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Tom Merry sprang forward just in time. "Stop, you villain!" he panted. He fairly hurled himself at Bunny. The ruffian, startled by his sudden appearance, missed his blow, and the cudgel barely grazed the Major's head. (See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER I. Six or Seven?

"SIX!" said Tom Merry.
"Seven, deah boy."
Tom Merry shook his head.

"Six!"
Tom Merry spoke gently but firmly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his celebrated eyeglass, and looked

round the study. There was certainly seven fellows in the study—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell, and Blake and Heggies and Digby and D'Arcy of the Fourth.

Tom Merry took a pair of scissors and cut a sheet of impot-paper into six strips. Upon each of the strips he wrote a name.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are labahin' undah a mis-

Next Wednesday:

"GRUNDY'S DOWNFALL!" AND "THE CITY OF FLAME!"

apprehension," said D'Arcy. "Your arithmatic is quite at fault. There are seven of us heah; therefore you will require seven slips of papah."

"Six!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, deah boy, look wound for yourself. There are three Shell boundahs—that's three—and Blake and Hewwie—that's five—and Dig and myself—that's seven. As the young lady remarks in the recitation, 'we are seven.'"

"Six!" said Tom Merry.

"If that is the kind of arithmatic you learn in the Shell, Tom Merry, I can onlay say that I am surprised."

Arthur Augustus was really surprised. He could not see how Tom Merry, adding three Shell fellows to four Fourth-formers, could make a total of six.

The seven juniors had been discussing a matter of some importance before they came to drawing lots. It was for the purpose of drawing lots that the captain of the Shell was writing the names on slips of paper.

Dame Taggles was ill. Dame Taggles kept the tuck-shop at St. Jim's. She was not very ill—only laid up for a time. But the news had brought something like dismay into the Lower Forms of St. Jim's. It was not that they sympathised with Dame Taggles. They did, of course; but they could have endured it with fortitude but for the fact that while Dame Taggles was laid up the school shop was closed.

"That was serious!"

The closing of the little shop in the corner of the quadrangle was not likely to last more than a few days. But during those few days supplies of tuck had to be fetched from Mrs. Murphy's, in the village. True, it did not take long to run down to Rylcombe on a bike and come back with a bag. But the "mooey market" in the Lower School was subject to fluctuations. On this special day a state of stony impunctiosity had reigned and tea had been very frugal in Tom Merry's study, and in Study No. 6 also.

But the evening post had brought a letter to Tom Merry from his old governess, Miss Pawcett, and that kind old lady had thoughtfully enclosed a currency-note for a pound. Money was no longer "tight," and, under ordinary circumstances, there would have been a rush to the school shop, and a handsome supper would have compensated for the deficiencies of tea-time.

But the school shop was closed—hermetically sealed. The school gates were locked, and the most good-natured prefect in the School House would hardly have granted a pass-out for the purpose of fetching in "tuck."

Hence the meeting in Tom Merry's study. There was, of course, only one thing to be done. Somebody had to scuttle out, after lights out, and down to the village, and return with the necessary supplies for a dormitory feed. The only question was—who should go?

To decide that question the juniors were to draw lots. Then arose the arithmetical dispute, Tom Merry insisting that there were six fellows, and Arthur Augustus vainly seeking to demonstrate that there were seven.

Unheeding the arithmetical arguments of the swell of St. Jim's, Tom Merry wrote out six names carefully on six separate slips of paper, all ready for the "lots" to be drawn.

"Now we want a hat," said Tom Merry. "You can fetch one of your silk toppers along, Gussy, if you want to be useful."

"But you have w'ritten onlay six papahs, deah boy."

"Yes; that's right."

"But we are seven!"

"Six!"

"Seven, you ass!"

"And still the little maid replied, we are seven!"

burmured Monty Lowther, quoting Wordsworth.

"Six!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"Unless you are off your wockah, Tom Merry, I fail to compehend you. There are us four chaps and you three driffahs—how do you make that six?" demanded Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner. "Good-evenin'!"

"Ahem! The—the fact is, Gussy—"

"Well?"

"I'm afraid you would—ahem!—soil your beautiful clobber in getting over the wall," said Tom Merry.

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seriously. "So—merely on account of your clobber, of course—ahem!—I think you had better stay in the dorm."

"Not at all, deah boy. I will put on some old clothes."

"Oh dear!"

"Besides, I will wisk the clobber," said Arthur Augustus. "This is vewy kind and thoughtful of you, Tom Merry, but I cannot be left out of takin' my share of the wisk."

"But we want the tuck to be brought in, you know," said Tom; "and—and you know what you are, Gussy!"

"Yes, you know, you know," murmured Lowther.

Arthur Augustus's eye gleamed through his monocle, and his noble nose was a little more elevated.

"I fail to undahstand," he said loftily. "If you cannot twust to my discretion—"

"You see, you'd run into a prefect," said Tom; "you'd give the whole show away, and then the feed wouldn't come off at all. So, under the cires, and especially considering the risk to your clobber, I think—"

"Vewy well!" Arthur Augustus's noble nose rose still higher. "I compehend you now, Tom Merry. Of course, undah the cires, I shall decline to come to the feed. Good-evenin'!"

"Where are you going, ass?"

"I am wetwin' from this studay!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner. "Good-evenin'!"

"Catch hold of his ears, Blake!"

"Certainly!" said Blake.

Arthur Augustus dodged.

"You uttah ass, if you catch hold of my yahs, I shall stwike you!" he exclaimed. "As Tom Merry declined to twust to my discretion, I decline to have anythin' furthah to do with the mattah, and I will wetwin'!"

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

"Enough said, Tom Merry!"

"You know you are an ass, you know!"

"Pway say no more. Aftah this, I wewget that I shall be unable to regard you as a friend. Blake, I insist upon your lettin' me pass."

"Oh, make it seven," said Manners, "and if Gussy draws the lot, and he fails to get in the tuck, we'll scalp him."

"Weally Mannahs—"

"All serene!" said Tom Merry. "Get off the high horse, Gussy. I'll put your silly name down. There you are."

"Thank you!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I should wufuse to have my name put down, aftah your remarks, but I am weally concerned for you fellahs. I twust the lot will fall to me, as I am convinced that I am the onlay fellah heah who is likely to bring it off."

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not weward that as an intelligent wemark, Tom Merry—"

"Put your paw into the hat," said Tom.

Seven slips instead of six were dropped into a straw hat, and shaken up, and then a cloth was put over the hat.

"The first name out takes it," said Tom Merry. "Who's going to draw?"

Jack fumbled in the hat, and drew forth a slip. The fellow whose name was written on that slip was to be entrusted with the task of getting in the consignment of tuck after lights-out that night. Six fellows hoped fervently that the name would not be that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. For, though the swell of St. Jim's was as good as gold, and had the very best intentions in the world, his chums could not help feeling that he was not the best fitted for that very secret and risky expedition.

Blake held up the slip. And six voices ejaculated, as the name was revealed:

"Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus smiled serenely. His name was written on the slip that had come forth from the hat.

"Hai Jove, you fellahs are in luck!" he remarked.

"It will be all wight now—wight as wain!"

"Tell you what," said Blake. "I'll volunteer."

"You would make a muck of it, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

"Leave it to me, Gussy," said Tom Merry appealingly. "I am afraid your judgment is not to be relied on, Tom Mewwy."

"Why, you ass!"
"Let me go, Gussy," said Lowther.
"You are such a duffah, Lowthah, you know!"
"Why, you fathead—"

"Pway wely on me, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "I shall do the twick all wight, but I should have felt vey uneasy if any of you fellahs had gone. You leave it to me."

And Arthur Augustus walked out of the study smiling. He was completely satisfied. But Tom Merry & Co. were not quite satisfied; they could not help wondering whether that carefully-planned feed could come off after all. But it was settled now. As Manners remarked classically, "Jacta est alea"—the die was cast!

CHAPTER 2

One Thing Needful.

BED-TIME came a little while after the lads had been drawn in Tom Merry's study. But in the short interval Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the recipient of many remarks and kind offers. There was a certain amount of risk, of course, in getting out of bounds and "buzzing" down to the village after lights out. If the junior who made the bold venture happened to be spotted by a master or a prefect he would certainly be caned, and "gated" perhaps for a month's holidays. Naturally, the chums of the School House had considered it the fair thing all round to draw lots for it. But the lot having fallen upon Arthur Augustus, it was curious to see how many fellows were perfectly willing to volunteer.

Arthur Augustus had unlimited faith in his own tact and judgment. But that faith was sadly lacking on the part of his chums. In that respect they were all doubtful Thomases.

But D'Arcy steadily declined to listen to the voice of the charmer. The lot had fallen upon him, and he regarded that as a stroke of real luck for his comrades. His triumphant return with the tuck would silence all hostile criticism. And he had no doubt about his triumphant return with the tuck.

So Blake and Herries and Digby were frigidly rebuffed, and Kangaroo and Talbot and Dane, who also made offers, were requested to depart and eat coke. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther received the same reply.

"May as well give up the idea of supper in the dorm at all," Monty Lowther remarked, when the Shell were going up to bed. "It's off for to-night. We'll have the feed to-morrow."

And the other prospective feasters agreed with Lowther.

But Arthur Augustus went serenely upon his way. He took a pair of rubber shoes into the Fourth-Form dormitory with him that night.

"Faith, and what's that for?" asked Reilly of the Fourth.

"Makes less wov, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh? Are you going out, then?"

"Pway excuse me if I do not answah that question, Weilly, as it is wathah a secwet," replied Arthur Augustus, with great caution.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you champion ass!" growled Blake. "Tell the whole dormitory. Tell Kildare, too. He'll be in in a minute."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'd better get those shoes out of sight before Kildare comes in," grinned Levison. "He might smell a rat if he saw them."

"He might!" chuckled Mellish.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you're quite wight!" agreed D'Arcy. And he slipped the shoes into his bed. "Pway don't uttah a word about it. Of course, Kildare must not know anythin'."

"Hallo! What is that that Kildare must not know?"

asked the owner of that name, as he came into the dormitory to see lights out.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. Arthur Augustus's amazing manner of keeping a dead secret tickled the Fourth.

"Well," said Kildare, looking at Arthur Augustus, "what's the little game?"

"Game, deah boy?" stammered the swell of the Fourth.

"Yes. What are you up to?"

"Up to?"

"If you're planning some rag for to-night, remember I've got an eye on this dormitory," said Kildare severely. "If I hear anything there will be trouble. Now turn in."

"That's all wight, deah boy; you won't heah anythin'," grinned Arthur Augustus, thinking of the silent rubber shoes.

"Well, turn in," said Kildare good-humouredly.

The Fourth Form turned in, and the captain of St. Jim's turned out the light and left them. Arthur Augustus's chuckle was heard in the darkness.

"Wathah pulled the wool ovah his eyes, deah boys—what?"

"Fathead!" grunted Blake.

"But what's the little game?" demanded Mellish curiously. Mellish was always curious, especially about matters that did not concern him.

"I am afraid I cannot answah your question, Mellish, as we are keepin' the whole mattah a secwet. You ara wathah a sneak, too."

"You silly ass," said Mellish angrily. "Do you think I don't know you are going out of bounds to-night?"

"Bai Jove! How do you know?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake, deah boy, did you tell Mellish anythin' about it?"

"No, ass!" growled Blake.

"Did you, Dig?"

"No, fathead!"

"I wufuse to be called a fathead, Dig! Did you, Herwies?"

"No, chump!"

"Then that wottah Mellish must have been eaves-droppin'," said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Mellish, I wogard your conduct as despicable!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at in Mellish's wotten conduct. I wogard it as beneath despision—I mean contempt!"

"You silly ass!" roared Mellish. "You've told the whole dormitory yourself."

"Wats! I have not uttahd a word!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have a great mind to get up and give you a feahful thwashin'," Mellish! I stonzyjly disapprove of your spyin' ways. Howevah, I shall wogard you with silent contempt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway wake me up at eleven, Blake, if I should drop off to sleep."

"What do you want to wake up at eleven for?" chuckled Lumley-Lumley.

"That is a secwet, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus's secret, and his way of keeping it, kept the Fourth amused for some time, and it was later than usual when they dropped off to sleep. But Arthur Augustus did not drop off to sleep. He was keeping very wide awake.

Blake and Herries and Digby went to sleep. They were not worrying in the least about calling their noble chum at eleven.

The swell of St. Jim's had to depend on himself.

By half-past ten his eyes were firmly sealed, and he was sleeping the sleep of the just, and dreaming that he was keeping carefully awake.

But as eleven strokes sounded out from the clock-tower Arthur Augustus opened his eyes and yawned. Even in his sleep it was weighing on his mind that he

ought to be awake, and he came out of the land of dreams as the clock struck.

"He sat up and rubbed his eyes.
"Bai Jove, somethin's stwinkin'!" he murmured. "I wondah what it is!" He drew his watch from under the pillow and struck a match. "Eleven, bai Jove!"

"Hallo!" came a sleepy voice from Blake's bed. "What's that light?"

"It's all wright, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, as the match went out. "It is eleven o'clock, and I am just off."

"You're not just off," said Blake drowsily. "You've been off for a long time—off your rooker. Go to sleep!"

"What about the expidish, deah boy?"

"Oh, chuck that!"
"I' attahly wufese to chuck it!" Arthur Augustus slipped from his bed, and began to dress, and slipped on the rubber shoes. "You can go to sleep, Blake. I will wake you when I come back with the grub."

"When you come back with a prefect, you mean!" growled Blake.

"Oh, wats!"
Blake grunted, and settled down to sleep again. He had to give Arthur Augustus his head, but he had little expectation of seeing the tuck that night. But D'Arcy was very determined.

He crept silently from the dormitory, and closed the door behind him, and crept away to the box-room.

He opened the window, stepped out upon the leads outside, and closed the window after him. He had to leave it unfastened, of course. Then he dropped to the ground, and scudded away to the school wall.

Lights were still gleaming from some of the lower windows of the School House, and Arthur Augustus was very careful to avoid the radius of light as he scudded across the quad.

He reached the wall, where the old slanting oak made it easy to climb, and chuckled with satisfaction at his success.

To climb the wall and drop into the road outside was the work of a few minutes. In the road he gave another gleeful chuckle.

"The silly asses!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "They will be wathah surpriswed when I come back with the tuck all wright. Ha, ha, ha!"

Greatly pleased with himself and things generally, the swell of St. Jim's started down the road at a trot.

The road was dark and lonely; only a pale glimmer of moonlight coming between heavy banks of clouds.

Arthur Augustus trotted on cheerfully, reflecting on the pleasant surprise of his chams when they should discover that he had carried out the nocturnal expedition without a hitch. He had only to get to the village shop, knock up Mrs. Murphy, get the "quid's" worth of tuck, and scud back to St. Jim's with it—it was easy as falling off a form.

He had just reached the cross-roads, about half-way to Rycombe, when he suddenly halted.

A dreadful thought had flashed into his mind.

He stood in utter dismay.

"Bai Jove! The money!"

He had forgotten to ask Tom Merry for the currency note.

Everything had gone rippingly, excepting that he had neglected that trifling matter, and had no money with him.

"Gweat Scott!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The uttah ass has forgotten to give me the curweney note! The uttah duhh! I should nevah have thought that even Tom Mewwy could be quite such an ass as that! Oh, deah!"

The game was up.

To knock up the village shop at that time of night when one had a solid "quid" to expend was one

matter. The same process when one could only explain that one had forgotten to bring one's money was quite a different matter. Arthur Augustus could imagine the kind of reception he would get.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus again. "Oh, deah!"

What was to be done?

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry Goes Out, and Mellish Goes In.

TOM MERRY sat up in bed.
Round him the Shell fellows were sleeping the sleep of healthy youths.

Tom had awakened, and he lay for a few minutes dosing, and the thought of Arthur Augustus and his expedition came into his mind.

That thought was enough to waken him widely.

He heard a quarter toll out, and he groped for his watch, and in a ray of moonlight that streaked in at the high windows he saw the time—it was a quarter-past eleven.

"Ten to one he's still fast asleep!" murmured Tom Merry. "There won't be any feed to-night. My hat!"

The thought of the currency note came into his mind, and he barely suppressed a howl of laughter. He had not thought of it before. Arthur Augustus had been so busy planning his strategy for the night that his mighty brain had not touched upon a trifle like that. And Tom Merry had given most of his thoughts to the unsuccessful task of persuading Arthur Augustus to yield up the post of honour, so the currency note had remained folded up in Miss Priscilla Fawcett's letter in Tom Merry's jacket pocket.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom. "Oh, the duffer! If he's gone without it—"

Tom Merry slipped out of bed.

The lot had fallen to Arthur Augustus, and it was only the "game" to let Gussy go if he chose. Tom Merry decided to take the currency note to him, and give him a call if he was still asleep.

He dressed himself quickly in the darkness. If Gussy was still in bed he would give him the note; if he had already gone, sublimely unconscious of the fact that he was unprovided with funds, there was nothing for it but to go after him.

"If he's gone he will have left the window unfastened," murmured Tom Merry. "I'll jolly soon see."

He crept out of the dormitory, taking his boots in his hand, and hurried down the passage to the box-room.

Suddenly he stopped and listened intently, his heart beating.

A slight sound had come from the darkness of the dormitory passage, and it sounded to his ears like a cautious footfall.

He listened for a few moments, scarcely breathing.

But the sound was not repeated. Evidently it was not some over-zealous prefect on the look-out.

The Shell fellow hurried into the box-room, closed the door, and quickly examined the window.

It was unfastened.

Arthur Augustus was evidently gone.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"The silly ass! I wonder when it will occur to him that he hasn't the money with him!" he murmured.

He put on his boots quickly, and in a few minutes more was out of the house, and scudding away towards the school wall. A light glimmered in the old quad. Taggles, the porter, was coming away from the direction of the stables, going back to his lodge. From the zig-zagging of the lantern Taggles carried, it was not difficult to guess that Taggles had been drinking the health of the King's troops with his friend the coachman, and doing it not widely but too well.

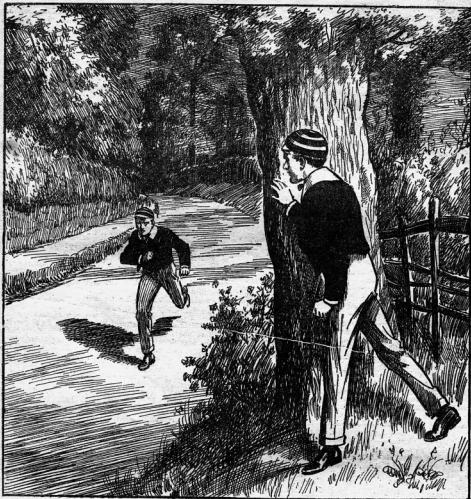
"Allo! What's that?" ejaculated Taggles suddenly.

