps, and depart!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder where the beggars have gone?" said Herries.

"Oh, I expect they have gone into that wood over there to look for nests!" suggested Digby. "It's a jolly good place, I know."

"It doesn't matter where they've gone," said Tom Merry. "The point is, they aren't here, and that they'll be back soon. So here goes!"

Whereupon, he carefully unscrewed the valves of the three back tyres, let the air out and then put the valves back as they were before.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "The howling idiots haven't changed a pump between them! All the better! Now, you chaps," he went on, "we'll hide ourselves behind the hedge, and watch the results. It will be as good as a pantomime!"

The seven juniors wheeled their machines through a gate into the field opposite, put them down behind a hedge, and then proceeded to wait for the advent of the Grammarians.

They had not long to wait, for before five minutes had elapsed, Frank Monk was seen to emerge from the little wood, followed by his two chums.

"Here they come!" whispered Blake. "Now for some fun!"

"Wathah, deah boy!" agreed D'Arcy, who was lying next to Blake. "I hardly think I shall be able to westwain myself fwm laughin' aloud!"

"Shut up, you asses!" said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Don't let them hear you!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Dry up!"

Meanwhile, the three bird's-nesters had reached their bicycles, and were wheeling them into the road.

"Well, I'm——" Monk stopped and stared at his flat back tyre in dismay.

"Well, I'm——" repeated Carboy.

"Well, I'm——" repeated Lane like a parrot.

"My back tyre's flat!"

"So is mine!"

"So is mine!"

There was a pause while the three juniors stared at one another in consternation.

"Have you got a pump, Laney?" said Monk at last, in measured tones.

"No; I've broken mine!"

"Have you, Carboy?"

"No. I thought——"

"You fatheaded asses!" exclaimed Monk hotly. "You might have had the sense——"

"Why didn't you bring one yourself, you howling idiot?" retorted Carboy warmly.

"How was I to know, you ass?"

"Well, you might have thought of that much, at any rate!"

"Look here, Carboy——"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Shut up, you two asses!" broke in Lane impatiently.

"It's no good standing there abusing one another like two navvies. That won't do any good to anybody!"

"I don't care! If Carboy——"

"Oh, rats!" retorted Lane. "Settle that after; what we've got to decide at present is how to get home!"

"Walk, I should think!"

"I suppose that's the only way. It's a fearful long way, though," said Monk.

"Why, it seems to me someone has done this on purpose!"

"Well, come on!"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

"Why; how could——"

"I shouldn't wonder if those St. Jim's rotters have had a hand in it!"

"By Jove! I believe you're right!"

"If they have, we'll teach 'em not to do it again when we see 'em next!"

"The rotten bounders!"

"They deserve to be lynched, if they have done it!"

"Well, look here! If we want to get back to-night, we'd better make a start. It's a matter of about five miles, I think."

Monk led the way, and a minute after the three Grammarians had disappeared round the bend.

The St. Jim's juniors had hardly been able to remain quiet during this conversation, and now sundry smothered laughs and chuckles might be heard coming from behind the hedge. They waited until Monk and his chums were well out of earshot, and then emerged from their hiding-place.

"What a gorgeous jape!" exclaimed Blake with a broad grin. "They'll be as mad as elephants with the toothache when they know for certain who did it!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" agreed D'Arcy enthusiastically. "We weally must let them know immediately."

"I say, you chaps," said Tom Merry, chuckling to himself. "I've got a ripping idea!"

"Good! Out with it!"

"Why, it's this! We'll give all our pumps to one person, and let him take them back another way. Then the rest can ride on and overtake them, and then we sha'n't be able to give them any help!"

"Ripping!"

"Good for you, Tom Merry!" said Blake approvingly. "We'll send Gussy with the pumps, as he certainly isn't for ornament——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"So why shouldn't we make some use of him?"

"I shall uttably wefuse!"

"Well, look here, somebody's got to go!" said Tom Merry decisively. "I don't think it had better be Gussy, as he might lose himself——"

"Pwaw don't be absurd, Tom Mewwy——"

"All right, Gus, you can go then!"

"I wepeat, I shall uttably wefuse——"

"I think Herries had better go, as he's the only one who has got a carrier——"

"Of course that settles it. Nobody else could carry the pumps!"

"I don't mind lending my bike to anyone, though," said Herries generously.

"We couldn't think of it, my dear chap!" said Tom Merry. "It's a rotten trick to borrow another fellow's bike, and——"

"All right, I'll go!" said Herries, sacrificing his desire to see the fun to his more ardent desire to score off the Grammarians.

"Thanks awfully, old chap!" said Tom Merry. "I knew you'd come up to the scratch!"

"Come on; give me your pumps!"

After some difficulty they managed to strap the five pumps, which they had between them, securely on to the carrier, and Herries rode off in the opposite direction to that in which the three pedestrians had disappeared, intending to reach the school by a somewhat roundabout way. The six remaining juniors mounted their machines, and pedalled after the Grammarians.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling!

A furious ringing of bicycle bells made Frank Monk and his chums to leap to one side of the road.

"Hallo, you chaps!" shouted Tom Merry. "D'you find pushing your bikes more pleasant than riding them?"

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"It's vewy stwange what ideas some people have!" remarked D'Arcy, staring at the trio through his monocle.

The only answer to these remarks was in the shape of dark scowls.

"Anything the matter?" inquired Blake pleasantly, dismounting.

"Do you think we're doing this for fun?" demanded Frank Monk aggressively.

"Couldn't say!" answered Blake. "It doesn't look very funny!"

"You silly asses!" said Lane. "Can't you see our back tyres are flat?"

"So they are!" said Blake feigning surprise. "Got a puncture?"

"Looks like it!" said Carboy sullenly.

By this time all the six juniors had dismounted and were standing round the three Grammarians, smiling.

"What are you all grinning at, you—you grinning apes?" asked Frank Monk angrily.

"Weally, Monk!" said D'Arcy in an injured tone, "I wufuse to be addressed as a gwinnin' ape!"

"Rats!"

"I shall be compelled to give you a feahful thwashin', unless you immediately withdraw your insulting wemark—"

"More rats!"

"Why don't you mend the punctures?" suggested Lowther.

"You fatheaded ass, how can we?" said Lane.

"If you ain't so abusive, I'll teach you for a small fee," said Lowther.

"You howling idiot!" retorted Lane indignantly, "we haven't got a pump!"

"Weally, Lane," broke in D'Arcy, "if you had put it as one gentleman to another, we might have been disposed to assist you. But under the cires, I considah it impos—"

"Come on, you chaps!" shouted Tom Merry. "It's no good wasting precious time with bounders like these. They can't be civil!"

"Quite so, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, preparing to remount.

"I'm just coming!"

"Here, I say!" shouted Frank Monk.

D'Arcy took no notice, but mounted his machine.

"Here, we apologise," went on Frank Monk. D'Arcy dismounted, and his friends followed suit.

"Anything we can do for you?" inquired Tom Merry sweetly.

"Can you lend us a pump?" asked Frank Monk, in by no means a pleasant voice.

"Sorry, I haven't got one myself," said Tom Merry, "but I dare say somebody has."

"Weally, Monk, I wewget to say I haven't got one with me, either!" said D'Arcy.

"Nor have I!" chimed in the other four, with one voice.

"So sowwy we can't oblige you!" said D'Arcy. "Good-bye!" he added, smiling sweetly and jumping on to his machine.

The rest followed his example, and they were soon all out of sight.

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Lane emphatically. "That settles it! Those bounders did it!"

"We won't forget this in a hurry!" said Frank Monk.

"I bet we don't!" agreed his chums.

And they did not. They devoted the whole of that evening, when they at last, hot, tired, dusty and cross, reached the Grammar School again, to thinking out a plan of revenge against the St. Jim's juniors.

In the meantime, careless of their rivals' revengeful plots, the St. Jim's juniors chuckled hugely over the jape.

CHAPTER 5.

Casualties in Study No. 6.

"HALLO! What's this?"

There was a group of juniors gathered round the table in the hall of St. Jim's, where the letters and parcels for the boys were usually placed. The remark referred to a somewhat bulky parcel addressed to D'Arcy.

"To what are you wewfering, Blake?" inquired D'Arcy, who was not near enough to read the writing on the label.

"Why, this object!" said Blake, picking it up and weighing it with his hand. "It feels jolly heavy!"

"Am I wight in supposin' that that parcel is for me?" asked D'Arcy.

"Unless your name isn't Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Esq."

"Pway hand it over in that case, deah boy," said the owner of that name. "I haven't the wemotest ideah what it contains!"

"It's come from London apparently," said Tom Merry, examining the postmark.

"Perhaps it's something to eat," said Fatty Wynn, brightening up considerably at the thought.

He had wandered into the School House, chiefly because

he had nothing particular to do, and also it had occurred to him that there might be something in the way of refreshment to be found in one of the studies.

"I fail to see any reason why it should be," said D'Arcy, coldly staring at the Welshman through his monocle. "I have no wecollection of sending up to London for anythin' lately. However, I pwesume it is all wight."

"Well, let's take it upstairs and open it," suggested Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Will you cawwy it up for me?"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake, I considah that wemark—"

"I'm not your fag."

"Weally, I never suggested such a thing. I merely put it as one gentleman to another."

"As one chuckle-headed dummy to a gentleman would be more correct!"

"I entirely wufuse to admit the cowwectcion."

"Come on, Gussy. Catch hold of it yourself, and buck up!" exclaimed Tom Merry, seizing the parcel and gently throwing it to D'Arcy.

The latter was utterly unprepared, failed to catch it, and it dropped heavily on his toe.

"Oh! Ow! You uttah boundah!"

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

"You have put me in quite a fluttah. Pway be more careful another time, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, rather, old chap!" said Tom Merry. "Only, come on now, and open that bundle."

"I wewgard you as an unfwienly bwute, Tom Mewwy!"

"Go hon!"

"But as you wufuse to cawwy this for me—"

"I don't think!"

"I shall be compelled to do so myself."

So saying, he picked up the parcel, and led the way to Study No. 6, followed by a curious crowd of juniors.

He placed the somewhat battered parcel on the table, and slowly proceeded to undo it, carefully folding the string up and folding the paper. The parcel contained a wooden box, with a lid firmly nailed on.

By this time everybody was getting somewhat impatient at D'Arcy's slowness, especially Fatty Wynn, whose hopes were running high that the box contained something edible.

"Here, I've got a screwdriver!" said Digby, producing the article, and a hammer with it, from a cupboard close to him. "Out of the way, Gussy! I'll open it!"

"Weally, Digby, I wewgard you as an interfewin' ass!" said D'Arcy. "Pway allow me to open my own parcels!"

"All right," said Digby, surrendering the tools to D'Arcy; "only, do buck up."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Hurry up!"

"Get a move on!"

"Get on with the washing, Gussy!"

Thus admonished, D'Arcy placed the point of the screwdriver between the box and its lid, and took a tremendous hit at it with the hammer. He missed the screwdriver by about a couple of inches, and hit his thumb instead.

Instantly there was a terrific yell.

"Ow! Wow! Yaroo!"

Arthur Augustus dropped the hammer and danced round the study, sucking his thumb madly.

In his agitation, he failed to notice the fact that the hammer alighted on Blake's foot.

Blake noticed it, though. With a howl like a Red Indian's, Blake clasped his toe in his hands, and went hopping round the study after D'Arcy, to the great detriment of the furniture, and the no less great amusement of the crowd of juniors.

"Ow! Wow! My thumb!" wailed D'Arcy.

"Yow! My toe!" yelled Blake.

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

"My thumb!"

"My toe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you dangerous ass, Gussy!" roared Blake.

"What the dickens did you want to chuck that hammer down on my toe for?"

"Weally, deah boy, how could I help it? I knocked my beastly thumb!"

"Yes; a jolly good job, too!" growled Blake. "I believe my toe is broken!"

"I am convinced my thumb is severely injahed. I stwuck it with extweme force!"

Another roar of laughter went round the room.

"I knew you would!" gasped Digby, holding his sides.

"You should have let me do it."

"Weally, Digby, I fail to perceive any reason for this

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widiculous mewwiment. I have injahed myself most severely."

"And you're not expected to recover—eh?" put in Tom Merry.

"Weally, Mewwy, you are vewy absurd! I have no doubt as to my ultimate wecovery, but I shall p'robably be incapacitated for some considerable time!"

"Really, Gussy, you'll be the death of me!" gasped Tom Merry. "Here, Dig, get to work on that old box, as Gussy is 'incapacitated' at present!"

"Under the cires., Digby," said D'Arcy, still rubbing his thumb, "I think I will allow you to wemove the lid of that box."

"Thanks awfully!"

Digby soon had the lid off, and pulled out from among the straw they were packed in six or seven little boxes, each containing a different make of safety razor.

"My only aunt! Razors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, you take the bun!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Everyone in the room was so tickled at the idea of D'Arcy using a razor, and laughed so long and loud, that it was some minutes before D'Arcy could make himself heard.

Fatty Wynn, however, did not join in the general laugh, as he was so disappointed it was not something to eat.

"You cackling wottahs!" D'Arcy began indignantly. "When a fellow has to shave—"

"Oh, Gussy, give me the feathers!" said Blake, with tears of laughter in his eyes.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I've got a down pillow at home which wants some more stuffing!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I fail to understand you!" said D'Arcy frigidly. "I see no weason either for this widiculous laughtah. I wecollect now orderin' these to be sent on approval—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As I wathah thought I wanted a shave." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I weally cannot conceive anythin' in that to pvovoke this extwaordinary outburst of laughtah."

"Now, look here, Gussy—" began Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to look heah!"

"If you don't want to kill me, shut up!" continued the hero of the Shell, gasping for breath after the exertion of laughing so much.

Even Fatty Wynn had a smile on his face.

"I don't considah you worth twoublin' myself about!" retorted D'Arcy sarcastically.

"But, I say, Gussy," broke in Manners, "who's going to ehave you?"

"What an absurd question to ask, Manners! Of course, I shall do it myself!"

"But you'll cut your throat!"

"Weally, Manners—"

"We couldn't think of allowing you to do it by yourself!" said Tom Merry decisively. "We might lose you, and then we shouldn't have anything to laugh at."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard that as an insultin' wemark."

"However, we'll do it for you if you're good," went on Tom Merry, totally disregarding the interruption. "You've got to choose the razor now, Gussy."

"Yes. Bai Jove! You wottahs have put me in such a fluttah that I quite forgot that!"

"Better choose the sharpest, old man," said Lowther, "or it won't cut off your beard."

"I shall obviously choose the sharpest, Lowther," answered the swell of St. Jim's. "If it isn't sharp enough, we can easily make it so, for I have ordered some stwops as well."

A search was immediately made in the bottom of the box, and there was found a strop, a stick of shaving soap, and an expensive badger-hair shaving-brush with an ivory handle.

"My word, Gussy! You'd better set up a barber's shop!"

"I'm blessed if I'd be shaved by Gussy!"

"Weally, Digby—"

"You make a better tailor's dummy than a barber, any day."

"I wefuse to be called a dummy!"

D'Arcy was beginning to get quite angry, but he soon forgot his annoyance in the excitement of choosing a razor. He examined each one carefully, and finally chose the best and most expensive one that had been sent.

"The weal weason why I am buyin' a wazor," he explained, "is in order that I may shave befoah Cousin Ethel's picnic. I weally could not bwing myself to go with a beard!"

"Too awful to contemplate, isn't it?" said Tom Merry.

"I agwee with you, deah boy!" answered D'Arcy, per-

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fectly seriously. "And for that reason, I intend to go and shave now."

"But, my dear Gussy," put in Blake, "your beard will have grown again by to-morrow, and you'll look worse than ever!"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!" said D'Arcy, quite taken aback. "Do you weally considah that likely?"

"Well, it's possible, isn't it?" answered Blake, trying not to laugh. "You'd better put it off till just before the picnic, because your beard will grow like grass as soon as you begin to shave!"

"That's right, Gussy. It'll save the trouble of doing it twice."

"Bai Jove, you chaps," said D'Arcy, after a pause, during which he had been examining his new razor, "we mustn't forget to weturn these othah razors, or they'll charge me for the whole lot! Pway help me pack them up again!"

It took some time to do this, as the razors were lying scattered all over the table, and their boxes all over the room. Also, the old saying, "Too many cooks spoil the broth," was very true in this case. However, it was done at last, and the lid nailed on, this time D'Arcy keeping well out of the way of the hammer.

CHAPTER 6.

D'Arcy Shaves.

CLANG, clang, clang!

The rising bell at St. Jim's was clanging out its strident tones as hard as Taggles' arm could agitate its brazen tongue.

Clang, clang, clang!

Jack Blake sat up in bed with a yawn.

"Ooh! Oo! Oh! Bother that bell!" he mumbled, rubbing his eyes. "Still, it's a fine morning, so here goes."

