

RUCTIONS ON THE ROAD!



A SURPRISE FOR THE CARAVANNERS.

(An Exciting Scene in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.) 13-9-19.



RUCTIONS ON THE ROAD!

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. on their Caravan Tour.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

An Unexpected Meeting.

"I WEALLY think—" "Draw it mild, Gussy!" "Wats! I weally think that the chap who talked this country 'Glowious Devon,' know what he was talkin' about!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, had reason for his remark.

The St. Jim's caravan was rumbling at a leisurely pace through a deep Devonshire lane. On either side the great banks of red earth rose, topped with the bright green of trees and grass. Overhead the summer sun shone in a cloudless sky of blue, bathing the earth with golden light.

Jack Blake was driving; but Circumstances, the horse, was making the pace, and he made it slowly. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the School, sauntered along with the horse, with their straw hats on the backs of their heads. Herries sat at the back of the van, with his legs dangling—Dig was inside, washing socks. The caravanners looked warm, and a little dusty—excepting Arthur Augustus. That unky youth gave more attention to his toilet than the others did, and he looked, as usual, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. A handsome Panama shaded his aristocratic face from the sun.

"We have had a wippin' caravan tour," resumed Arthur Augustus. "And I am very glad we did not miss Devon. It has occurred to me, dear boys, that you see more of a place from a caravan than from a railway train."

"Not really!" asked Tom Merry. "Yess, wathah!" "These great thoughts," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "only occur to a brain like Gussy's. How does Gussy do it?" "Weally, Lowthah—" "It's ripping here, and no mistake," remarked Manners. "I've taken a lot of photographs since we got into Devon. I shall have no end of developing to do next term at St. Jim's. There's a draw-

back to a caravan. You can't very well fit it up with a dark-room."

"I do not wegard that as a drawback, Mannahs."

"I've been thinking, though," said Manners reflectively. "By painting the windows a dark red—"

"What?" "And pasting paper over all the cracks, I might use the caravan itself as a dark-room—"

"Let's catch you painting the windows a dark red, you ass!"

"Well, I'm rather anxious to get on with the developing. I've used nearly all my film—"

"Thank goodness for that!" said Tom Merry.

"Yass, wathah! I suppose you have been keep hangin' about a hundred times while Mannahs was takin' idiotic photographs—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Mannahs—" "I wonder if we shall see anything of Figgins & Co. before the end of the vac," remarked Tom Merry. "Figgys was talking about going caravanning with Kerr and Wynn."

"Oh, those New House bouncers ain't up to it!" said Lowther.

"Wathah, not! Look at the feabul sweepes you chaps would have landed in if I had not been with you!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I have felt it a great responsibility all the time."

"Well, of all the cheeky asses—"

"Of all the frabjous chumps—"

"I am simply statin' the facts, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "I do not mean to imply that I have found it a twouble; I considered it my duty to look afiah you!"

"Why, we've spent nearly all the time fishing you out of scrapes!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mowwy—"

"Only a week ago you fell in love—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass—"

"And we had to rescue a land-girl from your gladsome glad eye!" said Monty Lowther.

"I wegard that remark, Lowthah, as the wemark of a wibald wuffian!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I considah that—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Herries, from the back of the van. "Look here, you chaps!"

"What is it?"

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Talk of angels, and you hear the rattle of their merry wings!" remarked Monty Lowther.

The caravanners looked back along the lane. Three cyclists had come into view, coming along merrily on the track of the St. Jim's van. And at a glance the caravanners recognized them as Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the heroes of the New House at St. Jim's.

The New House trio recognised the School House juniors at the same moment, and they slowed down as they came on.

"Hallo!" ejaculated George Figgins.

"Fancy meeting you!"

"Still rolling about in your old 'bus'!" remarked Kerr.

"How have you got on for grub?" asked Paddy Wynn.

"Tom Merry laughed.

"We were just speaking of you," he said. "You were gaming about caravanning this vac, Figgys—"

"Weedn't run to it," said Figgins, with a grin. "We've taken the jiggers out for a run instead. Paddy's been our guide over Wild Wales, and now we're doing Devon. Hallo! What's that on your face, Gussy?"

"Is there anythin' on my face, Figgins?"

"Yess, rather!" said Figgins, with a very serious look. "There—stickin' the middle of your chivvy! What earth is it?"

Arthur Augustus' hand flew to his nose.

"Bai Jove! I can feel nothin'!" Figgys—

"You've got your finger on it now."

"I've got my finger on my nose."

"Oh, it's a nose, is it?" asked Figgins cheerily. "Blessed if I should have thought it! Now you mention it, I can see it's something like a nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You uttah ash!" roared Arthur Augustus.
 "So you're still vanning it!" said Kerr. "We're heading for Dartmoor now. That your way?"
 "That's it," said Tom Merry. "We're going slow, though."
 "And we're going quick!" said Figgins. "That's as it should be—New House always ahead of the School House."
 "Rats!"
 "I dare say we shall see you again, to-ha!"