Tom Merry squeezed close against a tree in the darkness and held his breath. The old porter had evidently heard a sound.

Taggles wagged the lantern round in a circle, and mumbled, and finally went on to his lodge, still mumbling.

Tom waited till he was gone, and then scudded off to the wall, climbed it, and dropped into the road.

ANSWERS



Tom Merry backed into the shadow of a tree beside the road, and watched for the runner to pass. The patter of footsteps came closer and closer, and a gleam of moonlight, falling into the road, revealed a juniper running. But it was not Arthur Augustus. It was Percy Mellish of the Fourth! (See Chapter 2.)

The moon had disappeared behind a heavy ridge of clouds, and the darkness was intense.

That D'Arcy had gone out he was assured, but where the swell of St. Jim's was then was a puzzle. He might be only a few yards ahead, or already at the village. As Tom Merry stood looking about him in the darkness, he heard a scraping sound at the wall behind him and swung round. It was a sound as of someone climbing, and it could only be D'Arcy, he supposed. But the sound stopped, and he could see nothing in the darkness. His boots had made a sound on the hard road, and perhaps that had given the alarm.

Tom shook his head. He concluded that he had been deceived, and that the sound was the rustling of a branch against the wall in the night breeze.

In the darkness and silence he started down the road towards the village.

The moon came out from behind the clouds, and a

silvery light fell into the old lane, lighting it up, for the moment, as if it were day.

Tom Merry looked along the lane for a sign of Arthur Augustus, but, as far as his eye could reach, the road was deserted.

"The blessed fathhead!" growled Tom Merry. "He's at the village by now, arguing with Mrs. Murphy, perhaps, to get the things on tick."

The moon disappeared again.

Tom Merry hurried on down the lane, keeping on the grass beside the road, in order to run without noise. He did not want to attract the attention of any chance passer at that hour of the night, especially Mr. Crump, the village policeman, if that gentleman should chance to be making his rounds. Mr. Crump would indubitably have reported the fact to the Head of St. Jim's the next morning if he had found a St. Jim's boy out of bounds at that late hour.

Patter, patter, patter!

Tom Merry stopped in sheer astonishment.

He was running without a sound himself, but from the darkness behind him there came a sound of rapid footsteps on the road.

Was D'Arcy behind him after all? Had he been delayed in getting out of the school? Tom Merry backed into the shadow of a tree beside the road and watched for the runner to pass. The patter of footsteps came closer and closer, and a gleam of moonlight, falling into the road, revealed a junior running.

But it was not Arthur Augustus.

It was Percy Mellish of the Fourth.

Tom Merry set his teeth hard. He knew what the presence of the spy of the Fourth meant. Mellish had got "on" to the fact that D'Arcy was breaking bounds that night, and had followed him—to spy. To the mind of a fellow like Mellish, it would not occur that D'Arcy's object was the innocent one of fetching in tuck for a dormitory supper. The cad of the Fourth was on the track, hoping to catch Arthur Augustus "out."

Mellish came to a halt within a few yards of the hidden Shell fellow and blinked round him in the half-light. He was evidently puzzled.

"Which way has he gone, the rotter?" Tom Merry heard the muttered words. "Down to Rylcombe or the footpath to Wayland! Confound him! If he dodges me I shall have my trouble for nothing! Hang him!"

Tom Merry grinned in the darkness under the tree. He watched the panting junior with some curiosity. He was interested to know what would be Mellish's next step.

The cad of the Fourth was evidently puzzled.

He had left the dormitory after Arthur Augustus, and the swell of St. Jim's was well ahead; but Mellish had undoubtedly heard Tom Merry getting out of the box-room. Tom remembered the sound in the passage, and again at the school wall. Not having the least suspicion that the Shell fellow was out of doors as well, Mellish had supposed that he was close behind D'Arcy, when, as a matter of fact, it was Tom Merry that he was following.

He stood in the lane, blinking round him in the gloom, and finally crossed to the side of the road, where a plank crossed the wide, deep ditch, giving access to a dark footpath through the wood. Mellish bent along the footpath, standing on the plank, and bent his head to listen for a sound from the wood. Which way had his quarry gone? He little dreamed that Tom Merry was standing within three yards of him, cloaked by the thick darkness under the tree.

A sudden gleam came into Tom Merry's eyes.

Mellish, standing on the plank over the ditch, looking into the wood, had his back, of course, to the road and to Tom Merry.

The temptation was too strong for the junior to resist. The opportunity of giving Mellish a lesson for spying was too tempting.

Tom Merry stole across the intervening grass, without making a sound. Mellish, staring into the wood and listening, did not dream that there was anyone behind him.

In two seconds Tom Merry was close behind, and then he sprang at the listening spy of the Fourth, and a violent shove between the shoulders sent Mellish reeling off the plank into the ditch.

Splash!

"Grooooooocch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry dived away down the road.

Mellish came up in the ditch, gasping and spluttering. There was only a foot of water; he was in no danger. But there was a foot more of soft and clinging mud under the water. And the water was coated with greenish ooze.

Mellish simply swam in mud and ooze, as he stood in the ditch.

"Grooch! Oh! Ugh! Yow! Oh, you rotter, D'Arcy! Yawp! Ah! Oooocch!"

The small Mellish had stirred up in the ditch was not agreeable. It was powerful—it was deadly! The un-

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happy spy of the Fourth scrambled out of the ditch, choking with mud and ooze and slime and smell.

He rolled into the road, gasping.

"Oooooocch!"

For some minutes he sat there, trying to get his breath. From head to foot he was smothered—his face had disappeared, his clothes even were unrecognisable. And the "whiff" of the mud was awful.

"Oh dear!" groaned Mellish. "Ow dear! Oh, the awful beast! Groooooch! Yoooch! Oh!"

He staggered to his feet at last, glaring about him. Mellish was not a fighting-man; but if Arthur Augustus had been at hand then, Mellish would have attacked him with the ferocity of a Hun. He had not the slightest doubt that it was to Arthur Augustus that he owed his disaster. He had not caught a glimpse of him, but he had no doubts. But the road was lonely and silent, and even the satisfaction of imparting some of the smelly mud to his assailant was denied him.

Mellish squeaked away back to the school. In his present state he did not feel equal to any more spying. Squealing out mud and water and slime at every step, the unhappy spy of the Fourth tramped away, in a mood that could only be called homicidal.

CHAPTER 4.

A Nice Night for Gussy!

"THE Utah ass!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark at least a dozen times, referring to Tom Merry every time, as he stood at the cross-roads in Rylcombe Lane, in doubt.

To return to St. Jim's for the currency note, and make his whole journey over again, was rather too large an order. Even if he succeeded without a mishap, the juniors certainly wouldn't care to be called in the small hours of the morning to partake of that famous feed. But the only alternative was to go on to the village in a stony state, and trust to his eloquence with Mrs. Murphy, or else to throw up the whole affair. That, however, was impossible—a D'Arcy never said die!

So Arthur Augustus, after standing a good five minutes in doubt—anthematising the asininity of Tom Merry—started again for the village. After all, he might be able to explain to Mrs. Murphy, and obtain the tuck all the same. He had great faith in his persuasive powers.

He passed the end of the turning which led up to Glyn House, where Glyn of the Shell's people lived, and passed under the thick shadow of the trees further along the road.

Then he halted again, with a sudden jump.

There was the sound of a movement under the overhanging branches that thickly shadowed the road, and he caught a glimpse of a moving shadow.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus involuntarily.

A sudden light gleamed out—it came from a pocket electric-torch. The light flooded the startled face of the swell of St. Jim's, and blinded him: He blinked in the light dizzily.

"G'wreat Scott!"

"Only a kid!" muttered a rough voice.

The light was shut off as suddenly as it had been turned on, and darkness reigned under the trees once more.

Arthur Augustus rubbed his dazzled eyes.

"Bai Jove! who is there?" he ejaculated.

There was no reply.

That there was at least two persons lurking there under the trees, Arthur Augustus knew; but they made no movement. His first thought, naturally, was that they were footpads—they could scarcely have any other reason for lurking there at that hour of the night. But they did not offer to molest him. After the flash of the light and those muttered words he saw and heard nothing of them.

The swell of St. Jim's hurried on.

If they were footpads, the sooner he got out of their neighbourhood the better. Keeping his eyes in their direction, though without seeing them, he hurried on up

the road, and breathed a little more freely when he was at a safe distance.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured, as the sleeping village came in sight, "that was a nawrow escape—a couple of twumps, I suppose. They couldn't have wobbled me of anythin', as that fathead Tom Mewwy forgot to give me the cawwency note; but, bai Jove! they might wope in the tuck goin' back, if they're still there. The wotahs, they have thown me into quite a flutah!"

Rylocombe was fast asleep when Arthur Augustus trotted breathlessly into the old High Street at last.

He halted outside Mrs. Murphy's tuck-shop.

There he proceeded to knock at the door.

He had been knocking for about five minutes—getting louder with every knock—when an upper window opened, and a head in a nightcap was put out, and a decidedly cross voice demanded to know who was there.

Arthur Augustus stepped back and looked up, and raised his cap politely to Mrs. Murphy.

"Pway excuse me, Mrs. Murphy—"

"Master D'Arcy!" exclaimed the good dame, in astonishment.

"Yaas."

"What are you doing out of your school at this time of night?" exclaimed Mrs. Murphy.

"I've come to fetch somethin'."

"What?"

"I wequah a pound's worth of tuck!"

"Nonsense! I canoot serve you at this hour!"

"Weally, Mrs. Murphy—"

"Go back to school at once!"

"I trust, madam, that you will not let me have this long walk all for nothin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I believe I have the honah of bein' wathah a good customah, madam!"

The reply was a mumble.

"Pway, madam—"

"A pound, did you say?" came the good dame's voice.

"Yaas."

"Then I will come down."

"One moment—"

"Well?"

"I feel I am in honah bound to mention that I have forgotten to bring the money with me—"

"What!"

"But I will wun down to-morrow on my bike and settle—"

Slam!

Arthur Augustus gazed up at the window in astonishment. It had closed suddenly, and with violence, and Mrs. Murphy had disappeared.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, "what a vevy remarkable woman, to wethah like that befoah I have finished speakin', Mrs. Murphy! Madam!"

The window remained closed, and there was no reply. Arthur Augustus, feeling very puzzled, began knocking on the door again.

It did not occur to him at first that the good dame was not inclined to come down in the middle of the night to give him "tick." But after he had knocked in vain for another five minutes, eliciting no response whatever, it dawned upon his mighty brain.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus indignantly. "This is uttally wotten! Is it poss that the absurd old lady supposes that it is merely a twick to obtain credit? I wegar that as insultin'. I shall certainly have to explain fullay that it was owin' to Tom Mewwy's stupidity that I left the cawwency note behind."

Knock! knock! knock!

There was no sign from Mrs. Murphy. Evidently she had made up her mind to let Master D'Arcy knock till he was tired. But there was a sound of heavy footsteps in the silent village street, and Arthur Augustus looked round in some alarm. He knew those heavy official footsteps. They could belong to no one but Police-constable Crump, planking along on his beat. The knocking, which echoed in a hollow way through the silent street, had caught the ears of Police-constable Crump, and he turned a corner near at hand, and at the sight of him Arthur Augustus simply jumped away from the tuck-shop and fled. He did not want to be marched back

to St. Jim's by Mr. Crump, and delivered over to the tender mercies of the Head or his Housemaster.

He ran for the lane—and there was a sound of thumping boots behind him. Police-constable Crump had caught a glimpse of him and was thundering in pursuit.

"Gwest Scott! I shall have to wun for it!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He vanished out of the street like a startled deer, and sped down the lane. The heavy footsteps of the village policeman died away behind. Mr. Crump was not a great runner; he had too much weight to carry for that.

Arthur Augustus paused in the lane to take breath. He remembered the two suspicious characters he had passed. He did not want to run into them again. He turned from the road and took the short cut through the wood. The densely dark footpath through the trees was not the route he would have chosen for that hour of the night, but he was not nervous, and it had the advantage of cutting off a quarter of a mile in the distance.

Arthur Augustus tramped away along the footpath disconsolately.

He had failed.

It was owing to circumstances over which he had no control that he had failed, certainly; but he could already hear the voices of Blake and Herries and Dig making that ancient and irritating statement: "I told you so."

It was annoying, to say the least of it.

But there was no remedy, and he tramped morosely along the footpath, determined that on the morrow he would tell Tom Merry very plainly what he thought of him. The footpath brought him out near the walls of St. Jim's, and he disconsolately climbed the wall and dropped into the quadrangle.

All the lights in the school were extinguished now. St. Jim's lay a black mass under the cloudy sky.

Arthur Augustus was crossing the quad when he stopped and listened. From the fountain in the quadrangle there came a sound of splashing and a mumbling, gasping voice.

"Oh, the rotter! I'll pay him out for this! The beast! Groooh!"

"Mellish, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in blank amazement.

He approached more closely. Mellish, with his handkerchief dipped in the water of the fountain, appeared to be engaged in washing mud and slime from his face, his hair, and his clothes. As a matter of fact, Mellish had been thus engaged for a considerable time. He could not go back to the dormitory in his reeking state, and he had stopped at the fountain to clean himself as much as possible. Even as it was, with the best he could do, he was likely to leave muddy traces behind him when he got into the house again.

"Hallo, Mellish!" said Arthur Augustus, in a low voice. "I didn't know you were out of the dorm, deah boy."

Mellish spun round.

"D'Arcy! You rotter!"

"Eh?"

"You beast!" hissed Mellish. "Look at the state I'm in!"

"Bai Jove, there's a howwid smell!" said D'Arcy. "I am sowsy if you have had an accident, Mellish, but I wefuse to be called names."

"You rotter! Oh, you—you—" Mellish made a rush at him reckless of the danger of being heard from the house.

Arthur Augustus backed away promptly. He did not understand the cause of Percy Mellish's wrath, but he understood that Mellish was reeking with evil-smelling mud, and he wasn't inclined to let the muddy junior get close. As Mellish still came for him he fairly ran, and dodged away through the trees. The cad of the Fourth bumped into a tree in pursuit, and gave a howl, and then returned to the fountain to resume his ablutions. Arthur Augustus, surprised and breathless, reached the back of the house and climbed in.

In the box-room he paused.

"That wotah must have gone out this way," he muttered. "I had bettah leave the window unfastened for him. I wondah what has happened to him? He seemed vevy watty about somethin'."

Silent in his rubber shoes, the swell of St. Jim's made his way to the Fourth-Form dormitory. His chums were fast asleep, and Arthur Augustus was glad of it. He did not mean to wake them up.

He slipped off his clothes and turned in. He was scarcely in bed when Percy Mellish came sneaking into the dormitory, and there was a whiff of smell that he brought in with him. Arthur Augustus sat up.

"Is that you, Mellish?"

"Yes, you rotter!"

"I trust you have had sense enough to fasten the window? Othahwise you will be bowled out in the mornin'."

"Yes, you cad!"

"What are you callin' me names for?" said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I do not wish to thrash you at this time of night, Mellish, but—"

"You've ruined my clothes!" muttered Mellish. "Look at the state I'm in, and I've been cleaning myself out there for half an hour or more. I shouldn't wonder if I've left mud in the passage and the box-room too. I was smothered. Well, if I get spotted, I'll see that you are spotted too, you can bet on that."

"How is it my fault, you ass? Have you fallen into a ditch?"

"You pushed me in, you rotter!"

"Bai Jove! I did?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"You know you did!" hissed Mellish, as he peeled off his wet and muddy clothes. "I shall have to hide these things somehow, and put on my Sunday togs. Oh, you beast!"

"I did not push you into a ditch, Mellish."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I had no ideah you were out of the dorm till I saw you in the quad."

"What's the good of pitching me that yarn?" snarled Mellish. "You came behind me and shoved me in the ditch because you knew I was following you."

"If I had known you were followin' me, you spyin' cad, I should have given you a fearful thrashin', and probably pitched you into a ditch," said Arthur Augustus. "But as it happens I did not, and if you express the slightest doubt of my statement, Mellish, I will get up now and give you a fearful thrashin' at the risk of wakin' the House!"

Mellish growled, but he expressed no further doubt of D'Arcy's statement—audibly, at least. A sleepy voice came from Jack Blake's bed—the murmur of voices had awakened him.

"Hallo! Who's burbling?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, it's you!" Blake blinked in the dark. "Been out, ass?"

"Yans."

"You don't mean to say you've got the tuck?" exclaimed Blake, broad awake now. "You've really pulled it off! My hat!"

"Ahem!"

"Good!" said Blake, sitting up in bed. "If you've got the tuck, Gussy, we'll have the feed, and I take back some of the things I've said about your brains."

"You need not twouble to get up, Blake."

"Why not, if you've got the tuck?"

"Ahem. I haven't got it! Owin' to unforeseen circo— There is nothin' whatevah to cackle about, Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Prey don't cackle like a fatheaded hen, Blake! Tom Mewwy forgot to give me the cuwweeny note."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I found I had no cash."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Mrs. Murphy, for some reason she did not acquaint me with, declined to give me cwidit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You will wake the whole dorm, Blake, if you cackle in that wicidulous maniah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It was scarcely my fault that Tom Mewwy forgot to give me the cuwweeny note."

"You forgot to ask him for it, you mean."

"Well, I—I—ahem—I—"

"Well, of all the blithering idiots!" came from Dig's bed.

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"Weally, Dig—"

"Of all the burbling cuckoos!" That was Herrice's contribution.

"If you fellahs like, I will go and wake Tom Mewwy up now, and get the cuwweeny note, and—"

"And we'll have the feed along with the milk in the mornin'!" chuckled Blake. "Don't be an ass, Gussy. Go to sleep. You haven't disappointed us."

"Weally, Blake, I am vewy glad I have not disappointed you. You weally do not feel disappointed?"

"Of course not. We expected this."

"Why, you uttah ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We knew you'd muck it up somehow!" growled Herrice. "Go to sleep, for goodness' sake!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Brrrrrr!"

Arthur Augustus snorted, and laid his head on the pillow. In about half a minute he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry to the Rescue!

TOM MERRY chuckled as he trotted down the road after disposing of the spy of the Fourth in a manner that was so eminently satisfactory—not to Mellish, of course. Mellish could not be expected to be satisfied.

The Shell fellow paused a little distance down the road and listened. He heard the enraged spy squealing away towards the school, and chuckled again. Mellish was evidently disposed of.