And he hopped out of bed.

Jack Blake was usually the first out of bed in the Fourth-Form dormitory, and this morning he seemed to be very much first, and felt accordingly virtuous.

He cast a disgusted eye over the rows of white beds, and snorted.

"Beastly lot of slackers!" grunted the Yorkshire junior.

And, carefully immersing Digby's sponge in his water-jug, he squeezed it partially dry, and advanced with a business-like air towards Dig's bed.

"Get up, Dig, you slacker!" he called, giving him a sporting chance of saving his bacon.

But Digby, unconscious of his impending fate, never moved.

"Dig, you pig, come out of it!"

And Blake grasped Digby by the collar and gave a tug, but the sleepy junior only grunted.

"Out you hop, or I'll fetch you out!" roared Blake.

"Gerrout! 'Tain't rising bell!" mumbled Dig.

"It is, ass! Try a little cold water!"

And Blake, with a grin of satisfaction, let about half a pint of water out of the sponge trickle down on to Dig's head.

Then Dig woke up. With a terrific yell, he gave a convulsive jerk and sat up, with such suddenness that his head smote Blake under the chin and snapped his teeth violently together.

Blake stopped grinning.

"Ow! Yahoo! Groo!" yelled Dig.

"O-o-och! Wow!" roared Blake, staggering back with his hand to his injured jaw.

And the two glared at one another furiously for a space.

"You—you raving lunatic!" said Digby at last, in measured tones, shaking the cold drops from his locks.

"You—you utter fathead!" said Blake heatedly.

"You—you dummy!"

"You—you cuckoo!"

"You silly freak!"

"You clumsy idiot!"

"You—"

"Oh, ring off, you two asses!" broke in a sleepy voice from the direction of Herries' bed. "Can't you go on with the duet some other time?"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus, sitting up in bed and reaching for his monocle. "Wing off, deah boys! I wegard your expressions as extwemely wude, not to say vulgah!"

"Oh, don't you start cackling, Gussy!" growled Blake.

"My head aches quite enough without your help."

"Weally, Blake, I considah your wemark as being decidedly personal. What are you holdin' your jawah like that foah?"

"Ass! That idiot Digby sprang up in bed like a blessed jack-in-the-box, and nearly knocked my front teeth through my head with his beastly napper!"

"Serves you jolly well right," said Dig. "You'd jump up



"I weally wegard this as extremely bad form of you fellahs to turn wound on me in this wepwehensible mannah, because I wefused to make a feawful fo par," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with chilly dignity.

pretty smartly if some raving, babbling lunatic emptied a couple of gallons of water down the back of your neck!"

"It's time to get up, you ass!"

"Well, that's no reason why you should slop a pailful of water over my head."

By this time the argument had effectually wakened the whole dormitory, which showed signs of getting weary of listening to it any more. In response to urgent requests from every quarter—couched in none too polite language—Blake retired, muttering, to his bed.

Digby, also muttering, proceeded to mop at his dripping head with his towel.

It was at this juncture that Arthur Augustus made his sensational announcement.

"I wathah think I will have a shave this mornin', deah boys," was all he remarked. "I am gettin' a bit bwistly, you know."

But if the swell of the Fourth Form had announced that he was about to amputate one of his limbs, it could not have caused a greater sensation.

"You're going to what?" shouted half a dozen voices at once.

Arthur Augustus looked up in surprise.

"Shave, deah boys. It is vewy necessawy and quite easy with this natty little wazor."

And he held up the brand new safety-razor which he had selected from the number he had had sent down from London the day before.

There was a general gasp in the dormitory.

Juniors in the Fourth Form were not accustomed to shaving, and the airy way in which D'Arcy referred to that delicate operation caused the dormitory to open their eyes.

Jack Blake was the first to recover himself.

It struck him that the spectacle of D'Arcy shaving himself would be quite likely to be extremely amusing.

He favoured the dormitory with a comprehensive wink, which D'Arcy alone failed to observe.

"Good, Gussy!" he said with interest. "I'm jolly glad to hear that you are going to shave at last! I don't like having a chap in the study with a chin like a scrubbing-brush!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, think how uncomfy it must be for the draper's young lady in Rylcombe!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared round indignantly.

"I wefuse to have my chin compared to a scwubbin'-bwush," he said, with chilly dignity, "and I wegard Digbay's wemark about the Wylcombe dwapah's young lady as bein' in the worst of taste!"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries solemnly. "But let's see how

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you use that mowing-machine. You won't have time before brekker if you don't buck up and start mowing the quills from your downy cheek."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies, don't be an ass! My chin is certainly a bit bwistlay—"

"Rather! About as bristly as a billiard-ball!" remarked Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy glowered and walked to his washstand.

Then he paused.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's up now?"

"Bai Jove! I've forgotten the shavin'-stick!"

"What's that?" asked Herries. "Will a walking-stick do?"

"Ass, it's a stick of soap—pwopah shavin' soap."

"Never mind, Gussy," said Blake. "Use ordinary soap. I dare say the mowing-machine will mow just as well, anyhow!"

"I suppose I shall have to. Bai Jove!"

"What's up now, ass?"

"Bai Jove, I've forgotten the bwush!"

"The what?"

"The bwush—the shavin'-bwush! You can't shave without a shavin'-bwush."

"You ass, Gussy! You'll forget your head one of these days!" said Herries impatiently.

"Bai Jove! Fancy forgettin' the shavin'-bwush!"

"Yes, if it wasn't you, I should be surprised," remarked Blake. "But—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"But what's the matter with a nail-brush instead?"

"Bai Jove! I wonder if a nail-bwush would do?"

"Of course it will, for once," said Blake. "It'll have to, anyway, as we haven't got a shaving-brush—and you must shave, as you say. You can't go down to brekker with a chin like a gorse-bush!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not! I suppose I shall have to use a nail-bwush!"

"Of course!"

With many grins, the dormitory crowded round the swell of St. Jim's.

A nail-brush was produced, and Blake lathered it from D'Arcy's scented soap. Then Arthur Augustus proceeded to lather all over his face and neck. As Blake remarked, "he might as well shave properly while he was about it!"

At last this interesting operation was over, and the crowd of juniors watched with bated breath.

D'Arcy took up the safety-razor.

"Looks to me more like a comb than a razor," remarked Herries. But he was instantly hushed into silence.

With much satisfaction, the swell of St. Jim's drew the razor backwards and forwards over his lathered face.

"Bai Jove," he remarked, feeling his chin, "that is a great improvement. I can hardly feel anythin' there now. Another two or three more latherin's, and it will be quite smooth."

"Rather!" said Blake solemnly.

And the dormitory chuckled silently.

An interruption occurred when Kildare looked into the dormitory.

"Hallo!" he said, in surprise. "What are all you crowd up to, eh?"

"D'Arcy's shaving, Kildare," said Blake solemnly, "and we're helping him, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the dormitory.

"What's that?" said Kildare, looking startled.

"D'Arcy's shaving, Kildare!"

The captain's face relaxed as he broke into a grin.

"Oh, I see! D'Arcy's shaving, is he? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kildare," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone of pained surprise, and turning his lathered face towards the grinning captain, "I fail to see any cause for laughtah!"

"Indeed!" said Kildare. "May I ask what the nail-brush is for?"

"I am usin' it to lathah with, as I have forgotten to bwing a pwopah shavin'-bwush up to the dorm," exclaimed Arthur Augustus coldly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kildare, moving towards the door. "You young ass, D'Arcy! Shaving at your age! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Well, I don't object, as long as you don't cut your throat and are ready in time for breakfast!"

And the captain went out, his shoulders shaking with merriment.

D'Arcy sniffed, and turned to his shaving again, and about

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two minutes passed in silence. Then suddenly he gave a yell, and dropped the razor.

"What's up?" inquired Blake.

"Ow! I have cut my chin most severely!"

"I knew you would, you lunatic!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Now you'll look fine, with a great cut across your face!"

D'Arcy made no answer, but continued to dab his chin with a handkerchief. Everyone in the dormitory was chuckling audibly.

"I wegard you as a lot of cackling wottahs!" cried D'Arcy indignantly, after a pause. "I fail to see the reason for this vulgar mewwiment!"

"Look in the glass, old chap!" answered Blake.

"I wefuse to look in the glass!"

"Quite right, Gussy! You'd only get a shock if you did!"

The cut was only a slight one, however, and soon stopped bleeding. But D'Arcy deemed it advisable not to go on with the operation of shaving. He found it more difficult than it looked, even with a safety-razor. So he carefully put his razor away, and made all haste to dress, finishing just in time for call-over.

CHAPTER 7.

The Picnic.

AFTER breakfast there was great excitement among the juniors when it was discovered that there was a small parcel for D'Arcy, evidently containing something of value, as it had come by registered post. The juniors guessed—and rightly, too—that it had come from Lord Conway, D'Arcy's elder brother, and contained the brooch that was to be presented to Cousin Ethel that afternoon.

The parcel was opened in the Terrible Three's study, all those who were invited to the picnic being present.

"What a ripping brooch!" cried Blake.

"Good for your brother, Gussy!" cried Tom Merry enthusiastically.

"I thought we could twust Conway to do the thing pwoperly!" said D'Arcy proudly.

And indeed it was a beautiful little brooch that lay before them on the table. The juniors gazed at it with delight, and examined it in various lights until Tom Merry put it back in its box with the remark that it "wouldn't do it any good to be pawed about."

The morning passed very slowly for the juniors, so impatient were they for the afternoon. Mr. Latham's patience was taxed sorely by Blake & Co., whose thoughts very often wandered far from their lessons. However, the morning was at last over, and punctually at half-past two the thirteen juniors met in the quad. They had all taken special care to make themselves look as tidy as possible, but D'Arcy quite eclipsed them all.

He looked an absolute picture, from his panama hat, cocked a little to one side, to his natty socks and elegant and well-fitting shoes.

He sauntered out, a few minutes after everyone else, with a smile on his aristocratic face.

"Hallo, deah boys!" he cried. "Sowwy to keep you waitin', but my tie was wathah twoublesome!"

"Well, it's lucky you aren't any later," said Tom Merry, "because we were just going without you!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," answered D'Arcy, "you don't mean that seriously?"

"Never more serious in my life!"

"It would have been quite imposs., deah boy. You couldn't have left me behind!"

"We shall now, you dummy, if you don't stop jawing!"

"Pway don't call me a dummy, Blake, or—"

"Come on!"

"Ail wight, deah boy! I'm quite weady!"

The party moved off out of the school gates. Several fellows who were strolling about the quad, looked at them curiously, and Wally, D'Arcy's younger brother, who was one of them, asked where they were going.

"Weally, Wally," answered D'Arcy loftily, "I cannot see why you should want to know!"

"I thought you might want someone to look after you."

"Weally, Wally, I shall be compelled to give you a most feahful thwashin' in a minute!"

But Wally took no notice of his brother's threat, and walked off whistling.

He came to a sudden stop in the middle of the quad, and became wrapt in thought—so much so, indeed, that he did not hear footsteps approaching him. The new-comer was Curly Gibson, his chum, who greeted him with a cheery

"Hallo!"

No answer.

"Hallo!" This time a shriek.

"Hallo! Git! No, don't!"

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"What's up?" asked Gibson.

"Nothing, only——"

"Come on! Out with it!"

"Did you see those chaps?" said Wally jerking his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the way in which the body of juniors had gone.

"No!"

"I wonder what they're up to!" mused Wally, half to himself. "I say," he added, turning to Gibson, "let's follow them!"

"Who-o, you ass? Where? When?"

"Oh! A whole crowd of Fourth-Formers and Shell-fish. I don't know where they're going. That's just what I want to find out!"

"Right you are! I'm with you!" shouted Curly Gibson. "Anything for a lark! Half a shake!" and he ran towards the School.

"I'm coming in too, first," shouted Wally after him.

Gibson stopped and waited for him.

Then the two disappeared into the School.

Meanwhile a lively discussion was in progress among the band of juniors.

"I tell you I'm going to do it!"

"You ass! It's plain that I——"

"You burbling duffer! Of course, a New House chap ought to——"

"Weally, deah boys, bein' cousin to Cousin Ethel——"

"Shut up, you dummy, you couldn't——"

"Peace, you fatheads!" shouted Tom Merry imperatively. "We shall all get taken up for being disorderly, if you go on like this!"

"Well, I must say it's obvious to me that——"

"Don't be an ass, Figgins!"

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Shut up!" retorted Tom Merry. "This has got to be decided, so I'm going to decide it!"

"I don't see why you——" began Blake.

"I don't care if you don't," said Tom Merry. "If someone doesn't decide it, we sha'n't be able to give Cousin Ethel the brooch at all——"

"All right, only I think——" began Figgins again.

"Look here, Figgins, for goodness sake stop jawing!"

"That's all very well, but——"

"Oh, ring off a minute!" chimed in Blake and Lowther together.

Figgins rang off, but continued to mutter to himself for some time after.

"Well, look here, you chaps," continued Tom Merry. "I know you all agree with me that I could do it best——"

"No, we don't!"

"But all the same, I really think we ought to let Gussy do it as he is a relation of Cousin Ethel's—unfortunately for her."

"Weally, deah boy——"

"I'm afraid he'll make an awful mess of it, but still——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Cousin Ethel knows him more or less, so she'll make excuses for him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I considah you extwemely wude——"

"Go hon!"

"It will want a fellah of tact and judgment to do it properly, and I flattah myself I am most suited to perform the duty!"

"Well, I don't," said Figgins decisively.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Better leave it to him, Figgy," said Tom Merry.

"I don't care! I believe Gussy will make an awful mess of it!"

"Weally, Figgins, I don't want to be compelled to thwash you in the public woad, but if——"

"Now shut up, you two fatheads!" put in Tom Merry.

"The thing is decided, so let it be. Gussie is going to give the brooch to Cousin Ethel."

"Quite wight, deah boy!"

"Well, all I can say is——"

"Don't say it then, Figgy!"

Figgins was silent. He realised it was hopeless to argue any more. And perhaps he felt in his innermost heart that D'Arcy was, after all, the most proper person to make the presentation.

The juniors had by this time nearly reached the appointed place. Suddenly Tom Merry gave a shout.

"Here's Cousin Ethel!"

The juniors rushed forward in order to be the first to greet her—all except D'Arcy, who strolled on in his aristocratic way. He thought it rather bad form to run up to a lady in the way his companions had done.

Cousin Ethel greeted each one of the juniors in turn. Arthur Augustus was the last.

"Hallo, deah girl!" he said easily. "Vewy pleased to see you again!"

"And I to see you, Arthur," answered Cousin Ethel smiling. "Better late than never!"

"Weally, deah girl, I came as quickly as poss., but these other fellahs outwan me!"

"Oh, I didn't see you running!" said Cousin Ethel mischievously.

"Well, as a mattah of fact, I didn't wun myself, but——"

"We did!" put in Blake.

"Exactly, deah boy!"

"Well, come and help me to get the things out of the trap!" said Cousin Ethel.

There was a smart little governess cart standing in the road, in which Miss Cleveland had driven over from Lord Eastwood's house, where she was staying for a few days.

Many hands soon had everything out of the trap, and bulky hampers and packages lined the roadside.

Miss Cleveland turned to the coachman.

"Will you be here again at six o'clock to take me back, please?" she said.

"Yes, miss," answered the man, touching his hat and driving off at a smart trot.

"Now, I know of a beautiful spot where we can have tea," said Cousin Ethel, "so if you will all follow me, we will go there immediately."

"Wight you are, deah girl! Lead on!" answered D'Arcy for himself and the rest.

Each of the juniors picked up something and followed Cousin Ethel. D'Arcy, however, took up his position by the side of his cousin, and made no attempt to carry anything, much to the indignation of his companions, who were labouring under various burdens. He afterwards explained that "he thought Cousin Ethel ought to have an escort, and that he wathah flattered himself as a lady's man!"

After they had walked for some time through Rylcombe Woods, they came to a clearing amongst the trees. The spot was carpeted with soft moss, and was an ideal place for a picnic.

The party put down the various baskets and packages, and wiped their heated brows; for it was very hot.

D'Arcy gazed round on the perspiring juniors.

"Why, deah boys, you appear to be wathah warm!" he remarked, looking quite surprised.

"Well, Arthur," said Cousin Ethel gently. "If you had been carrying a heavy basket, you would probably be hot, too!"

"Weally, deah girl, I never thought of that. I am weally vewy sowwy!"

"Oh, don't mention it," said Figgins heroically, while he streamed with perspiration. "I enjoyed it. Just made me feel nice and warm!"

Cousin Ethel laughed merrily.

"Never mind," she said, "you will all get cool now, as we're right out of the sun here."

They all seated themselves either on logs or tree stumps, or on the ground, and began to chat while they cooled down. After a time, when they were quite cool again, Cousin Ethel held up her hand, and everyone was immediately silent.

