

Read 'Lonesome Len,' by H. T. Johnson, in 'The Boys' Herald.'



The GEM

LIBRARY NO. 143. VOL. 5.

A Splendid New School Story, "TOM MERRY'S BIRTHDAY." By Martin Clifford.



"Wally, Wally, I wewot to say you do not appear to have changed your collar this mornin'!" said the swell of St. Jim's.

"I am sorry for the lad who has done this!" muttered Mr. Selby.



"It's awfully decent of you fellows! I said Tom Merry. "Heeb, heeb—I mean, wot, don't boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.



"Call him off!" shrieked the terrified Form-master, as Herries' bull-dog flew at his legs.

Some stirring incidents con-tained in this week's splendid Story.



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TOM MERRY'S BIRTHDAY . . .

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

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Wally's Promise.

"It's a beastly shame, Wally!"

"Curly Gibson spoke loudly and indignantly. Preparation at St. Jim's for the Third Form was just over, and a small crowd of the fags were surrounding D'Arcy minor, indignant expressions on all their inky young faces.

"Selby always drops on Wally for everything."

"The kid didn't make a sound. Did you, Wally?"

D'Arcy minor shook his head.

"How could I help the beastly desk-hinge squeaking?"

He exclaimed wrathfully. "And now I've got to stay in all morning—and it's a whole holiday!"

"And Tom Merry's birthday, too!"

"There are bound to be heaps of footer and japes going on. It's too jolly rotten for words, Wally!" exclaimed Selby, one of the biggest Third-Formers in the School house. "And I wouldn't stand it if I was you."

D'Arcy minor grinned a little. How he was to escape pending detention in the face of Mr. Selby's direct order as he was to be detained was not made quite clear by Selby.

"Then the chief of the fag Form shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't be helped, Dud; I shall have to stay in, that's all."

"It's jolly unfair!"

"Can't be helped, kid. Selby always is a beast when he gets ratty."

"Well, but let's jape him, anyway," said Curly Gibson wrathfully. "We'll make him look an ass somehow."

Again D'Arcy minor shook his head.

"Can't be done, kid——"

"Rats!"

Wally went rather pink.

"No, it can't, Curly. I—I——"

The Third-Formers stared at their acknowledged leader in amazement. No one had ever known the scamp of the fag Form hesitate at a jape before.

The idea that he was afraid of the consequence, severe as they might be in this particular case, did not enter any of the other juniors' heads.

"What are you cackling about, Wally?"

"Why can't it be done, ass?"

D'Arcy minor went pinker.

"I'm sorry, kids, but—but I gave my word to Gussy——"

The Third-Formers stared still more.

"Gave your word to Gussy——"

"Why, you haven't seen the one and only since prep——"

D'Arcy minor had his hands deep in his pockets now.

"I gave Gussy my word yesterday," he said briefly. "My brother made me promise I wouldn't have any more rows with Mr. Selby——"

"My aunt!"

"You'll never be able to keep your promise, kid."

A LONG, COMPLETE TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.
No. 143 (New Series). Copyright in the United States of America.

"Oh, the promise is a limited one, Jameson!" said D'Arcy minor. "It only lasts a week, as a matter of fact; I stuck out for that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You see, Gussy pointed out there had been one or two rather hefty rows in the Third lately, and the old fogey managed to make me promise somehow," explained the chief of the fags. "Wish to goodness I hadn't thought, after what happened at prep."

The others nodded gloomily.
Of course, not another word could be said about Wally japing Mr. Selby for what, at the very least, had been an act of unconscious injustice.

Wally had passed his word to his brother, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That finished the matter as far as Wally was concerned.

"But it's pretty rotten!" Wally growled. "Ten to one it will be a fine day, and there will be any amount of fun, ragging Tom Merry about his birthday. Still, it can't be helped."

And the Third-Formers walked away towards the Common-room.

Only one of the little crowd remained behind. That one was Dudley.

Dudley was a big, rather rough sort of junior, who, though liked by Wally and the others well enough was not what would be termed popular.

But, whatever the others thought of Dudley, there could be no mistaking what Dudley thought of Wally D'Arcy. There were very few things the big Third-Former would have hesitated to set his hand to in order to do Wally a good turn, and his only reason was that D'Arcy minor had chummed in with him when he stood almost chummy in the big school some time before.

The scamp of the Third never quite realized what a big thing he had done when he stretched out a friendly hand to Dudley. Rough and uncouth as Dudley was, he was not the junior to forget easily.

He stood for a moment or two looking after the retreating juniors, then sauntered out into the grounds, his hands in his pockets.

There was an angry flush on his face.

It had been grossly unfair of Mr. Selby to punish Wally by a whole day's detention just because Wally's desk had squeaked loudly in the middle of the Form-master's lecture. At any rate, Mr. Selby ought to have made full inquiries, Dudley thought, and he certainly should have taken Wally's word.

The scamp of the Third was not given to speaking falsely. The big Third-Former's thoughts ran in an angry groove as he made his way out into the grounds. He half thought of going into Mr. Selby's room and explaining about the squeaky hinge, when his thoughts received an abrupt shock.

There was someone who looked very much like Mr. Selby in front of him. Dudley kept in the shadow of the gymnasium wall and peered across the quadrangle.

It was almost dark by now.

For a moment or two the junior could not be certain; then something happened which settled the matter. The master in front of him had suddenly taken a rather hasty step to the right, to avoid Towser's kennel.

Towser belonged to Herries, of the School House Fourth, and, although the bulldog was liked by most of the masters, he was cordially detested by Mr. Selby.

That was well-known to Dudley, the big Third-Former.

For an instant the conversation about paying Mr. Selby out by japing him came back to the junior, and a grin flashed across his face. It would be a great trick to let Towser loose.

Mr. Selby was ridiculously afraid of dogs, and Towser was a rather awe-inspiring specimen of his breed.

Mr. Selby would be more than startled when Towser sprang out of the shadow towards him, for the bulldog was almost certain to do that. He would want to see who the master was.

The thoughts flashed through Dudley's mind rapidly.

He knew that Towser was perfectly safe—a little playful perhaps, but seldom more. And, as Dudley looked at things, Mr. Selby deserved to be startled.

The junior crept forward along the wall of the gymnasium just as Mr. Selby was nearing the centre of the quadrangle. Towser growled loudly.

"Good dog!" whispered Dudley. "Come for a walk, Towser!"

Towser growled again, but it was a growl of pleasure this time.

The Third-Former unfastened the chain. Then he pretended to pick up a stone.

The bulldog watched, trembling with excitement. The

next moment Dudley made another pretence of throwing the stone towards Mr. Selby, and Towser darted away.

He was making straight for the Third Form-master.
Mr. Selby had suddenly stopped walking. Towser was coming on with huge bounds, snorting in a nervous manner.

At that moment four Fourth-Formers came from the gymnasium.
"My hat—"

"Bai Jove—Gwent Scott!"
Then one of the four dashed forward. It was Herries, and he had recognized Towser's growl.

"It's all right, sir!" Herries gasped. "Towser's all right if you don't look at him. My only Aunt Jane!"
Mr. Selby had started to run.

He was careering wildly back towards the gymnasium, and the bulldog was running just behind him. Towser thought it was all a game.

Then suddenly the Third Form-master gave vent to a wild yell.

Herries sprinted forward with a gasp.

CHAPTER 2.

Mr. Selby's Misfortunes.

"BAI JOVE! Call Towseah off, Howwies, deah deah!— Pway call Towseah off, as he will weah Mr. Selbays twousahs!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, was going also.

But the concern of the four Fourth-Formers was not compared with Mr. Selby's alarm. The Third Form-master was thoroughly scared.

He thought it was only his speed which was preventing an attack; he was far too flustered to consider for a moment the possibility that the bulldog might only be romping.

And it seemed to Mr. Selby that Towser was gaining upon him.

He wheeled round suddenly just before he reached Herries and kicked out at Towser. It was a well-judged kick, for it caught the bulldog in the side, and considerably hurt him.

In spite of his master's assertions to the contrary Towser was an ordinary bulldog. He had meant no harm in running after Mr. Selby; but he was hurt now.

With a loud-voiced growl, he flew at Mr. Selby's legs. Mr. Selby uttered a shriek.

"Call him off, Blake! O-oh!"
Jack Blake, one of the four Fourth-Formers, gasped and rushed up.

"Herries—Herries, call the brute off!"
"Towser—Towser! Good dog!"
"Good dog? Gwent Scott, fancy callin' Towseah a good dog!"

Herries did his very best. He tried to gain a grip on the bulldog's collar, and failed. But it was not his fault.

"Come on, old boy—Towser, old chap—"
"Gr-r-r—woof!"
"Oh!" shrieked Mr. Selby. "O-oh! Ow!"

"Stand still, sir, and don't look at him!" pointed Herries.
"Towser is all right if you don't look at him—"
"Gwent Scott!"

Whether the Third Form-master heard Herries or not there was no saying. It was painfully apparent that he did not mean to act upon it, though.

Instead of standing still, Mr. Selby commenced dabbling about in the most energetic manner.

Herries' breath came in quick gasps.
Every moment he expected the master would lead us Towser, and Herries did not like to think of what might happen then. As he said afterwards, Towser was a big bulldog.

And what Herries so dreaded did happen.
The Third Form-master trod on Towser's left paw and the bulldog growled with mixed pain and anger. The next instant he loosened his grip on the master's trousers and took a firmer one. This time there was some calf and grey tweed trousering between his teeth.

The shouts Mr. Selby was uttering must have been heard half over the School House.

They were heard by D'Arcy minor and the other chums of the Third, anyway, for they came padding from the Third Form-room.

"My only Aunt Jane!"
Wally gasped, but he did not look as sorry as he ought to have done. Jameson was even chuckling.

Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus, and Digby were on their way's end. They were doing their utmost to aid Herries in getting the bulldog away.

"Catch hold of his collar, chaps—"
"Seize his leg, Gussy!"

"Aw, dear boy! I utterly refuse to seize Towzah's wounded leg! Go home, Towzah!"

"My-my hat!"
Herries had a grip on his bulldog's collar at last. He was on his knees, and what he saw relieved him a little. From Mr. Selby's shouts, he had thought he was badly bitten, but it took a great deal to make the bulldog the advantage of his awe-inspiring set of teeth.

That the master was bitten at all was more a mistake than design on Towser's part.

"How like, the chief of Study No. 6, heard his chum's dog bark and rushed to the rescue. He also got a grip on the dog's collar.

"Now!" panted Herries. And the two tugged violently.

There was a loud sound of rousing cloth, then Towser was wrenching away. He had most of Mr. Selby's left trouser-leg below the knee in his mouth.

"Gloat Scott!"
The sudden release did not bring instant relief to the Third Form-master. It caused him to overbalance, and he sat down with a thud.

Then Towser looked at him, his head on one side. The bulldog was still growling, straining hard to get free.

"Don't look at him, sir," almost shrieked Herries. "Towser hates being looked at."

There was just light enough to see the extent of the damage done.

All the little crowd of juniors could see Mr. Selby's rather peculiar hair distinctly, and there were just one or two spots of blood there.

It was nothing of a bite, really. Herries often got much worse bitten playing with his dog; but it was a bite, all the same. And every junior there knew Mr. Selby's horror of a dog.

The master sprang to his feet, his face flushed with not inconsiderable anger.

"How dare you? Herries—I—"

Mr. Selby was inarticulate.

The thing he next dreaded to a dog bite was appearing ridiculous. He realised that he had suffered in both ways during the last few minutes.

Herries also realised it, and tried to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"I think it was only his play, sir. Towser's a very good dog really—"

It was a praiseworthy attempt to smoothe matters over, but he scarcely likely to prove successful. To tell a man that the dog which has just bitten him is gentle, savours of insult and insult to injury.

Mr. Selby refused to be convinced.

"The dog shall be destroyed," he shouted. "He is dangerous. It is a disgrace he should ever have been allowed to come to the school—"

"Steady, sir—"
"Please, Herries—"

"But—"

"Silence, boy!" thundered the Third Form-master. "How dare you let the dog loose, Herries? How dared you, Herries?"

Herries started.

It really was strange that Towser had broken away from the kennel. Herries remembered having fastened him up before preparation.

Mr. Selby was facing the juniors now, his face flushed with rage.

"Which of you boys let the dog loose?" he cried. "D'Arcy?"

"No, sir, I nevah go neah Towzah, as he has a respect foah a fellow's twousahs—I mean—"

The bulldog was still gnawing a portion of the Third Form-master's trousers, the remark was not quite a happy one. Wally did his best to turn the chuckle into a cough.

"Speaking to you, D'Arcy minor."

"No, sir, I didn't let him loose—"

"No, sir!"

The Third-Formers answered together. There was a chorus of denials.

Mr. Selby glared at them.

"If however you are telling me an untruth, D'Arcy—"

"No, sir, I am pleased to say my minah is not in the habit of tellin' untruths," said Arthur Augustus with a flourish.

"It appears to me that Towzah must have broken loose of himself—"

"No, boy! Nothing of the sort happened. The dog was on purpose—I heard the voice of some junior at the door soon after I had passed."

"No, Blake started.

"No, Blake thought he had heard a voice talking to Towser,

while still in the gymnasium. The chief of Study No. 6 glanced at Wally & Co.

The Third-Former looked as puzzled as his own chums did. But there was no time to think the matter out further at that moment, for Mr. Selby was leading the way to Towser's kennel, keeping an anxious glance directed towards the bulldog all the time.

The Third Form-master was biting his lip in order to keep a never very reliable temper under control.

Towser still had the remains of the trouser-leg in his mouth, and even Herries could not make him give it up.

Mr. Selby's own pupils, the fags of the Third, had their handkerchiefs stuffed in their mouths. It was outside the scheme of human nature for them to feel sorry.

Even Digby was making curious sounds in his throat as he followed the weird procession. The spectacle of Towser trotting by Mr. Selby's side, carrying a good quarter of a yard of that gentleman's trouser-leg in his mouth, was almost too much for the Fourth-Formers.

Jack Blake looked rather grave.

He was more and more convinced that someone had let the dog loose. He glanced at Mr. Selby's face and wondered what the master was thinking about.

He was not left long in doubt.

Mr. Selby looked keenly at the chain which had fastened Towser to the kennel, then wheeled round.

"It is as I thought," he thundered. "Someone let that dog loose, and deliberately set the vicious animal on me."

"Please, sir, Towser isn't vicious; if you don't look at him he's awfully gentle—"

"Will you be silent, Herries!" exclaimed Mr. Selby. "I say that vicious bulldog was deliberately set on me by one of you boys—"

"Weally, sir—"

"D'Arcy, I ordered you to be silent."

"Yass, wathah, sir!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "Howevah, I twast you will allow me to wemark—"

"I will allow you to do no such thing."

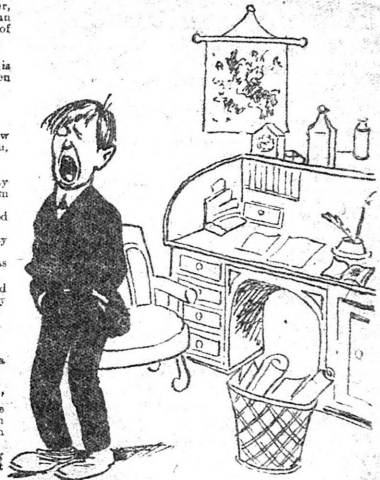
"All right, sir; but—"

"D'Arcy, you are covering yourself with suspicion."

Arthur Augustus started violently.

"Gwreat Scott, sir, you don't think it poss. that I can have set a bulldog, who has no respect foah a fellow's twousahs, on a mastah and an eldab—"

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

"One of you boys is guilty."

"No, sir, we are not," cried Jack Blake rather quickly. "We did not leave the gymnasium until we heard your shouts, sir."

The words were uttered respectfully enough, but there was something in Jack Blake's tone that told Mr. Selby he had gone far enough.

He remembered a previous occasion when a hasty jumping to conclusions in suspecting Jack Blake & Co. of taking examination papers, had been the cause of an undignified climb down. Mr. Selby did not want anything like that to happen again.

He turned from the Fourth-Formers to his own pupils.

"D'Arcy minor, was it you?"

"No, sir; I said it wasn't just now, sir."

"If you don't believe us, just," said Curly Gibson indignantly, "you can ask Kildare. He saw us coming out of the coll. just as you shouted."

"And Dudley, too," put in Jameson. "Dudley was with Kildare."

The words were scarcely out of Jameson's mouth when he would have given almost anything to have recalled them.

They certainly had passed Dudley, the big Third-Former, who had been stopped by the captain for something, and Dudley had been running. He must have come from the quadrangle, too.

Could it have been Dudley who had let the dog loose?

Before the juniors could answer the question which had flashed across nearly all their minds, Mr. Selby had broken the pause again.

His voice was calmer now, but there was a very stern note in it.

"I am sorry for the lad who is guilty, D'Arcy minor," he said in a low voice; "I scarcely think a boy who would set a bulldog on a master will be allowed to remain at St. James's. I advise you other boys not to attempt to shield the culprit."

And without another word, Mr. Selby strode away.

His bare calf and the frayed end of his trouser-leg was distinctly visible in the half light, but no one laughed.

There were very serious expressions on all their faces just then.

CHAPTER 3.

An Epidemic of Meetings.

"**B**AJ Jove!" Arthur Augustus ramméd his monocle in his eye and stared down at something Herries held in his hand. Herries scrambled to his feet.

"Yes, it's right enough about Towser being let loose on purpose," he said quietly. "The chap who did it must have untied this piece of cord."

"Couldn't—couldn't it have worked loose, kid?"

Herries shook his head.

"No, Wally; I remember I tied it in two or three knots. Besides, the piece of cord was on top of the kennel."

"My hat!"

The fact that the piece of cord was on top of the kennel settled the point once and for all. There could be no doubt that Towser had been deliberately let loose.

"But it doesn't prove Towser was set on Selby," exclaimed Digby anxiously. "The old dog may have been let loose just as a joke against Herries—some New House ass may have done it."

"Where are you going, Wally?" flashed Jack Blake, wheeling round.

"What's that got to do with you old fogeys, anyway?" said the scamp of the Third cooly.

"Wally, wemembah Jack Blake is your eldab—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"Weally, Walthab—"

"So long!"

And the fags began to move away in a solid body. Arthur Augustus stared after them.

"Wally, as your majah, I ordah you to come beah instantly—"

"Rats!"

"Wwent Scott! The uttah young wascal said 'Wats!' to me, Wally—"

"Go hon!"

"Walthab, you uttah young wascal—Walthab—"

But D'Arcy minor and his chums had disappeared in the distance. Jack Blake laughed pleasantly.

"Anyway, they don't know anything about it, Gussy," he exclaimed.

"No, wathah nof, as I have Wally's promise there should be no more woss foah a week with Mr. Selbay. Howevah, the young wascal ought to have stopped when I ordahed him to do so, and I shall wemonstrate with him—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 143.

"Well, ring off now."

"What do you make of it, Blakey?"

The chief of Study No. 6 thought for a moment or two, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Someone let the dog loose, of course; but as Dig said, it doesn't prove he set him on Selby. Perhaps it was a scamp trying to steal the brute?"

"My hat!"

"What's up now, Herries?"

"Someone trying to steal Towser!" said Herries in a stern voice.

"My aunt, that makes it a more serious matter. I don't want to go to the expense of paying a man to water the kennel each night—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, there's no need to laugh, Digby! Towser is a jolly valuable bulldog—"

"Go hon!" grinned Digby. "My aunt! Did you ever see anything funnier than Towser trotting along with a quarter of a yard of Selby's bags in his mouth, kid?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could laugh now, but there was still a rather concerned note in their chuckles.