Tom Merry dropped into a walk, still following the belt of grass beside the road. He had wasted some time on Mellish, and he had no hope of overtaking Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was at the village by that time, or before.

The captain of the Shell walked on. He was not afraid of missing Arthur Augustus; either he would find him in the village, or he would meet him coming back. But matters were not destined to pass that night as the captain of the Shell expected. The adventures of that eventful night were by no means over.

In the stillness of the night a sound of clear and ringing footsteps came to his ears.

He stopped.

The footsteps came down the lane that led to Glyn House towards the road. Somebody was coming from Glyn House, doubtless a visitor leaving unusually late. Tom Merry paused under the shadowy trees, to wait for the pedestrian to pass. Tom often visited Glyn House with Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and he did not want to be seen by somebody who perhaps knew him. A report to the Head, and gating for the next three or four half-holidays in consequence, would have played havoc with the junior cricket matches.

He waited. The footsteps came ringing on from the lane to the road, and in a glimmer of moonlight through the trees Tom caught a glimpse of a square-shouldered figure and a white moustache. He was glad that he had kept out of sight. The square shoulders and white moustache belonged to Major Stringer, a retired Indian veteran, who lived in the neighbourhood, and was reputed to be immensely rich and a grim old martinet. There was not the slightest doubt that, if Major Stringer had seen a St. Jim's fellow out of bounds at that hour, he would have felt it his duty to report the matter to the Head. Major Stringer had brought home with him from India the very strictest notions of discipline, and there were rumours in the village that he ruled his household with a rod of iron, as if they had been sepoy in his regiment.

Tom Merry was exceedingly glad to have escaped the sharp eye of the major—all the more because that sharp eye had been on his once on a certain occasion when—by accident—a tip-cat had come into contact with the major's silk hat, and severely damaged it.

He waited for the major to pass on. But the old gentleman paused in the road to light a cigar.

Tom Merry stood silent under the trees, squeezing against a trunk. He was not more than six feet from

the major, and he feared that the glimmer of the match might reveal his presence.

However, the match went out, and the scent of the cigar came to him, and the major moved on.

Then—so suddenly that it dazzled the junior—a gleam of light came from the blackness under the trees on the road towards Rylcombe.

The electric light flashed out, and shone on the startled face of the major, as it had shone on that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a quarter of an hour earlier.

Major Stringer started back, and the cigar dropped from his lips.

"Gad!" he ejaculated.

The light was instantly shut off.

At the same moment two shadowy forms leaped from the dark, sure of their victim now, and two strong pairs of hands grasped the startled major, and he went to the ground with a crash.

He uttered a startled cry as he went down, and began to struggle furiously.

"Footpads, by gad! Hah! Would you, you scoundrels?"

"Hold him, Bunny!" panted a hard voice.

A knee was planted on the major's chest, but the tough old soldier was not easily held. He grappled with his assailant, and the ruffian panted again:

"Bunny, you fool, club him—club him!"

Tom Merry had stood dazed, utterly taken aback by the startlingly sudden happening.

But as he heard the footpad's savage cry he ran forward.

One ruffian was kneeling on the major, striving hard to keep him down, and the other—the man called Bunny—was aiming a blow at the old soldier's head with a short, thick cudgel.

If that blow had fallen the major would have collapsed, stunned, if not killed, on the dim, starlit road.

Tom Merry sprang forward just in time.

"Stop, you villain!" he panted.

He fairly hurled himself at Bunny.

The ruffian, startled by his sudden appearance, missed his blow, and the cudgel barely grazed the major's head. The old gentleman uttered a cry of pain. But, with indomitable pluck, he struggled with the man who was holding him.

Bunny turned ferociously on Tom Merry.

His cudgel swept up for another blow, this time aimed at the junior, while the two men on the ground grappled and rolled over in conflict.

Tom Merry saw the blow coming, and tried to dodge it. He saved his head, but the cudgel crashed on his shoulder with stunning force.

The next instant his right, clenched and as hard as iron, caught Bunny on the chin in a terrific upper-cut.

The ruffian gasped, and toppled over backwards as if he had been shot.

Crash!

Tom Merry, one of the best athletes in the Lower School at St. Jim's, was a hard hitter, and he had put all his strength and all his weight into that terrific drive, and it had fairly doubled the ruffian up. The cudgel clattered in the road, and Bunny rolled over, groaning.

The pain in his left shoulder, where the cudgel had struck him, was bitter, but for the moment Tom Merry hardly noticed it.

He groped for the cudgel he had heard fall, and grasped it, and sprang towards the major and his assailant.

Crash!

The ruffian had got the old gentleman under again, and was kneeling on him and gripping his throat, when the cudgel came on his head with crashing force. Tom Merry was too excited to think or care how hard he was hitting. The footpad rolled over with a groan.

"By gad!" panted the major, sitting up dazedly. "Scoundrels! Ruffians! Penal servitude for this! Oh, my neck! Ow! Begad!"

Tom Merry reeled against a tree. His shoulder was hurt, and he almost fainted with the pain, but he still gripped the cudgel.

A light gleamed on the road.

Heavy footsteps came from the direction of the village.

"What's all this 'ere?"

It was the voice of Police-constable Crump.

Bunny made a sudden bound, and disappeared in the trees, and was heard a second later crashing through a hedge. But the other man lay where he had fallen, groaning. He was not in a state to move; the doughty blow on his head had more than half stunned him.

"Help! Police! Footpads! Gad!" gasped the major.

Tom Merry dropped the cudgel, and backed into the shadow of the trees.

Major Stringer did not want any more help, with his assailants disposed of so thoroughly and the policeman at his side.

Tom Merry remembered the danger of being recognised, and he was quick to take cover. There was a terrible ache in his shoulder. He had to clench his teeth to keep back the sound of pain that almost forced itself from his lips. Police-constable Crump flashed his lantern on the scene, and helped the major to his feet. Tom Merry, secure in the deep shadow of the trees beside the road, silent on the grass, ran for it.

He had acted gallantly, and he had run a deadly risk, and he was hurt, but the important matter at that moment was to get away unseen. For the assistance he had given to Major Stringer would not make any difference to the fact that he had been out of bounds at close on midnight—an act of which the Head would take a severe view if it came to his knowledge. Indeed, the danger he had been in would possibly increase the Head's anger, for the footpads might have attacked him if he had fallen in with them alone. It dawned on Tom's mind, in fact, that there were good reasons for keeping the school rules, apart from the fact that they were "rules."

He ran hard. The group in the road were between him and the village, and he had to scud away towards St. Jim's.

In a few minutes he was far beyond the reach of Police-constable Crump's lantern, and the sound of Mr. Crump's gruff voice had died away far behind.

Then Tom Merry halted.

The pain in his shoulder was intense, and it made him gasp. He stooped, and sat down in the grass beside the road, at a short distance from the school, and removed his jacket, and unfastened his shirt. Then he felt carefully over his shoulder. The cudgel had struck him a slanting blow, gliding off as it struck. He felt over the shoulder with his fingers, heedless of the pain a touch caused him, and gasped with relief as he ascertained that there were no bones broken. He could feel a bruise forming, and he knew that on the morrow his shoulder would be black as ink. But that was nothing in comparison with a serious injury. His left arm would be stiff for a day or two, that was all. It meant knocking off cricket for a few days.

There was no sound from the road. Mr. Crump had probably secured the fallen ruffian, and was taking him to the station. As for Bunny, he was probably a mile or more away by that time.

Tom Merry sat and rested.

His shoulder hurt him, though the pain was abating a little now, and he was not inclined to go down to the village now. He determined to wait where he was till Arthur Augustus came by, little dreaming, at the moment, that Arthur Augustus was already within the walls of St. Jim's. It had not occurred to him, naturally, that the swell of the Fourth had taken the shorter path home through the wood. As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus had been climbing the school wall at the very moment when Tom Merry had been tackling the footpads.

Midnight sounded from the clock-tower of St. Jim's, and the heavy strokes came dimly to the ears of the captain of the Shell. He rose to his feet, and looked anxiously down the road.

Where was D'Arcy?

"The blithering ass!" murmured Tom Merry. "He can't be staying in the village all this time. Where the dickens has he got to? Blessed if I'll wait any longer!"

With a dull, heavy ache in his shoulder, Tom started for the school. He could not repent that he had come out, considering the service he had rendered to the old major; but he was feeling extremely seedy and "rotten." It was with difficulty that he climbed the school wall.

All was dark and silent as he dropped into the quadrangle.

Suppressing a groan, the Shell fellow tramped silently across the quad, and made his way round the house. He climbed the outhouse, and just as he drew himself on the leads he heard a sudden sound.

Click!

It was the catch of the box-room window. It had been fastened, and he was shut out.

CHAPTER 6. Silence is Golden.

TOM MERRY grunted.

He dragged himself on the leads, and approached the box-room window.

He tried it, but it was fastened within. He had been only a few minutes behind whoever had entered—Mellish, doubtless. Or was it D'Arcy? It occurred to him for the first time that Arthur Augustus, not knowing, of course, that he was out, might have taken the short cut home.

Tom Merry tapped on the window, in a faint hope that the fellow who had gone in might be still in the box-room.

But there was no sound within.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Tom. "What rotten luck!"

He was shut out, but it was useless to stand there and bemoan his fate. That would not help.

He climbed on the window-sill, and opened his pocket-knife, and essayed to pass it between the sashes, to push back the catch.

Snap!

Br-r-r-r!

He opened the second blade, and started again, more carefully this time. Fortunately, this time he succeeded. There was a snap, but it was the snap of the catch as it sprang back.

With a breath of relief, he pushed up the sash, and tumbled into the box-room.

He closed the window, and paused. Before he fastened it, he wanted to know whether both Mellish and D'Arcy were indoors. Mellish, spy as he was, and cad generally, could not be left out all night; though it would be no more than he deserved.

Tom removed his boots, and, leaving the window unfastened, stole on tiptoe to the Fourth-Form dormitory and listened.

There was a murmur of voices in the dormitory.

He heard Mellish's snarling voice, and the stately tones of Arthur Augustus in response; and that was enough.

He glided away again to the box-room, and fastened the window. Both the Fourth-Formers were back in their dormitory, and that was all he wanted to know.

With aching shoulder, and his head almost dizzy with pain, he crept to his own dormitory, and entered silently. All he wanted now was to get to bed, to sleep.

There was no sound in the Shell dormitory save the steady breathing of the juniors.

Tom Merry slipped off his clothes swiftly, and turned in, and in spite of the ache in his shoulder he was asleep a couple of minutes after his head touched the pillow.

Neither did he wake again till the rising-bell was clanging out in the sunny summer morning.

Clang! Clang!

Tom Merry's eyes opened.

There was a dull ache in his shoulder, but most of the pain had gone; but his left arm was still painful, and he gave a little yelp as he moved it. Monty Lowther, already out of bed, looked at him with a grin.

"Turn out, slacker! What price that feed?"

"We'll jolly well talk to Gussy this morning," said Manners. "Of course, we knew there wouldn't be any feed, as it was left to Gussy. I suppose he slept like a top all night."

"Of course he did, the ass!" said Kangaroo.

Tom Merry grinned as he thought of the currency note still reposing in his pocket. He turned out of bed.

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Lowther, as Tom took the currency note from his pocket and held it up.

"The giddy note!"

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"But, Gussy——"

"He forgot the money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then he may have gone without it!" howled Glyn. "Ha, ha, ha! I wonder what Mrs. Murphy said to him if he woke her up at half-past eleven to ask for tuck on tick?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows hurried through their dressing. They were anxious to know how Arthur Augustus had fared; whether he had made the expedition, and what kind of reception Mrs. Murphy had given him, if he had.

No one in the Shell dormitory had any suspicion that Tom Merry, too, had been abroad that eventful night.

The captain of the Shell dressed without a word.

He had wisely decided to say nothing of his adventure with the footpads. He had a natural modest dislike to representing himself in a heroic light, but that was not his chief reason. But he knew that Major Stringer's mishap would be the talk of the neighbourhood. The major was a great man for a mile and a half, so to speak, and the attack upon him would cause any amount of excitement. The major would certainly mention that a boy had come to his help; and if the St. Jim's fellows knew that Tom Merry had been out, and had come home with a bruised shoulder—if, in fact, he allowed it to be known that it was he who had helped the major—the matter was certain to come to other ears.

The juniors could, of course, be depended on not to "sneak." But if so many fellows had known of Tom's share in the major's adventure there was not the slightest doubt that someone would have chattered incautiously.

And thanks from the old major for help rendered would not have compensated Tom Merry for a caning from the Head, and gating for half a dozen half-holidays.

Tom, apart from reasons of modesty, had a very natural dislike for coming into the limelight, under the circumstances.

He intended to confide the matter later, under a pledge of secrecy, to Manners and Lowther, his intimate chums. But there was no need at all for it to go further.

So he dressed in silence.

He was careful to keep his bruised shoulder out of view as he dressed. The Terrible Three left the dormitory unusually soon after rising-bell, and with them went Glyn and Dane and Kangaroo and Talbot and Gore, all eager to hear what Arthur Augustus had to say.

Monty Lowther threw open the door of the Fourth-Form dormitory. The Fourth-Formers were dressing, but none had gone down yet.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, half dressed, and wholly indignant, fixed a withering glare upon Tom Merry.

"You uttah ass!" was his greeting.

Tom stared.

"Hallo! What's the matter now?"

"You mucked up the whole thing, you fearful duffah!"

"I did!"

"Yaas, wathah! You uttably forgot to give me that wotten curweny note."

"You forgot to ask me for it, you mean."

"Weally, you clump——"

"You undertook to fetch the tuck," said Tom Merry.

"Naturally, it didn't occur to me that you would go without the tin."

"I wegar that as havin' acted like a howlin' idiot, Tom Mewry. I was tweeked with gwoss diawrespect by Mrs. Murphy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing whatever to cackle at. When I explained to that very suspicious old lady that I had forgotten to bring any money, she actually slammed the window shut——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

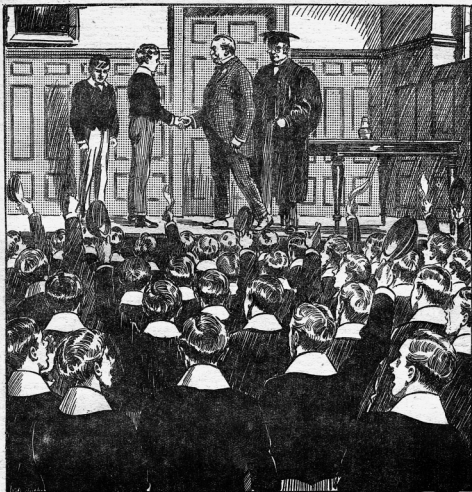
"And refused to open it again. I should wegar such conduct as simply brutal if Mrs. Murphy were a man. I had to come away empty-handed——"

"As well as empty-headed," said Monty Lowther sympathetically. "Poor old Gussy!"

"Weally, Lowthab——"

"And Mellish had all his trouble for nothing."

shuckled Blake.



Tom Merry winced as the old major gripped his hand with the grip of a vice. "Dr. Holmes, this boy is a credit to the school, by gad! His schoolfellows should be proud of him." "So we are, bal jove!" sang out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, no longer to be repressed. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellahs, I call for thrice wingin' checcahs for Tom Mewwy!" "Hurra! Hip-pip-hurray!" (See Chapter 14.)

"Mellish?" said Lowther. "What had Mellish to do with it?"

Blake grinned gleefully.

"He followed Gussy out. He got on to it that Gussy was going out, and he thought he was up to something, and spied on him—didn't you, Percy dear?"

"Go and eat coke!" growled Mellish.

"He never thought Gussy was going out for harmless and necessary tuck, of course," grinned Blake. "He thought he was going to the Green Man, perhaps. Did you think he was going to the Green Man, Mellish?" Mellish did not answer.

"Oh, my young friend, beware of inquisitiveness," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "My dear Mellish, I have observed this unpleasant trait in your character more than once." Lowther was imitating the solemn manner of Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. "Beware of it, Mellish. As you grow up—"

"Shut up, you silly idiot!" howled Mellish furiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beware of it," said Lowther. "As you grow up this disgusting trait in your character will grow also, unless you hold it in check while yet in your youth, my boy! Oh, make an effort while there is yet time!"

"You silly fathead!"

"It is for your own sake I speak, Mellish. I implore you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But that isn't the best," chuckled Blake. "The cream of it is that somebody shoved Mellish into a ditch, and he came home reeking. He thinks it was Gussy, but Gussy says it wasn't."

"It was!" howled Mellish.

Arthur Augustus laid down the collar he had been about to adjust.

"What did you say, Mellish?" he asked, with ominous quietness.

"I said it was you, you rotter!" growled Mellish.

Arthur Augustus crossed towards Mellish, who promptly dodged round his bed.

"I am sowwy, Mellish, but I have no resource but to give you a fearful thwashin'," remarked Arthur Augustus. "You have cast doubt upon my word."

Mellish jumped over a bed.

"Stop, you wottah!"

Mellish cleared another bed as Arthur Augustus rushed after him, and bolted for the door, with his jacket in one hand, and his necktie in the other. He disappeared down the passage.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was incapable of quitting the dormitory without a collar on, so Mellish escaped. The swell of St. Jim's finished his toilet with a frowning brow. The Shell fellows, after explaining—at full length—their opinion of Arthur Augustus and his manner of conducting an expedition, departed chuckling. It was agreed on all hands that it was precisely what might have been expected of Gussy, and, indeed, Blake declared that he was thankful it was no worse. Gussy might have been marched back into the dormitory with Mr. Carrington's hand on his shoulder, or the tuck might have been purchased and confiscated immediately afterwards. And, in fact, Blake went so far as to propose a vote of thanks to Gussy for having forgotten to take the currency note with him.

But Arthur Augustus did not stay for the vote of thanks. He marched out of the dormitory with his noble nose high in the air, leaving his comrades grinning.

CHAPTER 7.

Looking for the Culprit.

"SOMETHING'S up!" murmured Tom Merry, at the breakfast table.

It certainly looked like it.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was at the head of the table, and he was looking very thoughtful, and frowning. Mr. Lathom, at the Fourth-Form table, was looking worried. Knox, the prefect, and Kildare had been seen in consultation with the two masters. Mr. Carrington, the Housemaster, had also been speaking to them, and he wore a frown, as he sat at the senior table.

It was only too clear that "something was up" in the School House that morning. Tom Merry could not help wondering whether it had anything to do with the expedition of the previous night.

So far as Tom was aware, he had left no trace of his exit and entrance, and he had not breathed a word on the subject yet, even to Manners and Lowther.

Mellish, too, was generally keen enough to look after himself. Perhaps Arthur Augustus had given himself away somehow. But the swell of St. Jim's, who was quite satisfied with all his precautions, was quite easy in his mind.