"Now you will all have to start working again," she said with a little laugh, "because we have to get sticks and make a fire to boil the kettles on; and also, some of you will have to go and fetch water from the cottage on the road. It is just near to where the trap was unloaded."

"Oh, I know it," said Lowther. "It's where old Mrs. Garfield lives with her son."

"That's right!" answered Cousin Ethel. "I think four of you had better go there, as we shall want plenty of water. Then I shall want two to stay with me, and help to put the things out and the rest can go and collect sticks and dry leaves."

"I'll stay and help to put the things out," cried Blake.

"And I'll be the other!" cried Noble.

"Look here, I——" began Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Don't you think I had better decide?" asked Cousin Ethel demurely.

"Why, of course!"

"Well, I think Figgins would be very useful here, and—let me see, who shall the other be—Tom Merry, I think!"

So it was decided that these two should stay and help Cousin Ethel. Everybody else felt a little disappointed, but kept their disappointment to themselves.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the only one who said anything.

"Weally, deah girl, I shouldn't like to leave you in this way——"

"I shall be quite safe, Arthur, with my two assistants!" she answered gaily.

"Weally, deah girl, I would wathah stay——"

"Come on, Gussy!" shouted Blake from the distance. "Come and get the water!"

And Gussy reluctantly went.

As the trees swallowed up the graceful form of the swell of St. Jim's, Ethel and her two assistants began to unpack the hampers and to put out the good things on the tablecloth, which they had spread on an even patch of ground.

"Oh dear!" said Cousin Ethel suddenly. "I've forgotten to bring any matches, and I'm sure none of you have any."

"I'm afraid I haven't," said Figgins.

"Nor I!" said Tom Merry.

"Do you mind going on after them to the cottage, and getting some, Figgins?" asked Cousin Ethel with a winning smile.

"I should love to, Cousin Ethel," answered Figgins, and hurried off immediately to hide any trace of the disappointment which he may have felt at having to leave Cousin Ethel after all.

"How very foolish of me to forget them," she said, after he had gone. "But there were so many things to remember. I hope I haven't forgotten anything else!"

"I shouldn't think so!" said Tom Merry, who was buttering scones at a great pace, and with remarkable skill. "There seems enough for an army here!"

"Not more than fourteen hungry people can eat!" answered Miss Cleveland laughing.

"Well, perhaps not!" agreed Tom Merry.

"Hallo! What's that?" he cried jumping up.

A noise of breaking twigs, as if a man were forcing his way through the wood, could be distinctly heard.

"I expect it's one of the boys coming back," suggested Cousin Ethel.

"They wouldn't be back yet, surely," said Tom Merry, looking round suspiciously.

The noise continued, and then a shaggy head appeared just in front of them. Cousin Ethel started back.

"Good-afternoon, miss!" said a gruff voice. "I 'opes I see you well?"

With these words a burly man stepped into the clearing.

He was wearing a torn and dirty old frock coat, light check trousers—very much the worse for wear—and an old straw hat with no crown—a real tramp. Neither Cousin Ethel nor Tom Merry said anything.

"I observes you is goin' to do yerselves well," went on the tramp in the same offensive tone. "You must be feelin' very 'ungry if you is goin' to heat all this yerselves! Well, since you is so pressin', I don't mind 'avin' a snack myself!"

Saying which he sat himself down, and, taking one of the scones which Tom Merry had been buttering so carefully, he jammed it into his mouth whole, and began to munch it.

Tom Merry's ire had been rising rapidly during the tramp's last speech, and when the ruffian began to help himself to the food, he could no longer bear it.

Without a word the junior rushed at the big tramp, and catching him round the neck, hurled him to the ground. So sudden was the attack, and so completely was the man taken by surprise, that it was some moments before he realised what had happened.

"You—hulking—great—brute!" cried Tom Merry, punctuating his remarks with punches, dealt with surprising vigour.

This brought the man to his senses, and with an oath he hurled Tom Merry from him. The boy immediately returned to the attack, but he was no match for the hulking ruffian.

Cousin Ethel looked on with a horrified expression on her face.

She did not know what to do.

Before she had time to shout for help, a strange thing happened.

Two small figures leapt out from behind a bush and sprang upon the tramp, dealing him stinging blows with two hard pairs of fists.

The man, who had managed to get on top of Tom Merry by this time, jumped up in a hurry.

But the two small figures seized him, one by either leg, and pulled him down again. Tom Merry then leapt up and hurled himself at the tramp again. At this moment Clifton Dane, Bernard Glyn, Jack Blake, and Arthur Augustus appeared on the scene, and the tramp, who had managed to get himself up again, seeing this reinforcement, turned and fled. His three assailants stuck to him as long as they could, but he managed to throw them off and escape into the wood, rubbing himself savagely as he ran.

"Bai Jove, what's the mattah?" asked D'Arcy, as the three combatants returned very much ruffled. "May I ask where you have spunged fwom, Wally?"

For the two figures who had rendered Tom Merry such timely aid were none other than those of Wally D'Arcy and his chum, Curly Gibson.

"Oh, I thought you might get into mischief," answered Wally, quite unmoved by his brother's stare. "So I came to look after you—just in time, too," he added.

"Yes, indeed!" put in Cousin Ethel breathlessly. "You came just at the right moment. Tom Merry, I think you acted splendidly, and I think we all ought to thank you; at all events, for our tea, if not for anything else."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "But weally, Wally, I fail to see any weason for your havin' followed us—"

"Never mind, Arthur," broke in Cousin Ethel. "They shall stay to tea now, and we are all very pleased they came, I'm sure."

Cousin Ethel soon recovered from the shock she had received, and in a few minutes the incident was almost forgotten.

The whole party set to work and made a large fire, and soon had the two kettles boiling merrily. The tea was made by Cousin Ethel, and then they all sat down.

For some time the conversation was practically limited to requests to pass something or other, but at length, all, even Fatty Wynn, were satisfied.

Several of the juniors were beginning to cast anxious glances at D'Arcy, whose duty it was to make the presentation; Tom Merry, who was sitting next to him, even went so far as to nudge him.

D'Arcy, however, did not understand what Tom Merry intended to convey.

He favoured the hero of the Shell with a glare through his monocle.

"Pway do not continue to nudge me, Tom Mewwy."

"Shut up, ass!" whispered Tom Merry, blushing furiously.

"I am afraid I fail to understand you."

"Buck up and begin, fathead!" hissed the leader of the Terrible Three.

"To what do you wefer, deah boy?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The present!"

Tom Merry whispered the word fiercely.

"Bai Jove, yaas! I had quite forgotten. Thank you for we mindin' me, deah boy!"

This conversation had been carried on in an undertone by Tom Merry, but D'Arcy had been speaking out quite loud, so everybody's attention had been attracted by this time.

"Hum! Ha!" began Gussy. "I was thinkin', deah gal—"

"That is, Cousin Ethel, we thought—" put in Tom Merry.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy. As I was sayin'—"

"It was awfully kind of you—" chimed in Figgins.

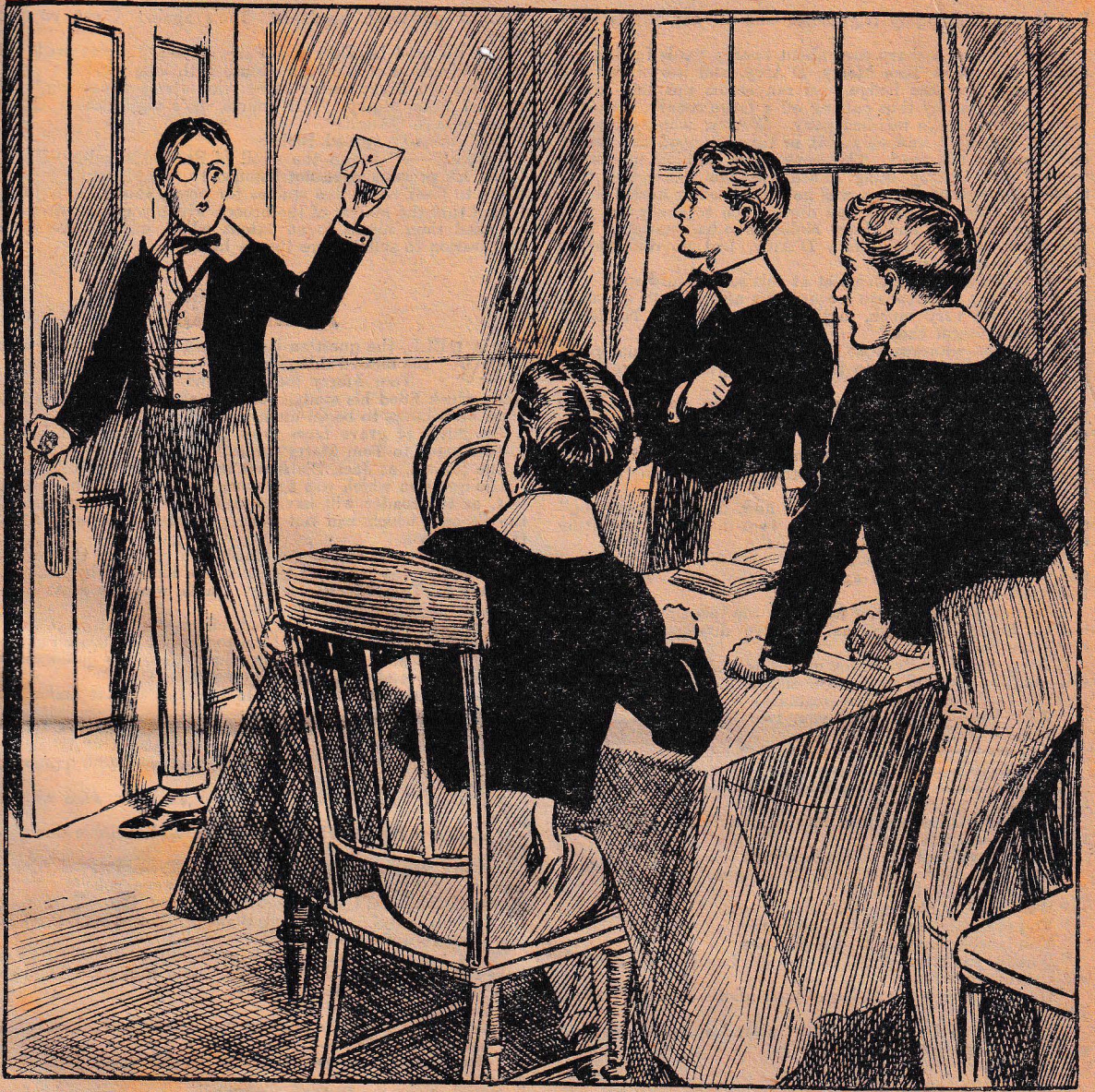
NEXT THURSDAY:

"Tom Merry & Co. at the Exhibition."

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale, dealing with the Adventures of the Juniors while on a visit to London.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Please Order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.



Arthur Augustus glanced at the letter as he was going out of the study, and, turning round, he said: "This is a letter from my Cousin Ethel," and was gone. The three remaining partners of Blake & Co. looked at one another in dismay.

"Pway leave it to me, Figgins. As I was goin' to remark—" He paused suddenly, as though he had forgotten what he was going to remark, and then went on more hurriedly than before. "As I was goin' to say, deah gal, we want to thank you for this pleasant afternoon—"

"Yes, and—" began Figgins again.

"Weally, Figgins, I am quite capable of thankin' Cousin Ethel without your assistance. We are havin' an awfully jolly time, aren't we, deah boys?"

"Yes, rather!" came from all sides.

"And we think it awfully kind of Cousin Ethel to have invited us."

"It is very kind of you, I am sure, to thank me like this," said Cousin Ethel, with a charming smile. "I am only too pleased that you are enjoying yourselves. We must try and arrange a lot of these pleasant picnics together this summer."

"Rather, Cousin Ethel!" came in hearty chorus.

There was a pause for a few seconds.

All the juniors were waiting for D'Arcy to make the presentation, but much to their surprise, the latter made no attempt to bring the subject up again.

All things, good and bad, must have an end, and the picnic was no exception to the rule.

Six o'clock came all too soon for any of the party, and a move was reluctantly made in the direction of the road and the waiting pony-trap.

Ever since tea, D'Arcy—either by accident or design, the rest of the juniors were not quite sure—had managed to keep so near Cousin Ethel, that it was impossible for the others to refer to the matter of the brooch again, except by signs and nudges and hints. And of these Arthur Augustus took no notice.

At last the hampers and packages—very much lighter than when they had been taken out—were packed into the trap. Cousin Ethel shook hands with the juniors all round.

And still D'Arcy had not said a word about the brooch.

Cousin Ethel took her seat.

"Good-bye, boys!" she cried. "I hope I shall see you all again soon!"

"Good-bye, Cousin Ethel!" shouted Figgins.

Three terrific roars followed, which were too much for the little pony, which took fright and set off at a gallop down the road. The groom, who was just stepping into the trap, was jerked on his back in the middle of the road.

Cousin Ethel seized the reins and tried to pull the pony up

But it was thoroughly frightened, and all her efforts were vain.

The road took a sharp turn about twenty yards further on, and for this point Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and the others ran. They leapt over the hedge, and ran across the field to the road again, and by thus cutting off a large corner, managed to arrive before the terrified pony. D'Arcy, who having got a start, was first, and only just in time, jumped the hedge, and stood in the road. The pony came rushing up to the corner, and D'Arcy flung himself at the reins, but they slipped through his fingers, and he was violently hurled to the side of the road. But he had done much to check the mad career of the pony, and Harry Noble, who had stationed himself some twenty yards from D'Arcy, had no difficulty in bringing it to a standstill.

Cousin Ethel was much upset at this second mishap.

"How very unfortunate we are this afternoon!" she said. "Thank you very much, Arthur, and you, too, Noble. I shall never forget this."

The groom, who was none the worse for his fall, came panting up, greatly relieved to find that his young mistress had taken no real harm.

He soon quieted the mettlesome pony down, and Jack Blake held the little animal's head till the groom was safely in the trap.

"Begging your pardon, but perhaps I'd better drive this time, miss," the man said respectfully. "The pony's still a little scared like and skittish."

"Oh, I can manage him all right now, James, thank you," smiled Cousin Ethel, whose nerves were in as good condition as any boy's. "Good-bye again, all!"

"Good-bye! Come again soon!" shouted the juniors, as the pony trap started off again, with the pony well in hand this time.

"Perhaps you had better not cheer me this time!" shouted Cousin Ethel laughingly, as the trap disappeared rapidly down the road.

D'Arcy was ruefully surveying his torn and dusty clothes. His eyeglass was still in his eye, and he looked as neat as he possibly could under the circumstances.

"Well done, Gussy! And you, too, Noble!"

"Thanks, deah boys!"

"You ought to have a putty medal!"

"And have a monument put up to yourself!"

"Weally, Blake, I consider that to be a wemarkably absurd suggestion!"

The party gradually lapsed into silence. Dark looks began to be cast on D'Arcy.

There was evidently a storm brewing.

It was Tom Merry who broke the silence.

"You silly idiot, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You shrieking ass!" said Lowther.

"You howling fathead!" said Manners.

"Weally, you chaps, I fail to see—" began D'Arcy, in his most stately manner.

"Have you any explanation of your idiotic conduct?" asked Blake.

"I am afwaid I do not wecollect what I am called upon to explain," answered D'Arcy frigidly.

"Why didn't you do it?"

"To what do you wufer?"

"You thick-headed dummy, the present, of course!"

"Bai Jove—yes! I had almost forgotten!"

"You—you muddler!"

"You awful bungler!"

"Pway give me time to explain myself, deah boys!"

"Then get on with it, before we slay you!" said Figgins darkly.

"Out with it!"

"Well, deah boys, it suddenly stwuck me that it would be wathah bad form—"

"Everything always is bad form to you."

"Pway don't intewwupt me! Don't you agree with me that it would seem wathah as if we were offewin' to pay for our tea—"

"Hum! You may be right!" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"As though," went on D'Arcy, "we could not accept her invitation without givin' her something in exchange?"

"Yes, I believe you are right, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "It would seem rather rotten"

"Well, what are we going to do now?" said Blake.

"Get back to prep.," suggested Herries.

"You ass! I mean with the brooch!"

"Well, there is no time to decide that now, at any rate," said Tom Merry.

"I should think there is; thanks to that ass, Gussy!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Oh, ring off! You make me tired!" said Figgins crossly.

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"Thank goodness, here's St. Jim's again! Come on you two!"

And followed by Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Figgins made off in the direction of the New House with long strides.

"Poor old Figgy seems rather sick about something," remarked Tom Merry. "Of course, he's right about Gussy being an ass, though!"

"Of course!" agreed Blake.

"Weally—" began the swell of St. Jim's indignantly.