Mr. Selby was painfully given to jumping to conclusions. He seemed to have made up his mind the dog was set upon him on purpose, and the junior who did let him loose ought to find it a difficult matter to clear himself.

And from the few words Jack Blake had overheard while in the gymnasium, he could not be quite certain that the junior in question had not meant to play some sort of a trick on the Third Form-master.

The chief of Study No. 6 was conscious of a great deal of relief in his knowledge that D'Arcy minor was not the culprit. All the Fourth Form chums thought a lot of the scamp of the Third.

"Jolly good idea of yours making the young ass pelted not to get into any more rows with Selby for a week," said Jack Blake, as Herries fastened Towser up once more.

"Ripping idea, in fact, for you."

"Yaas, wathah. Most of my ideahs are wippin' when you come to considah them, deah boy."

"I don't think. Hallo!"

"Bai Jove!"

The chums of Study No. 6 stopped speaking to Herries. A vague sound of a well-known voice could be heard fading softly across the quadrangle.

"Cheer-ho, Blakey! Where are you, ass?"

Jack Blake faced the others.

"Tom Merry, chaps."

"Wathah! I recognised his voice instantly."

"Gussy—Gussy, you utter ass, where are you?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ring off, kid," breathed Jack Blake. "Young Merry mustn't spot us if it shows Powers."

"No, wathah not; but I must refuse to be de-ah-ded as an ass."

"Gussy, you old duffer, are you looking for a tick?"

It was Tom Merry's voice again. There could be no doubt he took about that.

Jack Blake caught Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"No roaring, Gussy. Ready, Herries?"

"Right-ho!"

"Scud for it, then," whispered the chief of Study No. 6, "as hard as you can."

And the four pelted away in the shadow of the gymnasium wall.

Digby, the last of them, had scarcely rounded the corner when the well-built, curly-haired Shell junior, known to all through St. Jim's as Tom Merry, came across the quadrangle. He listened intently, then peered into the gymnasium.

"My hat, I'm sure I heard Blake's giddy voice!" he cried.

He called out the name as loudly as was judicious at that time of night in the quadrangle, and listened for a reply.

None came.

He could hear the sound of running footsteps on the asphalt, but nothing else.

Tom Merry whipped his hands from his pockets.

"Ragging—eh?" he muttered aloud. "This must be some come in."

And he, too, pelted across the quadrangle and disappeared in the gymnasium wall.

He must have gained the college a very few minutes after the other four, but there were no signs of them now.

The Shell junior did not wait to make inquiries. He scudded as hard as he could for the Fourth Form stairs.

He banged on the closed door of No. 6.

"Open the door, asses!"

There was no answer.

Tom Merry looked puzzled, and banged again.

"Don't goat, duffers! What's the wheeze?"

"**LONESOME LEN.**" By HENRY T. JOHNSON, starts in

"**THE BOYS' HERALD**" On Wednesday November 6th



"Don't look at him, sir!" shrieked Herries. "Don't look at him; Towser hates being looked at!"
 "I—I—how dare you—Herries!" spluttered Mr. Selby. (See page 2.)

to answer again.

Tom Merry tried the door. It was locked, and a glance at the key-hole showed that the key was on the inside.

The four were within their room, then.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

"The nice way to treat a guest, and no mistake, Gussy,"

he exclaimed. "Talk about bad form—"

"But Jove!"

Tom Merry had got an answer at last.

It was only a muffled one; certainly, as if some one had hastily placed a hand over the speaker's mouth. Still, it was an answer all right.

"I suppose you are all looking for thick ears!" the Shell growled. "Don't be a shrieking duffer, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy. Pway wemove your hand frowm my mouth, Digby, or I shall lose my tempah! Weally, Tom Mewwy, I must request you not to address me in that rough and weady mannah!"

"Open the door, then, ass!"

"Impass, deah boy!"

"Why is it impossible. You aren't doing photographs, are

"No, wathah nof, deah boy! We are holdin' a meetin'."

"What about?"

"A vewy important mattah."

"What about, ass?"

"Weally, Mewwy, I have already wequested you not to address me in that mannah."

Tom Merry ratched his hands in his pockets.

"Shrieking young duffers!" he growled. "If I had time I'd break down the door and bump the lot of you. Go and eat coke!"

And the hero of the Shell walked off.

He made straight for his own study, a puzzled expression on his handsome young face.

He caught hold of the door-knob vigorously.

"Silly young duffers!" he muttered. "If it's a jape, Blakes wants boiling in oil for not letting us into it. Hallo!"

The door, like the door of Study No. 6, would not open. Somebody had locked his own study.

"My hat! Manners, Lowther!"

"Hallo!" came back the cheery voice of Lowther, the humorist of the Shell. "Who is there?"

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"I—Merry!"

"I, Merry? Don't know him. Know a young ass with a swollen head, named T. Merry?"

"Open the door, Lowther, or—"

"Not to I, Merry, old chap. I don't know him."

The hero of the Shell went pink.

"Look here, you young rotters—"

"We're looking," said Lowther. "There isn't much to see, though."

"No, but there's a good lot to do," came Manners' voice.

Tom Merry started.

"A lot to do. What do you mean? We've done our prep."

"Y-yes, but—"

"Y-yes, but—"

Tom Merry waited.

"You see," began Manners, "we are holding a meeting, and—"

Tom Merry started again. Jack Blake & Co. had said they were holding a meeting as well.

The hero of the Shell could not make it out.

"I believe you are all off your rockers!" he exclaimed.

"If you don't open this door—"

"Sorry, kid, but—"

"Open—the—door—"

There was no answer this time.

Tom Merry repeated his remark, accompanying it with sounding thumps on the door.

Manners and Lowther, his chums of the Shell, did not reply.

Tom Merry began to kick vigorously, but he had to stop that abruptly. Mr. Linton was coming along the corridor.

The Shell master started to read the notice on the school notice-board, so Tom Merry had to walk away.

"All right, asses!" he breathed through his nose. "Locked out of my own study. We'll see about that!"

As Mr. Linton was still in front of the notice-board, Tom Merry decided to go into the New House. There would be plenty of time before the dormitory bell rang.

He made his way towards the Fourth Form quarters, and knocked gently at the study sacred to Figgins & Co., the biggest thorns in the side of the School House as far as honest, friendly rivalry between the two Houses went.

"I say, Figg—"

"Oh, go away, French; we're holding an important meeting!" came back Figgins' voice. "It's about—"

Tom Merry started violently.

Figgins & Co. were also holding a meeting. There seemed to be an epidemic of meetings in the St. Jim's air that evening.

Tom Merry hastened to explain.

"I'm not French, ass; I'm Merry!"

"My hat!"

Figgins' voice betrayed a startled note.

"What do you want here, Tom Merry?" he demanded, after a short pause. "If you have come for a thick ear—"

"Rats! Open the door."

There was another pause, then Kerr's voice rang out. Kerr was the Scots chum of Figgins & Co.

"It can't be done, old chap. We're holding an important meeting. Come some other day."

"Rats!"

"And there isn't any grub going," said Fatty Wynn. "I'd push a sandwich or two under the door if there were."

Tom Merry snorted.

"I didn't come for grub, ass!"

"That's all right, then. Good-bye, old chap."

"Look here—"

"So long, Merry!"

"You young duffers, I came—"

"Sorry you can't stop, kid," concluded Figgins. "If our luck's still bad, we may see you later on."

And the same deathlike silence fell upon the New House study that had reigned in Tom Merry's own room.

The hero of the Shell delivered a parting kick at the door, then sauntered away, his hands in his pockets.

As he gained the School House, the sound of footsteps in the corridor made him turn.

A small crowd of juniors were pelting along towards the stairs.

Tom Merry stared at them in surprise, but they were up the stairs before he could speak. Wally was still leading the way.

"He must have come up these stairs, chaps!" he panted.

"My hat, I believe it was old Dud!"

Curly Gibson nodded. He and Jameson both looked a little scared.

If it had been Dudley, and if Dudley had deliberately set the door on Mr. Selby, there could be only one result. Dudley would be compelled to leave St. Jim's.

The Third-Formers of St. Jim's were not famous for deep thinking. Still, they saw the seriousness of this affair quickly enough.

The thing was to find Dudley and learn the truth.

Running as hard as he could, Wally led the way up the second flight of stairs and scudded along the passage towards the box-rooms.

The box-rooms were rather favourite hiding-places at St. Jim's. Anyway, the chums of the Third had searched everywhere else.

Wally put up his hand.

"Dudley—Dud, old ass!"

There was no answer. D'Arcy minor raised his voice a little.

"Dud, where are you?"

There was an answer this time, in the form of an opening door. Dudley was peering cautiously along the corridor.

"Is that you, Wally?"

"Rather, old chap."

"What are you doing here, Dud?" said Curly Gibson, looking more scared than ever. "You aren't hiding any more?"

The big Third-Former nodded.

"That's just what I am doing, though. Has the rag started yet?"

D'Arcy minor did not answer the question at once. A very concerned expression had flashed into his good-looking, boy young face.

"My hat, it was you who set Towser free, then?"

"Rather!"

D'Arcy minor stared blankly. This looked like being a problem his age made it difficult for him to grapple with. Dudley went on quite coolly:

"Didn't he worry Selby, too; I believe old Towser took a piece out of his calf as well."

"Selby was—was bitten!" gasped Jameson.

"Did—did Towser get out of control and go for him?"

Dudley grinned again, but there was not a great deal of mirth in the smile.

"Not much!" he said shortly. "I egged the old dog."

"My aunt!"

"You—you don't mean you set Towser on the loose, Dud?"

"Yes, I jolly well do, Curly!" said Dudley as coolly as ever, as far as the steadiness of his voice went.

The other lads stared in the faint light of the turned-down gas-jet. This problem was certainly beyond them.

In a few words Dudley might have made his question a little easier, but the big Third-Former had plenty of grub.

He was one of the last in the Third to whine.

He might have explained that he had meant Towser to startle Mr. Selby, and nothing more. Wally & Co. would have understood that, but Dudley did not say it.

It was a sort of excuse Mr. Selby would never have taken; it was one the Head could scarcely be expected to make an allowance, in spite of his splendid knowledge of the junior school.

If it came to a question and an answer, as it would in the Head's study, Dudley had set the bulldog on Mr. Selby.

CHAPTER 3.
Looking for Dudley.

"LOOK out, kids!"

"It's all right, Wally; it's only Tom Merry."

"Good egg!" breathed D'Arcy minor. "Don't stop to jaw with the old fogey."

And the half-dozen Third-Formers scudded past the Shell junior.

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What he had intended the dog to do, scarcely entered into the matter.

Dudley saw that clearly enough now.

He did not offer his excuse.

D'Arcy minor's stare became blanker.

"You must have been off your rocker, Dud," he said desperately. "Selby is raving about it."

"I suppose he is a bit ratty!"

Wally ruffled his hands in his pockets.

"It isn't a laughing matter, you ass!" he said angrily.

"Look here, you'll get sacked perhaps—"

Dudley shook his head.

"No, I shan't get sacked," he said, through closed teeth. "I'm not going to give them the chance to sack me—I'm not to cut!"

The other Third-Formers started.

Wally was completely stargored for a moment or two.

"Do you mean you're going to run away from St. Jim's, Dud?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. If things blow over at all, and the head will take me back, I shall be jolly glad to come, but it's no good staying to be sacked, is it?"

After all, D'Arcy minor was not very old. As Dudley spoke the words, they seemed to be the only possible words to speak.

All the Third-Formers there were ready to agree that it was no good waiting to be expelled.

And expelled Dudley would be if he did wait.

Wally had not the slightest doubt on that point.

"Why did you do it, Dud?"

The big Third-Former shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, Selby's a beast!" he growled. "He's always landing on me something or other. You yourself said it was about time we japed him again."

Wally started. He certainly had said that, and he wished about anything now that he had not given his promise to his brother.

Of course, to jape a master would have meant a fearful row, but no jape that Wally had a hand in would be as serious as this bulldog affair.

It came to that, the scamp of the Third could not help thinking Dudley's trick beyond a joke. But he said nothing.

Young as he was, D'Arcy minor knew enough of human nature to refrain from "rubbing it in" when a fellow was down. There was nothing to be gained from doing that.

"When are you going to cut, Dud?" asked Jameson, after a painful pause. "The last train has gone."

"Yes, it's too late to-night."

"Then you are going to stay at St. Jim's to-night, anyway."

"Yes, up here!"

"M. hat!"

Dudley shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's no good going down to the dormy, is it? Ten to one I've been sent for already."

"Yes, that's so."

"And if I stay up here, they'll think I've run away already, and it will be easier in the morning."

Wally nodded his head.

"Yes, there is that. You'll have to be careful getting away in the morning, though. That will want working."

"Will you chapt-help me?"

"Habor!"

"Then you can give me the tip when the coast is clear," said Dudley. "You'd better cut now, or you may be missed as well, and seen going down."

"Right-ho!"

But Wally did not go at once.

He rather hated the whole business; still, he could not think of anything to say against the plan. Wally himself had run away from St. Jim's once, after trouble with Mr. Selby.

"Aren't you going, Wally?"

"Yes! I say, kid, what's against staying and facing the music?"

"I get sacked," said the other fag briefly. "May as well save them the trouble."

"Yes, I suppose so. I am awfully sorry, Dud!"

Dudley's eyes glistened, but he nodded without answering. He stood in the passage watching the junior who had done so well for him in the past, following the others down the stairs.

But Dudley went back to the box-room and sat down on an old chest. He buried his face on his arm, and things went very black to him.

He had refrained from telling D'Arcy's minor that he had meant his trick to go as far as it had gone, and there were also two other things he had left unsaid.

The first was that he had played the trick simply because he had been angry at Mr. Selby's unfairness in keeping Wally out. Scarcely anything in the world would have made the big Third-Former tell that.

The other thing was that he had nowhere to go when he left St. Jim's. His father and mother had been dead a good many years now, and his uncle he lived with was abroad, the house being shut up until the holidays.

It was scarcely to be wondered at that things looked very black for Dudley in the box-room for the remainder of the night.

CHAPTER 5. The Freak Co.

LANG!

The loud-voiced dormitory bell sounded through St. Jim's, and crowds of juniors began to stream towards their respective rooms.

Tom Merry was one of the first to gain the Shell dormitory. He opened the door and walked in grimly.

"Is Manners here?" he demanded. "Skimpy, is Manners here?"

Herbert Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, glanced round the large room.

"Dear me, I do not see him, Merry—"

"Ass!" breathed Tom Merry. "Has Lowther been in, then?"

"I really cannot say, Merry; we have been holding a meeting here—"

Tom Merry started.

"What—what did you say, Skimpy?"

"Dear me! I said that Dawes, Bland, and myself have been holding a meeting—"

"What about?"

"About!" Dear me, I cannot tell you what it was about, Merry! said Skimpole, blinking through his glasses. "We must be careful not to tell Merry what the meeting was about, Dawes!"

"Yes," said Peter Dawes, "casher!"

Peter Dawes was one of the latest acquisitions to the Shell Form.

He was a tall, woody junior, not unlike Skimpole in figure. But unlike the genius of St. Jim's, there was something painfully sad about his face when in repose. He was looking into the fireplace now with his forehead wrinkled wearily.

Tom Merry glanced at him. Dawes was a curious junior, and although the hero of the Shell had had very little to do with him since his arrival a few days before, the little had puzzled him a great deal.

Peter Dawes looked as if he seldom laughed.

Bland was a very different junior, who had also only recently arrived at St. Jim's, and about the only thing Tom Merry knew about him was that he was given to speaking his thoughts aloud.

This pair had been put into Skimpole's study, and already the trio were becoming known as the Freak Co.

Before Tom Merry could speak again, Manners and Lowther came into the room.

"Cheer-ho, Tom Merry—"

"Hallo, Tommy—"

Tom Merry glared a little.

"Have you asses been looking for thick ears, Manners—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A sudden burst of laughter had interrupted Tom Merry's sentence. It had not come from Manners or Lowther.

They both wheeled round as quickly as Tom Merry did.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

They stared at the end bed in amazement, for someone was rolling about on it.

It was Peter Dawes, the latest addition to Skimpole's study. Skimpole himself was blinking rapidly through his enormous glasses.

"Dear me! I wish you would be more careful, Merry!" he exclaimed. "You have set Dawes off again."

"My hat!"

"Set—set him off?" muttered Tom Merry.

"Yes. Surely you can see you have!" said Skimpole. "Dawes has fits of laughter like this, and you must have said something to set him off, although I will admit you never can tell when they are coming on. He laughed just like this when I was reading one of Professor Loosetop's theories to him this afternoon. Dawes—Dawes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter Dawes. "Ho, ho, ho!"

The juniors stared in blank amazement.

What they had said to set the new junior off in this fashion was beyond them. Skimpole had no idea, either. He was endeavouring to put a stop to the laughter.

He was shaking Dawes vigorously.

"Pray stop laughing, Dawes; it is most annoying! Stop at once, Dawes!"

"My aunt!" gasped Tom Merry. "He's going off his rocker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" choked Peter Dawes. "Merry has just

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reminded me. Have you chaps heard the story? Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's stare became more acute. He had not the slightest idea whether he had heard the story or not, for Dawes' laughter choked further utterance. Skimpole was still shaking him.

"He is often reduced to this state," the brainy man of the Shell explained. "I think he knows a humorous story—"

"What is it?" gasped Manners.

"Dear me, I haven't the slightest idea! When Dawes thinks of the story, he laughs so much he can't tell it—will you please help me shake him?"

"Right—he!" said Tom Merry. "What's shaking him do?"

"It sometimes stops him. Manners, will you please help me to shake him as well?"

"Rather!" said Manners.

Lowther did not wait to be asked.

He joined the others in shaking Dawes with great pleasure.

"No chance of his exploding, I suppose—"

"Dear me! Please stop, Dawes!" panted Skimpole.

"Life is too serious a matter for frivolous laughter. Merry, we are not shaking him enough!"

"How's that, then?" grinned the hero of the Shell.

"Let him have it, chaps!" breathed Manners. "Come on, Bland!"

Bland also joined in, and as Dawes' laughter grew worse instead of better, French also lent a hand.

"My hat, what a row!"

"Oh, do gag him, someone!"

"Sit on his head, Skimmy!"

"Ram a pillow in his mouth, Manners!"

Dawes must have heard these words, but they made no difference to him. His yells of laughter became louder, if anything.

They were so loud that none of the Shell juniors heard the door being opened.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"Come and lend us a hand at shaking Dawes, kid!"

chuckled Manners. "He's off his rocker!"

"Bai Jove! I am inclined to agree with you, Mennahs, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus, coming further into the room. "Pway stop that widicuous laughtah, Dawes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Haas he been tellin' you his funny story, deah boys?"

"He's been trying to."

"And he's checking now, instead," grinned Lowther. "My hat, we shall have Kildare along in a minute!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, he's got to be stopped. Put the mattress over him."

"Good biz!"

"Won't it wumple his clothes, deah boys?"

"Bother his clothes! Ha, ha, ha!"

The mattress was yanked from beneath Peter Dawes, then pressed down on the top of him. Manners and Lowther at once sat on it.

"That ought to stop him, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "I shouldn't think anyone would want to laugh undah the present circumstances. Bai Jove! He is, though!"

"All of you sit on him," said Tom Merry grimly. "Dawes has got to be stopped."

"Dear me, yes, only don't sit on me, French," said Skimpole. "I think he is quieting down now."