After breakfast, when the School House fellows should have left the dining-room, Mr. Carrington ordered the Shell and the Fourth to remain, while the rest went out. The Form-masters also remained, and Kildare and Knox, the prefects. Fourth and Shell looked at one another apprehensively. If all their consciences had been perfectly clear there would have been nothing to dread, of course; but so many consciences could not possibly be clear all at once. It really was not to be expected.

As Monty Lowther had sapiently remarked, they were all human at times.

Fourth and Shell stood waiting for the chopper to come down, as they expressed it. Mr. Carrington was looking very severe. The Housemaster of the School House was generally very kind and genial, but he could be severe when severity was required—and he appeared to think that it was required now.

"Boys," said Mr. Carrington, "it has come to my knowledge that someone broke bounds last night after lights out in the junior dormitories."

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The juniors were silent. Everybody present knew that D'Arcy and Mellish had been out of bounds, but, naturally, nobody intended to say so.

"This is a very serious matter," said Mr. Carrington; "I have no choice but to investigate the matter carefully, and inflict condign punishment on the offender. I need not enlarge upon the seriousness of the offence." Silence.

"To break bounds at any time is a serious matter, but at night it is doubly serious, and I have no resource but to report the delinquent to the headmaster for a flogging."

"Oh!" murmured the juniors.

Mellish turned almost yellow. He had carefully hidden his muddy clothes, but he had a lurking fear that they might come to light. Tom Merry and D'Arcy were calm and self-possessed. They did not intend to give themselves away, of course, and they knew there would be no sneaking. They did not see anything to fear. Mr. Carrington was not tactless enough to question each boy separately; he had no desire to drive a boy into falsehood by unfair questioning. True, Tom Merry and D'Arcy would not have answered untruthfully in any case, but many fellows would have considered it justifiable if their Housemaster had taken an unfair advantage. But that was not Mr. Carrington's method.

"If the boy in question cares to come forward, I will do my best to make his punishment more lenient," said Mr. Carrington.

There were some sly smiles among the juniors. Nobody was likely to come forward for the pleasure of being flogged by the Head. The juniors were more likely to dodge that treat as long as they possibly could.

Mr. Carrington waited a minute for a reply, but none came.

"Excuse me, sir," said Monty Lowther, at last, in his blindest tone. "May I ask whether this is a certainty—this shocking circumstance, sir?"

Mr. Carrington looked at him.

"It is quite certain, Lowther. Traces of mud have been found, leading from the box-room along the dormitory passage. Some boy from either the Shell or the Fourth Form broke bounds last night, and came home in a very muddy state."

Mellish almost gasped.

"The matter will now be investigated," said Mr. Carrington. "You may go!"

The juniors went.

They gathered in the quadrangle to discuss the situation. In the School House Mr. Carrington and the Fourth-Formers and Kildare and Knox were investigating. Figgins & Co. of the New House came over to inquire the cause of the serious and sedate discussion. They found Mellish shaking his fist under Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's aristocratic nose.

"Weally, Mellish, I wepeat that you are mistaken," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally did not push you into the ditch!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Figgins.

"Flogging for somebody, if it comes out," said Blake dismally. "Gussy, of course!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gussy been putting his foot in it again?" said Kerr sympathetically.

"It's all Mellish's fault," said Arthur Augustus. "He followed me out to spy on me, and fell in a ditch, and left a lot of twaces when he came in, and Cawwington is on the twack."

"If I get bowled out, you'll get it as well as me, I know that!" said Mellish savagely.

"You are a sneaking wottah, Mellish!"

"Hard lines!" said Figgins. "But I'm really surprised at you, Gussy! What were you going on the tiles for?"

"You uttah aas, I was not goin' on the tiles! I went out to fetch in a feed from Mrs. Murphy's—"

"And forgot to take the money!" sneered Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then the feed hasn't come off," said Fatty Wynn. "I'll tell you what, you chaps—I'll manage it for you. It's simply awful now the tuckahop's closed, you know. I haven't had anything since breakfast."

"Nearly ten minutes!" grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bell rang for chapel, and the juniors proceeded to chapel, and then to morning lessons. The investigation was still proceeding, but apparently no discovery had been made. Morning lessons passed off without interruption.

When classes were dismissed there still came no announcement. Mellish's muddy "clobber" had evidently not been unearthed yet, and the cad of the Fourth was breathing a little more easily. At dinner the Form-masters were still looking very severe, but they had nothing to say about the escapade of the previous night. After dinner the Terrible Three sauntered out into the quadrangle. Tom Merry debated in his mind whether he should now confide his share in the matter to his two chums. He had no wish to keep it a secret from them, but it was safer for Manners and Lowther to know nothing till the investigation was over. Knowing nothing, they could say with a clear conscience that they knew nothing, if suspicion should turn in their direction.

Tom Merry was thinking the matter over when he gave a sudden jump. From the direction of the gates a man came striding towards the School House—a man with square shoulders, a white moustache, and a bronzed face.

"Hallo! What does old Stringer want?" remarked Lowther. "Hallo, hallo! Where are you off to?" he added, in amazement.

Tom Merry was scudding round the house. His chums followed him in astonishment. Major Stringer, without noticing the juniors, passed into the School House.

"What's biting you, Tommy?" demanded Lowther, as he ran the captain of the Shell down behind the gym.

"N-n-nothing!"

"What did you bolt for, you ass?"

"Did I bolt?" said Tom innocently.

"Yes, you did! Have you been falling foul of old Stringer?" asked Manners. "He can't have come to complain to the Head about you, I suppose?"

Tom chuckled.

"No, I shouldn't think so. Let's go and look at the cricket. Knox is batting, and I want cheering up."

So the Terrible Three went to look at Knox batting, which was always an amusing spectacle. A quarter of an hour later Tom Merry, who had his eye on the gates, was greatly relieved to see the old major depart. Major Stringer's visit might, of course, have had nothing to do with the happening of the previous night, but Tom had his doubts. And the thanks of the major for assistance rendered were of no especial value to him—weighed in the balance against the flogging Mr. Carrington had promised to whoever had broken bounds that night.

CHAPTER 8. Simply Amazing!

"D'ARCY!"

Study No. 6 were chatting under the elms, when Kildare bore down upon them. There was a somewhat peculiar expression on Kildare's handsome face, and the juniors were on their guard at once.

Blake nudged his chum as a warning to be careful, and Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on him inquiringly.

"Wow! What are you pokin' me in the wibs for, Blake, you ass?"

Blake murmured something indistinctly.

"Yaas, Kildare," said Arthur Augustus. "Anythin' wanted?"

"You're wanted," said Kildare.

"You'd like me to bowl for you?" asked D'Arcy diplomatically.

"You're wanted in the Head's study."

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I say, is anything up?" asked Blake.

Kildare smiled.

"D'Arcy's rubber shoes have been found," he said. "Perhaps D'Arcy will explain why his rubber shoes are dusty, and why were they hidden in his hat-box."

"Oh, deah! You don't mean to say that Cawwington

looked into my hat-box, Kildare? I should weally not have expected that of Cawwington."

The captain of St. Jim's laughed.

"You young ass, a prefect found them there! You are to go to the Head at once. But I don't think you need be alarmed. Dr. Holmes knows all about what happened last night, and there's nothing to be afraid of. But cut off at once."

"You see, deah boy, it was quite an innocent expedient," said Arthur Augustus. "I am suah Dr. Holmes would not suspect me of bweakin' bounds from any wotten motive. It was simply a question of tuck."

"Yes; go to the Head now."

"You see, the tuckshop bein' close, we—"

"Buzz off!"

"Yaas, certainly. Undah the cires, Kildare, you will see that— Pway don't take hold of my yah, Kildare; I am goin'!"

And D'Arcy went.

Blake and Herries and Digby accompanied him to the Head's door.

"Mind," said Blake, "if there's trouble, we're coming in; the old boy will go easier with a crowd of us, and we were really in it, too. It was only by chance that a howling idiot went out instead of one of us."

"Weally, you fathead—"

"Go in, ass!"

Arthur Augustus tapped at the Head's door and entered. Kildare's words had relieved him of some of his apprehensions, though after what Mr. Carrington had said that morning he did not quite see how the Head could take a lenient view of the matter.

To his surprise he found the Head looking very good-humoured. The Housemaster and Mr. Lathon were also in the study. They were looking very good-humoured too.

"Ah, it is you, D'Arcy!" said the Head benevolently.

"Yaas, sir. Kildare says you want to see me, sir."

"You were out of bounds last night."

"Ahem!"

"You need not hesitate to admit the fact, D'Arcy, as there is no longer a question of punishment, owing to what has occurred."

"I am vey glad to heah you say so, sir," said D'Arcy, greatly relieved, and immensely puzzled at the same time.

"You may be aware that Major Stringer has called," said the Head.

"No, sir, I was not awah of it," said Arthur Augustus, still more perplexed. What Major Stringer's call could possibly have to do with him he could not fathom.

"You admit that you were out of bounds last night, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir."

"Your motive—"

"I am suah, sir, that you would not attribute a wotten motive to me. I was simply goin' to the tuckshop."

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"You see, sir, Mrs. Taggles' shop bein' closed—"

"You can go to the shop in the village in the daytime, D'Arcy."

"But the wemittance didn't come till aftah lockin' up, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you introduced tuck, as you call it, into the school at a late hour last night?" exclaimed the Head.

"Oh, no, sir! That ass—I mean Tom Mewwy, forgot to give me the money, and I nevah thought of it till I was weally there, and so—"

Dr. Holmes suppressed a smile.

"So you had your journey for nothing?"

"Yaas, sir."

"Very well, D'Arcy, I accept your assurance that you had no worse motive in breaking bounds, but it is, nevertheless, a serious matter, and I should have administered a flogging had not other circumstances come to my knowledge."

"Oh!"

"But considering your conduct last night, D'Arcy, I feel that I have no resource but to pardon you."

"You are vey kind, sir."

"Major Stringer made a special request to that effect, and I did not see how I could refuse him."

"Majah Stwingah, sir!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. All Arthur Augustus knew of Major Stringer was that he was a grim-faced old martinet, with a reputation for hot temper and great severity. Why a stranger, and such a stranger, should have called on the Head to speak up for him was beyond the understanding of the swell of St. Jim's.

"So I have decided to pass the matter over, D'Arcy." "Thank you, sir. It was vevy kind of Majah Stwingah to speak up for me, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

"He judged correctly that I had capable of such gallant conduct could have had no bad motive for being out of bounds, even at so late an hour," said the Head. "I agree with him on that point. But it must not occur again, D'Arcy. This time you are pardoned, but if there should be any recurrence of this reckless conduct you will be severely punished."

"Yaas, sir." "Now you may go," said the Head. "Having, I hope, made you sensible of the seriousness of your fault, I will add that I am vevy pleased with your conduct last night, and I congratulate you."

"Bai Jove! I—I—I mean—I—" stammered Arthur Augustus, in utter confusion. "I—I—you are vevy kind, sir—but—"

"That will do, my boy," said the Head kindly. "You may go!"

"Yaas, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He left the study like a fellow in a dream. Blake & Co. awaited him with anxious looks.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Not licked?"

"No. Only feashfully surprised!"

"Well, the Head's a brick!" said Dig. "Come away before he changes his mind."

Arthur Augustus followed his chums into the quadrangle, in such a state of amazement that his eyes were almost bulging from his head. The news had spread that the swell of the Fourth had been spotted, and in the quadrangle he was surrounded by an inquiring crowd of juniors. Mellish was among them, grinning. Now that somebody had been spotted, the end of the Fourth felt quite safe—and he was quite assured that Arthur Augustus would not have given him away. The Terrible Three came over from the cricket-ground, and joined the crowd under the elms. They had just heard the news.

"Not licked?" exclaimed Tom Merry anxiously.

"No!"

"Lines?"

"No!"

"Anything?" demanded Monty

Lowther.

"Nothin'!"

"Well, my hat!"

"Only congratulations!" gasped

Arthur Augustus.

"Who-a-a-at!"

"The Head congratulated me on what I did last night," gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Unless I am dweamin', the Head must be off his wockah!"

"Well, my hat!"

And the juniors, as astounded as Arthur Augustus himself, stared blankly at the swell of St. Jim's. It was past D'Arcy's comprehension; and it was past theirs!

CHAPTER 9.

"Blake Makes a Discovery,

CONGRATULATED?" said

Blake.

"Yaas!"

"What for?"

"For what I did last night!"

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"Breaking bounds?" said Gore.

"Yaas!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"I suppose," said Arthur Augustus slowly—"I suppose I am not dweamin'? I presume that I shall not wake up presently in the dorm?"

"But—but Carrington said that the chap who had been breaking bounds would be flogged!" howled Lowther.

"Yaas, I know!"

"And you've been congratulated?"

"Yaas!"

"Well, this beats it!" said Blake.

"Beats it hollow!" said Tom Merry. "You're quite sure that you didn't dream that, Gussy?"

"Weally, Tom Mewvvy—"

"Well, if the Head congratulates a chap for breaking bounds, we can all please him that way," remarked Levison. "I'd break bounds every night, for that matter!"

"There must be some mistake, somehow," said Tom Merry. "What did the Head tell you he was congratulating you for, Gussy?"

"For my conduct last night. He said he was vevy pleased!"

"Pleased!" howled the juniors.

"Yaas!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"He said I had done wrong, and must not do it again, as I should not get off next time, and then he said he was vevy pleased with my conduct, and congratulated me!" said Arthur Augustus dazedly. "I cannot comprehend it. But Carrington and Latham were there, too, and they both looked vevy pleased, and nodded, you know, approval."

"Well, that takes the cake!" said Tom Merry, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "It simply beats the band! Still, you've got on the licking, that's something!"

"Yaas, I am vevy glad of that, of course, but I am vevy perplexed. It seems to me vevy mysterious!"

"As mysterious as a giddy novel!" said Lowther. "Of course, there wasn't any harm in it—but a chap wouldn't have expected the Head to be pleased!"

"And then Stwingah, too—"

"Major Stringer!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a start.

"What had he to do with it?"

"That is the most remarkable thing of all. It appears that he has called on the Head, and spoken up for me, and I do not even know the man, you know. I don't see how old Stwingah can have known that I was out of bounds last night. It is a vevy great mystery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry's eyes danced.

He understood now.

The major had not, of course, recognised his rescuer the previous night, in the darkness and the hurry, but he had known that he was a schoolboy—probably had seen the St. Jim's cap. He had guessed that his rescuer belonged to St. Jim's, or perhaps had simply called to ascertain whether he belonged there or not—and had told the Head the story.

It was for that rescue, of which Arthur Augustus was sublimely ignorant, that the swell of St. Jim's had been pardoned.

Tom Merry understood the mistake now.

But he did not explain the sudden burst of laughter which had drawn all eyes on him. He did not mean to explain. So long as that mystery remained a mystery, Arthur Augustus would not be flogged. The swell of St. Jim's, quite unconsciously, was getting the benefit of Tom Merry's action, and Tom was glad for him to get it.

FOR NEXT WEEK :

GRUNDY'S DOWNFALL!

Another Splendid Long,
Complete Story of
Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

—By—

MARTIN CLIFFORD,

Order in Advance.
PRICE ONE PENNY.

The captain of the Shell walked away towards the cricket-ground to escape questions, leaving the amazed juniors gathered round D'Arcy. Lowther dashed after him, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Tom—what—"

"Yow!" yelled Tom.

"What's the matter?"

"Yoop! Leggo my shoulder!" gasped Tom Merry, twisting himself away, his face quite pale with pain. It was his left shoulder that Monty Lowther had grasped.

Lowther stared at him blankly.

"What on earth's the matter? What's wrong with you?"

"Oh, dear!" groaned Tom Merry. "Oh! Ah! Yah! Oh! It's all right! Yow! Nothing the matter! Grook!"

"Anything wrong with your shoulder?"

"Well, I've got a liguise there," admitted Tom.

"How did you get it?"

"Got a knock!"

"Must be pretty bad for you to howl out like that," said Manners, who had come up. "How did you do it?"

"I didn't do it," said Tom Merry; "and it's a dead secret—not for you chaps, but it's got to be kept dark, or Gussy will get his flogging after all. Come with me, and I will a tale unfold."

The astounded Shell fellows followed him. Out of hearing of any curious person, Tom proceeded to explain.

"I was out last night," he explained. "I remembered the note, and went after Gussy. I didn't find him—and the note's still in my pocket." And in a few words Tom gave an account of the exciting encounter with Major Stringer and the footpads. "Mind, it's got to be kept dark. Stringer's told the Head, and as Gussy was out of bounds, the Head's jumped to the conclusion that it was Gussy who helped old Stringer out of his fix—"

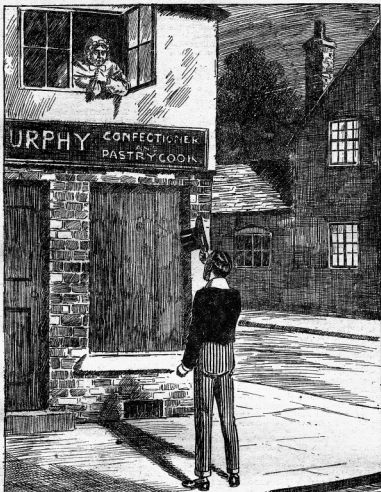
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a mistake, but it's got Gussy off the licking," said Tom. "No need to say a word—see?"

"And Gussy is getting all your giddy kudos," said Manners.

"Oh, blow the kudos!"

"True heroes are always modest," said Lowther solemnly. "Thomas, I commend your conduct."



Arthur Augustus stepped back, and looked up, and raised his cap politely to Mrs. Murphy. "Pwaw excuse me, Mrs. Murphy—" "Master Darcy!" exclaimed the good dame, in astonishment, "What are you doing out of your school at this time of night?" (See Chapter 4.)

"Don't be a fathead, old chap!"

"And your shoulder's hurt, is it?"

"Black as ink this morning," said Tom ruefully. "That ruffian gave me an awful wallop there with his club. But it doesn't hurt much now, excepting when a silly ass shoves a silly paw on it!"

"Well, you fathead, you should have told me!"

"I've been going to tell you," said Tom. "But mind it's kept dark now. If the Head knew, Gussy would get his licking all the same."

And it was agreed that Tom's adventure should be kept a dead secret. Tom Merry hoped that the matter would end there and then. But the matter was far from ending. After lessons that afternoon, Blake went down to the village tuck-shop on his bike; and he did not forget to take the currency note with him. When he returned, plenty reigned in Tom Merry's study. Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three gathered to the feed that

had been so long delayed, and Figgins & Co. of the New House honoured it with their presence, and several other fellows—most of them still interested and puzzled by the queer incident of the Head's congratulations to D'Arcy. Blake had brought back a paper from the village—the local paper, which was published that day. And there was news in that paper.