But his protests were not listened to. The juniors hurried along to their respective studies for prep., though it is to be feared that the matter of the brooch which was not presented occupied their minds to an extent which would cause their preparation to suffer more than a little.

CHAPTER 8. Another Meeting.

"WELL, the question is, what are we going to do with the blessed thing!"

Tom Merry looked round the circle of serious faces which filled his study, with the air of one propounding what he believes to be an unanswerable conundrum.

The circle of grave faces grew graver, but no one vouchsafed a reply to Tom Merry's question.

The juniors, as Jack Blake put it, were "stumped."

The question which was agitating the minds of the meeting was, as the reader will have already guessed, the matter of the brooch, which had not been presented to Cousin Ethel that afternoon.

As soon as preparation was finished, a crowd of the parties concerned in the proposed presentation had met by common consent in Tom Merry's study, which was the most commodious of the juniors' studies.

Since the swell of St. Jim's had, off his own bat, as it were, decided that it would be bad form to present the brooch to the giver of the afternoon's picnic, there were the juniors left with a pretty and valuable piece of jewellery.

The question was, what was to be done with it under the circumstances?

"Well?" asked Tom Merry, when the long silence, which followed his question, began to grow oppressive. "What are we going to do, you dummies? You aren't all dumb dummies, I suppose?"

"You ass!" said Blake. "How do we know what we are going to do!"

"Blessed if I know what we can do!" added Noble thoughtfully.

"Well, you are a set of fatheads!" said Tom Merry warmly. "Not a blessed suggestion between you!"

"Well, why don't you suggest something yourself, then, if it's so jolly easy?" demanded Blake. "We've had a lot of jaw from you, but precious little sense!"

"You see what comes of letting a silly duffer like Gussy have anything to do with anything," said Figgins. "I knew how it would be all along!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Yes, Gussy's sure to mess it up, if possible, whatever it is," agreed Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" came in hearty chorus from the circle generally.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and glared at the meeting with a glare which ought to have paralysed all the members thereof on the spot. Curiously enough though, it did not seem to affect them in the slightest.

"Weally, you wottahs, I stwongly wesent your wiculous wemarks!" said the indignant swell of St. Jim's. "It would have been a gweat ewwor of judgment to have pwesented my Cousin Ethel with a bwooch just as we had finished wofin' up her grub. I—"

"Why didn't you think of that before, then; before we got the brooch, ass?" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake, kindly wefwain fwom indwulgin' in vulgah abuse! As a mattah of fact, it nevah ocwuwed to me, what feawfully bad form it would be till I was on the point of makin' the pwesentation."

"What's the good of you, then?" grunted Lowther.

"Weally, Lowther, I weward this as extremely bad form of you fellahs to turn wound on me in this wopwewehensible mannah, because I wewused to make a feawful fo par," said D'Arcy, with chilly dignity.

"A fearful what?" asked Herries.

"A fearful fo par!"

"Eh?"

"A fo par, deah boy!"

"Blessed if I know what you're jabbering about," said Herries. "What's a foper, when it's at home, anyway?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

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

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.

"Gussy means a faux pas, I suppose," grinned Tom Merry.

"Yaaaas, wathah, deah boy! A fo par!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens is a fo par?" demanded Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, your ignorance is astoundin'! A fo par—"

"Faux pas means a false step, literally," explained Tom Merry, laughing. "That is an error of judgment! It's French!"

Herries sniffed.

"Why the dickens can't the ass talk English?" he said warmly. "Blessed if I know what he's jabbering about with his fo pars and things."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus glared, and seemed about to make some warm retort, but Merry thought it time to intervene.

"Look here, you chaps," he said hastily. "We aren't any nearer to a solution of our difficulty, and it'll be bedtime soon. That chap D'Arcy does jaw so!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Does jaw so that we shall have to muzzle him, I'm afraid, before we can do any good."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally—"

"Shut up!"

"Stow it!"

"Ring off!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Chuck him out!"

"Get on, Tom!"

"Get on with the washing!"

The meeting intimated its feeling with no uncertain voice, and after one or two attempts to make himself heard, D'Arcy subsided.

Tom Merry grinned, and got on with the "washing."

"As I said before," he remarked, "we're in a blessed difficulty. It seems a funny position, but here's a nice brooch we've got to give away, and there's a jolly nice girl to give it to—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And yet—and yet we can't give the jolly nice brooch to the jolly nice girl, according to Gussy, anyway."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I pwotest—"

"That's all right, ass! We don't want to hear you all over again," said Tom Merry hastily. "I think we all agree with your withholding the presentation as you did, on the whole, don't we, chaps?"

There was a murmur of assent from the "chaps," at which D'Arcy looked gratified.

"That doesn't help us to decide what to do with the blessed brooch, though," growled Figgins.

"Has anybody got any idea whatever to propose?" asked Tom Merry, somewhat sarcastically.

Fatty Wynn, who was at the meeting with the other two members of Figgins & Co., though, as a matter of fact, all three of them ought to have been safe in the New House at this hour, jumped up like one struck by a sudden inspiration.

"What I say is," he exclaimed—"why not stand Cousin Ethel a feed back again as a birthday present? You couldn't have a better birthday present than a jolly good feed, I suppose? A jolly good feed—"

The juniors looked at one another, and grinned.

"Oh, ring off, Fatty!" said Jack Blake, in bored tones.

"Don't you ever think of anything else besides feeds? Fancy giving a girl a feed for a birthday present!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"You ask for ideas, and then, when I think of a jolly good one, you—"

"Trust Fatty to think of a feed!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rather!"

"No, Fatty," said Merry, with a smile. "It's very good of you to suggest an idea, of course—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's ruled out of court, thank you!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" grunted Fatty. "Of all the silly asses! I think a feed's a jolly good idea!"

"It wouldn't help us much, now we've got the brooch, anyhow, cormorant!" said Blake. "So ring off, for goodness' sake!"

"Yes, ring off, Fatty!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Blessed if I'm going to stay at the meeting any longer, if all the sensible ideas are going to be squashed at once!" grunted Fatty Wynn. "I'm off to the New House again."

And the fat junior pushed his way to the door, and bounced out.

There was a general grin.

"Directly Fatty finds that feeds are off, he's off, too!" remarked Lowther humorously.

"Ha! ha! Rather!"

"Now, any more brilliant ideas?" asked Tom Merry, looking round. "Not much time left before bed-time, you chaps, so get all your wonderful notions off your chests sharp, if you're going to!"

There was a slight pause, and then boldly, and like Horatius of old, up spake Herries.

"I've got a real ripper!" he said. "An absolute knock-out!"

Herries spoke deliberately, drawing a deep breath.

It was clear that he was filled with admiration of his own wonderful idea.

The juniors looked at Herries rather doubtfully. It was not often that Herries intruded his ideas on the company, and when he did so, they were almost always scouted at once.

Figgins, with charming candour, remarked as much.

"It's not often you have any ideas at all, Herries," he remarked, "and when you do have 'em, they're always rotten. Still—"

"Look here, Figgins—" began Herries warmly.

"Well, it's a fact! You—"

"Look here—"

"Shut up, Figgy!" interrupted Tom Merry pacifically.

"This may be an exception. Let's hear your wheeze, anyway, Herries."

"Hear, hear."

"Ring off, Figgy!"

"Spout up, Herries!"

Herries looked somewhat mollified.

"Well, all right," he said. "But I'm blessed if I'm going to have chaps running down my idea before they even know what it is!"

And he glared at Figgins, who muttered something inaudible.

"Oh, get on with it, Herries!" urged Harry Noble.

"Cut the cackle and come to the hosses!" remarked Blake impatiently.

"Well, my idea is this," said Herries. "Why not give Cousin Ethel a jolly little bull-pup like Towser was when I had him? I think a bull-pup would be just the thing she'd like."

The juniors fairly gasped.

"Bai Jove!"

"M-my hat!"

"M-my great green aunt!"

"Great Scott!"

CHAPTER 9.

Herries's Plan is Not Adopted.

THE juniors were absolutely flabbergasted. So this was Herries's wonderful idea!

The juniors gazed at Herries with feelings that were almost too deep for words.

Herries looked round in surprise.

"Well, what's the matter with you chaps, now?" he demanded.

Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins looked at one another in silence.

Then all three nodded simultaneously.

"Bump him!" jerked out Tom Merry.

And the juniors closed round Herries and grasped him in a firm grasp.

Herries gave a yell of surprise and alarm.

"Here, I say! What's up with you lunatics? Leggo, you asses! Ow!"

But the juniors were grimly determined, and no heed was paid to Herries's outcry.

He was grasped by many pairs of hands.

"Now!" said Tom Merry relentlessly. "Up with him!"

"What—ho!"

And Herries was lifted, willy-nilly, into the air.

He struggled and shouted in vain.

"Here! Hi! I say! Leggo! You—you dummies!" he gasped. "Blake! Dig! Ow!"

"Bump him!" commanded Tom Merry sharply.

Bump!

Herries took the floor in a sitting position with a dull thud, as the novelist would say, and the dust rose in a cloud from the study carpet.

"Ow! Oh! Wow!"

"Again?"

He was heaved up again as if by clockwork.

"Now!"

Bump!

"Ow! Oh! Grooh! You—you—"

"Another one!"

"What—ho!"

Bump!

The grinning juniors released Herries at last, and he rolled over on the dusty carpet.

"Groah! You beastly bounders! What's this for?" he yelled. "Blessed if the whole lot of you aren't off your beastly rockers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared.

Herries's indignation was so real, that it was evident that he thought he was the victim of some gross injustice.

"My dear ass," said Tom Merry, "you must see we had no other course to take, except to bump you! You see——"

"I see a set of howling, frabjous idiots!" howled Herries.

"You see," went on Tom Merry calmly, "when a chap raises a chap's expectations like that, by saying that he has a ripping suggestion to make——"

"Well, and so I had!" yelled Herries wrathfully.

"Then why the dickens didn't you make it," demanded Tom Merry, "instead of babbling that silly rot about a bulldog?"

Herries looked to be on the point of exploding.

"You—you blockheaded dummy!" he howled. "It was a jolly good idea!"

"My dear freak, it was the most hopeless, burbling piece of rot ever thought of, even by you!" said Blake, in measured tones. "The idea of landing Cousin Ethel with an animal which might turn out anything like Towser!"

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

"Besides which," remarked Noble, "it doesn't help us in the slightest to know what to do with the brooch."

"I tell you," began Herries obstinately—"I tell you——"

But he never did tell them.

Such a storm of voices calling upon him to desist arose, that he was obliged to bow before the storm of popular indignation.

"You're a lot of asses!" he yelled above the din. "And it's my belief you're blessed well off your rockers! Towser——"

"Ring off!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Drown him!"

"Towser is a——" shouted Herries.

"Shut up!"

"Out with him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And a rush was made at the persistent Herries.

Herries, obstinate as he was, did not wait for the rush.

In a twinkling he wrenched open the door and dashed out into the passage, slamming the door to after him.

There was a yell of laughter from the study full of juniors, who did not attempt pursuit.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's settled Herries and his blessed ideas!" said Tom Merry, with a grin. "Fancy presenting Cousin Ethel with a pocket-edition of that fearful beast Towser!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe Herries thinks of that beastly bulldog in his sleep," said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To return to business," said the practical Figgins. "Nobody has made any suggestion worth a cent yet, so we are no better off than when we started this confab."

"It will be bedtime jolly soon, too," put in Noble.

"Well, has any gentleman any other ideas to trot out for the last time of asking?" said Tom Merry. "We must give Cousin Ethel something, and——"

"A camera is a jolly nice present for a girl," suggested Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs——" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Everyone likes to be able to take photos," went on Manners.

"I think——"

"Weally, Mannahs——"

Manners frowd up.

"Look here, Gussy, you blessed tailor's dummy, if you keep on interrupting me, I'll throttle you!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I can see you getting ready to crab my idea of a camera from the start, you frabjous ass!"

Arthur Augustus drew himself up with chilly dignity.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Just because you aren't keen on cameras yourself, you—you cuckoo!" went on the amateur photographer of the Shell, his voice rising in his indignation. "You go and——"

But Arthur Augustus refused to have his remarks interrupted any longer.

He jammed his monocle tightly into his eye, and surveyed Manners in a most stately way.

"Your remarks are couched——"

"Good word, couched!" muttered Lowther.

Arthur Augustus froze Lowther—or thought he did—with a frigid glare, but otherwise disregarded the frivolous interruption.

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"Are couched in most offensive language, Mannahs," he went on, in his stately way. "I shall be compelled to pwoceed to give you a most fearful thwashin' if you do not immediately withdwaw them. I meahly wished to wemark before you pwoceeded with your suggestion, that my Cousin Ethel alweady has a camera."

"Oh!" said Lowther.

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, I see!"

"Yaas, and about time, too! And now pewhaps you will withdwaw your offensive wemarks immediately, Mannahs!"

"Oh, rats!" said Manners offhandedly.

"Eh?"

"Rats!"

"Did you say wats to me, Mannahs?" said Arthur Augustus politely.

"No," said Manners. "I didn't! I said rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pwaw put up your hands, Mannahs," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's wrathfully. "I will give you a fearful thwashin'!"

"Chuck it, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We can't get on with the meeting while you and Manners are engaged in giving each other fearful thrashings."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, chuck it, and let's get on with the washing!"

"But——"

"Ring off!"

"Shut up!"

"Quiet, Fido!"

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Stow it, ass!"

And Arthur Augustus at last consented to stow it.

Tom Merry looked round the assembled company again.

"Is that the last of the brain waves?" he inquired. "Because, if so, I've got a little suggestion to make myself."

His chums glared at him.

"Then out with it, ass!" said Blake. "Why the dickens didn't you say so before?"

Tom Merry blushed modestly.

"I wanted to hear what you chaps had to say first."

"Rats!" said Blake rudely. "Now then, out with it, and look sharp about it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Very well."

Tom Merry cleared his throat, and his cheeks grew a little pinker than usual.

"It's like this, you chaps," he said. "You all know what a jolly, charitable girl Cousin Ethel is, and what a lot she does for the sick and poor, don't you?"

"Rather!"

"Of course!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, how would it be to send a big basket of flowers and fruit to the County Hospital as a birthday present for her? It would please her as much as anything could, I know, and she would not be able to refuse it. What do you say?"

Tom Merry waited, with heightened colour, in some anxiety, while the other juniors looked at one another in silence.

Gradually, the merit of Tom Merry's plan dawned on them. They would be doing a kind action by sending the flowers and fruit to the poor inmates of the hospital; they would be satisfying themselves by giving Cousin Ethel a birthday present; and more than that, they knew that their girl-chum was so genuinely charitable, that it would give her more pleasure to be the cause of such a gift to those who were less fortunately placed than she herself, than the receipt of any personal gift.

Figgins was the first to break the silence. His rugged, homely face lit up with genuine pleasure as he stretched out his hand and gave Tom Merry's a hearty shake.

"It's a ripping idea, Tom," he said, and his tones were softer than usual with him. "You're a brick to have thought of it."

"Hear, hear!" said Jack Blake heartily.

"You like the idea, then?" asked Tom Merry, with shining eyes.

"Rather!"

"It's ripping!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Then that's what we'd better do!"

"Good!"

"The best thing we can do, will be to get the stuff and let one of us go over to the hospital with it and explain to the matron," went on Tom Merry. "Next Saturday afternoon would be a good time, if we can get the stuff by then."

"What about the match against Reilly's Irish eleven?" asked Blake

"Yes, there's that, of course," replied Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Still, I think it would be better for only one of us to go, so it won't matter very much."

"I don't mind standing out of the eleven for once," said Figgins generously. "I'll go over to the hospital with pleasure."

"Rats!" said Blake. "I'll stand down and give some other chap a chance in the eleven. I'll go."

"As a matter of fact," said Lowther, "I was just going to offer to go myself!"

"Look here, Lowther—" began Blake and Figgins together, when they were interrupted by a remark from Harry Noble who had been looking very thoughtful for the past minute.

"There is one thing, you chaps," said Noble. "This idea of Tom Merry's, good though it is, doesn't tell us what to do with the brooch, does it?"

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

"Nor it does!"

The juniors' faces fell somewhat.

Except for the keen-witted Cornstalk, they had all overlooked the fact temporarily.

"Look here, you chaps!" said Tom Merry resolutely. "I propose that we leave that brooch question over for a bit. Cousin Ethel doesn't know anything about it, and so let's shelve it till we get a favourable chance of giving it to her. We're sure to think of something before long."

"Right-ho!" said Blake heartily. "I second Tom Merry's proposal."

"Hear, hear!"

"Then all we have to think about now is the whip round for the hospital's birthday present, and appointing someone to go over with the stuff," said Noble.

"That's it!" agreed Tom Merry. "And as the amount of the subs. towards the brooch was limited, I rather think we shall be able to stand a jolly fine basket of stuff for the hospital."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good!"