"Yes, he's ringing off."

"Give him a decent time to get quite calm," grinned Tom Merry. "Does he often go off like this, Skimmy?"

"Yes, unfortunately he does," said the genius of St. Jim's blinking thoughtfully. "Whenever any remark brings some story he knows to his mind, we have considerable trouble with him—don't we, Bland?"

"Rather!"

"He's calm enough now, deah boys. I am afraid you are wumplin' his clothes."

Tom Merry jumped down from the mattress, and the others did the same. All were ready to jump back again in case Dawes showed any signs of a further outbreak.

But the member of Skimpole & Co. was as solemn as ever now.

He seemed to be a good-tempered junior, too, for there was not a sign of resentment on his face. Tom Merry rather liked him for that.

"But thank goodness he isn't in our study, Skimmy!" he whispered. "Ten to one he would be slain before the week was out."

"Dear me! Pray do not give vent to such barbarous sentiments, Merry," blinked Skimpole. "Dawes is really a very clear-brained junior. He is a Socialist, a Determinist—"

"And a silly dufferist!"

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"Dear me! I do not think I know that word. However, unless one is reckless enough to make some remark referring to the funny story he knows, he is very quiet."

"But you don't know his story, ass!"

"Dear me! Yes, that is the difficulty," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "We have to be very careful, Merry."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the hero of the Shell. "I should think you had. Have you come in here for a thick ear, Gussy?"

"Weally—"

"Oh, you have! Gussy has come for a thick ear, deah. Do you think we've got time before lights out?"

Arthur Augustus rammed his monocle in his eye.

"You leave me no othah resource but to consider you in the light of a waggin' wottah, Tom Merwy!" he said with dignity. "As a matter of fact, I have even been with a wotten piece of news."

The laugh died out of Tom Merry's face. Even Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, was silent.

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"Has anything happened, kid?"

"Yaas, wathah, Mennahs! I wewget to say Dudley has been wicked enough to wun away from St. Jim's."

The words fell like a bombshell amongst the juniors.

A St. Jim's chap had run away! Dudley was a Third-Former, a junior none of them knew much about, and seldom had cause to speak to, but he was a St. Jim's chap, Tom Merry looked very grave.

"Are—are you certain, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! Tagglos, the portah, is tellin' every one."

"My hat!"

"I thought I would let you know, deah boys!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "I wathah wanted to intahview him minah, but it is too late now. Walthah was inclined to show in with Dudley, you know."

"Slip down to the Third-Form-room after lights out!" Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I am afraid that is impossh, deah boy," he said. "As Wally wathah I must set him a good example. I wad to impress upon Wally durin' the next few days that he must obey the wules of the school, bai Jove!"

"Humph!"

"My hat! How rotten about Dudley!"

"Yaas, wathah! As a matter of fact it has put me in wathah a flutah. It weally looks as if he did set Lowther on Mr. Selbay, too."

Tom Merry nodded.

He had heard about the affair of the bulldog, and it certainly did appear now as if the Third-Former knew more about it than he should have done.

The hero of the Shell glanced at his watch.

"My aunt, he'll never get away, though!" he exclaimed.

"The last train went over an hour ago, and the station masters will be warned by telephone all along the line. He'll be caught all right to-morrow."

"Bai Jove! I twust so."

"Rather!"

And a solemn sort of silence reigned in the Shell dormitory as the swell of St. Jim's left the room.

Dudley's disappearance had cast a gloom over the school.

CHAPTER 6.

Tom Merry is Surprised.

"M X hat!"

Tom Merry woke up with a violent start the following morning.

He sat up in bed and held his pyjamas jacket away from his chest. It was wringing wet.

"My—my aunt!"

"Cheer-ho, kid!"

"Many happy returns of the day, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry understood, then. It was his birthday, and the juniors had awoke him in order to offer the congratulations.

Their method of rousing him had been very simple. A well-soaked sponge, equally well aimed.

"You shrieking duffers! My aunt! How many presents are there in here?"

"Quite a respectable numbah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "We have come to wish you many happy returns of the day, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry grinned pleasantly.

"Thanks, kid. Half the coll. is here."

"Yaas, wathah! The principal half, that is. There are no seniors—"

"Of masters," chuckled Figgins's voice.

"THE BOYS' HERALD" On Wednesday next, November 9th.



"I am sorry for the lad who has done this!" said Mr. Selby quietly, as he walked away with his bare calf distinctly visible. (See page 4.)

Tom Merry stared.

There were not only School House juniors present, then; there were quite a many fellows from the New House.

The hero of the Shell went red.

He could not help feeling embarrassed at the compliment friends and rivals were showing him at the very first opportunity on his birthday.

"It's awfully decent of you asses."

But there was more to follow. Manners came up to the lad, one hand in his pocket.

"We had a whip round, Tom Merry," he said rather nastily. "All the Shell kids. I've got a list of the names."

And he tossed a miniature folding camera on the bed.

It was a neat little instrument which folded up small enough for the waistcoat-pocket, almost. Tom Merry had been wanting one for a long time.

"I went and chose it," said Manners, the most-enthusiastic amateur photographer of St. Jim's. "The lens is ripping. I tested it myself."

If Manners had tested the lens and pronounced it ripping, it would have to be a very good one. Manners was not easily pleased in the matter of lenses.

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"It's awfully decent of you chaps," repeated Tom Merry. "I—"

"Bai Jove! I considah it wathah funnasy you should have had a whip wound, Mannahs."

"Why funny, ass?"

"Because we Fourth-Formahs also had a whip wound—didn't we Blake, deah boy?"

"Rather!"

"And we bought a punching-ball," added Digby. "You know you said you wanted a punching-ball, Tom Merry."

And a brand new punching ball was dumped down on the bed.

Before Tom Merry could answer, Figgins jabbed him in the ribs with a new fishing-rod.

"Seems to have been an epidemic of whips round," he grinned. "From the New House chaps, kid."

Again Tom Merry was prevented from answering.

The only Shell junior who had been asleep during the presentations had just woke up. It was Skimpole.

"Dear me!" blinked the brainy man of the Shell. "Is Tom Merry here?"

"He is!"

NEXT
THURSDAY:

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"Good!" said Skimpole. "I have a volume of Professor Lowson's 'Ethics of Determinism' for you, and trust you will gain as much benefit from the work as I have gained. It is from myself, Bland, and Dawes."

And a heavy, nicely-bound volume was handed to the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry took it, still very red.

"Thanks awfully, Skimmy!"

Of course, he would have much preferred a book of adventure, but he would not have let Skimpole see that for this world. And Tom Merry meant to read the "Ethics of Determinism" if he had to take it in small doses of half a page a day.

"Jolly ripping of you, Skimmy?"

"Pray do not mention it," said Skimpole severely. "New that you have passed one more milestone on the road of life, I trust your mind will have taken a more serious turn, that it will be open to accept the great truths—"

"Exactly," said Jack Blake heartily.

"But I had not finished—"

"I quite agree," added Figgins.

"Dear me—"

"And so say all of us," concluded Harry Noble. "Three cheers for that ass, Tom Merry, chaps."

And three cheers went up.

Then cries of speech followed, and Tom Merry had to get up on the bed.

He never quite knew what he said, because he felt a good deal flustered. Still, his few words were not badly chosen, all things considered.

The presentations had come as a real surprise to him.

Arthur Augustus was polishing his monocle.

"Heah, heah—I mean wot, deah boy!" he exclaimed. "It has been a pleasah to us—yass, weally!"

"Hooray!"

"The thing now is to decide what is to be done to-day."

"Yes, what's to be done on Tom Merry's birthday, chaps?"

"Another!" exclaimed Figgins. "At our meeting last night—"

"When we were holding a meeting yesterday evening," said Manners, "we decided—"

"Our plan was—" began Jack Blake.

Tom Merry started. He knew now what had caused the curious epidemic of meetings the previous evening.

It was all rather embarrassing to the hero of the Shell.

Arthur Augustus waved his hand loftily.

"Weally, deah boys! There is no need to twouble about what is to be done to-day," he said. "I have already settled the mattah."

The other juniors stared.

"Of all the cheek—"

"Go hon, Gussy!"

"Weally, deah boys! Howevah, to get on with the washin'. Our plan is—"

"Oh, is it?"

"I don't think. As a matter of fact, we take our bicycles—"

"Wats, Figgay?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Utter wats, deah boy!"

"Look here—"

"You look here instead, Jack Blake."

Arthur Augustus waved his hand again.

"Pway don't get watty with one another, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "Tom Merry will understand that we are all vewy anxious to make his birthday a waddin' success."

"Rather!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Jolly decent of you all!"

"Heah, heah—I mean wot! Bai Jove, I shall be all in a fluttah in a minute. My woposal is—"

"Who is it to, anyway," demanded Figgins warmly—"the draper's young lady at Rylcombe?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus went pink.

"Weally, Figgay, a wemahk like that is in wank bad taste—"

"Blow bad taste! We take our bicycles and scorch over to Higcliffe—"

"We do nothin' of the sort, you uttah duffah!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "We go ova to Woodfield instead, deah boys."

The other juniors stared again.

"We can't go by train, kid."

Figgins stared blankly.

"Woodfield! My hat! I'm not going to cycle sixty miles there and sixty miles back, even on Tom Merry's birthday!"

"Fancy Gussy cycling a hundred and twenty miles in a day!" grinned Lowther. "Make it a month, Gussy, and I won't say you mightn't manage it."

"Weally, Lowthah, as a mattah of fact, I could cycle neably two hundred miles in a day, Howevah—"

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"LONESOME LEN," By HENRY T. JOHNSON, starts in

"Bats!"

"Howevah, we are not going to cycle, you duffah!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in a raised voice.

The other juniors stared again.

"We can't go by train, kid."

"I believe we should have to go up to London and change there, ass."

"Wats, deah boy. We are not goin' by twain—"

"How are we going then, ass?"

"Make an afternoon stroll of it, Gussy?"

"Pway don't be widelous, Lowthah! No, deah boy, we are goin' to motah over there."

The juniors started. Jack Blake was as surprised as any of them.

"Ass, how can we motor?"

"By goin' in a motah, deah boy; my patah's tourin' car will be at the gates at ten o'clock, although the divanahed not be able to come with us."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Not—not that big car of your pater's, Gussy?"

"Yass, wathah! The forty-horse-powah tourin' car," said Arthur Augustus coolly. "I awwanged all that yesterday by wiah—"

"Yah! You uttah wuffian! Wow!"

"Hooray!" yelled Figgins, banging the swell of St. Jim's on his back. "Good old Gussy!"

"Good old ass!" yelled Jack Blake, also banging away.

"You wottah! You uttah wuffians, you are wumpin' my clothes feashfully!"

But the excited juniors did not bear him.

They banged him on the shoulder vigorously, Arthur Augustus began to gasp.

"You w'etched waggals! Pway Leah my plan out, as I have another idea."

"My hat!"

"The one and only is coming on in his old age."

"What's it this time, Gussy?"

"I have awwanged that we motah to Woodfield foah the express purpose of givin' the village footah team a testah whackin', deah boys," panted Arthur Augustus. "They has agreed to play us; I weived a wiah from their see-hus evenin'."

"Play Woodfield—?"

Figgins gasped.

"My only Aunt Jane, but they would give our first a good game, Gussy."

"Yass, wathah! But I expect they will be stwong enough to give us a good game as well, deah boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed, but it was not for long. We had were one of those teams with a reputation in the county.

They had done several big things that season already.

"My hat, we shall have to go all the way, Gussy!"

"Yass, wathah! But I feel feashfully fit. Personally, I thought my two ideahs wath wippin'."

"Rather!"

"Splendid!"

"Good old Gussy!"

Tom Merry's eyes were sparkling.

There was a good deal of rivalry between the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—and the Council of Study No. 6. It was friendly rivalry, certainly, but that did not prevent it causing rows occasionally, although the two Co.'s were more than ready to unite when it came to a dispute with the rivals from the New House, Figgins & Co.

This being so, Tom Merry could not help feeling flattered at the plans made for his birthday. Looking at the crowd and flushed faces of the juniors surrounding him, he felt that it was good to be a St. Jim's fellow.

Arthur Augustus had placed his back against the wall of the shed, there should be no more congratulatory thumps on the shoulder.

"I trust my two ideahs meet with your approval, Tom Merry, deah boy," he said coolly. "If not, the motah can easily be sent back."

"It's a great idea, kid; thanks, awfully."

"Rather!" exclaimed Manners anxiously. "I—I say, many will the car hold, Gussy?"

"It will have to hold eleven of us, deah boy—the wain team, bai Jove! I am afraid it will be wathah a crowd."

"Blow a crowd!"

"We'll hang on with our eyebrows," said Lowther.

"Rather!" exclaimed Manners. "I'll go and get some plates in my camera."

He flashed away, and Tom Merry began to dress hurriedly. Everyone was talking at once.

ANSWERS

"THE BOYS' HERALD" On Wednesday next, November 5th.

The door was gently pushed open, but none of them heard it. D'Arcy minor put his head into the room. He did not keep it there long—just long enough to run an anxious eye over the juniors crowding round Tom Merry. Then the Third-Former withdrew and dashed up the second flight of stairs. He was making for the box-room.

CHAPTER 7. Wally's Plan.

"DUDLEY!"

The key of the box-room door was turned softly. "Is that you, Wally?" whispered Dudley's voice. "Father! Only Jameson and Curly Gibson with me; the others are scouting about downstairs," answered D'Arcy minor. "Are—are you still keen on cutting, Dud?"

"Of course."
"It will be jolly difficult to work."
The big Third-Former shrugged his shoulders. "Anyway, it will have to be worked somehow," he said. "Don't the masters and pres. think I've boited already, Dud?"

"Yes, rather, and every station-master for miles around has been spoken to on the telephone or by wire."
"Humph!"
"And a good many of the pres. are going to spend the whole holiday scouting about the country on bicycles looking for you, Dud," added Jameson.

"By Jove!"
"And the masters will be keeping a look-out, too."
"I suppose so," said Dudley. "I say, you don't think I shall have to wait until to-night, do you?"

"Wally shook his head.
"I don't see that you would gain much by doing that, kid; because the station people will be watching for a junior, and you would be bound to be collared."

"And I am not so sure the police won't be warned," added Curly Gibson. "It isn't likely just yet, of course, but you can't know."
Dudley looked from one to the other, then he rapped his knuckles in his pockets.

"Anyway, I'm going to cut," he said firmly. "I'm going to get away somehow."

"You—you've absolutely made up your mind on that, Dud?"
"Yes, absolutely."
"Well, I think it can be managed," answered Wally, after a short pause. "I can't tell you until ten o'clock, though."

Dudley stared.
"What do you mean, kid? If I miss the nine-thirty train, I can't get on until mid-day."
"Oh, the train from Rylcombe Station is out of the question."

"Next but—"
"It's no good going there. The station-master will be watching, and Kildare is going to see every train out, and it will be the same with every station for thirty miles round. The pres. mean to catch you somehow."

"Then how can it be managed at ten o'clock, Wally?"
D'Arcy minor grinned a little.
"I don't know that it can be managed," he said. "There's just a chance—it all depends."

"How do you mean?"
Dudley's words were cut short by the clang of the breakfast gong.

Wally, Jameson, and Curly Gibson moved towards the door. "You'll see when ten o'clock arrives, kid," said D'Arcy minor. "Get ready to cut at a moment's notice."
"I'm ready now."

"Right-ho! I'll slip up here at ten o'clock, or a few minutes before. I believe it will work all right."
And Wally flashed away.

He took a seat at the table near his brother, Arthur Augustus, in spite of the fact that he should have been at the First Form table.

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye to get a better view of his minor.

"Wally, Wally, I wgwet to say you do not appeal to have changed your collah this morning, deah boy."
"No; but I put a clean one on last week—"
"Last week! Gwast Scott!"

Wally grinned.
"Yes, kid, and I shall probably put on another the week after next. But to get on with the washing. You old fogeys are going to Woodfield in the car, aren't you?"

"Yass, wathah! But about your collah—"
"Start at ten o'clock, don't you?"
"Yass, wathah, onlay pway don't intewwupt me when I am in the middle of the important matter of collah."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

"Who is going with you?"
"The wgwahh football team, of course."
"Ehven, eh? My hat!"
"Yass, it will be wathah a cwash. Bai Jove, your tie is cwooked."

"You don't say so," muttered D'Arcy minor absently. "I think I'll come and see you off."
"Yass, do, deah boy! Bai Jove, bwakkah is orah at last. I will speak to you istah about your collah!"

The juniors hurried from the room, Arthur Augustus being joined at once by the rest of the Woodfield party. They were the usual eleven.

The Terrible Three, the chums from Study No. 6, Figgins & Co., of New House fame, and Harry Noble, better known as Kangaroo.

They were all very excited.
All had the largest overcoat he could find ready to put on, but the largest of them was insignificant compared with Arthur Augustus's tremendous motor-coat.

Everyone was speaking at once.
"Has the car turned up yet, Gussy?"
"I heard something toot up while we were at brekker, kid."

Arthur Augustus glanced at his watch.
"Bai Jove, yass it will have awrrived, as the chauffeur was to catch the nine-thirty train back to Eastwood. I pwpose we go and see."

A general rush was made for the grounds. D'Arcy minor, Curly Gibson, and Jameson were following in the rear. They seemed unduly interested in the doings of the juniors they usually termed the old fogeys.

"Bai Jove! Yass it has awrrived, deah boys!"
"My hat, yes!"
A magnificent touring-car was waiting just inside the gates, with Taggles, the porter, standing on guard. The juniors rushed up.

"My hat, isn't she a zipper!"
"Hooryay!"
Everyone became still more excited. They crowded round the car enthusiastically.

Arthur Augustus was putting on his enormous motor-coat.
"Pway start hor up, Figgay, deah boy," he said languidly. "I trust you will take the wheel, Tom Merry, as it is your birthday."

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.
He had driven a motor before, but never anything like a forty-horse power touring car of that size. Still, the captain of the junior eleven of St. Jim's had excellent nerves.

"I should love to, Gussy."
"Wight-ho, deah boy. Pway whizz her wound, Figgay, as I have already switched on."

Figgins stepped round to the front and caught hold of the starting-handle.
He was rather pink.

Figgins did not know a very great deal about cars. He turned the handle hastily.
"Pway turn it the othah way, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "It is a left-hand turn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Figgins went punker, and gave the handle a vigorous turn. There was a gentle parr at once.

The engine had started.
All the juniors were slipping on their coats.
"My hat! What about the footer things?"
"Bai Jove, we shall have to wash and get those, deah boys! I trust they are already packed."

"Rathor!"
"Shall we get yours, Gussy?" exclaimed Jack Blake.
"No, I had bettah come, deah boy, as I shall want goggles, Wally, pway see that the engine doesn't waco."

"Right-ho!" said D'Arcy minor, sauntering up coolly. "Are all of you going into the coll?"
"Rathor! But we shan't be long."
"Scud for it, chaps!"

The juniors pelted away. The moment their backs were turned, Wally wheeled round.
"Go and fetch him, Jameson, like the giddy wind!"
"But there isn't anywhere to hide him."

"Rats! Go and fetch him!"
And Jameson scudded across the quadrangle as hard as he could run. Curly Gibson was about to follow, but D'Arcy minor seized his arm.

"My hat, I've got it!" he whispered. "Bring Dud down to the side entrance."
"But—"
"Aas!" muttered Wally, and he sprang into the driver's seat.

The next instant the big car was moving silently out of the college grounds.
Curly Gibson looked astounded for a moment, then he clucked.