"They were chattering about it in Mrs. Murphy's shop, so I got the paper," Blake explained. "It's about old Stringer—and Gussy."

"Bai Jove! About me, deah boy?"

"Yes, you secretive young villain!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You deceitful, prevaricating—"

"What?"

"He's been taking us in," said Blake, with a sorrowful shake of the head. "I should never have believed it of Gussy! Taking in his old pals!"

"I uttably fail to understand you, Blake."

"Slush! Don't add fuel to the fire," said Blake chidingly. "Don't add the sins of a Berlin journalist to those of an Ananias. Gussy, I am shocked at you!"

"You uttah ass—"

"If I did not put it down to your celebrated modesty, Gussy, I should punch your head for keeping it dark," said Blake.

D'Arcy gazed at him in utter astonishment.

"I pwesume you are jokin'," he remarked, at last.

"Do you mean to say you're still keeping it up?" roared Blake. "I tell you it's in the paper."

"Bai Jove! What's in the paper?"

"About the gallant rescue."

"You are speakin' in widdles, deah boy."

"What the giddy dickens are you driving at, anyway?" asked Figgins.

"Listen, my children!" said Blake.

And even the succulent feed was forgotten as Blake proceeded to read out a paragraph in the "Hylcombe Gazette." The paragraph was somewhat long-winded, but the information it contained was to the effect that Major Stringer, a well-known and highly-respected resident in the neighbourhood, had been attacked by a couple of footpads directly after leaving Glyn House the previous night. He would have been undoubtedly seriously maltreated and robbed but for the prompt aid rendered by a schoolboy, whose name was at present unknown, but who was supposed to belong to St. James's School, that celebrated scholastic foundation in the vicinity of Hylcombe. One of the footpads was under arrest, the other had, for the moment, eluded Police-constable Crump.

"There!" said Blake. "That's why old Stringer came here; that's why the Head pardoned our prize ass and congratulated him! And the cheeky duffer kept it up to us that he didn't understand—wasn't going to tell us about it, by gum! Now, Gussy, you Ananias, you Prussian, you journalist, you war-correspondent, what have you got to say?"

CHAPTER 10.

Not Gussy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY had nothing to say. He was dumb.

His astonishment was so great that he stood with his mouth open, gasping like a fish newly landed.

"Well!" said half a dozen voices in chorus.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, at last. "This is astonishin'."

"Why didn't you tell us?" demanded Herries.

"Blessed modesty—hiding his giddy light under a giddy bushel!" said Digby.

"Blessed cheek!" said Blake.

"Spare his blushes!" murmured Kerr. "Modesty, thy name is Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rubbed his noble nose thoughtfully. All eyes were upon him.

"This really beats the band!" said D'Arcy. "I should nevah have supposed that Mellish would do a thing like that."

"Mellish?" said Blake.

"Yass, it must have been Mellish—he was the only othah fellah out of bounds, you know."

"Wasn't it you?" howled Blake.

"Wathah not? I nevah heard of it till this minute," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose old Stwingah didn't see the chap cleanly in the dark, and he is wathah an old duffah, anyway."

"It—it wasn't you?"

"Certainly not. Appawntly the Head thinks it was me, as it was found that I was out of bounds, owing to a pywin' boundah findin' my wabbah shoes in my hat-box."

The Terrible Three were silent. They alone possessed the key to the mystery.

"But—but it can't have been Mellish did it," said Blake. "Mellish would have bunked if there'd been any danger. He's a funk. Besides, if he did a plucky thing like that, he'd let all St. Jim's know about it."

"Yass, it certainly seems vewwy odd if it was Mellish; but it was certainly not me. I wathah think I came on those footpads, though—there were two wuffians lurkin in the lane, and I passed them, near the woad up to your house, Glyn."

"Why didn't you arrest them, and give them in charge?" asked Bernard Glyn, with great solemnity.

"Weally, I could not vewwy well seize two hulkin' wuffians—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you are wottin', you wottah! Besides, I didn't know they were waitin' there for anybody; I thought they were two twamps, and I came home anothah way, so as not to wun into them again. I suppose it was aftah that they tackled the old majah. If I had been there, of course I should have wushed to the wescue like anythin'. But, as it happens, I wasn't there, so, of course, I had no opportunity of wushin' to the wescue. The Head is labahin' undah an erwah."

"Jolly lucky error for you," said Fatty Wynn. "You were going to get a flogging."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Wynn.

"Weally, Wynn," he said, in his most stately manner, "I twust you do not think I am goin' to leave the Head labahin' undah that erwah."

"Least said, soonest mended," said Blake.

"I cannot possibly consent to takin' the credit for a brave action that I have not committed—I mean, performed, deah boy."

"You want to be flogged, fathead!"

"Wats! I wufuse to appeah under false colours—"

"Pass the jam!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Give him a bun and shut him up!" said Blake.

"I will have a bun, but I will not shut up. It is my duty to acquaint the Head with the fact that I am not the heowic wescuah."

"Rubbish!" said Blake. "You were the heroic rescuer right enough. You do these noble deeds without noticing it, you know. A D'Arcy never does anything like a common mortal. You rescued the major, and then forgot all about it!"

"Impos, deah boy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are going to persist in wottin', you wottahs —"

"We are going to have tea," said Tom Merry. "Pile in, Gussy!"

"Vewwy good, deah boy; but aftah tea—"

"Sufficient for the tea-time is the feed thereof," said Monty Lowther. "After tea, Blake, you'd better chain him up in the study. Herries will lend you Towser's chain."

"Certainly!" said Herries heartily.

"You uttah asses—"

"But who the dickens could have done it, if Gussy didn't?" exclaimed Figgins. "None of us were out. It's the sort of thing a New House chap would do, but we were in bed. But I'll bet Gussy's Sunday topper that it wasn't Mellish."

"Mellish came home rather a wreck, though," said Digby. "Somebody had pitched him into a ditch. He said it was Gussy."

"It wasn't Mellish," growled Blake. "Mellish would have bolted. Perhaps he did bolt, and fell into the ditch. It's lucky for Mellish, too, that our giddy prefects ain't up to the form of Sherlock Holmes. They found that somebody had been out of bounds by the mud in the box-room and the passage, and they found it was Gussy because of his dusty rubber shoes. It hasn't occurred to their mighty brains that Gussy's shoes, having only dust on them, couldn't have left the mud in the passage."

"I'll bet you Knox gets on to it," said Tom Merry. "Knox is looking into the matter, and he's awfully sharp. If he finds Mellish's clobber, Mellish will be in for it."

"Unless he turns out to be the hero!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's that about Mellish?" asked the owner of that name, looking into the study.

"Trot in!" said Blake. "All heroes are welcome! Mellish, old man, did you rescue the major last night?"

"What major?" asked Mellish, in astonishment.

"Ha, ha! There's only one major been rescued. Read that!"

Percy Mellish read the paragraph in the paper. A peculiar look came over his face as he read it. All eyes were upon Mellish's face. Nobody thought for a moment that he was the unknown hero, but they were wondering whether he would lay claim to the distinction.

"Old Stringer must have thought it was D'Arcy," he remarked, at last.

"Gussy says it wasn't—was it Gussy? Gussy! Where's that blessed ass got to?" exclaimed Blake, jumping up.

Arthur Augustus had slipped quietly out of the study.

"Gussy!" shouted Blake.

No reply.

"If he's gone to the Head I'll—I'll—I'll——" Blake did not finish. He rushed down the passage after the vanished swell of the Fourth.

But Arthur Augustus was gone.

At that very moment he was tapping at the door of the Head's study.

CHAPTER 11. D'Arcy Does His Duty.

"**C**OME in!" Dr. Holmes gave the swell of St. Jim's a kindly glance as he entered. The Head was standing by the telephone.

"If you please, sir——"

"One moment, D'Arcy; Major Stringer is speaking to me on the telephone. He desires to be informed if I have yet discovered the name of the boy who rendered him no signal a service, and I am very glad to be able to——"

"Dr. Holmes——"

The Head made him a gesture to be silent.

"I must speak, sir."

"D'Arcy!"

"I'm not the chap, sir!"

"What!"

"I undahstand, sir, that you are undah the impression that I wessued Majah Stwingah from the footpads last night?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"Well, I didn't, sir!"

Dr. Holmes lowered the receiver, and looked blankly at the flushed, excited face of Arthur Augustus.

"I fail to understand you, D'Arcy."

"I am twyin' to explain, sir!"

"Do you mean to tell me that it was not you who rendered assistance to Major Stringer last night?" exclaimed the Head sternly.

"Yaas, sir!"

"Bless my soul! You have, then, come here to undecieve me!"

"Yaas, sir!"

"And why did you, not do so before?" exclaimed the Head sharply. "You are aware that I pardoned your fault because of your supposed act of courage, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir; but I was not awah of it then. I was verry much surprised when you let me off, and I did not see

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what Majah Stwingah had to do with it. But I have just seen it in the paper, sir, and so I have found out that you were labahin' undah a misapprehension."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"As I do not wish, sir," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "to claim the cweedit of an action I did not perform, I felt it my duty to come and tell you."

"Oh!"

"I had not the faintest ideah that anythin' had happened to Majah Stwingah, and I did not know that I was supposed to have wessued him, sir."

"Then why did you suppose that I told you I was pleased with your conduct?" exclaimed the Head.

"I weally could not imagine, sir."

"Why did you suppose that I congratulated you?"

"I could not account for it, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

There was silence in the study. Dr. Holmes coloured a little. He seemed to have forgotten that the major was still on the telephone. He gazed at the swell of St. Jim's at a loss for words.

A sharp buzz on the bell reminded him of the major. He raised the receiver again.

"No, major," he said into the receiver. "I am sorry to say that the boy is not yet known. I shall, however, pursue my inquiries, and I will inform you. Yes—yes—I understand that you would like to see him—quite so; a very brave action—I agree with you, a credit to the school—oh, quite so!—I will certainly inform you—good-bye!"

Dr. Holmes hung up the receiver. Then he fixed his eyes upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy again.

"I am glad you have come to me, D'Arcy," he said; after a pause. "May I ask what is your precise object in coming and telling me this?"

"I could not consent to weceive the cweedit for what I had not done, sir," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Quite right and proper—very right and proper," said the Head. "But you are aware that, as you did not perform the action for the sake of which I pardoned you, you are still liable to be punished for your transgression of the laws of the school in breaking bounds last night."

"I am awah of that, sir!"

"Ahem!" said the Head. "H'm! H'm!"

There was another pause.

"Having pardoned you once, D'Arcy, although under a misapprehension, I do not feel justified in rescinding my pardon," he said; "all the more, as I am convinced that your object in breaking bounds was not an unworthy one."

"Thank you, sir! But I do not wish to take advantage of an ewrah, sir," said Arthur Augustus nobly. "Pway, do as you think best, sir!"

The Head coughed.

"I am not likely to do otherwise, D'Arcy."

"Yass; quite so, sir."

"However, instead of the severe caning I should have administered in the first place, I shall merely give you an imposition."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You will take five hundred lines, and you will stay in on Saturday afternoon to write them out," said the Head.

"Now you may go."

"Very well, sir!"

There was a knock at the door, and Knox the prefect came in. The bully of the Sixth was looking elated, and Arthur Augustus did not need telling that he had made some discovery that would be uncomfortable for somebody.

"What is it, Knox?" asked the Head.

"I have discovered that another junior was out of bounds last night, sir," said the prefect.

"Ah, from what I have just learned, I concluded as much," said Dr. Holmes. "But you are sure of the fact, Knox?"

"Quite sure, sir! It occurred to me to examine the shoes belonging to D'Arcy, and I found that they were merely dusty, with no traces of mud on them. It was, however, the traces of wet mud in the box-room and the passage which caused me in the first place to call Mr. Carrington's attention to the matter. I have, therefore, made a further investigation, and I am informed that the boots of another boy in the Fourth were noticed to be very wet and muddy by the boot-boy, so wet, in fact, that this morning the boy in question put on a different pair. They were the boots of Mellish of the Fourth."

Arthur Augustus was passing out of the study slowly, for he was interested in Knox's discovery, having the amiable desire to put Knox's new victim on his guard. As soon as he heard Mellish's name, however, he went down the passage with a rush.

He arrived breathless in Tom Merry's study, whither Blake had returned disappointed from his pursuit.

"Mellish heah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, panting.

"I'm here," said Mellish. "What's up?"

"You're bowled out, deah boy!"

Mellish gave him a furious look.

"You've given me away!"

"Why, you uttah wottah—"

"Shut up, you cad!" said Tom Merry. "You know that D'Arcy would do nothing of the kind."

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Then how am I bowled out?" said Mellish sullenly.

"Knox has been spyin' as usual. He's found out that your boots were wet this mornin', and he puts the mud down to you."

"It was bound to come out," said Blake sagely. "Have you owned up that you are not the hero, fathead?"

"Yass, wathah!"

"And what's the verdict?"

"Gated on Saturday, and five hundred lines, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "It's weally enough to discourage a chap from ownin' 'up, isn't it? However, the Head drowped the canin'—he weally couldn't do less undah the circe."

"Then there's a hero's job vacant," remarked Monty Lowther. "The best thing you can do, Mellish, is to turn out to be the missing hero."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish's eyes glistened.

"I hawwied heah to warn Mellish that Knox was on the track," said Arthur Augustus. "The beast will be down on you soon, deah boy, askin' questions. You had better own up."

"Oh, rats!" growled Mellish uneasily.

"It won't be a floggin'—the Head can't vewy well give you worse than he's given me, for the same bizney, you know."

"Do you think I want five hundred lines and a gating?" howled Mellish.

"I twust you will tell the twutts, deah boy. Besides bein' more honourable, it is weally safah in the long run."

"Errrrrr!"

"Cave!" murmured Blake. "Here comes the Knox-bird."

Knox of the Sixth strode into the study.

CHAPTER 12.

Percy Mellish—Hero!

TOM MERRY & CO. greeted Knox with a grim silence. They were on the worst of terms with the bully of the Sixth. But Knox had not come there for the Co. He had been looking for Mellish, and learned that that estimable junior was in Tom Merry's study.

"So you're here, Mellish," he said grimly.

"What's wanted?" said Mellish sullenly.

"You are," said Knox. "You were out of bounds last night."

"It's a lie!"

"You deny it?" demanded the prefect.

"Yes," said Mellish desperately.

The juniors in the study did not speak a word. It was not their business to betray the wretched cad of the Fourth, much as his falsehood disgusted them. Knox's lip curled.

"Then how is it your boots were soaked with water this morning," he asked—"soaked with water and smothered with mud?"

"I—I don't know!" stammered Mellish.

Knox grinned.

"Are you wearing your usual clothes to-day?" he asked.

"Yes."

"There isn't any mud on them," said the prefect, scanning him from head to foot, "and they look cleaner altogether than a fag's everyday clothes. You may as well own up that you've got your Sunday Etoms on, Mellish."

"I—I haven't."

"Very well. Come to the dormitory and show them to me."

Mellish did not move.

"You must have got smothered last night, from what I hear about your boots," said Knox. "I've seen the boots, too—they're still damp. You may have been in water—in a ditch, perhaps. I expect-I shall find your clothes, those you wore yesterday, in a mucky state. Anyway, we'll see. Come to the dorm with me."

Mellish remained where he was.

"You hear me, Mellish. The Head has sent for you, but if you deny that you were out of bounds, I mean to take proofs along with me. Come with me."

As the dismayed Mellish still did not move, the bully of the Sixth gripped his collar and led him out of the study.

Mellish was led to the dormitory, where he was forced to unlock his box, in which reposed the clothes he had worn the previous night. Mellish had cleaned them as well as he could, but they still showed plain enough traces of his misadventure, and they were still reeking with damp. Knox grinned as he examined them. He was sure of his victim now.

"You still deny that you were out last night?" he asked.

Mellish was silent.

"Come to the Head."

The cad of the Fourth, still silent, followed Knox to the Head's study. His face was desperate. The proofs against him were undeniable, and he was by no means

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sure of getting off so cheaply as Arthur Augustus had done. For the good reputation of Arthur Augustus stood him in good stead, while Percy Mellish's reputation was of the worst. He had been punished more than once for smoking, and he had been cautioned severely for being seen in conversation with some of the disreputable habitués of the Green Man in Rylcombe. He would have to prove that he had not broken bounds with a rascally motive. A fellow had been expelled from St. Jim's for nightly visits to the Green Man, and Mellish's conscience was not clean.

He was inwardly quaking as he followed Knox to the Head's study, and he quaked still more as he entered that dread apartment.

"Here is Mellish, sir," said Knox, greatly elated by the success with which he was fulfilling the duties of a zealous prefect. "I have found the clearest proof that he was out of bounds last night. The clothes he wore yesterday are hidden in his box, muddy and wet. He refuses to explain to me how they came into that state, but—"

"You will explain to me, Mellish?" said the Head grimly.

Mellish's teeth chattered.

"You were out of bounds, Mellish?"

"I—I—I—"

"Yes or no?"

"I—I thought—I— followed D'Arcy out, sir! I—I was afraid he might come to some harm, sir!" stammered Mellish. "I—I hope you'll excuse me, sir, because—because if I hadn't been there, Major Stringer might—might have been badly hurt, sir."

Dr. Holmes looked at him very hard. Percy Mellish looked like anything but a hero at that moment, certainly; but it was evident that that was what he was claiming to be.

"It was you, Mellish, who rendered assistance to Major Stringer?"

"Yes, sir."

Knox breathed hard, through his nose. He knew Mellish better than the Head did, and he did not believe the statement for a moment.

But the Head could not doubt. Major Stringer had informed him that he was certain that it was a St. Jim's junior who had helped him. He had recognised the badge on his rescuer's cap in the moonlight. And as the heroic rescuer was not Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, it was evidently Mellish—unless there had been a third junior out of bounds at the same time.

"I—I am sorry I went out, sir," mumbled Mellish. "I—I was really anxious about D'Arcy, sir. I—I thought there might be footpads about, or something. I—I fell into a ditch coming home."

"Why did you not make yourself known to Major Stringer?"

"I—I was afraid to, sir. I—I— Mellish had to think before he answered. "I—I—I was out of bounds, sir, and—"

"I understand. Have you mentioned this to anyone among your schoolfellows?"

"No, sir."

"You have kept it a secret?"

"N—not exactly a secret, sir, but—but I didn't want to seem to be boasting, sir. It—it wasn't much I did."