"Now about me going over with the stuff," began Figgins ungrammatically.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

"My hat!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "There's the bell! You'll have to buck up, you New House chaps!"

The school bell which announced to all and sundry that it was bedtime for the Junior School at St. Jim's, had interrupted Figgins's reopening of the vexed question of who should accompany the present to the hospital.

And Figgins did not try to pursue the question.

"My only Panama!" he gasped. "We ought to have been back in the New House hours ago! There'll be a row if old Ratty spots us!"

"Rather!" mumbled Fatty Wynn. "And I want to finish up that bit of cake I left in the study before I go to bed. I know I sha'n't sleep if I don't. I get so hungry this hot weather!"

"Come on, you fat boulder, and don't jaw," said Kerr, the canny Scot, dragging Fatty Wynn by the arm.

"Good-night, chaps!"

"Ta-ta! And buck up!"

"What-ho!"

And the three New House juniors sprinted off across the quad., leaving the rest of the meeting to disperse to their respective dormitories.

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy Goes.

"TELL you—"

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"Bosh!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Rot!"

The scene of the argument was the quad., and the time immediately after morning lessons. And when it is recorded that the subject was the question which had been left undecided the night before, namely, who should go with the present of flowers and fruit to the hospital, the reader will not need to be told the identity of the arguers.

"Of course I'm the chap to go!" said Figgins emphatically. "A New House fellow—"

"Is just the one to muck everything up," finished Lowther for him. "And as we don't want everything mucked up, a School House fellow will have to go."

"Piffle! Why—"

"I tell you I—"

And so the argument went on.

It was evident that the honour of bearer of a gift on Cousin Ethel's behalf was keenly sought after by the juniors.

The quad., however, was scarcely a suitable place for such a discussion, which began to attract some attention.

Wally, D'Arcy's younger brother, and the scamp of the Third Form, strolled up with Jameson and Curly Gibson, his two great chums.

The three fags regarded the group of arguing juniors with expressions of great superiority.

"What's all the row about, eh?" called out Wally. "Is it a mothers' meeting or a cackling competition, or what?"

Arthur Augustus, the elder scion of the noble house of D'Arcy, ceased arguing with Fatty Wynn, and regarded his younger brother coldly through his monocle.

"Weally, Wally—" he began, in his most stately manner; but that was as far as he got.

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" said Wally, with a sniff. "I'm off. I can't stand a row. Get on with your cackling, do!"

And the three young rascals strutted off arm in arm, leaving Arthur Augustus looking pink with indignation.

The idea of Wally, the noisiest and most unruly of all the fags of St. Jim's, not being able to "stand a row"—in his own elegant language—was distinctly good. And so it appeared to Tom Merry, who had heard what the scallawag of the Third had said.

"That young brother of yours just about takes the bun, Gussy," he laughed. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"He is a distressingly vulgah young wascal," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head, with a sigh.

"Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, Gus!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" began the swell of St. Jim's, looking shocked.

"It is a bit thick, though, our making a row like a lot of fags in the public quad., as it were," said Tom Merry.

"Blessed if it isn't jolly infra. dig."

"Heah, heah, deah boy! I agree with you theah," said D'Arcy readily.

"That's right enough," said Jack Blake, breaking off from the argument he was having with Kerr, of the New House. "Still, what I say is, it's absurd for the New House fellows to say that—"

"Rats! It's you School House loonies that are doing all the arguing," said Kerr warmly. "All we say is—"

"Oh, ring off! I—"

Tom Merry put his hands to his ears.

The argument was getting into full swing again, and it behoved him to stop it before it went any further.

"Look here, you chaps," he cried, raising his voice, "we can't go on arguing here like a set of Third-Formers."

"Heah, heah, Tom Mewwy!"

"Besides, we shall never get any forrader at this rate, either. Now, I have a proposal to make."

"Good!"

"Out with it!"

"Let's hear it!"

"It's this, then. I propose that this delicate mission to the hospital be undertaken by—"

"By yourself, I suppose," put in Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, ass; by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Esq., cousin of Miss Cleveland."

"Heah, heah, deah boy—heah, heah!" remarked D'Arcy, with much satisfaction.

The rest of the juniors were silent for a moment.

Then Figgins's voice growled out the single word:

"Rats!"

But the majority of the juniors were, after all, in agreement with Tom Merry.

They could not all go, and although each was convinced that he himself was the only proper person to do so, they had to admit that D'Arcy, as the cousin of Miss Cleveland, had a certain amount of right to the honour.

Figgins did not admit anything of the kind, of course. But where Cousin Ethel was concerned, Figgins was apt to be unreasonable, and the motion that D'Arcy should go was carried, in spite of the opposition of the New House junior.

And so the matter was settled.

On the following Saturday afternoon, Taggles's pony-trap, with Arthur Augustus's elegant figure at the ribbons, and an enormous hamper in the back, drove out of the gates of St. Jim's, en route for the county hospital.

The juniors who were "in the know" gave it a cheer, and with a cheery wave of the whip in reply the swell of St. Jim's disappeared from sight.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had started out on his mission.

CHAPTER 11.

The Envoy's Return.

IT was dusk before the swell of St. Jim's drove into the old college gates again.

Taggles, the school porter, came out of his lodge, and took over the pony-trap, together with the half-crown.

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tip which Arthur Augustus, with his customary generosity, gracefully presented him with.

"Which I 'opes as you've 'ad a nice trip, Master D'Arcy," said Taggles graciously.

"Yaas, wathah, Taggy, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, somewhat absently. "I—Hallo! Ow! Wow!"

Arthur Augustus broke off with a gasp as a hand smote him heavily on the back, and Blake's well-known tones exclaimed:

"So you're back at last, are you? Well?"

Arthur Augustus glared at his study leader and gasped. Herries, Figgins, and Digby, who, with Blake, had been on the watch for their chum's return, grinned at his expression.

"Well?" repeated Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well?"

"I wegard you as a wuff ass, Blake."

"Well?" asked Blake again, with exasperating persistence.

D'Arcy breathed hard. For a moment it almost looked as if he were about to forget the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, and "let himself go."

But he pulled himself up in time.

"Pway do not be so widge, Blake," he remarked, in his most stately manner. "I do not wish to be compelled—Ow!"

He broke off with a squeal, as, for the second time within two or three minutes, a hand smote him heavily on the back.

"What cheer, old son?" came in Tom Merry's cheerful voice. "Back again from the wilds, then, in comparative safety, are you? Well?"

"Well?" echoed Manners, Lowther, and Noble, who were with Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus gave a wriggle, and put a hand gingerly up to a spot as nearly between his shoulder-blades as possible.

"I wegard you as a wuff beast, Tom Mewwy," he exclaimed plaintively.

Tom Merry did not seem to hear.

"Well?" he repeated, fixing his eye sternly on the countenance of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Well?" came like an echo from Manners, Lowther, and Noble.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle carefully, and treated his interlocutors with a comprehensyge and icy stare. The juniors did not move a muscle of their faces.

Then their lips moved, and one word came from all eight simultaneously:

"Well?"

Arthur Augustus's stare became, if possible, still more frigid.

"Weally, you fellahs," he remarked icily, "I can onlay suppose that this fine weathah has turned your bwains, such as they are. Kindly wefwain from the pawvot-like wepetition of that widdlewos wemark."

This stately oration ought to have crushed the juniors completely, as Arthur Augustus confidently expected it would.

But, funnily enough, it did nothing of the kind.

Tom Merry merely looked across at Blake with eyebrows slightly raised in interrogation.

Blake nodded.

"No. 6," he ejaculated briefly.

No other word passed between the seven juniors. With one accord eight pairs of hands were stretched out to seize upon the swell of St. Jim's.

The elegant junior protested and struggled in vain.

"March!" commanded Tom Merry.

And the eight silent juniors, with their far from silent prisoner, marched.

Straight across the quad, they marched, up the great staircase of the School House, and into Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage.

Nor did they release their prisoner until they were all safely packed inside the study, and Blake had placed his broad back against the closed door.

Taggles watched the juniors disappear with a sniff.

"Young rips, that's what they is!" he snorted. "Young himps! Wot I says is this 'ere, all boys is young himps!"

And having delivered himself of this sage opinion, the amiable Taggles retired to his lodge and his glass of gin-and-water, the half-crown which one of the "young inps" had given him jingling comfortably in his pocket as he went.

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CHAPTER 12.

A Knotty Problem.

"NOW, then, Gussy," said Tom Merry, wagging an admonitory finger at the swell of St. Jim's, who lay back gasping in the only armchair Study No. 6 boasted; "now then, you long-winded old gasbag, you, we've got you! Do hurry up and tell us exactly what happened over at the hospital—what the matron said to you, and what you said to her, and every other detail."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll have to do it, so you may as well start it at once, without any palaver," added Blake.

"Spare us your remarks, and come to the point at once," added Lowther.

"Weally, deah boys—" began Arthur Augustus helplessly.

"Now, then!" said Blake warningly.

"Cut the cackle, mind!"

"Weally—"

"Cut the cackle and come to the hosses!" urged Lowther.

Thus prompted, Arthur Augustus for once climbed down, and came to the point without any unnecessary preamble.

The matron of the hospital had received him and the gift very graciously, and had dwelt on the intense pleasure the flowers and fruit would give to the inmates.

D'Arcy explained, he said, that the present was virtually from Cousin Ethel, to whom alone thanks should be addressed, as it was the knowledge of her great kindness of heart which had alone prompted the gift. The matron had insisted on the elegant junior staying to tea with her, and the journey home, like the journey there, was accomplished without any untoward accident.

"Then everything in the garden was lovely, and all went as merrily as a marriage-bell, so to speak?" remarked Tom Merry, when the swell of St. Jim's at last paused in his narrative.

D'Arcy hesitated, while the juniors all eyed him in some surprise.

"Er—yaas—oh—er—yaas, wathah!" he said, somewhat absently.

"What do you mean?" demanded Blake at once.

Arthur Augustus looked somewhat embarrassed.

"W—what do I mean, deah boy?" he repeated.

"Yes, ass!" said Blake sharply. "What do you mean by saying 'Yaas, wathah,' in that tone of voice?"

"Weally, deah boy, i-i-it's nothin'!"

"Nothing? Rats! What is it?"

"I—I—nothin', deah boy!"

Blake breathed hard through his nose. He looked for a moment as though he contemplated extracting the required information from his elegant chum by means of resorting to violence.

But calmer counsel prevailed.

He reflected after all that, obstinate as he could be at times, Arthur Augustus was the soul of frankness as a rule. He deserved to be treated leniently on his occasional lapses from the path of virtue.

"Now, look here, Gus," said the Yorkshire junior, in a tone of kindly interest that was almost fatherly, "you've got something on your little chest, that's clear. You won't do any good by keeping it to yourself, so out with it, and let's see what we can do to help you—if it isn't private, that is."

Arthur Augustus was silent for a moment.

"I wathah think I will," he said at last. "It's like this, you see, deah boys. In the course of convabsation, the matwon wemarked that two of the beds in the hospital have wecently had to be given up, owin' to insufficient support in the way of subscriptions bein' forthcomin' to keep them up."

The study full of juniors was silent, listening with downcast eyes.

"The matwon seemed to take it vevy much to heart," went on D'Arcy, "and I said I would see what I could do towards havin' the beds started again."

"Good old Gussy!" murmured several voices.

"You—you see, deah boys," went on the kindhearted swell of St. Jim's, "it seems so wotten to have two beds shut up for lack of funds when there are so many pooah beggahs wantin' to get into the hospital. The matwon says she has done ewerythin' poss. to keep them open."

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry, with conviction, breaking the short silence that followed D'Arcy's tragic little tale. "It's rotten, and it's not right!"

"And it's up to us to put things right!" chimed in Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"Rather!"

"Jollay good!" said Arthur Augustus, in great relief. "I ought to have known that you fellahs would help me at once."

"Of course you ought, ass!" said Blake severely. "We're going to start right away. The only question is, how are we going to help?"

"Of course, we could all write our people and tell 'em about it, and get 'em to send something," said Noble, "but—"

"But that wouldn't be doing anything ourselves—it would be asking others to do it for us," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Exactly," said Noble. "Just what I was thinking myself."

"I might write my govannah for a whole lot of fivahs," said Arthur Augustus, with a wrinkled brow. "Of course, if I put it to him as a sport—"

"Ha, ha! That'd be hardly fair on your noble governor, Gussy!" laughed Lowther.

"Ha, ha! No!" agreed the others.

"Pewwaps you're wight," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully, "but how on earth are we to waise money?"

"Blessed if I know," muttered Herries, scratching his head.

"How much is wanted, do you know, Gus?" inquired Blake, ever practical.

"Yaas, watah! Some wich merchant company has pwomised half the money, pwovided the othah half is waised. That will mean about a thousand pounds must be found, the matwon says."

"H'm! It's a good lot."

"Yaas, watah! Of course, we can't expect to get the lot, but we can help towards it."

"Of course."

The juniors thought hard for a minute or so.

Figgins's brow was especially corrugated. It was obvious that the chief of the New House juniors was putting in some really hard thinking.

"We might get up a monster dog-show or something," said Herries, suddenly struck by a brilliant notion. "Towser—"

"Blow Towser!" said Blake.

"What do you mean, Blake?" said Herries. "A dog-show or something—"

"Better make it the something, then," said Tom Merry tersely. "A dog-show's absolutely off."

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Rats! What's the good of a blessed dog-show with only about two dogs in the school?" said Tom Merry. "It'd be a toss up between Towser and young Wally D'Arcy's Pongo as to which was the ugliest-looking brute in the show, anyway."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You asses!" shouted Herries wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling cuckoos!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You blessed dummified fatheads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled with laughter, and the indignant Herries gave it up, and took refuge in a glowering silence.

"Now, any other suggestions?" asked Tom Merry. "If any of you have a brain-wave, speak now, or for ever hold your peace."

There was another slight pause, and then Figgins stepped forward with a modest blush on his homely face.

There was a stir of anticipation.

Figgins did not very often thrust himself forward, unless he had some good reason for it.

"Go it, Figgy," said Tom Merry encouragingly. "Out with it!"

"Well, I've got an idea," said Figgins simply, "which is just exactly the thing!"

"Let's hear it, then, old man!"

"We must get up a sports meeting."

"What?"

"My hat!"

"A sports meeting!"

The juniors gasped as the idea, with all its details, struck them thus suddenly.

"Yes, why not?" went on Figgins calmly, though the pink flush on his cheeks showed how inwardly excited he was at the prospect. "A sports meeting at this time of the year isn't usual, I know, but it will be none the worse for that, and more original. We could arrange with Frank Monk and Gordon Gay of the Grammar School to go in with us, probably, and make it a two-school affair. Besides—"

Figgins paused, and blushed awkwardly.

"Besides what?" demanded Blake, amazed at the New House junior's eloquence, and surprised at its sudden termination.

"Why, I—I was thinking that—that it would be a good chance to give Cousin Ethel that brooch, you know," said Figgins, going a fiery red. "If we asked her to give the prizes, it—it would only be natural to give her a little present herself."

The murder was out at last! The secret of Figgins's brilliant idea was revealed! It was the thought of Cousin Ethel that had inspired it!

"Good old Figgy!" murmured Tom Merry, as this thought passed through his mind.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Figgy!"

"Bully for you, Fig-pudding!"

Shouts of approval of Figgins's plan filled the study. It was one of those happy thoughts that just meet the case, as it is at once obvious to everyone. Every junior present approved of it wholly.

An eager discussion at once began, everyone talking at once and suggesting details and improvements on the plan.

"We can run it in co-operation with Mr. Short, the rector, down in the village," said Manners enthusiastically. "He will let us have the Rectory meadow, and will advertise it when he knows its object."

"Rather!" assented Noble. "The village boys must be asked to compete in the events, too, of course."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We'll make it an open meeting, and we ought to see some good racing with St. Jim's and the Grammar School kids and the village boys."

"The Head will have to be consulted first, of course," remarked Figgins, thoughtfully. "But he's sure to help all he can when he knows the object of the meeting."

"Yaas, watah!" put in Arthur Augustus. "The Head is certain to behave like an old sport!"

"Rather!"

"It ought to be a good leg-up for the hospital, as far as advertising goes, anyway," said Blake. "It will draw people's attention to the lack of beds, and make 'em subscribe."

"That's so, too!"

"Now, about the events," said Tom Merry, drawing a sheet of paper towards him. "We must have the hundred and the half-mile, of course."

"And the long and high jumps," said Noble.

"Rather! And the hurdles."

"And the quarter," put in Digby, who rather fancied himself as a sprinter.

"Then we must have a cycle-wace of some kind, deah boys," put in Arthur Augustus. "I watah fancy I should go in for the cycle-wace."