He understood Wally's plan; although he did not quite see how Dudley was to be smuggled aboard the car.
But Curly Gibson did not hesitate.
The fags of the Third had come to rely a great deal on their leader.

CHAPTER 8.
The Start.

"**B**AI JOVE!"
Arthur Augustus started.
He ruminated his monocle in his eye and stared blankly at the college gates.
"Bai Jove!"
"What's up, Gussy? You haven't forgotten your boots or anything— My hat!"
Tom Merry also started.
"My only Aunt Jane!"

All the Woodfield party stopped dead and stared now. There was no sign of the huge car they had left standing before the gates less than five minutes ago.

Arthur Augustus rushed forward, forgetting altogether that hasty running was scarcely in keeping with the dignity which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"It's a Wally—it's my mish!"
"What's your mish, miss?" breathed Tom Merry, sprinting as hard as he could. "You don't mean he's gone off with the car?"

"Yess, wathah!"
"But can the kid drive?" exclaimed Jack Blake, in alarm.
"Yass, he can drive all wright. I shall administrah a feahful thwashin' for this twick'r nothin' will pwevent my administrahin' a feahful thwashin', bai Jove!"

The car was nowhere in sight.
All of them had gained the road by now, and the car could not be seen. Figgins raced to where a small road branched off from the main one.

"No, it isn't along here, either."
"Wally's snaked the car!"

"Bai Jove! It is utahly impos. to believe that my mish— What is that along there, deah boys?"
"A hay-cart," said Lowthah, "or the church spire."
"Pway don't wsg. Lowthah. Bai Jove! I am all in a flutah."

The eleven juniors stood stock still for a moment, holding their football-bags limp. The disappearance of the car had come as a great shock.

Jack Blake glanced at his watch.
"The young sweep has only gone for a spin; he will come back here all right."

"I'm not so certain about that, kid!"
"Oh, yes he will!" said the chief of Study No. 6. "He knows we have a footer match to play at Woodfield, and Wally wouldn't let us down over a footer match."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"
"I expect he's gone down to Rylcombe— Hallo!"

Tom Merry had caught sight of the track left by the scudded tyres of the back wheels. They showed up quite plainly along the dusty road.

The hero of the Shell dashed ahead.
"My hat, he's gone down this lane!"
"Bai Jove, so he has! I wondah—"

Tom Merry & Co. did not wish to hear what it was Arthur Augustus wondered. They dashed forward towards the bend in the lane.

They would be able to see a good way along from there.
"My hat!"
"What is it, deah boy? Gweat Scott, theah it is! Wally—Wally, you utah young wascal!"

The huge car was standing quietly in front of the side entrance, and Wally was still in the driver's seat.
He nodded cheerily to the oncoming juniors.
"Hallo, kids!"

"You utah young wascal, Wally—"
"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" said D'Arcy minor coolly.
"The old car goes very well; I brought her down here like a flash."

The scamp of the Third jumped out of the car and rammid his hands in his pockets.
"What's the matter, Gus?"

Arthur Augustus was glaring at his junior.
"Weally, Wally, you twy my tempah to a gweat extent," he said frigidly. "I should wegwot havin' to administrah a feahful thwashin' on Tom Mowwy's birthday—"

"Rats!"
"Bai Jove, Wally—"

"Go hon!" grinned the scamp of the Third. "You other chaps will never get started if you don't stop Gussy caeking."
"Yes, let's get on with the washing," said Jack Blake.
"You can thrash Wally when we get back."

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"Weally, but—"
"And as you said, there can't be any rows in the family on young Merry's birthday."
"No, of course there can't, young Blake," said Tom Merry.
"Where shall we put our footer things, Gussy?"
Arthur Augustus turned from his minor.

"Bai Jove! I pwoove we put them all in the luggage-holdah at the back, deah boys!"
"Good wheere!"
"Is it locked— Hallo!"

Figgins stopped on his way round to the rear of the car. D'Arcy minor was standing with his back to a huge leather luggage-carrier, which ran the whole width of the car.

"My hat! There's room here for about fifty footer bags, Gussy!"
"Yass, wathah!"

Wally had his hands in his pockets.
"Oh, rats! You old fogeys don't want to put your things in the luggage-carrier."

Figgins stared at the Third-Former in surprise.
"They would rattle about no end," added D'Arcy minor coolly. "Much better shove the bags in the car."
"Bai Jove! They might wattle a bit."

"There's a ripping place where you can put them under the seat-cushions!" exclaimed Wally. "Heaps of room!"
"Yess, wathah! I nevah thought of that."

"No, you never think of anything," grinned the scamp of the Third.
"Weally, Wally—"

"In they go!" sang out Curly Gibson. "My hat! I wish we were coming with you."

"Rather!"
"Hope you have a decent time."

"Mind you, wathah Woodfield!" exclaimed Wally. "They are no end of a cocky team."

The Third-Formers were talking loudly and altogether. They seemed slightly excited.

Arthur Augustus had just slipped on his motor-goggles, affairs that might have been mistaken for small muffs in the distance.
"Will you have goggles, Tom Mowwy, deah boy?"
"No, thanks. I say, kid, I've never driven a car as big as this—"

"Wats! Pway jump in, deah boy!"
And the swell of St. Jim's stood on one side to let Tom Merry take the driver's seat.

The hero of the Shell did so, his face very flushed.
Every one of the little party seemed to be going dead set of his way to make his birthday a success. There had been none of the usual disputes as to whom should drive, as they would have been on an ordinary occasion.

All of them appeared anxious to see Tom Merry of the wheel.
The Shell junior slipped into the comfortable seat, and pressed down the clutch-pedal with his foot.

"Ready, chaps?"
"Rather!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"
"Fire ahead!" sang out Jack Blake, and the great car moved slowly down the lane.

There was no doubt about it, Tom Merry knew how to start a car whatever he may not have known about the duties of a motorist.

The Third-Formers stood together until the car was round the bend, then they turned to each other with suppressed chuckles.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Did 'em brown, kids!"
"My hat, rather!" chuckled Wally; then the laugh died out of his voice.

"Poor old Dud!" he said quietly. "If it had been anyone else but Selby Towzer had bitten, things might have been glossed over."

Jameson nodded.
"Lathom, for instance," he said thoughtfully. "He would have been awfully ratty at first, of course, but I don't believe Lathom would ever get a fellow sacked."

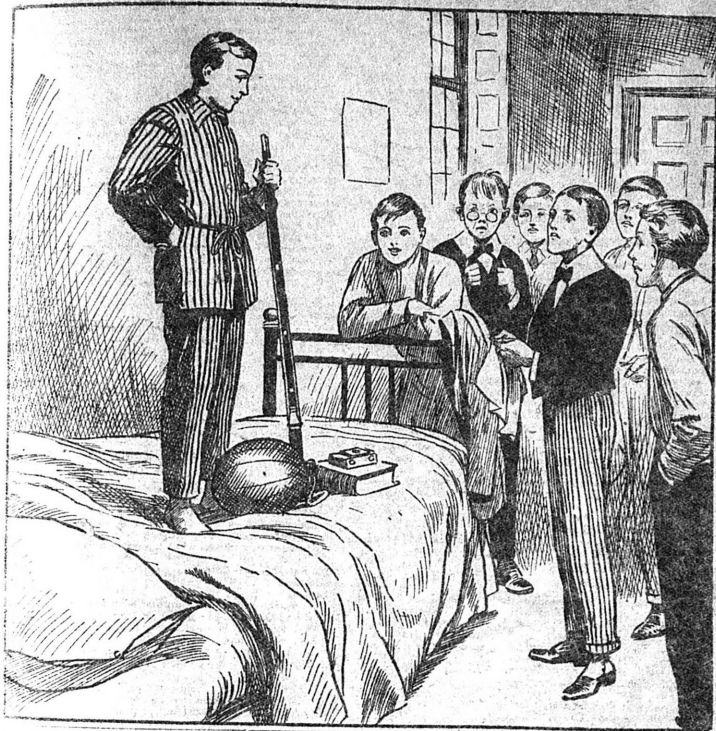
"No, nor Railton, nor any of them, except Selby."
The others nodded.

But perhaps that was not quite just to the Third-Former.
Once or twice before Mr. Selby had surprised his own young pupils, and perhaps he was destined to surprise them again before long.

Still, they did not think of that as they turned back towards the old school.

Only one thought was uppermost in their minds, and that Dudley's own words had given rise to that thought.

Where was the use in staying to be expelled? That was what Dudley had said, and it was what his chums were thinking now.



"It's awfully decent of you fellows!" said Tom Merry, to whom the presentations had come as a real surprise. "Heah, heah,—I mean, wot, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, polishing his eyeglass. (See page 10.)

It did not occur to them that Dudley might not have been crushed after all if he had stayed and faced the music. They thought they knew Mr. Selby too well for that. All three of them looked rather gloomy as they mounted the steps leading to the college itself. The gloom was fated to remain with them for the remainder of the day.

CHAPTER 9.

A Startling Discovery.

"MY hat, isn't this ripping!" Jack Blake gave vent to the remark as the chilly, autumn air cut against his face. They were careering through some of the prettiest country in Sussex, with a cloudless sky overhead and almost perfect roads beneath the tyres.

"Splendid!" "Rather!" panted Tom Merry. "Say when you would like to take the wheel, Gussy?" Arthur Augustus waved his hand.

"That is all wight, deah boy! Jack Blake is goin' to take her on aflash lurch, if he cares to. Bai Jove!"

"Rather!" "Thanks awfully," said Jack Blake, his eyes sparkling. Fatty Wynn's eyes were also enthusiastic for the moment.

"Lunch!" he exclaimed, brightening up. "Did I hear someone say lunch?"

"Yass, wathah! We thought we would stop at the next decent place, deah boy."

"Rather!" said the Falstaff of St. Jim's. "I agree with that proposal. I must admit motoring makes me feel fearfully hungry. I—I believe I feel a little faint from want of food."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Fatty Wynn had been having sandwiches all the way from St. Jim's, but it was useless to point out that fact to him.

Fatty Wynn did not consider sandwiches as in the light of real food.

"That looks a decent, old country inn," he exclaimed. "As we have a hard football match to play this afternoon, I really think it would be reckless of us to pass this inn. Aren't—aren't you going to stop, Tom Merry?"

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

The intense concern in the Welsh junior's voice made Tom Merry laugh, but as they all seemed keen on stopping, he slowed the car down.

Tom Merry himself would not have minded missing a good many meals to be driving that huge car.

"Shall I switch off, Gussy?"

"Yess, wathah, deah boy! We may as well stop the engine altogether as it is useless to wash maffins. I must admit I am wathah peckish myself."

"Peckish?" said Fatty Wynn weakly. "Did you say peckish?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The engine was stopped, and the juniors scrambled from the car. The owner of the neat little country inn was already at the door.

He was very stout, as stout as Fatty Wynn, and there was a pleasant, inviting expression in his merry eyes.

"Cold meat and salad and potatoes, young gentlemen," he exclaimed. "Draught ginger-beer, and a pudding afterwards, that'll come as a surprise."

"What—what is the pudding, please?" said Fatty Wynn breathlessly.

"That is to come as a surprise, young gentleman."

Fatty Wynn's face broke out into a happy smile. He almost ran into the little inn.

Arthur Augustus took one glance at the car to see that all was right, then followed the others in.

"Pway do your best in the way of wespas," he said pleasantly, to the innkeeper, "and bring the bill to me."

"Rats, Gussy!"

"Bot! We are all in this—all except Tom Merry."

Tom Merry coloured a little. The fellows had not forgotten it was his birthday yet, then.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Wight-oo!" he said. "We each pay a share, except Tom Mewwy. Pway take the head of the table, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, deah boy— That's the style, Blakay."

Tom Merry had been seized and forcibly bumped down in the chair at the head of the table. It was the only chair, as it happened, which faced the window.

The fellows had scarcely slipped off their overcoats before the innkeeper came in with a huge joint of splendid-looking beef.

He began to carve at once.

Fatty Wynn watched with glowing eyes.

"I wonder what the pudding is, Figgy?" he whispered.

"Suppose it's blanc-mange?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it might be."

"Wait and see, kid."

Fatty Wynn grunted, then his plate was handed to him.

It was very liberally stocked with eatables. A moment or two later every junior of the eleven had a plate before him.

Rushing through the keen air had given them splendid appetites. They were all doing full justice to the excellent country repast before them.

"Ripping!" boomed Fatty Wynn. "If only I knew what the pudding to follow was—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, it may be a fruit-tart—"

"Pass the mustard, Gussy, old ass!"

"Certainly, Hewies! Only, pway don't allude to me in that wathah-and-wedday mannah."

"Or treacle-pudding," said Fatty Wynn suddenly. "Guesy, do you think it's likely to be treacle-pudding—"

"Bai Jove, it is uttally impos. foan me to say, deah boy! Pway sit down, Tom Mewwy. Fatty Wynn hasn't finished yet."

"Good gracious—no!"

"My hat!"

Tom Merry was on his feet staring out of the window.

Everyone, with the exception of Fatty Wynn, had finished the first course by now, and were only waiting for the New House junior to put down his knife and fork. They knew from experience that it would be a long wait.

"What's the matter, Tom Merry?"

"What's up—"

"My hat! There's someone playing about with the car! Great Caesar!"

The other juniors stared out of the window.

Not only was someone playing about with the car, but that someone was sitting on the luggage-carrier behind it.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"Some kid is getting into the car from behind!"

"Getting out of it, you mean," flashed Tom Merry. "My hat! Look, Gussy!"

"Gwac! Soot!"

There was a general rush for the window. Fatty Wynn was the only member of the party who did not leave the table.

The window was closed and Jack Blake could not get it open. Then Tom Merry's voice rang out again.

"Who is it? My hat! See the cap he's wearing—"

"It's Dudley!" yelled Figgins. "I believe it's Dudley!"

Figgins was in the best position to see, but even he had only caught a momentary glimpse of the junior.

For the instant, though, he was certain it was Dudley.

"I tell you it is—"

"Look! Bai Jove, I am all in a fluttah!"

"There he goes!" gasped Herries. "Across the field!"

Someone was flashing across the field opposite the inn. It was a junior's form, and the junior was wearing a St. Jim's cap.

That much was certain, but there was nothing else that Tom Merry & Co. could be positive of.

Still, the little was enough.

With a rush the juniors trooped from the inn. Tom Merry flashed round by the back of the car.

The lid of the luggage-carrier was wide open.

Then a cry came from Figgins.

"My hat! Where's he gone, chaps?"

Not a sign of Dudley, if it were Dudley, could be seen.

The field terminated in a wood, and the closely-growing trees made a search look rather formidable.

"Bai Jove! We shall never find the young wathah in that wood, deah boys!"

"We'll have a jolly good try, anyway," said Tom Merry crisply.

"Yass, wathah! Pway huwvy, Fatty Wynn!"

There was consternation on Fatty Wynn's chubby face.

"But the pudding!" he exclaimed. "We can't possibly disappoint the landlord!"

"Rats!"

"But—but suppose it were blanc-mange, after all?" pleaded the Falstaff of St. Jim's. "I have an idea it was blanc-mange or—"

But the other juniors were already pelting across the field.

Fatty Wynn sighed, and followed at a gentle amble.

CHAPTER 10.

Trouble with Keepers.

"**B**AJ Jove! We shall never find the young wathah!"

Arthur Augustus gave vent to the observation as the undergrowth in the wood became so dense that it was difficult to force their way through it.

He had scarcely spoken when a loud voice rang out.

"Who is there?"

"Keepahs! Bai Jove! It appears we are two-pasah, deah boys!"

Tom Merry & Co. stopped.

They could just see the outline of a keeper ahead. Tom Merry and Jack Blake exchanged glances.

"Shall I go and ask him, Blakey?"

"Just what I was thinking."

Tom Merry hurried forward. His appearance before the trees was the signal for another cry.

"Here he is!"

"Collar the young poacher, mates!"

And Tom Merry was seized before he could speak.

He struggled to free himself, but he was in the grasp of three grown men.

He turned to one of them angrily.

"I'm not poaching, you ass! We're looking for a chap—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So are we looking for a chap. We've found him, mate!"

chuckled the keeper. "This will please the guv'nor, mates!"

"I tell you—"

"Yes, you've already told us once, young shaver."

"Ass, one of our chaps has run away from school, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was galling to be laughed at in that manner.

It had never occurred to Tom Merry, or any of them, that in entering the woods they would be trespassing. It was extremely annoying to be mistaken for youthful poachers before the hunt for Dudley had really commenced.

Tom Merry began to struggle again.

"A pretty set of asses you'll look when it's all explained," he growled. "Look here! I'll give you my name and—"

"He wants to give us his name, and call an' see us what he isn't so busy, mates."

Then another cry went up. It came from Arthur Augustus.

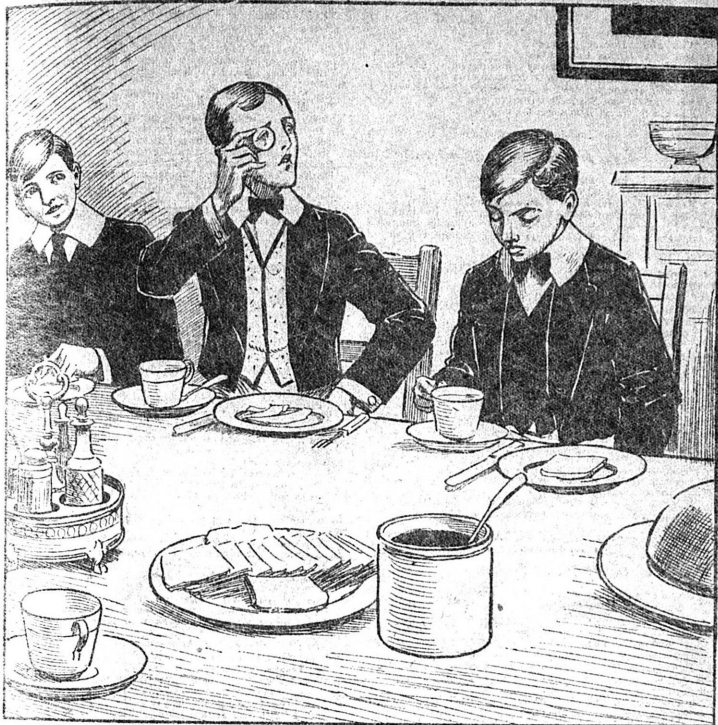
"Wescue, deah boys! Tom Mewwy is captured by a bloke howwid keepahs! Wescue!"

"Hooray!"

And a small crowd of juniors burst through the undergrowth. They were headed by Jack Blake and Fatty Wynn.

"Get out of the way and I'll roll on them!" panted Wynn.

"Altogether, chaps!"



"Weally, Wally, I wewget to say you do not appeah to have changed your collah this mornin'." exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, surveying his younger brother through his monocle. (See page 17.)

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"
 And the ten juniors came on.
 The keepers started in surprise.
 They had known that Tom Merry was not alone in the woods, but it came as a shock to them to find that he was one of a party of eleven.
 Before they had recovered from their surprise, they were surrounded.
 "Altogethah, deah boys! Weleass Tom Mewwy, you merrah!"
 The keeper did not obey willingly, but he released the Shell later all the same. He had to, because Jack Blake and Figgins charged into him.
 No blows were struck. The chums from St. Jim's had no quarrel with the keepers, who were probably only doing their duty, but Tom Merry had to be rescued.
 The rescue was effected almost instantly.
 "Wun, ho covah?" panted Arthur Augustus. "Wun like deah boy!"
 The juniors scattered, and for a moment the keepers were considered to follow them up.
 When the men had recovered from their surprise, Tom Merry & Co. had regained the field.
 "Hew!"