"Major Stringer tells me that you saved him from very serious injury, and he was afraid that you had been hurt in the struggle," said the Head.

"I—I wasn't hurt, sir. Only—only I fell into the ditch coming home. I—I was in a hurry—"

"Very well, Mellish. I shall pardon your escapade, in view of your very brave action," said the Head. "I congratulate you on the courage you have shown."

"Thank you, sir!" said Mellish, regaining confidence now. "Of—of course, I couldn't see them pitching into him without lending a hand, sir."

"It was very courageous. You might have received serious injury yourself. You may go, Mellish."

Mellish was glad to go.

Dr. Holmes went to the telephone at once and rang up the major. In a few minutes more Major Stringer was acquainted with the name of his heroic rescuer.

CHAPTER 13.

In the Limelight.

"MELLISH!"

"By gum!"

"Come off!"

"Tell us another!"

Such were the remarks of the School House juniors when the story of Percy Mellish's heroic conduct came to light.

The news excited quite a sensation.

The most astounded of all was Tom Merry. But Tom held his tongue. He did not desire to reap any laurels, and he knew that it would be serious for Mellish if it came out that he had deliberately deceived the Head. Manners and Lowther were wrathful, and inclined to give away the wretched cad of the Fourth. But Tom Merry held them to their pledge of secrecy.

"He would get it in the neck if the Head knew his leg had been pulled," said Tom. "Tain't our bizney to show him up. Besides—"

"Besides what?" growled Lowther.

Tom laughed.

"I couldn't prove it," he said. "It would be a rival claim, and Mellish has made his claim first. And I'm jolly well not going to compete with Mellish for honour and glory."

"But it was you, wasn't it?" howled Manners.

"Yes; but Mellish would say it wasn't. He would have to stick to his yarn now. No good making him pile up a mountain of lies. He's told enough already. Least said soonest mended."

So the Terrible Three held their peace.

But the other fellows, in spite of the incredulity with which they received the news at first, simply had to believe it. For Mr. Lathom shook hands with Mellish before all the Fourth Form, and congratulated him on his pluck.

Mellish smirked modestly, and declared that any fellow would have done it.

The fellows were astounded, but they had to be convinced. Mellish had been pardoned for breaking bounds on account of his heroic conduct. Mellish was the hitherto hidden hero. And all his Form-fellows could say was, "Who'd have thought it?"

Certainly nobody who knew Mellish would have thought it. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sapiently remarked that you never knew, and he, for one, was determined to do full justice to a fellow who had thus shown his quality so unexpectedly.

Mellish, the hero, basked in an unusual limelight.

Whoever had tackled those two hulking ruffians to help the major was undoubtedly a hero, so Percy was a hero. He enjoyed his novel position. That evening he was the lion of the School House. New House fellows came over to have a look at the hero. Percy Mellish was the cynosure of all eyes.

In the common-room that evening Arthur Augustus paid him a graceful tribute in his graceful manner.

"I am sorry for some of the remarks I have made to you, Mellish, dear boy," he said. "I never thought you were such a plucky chap. I am sorry to say that I have always regarded you as a wank outside."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you would not cackle, dear boys, when I am apologising to Mellish. I have always considered you a rotten funk, Mellish!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And a regular wastah, you know!"

"You silly ass!" howled Mellish. Arthur Augustus's manner of apologising did not seem to be to his taste, somehow.

"Weally, Mellish, I am expressin' my regret. Aftah what you have done I am quite sorry that I have looked upon you as an uttah wascal!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I refuse to shut up till I have finished apologis'in', Mellish! Aftah the remarkable discovery that you are not an out-and-out wottah, I—"

Mellish stamped away.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Mellish may be a bewo, but his mannaahs leave vevy much to be desiahed. It is weally not polite to walk away when a fellah is

apologian'. And I uttably fail, Blake, to see any reason for your wibald mewment."

That evening Mellish enjoyed himself. He liked the limelight, all the more perhaps because he rarely had any of it. He was complimented on all sides. Knox the prefect was still doubtful, but Kildare and Darrel of the Sixth both told him that he was a plucky kid, and Mellish grinned and smirked. The Terrible Three, naturally, had nothing to say to him on the subject, though they watched him very curiously.

How any fellow could sail under false colours and bag the credit that was due to somebody else in that manner was a puzzle to Tom Merry. But Percy Mellish seemed to have no scruples about it. The next morning Mellish was still an object of general interest. His study-mate Levison joined him in the quad when the Fourth went out from breakfast. Levison was a very keen youth, and he had the strongest doubts on the subject.

"You've surprised us all, Percy, old man," he remarked.

Mellish looked at him loftily.

"I don't see anything to be so jolly surprised about," he said. "I suppose I couldn't let old Stringer be gartored without chipping in, could I?"

"Well, it was risky," said Levison, eyeing him narrowly.

"I didn't stop to think of the risk."

"Yes; that's jolly queer."

"What's jolly queer?" growled Mellish.

"That you didn't stop to think of the risk," grinned Levison. "Generally speaking, that's the very first thing you would have thought of. A fellow might almost suspect that you were humbugging—"

"Look here, Levison—"

"Only, if you were, it would come out who the real giddy hero was," remarked Levison. "I can't find that anybody else was out of bounds that night."

"So you've been inquiring?" sneered Mellish.

"Yes, rather! Why not? But nobody seems to have been out, and old Stringer seems sure it was a St. Jim's chap that helped him. He might have been mistaken, and it might be one of the Grammar School chaps—if, of course, it wasn't you—and the facts might come out yet."

Mellish's jaw dropped.

That possibility had not occurred to him. But now that Levison pointed it out it gave him a throb of uneasiness. Levison grinned at the expression on his face.

"What's the matter, Percy?" he asked.

"Nothing," grunted Mellish.

"If you were the chap you're all serene," grinned Levison. "But if you were not I advise you to be careful. Old Skeat is rather keen, you know."

"Inspector Skeat?"

"Yes. He will be down here to see you about it to-day, you know."

"Why should he want to see me?" asked Mellish.

"You evidence will be wanted! They've caught one of the footpads, you know, and you'll have to appear as a witness."

"Good heavens!"

Mellish almost staggered. He had not thought of that either. Levison burst into a laugh.

The bell rang for morning classes, and Mellish went into the Horn-room. He went with a troubled brow. He was very thoughtful indeed that morning, and it was only too clear that the "eclat" that had fallen to his lot was no longer a source of enjoyment.

After morning lessons, when the juniors were coming out of the School House, Jack Blake uttered a sudden ejaculation, and clapped Mellish on the shoulder.

"Here he comes, Mellish!"

Mellish jumped.

"Eh? Who? What—?"

He et-erol round in terror of seeing Inspector Skeat or P.C. Clump from Rylcombe. A square-shouldered man was stiding across the quad towards the house. It was Major Stringer.

"He's come to thank you, Mellish," said Blake. "What are you looking so scared for? He won't eat you."

"He's not so savage as he looks," said Digby. "Stand up to him, Mellish. What are you dodging away for?"

"I—I—I—" faltered Mellish.

"Modesty thy name is Mellish!" grinned Levison. "Spare his blushes! Let him get out of sight!"

Mellish backed into the house. He did not want to meet the grim-faced, steely-eyed old major—far from it. Major Stringer strode into the house without glancing at Mellish in the hall, but he halted suddenly as the Terrible Three came down the passage.

"Ugh!" said the major.

The chums of the Shell stopped, and Tom Merry made a strategic movement in retreat. The major waved his hand to him.

"Come here!" he shouted. "You—I mean—you—what's your name—what? I want to speak to you!"

His gesture indicated Tom Merry, but Tom affected not to understand. The major remembered the name the Head had given him on the telephone, and hailed Tom by name, not his own name.

"Here, Mellish! Do you hear me, Mellish?"

"He's recognised you, you ass!" whispered Monty Lowther. "And he thinks your name is Mellish!"

Tom Merry did not reply. He backed round the nearest corner, and the major, looking surprised and a little angry, shouted the name again.

"Master Mellish! Come here, I tell you, begad!"

"Here's Mellish, sir!" chortled Blake.

Major Stringer stared at him.

"Eh—what?"

"Come on, Mellish!"

Study No. 6 dragged Percy Mellish forward. Mellish's modesty seemed to them absurd, and there was no reason why he shouldn't receive the thanks of the old gentleman he had so bravely rescued. Mellish did not look or feel like a hero at that moment. He was only longing to escape. But there was no escape for him. A crowd of fellows had gathered round, ready to cheer the hero; they were quite prepared to do Mellish justice. But, as it happened, justice was the very last thing Mellish wanted at that moment.

"Heah he is, sir—heah's the hewo!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't w'iggle, Mellish. The majah wishes to thank you for your hewic conduct. Heah he is, sir!"

CHAPTER 14.

The Hero!

MAJOR STRINGER stared at Mellish.

After a long stare he adjusted an eyeglass in his steely old eye, and stared again, with a stare that seemed almost to bore a hole in the unhappy junior.

"Who's this?" rapped out the major.

"Mellish, sir," said Blake

"Nonsense!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Another boy of the same name perhaps," said the major. "I have called to see the boy who helped me the night before last—that boy I called to."

"Eh! This is the chap, sir," said Blake, in astonishment. "This is Mellish, sir. He is the chap who did the trick, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bosh!" said the major, twisting his white moustache impatiently. "Rubbish!"

And the major strode on, and went to the Head's study. The juniors remained in a state of amazement.

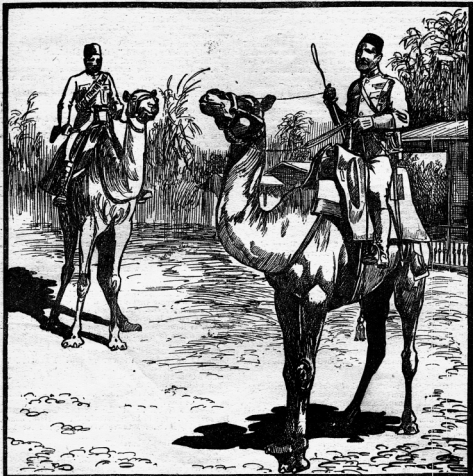
"Well, I call that ungrateful," said Blake, with a whistle. "I thought he was going to make Mellish a speech, or something."

"Yaas, wathah! I cinsidah his conduct vewy remarkable!"

"I—I don't want any fuss!" gasped Mellish. "Let me alone, confound you! I don't want the old donkey to thank me!"

"Affah his vewy remarkable conduct, Mellish, I advise you to take no furthah notice of him," said Arthur Augustus.

Mellish would have been only too glad to take D'Arcy's good advice. He scuttled out into the quadrangle,



To all parts of the globe the call of the Empire has penetrated; and the loyal Egyptian troops are holding themselves in readiness to throw in their lot with the Allies. At present, many of them, mounted on their faithful camels, are keeping strict watch and ward on the banks of the Suez Canal.

hoping fervently that he would be able to take no further notice of the major, and that the major would take no further notice of him.

But Major Stringer had called on business. He was a very determined old gentleman. He was there to find the junior who had so bravely helped him against the footpads, and he meant to find him. The Head was expecting him, and, after greeting the major, he rang for Toby, and sent him for Mellish.

The unhappy hero was a long time coming. Toby had to look for him for at least ten minutes before he found him. When he received the Head's message Mellish groaned. But there was no help for it, and, with slow and faltering steps, the hero of the Fourth took his way to the Head's study. His aspect was anything but heroic as he came into that dread apartment. He looked rather as if he were going to execution.

Dr. Holmes greeted him with a kindly smile.

"Ah, I have been waiting for you, Mellish! Major Stringer has called to see you, and to thank you—"

"Ye-es, sir," stammered Mellish.

"This is the boy, major."

Major Stringer snorted.

"This is not the boy, Dr. Holmes!"

"What!"

"The boy who helped me was bigger—a little taller, and much bigger built," said the major. "That is not the boy."

Dr. Holmes almost gasped.

"But—but Mellish has assured me— Mellish, is it not a fact that you gave assistance to Major Stringer?"

"P-p-p-perhaps Major Stringer d-d-d-didn't see me very c-clearly in the d-d-dark," stammered Mellish.

"Yes, that must be it," said the Head. "I have learned that two boys were out of bounds that night— Mellish and D'Arcy; but D'Arcy denies any knowledge of the affair. It rests, therefore, with Mellish. Doubtless, in the darkness you did not see him clearly."

Another snort from the major.

"Quite so; but I saw him, though not clearly, and I am certain that I saw the boy as I came into the House. For some reason he dodged away, young rascal!"

"This is—is amazing!" said the Head. "If Mellish has made a false claim— Bless my soul! You—you think you recognised another boy, major?"

"I know I did, sir."

"But—but as it all happened in the dark—"

"That is so; but I saw the boy, and I am sure I should know him again. At all events, I can ascertain by questioning the lad I saw as I came in. Have you any objection, sir, to my seeing all the juniors, and then—"

"I will offer them to be assembled at once," said the Head, rising. "This matter must be probed to the bottom."

Five minutes later the prefects were assembling the School House juniors in Big Hall. The juniors came in in a state of wonder, only the Terrible Three guessing what the sudden order might mean. Tom Merry kept as much out of sight as he could in the ranks of the Shell. Never had the captain of the Shell been so anxious to avoid the public gaze. He could feel disgust for Mellish's falsehood, and at the same time desire a very strong disinclination to be the means of showing up the wretched impostor.

Major Stringer came in with the Head. The old major's steely eye glittered over the juniors. Tom Merry kept his eyes on the floor. But it skilled not, as the poets say. The major's glittering eye fastened upon him almost at once, and a brown finger pointed.

"That is the boy!"

"Dear me!" said the Head. "That is Merry of the Shell! This is most surprising. Merry, come here at once!"

"Gwæt Scott!" came a voice from the ranks of the Fourth.

"Silence!"

Tom Merry, his face crimson, came forward reluctantly. Major Stringer's eye glittered at him through his monocle.

"So your name's Merry?"

"Yes, sir," murmured Tom.

"Hold up your chin!" snapped the major. "Let me see your face."

He reached out with a brown hand and grasped Tom Merry by the shoulder, and the Shell fellow uttered an involuntary howl.

"Yow!"

"Hallo! What—what—what's the matter with you? Is your shoulder hurt?" rapped out the major.

"Oh dear!" groaned Tom Merry, in anguish.

The iron grasp of the major had sent a throb of pain through him that made him feel like fainting for the moment.

"I thought the boy was hurt in the struggle, as I told you, Dr. Holmes. Young jackanapes!" said the major crossly. "Is your shoulder hurt, boy?"

"Only a—n—a bruise, sir!" stammered Tom.

"You should have had it seen to, Merry," said the Head quietly. "Now, kindly tell me, were you out of bounds the night before last, Merry?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"I—I went after D'Arcy because he'd forgotten to take the money with him."

"And it was you who assisted Major Stringer when he was attacked?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Mellish, come forward!" said the Head.

Mellish almost staggered forward. All eyes were upon him, and the glances seemed to scorch the wretched impostor. There was a hiss from some quarters, and the Head made a gesture for silence.

"Mellish, do you still maintain that you are the boy who went so bravely to the help of Major Stringer?"

"I—I wasn't, sir," moaned Mellish. "I—I didn't mean to say I was, sir—only—only I—I thought I was going to be flogged, so—so I—"

"I understand, Mellish. You told me a falsehood to escape punishment?"

"I—I—"

Dr. Holmes made a gesture, and the wretched Mellish backed away among the Fourth, wishing that the floor would open and swallow him up.

"Now, Merry, you will kindly put an end to this mystification! Tell me the truth at once. It was you who assisted the major?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"And why have you kept it a secret, and allowed me to remain under a misapprehension?" exclaimed the Head. Tom Merry grinned slightly.

"I—I was out of bounds, you see, sir; and—and, besides, I—I—"

"But you were aware of what I had said to D'Arcy, doubtless, and you knew that you would be excused, under the circumstances?"

"Yes; but—but—"

"I think I understand," said Dr. Holmes. "You did not wish to expose that wretched boy who made a false claim? However— But I will say no more about it. You are excused for being out of bounds that night, Merry, as it was the cause of your rendering such valuable assistance to Major Stringer."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You young rascal!" said the major. "I knew you at once. It was a plucky thing, by gad! I should have been brained if you had not been there. Give me your hand." Tom Merry winced as the old major gripped his hand with the grip of a vice. "Dr. Holmes, this boy is a credit to the school, by gad! His schoolfellows should be proud of him!"

"So we are, bai Jove!" sang out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, no longer to be repressed. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellahs, I call for three wingin' cheeaks for Tom Mewwy!"

"Hurray! Hip-pip-hurray!"

"Bravo, Tommy!"

The old hall rang with cheers for Tom Merry. The old rafters echoed and echoed again as the cheers rang out for the hidden hero, revealed at last!

THE END.

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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Harold Mackenzie and Jim Holdsworth, while cruising in their yacht the *Isis* in the Red Sea, land on one of the barren Hainish Islands, where they discover information relating to a mysterious City of Flame.

An Arab suddenly appears, and says he is Anubis of Shoa, the country in which is situated the City of Flame. He warns the comrades of awful dangers they will encounter if they attempt to reach the unknown city, and then vanishes.

Harold Mackenzie, Jim Holdsworth, and Bob Sigsbee, an American member of the crew, form themselves into an expedition for discovering the City of Flame.

After many exciting adventures, they at last reach the land of Shoa, and Anubis, the man whom they met under such strange circumstances in the Red Sea, again turns up, but fails to injure the three comrades.

Sigsbee finds a metal tablet, on which is written, by one Patrick O'Hara—who apparently is a captive of the natives—directions for reaching the Temple of the Sun, and the comrades determine to make this their objective.

They cross a waterless desert, and at last come in sight of the Great White Mountain, on which is the Sun-Temple. It is decided to pitch camp for the night, and to endeavour to gain admittance in the morning.

While Mackenzie is on guard in the night, he hears a lion roaring, and the roar is followed by an appalling cry—a human cry.

From within, in that vast solitude, had come that terrible sound!

(Now go on with the story.)

The Lion's Victim.

"What was that noise?" asked Sigsbee, as he reached for his rifle.

"A lion," replied Mackenzie. "It is over yonder."

He pointed to the clump of bushes, behind which the animal had disappeared.

"I fancied it was a human cry that I heard," continued Sigsbee. "It woke me."

"That was my idea, too," put in Jim Holdsworth.

"That came immediately afterwards," said Mackenzie.

Question and answer had been exchanged rapidly, while Sigsbee and Jim were getting on to their feet and slipping cartridges into their rifles. No more than a minute had passed since the roar of the king of beasts had broken on the stillness of the night. It was repeated, but the human cry was not. The three comrades looked at each other.