"Better make it a slow cycle-race, then," remarked Blake. "We may as well give Gussy a chance."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll make it a slow cycle-race, then," said Tom Merry. "The Rectory field is too bumpy for a fast race really, anyhow."

"What about an obstacle-race?" said Herries, coming out of his prolonged fit of silence. "That's the best race of the lot, I always think."

"Good! We must have an obstacle-race!"

"Rather! Shove it down, Tom Merry!" said Blake. "Then there's—"

"Here, hold on!" said Tom Merry. "That's eight events you have got down already. We'd better leave the list at that for the present. We must form a committee, first, to arrange the whole thing."

"Good! Then let's get on with it!"

And the juniors did get on with it, with a vengeance. They all worked like horses, as Blake put it.

The Grammar School was communicated with, and readily fell in with the scheme, and a strong committee was formed, consisting of Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, Noble, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Gordon Gay and Frank Monk, of the Grammar School Fourth Form.

The Heads of St. Jim's and the Grammar School—Drs. Holmes and Monk—and the Vicar of Rylcombe—the Rev. Mr. Short—approved of the scheme highly, and offered to do what they could towards making it a success.

The day was fixed for the following Saturday, and the committee, as may be imagined, had a busy week of it.

Tom Merry got some special posters rushed through by his friend the Rylcombe printer, and the county was sowed with them. The Rectory meadow, itself, was transformed into a businesslike-looking course.

It was a bit rough, naturally, but the juniors could not afford to be too particular. Their enthusiasm carried them through every difficulty.

Hours were spent in pegging, and marking, and flagging, and the course for the obstacle-race looked difficult enough for anything when the energetic Blake had finished with it.

There was one thing in the midst of all these preparations which puzzled very much all those juniors interested in the project who were not on the committee. That was, that however busy the committee might be, they always had time for long confabs with Bernard Glyn, the ingenious member of Cornstalk & Co.—who was generally-known as the St. Jim's inventor.

Glyn was not a member of the committee, nor was there any particular reason for his being especially interested more than any other junior in the great sports meeting. But it

was a fact that Bernard Glyn got special leave off all games and slipped off by himself on every possible occasion. And at frequent intervals he had long consultations with the committee, who listened to his every suggestion with the greatest respect.

This puzzled many of the juniors sorely, but not even the closest chums of any of the committee-men could get any information from that important body on this point.

"Wait until Saturday!" was the invariable reply.

And with that the curious ones had to be content.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the "rank outsider," as he was generally called—made more than one attempt to satisfy his curiosity by underhand means, but without success. The nature of the promised "Monster Sensation" was guarded like a State secret, and remained a mystery to St. Jim's.

Needless to say, one of the first actions of the committee was to put Figgins's excellent suggestion into practice and write to Cousin Ethel, inviting her to present the prizes on the great day, some very handsome prizes having been offered by various masters of the two schools, and others.

Equally unnecessary is it to add that Cousin Ethel accepted the invitation "with the greatest pleasure in the world," to quote her letter, and this fact tended greatly to increase the fervour with which the St. Jim's juniors—one especially—looked forward to the great day.

For did not the whole scheme owe its inception, more or less, directly to Cousin Ethel?

CHAPTER 13.

Great Preparations.

THE day on which the sports were to be held dawned fair and smiling. The sun shone brightly overhead, and the drops of morning dew on the grass sparkled brilliantly, as if they had been diamonds. No more perfect morning could be imagined for the events which were to take place.

The committee were early afoot, taking a last glance at the Rectory meadow, to see that everything was ready and in its place. Such had been the care with which everything had been arranged, however, that nothing needed altering.

"It'll be a howling success!" said Tom Merry, with conviction.

"If it isn't, it ought to be!" put in Figgins. "The only thing that could have spoilt it was rotten weather, and we seem to have steered clear of that!" he added, gazing into the cloudless blue of the sky.

"Supposing nobody turns up!" suggested Harry Noble, cheerfully.

"Ass!" was all that Blake remarked.

D'Arcy went into it more fully.

"Weally, Noble," he said, "I hitherto have regarded you as a moderately reasonable individual; but after that remark, I am compelled to change my opinion!"

"Well, I'd change it back again quick!" retorted Noble, in mock anger.

"I am afraid that is impos. until you have given me good reason for so doin'!"

"Right you are!" cried Noble, rushing at D'Arcy and seizing him violently.

"Welease me, wuffian!" cried D'Arcy. "You are hurtin' me tewwibly!"

"Is your opinion the same still, or are you wavering?" asked Noble, keeping a firm hold on him.

"Weally, Noble, I cannot see any reason for my alterin' it!"

"Well, the sooner you do, the better for you!" answered Noble. "I shall inflict fearful punishment on you until you do!"

"Under the cires., then, I think I may say that my opinion is not unaltewable."

"Good! You apologise, then?"

"I considah that equivalent to an apology!" said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Well, I'll let you go on condition you behave as well as you can and don't make any more rude remarks!"

"Weally, Noble, I shall make no effort to behave any better than usual."

"Well, I certainly sha'n't let you go!"

"Pway welease me, as I am gettin' wathah tired of this position!"

"Well, as I know you can't help it, I'll have mercy on you!"

"Weally, Noble—"

"Don't thank me!" said Noble condescendingly. "I always was merciful."

"I did not intend to thank you. I wegard you as a wuff beast!"

"I say, you chaps, I hope we get a good crowd!" said Jack Blake, diplomatically changing the subject.

And, indeed, everything seemed to point to there being an unprecedented attendance at the afternoon's amusements.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 131.

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

MONSTER SENSATION!

THE GREATEST NOVELTY OF THE AGE!

Problem which has baffled man for centuries will be Solved at 4.30 sharp on

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20th,

In the Rectory Field, Rylcombe.

DON'T MISS IT!

COME EARLY AND AVOID THE CRUSH!

Naturally, the curiosity of the whole school was aroused by this advertisement.

What was the sensation going to be?

But the committee were dumb whenever the subject was mentioned.

Tom Merry, Jack Blake and D'Arcy were just entering the School House, preparatory to having breakfast, when they were met by Reilly, the Irish boy from Belfast.

"Sure, and what is it we're going to see this afternoon?"

"Go and devour a material used for producing heat, my dear Irish fathead!" said Blake cheerfully.

"But, really, tell me, is it to be very exciting?"

"Your hair will stand up absolutely straight before it's finished, my pretty Irishman!"

"You're a lot of silly idiots, I'm thinking!" said Reilly.

"Don't think, dear boy!" answered Tom Merry. "It's a bad habit, and besides, you might hurt yourself."

"Rats!" retorted the Irish boy, and walked off with a discontented grunt.

"What an inquisitive little youth it is!" said Tom Merry.

"He won't be happy till he gets it, so to speak!"

"Yaas, wathah!" put in D'Arcy. "And I weally believe he hasn't any idea what form the surprise is going to take!"

"I am quite sure of it!" said Blake. "And what's more, not a soul in the school except the committee and one other, have a ghost of a notion what it's going to be!"

"By Jove, it will be sport!" said Tom Merry. "Won't it fairly open their eyes!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! But all the same, I am vey much in favour of withholdin' to breakfast."

"Yes, come on, we're late as it is!"

Saying which, all three hastened off to breakfast.

It was noticed by some of the boys that Bernard Glyn finished his meal unusually early, and immediately after he disappeared down the road, in the direction of the railway station.

"It absolutely beats me what Glyn is up to!" said Manners to Lowther after breakfast.

"He's got one of his weird little games on, I suppose," answered Lowther. "I bet we shall see something funny this afternoon!"

"I say, let's go down towards the station and see if we can gather anything."

"Right you are! Come on!"

The two juniors set out, and after about five minutes' walking there appeared a large farm cart round the bend in the road, and Bernard Glyn was leading the horse. An extraordinarily-shaped object, covered over with canvas, lay in the cart. This the two boys looked at as carefully as they could without actually appearing very curious about it.

Bernard Glyn frowned slightly.

"Hallo, Glyn! Taken up farming?" asked Lowther.

"No," answered Glyn.

"Can we help you in any way?" asked Manners, with unusual politeness.

"No, thanks," answered Glyn. "I can manage quite well alone. I'm just going up to the Rectory field."

Saying which, he turned sharp to the right up a lane which led to the Rectory field by a short cut.

Manners and Lowther looked at each other and scratched their heads.

"I can't make head or tail of it," said Manners.

"What ever was in that cart?"

"I don't know. There's nothing for it but to wait and see."

"Well, we can be sure we shall get our money's worth if Glyn has anything to do with it."

"And it looks somewhat as if he had, fathead!" said Manners sarcastically.

"That is precisely what I meant to imply, idiot!" retorted Lowther.

"All right, lunatic!"

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.

"All right, ass!"

With this interchange of polite remarks they reached the school, and, finding that they were somewhat late for school, rushed at full speed into the doorway of St. Jim's.

Crash! Biff! Bang!

"You howling fatheads!"

"You howwid boundahs!"

"You chuckle-headed dummies!"

"Can't you look where you're coming to, you great, clumsy elephants?"

"Why don't you blow a horn when you're coming round a corner at about eighty?"

These remarks were delivered in a very short space of time by various members of the Bazaar Committee, who were just coming out of the school door when Manners and Lowther ran in.

A violent collision had occurred, as may be gathered from the somewhat abusive language.

"Can't you get out of the way when a fellow's in a hurry?" said Lowther. "We're fearfully late as it is."

"Yes; you abusive lot of dummies!" put in Manners. "Clear out, and let us pass!"

"Weally, Mannahs," answered D'Arcy, "I considah your wemark vevy out of place. I considah the circs. wawwant a vevy humble apology fwom both of you!"

"Go and eat your apology!" retorted Manners very rudely. "Clear out! I'm in a hurry!"

"I've no doubt you are," chimed in Tom Merry; "but we aren't, so it doesn't much matter how long we keep you."

"Come on, Manners!" shouted Lowther. And made a rush at the other juniors, who occupied the whole of the passage.

A fierce struggle ensued.

"Catch hold of his legs, Gussy!"

"I'll take his arms. Now, then!"

"One, two, three!"

Bump went the two unfortunate juniors against the wall.

"Ow! You're breaking my neck!"

"Leggo, you bouncers! You're killing me!"

Then the tormentors dropped the two juniors on the floor, and walked on. Manners and Lowther had no time nor wish to continue the argument, but fled to the class-room, where they arrived very late. Fortunately for them, Mr. Linton was still later, so they escaped further punishment.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Figgins, Noble, and D'Arcy walked across the school yard towards the Rectory meadow. They had obtained leave off for the morning to inspect things generally.

"Those wuff boundahs have considerably disawwanged my dwess!" said the swell of St. Jim's, endeavouring to put his tie straight with the aid of a little pocket mirror which he always carried.

"By Jove! So they have!" cried Blake. "I can see two particles of dust on your left trouser leg!"

"Weally, Blake, I most sincerely wegwet you cannot be more sensible! One cannot be too careful of one's appearance!"

"Of course, when a chap's naturally ugly——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Quite so, Blake. One has to be very careful. Besides, he must think of his future career as a tailor's dummy!" put in Tom Merry.

"I wufese to be called a tailor's dummy!"

"Well, you might be the tailor yourself, and be the dummy during off hours!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are extremewy wude!"

"Never mind, Gussy. Cheer up!"

"I wufese to cheer up!"

"Don't be downhearted!"

At this moment there was a shout from Figgins, who was a little ahead of the rest.

"Glyn's up here, already on the job!"

"Good! Let's go and see if we can help him."

A small shed had been erected in one corner of the Rectory field, and had been railed off from the rest of the field by hurdles. The boys just caught a glimpse of Glyn entering the shed. As they approached the shed, he came out again, as he had heard their voices.

"Hallo, you chaps! Not in school?"

"No. We've got the morning off," answered Tom Merry.

"Good!" he added. "What a sporting old bird the Head is!"

"Yaas, wathah!" broke in Gussy. "A wegular old sport!"

"Have you got it in there?" inquired Figgins, after a pause.

"Yes. Just pushed it in. It looks ripping!" answered Glyn.

"Can we see?" asked Blake.

"Yes, rather! Come on!"

The juniors disappeared into the shed. After a moment there could be heard sundry exclamations of surprise and delight.

"What a ripping wheeze!"

"Bai Jove! What a wemarkable object!"

"Absolutely A1!"

After some minutes they all came out into the open again.

"Now, look here," said Tom Merry, "let's make a complete round of everything, just to see that everything will be all right this afternoon."

"Right you are. Lead on!"

Great care had been taken over the various arrangements. The field was quite extensive, and they had easily been able to measure out a circle of a quarter of a mile. They had put strong string all the way round this circle, tied on to stakes, which were fixed in the ground at intervals of about ten or fifteen yards.

Then, by the hedge at one side of the meadow, they had prepared a pit for the long jump, and in the middle of the circle they had mowed and rolled a patch about ten yards square for the high jump. They had also taken a big horse-roller round the course several times, which was, therefore, in a very fair condition.

A small flag had been tied on to each stake around the course, and the whole presented a very gay appearance.

After a very comprehensive tour of inspection, the committee came to the conclusion that no alterations were necessary. They therefore employed the rest of the morning in improving the patch where the high jump was to take place, and in redigging the long-jump pit, and in generally preparing for the afternoon's events.

They returned to St. Jim's at one o'clock, hot and perspiring after their vigorous morning's work.

"Bai Jove, deah boys," remarked D'Arcy, "I am feelin' so vevy hot and tired that I am vevy much afwaid that I shall be unable to wun in any of the events this afternoon!"

"I haven't seen you do any work yet," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You spent your time in giving useless directions to everybody else, and in generally making a nuisance of yourself, as far as I can remember."

"Weally, Blake, your memwory must be wemarkably bad, then. I distinctly wewollect assistin' you to pull the weller——"

"My only aunt! You don't say so!" put in Tom Merry, in affected surprise. "And yet you're still alive!"

"Pway don't be uttably absurd, Tom Mewwy!" answered Gussy, with dignity. "I am capable of a much greater amount of work."

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

"You caeklin' wottahs! I am tellin' you twuth, and I can see no weason for this widiculous mirth."

"Now, look here, Gussy," began Tom Merry, looking quite serious. "Do you mean to tell me that you can do more than help another chap to pull a roller over about ten square yards of grass in one morning and not die of exhaustion?"

"You absurd cweature, of course I could!"

"Then, my fellow committers," cried Tom Merry, waving his hand round the circle of grinning juniors, "let us carry this wonderful phenomenon, this human being of unparalleled strength, shoulder high through the courtyard of this ancient seat of learning!"

"Hear, hear!"

Without further delay, the boys seized the unfortunate D'Arcy, and hoisted him up on to their shoulders, much to the detriment of his clothes.

"Welsease me instantly, you wotten boundahs!" shouted D'Arcy, struggling to free himself and get to the ground again.

"Real fame cannot long lie hid!" said Blake majestically. "Your wonderful powers are gradually being found out, Gussy."

However, in spite of D'Arcy's protests and struggles, he was carried right through the school yard shoulder high. Just in front of the entrance to the school they deposited him on his back on the gravel, and then disappeared inside. D'Arcy slowly picked himself up.

"Weally, these wuff wottahs are becomin' unbeawable!" he muttered to himself. "I shall weally have to cease to weward them as fwends any longah!"

By the end of dinner, however, he had forgotten all about his wrongs and his threat, and was at peace with his late tormentors.

CHAPTER 14.

Good Racing.

ALL was excitement after lunch. The bazaar opened at 2 p.m., and the sports were to start at 2.15. A great crowd was expected, and the authorities were destined not to be disappointed.

St. Jim's and the Grammar School turned up in force, convinced that they were to see some really good sport. Then the "Monster Sensation" had proved a great attraction, for all were curious to know what it was to be. The members of the committee, who were the only people "in the know," had been positively besieged by inquisitive persons.

Some had expressed their curiosity openly; some had appeared as if they really had not the slightest wish to know; but one and all had failed to extract a single piece of information about it.

Frank Monk and Gordon Gay had, perhaps, had the worst time of all, as they were the only two on the committee in the Grammar School, and, consequently, they had to bear what was borne by six in the School House. But the day had arrived, and not a soul was any wiser.

Two o'clock struck, and the boys began to pour into the meadow. There was some struggling and pushing to get in front, as the first arrivals would have the best chance of securing a good position from which to watch the sports.

There was a good deal of friendly rivalry between St. Jim's and the Grammar School, as boys from both had entered for almost every race.

The first event was the hundred yards race.

The competitors were seen throwing off their coats and taking up their positions for the start. Mr. Railton had consented to act as starter, with Mr. Linton and Mr. Short as judges.

All was in readiness.

"Are you ready?"

"Are you steady?"

Bang!

The pistol rang out, and the boys shot off.

Arthur Augustus and Clifton Dane represented St. Jim's in this race, while Frank Monk was the only Grammarian. Two village fellows were also running.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Buck up, Monk!"