"Bai Jove! I am all in a fluttah!"
 "You'll be in a worse fluttah if they catch us!" panted Figgins. "If we can gain the road before they get out of the woods, it ought to be all right."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Suppose they follow us up?" panted Jack Blake, running as hard as he could.
 But there was no time to discuss the point. The thing to do was to get back to the inn.
 Fatty Wynn was as firmly of that opinion as any of them.
 "And it's all rot about it being Dudley!" he breathed.
 "Some village kid playing the goat!"
 "How do you know?"
 "Bound to be."
 "Did you see him?" asked Tom Merry.
 "No, I didn't see anyone!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly.
 "I was eating at the time. I can't do two things at once, Tom Merry."
 "Heah we are! Bai Jove!"
 The juniors scrambled over the fence, then hesitated.
 It was not unlikely the keepers would follow them up, and if they did so, it was pretty certain trouble would be the result.
 Tom Merry glanced at the others.

"I propose we settle with the landlord of the inn, and get on with the washing!" he exclaimed.

"What about Dudley, though?"
 "And what about the pudding?" gasped Fatty Wynn.
 "It's an awful insult to go away without tasting something a man he had made as a special treat—rotten bad form!"
 "We will apologise, dear boy. Weally, Tom Mewwy, I nearly think it can have been Dudley, you know."
 "The kid had a St. Jim's cap on, anyway."

"Bai Jove!"
 "Here comes the innkeeper!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.
 "I believe the pudding is spoilt!"
 Whether that was so or not; they were not destined to learn.

The stout innkeeper came up hurriedly.
 "Did you catch him, young gentlemen?"
 "Bai Jove! Catch him! Catch whom?"
 "The young gentleman who got out of the luggage-carrier!" laughed the innkeeper. "I suppose he smuggled himself aboard the car before you started without any of you noticing."
 "My hat!"

"It was Dudley, then!" flashed Tom Merry. "I say, where do the woods lead to?"
 The innkeeper looked puzzled for a moment.
 "Well, it used to be a short cut to the station, which is two miles away by road."
 "To the station?"

"Yes, sir. There's the signpost pointing to the pathway through the woods, which the owner has done away with now."

"My only Aunt Jane, Dudley will have seen the post, chap."

"Bound to."
 "It's right against the car."
 "Yes; that's a fact!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The young sweep will have made for the station! When is the next train, landlord?"

The innkeeper glanced at his watch.
 "Well, there's one pretty well due now," he said slowly.
 "There's no telling on this branch line. Five minutes one way or the other isn't noticed!"
 "The car!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Pway let's wace to the station and pwevout the young ass wunnin' away, dear boys!"

The words were scarcely out of Arthur Augustus's mouth when there was a rush for the car.
 Jack Blake seized the handle.
 "Switch on, Digby! Right!"
 "Yes."

There was a purring noise, and the engine was started up. Figgins was paying the innkeeper for the lunch. They could settle about their respective shares later on.

"Sorry to have to rush off like this," the New House junior was exclaiming, "but one of our chaps has been ass enough to run away from school! Come on, Fatty!"
 "But the pudding?" said the Falstaff of St. Jim's. "It's—it's all roady, chaps!"
 "Rats!"

"Pway take the wheel, Tom Mewwy, dear boy!"
 "More rats!" said the Shell junior firmly. "I don't pretend to be able to drive as well as you can, and this has got to be a scorching run."
 "Wight-ho, deah boy!"

There was no time to be lost arguing the point.
 The juniors were scrambling into the car as rapidly as possible. The innkeeper closed the doors.
 "Straight on!" he called out. "You can't miss it!"
 And the car darted ahead.

Fatty Wynn dropped back in his seat with a sigh.
 "It was blanc-mange," he said dismally. "I feel certain it was!"

The others were gasping a little.
 Arthur Augustus was driving at a pace they had never been driven at before.

Their eyes were watering vigorously

CHAPTER 11. Just Too Late.

"TWUST we do not wun through any polico twaps, deah boys."

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "I trust so, too!"
 Arthur Augustus accelerated up a little.

"I am afraid we are exceeding the speed limit, you know; but it's in a good cause. Kildare and all the pwefects have given up their holiday to try and find young Dudley, so it is up against us to go a little out of our way, bai Jove! I think we are justified in wunnin' the wisk of being fined."
 "It isn't a case of risk, if we are caught, kid."
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"LONESOME LEN," By HENRY T. JOHNSON, starts in

"What does the speedometer say, deah boy?"

Tom Merry glanced down.

"My hat! We are doing over fifty miles an hour!"

"Is that all?" said the swell of St. Jim's coolly. "I don't dweive this car at ovah sixty miles an hour to get a dash for one of the villagahs at home. Bai Jove, we wind woad hesh!"

Tom Merry watched Arthur Augustus spellbound.

The Shell junior had driven well and at a good pace, but he knew he could never have brought the splendid car along as the swell of St. Jim's was driving her.

Tom Merry would not have felt justified in taking a race as the fourth-former was taking this one, for instance.

But it was nothing to Arthur Augustus.

He had the engine and the car under perfect control.

Presently Jack Blake uttered an exclamation.

"What was that, Gussy?"

"A loud whistle had suddenly cut through the air. Arthur Augustus accelerated up still more.

"The twain, bai Jove!"

"Look out!" gasped Tom Merry.

Another bend in the road showed the station a few feet ahead. Even from where they were they could see the signal holding up his green flag.

But there was something else which Tom Merry, Fatty and Jack Blake saw at the same moment.

The figure of a junior was scrambling through the door of a third-class compartment just as the train began to move.

"Stop!" yelled Tom Merry, as Arthur Augustus ground his brakes.

"Guard, stop!"

The car was almost at a standstill now, and Tom Merry sprang out. He was followed instantly by Jack Blake and Figgins.

"Stop the train!"

"Stop!"

The juniors yelled at the tops of their voices, but the words fell on unheeding ears.

There was only one official on the platform—a constable who combined the various duties of station-master, porter and signalman.

He met the excited juniors with a solid grin.

"Too late, young gents; you'll have to go by the next."

"Stop it!" yelled Figgins. "Stop!"

But the guard's van was already at the end of the platform, and the stolid grin on the station-master's face was still more stolid.

"I've stopped the train once already," he growled at last for a young gent with a cap like yours! I'm not going to do it again!"

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

It was nothing for trains to be stopped on this branch line—the same line which served Rylcombe. The matter of fact, the train was often kept waiting for ticket holders who did not care to hurry through the fast.

After the great effort, Arthur Augustus had made it, exasperating to be greeted with nothing but a standstill from the station-master.

Before Tom Merry had time to answer, Arthur Augustus himself came hurrying on the platform.

"Bai Jove! Wouldn't they stop the twain, deah boy?"

"No!" growled Jack Blake. "This man seems to be it's all a joke."

"You'll have to go by the next, that's all!" snapped the station-master. "I know my duty, I do!"

"We weren't goin' at all, bai Jove!"

"Then what did you want the train stopped for?"

"Because there was a young wascal aboard we wanted to capture," said Arthur Augustus.

The station-master stared.

"You wanted the train stopped to— I suppose it was a trick?"

"Gweat Scott!"

"And you ought to be ashamed of yourselves for not stopping a train might cause an accident?"

He did not explain in what way this might have done brought to pass, but it was obvious to Tom Merry his smile did not mean a cheery nature. The man's tone was very surly.

Arthur Augustus waxed indignant.

"I am surprised you didn't stop the twain; it is a very serious mattah!"

"Oh, it is, is it?"

"Yaas, watah!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's.

"However, you must wish to the junction station, as the junior wessin' a St. Jim's cap detained!"

The station-master stared.

"Do you mind saying again what I must do, young gents?"

He growled, emphasising the word "must."

"Wish along the line to the junction station and—"

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"Ring off, Gussy!"

"We can hardly do that, kid," whispered Tom Merry—"I mean, the station people couldn't very well detain a chap for nothing."

"Hai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"And we can't bring the police into the affair," said Figgins doubtfully. "Somehow, that isn't the game, and it's letting St. Jim's down a bit."

"Hai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"But suppose Dudley gets away to London, what on earth will happen to the kid?" said Jack Blake, looking puzzled.

"After all, he's only a Third Form lad."

"Hai Jove! Yaas; there is that, too!"

"What's to be done, chaps?"

"It certainly was rather a puzzle. They felt in honour bound to do their best to prevent the train running away, both for the junior's own sake, and for the good name of the old school."

"But what was their best?"

Tom Merry turned to the station-master again.

"How far is it to the junction station by road?" he asked.

"Find out!" growled the man. And he turned away.

Arthur Augustus gazed at him through his monocle in blank amazement.

"What Scott! Hai Jove! What a surly w'etch!"

But the farm-hand had come on the station at that moment, evidently with the intention of catching the train just gone.

However, he appeared to be in no hurry, for, after declaring the station clock was wrong, because it did not agree with his own watch, he sat down to wait for the next train.

Tom Merry hurried up to him.

"How far is it to the junction station, please?"

"Hai road."

"Hai road," answered the farm-hand, "twenty miles; please a bit more, sir."

"Figgins, look up in the time-table when the London train leaves the junction station!" flashed the hero of the Shell.

"Hai a decent road?"

"Hai, sir; middin' fair."

Figgins came rushing back from the time-table sheet posted on the station wall.

"The train Dudley is in gets to the junction station at five o'clock," he exclaimed; "the London train leaves five minutes after, and is practically an express."

"What's the time now?"

Tom Augustus whipped out his magnificent gold hunter.

"Hai Jove, we can just do it, unless we have to go much further w'ound than the train, deah boys!"

"You have to go a fairish distance further, sir," said the station-master. "Keep to the main road all the way, and don't be tempted by any turnin'!"

"Thanks awfully, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Hai Jove, let's try to do it, Tom Merry!"

"Father?"

"It will be a wotten wush!"

"Hai ray?"

"Hai better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

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"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"What he better, Gussy!"

"Get on with the washing, then. My hat!"

Arthur Augustus had started with a still bigger jerk this time. He was thinking of the object of their forthcoming run—a good deal more than the strain on the car at that moment.

An instant or two later they were speeding down the road at a pace which gave the farm-hand his second shock that morning.

CHAPTER 12.

A Great Race.

"MY hat, we're only about fifteen miles from Woodfield, chaps!"

Jack Blake made the remark as the car dashed through a village. The chief of Study No. 6 had a touring map on his knee.

The rush of chilly air almost wrenched it from his hands. "Yes, I reckoned it out at something like that myself," said Figgins. "By Jove, can't Gussy drive!"

Jack Blake nodded.

The swell of St. Jim's was getting the car along in better style than ever now.

They were on the main road, one frequented a good deal by cars, too, and the speed at which they were travelling showed up in startling contrast as they passed car after car.

Tom Merry, in the seat next to Arthur Augustus, had his eye fixed on the speedometer. At times, when a straight stretch of road assured Arthur Augustus he was not risking any other road user's life, the hands on the dial showed nearly sixty miles an hour.

It made the juniors' breath come in gasps.

The cold air cut against their faces with stinging force. It was some time, even, before Manners could be convinced it wasn't hailing.

"My hat, there's the line, Gussy!"

"And there's the train!" shouted Figgins. "We shall do it with minutes to spare. By Jove!"

As the words left Figgins' mouth, Arthur Augustus brought the car round with a suddenness which flung the juniors into each others' arms.

The road was winding away from the line.

As far as Jack Blake could tell, it seemed to be leading straight away from the station, almost at right angles.

"Hai Jove, this is wathah a blow, deah boys!"

"Couldn't some of us have a race across the fields?"

"My hat, it couldn't have been more than a mile!"

But that was out of the question now. Looking back, it seemed almost as far to the corner as it had seemed from the corner to the small buildings they had taken to be the junction station.

Jack Blake opened his map again. His eyes were running with water.

"How far do you make it, deah boy?"

Jack Blake hesitated.

"Three or four miles, not more."

"Phew!"

Tom Merry whistled as he glanced at his wrist watch. It was going to be a very close thing, but how close there was no saying.

The London train could be relied upon to leave the junction in time, and the time-table had shown a five minute wait for the branch line passengers.

On paper they seemed to have a minute or two to spare. But paper figures were not to be relied upon as far as the little branch line was concerned. It was quite likely Dudley would gain the junction with just time enough to rush across the bridge and jump into the London express before the wait.

The hero of the Shell shouted this into Arthur Augustus' ear.

"Hai Jove, I nevah thought of that, deah boy. I am afraid there is no othah rescourse but to wush mattah."

And the car leapt forward.

To Digby, Manners, and some of the others not used to motoring, the speed now was rather nerve-racking. The perfectly cool manner in which Arthur Augustus was driving staggered them.

Jack Blake had his finger on the map. He was ticking off every cross road they passed.

"It can only be just round there, chaps!" he yelled.

"Hai Jove! Get weady to spring out, Tom Merry!" The hero of the Shell did not answer. He had his hand on the handle of the side door, and the handle was turned. The next instant the car dashed round the bend.

"Hurrh!"

"There it is! We've done it!"

Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus stared ahead.

There was the station dead ahead, certainly, but had they got there in time after all? Tom Merry's watch showed

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NEXT THURSDAY!

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

that it was five minutes past one, and the Shell junior prided himself on his correct time.

He looked above everything now, though, that he was a moment or two fast.

"There isn't a second to spare, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus did not answer.

He was sounding the horn all the way. The noise it was making might tempt the officials to keep the train back, although that was scarcely likely in the case of a London express.

Still, Tom Merry & Co. were grasping at all sorts of chances that morning.

"My hat!"

Even Tom Merry gasped this time. It looked almost certain that Arthur Augustus was going to dash into the station wall.

But a shrieking, screeching noise told of the powerful brakes, and the car was stopping. Tom Merry had the door open. He did not know it, but Jack Blake and Figgins in the back part of the car also had their doors open.

Then the three of them sprang out at the same moment.

The car had not stopped. It was rather a risky jump, but the juniors did not think of that.

They had long ago made up their minds that it was up to them to do their best to prevent Dudley running away from St. Jim's.

Whatever faults Tom Merry & Co. had—and they had their share—they certainly had the virtue of being thorough.

The car was not even at a standstill when the three great rivals rushed for the barrier.

An official hurried their way, pointing at the ticket office, the window of which was closed.

"Too late, my lads!"

"Over!" breathed Jack Blake; and he vaulted the barrier.

The ticket examiner gasped; then Figgins and Tom Merry were over at well.

Even as they gained the platform a shrill whistle sounded.

The guard had started the train.

Tom Merry saw that, but he also saw something else. Someone wearing a St. Jim's cap was looking cautiously from a third class window.

"There he is!"

"There's Dudley!"

The head was withdrawn instantly, but Figgins had seen. The leader of the New House juniors was the crack sprinter of the football eleven, still, it is doubtful whether he had ever sprinted on the football field as he polted along that platform now.

The train was already moving, but very slowly.

It was a long train, and the line was slightly on an incline. The look seemed to be with Tom Merry & Co. at least.

Like a flash Figgins was past Tom Merry and Jack Blake.

The guard shouted, a porter dashed forward, but Figgins darted round him; then Dudley's compartment was reached.

Figgins did not lose a fraction of a moment. He flung open the door, and got a grip round the Third Former's waist.

Not a moment was lost in speaking. Figgins had made up his mind what to do, and he did it.

He yanked Dudley from the train just as rapidly as was possible.

"Look out!"

The porter was rushing up with startled face.

The guard had whistled shrilly, and put out his arms to stop the train, and the engine-driver had clamped on the brakes.

But there was scarcely any need for all that. Figgins and Dudley stumbled out of the train, and Tom Merry and Jack Blake got a firm grip upon them.

If it had not been for that the two juniors would have rolled over and over on the platform.

"My hat!"

"Show!"

The firm grip on Dudley's arm was not relaxed, but they were not allowed to go into details just then.

Two or three station officials were running up, including the guard. The train was still half in and half out of the platform.

Tom Merry glanced round.

He was thinking very quickly just then.

Dudley was caught. If they stayed now, it was more than probable they would have to give their names and addresses, and inquiries would be made. That would mean an explanation would have to be forthcoming about Dudley's attempt to run away from St. Jim's; and as Tom Merry looked at it, the old school would not gain by such an explanation.

"Gussy," the Shell junior suddenly shouted, "cut for it, chaps!"

"But—"

"As hard as you can!"

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Arthur Augustus nodded his approval.

"Anyway, that's a sportin' offah, dear boy. I thought, we shan't let you do that."

"Wait and see."

Tom Merry started. He had just glanced at his watch again.

"I say, Gussy, there isn't a great deal of time left for the Woodfield match is due to start."

"Bai Jove, I was foggittin' the football!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "We shall have to hurry to the ground at once."

"Rather!"

"Woodfield is somewhere about here—less than ten miles

The others understood. Still holding Dudley, they dashed for the fence which separated the platform from the road.

They had the Third-Former over in a flash.

The porters and the guard were almost up with them, then, but Jack Blake was over just in time.

Then the four scudded along the road for all they were worth, Dudley running his hardest to keep up with the older juniors.

Tom Merry was yelling loudly.

"Gussy! Gussy, bid them!"

And a baring sound behind told them Arthur Augustus had grasped the situation.

The car was overtaking them.

A few seconds later it dashed up, and Dudley was bundled aboard; then the clutch was let in again, and they sped down the road.

Tom Merry dropped gasping on Fatty Wyan's knee and glared at Dudley.

The Third-Former had his hands in his pockets, and was glaring back.

CHAPTER 18.

Dudley's Word of Honour.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS brought the car to a standstill, and all the juniors turned in their seats.

Everyone was staring at Dudley, of the Third Form. Dudley went rather pink.

"I don't know what it had to do with you chaps, anyway," he began. "I suppose I can run away if I saw—"

"What after pill?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Here, kid, you were doing your best to let St. Jim's—"

and—"

"No, I wasn't. I'm no more likely to let St. Jim's than you are, Tom Merry."

"You were running away from the school," said the junior quietly. "What sort of a name do you think—"

gets if the chaps run away!"

Dudley turned from pink to a deep red.

"Well, I should have been expelled if I had given it, was only saying them the trouble of sacking me."

"I suppose you were afraid of facin' the music, Dudley."

"No, I wasn't."

Arthur Augustus shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, I am bound to take your word of honour, boy," he said; "but it is wathah remarkable."

"I tell you I wasn't afraid of facin' it out; only was the good of wantin' to be expelled!"

Tom Merry looked at the lag keenly.

"It was you, of course, who set the bulldog on Selby."

"Yes."

"Bai Jove, what a wotten thing to do!"

"You don't know what might have happened, if it weren't for herries. 'Towser is a brave dog, and he does what he's told. Look how he won the first prize at the dog show."

"A reckless thing to do, Dudley."

"I don't call it reckless myself," said Jack Blake bluntly. "Caddish seems more like the word."

Dudley wheeled round.

"I didn't mean 'Towser to bite Selby, and—"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry looked at the Third-Former again. The Shell had thought all along that there might be such an explanation to the affair as that.

"Makes you out more of a duffer than ever, Dudley," exclaimed.

"Yass, wathah; you never thought of that, Dudley, you!"

The lag still had his hands in his pockets.

"I suppose you are going to yank me back to St. Jim's."

"Wathah—"

"You'll have to keep a decent watch on me, then, if you turned Dudley," because I shall scud for it at the first chance I get."

Arthur Augustus nodded his approval.