"If a man's there," said Bob Sigsbee, "I reckon he's a gone coon."

"We must find out," exclaimed Mackenzie.

They ran forward in line, but keeping a few yards apart, with rifles held ready. The animal did not show itself, but they could hear it. They circled round the clump of bushes, and then a sight met their eyes which brought them to a sudden halt and for a few seconds held them spellbound.

On the ground was the body of a man, and standing over him was a great, black-maned lion. Its forelegs were stretched wide out, one on each side of the man's body, and it was swaying its massive head angrily from side to side.

"Flug it!" said Bob Sigsbee crisply.

They fired together, the three shots ringing out like a single report. The animal leaped into the air, dropped, gave a curious sort of snarling cry, and rolled over dead. It had one bullet in the heart and two in the brain.

"Nothing that ever lived could stand up against such a

volley as that," said Jim. "But what about this poor wretch? There's some life in him still; I saw him move slightly."

They bent over the unconscious man, who was bleeding from wounds inflicted by the lion's terrible claws. A blood-stained knife, with a long, two-edged blade, was still grasped in his right hand, so he had evidently managed to wound the animal before he was struck down.

He was a native, a young, well-built man, and, to judge by the garment that he wore, a servant or a priest of the temple.

This robe was black, and had a golden sun embroidered on the right breast. It was fastened at the waist with a yellow cord.

"He is badly mauled," said Mackenzie, "and after we have bound up his wounds we must carry him up to the temple. If he doesn't get better attention than we are able to give him he won't live long. It's possible the priests have some knowledge of surgery, and it is almost certain they'll have healing ointments, of sorts."

"Yes, they know how to look after themselves, you bet," agreed Jim. "But if it comes to healing anybody outside their own circle, they probably indulge in a lot of incantations, and all that sort of rot, and the patient pegs out."

"Witch-doctor stunt," observed Sigsbee. They carried the wounded man to the camp-fire and bound up his hurts as well as they could with the limited appliances at their command.

"Is it your idea that we should carry him up to the temple right now?" asked Sigsbee.

"Yes," replied Mackenzie. "The sooner we get him there the better. And it will serve as a sort of introduction for us. We may have found some difficulty—to put it mildly—in gaining admission to the temple; but surely the priests can't refuse us when we have been of service to one of their friends."

"Depends on what sort of fellows they are," Sigsbee retorted. "When I've got to deal with priests of a heathen temple I ain't making any bets on results."

"We shall have to fix up some sort of a litter," said Mackenzie, "but we can easily manage that."

There were plenty of wild vines with tendrils as tough as ropes, and when a goodly length of these was interlaced between two strong tree branches, cut for the purpose, they had a rough but serviceable kind of litter.

On to this they lifted the still unconscious man, and then, having gathered up their own few belongings, they shouldered the litter and started.

It was a weary tramp with their heavy burden, and the last part of the way was up a steep and rugged mountain path. It took them three hours to cover those five miles, and it was with exclamations of thankfulness that they at last came to a halt in front of the Temple of the Sun.

The temple was a massive structure, which had withstood the storms of centuries, perched high up there in a pass of the White Mountain. The main doors, strongly built of wood, and iron studded, were twelve feet high. They were closed.

Sigsbee and Jim hammered upon them with the butts of their rifles, and the noise they made caused a hollow echo to boom from the interior.

The Red Irishman.

It seemed that the priests were in no hurry to answer the summons, for after waiting several minutes without result, Sigsbee and Jim hammered again. Mackenzie lent them a hand this time.

As there was some doubt as to how they would be received,
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for their reception by the natives of this benighted country had been so far the reverse of friendly, they waited with their rifles ready loaded. At length the covering of a small grating in one of the large doors was slid back, and a face appeared at the opening.

"Who are you that come to disturb the inmates of the temple at this hour?" demanded this individual, in a harsh voice.

"Travellers," replied Mackenzie. "We have with us a young priest of this temple, who has been sorely hurt by a lion. We rescued him, and at great trouble to ourselves have brought him here."

There was a pause, during which the man behind the door was evidently surveying them through the wicket. He could not see much, for it wanted an hour of dawn, and the moon having set, the night—or morning—was very dark. The litter, with the injured man in it, was the most conspicuous object, for the others were standing a little to one side.

Presently a gong was sounded, and that was a summons to other priests or attendants of the temple, for voices were heard and the shuffling of many feet. Then one of the great doors was slowly opened, and a man bearing a flaming torch stepped outside. Others followed him. They were all clad in the same sort of robe that the wounded priest wore—if he was a priest—and they stared at the strangers in amazement.

"White men!" exclaimed a short, thick-set individual, who appeared to be in authority. "Strangers! Whence come ye?"

"From afar," replied Mackenzie, waving his hand vaguely towards the east. "We now ask for food and shelter. Which, under the circumstances, you will not refuse," he added decidedly, glancing down at the wounded priest.

There is no doubt that Hal Mackenzie had adopted the best tone in dealing with the officials of the temple. To beg favours of the people of this country was a waste of breath, for they regarded it as a sign of weakness. It was better to demand what you required as a right; then you were more likely to obtain it.

The priests consulted together in a low tone for a few minutes, and then the chief among them addressed Mackenzie again.

"You say that our brother, whom you have brought here wounded, was attacked by a lion, and that you saved him. But he is still near to death, and he may yet die before we hear his story. Did you kill the lion?"

Hal Mackenzie was getting impatient.

"Yes," he replied shortly. "You will find the body if you go back along our trail, though the vultures will be there before you. See, already they are coming."

He pointed upwards. Two dark specks passed overhead and vanished from sight. So high were these carrion birds flying that they looked no more than mere specks in the sky.

"Always there is food for the vultures," replied the priest, in an unpleasantly suggestive manner. Then he harked back to the lion-killing, asking what weapons they had used. "For without a spear," he added, "it is not easy to kill these animals. And you have no spear."

"You had better leave your questioning to another time," said Mackenzie; "and then, if we choose to answer you, you will learn much about our weapons and the way they are used. Now you would do well to remember your wounded friend, for he needs attention, instead of wasting time in useless talk. And lastly, I must ask a question. Do you refuse us admission to the temple?"

It was evident that the head priest present—he was not, they afterwards learned, the chief priest of the temple—was not accustomed to be spoken to in this manner, for he favoured Mackenzie with an ugly look, and angry mutterings rose up among the others. However, as they were debarred with curiosity to learn something more about the white strangers, the matter passed; and the head man, whose name was Nicanor, motioned to two of his followers to raise the litter. Then, turning to his unwelcome "guests," he said:

"You can enter, white men."

A procession was formed, the bearers of the litter leading. After them came Nicanor, then Mackenzie, Sigbee, and Jim, while the remaining priests brought up the rear. They traversed a long, stone-paved passage, and entered a vast hall with a domed roof. They could just make this out, but what the hall contained they did not know, for beyond the radius of the flaring torchlight it was in complete darkness.

Such objects as they passed close to they could, of course, see, and one they noted was a grim stone image, presumably a god of some sort. For the people of Shoa were worshippers of idols, although they had a temple to the sun.

A few yards beyond this image Nicanor motioned to his "guests" to stop. The rest of the procession passed on, with the exception of the torch-bearer.

"Here is the guest-chamber," said Nicanor, indicating

an apartment which opened off the main hall on the right. "Rest for a while."

Mackenzie entered, followed by his companions, and the torch was stuck in a sconce. The appointments of the guest-chamber certainly did not err on the side of luxury. There were several broad wooden benches and an oblong table, but nothing else.

"Food will be brought to you," added Nicanor, "when our own morning meal is prepared."

Having made that announcement he stepped back, and was about to close the door behind him, when Sigbee placed himself against it.

"You can leave that open," he said. "We don't like closed doors."

The priest hesitated, then shrugged his shoulders. "As you will," he replied. "But take heed that you do not quit the guest-chamber, lest ill befall you."

Then he and his attendants walked away.

"Well, we're fairly inside," said Jim. "It was a good idea of yours, Sigbee, not to let that door be closed."

"I'll tell you another idea of mine," replied Sigbee. "Stick to your rifles. Don't give them up on any account. Fasten them to your side while you sleep, if we are long enough in the temple to want to sleep. In any case, one of us must always remain awake on guard. I don't put any faith in those priests."

"I quite agree with you," said Mackenzie.

"I suppose, when they want to 'speed the parting guest,' they push him over a precipice," observed Jim, grinning. "And they don't put themselves out of the way on our account. When they have their breakfast they will bring us something to eat. I hope they have breakfast early."

There was nothing to do but sit down and wait for daylight, which was not very far off. No doubt a watch was being kept on them from some dark recess of the central hall.

Half an hour passed, and the gloom began to lighten. Soon they were able to pick out objects in the vast domed chamber of the temple. In the tropics sunrise succeeds daybreak very quickly, and soon the interior of the structure was being filled with a golden light, which streamed in through various windows and loopholes.

It was a wonderful sight that was revealed to them, and they gazed upon it spellbound and silent. The domed roof was even higher than they had supposed, and perhaps the great height took off something from the vast length and breadth of the central hall.

There was an altar of black marble near the end opposite the entrance doors, and above the altar was a great golden sun, which gleamed with dazzling brightness in the morning light. At intervals along the sides of the temple were stone or marble figures, all of them grim-featured, if not actually hideous, and all of them life-size.

But there was one figure on a dais near the altar which dwarfed all the others into insignificance. It was more than twice the size of life, and was sculptured out of pure white marble. On its forehead was a small golden sun, like the great one over the altar. Its eyes glittered like orbs of fire, and its countenance was terrible in its expression. Its bent arms were thrust out a little in front of its body.

"That, I suppose, is the Sun-god?" said Mackenzie.

"Wonderful sculptors," ejaculated Sigbee, "those ancients who carved these figures, but I ain't full up with admiration of their idea of beauty! Look around. Snakes! There ain't a face in all these figures that wouldn't frighten a cat into fits!"

"But where all this time is Patrick O'Hara?" said Jim. "Saint Patrick O'Hara I ought to say. We came here to help him. Are we to look for him in a niche? Where is he kept?"

A moment later they saw him.

From behind the statue of the Sun God he stepped forth, clad in a black robe, with strange signs and figures worked over it in scarlet. He was a man over six feet in height, broad-chested and big-boned. He had a round, red face, fringed with a beard of the most vivid red, and a shock-head of unbarbered hair of the same startling colour.

There was humour in his face and eyes, but at the moment the expression in them was a mixture of amazement and delight. He stared at the trio. The trio stared at him.

"Gee! It's come out of a museum!" exclaimed Bob Sigbee.

"It's Saint Patrick!" cried Jim, who wanted to laugh badly, but thought it better to bottle it up for a bit.

Hal Mackenzie called out:

"Are you Patrick O'Hara?"

Then the figure spoke:

"That's me name," he replied, in a deep, booming voice, "and I'm from County Cork. You're countrymen—British—"

"Guess I'm American!" interposed Sigbee.

"It's all the same," cried Patrick O'Hara. "Sure, I was beginning to think I'd never see a white man again. Was it my writin' that ye read, away forein't the Barrier Mountain, that ye know my name, and have come up here to the temple?"

He had crossed the hall while he was speaking, and one after the other he shook them by the hand until their arms ached. "It was that which caused us to pay a visit to the Temple of the Sun," replied Mackenzie—"at least, that was the main cause. But we gathered you were practically a prisoner here. Yet you seem to have some liberty, and if you stuck up that notice by the Barrier—"

"I didn't," interrupted O'Hara. "Wanst only have I been any distance away from this haythin temple since I was brought here two years ago, and thin I was glad enough to get back to it."

"Why?"

"It isn't aisy to get into this land, but it's moighty hard to get out of us. With regard to the metal wids the writin' engraved on it, a priest had that fixed up for me, an' him not knowin' what the writin' was about. That was a while after I tried to escape. Get away I did, an' for three days I was hidin' in the jungle, me being without food all that toime. Be the mortal, it made me stomach feel quare even now when I think of it. There was wild bastes prowlin' about the jungle, too, an' me wid only a toothpick av a knife to defend meself. Then there was parties av armed men out afther me. I'd have made a foight av ye, but I was impty, so at last I returned to the temple for something to ate."

"You say you were brought here. Who by?"

"It's this way," replied O'Hara. "I was leading fireman aboard a steamer what was bound out to Zanzibar. The steamer was wrecked in a storm on the Somali coast. So far as I know, I was the only man saved, me bein' a strong swimmer. For days I wandered about, an' thin I was captured by some slave-traders. They carried me inland—weeks we were travellin'—finally sold me to these people. I believe I fetched a good price, but not a bit av the money did I handle, had cess to them!"

"But why were you made a saint?"

Patrick O'Hara grinned. "There's an odd legend," he explained, "that hundreds av years ago there was a saint av sorts in this land, who was exactly loike me. Maybe he came from Oirland. He had hair the colour of the sun, which is their plazin' way av sayin' it was rid. Be the same token, they're all black-haired in this country. Well, they have guare superstitions, an' they thought sure I was this same saint come to loife again. An' he's supposed to bring prosperity to the land. I don't know whether I have, but they don't mane to let me go if they can help it. Lately, though, there's been a faction working against me, headed by the chief priest. An' I mane to be at out wids them."

"Is Nisanor the chief priest?"

"No; the second head man. The chief priest isn't in the temple at present. But if they're spoilin' for a foight, I'm ready to oblige him."

Mackenzie could not help laughing. Here was this wild Irishman, who had been anxious to escape from the thralldom of being half saint, half prisoner, now equally anxious, apparently, to remain and do battle with the faction which had arisen to overthrow him. The situation seemed likely to lead to some stirring complications.

"You can sure count on us if you want any help," put in Sigbee.

"Yez look loike the bhoyz who could put up a good foight," said O'Hara cheerfully. "But you'll have to tell me how you got here, an' what you came to the country for in the first instance."

"It's a long yarn," replied Mackenzie. "But our principal reason for coming here was to see the City of Flame. Have you returned it?"

"No," ventured O'Hara; "but I've seen the reflection av it often enough. The Flame City! 'Tis a place that many folks would be glad to get out of, so I've heard. But maybe you'll have your chance of getting there, an' if I've any luck I'll be with ye."

"How do you mean?"

"In two days' toime the queen's comin' on a special visit to this temple," explained Pat O'Hara. "There'll be great doings. You'll be safe enough here till then. If she's in the moind she'll take ye back wid her to the city. But if not—"

"Well, if not!"

"Bedad, there'll be fun, whichever way ye look at ut!" said O'Hara, with a beaming smile. "I see you have rifles, and they'll bata all the magic they're able to bring against ye."

"But the queen, being a woman—"

"That's the trouble," interrupted O'Hara. "But don't

forget what I'm tellin' ye, that she's a queen first an' a woman afterwards. An' me bein' a saint, I'm wad degree higher than a king. By right I should be ruler av this country."

"Seems to me," observed Sigbee, "that this saint stunt is going to let us in for something real rich."

Queen Clytemna of Shoa.

The great day, pregnant with many possibilities, had arrived, and all the staff of the Temple of the Sun were drawn up in two ranks outside the main gates to receive Queen Clytemna of Shoa—or Sheba, if Mackenzie was right in his supposition that it was the ancient country whose queen visited King Solomon.

Whatever the condition of the country, the present queen was determined to abate no whit of show and ceremony when she paid a State visit. In the splendour of her retinue it is probable that she ran her old-time predecessor, the historic queen, very close. The procession was a mile long, and what struck Hal Mackenzie and his comrades more than anything as they watched it advancing through the pass was the entire absence of horses.

There was not one; not the smallest pony. Indeed, it appeared that in all the land there was not a single horse.

"They don't seem to spread themselves out in the way of tame animals," observed Sigbee. "Six camels and two elephants in this circus. I allow Barnum could have done a sight better than that."

"With animals, very likely," agreed Jim; "but he would have to take a back seat in all the other departments. There's real gold and silver here, not tinsel and brass; a real queen, not an imitation one; real fighting men, not stage supers."

"Sure enough," replied Sigbee. "But I'd like to know who's who among the leaders in that crowd. If that blamed saint Patrick O'Hara were only at hand, he could give us some information."

But O'Hara had not been able to remain with them on this occasion, for his position in the temple, as a sort of saint, gifted with the power of being good or evil on the land, obliged him to hold himself aloof from everybody during the forthcoming ceremony. Moreover, he was on his dignity this morning, for there was a suspicion of trouble brewing with the chief priest.

"I've got to tache him," O'Hara had said to his new friends that morning, "that however big a swell a chief priest may be, he don't come up to a saint."

It was midway when the leading company of the queen's bodyguard reached the gates of the temple. They were stalwart warriors, armed with spears, and carrying silver shields. They also wore helmets of silver, and their belted tunics were of scarlet. Then followed some gorgeous palanquins in which were seated some high officers of the Court. Next came the queen's palanquin, which was abazw with gold and silver decorations. It was borne by eight bearers.

Behind were some lesser officials and a long string of armed men. The queen travelled with a good escort. They had been two days on the journey, for the City of Flame was twenty-five miles from the temple.

As Queen Clytemna sighted a great shout rose up from the assembled warriors and priests, while the armed men raised their spears aloft in salute.

"Hail to the mighty queen!" they cried. "Ruler of the Land of Shoa! Mistress of the secrets of the Flame City!"

The acclamation was a grand, deep-toned roar of human voices, producing a wonderful effect as it was thrown back in rumbling echoes from the mountain-sides.

In truth Clytemna looked every inch a queen as she acknowledged the salute by a haughty inclination of her head. She was tall, handsome, and possessed a perfect figure. On her head she wore a golden diadem set with rubies, the glittering gems seeming to gain in lustre amidst the masses of her raven-black hair.

Her Royal robe was of pure white, slashed with scarlet. Precious stones flashed on her bodice, and her waist was clasped with a golden belt studded with rubies.

As she passed into the temple she darted one swift glance at Mackenzie, Sigbee, and Jim Holdsworth—who were standing at "attention," rifles in hand—but at the moment did not pay them any more attention. The priest, some officials, and twenty of her bodyguard followed her into the great hall, but the rest of the retinue remained outside.

There was one individual, however, who favoured the adventurous trio with more than a passing glance. He was a big man, with a cruel, cunning, and cynical face, and as he paused for a moment and stared at him, his expression was the very reverse of friendly.

"That fellow will know us again," murmured Jim, as he passed on. "Who is he?"

Mackenzie inquired of a man standing next to him, and was informed that he was Argolis, the chief priest.

"If that's the chap that Pat O'Hara is bottin' up against," whispered Sigsgbee, "I guess the Irishman hasn't got much of a chance."