"Now's your chance, Dane!"

"Monk's leading!"

"No, it's Gussy!"

"Bravo! Bravo! Well done!"

Just at the last moment, the taller of the two village lads had made a final effort and snatched the race from D'Arcy. Dane and Monk tied for third place, while the second villager brought up the rear. It had been an excellent race, and everybody was pleased with the result.

D'Arcy took his beating in a thoroughly sportsman-like way.

"He absolutely outwun me!" he declared. "He weally wan the wace weamarkably well."

As there was none too much time, the boys had taken up their positions for the next race—the quarter mile—almost before the hundred yards was over.

D'Arcy came up to Tom Merry, who was running.

"Good luck to you, deah boy!" he said genially. "Pway don't over exert yourself and wuin your chance for the high jump!"

"Don't you fret, old chap," answered Tom Merry. "I'm good for more than a quarter, even if I have pulled a roller this morning!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Bang!

D'Arcy jumped at the noise. Mr. Railton had pulled the trigger quite by accident, and there was no one more surprised than he. Some of the competitors had started off, but they were soon recalled.

"It has put my nerves in quite a fluttah!" said D'Arcy, in rather an offended tone. "I was not expectin' it in the least!"

"Nor was I, my dear boy," said Mr. Railton, overhearing D'Arcy's remark. "Somebody carelessly jogged my arm in passing, and that caused me to pull the trigger quite unwittingly."

The boys were now in their places again, and Mr. Railton went through the usual formula.

Bang! went the pistol.

They went off.

Noble took the lead at the start, with Tom Merry in close attendance. The first half of the race was run in this order, and then Tom Merry slowly began to gain on Noble. When they came into the straight, Noble was only leading by a couple of feet.

Could Tom Merry do it?

The crowd of boys were roaring encouragement to the two strugglers. Closer and closer drew Tom Merry to the leader. Now they are only ten yards from the post! Noble labours heavily but sticks to it well! They are level, and only two more yards! Now they have passed the post! Who has won? The two judges are seen consulting together. Then comes the official verdict:

"Tom Merry and Harry Noble tied for first place!"

Cheer upon cheer rang out. Both had made a very plucky and sportsmanlike effort, and neither had been beaten! What more could be wished for?

"Well run, Tom Merry!"

"Well run, Kangaroo!"

"Well done, St. Jim's!"

Even the Grammarians could not restrain their enthusiasm. Their representatives had been well beaten, but they were, at least, good sportsmen, and they cheered lustily with the rest.

D'Arcy went up to the two runners, who were gasping for breath.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, that was a pewfectly wippin' wace!" he said. "You have amply wepaid the twouble I have taken in twainin' you!"

"Yes, you certainly have always let us do all the work," gasped Tom Merry. "I suppose that is what you mean?"

"Not exactly, deah boy!" he answered. "I was wewefin' more to the care I have taken of you, and—"

"Go and eat coke, you dummy!" cried Kangaroo, who had by this time almost recovered his breath. "The only thing you ever did to keep us in training, is to give us something which we can always laugh at."

"I fail to compwehend your meaning, Kangawoo!"

"My dear Gussy," put in Tom Merry, "do you think we keep you in the School House for nothing?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!"

"Really, Gussy, you must be even thicker-skulled than I thought you were!"

"I considah that to be a vewy insultin' wemark, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus. "And as it is imposs. at the moment to give you the fearful thwashin' you deserve, I shall cease to wegard you—"

D'Arcy's remarks were cut short by the clang of a large bell, which announced that another race was soon to be run.

The one hundred and twenty yards hurdle race was the next item on the programme.

D'Arcy and Bernard Glyn were in for this, while Gordon Gay represented the Grammar School. Arthur Augustus rather fancied himself as a hurdler; and, indeed, he showed very good form, as a rule, in this—the prettiest of all races.

"How are you feelin', deah boy?" he inquired of Glyn.

"Fit as a fiddle!" replied the Liverpool lad gaily. "How's yourself?"

"I have been wathah put out by Tom Mewwy," he answered, "but otherwise I am feelin' quite confidant of success."

"Mind you don't catch your toe in the first hurdle, then!" said Glyn, smiling.

"Weally, Glyn, I considah that a vewy unnecessary warnin'. But," he added, changing his tone, as he thought he might have hurt the Liverpool lad's feelings, "thank you all the same!"

"Don't mensh," answered Glyn, laughing outright.

The starter called to them to get ready. One, two, three, and they were away. Glyn got a very good start, but by the sixth hurdle D'Arcy was level with him.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Keep it up, Glyn!"

"Liverpool for ever!"

"By Jove, he was nearly over, then!"

"Bad luck!"

"Well run, Gussy!"

At the eighth hurdle, Glyn had just grazed his shin, and had thereby lost his step. He crashed right into the middle of the ninth and smashed it to splinters. Gussy just got home first, in consequence, from Gordon Gay. But he had run very well, and would probably have won in any case.

One or two juniors anxiously ran up to Glyn, who was lying on the grass, but everybody was very relieved to see him scramble to his feet again, apparently quite unhurt.

"Are you all right?" asked Dr. Holmes, who was first on the spot.

"Quite all right, thank you, sir," answered Glyn. "Except for a few little grazes," pointing to his shin, which was bleeding a little.

ANSWERS

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.

"Good! I am glad it is nothing worse!" said Dr. Holmes, very much relieved.

Bernard Glyn smiled merrily, and walked off to get his wound, which was quite a slight one, bathed.

Arthur Augustus was immensely pleased with himself.

"Vewy hard luck on Glyn," he said. "It would have been anothah weally good wace if he hadn't fallen."

"Gordon Gay wasn't far behind you, old boy!" said Monty Lowther. "You nearly lost the whole biz by looking round at Glyn."

"Weally, deah boy, I only wished to assuah myself that Glyn was not sewiously hurt!"

"Very thoughtful of you, Gussy," said Jack Blake, who had joined the group. "I wonder you didn't stop and help him over the next hurdle."

"Pway don't be absurd, Blake," he answered. "I could not have done that and won the wace——"

"You don't say so!"

"Whereas," he continued, totally disregarding the interruption, "I could look wound and win the wace, as you see."

"Oh, yes, you're a marvel, Gussy, we know!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 15.

Kangaroo Does Not Win!

"**H** ALLO! Here's Cousin Ethel!" shouted Tom Merry, running forward to meet the charmingly-dressed girl who had just arrived.

"I'm so sorry to be so late!" said Miss Cleveland, after shaking hands all round. "I was detained just at the last moment, and have only got away now by great luck!"

"I'm so glad you did, Cousin Ethel," said Figgins. "It would have been dull without you!"

"Yaas, deah girl," put in D'Arcy gallantly. "No function of this kind is complete without you."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure," answered Miss Cleveland, smiling. "I certainly should have been immensely disappointed if I had been unable to come."

"You are just in time to see the long jump," said Jack Blake.

"Oh, I'm very glad I haven't missed that!" said Cousin Ethel. "By the way, what have I missed?"

"The hundred yards, the quarter mile, the slow bike-race, and the hurdles."

"Oh, I am sorry I did not see the hurdles! I think it is quite the nicest race of all. Who won it?"

"I am pleased to be able to tell you that I won the hurdles!" said Arthur Augustus proudly.

"Well done, Arthur!"

"Glyn had the misfortune to fall just before the finish, thus spoilin' his chance."

"Oh, I am sorry for that!" said Miss Cleveland. "Are you much hurt?" she added, turning to Glyn, who had just come up with a bandage round his shin.

"Very little, thank you, Miss Cleveland," said Glyn. "Just a scratch."

"I'm glad it is nothing worse. Now come along and let us get good places for the long jump. I wonder who will win it!"

"I wathah fancy Kangawoo wil cawvy this off."

"Unless some dark horse from the village turns up!" said Glyn.

"That's poss.," agreed Tom Merry. "These village chaps are often jolly good jumpers."

"You know Bill Jennings, the bootmaker's son, down the village?" said Figgins.

"Yes."

"Well, they say he's been practising every day for the last month."

"Well, he ought to do something, then," said Kangaroo.

"I have hardly practised at all."

"Well, you ought to have done, slacker!" said Jack Blake.

"Well, I didn't see you at it often," retorted Kangaroo.

"And you rather fancy yourself?"

"Yes. But I haven't a chance against a kangaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass, Blake!" cried Kangaroo.

"Well, aren't you a kangaroo?"

"Don't be a fathead!"

"Rats!"

"I say, you two," shouted Tom Merry, "you'd better chuck that and come along to the start, or you'll get left."

"Come on, Kangaroo! Hop up!"

"Right-ho, Tyke!"

Jack Blake flew off, closely pursued by Kangaroo. They both arrived at the starting-point thoroughly out of breath.

"You are two silly asses!" commented Digby, who was taking part in this event. "You're worn out already!"

"Go and eat coke, ass!" retorted Blake. "I'm just tiring Kangaroo out so that I can win!"

"Yes, but you must remember kangaroos have a tail to help 'em!"

"I'll slay you, Dig, in half a shake!" breathed Noble.

"Don't trouble!"

"I'll grind you to powder!"

"Don't waste your breath like that!"

"Now then," shouted Mr. Railton, "get ready to come in the following order."

He then read out all the competitors in order. Each competitor was to have two tries, and the winner to have two or three exhibition jumps.

Blake was the first to go. He made a very fair jump, but nothing very extraordinary.

Kangaroo was the next to perform. He came rushing down the course at an enormous speed, and then jumped, and the jump really reminded one very much of the animal after which he was named.

"Well jumped, Kangawoo!" cried D'Arcy, who was standing next to his cousin, looking very happy. "What a weamarkably ungainly jumpah he is, though, isn't he, Ethel?"

"He certainly is not very elegant," agreed Cousin Ethel. "But he jumps very well."

"Yes, he does," said Figgins, who was occupying a position on her left side. "And what's more, he's going to win!"

"Hallo, who's this?"

An ungainly figure was pounding down the course, taking enormous strides, and blowing like a grampus. He took off about a foot before the mark and jumped, spreading out his arms and legs in a most extraordinary way. He landed in the pit, and losing his balance, went headlong into the crowd behind, knocking several over, so great was his impetus.

However, he soon picked himself out, apparently none the worse, and returned to the starting-point with a grin on his face. It was Jennings, the bootmaker's son. However, in spite of his curious method, he had made quite a good jump—not more than two inches behind Kangaroo.

"Here's Tom Mewwy appwoachin'!" sang out D'Arcy presently. "I wondah if he will succeed in beatin' these othah fellahs!"

But no. He fell short of Kangaroo's jump by six inches.

There were several more competitors—notably, Carboy and Lane, of the Grammar School—but no one beat Jennings or Kangaroo.

Kangaroo's second jump was not so good as his first; but Jennings did better, and after much measuring, the judges came to the conclusion that they were equal, and they would, therefore, have to jump again.

Kangaroo was the first.

"I shall not weally be vewy surprised if that village lad succeeds in beating Kangawoo," said D'Arcy to his cousin.

"Really? I should like Kangaroo to win this," answered Cousin Ethel; "but the other boy jumps very well."

"I quite agree with you, deah girl," said Gussy, screwing his monocle in his eye as he spoke. "Here he comes!"

"Go it, Kangaroo!"

"St. Jim's for ever!"

"Well jumped, sir!"

A great shout arose when it was seen that the St. Jim's junior had beaten his former jump by several inches.

"That's splendid!" cried Cousin Ethel. "Jennings will never beat him now!"

"Vewy impwob!" said D'Arcy.

It was now Jennings's turn. He lumbered down the course as before, took a terrific jump, spread out his arms and legs, and fell on his nose, also as before.

The two jumps were so near one another that no one could see which had won.

The crowd awaited the result with breathless excitement.

"Jennings wins!"

A roar of congratulation broke from the boys, who, although disappointed that their favourite had not won, were true sportsmen, and did not grudge the bootmaker's son his victory in the least.

"How very disappointing for Kangawoo!" observed D'Arcy, readjusting his monocle, which had dropped from his eye in his excitement, and staring at the somewhat uncouth figure of Jennings. "Fancy a kangawoo not bein' able to jump farthah than that!"

Cousin Ethel went up and congratulated the winner, who looked very startled at being spoken to by the girl.

"Thank 'ee kindly, miss," he said, blushing. "It makes it twice as nice winnin', being congratulated by yew!"

All the people knew Miss Cleveland well, and consequently loved her well. She had been specially kind to Jennings's mother, who was an invalid.

The bell was beginning for the next race, and D'Arcy consulted his programme.

"I am afwaid I must leave you now, deah girl," he said to

CHAPTER 16.

A Monster Sensation Indeed!

his cousin. "The next is the high-jump, which I wathah hope to win."

"Well, good luck to you, Arthur!" answered Cousin Ethel.

"I shall try hard to win."

So saying, he walked off and joined a group of juniors who were making their way to the starting-point.

The result of the high jump was unexpected. After a great struggle with Gordon Gay, of the Grammar School, Figgins managed to secure first prize with the very creditable jump of 5ft. Zins.

Figgins was absolutely delighted—more because he would receive the prize from Cousin Ethel than anything else. And to add to his delight, the girl had made a point of congratulating him immediately after his success.

There were two more races to be run—the half-mile and the obstacle-race.

D'Arcy absolutely refused to run in the former, as he insisted that he wanted some "west" before the obstacle-race, especially after his exertions in the high jump.

"You fellahs are so absolutely inexhaustible!" he complained. "I weally cannot do without some wepose during an aftahnoon of such vewy violent exahcise."

"Don't be a slacker, fathead!"

"You might be an old man the way you talk, ass!"

"You're a fat, lazy dummy—that's what's the matter with you!"

These and other similar comments had no effect upon the swell of St. Jim's. He refused to run this time.

Bang!

"They're off!"

"Buck up, St. Jim's!"

"Stick to it, Grammarians!"

Tom Merry led for the first lap, with Kangaroo behind him and Gordon Gay a good third. Half-way round the second time, Tom Merry had the great misfortune to lose one of his running shoes, and as he had no stockings on, he did not like to continue. This left Kangaroo leading by a yard from Gordon Gay.

"Stick to it, Kangaroo!"

"Keep it up, Gay!"

Gordon Gay drew level with the St. Jim's junior about a hundred yards from home. Fifty yards from home he was a good yard ahead, and finally he won by a couple of yards from Kangaroo. Gordon Gay had run well, and thoroughly deserved his win.

The Grammarians were delighted, and cheered lustily.

After a wait of some five or ten minutes for the half-milers to recover their breath, the bell rang for the last race of the afternoon—the obstacle-race.

The first thing that the competitors had to do was to get under the pig-net, tightly pegged to the ground. An eager crowd of spectators had gathered round this, and there was much amusement caused at the fearful struggling to get in first. D'Arcy arrived actually at the net first, but he was rather slow in getting underneath, and several others got in front of him.

"Mind your parting, Gussy!" yelled the crowd. "You'll get stuck there if you don't look out!"

"You're coming out at the side, Gus! Go back!"

And indeed, in the excitement of the moment, D'Arcy was making for the side instead of the end. However, he happened to catch the last remark, and so he turned and headed in the right direction.

They then had to jump over, or through, a large hedge of furze, built up for the occasion. Nearly all of the runners landed right in the middle, and came out with torn knickers and scratched legs. D'Arcy, however, had managed very nearly to clear it, and so came off rather better than most.

The last obstacle which the competitors had to overcome were barrels. The ends had been taken out, and they had to crawl through them as best they might.

Gordon Gay, who was one of the leaders, got through his barrel very cleverly indeed, and came in first. He had done very well, winning the last two races, and getting in second in the high jump. Tom Merry was second, and Jack Blake third.

Arthur Augustus's chance had been spoiled by an incident which had occurred at the barrels. He had succeeded in getting himself half through his, when suddenly there was a loud ripping noise. He had caught his running-drawers on a projecting nail!

When he emerged, there was a long slit down the side of his running-shorts. He looked at the tear in horror!

"Bai Jove! What a fearful catastrophe!" he muttered aghast. And holding the tear together as best he could, he made a dash for the side-ropes.

The grinning crowd of onlookers parted to let him through, and he dashed off to where he had left his coat.

All thoughts of the race had faded entirely from his mind in the face of this accident to his attire. Before all else, he remembered that he was the Swell of St. Jim's!

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NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY & CO. AT THE EXHIBITION."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.

IT was just now a quarter-past four. The sports had ended just at the right time, the "Monster Sensation" being timed for half-past four.

Glyn had disappeared into the shed in the corner of the field some five minutes before.

"Hallo, what's that?" said Lowther to Manners.

They were leaning over the hurdles, gazing inquisitively at the shed, as though they hoped to fathom the secret of its interior.

"Sounds like a bee in a fit," suggested Manners.

"Pretty large one, to make a row like that! More like a million bees!"