"Anyway, that's a sportin' offah, dear boy. I thought, we shan't let you do that."

"Wait and see."

Tom Merry started. He had just glanced at his watch again.

"I say, Gussy, there isn't a great deal of time left for the Woodfield match is due to start."

"Bai Jove, I was foggittin' the football!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "We shall have to hurry to the ground at once."

"Rather!"

"Woodfield is somewhere about here—less than ten miles



"Call him off!" shrieked Mr. Seiby, thoroughly hoarse, as Tower, with a loud growl, flew at his legs.
(See page 5.)

and Jack Blake, looking at the lag again. "My

What is the mattah, deah boy?"
"What is to be done with Dudley while we play?"
The juniors looked at one another in dismay.

It was altogether out of the question to think of getting
back to St. Jim's with Dudley, and reaching Woodfield again
time for the match. It was also out of the question to
go one short and leave that one to guard the Third-

Form.
"My hat, I wish I had brought Tower," exclaimed
Figgins. "He would have minded Dudley."

"Humph!"
"He would, Tom Merry; Tower got the first prize at
the show—"

"I beg off!" exclaimed Figgins. "I say, what's to be
done with chaps?"

"We lock him up in the Woodfield pavilion, the fellows
don't want to know all about it."

"I should get out, somehow," grinned Dudley.
"It's much better let me go—"

"I shall be expelled in any case, and— What's the
matter, Merry?"

Tom Merry had caught the younger led by his arm. He
was looking him straight in the eyes.

"Look here, Dudley, you said just now you were no more
likely to let St. Jim's down than I was!"

"Well, I'm not—"

"You'll be letting the school down if we don't get through
this match without having to trouble about you," said Tom
Merry quietly. "It'll also be letting St. Jim's down if we
have to ask one of the spectators to keep an eye on you."

"You needn't think you can frighten me," grinned the
Third-Former. "I should dodge the giddy spectator easily
enough."

"I'm not trying to frighten you," answered Tom Merry,
still more quietly, "I want you to give us your word of
honour that you won't try to cut off while the match is
taking place."

Dudley staid.
"I say, it isn't fair of you to ask that—"

"Wats, deah boy! We have no othah resource but to
ask deah your word of bunah."

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

Another Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"Yes, but—"

"Will you give it, Dudley?" demanded Tom Merry. "That you won't cut from the moment we get on the ground until we are all off it again after the match?"

"I shall cut afterwards."

"You mean on the journey home, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather; I shall cut then—"

"You won't have the chance. You can try, if you like."

"All right, then," growled Dudley.

Tom Merry's face cleared a good deal.

"You'll give us your word?"

"Yes," muttered the fag, "I won't try to run away until we've all left the ground. Now get on with the washing."

"Thanks, kid," said Tom Merry, and he glanced at the fag again.

Not so very long ago Dudley would have refused to give a promise like that. He never would have given the promise with the intention of breaking it, certainly, as one or two at St. Jim's might be tempted to do; but he would have refused to pledge himself.

That was when he had been alone in the college, scarcely noticed and without a single friend.

Then Wally had chummed in with him, and a gradual change had taken place in Dudley.

That it was a change for the better was due to the scamp of the Third. D'Arcy minor never quite realised what a power he was in the laud of the fag Forin of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry had only a vague idea of the truth, but it was obvious to the Shell junior how thorough was the change in the big Third-Former.

Tom Merry found himself glancing once or twice towards him as they sped along the roads towards Woodfield. He was trying to think of a way out of his difficulties for the fag.

CHAPTER 14.

A Blank First Half.

"**B**AI Jove, they have a wippin' ground, deah boys!"

"Rather!"

Nous of the juniors had ever been to Woodfield before, and their first glimpse of the little market town as the car ran easily down the hill towards the church, was a pleasing one. Then they came in full view of the football-ground, and that was still more pleasing.

The neat little enclosure with its newly-painted pavilion looked awfully inviting amongst the trees, and the gaily coloured flags at the entrance added to the picture.

"Bai Jove, there are a good many spectators on the ground already, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway look out foah a gawage, Figgay—"

"Wait a minute, Gussy; they are opening the gates for us."

"Bai Jove, so they are—"

The swell of St. Jim's ran the car slowly up to the entrance, and was greeted by a cheery hail from the money-taker, the Woodfield secretary.

"St. Jim's, of course?"

"Yaas, wathah! We twust you have a full team?"

"Yes, quite full," answered the secretary, looking enthusiastically at the car. "Are you going to leave the car on the ground?"

"Yaas, wathah, if it can be awwanged."

"Right-ho! Just run up to the pavilion, you'll find plenty of room there. Hope we have a good game, air."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The car was run slowly through the gates, and the moment it was on the ground, a cheer went up.

It was a genuine, hearty cheer, such as a good many of the country-club and their partisans still take pleasure in giving the visiting side.

The St. Jim's eleven raised their caps and jumped down the moment the pavilion was reached. Dudley also jumped down.

"I suppose the car will be all right left to itself!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah. Howevah, as you have promised to wemah heah—"

"I promised not to cut off. I didn't say anything about where I'd remain. I'll act as linesman if you like."

"Bai Jove, that's wathah a good ideah, deah boy!"

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry. "I vote we get changed at once and have a kick or two. Motoring makes you as stiff as old boots."

"Rather!"

"Get the bags, chaps!"

The juniors hurried into the pavilion, to be greeted by the Woodfield captain, a finely-built youth, who worked on a neighbouring farm.

Tom Merry held out his hand at once.

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"Ought to be a ripping game," he said pleasantly. "Your ground looks in ripping condition."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

The Woodfield captain flushed and nodded.

He was a farm-hand, and there were some visiting captives who did not offer up shake hands with him. Tom Merry could not begin to guess why he had coloured.

The juniors were hastily changing their clothes now, the stiffness from their long drive in the car having almost disappeared. By the time they were out on the ground, they felt as fit as they had ever felt in their lives.

Five minutes slipped by rapidly as they sent shot after shot at Fatty Wynn, and it was easy to see the Welsh pack from the New House was in good form.

Then the referee sounded his whistle.

Tom Merry had lost the toss, so his side had to face the breeze there was. There was very little in choice of ends really, though.

As the two lines of forwards stood facing one another, difference in weight was rather apparent. The Woodfield forwards were much the heavier set.

"Howevah, I feel remarkably fit, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "so it will be all right."

"Oh, we shall give them a good game," grinned Tom Merry.

Then the whistle sounded again, and the match had started.

The Woodfield forwards were the first to get going, a sturdy charge sending Arthur Augustus over the line with the ball to a Woodfield half.

The next instant, Collins, the captain, had possession.

He raced away in fine style.

But Harry Noble at centre-half was a hard man to get upon to follow up. The young Cornstall never stopped calling to his backs to repair his own mistakes.

Lowther and Digby at full back waited.

Collins was coming on splendidly, then Digby came forward.

He bundled in the big centre in fine style, and Lowther got the ball away with a huge punt.

"Good old Monty!" breathed Tom Merry. "Come on, Black!"

The chief of Study No. 6 did not answer. He was dived through the halves at a rare pace.

Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry on each side were watching the ball with sparkling eyes. Jack Black was at his best in making good passes to either side.

"Here you are, Gussy!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

And the swell of St. Jim's was carrying the ball on to the touch-line.

The half who had bowled him over a few moments had dashed up again. Arthur Augustus saw him coming, but did not turn his head. He waited until the Woodfield ball was almost upon him, then he stopped dead, bringing the ball back with his heel.

The half blundered by and thudded into the ropes.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, racing on again. "That was wathah a neah thin! Look out, deah boys!"

And he swung in a splendid centre.

Dead in front of Tom Merry the ball dropped, and the Shell junior did not waste time by hesitating. He went in with all the strength of his right foot.

Crash!

The ball had struck the upright, leaving a round patch of white paint. The goalkeeper had not moved.

Two inches to one side and it would have been a certain goal.

"Oh— No luck, Tommy!"

"Hard cheese!"

But the junior captain of St. Jim's only grinned.

"All in the game, kids," he said. "You chaps get the ball down in rare style, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah—I mean, wot! I twust you mean to be like anythin' on your birthday, Tom Merry."

They had not even forgotten that it was his birthday.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

Now he came to think of it, it would be rather deah if he could do something really big in this match, just to see the fellows he appreciated the splendid day they had planned for his birthday.

Tom Merry rather hung to that idea.

But the Woodfield side were having most of the game, their weight carrying them through the visiting halves so easily.

An expert would not have been greatly worried, though. The Woodfield side were working twice as hard as the visitors, and they were certainly not doing twice the amount of pressing. The match was still young.

And when Tom Merry and his other forwards had

being, their pretty footwork was a pleasure to watch. It brought forth cheer after cheer.

The home partisans were used to seeing good, bustling matches, but village teams are not always clever with their feet. The junior eleven of St. Jim's could give a good many points to a good many sides in that department of the game.

Watching them, Kildare had often said he would like to see the same eleven playing in some big match in a few years time, when the whole side averaged a couple of stone heavier.

The Woodfield side were playing for all they were worth. They certainly were paying the juniors the compliment of not looking upon the match as a walk-over.

And it was well for them that this was so. For it came to that, the most dangerous shots had come from Tom Merry and Jack Blake, although Fatty Wynn had had by far the most to do in the opening half.

The Woodfield front line were not nearly so clean at looking as the younger quintet.

As he looked at times as if Collins would succeed in forcing his way through, sooner or later, and as the interval approached, the cheers became louder and louder.

Go on, Collins!"

"Woodfield—Woodfield!"

It looked as if nothing could prevent Collins gratifying the spectators as he dashed past Harry Noble.

He was round Digby, and Lowther could only charge at him without any hope of reaching him in time to prevent the shot.

Collins went on. He was dead in front. He looked certain to score, then Fatty Wynn dashed from the goal mouth at a pace no one would have thought him capable of.

There was a thud, and goalkeeper and forward crashed together, and for the first time that afternoon Collins had missed his match as far as sheer weight went.

The Falstaff of St. Jim's had grassed his man without even staggering himself.

At the next moment Fatty Wynn had the ball in his hands, and with a big kick, sent the ball well over half-way line.

"Merry!" he grunted to Collins, and ambled back into goal.

The spectators cheered almost as loudly as if it had been a goal, whilst Dudley forgot his duties as a neutral linesman, and went that he was being taken back to St. Jim's when he had done his best to run away, and roared at the top of his voice.

"Well played, Fatty!"

"Good old Wynn!"

"Hoarsey!"

And before the cheers came to an end, the whistle sounded for half time. Neither side had scored yet.

CHAPTER 15.

A Great Goal.

THE second portion of the game started at a furious pace.

Collins led his forwards with wonderful dash, sweeping along the junior halves before them. But the halves were strong to their men, which was something for the backs to be thankful for.

But Lowther and Digby were playing a splendid game.

They met the ball clear time after time, and at last the St. Jim's forwards relieved the pressure. Tom Merry beat the back in front of him, and got in a nice pass to the wing.

Lowther took the ball in his stride, springing along the line as hard as he could run.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were racing up the field.

They knew Figgins' play, and so they knew there was no chance when he would centre. It would be at the moment Figgins thought his inside men best placed.

The centre came, a well-judged kick, which caused the backs to drop just between the backs. Tom Merry sprinted on with every inch of pace he could muster.

The backs were closing in upon him, the goalkeeper was shouting about on the line, trying to make up his mind whether to run out or not, and the ball was bouncing a good deal on the dry turf.

Tom Merry followed up with bated breath.

There was a great race between Tom Merry and the left back, but suddenly, Tom Merry seemed to spring ahead in one stride.

He got his foot to the ball just as the back dashed up, and sent a heavy thud. Tom Merry and the back were both on the ground.

"My hat!"

"Hoarsey!"

The players were a good deal shaken, and grinned ruefully at the way they had sent themselves out. Then they turned to the referee, who was taking the ball from the back of the net.

Tom Merry had drawn first blood for his side, a good goal, scored by a splendid shot. The St. Jim's side yelled with delight.

"Good old Tom Merry!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah he is playin' in quite birthday form, bai Jove!"

"Ass!" grinned the hero of the Shell.

Collins, the farmhand captain of the Woodfield team, also grinned.

"Is it his birthday, then?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; we are oval heah to celebrat it, as a match of fact."

"Well, it's a clinking game, anyway, and your goal is great."

But the game was getting better every moment now, the play being fairly equally divided.

Woodfield were struggling desperately to get the equalising goal, and the St. Jim's defence struggled just as desperately to prevent them. Kangaroo was hanging to Collins like a shadow. The Cornstalk knew who was the dangerous man of the Woodfield front-line.

"Bai Jove, Kangawoo is playin' wippingly!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I wathah fancy we shall win."

"The game isn't over yet, kid."

"No, wathah not; but I feel as fit as avah! Bai Jove!"

Collins had the ball again now, and he was rushing up the field as hard as he could go.

Harry Noble charged into him, and the heavier player came off first; then Collins bowled Digby over.

Lowther rushed to the rescue, but the Woodfield captain had his teeth gritted. More than one good shot from his foot had been stopped by Fatty Wynn, and Collins had a record to think of. Up until that match he had scored at least one goal each game for his side since the first of September, and he did not want a schoolboy team to spoil the record.

He ran on grimly.

"Look out, Wynn. My hat!"

Collins had shot, a terrific drive with all his weight behind it.

And the ball was sailing for the corner of the net.

It was one of the fastest shots Fatty Wynn had ever seen coming his way. But the Welsh junior did his best.

He flung himself at full length across the goalmouth, and got the tips of his fingers to the ball. It was a great attempt, then a groan went up from Dudley, the linesman.

Fatty Wynn had almost succeeded in stopping the ball, but not quite. It just rolled over the line.

"My hat!"

"Hard luck, Fatty," breathed Lowther. "The ball's not six inches over the line."

That was true, but the six inches were just enough.

The scores were one all now, and Collins had maintained his record. In a way, Woodfield were fortunate, but it was a splendid shot.

Fatty Wynn was the one who had suffered most at the hands of Fats.

"It's because I'm faint with hunger!" he said as he scrambled up to his feet. "I blame Dudley entirely for that goal."

"My aunt!"

"Yes, I do, Digby. If we could have stayed at the inn and had some of that pudding—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther and Digby grinned, but they looked very determined as they waited for Tom Merry to kick off. That piece of bad luck had to be wiped off the slate somehow.

And the St. Jim's forwards seemed to be of the same way of thinking, for they got away right from the kick-off.

As the penalty area was reached, Tom Merry had the ball; he flashed it to Jack Blake.

The chief of Study No. 6 was in a slightly better position to shoot. There was no more unselfish player at St. Jim's than Tom Merry, the junior captain.

Crash!

It was a fine shot Jack Blake served up, but it did not score. The home goalkeeper was as keen as Fatty Wynn.

And time was wearing on now.

Tom Merry knew there could not be very much more to go, and so the game became faster than ever. Time after time the Shell junior led his forwards up the field, but somehow the luck always seemed against them.

Tom Merry hit the cross-bar once himself, and two other shots from Jack Blake missed by inches within five minutes, then things became desperate if St. Jim's were to pull the game out of the fire.

"Pway, wun like anythin' deah boys! Bai Jove, isn't Tom Merwey playin'?"

Jack Blake nodded.

The captain of the junior eleven was in his very best form that afternoon. He was passing, dribbling, and shooting as well as ever he had done since the beginning of the season, and yet, somehow, St. Jim's could not score.

Tom Merry's face was becoming grimmer and grimmer.

"We've got to do it, Blakey."

"Rather!"

"How much longer do you reckon there is, kid?" Jack Blake asked Dudley, and the Third-Former's answer came promptly.

"Less than five minutes!"

"Five minutes to go, chaps!" And the seconds of those five minutes were slipping by with the St. Jim's front-line standing idle.

Collins & Co. had the ball at the other end of the field, and although they did not look like scoring, the visiting defence could not get the ball away. Tom Merry stood watching for a moment or two, then started to run.

"The ball's got to be up this end, somehow. Let's go and give them some help."

"Right-ho!"

The inside forwards fell back, and, with a grin, the Woodfield backs followed them up. They thought St. Jim's were going to pack their goal, being content with honours easy.

Collins was in possession again, and Kangaroo was struggling to rob him. But he could not charge the heavy forward off the ball; as he afterwards said, it was like running into a wall.

Then Tom Merry dashed up.

He did not charge Collins, he simply flashed across in front of him, and gathered the ball as he ran. Then he raced down the field with it.

"Tommy—Merry!"

Figgins was calling out anxiously, and Tom Merry glanced towards him.

A pass out to Figgins now would mean a score probably. The fast man of the side had a clear run.

"He's offside, Merry!"

Jack Blake's voice rang out behind him, and the Shell junior was grateful for the words. Figgins was certainly in a doubtful position, and it was too late in the game to run risks.

Tom Merry went on by himself.

The centre-half came for him, but the junior had beaten his man before that afternoon. He beat him again now, with a clever feint. Then he raced for the backs.

The backs came to meet him.

They were running shoulder to shoulder, covering up every inch of the goal. It looked impossible for Tom Merry to do anything with his chance.

"Back—pass back!"

It was Jack Blake's voice again, but this time Tom Merry did not take the advice. He just went on, and the other forwards stared.

It looked as if Tom Merry meant to rush full tilt into the big Woodfield backs, and try to force his way through. The idea of this made Jack Blake gasp.

Then a muffled sort of shout came from Dudley.

Tom Merry had suddenly got his foot under the ball, and with a gentle kick, lifted it over both backs' heads.

Then he flashed round them, still in his stride.

The goalkeeper rushed out, the only thing he could do, but he could never hope to get to the ball before Tom Merry did. Still, he would be covering up a good deal more of the goal mouth than if he had stayed on the line.

Tom Merry did not wait to trap the ball.

He had no idea how near the backs he had beaten were, and there was no time to lose. The referee had his watch in his hand now.

Then the junior captain of St. Jim's shot.

It was a wild, terrific drive, one of the hardest shots he had ever sent in, and it seemed to crash into the net the instant it left his foot. St. Jim's had taken the lead again, for the goalkeeper had scarcely seen the ball.

Tom Merry had won the match which was being played to celebrate his own birthday, which was as it should be.

The juniors rushed up and crowded round him. Collins came up, grinning.

"Well played, sir!" panted the Woodfield captain. "A shot like that deserves to win any match."

"And the run up, too!" exclaimed one of the backs.

"Many happy returns of the day, sir!" exclaimed the other defender, and Tom Merry found himself shaking hands with fellows he had never seen in his life before.

But it had been a splendid game. Now they came to look back, there had not been a single foul for unfair play; in fact, the only time the referee had had to stop the game had been for a rather doubtful off-side.

There had not even been a case of handling. The referee himself, a local policeman, was infected by the enthusiasm as well as the players.

"A splendid game!" he exclaimed. "I wish all the matches I have to ref. were as clean. And the better team won, Collins."

"That they did!" said the home captain heartily. "I want to thank Mr. D'Arcy for arranging the match."

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"LONESOME LEN," By HENRY T. JOHNSON, starts in

"Pwaw don't mention it, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I twust we shall be able to awwange a wotern match on our gwound. I could send the car ovah foah you if you don't mind being wathah cwashed."

"By Jove! That would be splendid!"

"Yaas, wathah! We must think about it, deah boy."

Tom Merry was flushed as he led the way to the pavilion. It had been a great day, and there was to be a great drive home. All of the others had refused solemnly to take the wheel, and so the hero of the Shell had a sixty mile drive before him.

That was something to make him long to be changed and ready again.