"We shall be in the swim, too," said Mackenzie.

They were standing in the long entrance passage, and so did not know what was going on in the great hall.

A quarter of an hour passed, and then Nicson, the second priest of the temple, came to them and ordered them to follow him, as the queen "desired to converse with the white strangers."

When they entered the great hall they saw that Queen Clytemna was seated on a chair of ivory, inlaid with gold, which had been placed in front of the altar. The chief priest was standing near her, and the armed guards were drawn up on one side of the vast chamber. On the other side the officials were grouped.

Behind the altar stood Pat O'Hara, his arms folded, and the light of battle in his eyes. He knew what was coming.

"How is it," thundered the chief priest, "that you have permitted these strangers to come into the presence of the queen carrying weapons? Disarm them!"

Hal Mackenzie looked him full in the face.

"We mean no disrespect to the queen," he said, in clear tones which rang through the building, "but we refuse to give up our weapons." Then he bowed gravely to the queen, and added: "To submit to be disarmed would to us be a degradation, and we come of a race who never submit to that."

"Will you dare defy us?" cried the chief priest furiously. "Guards, take the weapons from these men!"

Half a dozen of the guards sprang forward to obey the order, but checked their rush when they found themselves looking into the barrels of three levelled rifles. They did not know what manner of weapons these were, and somehow they didn't like the look of them.

"Don't fire," whispered Mackenzie, "except as a last resort." He then addressed himself to Argolis, the priest, assuming an air of haughty surprise. "I spoke to the queen," he said. "Is it your duty to answer for her or give orders in her presence without consulting her? But perhaps you are the king?"

"Good for ye!" exclaimed O'Hara, in a deep, booming whisper. "Faix! You've got him on the hip!"

The startled audience looked from the "saint" to the queen, from the queen to the chief priest, and from the priest to the white strangers. The guards stood irresolute, not knowing how to act.

Mackenzie's brief and daring speech had the effect that he hoped for. He was a swift reader of character, and he had read Queen Clytemna's aright. At the first refusal to disarm she had regarded the defiant trio with angry surprise, but she would brook no interference from any of her subjects. The order for the arrest of the white men should have come from her lips, and it was presumption on the part of Argolis to have given it.

Perhaps this would not have occurred to her during the momentary excitement had it not been for Hal Mackenzie's pointed query and his last sarcastic remark. "But perhaps you are the king."

"There is no king in this land, strangers," said Clytemna coldly, "nor ever will be. As for you, Argolis, methinks you have strangely forgotten yourself."

"While you are in the temple, queen," replied Argolis, "it is surely my duty to take all precautions for your safety. And I would remind you of the law of our country that strangers who enter it shall either be put to death or sent to work in the mines as slaves. Yet these strangers are still free, and are armed."

"I am the law," the queen retorted, "and for the time it is my will that these strangers shall live!"

The vindictive chief priest accepted this rebuke with a show of humility, for he was shrewd enough to be aware that any further opposition on his part might only result in the strangers being taken into greater favour. He would bide his time, and he had an idea that he wouldn't have to wait long for his revenge.

"I'll bet that old trickster has got some other cards up his sleeve!" whispered Jim to his comrades.

There was rather an awkward silence for about a quarter of a minute, and then Queen Clytemna spoke again.

"The weapons which you carry, white men," she said, "are such as I have never seen before. How are they used?"

"If you will order one of your guards to raise his spear high above his head, O Queen," answered Mackenzie, "I will show you. The man will not be harmed; I promise it."

The queen gave the order, and one of the guards lifted

his spear up high. He was standing about five-and-twenty yards distance from them.

"You take the shot, Sigsgbee!" whispered Mackenzie.

Then he and Jim stepped back a pace, and all eyes were fixed upon the American as he brought his rifle to his shoulder. There was a moment of tense and breathless expectancy, then the silence was broken by the sharp report of the rifle. The glittering spear-head leaped a couple of feet into the air, and then fell with a clatter on to the marble floor. It had been severed clean from the shaft.

Exclamations of wonder and dismay rose up from the on-lookers, in the midst of which Pat O'Hara's howl of delight went unnoticed.

The tiny flash could not have been seen in the bright sunlight which streamed into the temple, but the effect of the shot was plain enough. And the noise of the report in that echoing hall was like thunder. Even the queen looked startled.

"At ten times that distance," said Mackenzie, "we can kill a man with one of our weapons."

He thought it as well not to let them know the full effective range of a modern rifle. That a man could be killed by a noise—for they knew nothing of the bullet—at a distance of two hundred and fifty yards, was sufficiently surprising and disturbing to the Shoans.

It was clear that their encounter with the natives at Crocodile Lake had not yet been reported in the city.

"It is very wonderful," said the queen, "and I have it in my mind to retain you in my service, so that you could make weapons of that sort for my guards. But that is a matter for consideration. Also I should like to hear something of the country from which you came, but that, too, must be left to another occasion. Now, there are matters which I must attend to—"

She paused, and looked sharply towards the door. Loud and excited voices were heard in the passage outside.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance?" she demanded angrily.

An officer, who was on guard at the door, answered her.

"There are two men who crave speech with you, O Queen," he said.

"So! They make noise enough. Who are they?"

"One is Anubis, the councillor," was the reply. "And the other is Valmirus, a captain of your guard."

"Anubis!" repeated the queen. "He has been long absent. Let them enter."

"That's done it!" muttered Jim. "And just as things seemed to be going smoothly for us!"

The two men entered. Valmirus was the leader of the Shoans with whom they had fought at Crocodile Lake, when they had rescued the girl. He still showed the effects of his wounds, and bestowed a vindictive glance on the trio as he passed them.

Anubis of Shoa, their old enemy, was smiling. But his smile was more threatening than the other man's scowl.

"I dreamt that we should meet again," he said to them in English. "This time, I think, you will not escape me!"

"We shall see," replied Mackenzie.

The two new-comers made a profound bow to Queen Clytemna, and awaited her permission to speak.

"Why do you require an audience of me now?" she asked. "Is your business so urgent that you could not wait?"

"It is urgent, O Queen," replied Anubis.

"It is long since you quitted the city, Anubis," the queen continued. "Where have you been?"

"Visiting strange lands, O Queen," was the reply. "It is not the first time I have met these white men, and I have hastened here to warn you against them. You may remember that you gave orders that the girl Zenobia was to be punished!"

"Well!"

"These white strangers," pursued Anubis, "prevented the carrying out of that order. They wounded some of your guards, and killed others. Valmirus was wounded. But I leave him to tell the story."

It was at this point that there came an unexpected interruption. Pat O'Hara had been regarding Anubis closely from the moment he entered the hall. Now the Irishman let out a sort of bellow of rage.

"'Tis the spalpeen," he cried, "who was in league with the slave-traders—the son of a pig who could me to the priests, and pocketed most av the money! By the mortal, 'tis him an' me for us now!"

Then he stepped down from the dais behind the altar, and strode into the centre of the hall.

(Next Wednesday's "GEN" will contain a further thrilling instalment of this stirring yarn. Make certain of obtaining your copy regularly if you haven't already done so, by placing a standing order with your newsagent.)

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HOW TO WIN THEM.

All you have to do is to introduce "THE GEM" LIBRARY to your chums. Show this copy to them and let them read it. Then get them to sign their names. You can rule a sheet of paper in the manner shown below, and the readers who send in the largest list of names will win these magnificent prizes. This Competition is being run together with our companion papers, "The Union Jack," "Boys' Friend," "Boys' Realm," "Magnet," "Nelson Lee Library," "Pluck," "Penny Popular" and "Marvel." It must be understood that this is one Competition, and that the decision of the Editor of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" must be accepted as final and binding in all matters concerning the contest. It does not matter which, or how many of these you get your chums to read. While one chum is reading the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY," get another to read the "Boys' Friend," and so on.

WRITE YOUR SHEET OUT IN THIS FORM.

I.....
of.....

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have shown the papers mentioned to my chums, who have signed their names on my list, and I have got them to read them.

Let your chums sign their names and addresses on one side of the column, like this.

Name of paper which they have read.

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THE JUDGE:

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THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to
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 OUR "THREE COMPANION" PAPERS!
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For Next Wednesday—

"GRUNDY'S DOWNFALL!"

By Martin Clifford,

In next week's splendid, long, complete story of the chums of St. Jim's, Grundy of the Shell is again the central figure. It is Grundy's intention to build up a cricket eleven, and as there is likely to be no mad rush of recruits, he feels constrained to offer the tempting allotment of cash payments to those who will play. Several fellows of the Melish type are not at all averse to becoming professionals, and in due course Grundy gets his team together. He plays one match only, with astonishing results! Tom Merry & Co. come out very strong, and

"GRUNDY'S DOWNFALL"

is as crushing as it is complete.

FROM A GLASGOW CHUM.

It is my pleasure this week to publish a letter from one of the "Old Brigade." It goes without saying that I am always delighted to have letters from those who have been indissolubly linked with the good old "Gem" Library from its commencement, as well as from those boys and girls whose connection with our world-famous little paper has only recently begun.

"Glasgow.

"Dear Editor,—For many years—since I was seven or eight—I have been a staunch reader of the good old 'Gem' Library.

"I want to say a word about the feature which first captivated me—the illustrations. I regard the artist who illustrates the 'Gem' as a real master of his profession, his pictures are always clear and well defined.

"Somewhere, I remember seeing a reply to a reader who protested against the prominence given to Talbot. I am convinced that Talbot is one of the most successful characters the 'Gem' has ever had, and fully deserves the place he occupies in your tales.

"In addition to the 'Gem,' I also patronise the 'Magnet.' I read with extreme pleasure the threepenny library entitled 'The Boy Without a Name.'—I was especially attracted by the Caterpillar, whom I regard as an admirable character.

"Now, what about another tale of the same kind? I can assure you a large number of my schoolmates would give it a rousing reception. Let the 'Nuts' plot against Courtenay; let the Caterpillar hold forth on the subject of 'roarin' blades'; and let Mobbs do his worst. There's an order for you!

"Seriously, though, I am sure another Highcliffe story would be welcomed by readers throughout the kingdom.

"Think it over, Mr. Editor.—Wishing you an enjoyable summer, I remain, yours sincerely,

"CIVIS BRITANNICUS SUM."

Many thanks, my Scottish chum! I have conveyed your appreciative remarks on the subject of the "Gem" pictures to Mr. Macdonald, our clever artist, who has gained a reputation for good work which falls to the lot of few draughtsmen.

I agree with you, "C. B. S."—excuse brevity, but life's short—that Talbot is an admirable character; but in order that my chums may not have too much of a good thing, I have asked Mr. Clifford to let him take a back seat for a time.

Now, with regard to the threepenny book suggestion, I have had ample proof that "The Boy Without a Name" gave boundless satisfaction to thousands of loyal Gemites and

Magnetites, and, as soon as the author is comparatively free from his labours in other directions, he will get to work upon another threepenny book story which will prove quite as captivating as its predecessor. But my chums must not lose sight of the fact that, in order to write "The Boy Without a Name," Mr. Frank Richards was compelled to curtail a much-needed holiday, and, although he would probably be only too ready and willing to give up his next holiday for the sake of his numerous admirers, I shall insist upon his taking a brief rest from literary cares. I feel sure that all my chums will agree that this is only fair, and wait patiently until another great threepenny book story from the world-famous author appears on the market.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

J. W. Berryman, 34, Blandford Street, Baker Street, London, W., will be glad to hear from boy "Gemites" in his district who are interested in boxing and swimming.

"A Scottish Well-wisher" (Leith).—Thank you for your letter. I note your remarks, and will do my best for you.

"A Gemite-Magnum."—I read with interest your recent long letter to me. As it touches upon many important points in connection with the companion papers, will you kindly furnish me with your name and address, so that I may write to you direct?

"A Friend in Need" (Walthamstow).—Thank you for your letter. I will try and do as you suggest.

Ernest Bradshaw (Fulham).—Many thanks for your note. My best wishes to your brother and yourself.

Leslie Mitchell (Great Yarmouth).—Sorry space precludes me from printing your letter, the loyal tone of which, however, I greatly appreciate.

W. J. B. (Bethnal Green).—Your suggestion shall be borne in mind. With regard to the announcement you wish me to insert in the "Gem," I will do so when space permits.

J. E. Page (Sheffield).—The magazine in question is printed by a local firm, but I do not know the charge made for same. Glad to hear you are about to start an amateur mag. You will need plenty of enthusiasm, but with the support of your Form-master you certainly ought to make the thing go. Good luck to you!

William Kay (Lower Edmonton).—You will hear more of Mr. Raitton shortly.

W. E. Evans (Poplar).—As we go to press at least three weeks in advance, it is naturally impossible to answer readers' queries at such short notice as you suggest. Then, again, there are a host of replies to Gemite chums, and they are inserted strictly in rotation. When my correspondence is unusually heavy, it often happens that a reader has to be kept waiting five, or even six weeks, for his answer; but he takes it smiling, as a rule. It is not in my power to carry out the other suggestion you name. Sorry!

Eileen and Molly.—Tom Merry has no parents. His best friends are Manners and Lowther, of the Shell. I will see what I can do towards carrying out your suggestion later on.

A. Burden and G. Quinn (Plumstead).—The age of the gentleman in question is uncertain.

"Disgusted" (Leeds).—I consider your letter to be very peevish. The present style of the "Gem" is eminently satisfactory to the majority of my readers—and it is the majority—an editor has to study. Your threat to give up reading the paper causes me no misgivings. I would prefer you to be a non-reader if you cannot look at things in a more sportsmanlike way.

THE EDITOR.



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LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

MODERN WARFARE.

A countrywoman, when asking in a shop for a pound of marmalade, was told that they had risen a penny a pound since her last purchase.

"What is the reason of that?" asked the old woman.

"I don't rightly know," answered the shopkeeper, "but I believe it's mostly owing to the war."

"What!" exclaimed the customer. "Surely they're not fighting by candle-light."—Sent in by Alex Morgan, Shepherds Bush, W.

ANY OLD THING.

Ferdinand (after having been to circus): "Pa, I should like to be a circus clown."

Pa (discouragingly): "Ah, but little clowns often get beaten by their masters."

Ferdinand: "I'll be a master, then."—Sent in by C. Jackson, Horsham, near Hull.

CHEERING HIM UP.

1st Clerk: "Heard the latest? There's been trouble with the boss, and Pa's got the sack, and so—"

2nd Clerk: "Cheer up, old man! Don't look so down about it."

1st Clerk: "And so have—"

2nd Clerk: "Well, well, it's rotten luck, but you must grin and bear it."

1st Clerk (getting out what he has been trying to say all along): "And so have you."—Sent in by A. Warner, Liverpool.

TRAGIC.

There was a hush of expectancy amongst the vast throng. All eyes were centred on the tall figure who towered, stern and grim, above his fellows. He moved his arm for the stroke. He raised it aloft above his head. Once more, for the last time, his eyes swept round the circle of anxious faces; then, grasping his trusty stick, his arm came down in a quick sweep, and the band began to play.—Sent in by J. Jones, Morton, Manchester.

SHE DESERVED IT.

A bulleting-sergeant was on his round in a certain suburb. "I shall want you to put up four men, madam," he said to the lady at an elegant villa.

"I'm sorry, but it's impossible," replied the lady. "My two children have scarlet-fever."

The sergeant expressed his sympathy, and proceeded to the next house. He told the lady there that she would have to take eight soldiers, because of her neighbour's misfortune.

"But Mrs. Brown hasn't got any children!" was the startled reply.

The indignant sergeant returned to Mrs. Brown's, and said:

"I find, madam, that we have eight men recovering from scarlet-fever, and they shall be sent here."—Sent in by B. Dohnan, Barnes, S.W.

THE DOMESTIC ZOO.

"Everybody in our family is some kind of an animal," said Willie to a lady visitor.

"How's that?" she asked.

"Well," replied Willie, "mother's a dear; my baby sister is mother's little lamb; I'm the kid; and dad's the goat."—Sent in by G. Rowe, Cape Colony, South Africa.

UNPATRIOTIC.

Little Willie rambled into the house, threw his soldier suit into the corner, and began looking over a book. This was very unusual, so his mother began to investigate.

"What did you come into the house for, Willie?" she said.

"You haven't quarrelled with George Brown, have you?"

"No, mother," answered the youngster. "But I'm not going to play war with him any more."

"Why not?" queried mother.

"Why, when we play war," explained Willie, "I'm Germany, and he's England, and if I don't let him lick me every time he says I'm not patriotic enough."—Sent in by F. Dyas, Grimsby.

UNCONVINCED.

Owner of Property (sternly): "Don't you see that notice up there, 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted?'"

Tramp: "No, gov'nor. I can't read."

Owner: "Well, now I've told you, you'd better clear off."

Tramp: "Excuse me, mister, but I don't know what it is. I've only got your bare word for it, and you're a puffed-up stranger to me. For all I know, the notice may be 'New Milk Sold 'Ere,' or 'Cherries Tuppence a Pound,' or 'Welking, Weary Wanderer.'"—Sent in by Wm. H. Adams, Nantwich, Cheshire.

"JUST AS GOOD."

Middle-aged Customer (at chemist's shop): "You seem very young to be in charge of a chemist's shop. Have you a diploma?"

Youthful Assistant: "No, sir; but we have a preparation of our own just as good."—Sent in by D. Gittins, Brierley Hill, Staffs.

HE'S OFF!

In the old days of volunteering, not every commanding officer could ride well, and some very amusing events happened.

On one occasion a general was inspecting a battalion, the colonel of which was a notoriously bad rider. As the band struck up the march past the colonel's horse shied violently, and the officer was nearly unseated.

Every man in the leading company was intensely interested in his efforts to retain his seat, with the result that the front rank became bunched and badly out of line.

"Ease off, there!" shouted the captain angrily.

"E ain't," replied a recruit, sotto voce. "But I'll bet 'o can't keep on for another two minutes!"

And, sure enough, the colonel and his fiery steed were soon parted.—Sent in by Sidney Horn, Leyburn, Yorks.

SARCASM.

"I've come to tell you, sir, that the photographs you took of us the other day are not at all satisfactory. Why, my husband looks like an ape!"

"Well, madam," replied the photographer, "you should have thought of that before you had him taken."—Sent in by Wm. McKendry, Ystrad, Rhondda, S. Wales.

AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION.

Tom Merry: "Are you dining anywhere on Thursday, Fatty?"

Fatty Wym (eagerly): "Thursday! No!"

Tom Merry: "Then how hungry you'll be on Friday!"

—Sent in by G. Harrison, Market Harborough.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

in order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes.

If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.

Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.