"Shure, and I'm thinkin' there'll be an explosion before long!" said Reilly, the Irish junior, who was standing near by.

"Sounds rather like a motor, doesn't it?" put in Manners again.

"I belave you're right, Manners, for once!" said the boy from Belfast. "I'm goin' to move meself before I'm blown to smithereens!"

And indeed it was a weird sound that issued from the shed. It was nothing definite, but a confused buzzing sound, with an occasional bang which startled the spectators considerably.

At this moment a group of juniors walked to the shed, in the midst of whom Cousin Ethel could be seen.

"Well, deah girl," D'Arcy was saying, "what did you think of the waces?"

"Splendid!" answered Miss Cleveland enthusiastically.

"Nearly every one was a good race—and, besides, everything was so nicely arranged, and went off so smoothly."

The committee beamed with pleasure.

"Yaas, I wathah flattah myself that the awrangements were good!" said D'Arcy. "Those othah fellahs helped me quite a lot!"

"You old fraud, Gussy!" whispered Tom Merry, good-humouredly. "You did a great deal less than anybody on the committee!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I think you must be jokin'!" retorted Arthur Augustus frigidly. "In my opinion, the whole thing would have fallen through without me!"

"In your opinion, perhaps, Gussy!" said Figgins. And then, turning to Miss Cleveland: "You musn't take any notice of him, Cousin Ethel! When talking of himself, his ideas seem to become, as one might say, rather warped!"

"Well, in any case," said Cousin Ethel, "the whole afternoon has gone off splendidly, and I congratulate you all!"

"Thank you very much!" answered Tom Merry, for himself and the rest. "And now, if you'll excuse us, we must go into the shed and see how things are getting on."

"Certainly!" answered Cousin Ethel. "I'm longing to see the animal, vegetable, or mineral which is to come out of that shed, so don't be late!"

"No, we won't be late! 4.30 sharp!" cried Blake. And the various members of the committee ran off into the shed.

Manners and Lowther took the opportunity of speaking to Miss Cleveland alone—it was an opportunity which did not often present itself.

"Well, Cousin Ethel, have you any idea what we're going to see?" began Manners.

"I'm afraid I haven't the vaguest notion. I've tried and tried again, but I cannot think of anything."

"There was a noise like a motor coming from the shed a minute ago," said Lowther. "But you can't create a 'Monster Sensation' in a motor-car, as far as I can see."

"Perhaps Glyn's going to do some trick-driving or something," suggested Manners. "I saw him dive into the shed just now, looking very excited."

"Stand on his head on the seat and steer with his mouth, or something!" put in Lowther.

"That would be rather too difficult, I'm afraid," said Miss Cleveland, laughing. "Something less dangerous, I hope."

"Well, it's sure to be something good. Trust Glyn for that."

Meanwhile, there was great excitement inside the shed.

"How's it going, Glyn?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"Very well, except for some slight misfiring a minute ago, but I've put it all right now."

"Why, what was wrong?"

"The magneto must have got a bit damp, I think. Nothing much."

"By Jove, deah boy, I do hope you won't injah yourself in any way!" said D'Arcy.

"I don't think, old chap! I'll look after that."

"At the same time, deah boy, be vewy careful. The clevevewest men make mistakes sometimes."

"Well, as I'm not one of those johnnies, I'm all right," answered Glyn gaily.

"What's the time?" asked Tom Merry.

"Another three minutes yet before half-past," answered Blake.

"Feeling nervous, old chap?" asked Figgins.

"Not a bit!" answered the sturdy lad from Liverpool.

"Well, good luck to you!" said Blake heartily.

"Hear, hear!"

Punctually at half-past four the big doors were thrown open, and every eye in the field was directed towards the shed.

And then, indeed, came a "Monster Sensation."

Glyn and the committee were manœuvring out nothing less than a flying machine! A positive gasp of excitement and amazement greeted its appearance.

The boys of the school had expected something extraordinary, but this exceeded anything they had ever thought of in the wildest flight of their imagination.

"Well, if this doesn't take the cake!" gasped Manners.

"And the bun and everything else!" added Lowther, staring open-eyed at the machine.

"I wish I'd brought my umbrella!" said Reilly. But nobody took any interest in his attempt at humour, so busy were they examining the aeroplane.

It was quite a small thing—something after the style of Santos Dumont's Demoiselle. It was a most graceful little machine, and looked splendid in the bright sunlight.

Cousin Ethel, as well as being astonished, seemed to be a little nervous.

"I do hope he doesn't hurt himself," she said to Manners. "Such nasty accidents can happen to aeroplanes."

"Yes; they certainly do not look over-safe," answered Manners. "But I'm sure Glyn will come off all right."

"Yes; he always manages to come out on top in everything he does," said Lowther.

"Well, I'm glad it's such a beautiful afternoon, with no wind to speak of," said Cousin Ethel. "A wind is very dangerous to flying-machines, I believe."

The machine was now in position.

Bernard Glyn looked over the main parts of the machine, to see that everything was in going order.

"All right?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Quite," was the brief answer.

"Is there anything more to be done?" inquired Blake.

"None, except to fly," answered Glyn. And, starting the engine, he took his seat in the aeroplane.

The machine glided forward for some twenty yards or so, and then began to rise. Bernard Glyn touched a lever, and the aeroplane rose still higher, and cleared the hedge at the bottom of the field.

"Bravo!"

"Well done!"

"Hurrah!"

The aviator had turned to the right, and was flying some twenty feet above the hedge and along it. He followed the hedge right round the field at this height, and then rose higher till he was nearly fifty feet from the ground.

It was a wonderful sight.

Every eye was riveted on the intrepid junior who was so pluckily steering the air vessel.

He performed several graceful evolutions over the heads of the spectators, and then alighted safely, almost on the exact spot from which he had started.

Cheer upon cheer greeted his descent.

A crowd of spectators rushed up to the flier as he descended.

"Well done, Glyn!"

"Bravo, old chap!"

"Pway accept my congwats., deah boy!"

"Thank you all!"

Then a voice from the back:

"Go up again, old man!"

"Yes, do!"

"Another ascent!"

"Will you, old chap?" inquired Tom Merry.

But before he could answer, Dr. Holmes had mounted on a chair, and was holding up his hand for silence.

A hush fell on the assembled crowd.

"I have the greatest pleasure," began the head-master, "in congratulating Glyn on his pluck and skill in the management of the aeroplane in which he has just made such a marvellous flight. I really had no idea that such a machine could be controlled with such exactness in the air. I am sure no one could have wished for a greater 'Monster Sensation.'"

A loud cheer broke forth from the boys.

When the noise at last subsided, the doctor went on:

"As the time is getting somewhat short, and you are all, no doubt, tired, I think a second flight must be postponed until another time. We will not tempt Providence any

further to-day. Miss Cleveland has very kindly consented to give away the prizes, so I will now ask her to perform her not unimportant part of the afternoon's proceedings."

Another round of cheering burst out at the conclusion of this short speech, during which Dr. Holmes went up to Bernard Glyn, and heartily congratulated him on his successful flight.

Then Tom Merry & Co. rushed at Glyn, who was beaming with pleasure, and hoisted him high up on their shoulders.

They carried him right round the meadow, while everybody shouted themselves hoarse.

When at last the cheering and shouting subsided, Dr. Holmes led Miss Cleveland up to a small table which had been placed in one corner of the field, and on which stood the prizes.

Figgins was perfectly delighted at the prospect of receiving a prize from Cousin Ethel.

"Isn't it ripping of her to give away the prizes?" he said to Tom Merry.

"Simply A1," agreed the hero of the Shell. "The very person to do it!"

"Rather!"

When it came to Figgins's turn to go up and take his prize, he became very nervous, and blushed deeply as he walked towards the table.

But Cousin Ethel's smile reassured him, and he received his prize—a beautiful pair of skeleton cricket-pads—with an elaborate bow, and a look which said volumes.

"Thank you, Cousin Eth—er—er—Miss Cleveland!" he said quietly.

But there was something in the way in which he said it which conveyed more than the ordinary meaning of that very ordinary phrase.

The last prize-winner had just returned from the table, and the clapping and cheering had just ceased. There was a pause for a moment.

Then a voice broke the silence.

It was Figgins's.

"Three cheers for Miss Cleveland."

There was an instant roar.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Never were three cheers more lustily shouted. Every boy strained his voice to the utmost.

Cousin Ethel smiled and blushed with evident pleasure. Then she leant over and whispered to Dr. Holmes, who was standing by her.

"Miss Cleveland has asked me to say," said the Head, "how very much she appreciates the kind welcome you have given her, and that it has been a very great pleasure to her to give away prizes to the boys of the schools and the village she knows and esteems so much."

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The cheering broke forth again as the good old doctor finished his little speech—Cousin Ethel's, by proxy—and sat down. But in half a minute he was up again.

"Bless my soul!" he muttered to himself. "I almost forgot. Bless my soul!"

"What's the Head want now, I wonder?" yelled Blake to Tom Merry, under cover of the cheering, which was still continuous.

"Blessed if I know!" replied Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "I suppose— By Jove!"

"What's up, ass?"

"Why, of course—"

But the hero of the Shell broke off without finishing his sentence.

Dr. Holmes was holding up his hand for silence again, which he soon obtained, and there was an almost breathless hush to hear what he was going to say next.

"There is one other thing I have been asked to do," he said, with a smile on his kindly face; "and it is something which I take great pleasure in doing. Some of the juniors of St. Jim's, who have been instrumental in getting up this sports' meeting, have asked me to present a little gift to Miss Cleveland, as a token of esteem and to mark her kindness in presenting the prizes to-day. I have much pleasure in presenting you with this little brooch, Miss Ethel."

"Hurrah!"

A terrific cheer broke from the crowd of gratified juniors, and the rest of the crowd joined in heartily.

"Bravo!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Cousin Ethel, blushing red with surprise and pleasure, took the little velvet case which the smiling doctor handed to her, with a murmured word of thanks.

She touched the spring of the case, and the lid flew open, revealing the dainty and valuable brooch which the St. Jim's

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Juniors had purchased for her as a birthday present, but had never presented.

An exclamation of delight broke from the girl.

"What a beautiful little brooch!"

She lifted her head, and looked round her with glowing cheeks.

For an instant her eyes met the eager glance of a lanky, homely-faced junior in the front row, and her cheeks grew a shade redder as she hastily dropped her glance again.

Figgins was also observed to blush a fiery red for no apparent reason.

But there was a reason, all the same.

"I'm—I'm sure it's very good of you all," said Cousin Ethel, embarrassed, as the crowd was silent to hear her little speech. "It's a sweet little brooch, and I shall always be very proud of it."

And she sat down, her pretty face suffused with blushes.

The juniors cheered again lustily at this little speech.

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

They were still cheering when the circle that had been formed round the prize table had melted away, and the patrons of the sports' meeting, villagers, and juniors were streaming out of the Rectory field.

Cousin Ethel, after a few words with the Rev. Mr. Short, who was beaming at everybody and everything, came up to the group of juniors who were waiting for her a little shyly.

"Now, stop that noise!" she said as severely as she could, which was not very severely, as some of the party, which included all her particular friends among the St. Jim's juniors, showed a disposition to go on cheering indefinitely. "The time for cheering's over now."

"Weally, Ethel, we were cheewin' you, you know!" protested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, please stop," said Cousin Ethel. "I am afraid you have all been behaving very badly to-day."

"Oh, Cousin Ethel!" came in a chorus of protest.

Cousin Ethel's face relaxed.

"Well, you know, it was very wrong of you to give me that lovely brooch," she said. "It must have cost a tremendous amount of pocket-money."

"Weally, Cousin Ethel—"

"But, though very wrong, it was awfully good of you all," said Cousin Ethel, with a radiant smile, "and I'm going to forgive you all."

"Good!"

"It is just the sweetest little brooch I've ever seen," the girl went on, with shining eyes, "and I value it ever so much."

The juniors all looked pleased and gratified. They could see that their girl chum was genuinely delighted and touched by their little present.

"And now," went on Cousin Ethel gaily, "I have a fine bit of news for you. I've just been talking to Mr. Short, who is perfectly delighted with everything. He says that the takings are over fifty pounds."

"Good egg!"

"Yes; isn't it splendid?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye with a thoughtful frown.

"Fifty pounds won't go vevy fah. The hospital wants a great deal more monay—"

"Yes, I know, Arthur," interrupted the girl. "Of course, we couldn't possibly expect to raise the whole amount. But what Mr. Short is so pleased about is, that the interest of the whole county has been aroused in the state of the hospital by these sports. He says that there is now little doubt that the whole of the necessary money will be subscribed. In fact, he has had over two hundred pounds promised in subscriptions this afternoon."

"Hurrah!"

"That's ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You boys ought to be very proud to think that you have done so much for the hospital," said Cousin Ethel softly.

The juniors were silent for a moment. Then one of them put into words what all of them were thinking.

"It was all through you," said Figgins, in a low voice, and blushing red. "The whole thing was Cousin Ethel's treat—wasn't it, chaps?"

There was an instant chorus.

"Rather!"

"Of course!"

"It was Cousin Ethel's treat!"

And Arthur Augustus solemnly added:

"Yaas, wathah!"

THE END.

(Another long complete tale of the juniors of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled: "TOM MERRY & CO. at the EXHIBITION," by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of THE GEM Library in advance. Price 1d.

A Splendid Old-time Sea Story.

In the Service of the King.

By LIEUTENANT LEFEVRE.

Everyone started, including Captain Burgoyne himself, and turned towards the person who had caused this interruption.

Cool and steady, but very pale, Oswald stood facing the captain.

"You said that the loss of the Catapult was due to Mr. Fryer," he repeated quietly. "That is untrue. You know that, sir. You know that Mr. Fryer died like a brave man and a sailor, of wounds received in battle."

"Silence!" said Burgoyne, with a look of fury on his face. He took a stride towards Oswald, and raised his clenched fist. But the lad did not falter—did not move, and kept his eyes on the man's face.

"The Catapult was lost in a storm, because mutiny had broken out on board, and there were no men to work the ship. Mr. Fryer was lying ill—dying—at the time in his cabin," he said slowly.

Captain Turnbull laid his hand kindly on Oswald's shoulder. "When the time comes, my lad, I dare say you will champion Mr. Fryer's cause, and I wish you success, if it is a just one."

"It is a just one. It is only because Mr. Fryer is dead that Captain Burgoyne dares to bring this accusation against his honour!" said Oswald hotly. "If Mr. Fryer had been the captain of the Catapult she would be lying in the harbour yonder now, instead of at the bottom of the sea!"

This was a bold stroke for the insignificant midddy to take. It was a direct accusation against his captain, and for a moment a chill silence fell upon them all. Even Maxwell changed colour, and wished that Oswald had held his tongue.

"You shall suffer for this!" said Captain Burgoyne, between his clenched teeth. "Gentlemen"—he turned to the others—"this youth was Mr. Fryer's ally, his confederate. I have made report of the whole occurrence to the admiral. In that report the name of Mr. Smith figures largely. He was Fryer's creature—in Fryer's pay!"

Oswald laughed aloud, scornfully.

"Hush—silence!" said Captain Turnbull, who was unaffectedly shocked at this passage of arms between a captain and a midshipman. His own self-respect and the respect he had for the dignity of his own position made him take sides with his brother officer. "Sir, you have been guilty of a great breach of discipline and etiquette in thus giving your late captain the lie to his teeth!" he said, turning sternly to Oswald.

"I should have been guilty of something even worse, sir—of ingratitude and disrespect for the dead—if I had allowed Captain Burgoyne to defame Mr. Fryer without saying one word," said Oswald respectfully.

The eyes of the young lieutenant who had claimed Fryer as his friend kindled.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, to Captain Turnbull, "but there is some right on the lad's side. Captain Burgoyne is no longer his captain, and he has the same right that every honest man has to defend the character of the innocent when assailed."

"Certainly, Captain Burgoyne is no longer this young man's captain, but he is still his superior officer, Mr. Forde, and is entitled to respect and deference."

Mr. Forde bowed.

"But I submit, sir," he said obstinately, "that he has the right to defend the memory of an officer who died serving the King and his country."

"I quite agree with Mr. Forde," said Captain Maher shortly. "I knew Mr. Fryer well by repute, and I cannot believe that Captain Burgoyne is correct in suggesting that he acted in any manner but as a British sailor should."

"Then I understand that you disbelieve me—that you call me a liar?" cried Captain Burgoyne, turning on his new foe savagely.

"You have used the words, sir; it is not for me to correct you," replied the other, with a low bow.

With a great effort Captain Burgoyne mastered his rage.

"You shall repeat them, sir!" he said, in a husky voice.

"At any time and at any place to suit your convenience, sir," responded Captain Maher.

(An extra-long instalment—with the opening chapters explained for the benefit of new readers—of this Thrilling Serial will appear in next Thursday's issue of THE GEM.

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