"Are you sure you chaps don't want to take the wheel, Blakey?" he exclaimed, as he scrambled into his third.

"I don't want to be piggy, and all that—"

"Rats, kid! I've driven her as much as I'm going to."

"Tom Merry is going to drive."

"Yes; it's the young ass's birthday!" Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, wathah!" he exclaimed firmly. "Well, Tom Mewwy, I shall have to insist that you take the wheel as I am wathah fatigued. Are you weady, deah boys?"

Everyone was ready, and they hurried from the pavilion. Then, suddenly, Tom Merry started.

"Where's Dudley, chaps?"

Jack Blake stared. He could not see the Third-Former.

"By hat! Where can the young ass have got to?"

"Perhaps he is in the car."

They raced up to the car, then a curious expression flashed across Tom Merry's face.

The linesman's bag Dudley had used, was lying in the driver's seat, and pinned to it was a slip of paper.

There was something written on it.

It was just one word:

"Rats!"

The juniors stared blankly at the slip of paper for quite a long time without speaking.

CHAPTER 16.

Arthur Augustus's Fall.

"BAI—bai Jove!" Tom Merry had his hands deep in his pockets. He looked very grim.

Manners was gasping.

"My hat! The young cad has cut, then!"

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! He has bwoken his word of honah!"

"Of all the howling young rotters!"

The juniors spoke loudly and indignantly. Tom Merry had not spoken yet.

When he did his voice was very quiet.

"I wouldn't have thought it of Dudley," he said. "I wouldn't have thought it of any St. Jim's chap."

"But he gave us his word of honah! It is uttaly impossible that he can have bwoken his word of honah, deah boy! Bai Jove! I am all in a flutah!"

Collins, the Woodfield captain, came up at that moment to say good-bye, and Tom Merry wheeled round.

"I say, when did the last train leave Woodfield?"

Collins looked puzzled as he took out his watch.

"A quarter of an hour ago—for the junction."

"Would there be a London train to meet it?"

"Yes, a connection. Why? Has anything happened to the car?"

"No; the car's all right," muttered Tom Merry. "There's no chance of catching him this time, chaps. The interval has completely beaten us."

"Yaas, wathah! I can hardly believe it. Gweat Scott! And my miwah wathah chummed in 'with the back outside!'"

"Best thing that can happen for St. Jim's is to be let go!" muttered Jack Blake bluntly. "I wouldn't trouble about the little cad if I were you, Tom Merry."

"I'm not going to—now."

And Tom Merry screwed Dudley's note up and threw it into the ditch with a shrug of disgust.

He had been completely taken in. Never for an instant had he thought Dudley would break his promise, and there was no resentment at being beaten.

If Tom Merry could not take a fellow's word, he shrugged his shoulders and left the fellow alone.

"I propose we get on with the washing," he said quietly.

"I admit, chaps. I'm about as surprised as I have ever been in my life."

"Wathah! I—I— Gweat Scott! To bwake my word of honah! Bai Jove! If evah I meet the young wotah again, I shall administrah a most fearful thwack!"

The juniors said good-bye to Collins and the rest of the

"THE BOYS' HERALD" On Wednesday next November 6th.

Woodfield team, and took their places in the car. For the first time that day, a gloom had settled on the party.

"They all did their best to shake it off, but that a St. Jim's chap should break his promise was unpleasant thinking.

Fatty Wynn was the only one who showed any signs of brightening up, and he did so when someone mentioned tea. "Yes, let's have tea somewhere, chaps," he said eagerly. "This autumn weather always makes me so jolly hungry, and we shall feel better about the Dudley affair after something to eat."

"Oh, bother Dudley!"

"Rotten little cad!"

Tom Merry took the car along at a steady pace, and none of them were speaking much. They did not know whether they were the more disgusted or surprised.

Fatty Wynn was the first to break the pause.

"What about this place, chaps?"

"Well, what about it?"

"For tea, of course," said the New House junior indignantly. "I feel almost faint. Oh, do pull up, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry glanced at the others, and stopped the car. He did not feel very much like tea himself, and one or two of the others were with him in that.

Dudley had done his best to spoil the finish of Tom Merry's birthday for him.

"We won't talk about the little wotah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as he led the way into a neat little tea-shop. "I must uttably refuse to allow anyone to mention a wretched name in my pwesence again."

"Oh rats!"

"Weally, Figgay— Bai Jove! Did anyone turn the wheel off, deah boys?"

Tom Merry went pink.

"I had forgotten to do that, and he jumped to his feet.

"Oh, rats, Gussy!"

"Oh, wats, deah boy! I will wun and turn it off while you chaps pour out tea if it comes before I return. I shall turn the petrol off when I stop, you know."

The swell of St. Jim's hurried from the little shop and made for the car. The moment he gained the road he gave vent to a startled cry.

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry & Co. sprang to their feet. There was the blindest consternation on Fatty Wynn's face. Was it to be another case of the missed pudding at the inn?

"I faced out into the road.

"Gussy—"

"What's the matter, ass?"

"My hat! He's gone!"

The juniors stared at the car in amazement.

Arthur Augustus was nowhere near it. They stared down the road, then Jack Blake uttered a cry.

"There he is! Perhaps some rotter sneaked a lamp or something?"

"My deah!"

Gerrins and the others broke into a wild run. They could all see Arthur Augustus's elegant figure in the distance, running at his very best speed.

The spectacle was a startling one to those who knew Arthur Augustus and his ways.

"Someone on, chaps!"

"Someone has stolen something!"

"Who is he running after?"

There was no answering that, then a still more extraordinary thing happened. Arthur Augustus had suddenly fallen, and was rolling over and over in the dusty road.

"My deah Aunt Jane!"

In a moment Jack Blake thought the swell of St. Jim's must have taken leave of his senses, then they dashed up. The next instant Tom Merry gave vent to a gasp of amazement.

"Oh, Dudley! Gussy has caught Dudley!"

"My deah!"

"Did the young rotter, Gussy! Stick to him!"

"Weah, wathah! Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry came to hand. Tom Merry had laid a very tight grip on Dudley's arm.

"Hold him!" he breathed through his nose.

"Yes, wathah! Bai Jove! I am covahed in dust. I am uttably dустay!"

Tom Merry took any notice of Arthur Augustus's remark. They were all staring grimly at Dudley.

"You wretched little cad, Dudley!"

"Oh, rats!"

"He wants a jolly good hiding!"

"Where did you see him, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! I am all in a fluttah! He was gettin' out of the luggage-cawvier."

Tom Merry stared.

"Gettin' out of it!"

"Yes," grinned Dudley; "and I should have got clear away if Gussy hadn't come out of the teashop. My luck's dead out to-day!"

"But—"

"The young wascal was in the luggage-holder all the time," panted Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry started violently.

"How do you mean, all the time? What's he mean, Dudley?"

The Third-Former chuckled.

"What he says, I guess!" he grinned. "I was in the luggage-holder all the time. I got in the moment the match was over."

"But—but the note!"

"Oh, rats to the note! That was to put you off the scent. I wanted you to think I'd broken my word, so that I could slip off the moment you stopped for tea. You know I said I'd cut at the first opportunity after we'd left the Woodfield ground."

"My hat!"

Tom Merry's surprise was scarcely less now than it had been before.

"And you meant to run away from St. Jim's—"

"Of course."

"You meant to leave us to think you'd broken your promise, Dudley?"

The younger boy went rather red.

"I—I had written a note. I scribbled it while we were coming along, and I left it in the luggage-holder."

"Bai Jove!"

"And I wasn't going to break my promise, you know," added Dudley, with another grin. "I said I would come away with you from the Woodfield ground, but I didn't say how. It was only my bad luck that stopped my cutting."

Tom Merry did not answer at once.

Somehow, Dudley's trick was not quite right; still, the Third-Former thought it was. He seemed to have no doubt on the point at all.

Tom Merry could not help thinking it over.

The question of whether it was quite the game or not was a good deal connected with Dudley having kept to the letter of his promise, and shirked a little the spirit of the thing. But Dudley was not very old. He was big, but he was by no means the oldest fog of the Third.

Looking at him now, Tom Merry felt heartily glad the junior hadn't broken his word.

Jack Blake still had hold of his arm.

"I suppose you still mean to cut if you get the chance, Dudley?" demanded the chief of Study No. 6.

"Rather!"

"Then you won't get the chance; you won't get half a chance, kid!"

"No, wathah not; bai Jove, my clothes are uttably wined!"

"Never mind, Gussy; you caught this young ass in rare style!"

"Yaas, wathah! But I am feakfully dустay! Pweay don't pull my coat-sleeve, Fattay Wynn, deah boy!"

"Tea," whispered the Falstaff of St. Jim's. "It'll be ready by now, and I believe Tom Merry is awfully hungry."

"Bai Jove, I was forgettin' tea!"

"For—forgetting tea!"

"Yaas, wathah, Wynn, deah boy! However, pweay let's wethah to the teashop again. You are to come with us, Dudley!"

"Yes, I could do with some tea," said the Third-Former coolly. "I didn't get any lunch, you know—I shall probably give you chaps the slip soon after."

Tom Merry glanced at the youngster curiously again.

There was something rather pleasant about his cool frankness—something which suggested D'Arcy minor in a vague way.

As a matter of fact, there were a good many things about Dudley which suggested Wally; the scamp of the Third. It was one of the many results of Wally's chumming in with the big Third-Former.

CHAPTER 17.

Wally & Co. are Scared.

"BEST if I can make out what's come over Selly!" muttered D'Arcy minor for about the twentieth time that day. "He—he isn't like himself a little bit!"

Curly Gibson shook his head.

"Jolly funny—"

"Fancy him coming into the detention-room and letting me off the impot!" went on Wally. "I was so startled, I don't believe I thanked him."

(Continued on page 25.)

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Another Splendid, Long, Complete

School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

NATURE UNDERGROUND. THE WORM HUNTER.

By F. ST. MARS.

WHEN you see a worm jump out of the ground straight as a poker for, it may be, a foot in the air, you may, or may not, feel surprised. Most people do. Yet the occurrence is not uncommon.

The worm which I am dealing with in particular did just this, and there came after him first a heave in the ground as if a little, tiny volcano were getting up in that place. Then this atom of a volcano developed a microscopical crater, and out of the crater came—not fire, but a little beetle exactly six inches long and dressed in black plush, and he ate the worm.

He was a mole.
His shape was the shape of a wedge; his forefeet were miniature trowels, without any evident arms to them; his hind feet like the front ones of a mouse; his tail one inch long; his nose the nose of a pig; his coat—black grey—apparently cut out of a lady's black skin-suit, and as for his eyes—well, you were at liberty to find them if you could. Most people couldn't.

Then a terrier came along looking for rats. He saw the mole, barked, and made a rush for him. His jaws closed on earth. He got a mouthful of earth, but no mole. Where the Spratt's biscuit had that mole gone? He had simply dived down to the earth—the bare, hard earth, mind you, just exactly the same, and quite as easily, as a fish dives in water. I do not know if you will believe me when I say that, feeling the vibrations of—or hearing—the approaching terrier's footfall on the ground, he had simply dug his way down out of sight. Yet dig does not seem to be a proper word for it, somehow. It was so quick.

Then the terrier ran away with his tail between his legs. This was something he could not understand, and all animals fear what they cannot understand.

But let us follow the mole. He worked down till he came to a tunnel, which was very much like a Tube railway tunnel save that it was about the size of a water-pipe. It was pitch dark here, and as he ran along it he had nothing to tell him where he was or who was coming. This is where his long snout and quick ears came in, and his eyes, or lack of them were explained. The highly sensitive snout felt the way before him. The amazingly quick ears told him who was coming—and you know how sound echoes in a tunnel, too.

Thus he moved till this small tunnel of his branched into another and bigger one, a regular high road of moleoidom under the green field, and there were sounds here. The place was full of sounds and vibrations. Evidently something exciting, or something else, was happening in the blackness of this main tunnel.

Suddenly there came the drumming of tiny feet down the tunnel. Something arrived quickly, swung round the corner into the side-tunnel, and promptly ran full till into our mole, because there was no room in that place to do anything else. The new-comer was a mole, too, a male, a big one. That is to say it was six inches long.

Now, Providence, and their father's fiendish temper, has decreed that whosoever two male moles shall meet in a narrow place there they shall fight, neither turning back, till the victor walks on over the dead body of the vanquished. Cheerful little ruffians, aren't they?

So these two fought all alone down there in the darkness under the grass field, where the cows fed lazily and the buttercups stole the gold from the sunshine and made believe it was their own. They fought not as you or I should do, but as creatures brought up to it. Moreover, they fought with an access of fury, a white heat of sheer devilish concentrated temper which made one hold one's breath and say "Thank goodness these things aren't as big as lions, or there would be no men left." Of all the wild folk the little mole has the worst temper, it may be pointed out.

At the end of forty-nine and three-quarter seconds, the fight ceased. Seeing that the second mole was lying on his back, with his little, pink, hand-like feet thrust upwards, and that he was dead, this is no matter for amazement. Our mole stood over him, gazing out into the blackness of the main tunnel; at least, I suppose he gazed, or smelt, which to him was the same thing.

Suddenly he jumped. Another noise had come echoing down the pit-like tunnel. A sound not of pattering, but of long, loose galloping. A thing was approaching at speed. Presumably it was on the track of the dead mole; was the cause of that little chap's frantic hurry.

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Then two eyes, blood-red as tiny rubies, shone in the blackness.

Our mole did not wait. He knew those eyes, for they were the eyes of the bogey man of every mole nursery. They belonged to the weasel, and he is the worst enemy the mole has. By reason of his long, sinuous body, his short legs, his snake-like agility, his keen scent, his bloodthirsty ways, and his courage above proof, he can, and does, hunt, face, and kill the mole up and down the length of his own tunnel. From the weasel, once well on the trail, the mole has to escape—unless Fate intervenes.

Hear now how Fate handled the affair of our mole. He ran he quickly along his own tunnel, and his ears told him that the weasel had stopped at the body of the dead mole he was at first hunting. Then the swift patter of the feet started afresh, and our mole knew that it was himself who was being hunted this time. He knew, too, that each time running was out of the question, by reason of his tiny feet. Remained, therefore, another way.

He stopped and, in the floor of the tunnel, sank his right leg a pantomime fairy through a trapdoor. He set tunnelling downwards; not quite, but almost straight down the walls. He was, as one might say, boring a shaft, and he performed the miracle almost as quickly as a sounder whale.

The weasel came hammering along, all senses keyed up to the work of keeping the trail, and, because of the darkness, fell headfirst down the shaft before he knew it. He dug, diggings outwards of claws, however, stopped him because he had gone more than a foot, and he hung on at that as he slant to make investigations with his nose. It was a dark, you know, and he had only his nose to go by.

He very soon settled the point that he was still on the right road, and then, claws digging into earth, ran his head down to act as a "drag" behind, head held cautiously forward—all brakes on, as it were—he proceeded cautiously downwards.

Then the catastrophe happened.

The mole struck water. He struck rock.

To be exact, the bottom fell out of the whole affair. The mole, digging frantically down into earth, dug suddenly into nothing—space. Before he knew it he was falling to the end of the fall was water.

Now, you may know, and engineers will tell you that if you strike an underground spring with a deep and steady boring, the water will fly up the shaft exactly as it does in the tube of a soda-water syphon. This is something to do with a complicated matter about the weight of water plus the pressure of air, plus I don't know what else.

In about one ten-thousandth of a second our mole was himself flying up the shaft he had himself bored, at about the speed of a bullet, on the lip of a screaming column of water. He had made, in fact, an artesian well all his own. Only, he knew nothing about artesian wells. He only knew that about half-way up he encountered the weasel, sliding cautiously down on his trail. When I say "he encountered," I mean he struck the weasel with a force that knocked all the wind out of that bloodthirsty little rascal. And the two went shooting upwards on the water column.

There was no time to think or do anything, even if they could have done anything in a shaft which their bodies fitted like bullets in a rifle barrel. They just whizzed upward.

In an amazingly short space of time—about three seconds—they reached the top and hit the roof of the original tunnel with a bang which ought to have half-jellified them. Then, then, in that moment of roaring, hurtling speed, when the full of water and the other half pulverised by impact, the weasel never lost his head. He kicked out with his hind legs at the mole close behind him, and with a snarl he wriggle flung himself along the tunnel to the left, which sent the mole sprawling up the tunnel to the right.

And that saved the mole. It may seem a little queer to act to hang a life on, but it was enough. You see, the tunnel sloped gently down from right to left. Then, after the water had shot along it, dividing into two columns at the top of the shaft, the column ran down the slope on the left much faster than it ran up the slope on the right. The result of this was that the right-hand column stopped after going about two yards with the slope against it, and left the mole stunned, but high and dry and alive. He got away and joined the left-hand column, which whizzed now fast drowning weasel with it, and filled all the side-tunnels on the lawn level till it finally expended itself in a maze of mazy labyrinths.

As for the mole, he calmly came to himself after a few minutes, got up, shook himself, felt himself all over with his mobile snout to make sure there was nothing wrong with the works, and serenely trotted off to hunt more worms.

(Another of these wonderful little stories next Thursday.)

"LONESOME LEN," By HENRY T. JOHNSON. "THE BOYS' HERALD" On Wednesday next, November 9th.

TOM MERRY'S BIRTHDAY (Continued from page 23.)

"Selby's a giddy mystery, and no mistake."
 "He seems worried a bit, somehow."
 Wally did not answer that remark. Mr. Selby certainly had seemed a little unlike the Mr. Selby they usually knew, that day, and the scamp of the Third was a good deal puzzled.
 "He has spent the whole day wandering about the country, and he hates walking," Wally muttered, after a time. "That's funny enough for anything!"
 "Looking for Dudley, I suppose," grinned Jameson.
 Wally also grinned.
 "Shouldn't wonder. I say, what a sell for them all!" he exclaimed. "Kildare keeps looking at me. He has cycled nearly all over the county since brekker, looking for the kid."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Third were standing near the gates of the grounds surrounding St. Jim's. It was beginning to get dusk, and the Woodfield party might be expected any moment now.

D'Arcy minor & Co. were very anxious to be the first to welcome Tom Merry. It would set their minds a good deal at rest to learn where they had had lunch, and whether there was a station handy.

"But you can trust Dudley," said Wally, after a pause; "we've brought the kid up well in the Third—"

"What's up?"
 "There's somebody coming across the quad, kid!"
 D'Arcy minor peered through the gathering gloom, and looked uneasy for a moment.
 "It's the Head and Selby," he muttered.

"My hat!"
 Not having easy consciences, the chums of the fag Form were not so much at anxious to meet the Head just then. Dr. Baines took more than an average head-master's interest in the Third Form, and he knew Wally & Co. had chummed in with Dudley.

More than once the scamp of the Third had expected a summons to the Head's room, and that was the one thing he did not want. A few of the doctor's quiet questions might be things very unpleasant for the three juniors who had chased Dudley to run away from St. Jim's.

"My aunt, they're coming here, kids!"

"How?"
 The Third-Formers were at the end of the carriage-drive, and the gates in front of them, the approaching masters were just at hand, and tall hedges on each side.

Wally glanced round quickly.
 "The hedge, kid!" he whispered, and darted to the left. Jameson and Jameson were scarcely seconds behind him, and all three scrambled into the hedge.

It was difficult work forcing their way through, but it had to be done, and they succeeded at last. They dropped down in the long grass-panting.

"But, only just in time, Wally!"

The Head and Mr. Selby were approaching the gates. They seemed to have no particular object in coming that way, as they were not going out. Mr. Selby was talking in a low voice.

"I cannot help blaming myself," the Third Form-master was murmuring. "I blame myself entirely."

"Nonsense, Selby—"

"I threatened the lad with expulsion—or, at least, I let them know I did not think the culprit would be allowed to remain at the school—"

"I think that would be the opinion of any master who was in the suppression a bulldog had been set on him by a scamp of his own Form," returned the Head.

"But I scarcely think that now, sir; Kildare has pointed out that the affair was more likely to have been an attempt to scare me, as my absurd fear of dogs was well-known in the Form."

The Head smiled.

"I am certain Kildare did not use those words, Selby."

"No, but that is what he meant!" snapped the Third Form-master. "I am ridiculously afraid of dogs."

"Is that so?" I, personally, am upset at the sight of a snake or a reptile. The most curious object in nature, Selby, is the average man."

Mr. Selby went on quickly.

"The lad has nowhere to go; his uncle is abroad. I feel very uneasy about the affair, sir—very uneasy indeed!"

The words came quite distinctly to Wally and his chums. They could not help overhearing, much as they disliked having their names mentioned.

"But to step from the hedge and face the two masters was out of the question. Even as it was, they might be seen at any moment."

But D'Arcy minor was not thinking about that.

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

He was staring through the gloom in amazement at the Third Form-master.

Mr. Selby had staggered his most unruly pupil with his few words.

It was the Head who next broke the pause.

"I am still confident Dudley will be caught," he said quietly. "Monteith and a great many other prefects have not returned yet, and it is almost impossible that he can have left by train."

"And if he is brought back, sir?"

"The whole matter will be thoroughly thrashed out."

"If it were possible, I should like it to be glossed over," answered the Third Form-master, after another pause. "I will admit, sir, the idea of my being responsible for a boy being expelled is unpleasant to me—very unpleasant indeed—a selfish motive, no doubt, but—"

Then the masters moved out of hearing.

D'Arcy minor lay where he was, amongst the long grass. He had gone rather white, and there was a flash of amazement in his keen eyes.

"My hat, that can't have been Selby speaking!"

Jameson uttered the words in a gaspy voice. Curly Gibson was looking very scared.

Then Wally jumped to his feet.

"I—I say, we have made a hash of it this time!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to the Head!"

"But—"

"I tell you I'm going to the Head!" breathed the scamp of the Third. "I didn't know Dudley hadn't anywhere to go to—I thought he was just going home—"

"And perhaps he wouldn't have been expelled after all!"

"And perhaps he will now for trying to run away from St. Jim's. My hat, Wally!"

Jameson was very scared indeed. Curly Gibson was not in a much better plight, and they both looked to Wally.

D'Arcy minor's chums had come to rely upon their leader when difficult points like this one arose. Wally seemed to have made up his mind.

"We've been asses!" he exclaimed. "I'm going to tell the Head everything!"

"There'll be an awful row, Wally!"

"Rats!"

"But—"

"Dudley hasn't anywhere to go!" returned the scamp of the Third. "I know what that means in London. Perhaps—perhaps they will be able to trace the kid if we own up at once!"

He did not wait for an answer! If the others had come to rely upon him, Wally also had come to rely upon himself a good deal. He scrambled through the hedge, regardless of scratched hands and face.

The others followed him, very startled.

Then all three stopped dead.

The distant sound of a motor-horn had caught their ears.

Tom Merry & Co. were returning from Woodfield.

The Third-Formers waited with white faces and bated breath.

CHAPTER 18.

Three Invitations.

THE Hugo car, with its tremendous head-light, came tearing up the road.

Tom Merry was still driving, and he was driving very well. D'Arcy minor & Co. watched, with their hands deep in their pockets.

"Heah we are, deah boys!"

"Rather! Keep hold of Dudley, chaps."

The words cut through the evening air sharply. Wally heard them, and dashed forward.

He flung open the huge gates in wild excitement.

"Dudley—Dud, old chap!"

"Bai Jove, there's my minnah! Gweat Scott; I believe Wally helped Dudley to smuggle himself in the luggage-holdah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry grinned.

Remembering the car had been taken round to the side entrance at the start that morning, the Shell junior had long since come to the conclusion that the scamp of the Third knew a good deal about Dudley's attempt to run away.

The thought had only just occurred to the swell of St. Jim's, though.

It staggered him.

"Gweat Scott! Wally, I believe you helped this young duffah to wun away—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Wally, as your majah—"

"As my grandmother!" yelled D'Arcy minor. "Come on, Dud! You've jolly well got to come and see the Head and Selby!"

Another Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"No luck, kid!" whispered Dudley, as he jumped out of the car. "I nearly did it, but the luck was dead out—"

"Hurrah!"
Arthur Augustus had removed his huge motor gloves in order to replace his monocle in his eye. He stared at his minor through it in amazement.

"Wally, I believe you helped Dudley—"
"Go hon!"
"Wally," shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I shall lose my tomah in a minute—"

"Rats!" said the scamp of the Third, with sparkling eyes. "Dudley, I don't believe you'll be expelled after all. Mr. Selby's got it into his head that you didn't really set Towser on him—that you only meant to scare him or something—"

"Yes, that's so," said Tom Merry quietly.
"My hat! Then the kid won't be sacked!"
"Hurrah!" yelled Jameson. "Let's scud to the Head's room!"

And before Tom Merry & Co. could stop them the four fags polted away. Arthur Augustus started forward.

"Bai Jove—"
Tom Merry caught his arm.
"Let them go, Gussy," he said quietly. "The young sweeps have a way of looking after themselves."

"Yaas, wathah, but—"
"We can go and explain how we caught Dudley later on."

"Yaas, that is so, but you are forgettin', deah boy," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in alarm. "I wogwot to say that I have no othah wesource but to considah my minah helped the young duffah to escape—"

"Of course he did, kid!"
"Gwest Scott! He will get into a foahful wov."

"Serve the young ass right."
"Gwanted, deah boy, but the wov may be vey foahful unless there is a fellow of tact and judgment pwesent—"

Tom Merry grinned.
"Rats, Gussy! Tact and judgment won't have any effect on the Head," he laughed. "All that sort of thing needed the Head can be relied upon to serve up."

Arthur Augustus thought for a moment.
"Bai Jove, I believe you are wight, deah boy," he said. "I think I can safely leave the mattah in the Head's hands."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weslly, I see no weason foah wibald laughah— Bai Jove, gway don't dig me in the ribs, Jack Blake!"

"Aas!" breathed the chief of Study No. 6. "The invitation, Gussy."
"Bai Jove, I was almost forgettin'! Tom Mewwy, deah boy, as it is your birtiday, we have prepared—"

"As it's your giddy birtiday, Tom Merry—"
"Seeing it's your birtiday, Tommy—"
Arthur Augustus, Figgins, and Manners had all spoken at once. Tom Merry was looking from one to the other in surprise.

Jack Blake suddenly plunged ahead.
"We've got a decent spread in Study No. 6, young Merry," he exclaimed. "You're coming to preside."

"Rats!" shouted Manners. "We've arranged a birtiday spread for Tom Merry—"

"Piffle!" cried Figgins. "He's coming to a spread Fatty Wynn has arranged in our study."

The rival Co's of St. Jim's glared at one another. Tom Merry looked blank. He was a little embarrassed again.
"It's awfully decent of you chaps—"

"My hat!"
A smile had suddenly flashed across Fatty Wynn's face.
"I say, kids—"

"Rats, Wynn! He's coming to our spread—"
"To ours, you mean!"
"More rats!"

"I say, kids," exclaimed Fatty Wynn again, "what against us amalgamating the feeds and having it in the gym?"

"My hat—"
"Hurrah!"
"That's the wheeze!"

"Good old Fatty!" exclaimed Figgins. "I expect there will be heaps too much grub, but we can ask some of the others—Keddy, Korruish—"

"And Glyn and Clifton Dane—"
"And the Freak Co.," chuckled Jack Blake. "If Dave starts telling his funny story we'll boil him in oil. We shall expect you in the gym. in half an hour, Tom Merry."

"Rather!"
"Come on!" said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "Let's go and arrange things. I believe this is going to be the feed of the term."

And the Falstaff of St. Jim's was right—it was the feed of the term up to date.

In the middle of it D'Arcy minor, Curly Gibson, and Jameson put in an appearance. They said they came with the news that Dudley was to be caned and nothing more.

And the chums of the Third waited for an invitation to sit down. Fatty Wynn, who was famous for his sympathy for those in hunger, gave the required invitation instantly.

Then there was silence in the gymnasium once again.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY'S SPLENDID NEW FEATURE!

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Read this First.

Edward Yorke, one-time knight of the road, joins the Navy as a shipman under the name of John Smith. His ship, the *Merchall*, is despatched to the Isle of San Andrado, to investigate the conduct of a certain family of planters, Mr. Wilson, who are suspected of complicity with the pirate, Kester. Oswald is left on the island, but is rescued by the captain of a "trader," the Peter and Mary. When they arrive at Kingston the captain receives orders from the admiral, who thanks him for the kindness he has shown to Oswald. Oswald then goes to his new ship, the *Merchall*, which immediately leaves for San Andrado. Arriving there late one night, Captain Garvin refuses to allow the ship to land until the following day. In the morning they reach the island and approach the house. Mr. Briggs, hearing there may be pirates there, orders Oswald to lead the way. Oswald is not attacked, however, and Mr. Briggs goes into the house. "The villains have gone!" he exclaims. "But we will have them yet!"

(Now go on with the story.)

A Deserted Island.

"What are you looking at? Did you break that door?" said Maxwell.

Oswald shook his head.

"I spent a night in there once," he said, pointing to the door. "I thought it was my last night on earth. It would have been, but for—for her!"

"There is no trace of her. The villains have gone and carried her off with them," Maxwell said.

"Oswald shuddered as he spoke—"they have gone and carried her, perhaps."

"What do you mean?" asked Maxwell sharply. "No, by heavens, I would not believe that they have harmed her!" he said firmly. "They are bad enough, but not so bad as that. They would have taken her with them, I am sure."

At that moment there was a sound of shouting outside, and the next instant the door of the saloon was burst open, and a number of sailors entered, dragging between them a small negro boy, whose black face had gone ashen-grey with terror, and who was so frightened that he had not the strength to stand.

"What have you there?" demanded Mr. Briggs.

"We found Master Quassie curled up in the bottom of a cupboard upstairs, sir!" said one of the sailors. "All right," the boy went on, in a kindly voice, addressing his shivering captor: "there ain't no call for you to take on! We ain't come to kill you and eat you, Quassie!"

The boy began to blubber.

"Stop that noise!" said Mr. Briggs, assuming his most stern aspect. "Where's Mister Wilson gone, and his son, and the young woman—eh?"

"The child did not seem to understand the question. He said that he had been more than eight or nine years of age, and that he had robbed him of what little wit he had ever possessed."

"You hear me?" bellowed Mr. Briggs. "You are trying to deny all the truth from me, are you? Now, then, out with it, and no nonsense! Where's your master—for I suppose the child was your master?"

"I do no, massa!" the boy sobbed.

"You don't know, you rascal!" said Briggs. "Then we must find out a way of making you know!"

"Maybe, sir," said one of the men respectfully, "if you let me tackle the youngster I could find out all he knows. He wants a bit of coaxing like. He—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Mr. Briggs.

Once more he turned to the trembling little picanniny. "Now, then, you black brat, I'm not in the mood for nonsense! You know what the stick is? Perhaps you'd like to taste it again! When did Mr. Wilson leave here—he and his son and miss?"

The child shook his head, and the tears rolled down his little black cheeks.

"Obstinate little demon!" muttered Mr. Briggs. "Mr. Bigben, step this way, if you please. Have the kindness to go out and cut a switch from one of those trees."

The burly old boatswain stood leaning against a wall, with his hands in his pockets, and affected not to hear.

"Twice Mr. Briggs repeated his order, then, turning to another of the men, told him off for the duty."

The man went out, and returned presently with rather a shamefaced air, and a small twig in his hand.

"You call that a switch?" roared Mr. Briggs. "By thunder, am I not going to be obeyed?" Then suddenly he turned to Oswald. "Mr. Smith, go out and cut a thick stick, if you please," he said.

"Not to torture that child with!" retorted Oswald quietly.

"Very well," he said. "I shall report your mischievous conduct on our return to the frigate."

Once more Mr. Briggs turned to the boy and questioned him in a manner well calculated to frighten his wits away. Then, gaining no satisfactory answer, he went out himself and cut a thick switch from one of the creeping plants outside the house.

There was a look of defiance on the little brute's face as he glanced round at the seething faces of his men.

"Come here!" he said, in a loud voice.

The boy tremblingly drew near to him.

"You know Mr. Wilson, the master of this house?" asked Briggs.

The boy shook his head.

"Obstinate little brute!" muttered Briggs.

The next instant, with a shrill whistling sound, the switch descended across the youngster's shoulders, and a scream broke from the child's lips as the sting of the blow bit into his tender, bare flesh.

"Ah, ho! I have found your tongue for you, have I?" cried Mr. Briggs. "Now, then, perhaps you will speak! When did Wilson go?"

The boy glanced round, his eyes glazed with terror. He looked like some wretched little hunted animal, looking about him in vain for pity and help—no, not in vain.

"Come, sir, come!" said old Bigben, coming forward. "This sort of sport is best left to planters and other slave-drivers. Maybe the child ain't got his wits, sir. Maybe he'd tell if he knew. I desney there'll be others left on the island, and if we look about us we shall find them."

"I want no advice and no instructions from you!" said Mr. Briggs. "Back to your place, and leave me to deal with this prisoner as I think fit."

At the word "prisoner" a broad smile came into old Bigben's face.

NEXT THURSDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DISAPPOINTMENT."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 143.
Another Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"I fix your pardon for guessing, sir, but if you'd leave the little one to us, maybe we'd get something out of him."

"I shall do without your help," said Briggs.

Again he turned to the black child with the oft-repeated question; again he failed to get a reply, and again the switch was raised to strike. But the boy did not fall.

Suddenly the switch was jerked out of Mr. Briggs's hand. With an oath he swung round, and found himself face to face with Oswald. For a moment the two stood looking each other in the eyes, while a low murmur of approval of Oswald's conduct ran round the room.

"So it was you?" Mr. Briggs said, after a pause.

"You make a mistake, sir," said Oswald quietly.

"You deny that you snatched that stick from my hand?" shouted the infuriated man.

"Absolutely," said Oswald calmly.

"Then you lie—yes, lie!" shouted Briggs. "Your conduct is disgusting. I shall report you to the captain."

Oswald bowed; and then, with an oath on his lips, Briggs swung round once more to face his victim.

But the child was gone.

Quick as a flash, one of the men had snatched him up the moment the lieutenant turned his back, then passed the little, trembling creature to the man nearest him, who in turn passed him on to the next. It was done with wonderful rapidity and dexterity, and before Mr. Briggs had turned round again the child had been passed to a sailor standing near the window, who had dropped him out on the soft turf outside.

The puzzled look of blank astonishment on the lieutenant's little, pulled-up face was more than the men could stand. Officer or no officer, their sense of ridicule could not be denied, and they broke out into a shout of laughter.

Mr. Briggs swore and stormed and raved and stamped his feet. He swore that he would report these all for mutiny; that the moment they returned to the frigate he would have them all put into the cells, that he would have them all up for punishment. Then, boiling over with rage, he swung round and marched out of the room.

"More trouble!" said Maxwell.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said old Higben, "might it be 'bess you as took that there stick out of the lull's hand?"

"It might have been," said Oswald, "but—"

"But it wasn't," said Garvin, who was standing beside Oswald. "As a matter of fact, it was me."

"Bless your heart, sir, it was well done!" said the old sailor.

Just then Mr. Briggs's voice sounded from outside, and the men hastened out and fell into line outside the house.

Mr. Briggs had got the better of his temper for the moment, though, so far as he was concerned, the matter was not going to rest where it was. Oswald should be reported when they returned to the frigate, so also should the boatswain. Meanwhile, Mr. Briggs had use for their services.

From the summit of the hill on which the house stood a clear view of the sea could be obtained in every direction, and there was no sign whatever of any craft, except the frigate lying at anchor in the bay.

Evidently the pirates had gone, and the Wilsons had made good their escape some time ago, but the most curious thing was the entire disappearance of the negroes, of which there had been between fifty and sixty on the island. Their huts were deserted and in confusion. In some there were evidences of a struggle having taken place, for the ground was trampled down, the rude furniture overturned and smashed, and here and there were bloodstains on the earthen floor and the mud walls.

Guides from the Sky — A Strange Discovery.

Briggs had divided his men up into three parties. To Garvin he had given charge of one, to Maxwell another, while he took the third, and so they searched the island. Oswald had gone with Maxwell's party; they had examined

several of the huts of the negroes without finding any trace of any living being. The huts stood on the edge of a plantation, and as they emerged from the door of the last house Oswald caught Maxwell's arm.

"Look!" he said, pointing upwards.

High in the air overhead a couple of vultures were wheeling round and round.

"Vultures," said Maxwell.

Oswald nodded.

"Wait!"

For some minutes they stood watching the unclean birds, until, evidently thinking that they had nothing to fear from these humans, they made a sudden swoop eastward, and disappeared in the long grass immediately below the spot where they had been hovering.

For a few moments more the two boys waited, but the birds did not return.

"There is something there—a body of an animal or a man," Oswald said.

"Come!"

They hurriedly made their way towards the spot where the birds had alighted, followed by the rest of their party. When they were within a few yards of it the linear birds rose into the air with shrill, discordant cries. The next moment they were within sight of the object—or, rather, the objects—that had attracted the attention of the vultures.

The tall grass had been beaten down and trodden underfoot, and in the midst of the clearing thus made lay two human bodies. There were four, but not until they were near enough to inspect them closely did the boys discover the fourth body. One was that of a tall, gaunt, white-skinned man, dressed in white pantaloons, which were pinned to his waist by a bright yellow scarf; the upper part of his person was covered with a striped blue shirt, which had been almost torn in shreds from his back. There was blood wound upon his body, but his face was black and swollen, and there were livid marks—the marks left by strong teeth—across his bare throat. In his hand he still gripped a blood-stained knife.

From his dress Oswald had no difficulty in recognizing the pirate crew who had sailed under Keater.

Close beside the first corpse lay the dead body of a young negro, face downwards. Two of the sailors stood around the poor thing over; then, for the first time, they became aware of the presence of the other body.

The little child, which the dead mother held tightly to her breast, lay on its back, its face towards the other body. The fourth, of that grim assembly was a stalwart, muscular young negro, whose half-naked body was slashed and mangled cruelly.

"This is some of the work of those villains," said Oswald, "and one of them has paid the penalty of his crimes."

As he spoke the negro stirred slightly, half opened his eyes, and uttered a low moan.

"He is still alive!" Maxwell said excitedly.

The negro opened his glazed eyes and looked at the men; then he opened his mouth and tried to speak, but the words would not come.

"Run to the huts, boys," said Maxwell, "and see if there is a drop of water to be found; it is that poor fellow needs."

Higben.

Fear of the men dashed the quest of water, and one of them returned with a brown earthen pot filled.

The boatswain took the flask from his pocket, poured a portion of the water into it, and formed a shallow basin, pouring a few drops into it, added a little more.

"Hold up the pot," said the head, Simpson, "and let the men drink. Then, kneeling to his knees, he poured some of the fluid between the sufferer's lips."

The negro swallowed the exertion seemed more than he was capable of, and he lay with wide-open eyes, and in a moment they thought he had ceased to breathe.

(This thrilling serial story will be concluded shortly.)

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