The New House Co. had slowed down to keep pace with the caravan. They drove at their pedals again, and Figgins playfully caught Arthur Augustus by the arms, and jerked it off and carried it along with him. Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Figgins, you are—"
 "Good bye-ee!" sang Figgins.
 "Give me my hat, you uttah ash!" shouted Arthur Augustus, dashing in pursuit of the merry cyclists.

"Bow-wow!"
 Figgins put the Panama on over his cap, and rode on merrily, with the swell of St. Jim's dashing frantically in pursuit.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co. "You feashful wotshak, give me my hat!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

Figgins smiled round at him. Kerr and Wynn chuckled. The three riders slowed down to let Arthur Augustus come nearer, and the swell of St. Jim's made a clutch at Figgins. Figgins's bike shot forward again, and Arthur Augustus, overbalancing himself, fell on his knees.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh cwumba! Ow!"
 Figgins circled round on his bike, and dropped the hat on Gussy's head as he knelt in a bewildered state. Then he rode on again after his comrades, chortling.

Arthur Augustus staggered up.
 "Oh, cwumba! The feashful wuffians!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I do not see anything" to cackle at you uttah duffahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "Look at the knees of my twousahs!"

The caravanners looked, and roared again.

The knees of Gussy's beautiful bags had certainly lost their glory.

"If you fellows regard this as funny—" exclaimed Arthur Augustus bestially.

"We do! Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Wats! The next time I meet that wuffian Figgins I shall give him a feashful wutshash!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I repeat—wats!"

And with that crushing remark Arthur Augustus retired into the van to dust his trousers.

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy to the Rescue!

"Hoor for a swim!"
 "Hoor, hoor!"
 "Yess, wutshah!"
 The caravan halted.
 In a couple of hours since the swim with Figgins & Co. and those juniors had long been lost to the caravan was following a solid beach, with deep woods on either side, and the sight of a stream glistening through the trees was grateful and comforting to the warm and dusty caravanners.

"Just the place for us," remarked Tom Merry. "We can tie up the horse here, and there seems to be nobody about."

"Yess, wutshah! The only drawback to caravanning is the lack of facilities for wutshah bathin'," observed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Fway den's get out of my sight in the wutshah."
 "Why not?" demanded Blake.
 "It is wutshah a wovwy havin' you wackless youngstabs to look aftah, you know."

"Ass!"
 "Wessly, Blake—"
 "Be-see-ee!"
 "I do not regard that as an intelligible remark, Blake, and I repeat, you had better not get too fah away from me," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I regard myself as bein' responsible for your safety."

The caravanners grinned. Arthur Augustus's sense of responsibility for them was very real—to him; but the other fellows persisted in declining to take it seriously. Circumstances were tethered in the grass beside the lane, and he cropped away contentedly as the caravanners prepared for their plunge. With their towels and bathing costumes, the seven juniors left the van, and made their way through the trees towards the stream.

The stream ran a hundred yards or so from the lane, and it was a lonely spot, overshadowed by big trees. The hot sun glinted through the foliage overhead. The sight of the cool water was very refreshing, and the van was prepared to enjoy their plunge. They stripped in the thicket, and put on their bathing costumes, and splashed in merrily.

Seven heads dotted the shining stream. The juniors could all swim, and they were enjoying themselves thoroughly.

Arthur Augustus, with his sense of responsibility for the party strong upon him, kept an eye upon his comrades. And he considered that it was fortunate he had done so when there came a sudden, sharp cry from Monty Lowther.

"Oh! Ow!"
 "Lowthah! What's the matiah!"
 "Oh! Ah! Ooop!"

Lowther threw up his hands, and disappeared under the water.

Like an arrow from a bow Arthur Augustus plunged to the rescue.

It was rather remarkable that neither Tom Merry nor Manners appeared to be alarmed by the danger of their chums. And Blake and Herriss and Digby preserved their equanimity in quite a wonderful way. Arthur Augustus was far too excited to notice those circumstances. He plunged wildly after Monty Lowther, who had disappeared from view.

Down went Arthur Augustus after the drowning youth. He came up again, with Lowther clinging to his hair.

"Hold on, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as soon as his head was above water.

"Help!" moaned Lowther faintly.
 "I'm helpin' you, deah boy. Fway take hold of my shouldah. You are pullin' my hair feashfuly— Yawwooop!"

"Help!"
 "Oh cwikey!"

Monty Lowther seemed too far gone to understand. He clung to Arthur Augustus's hair with a grip of iron, and the swell of St. Jim's fairly howled with anguish.

But he endured that anguish with great fortitude as he rubbed Monty Lowther to the bank. Lowther was bundled ashore, gasping, and he still held on to Gussy's hair.

"Wessah me, Lowthah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You are quite safe now."
 "Oh deah!"

"Bal Jore! If you do not release my hair, Lowthah, I shall stwike you on the nose!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

There was a sudden howl from Tom Merry in the stream.

"Help!"
 Monty Lowther released Gussy's hair at last. The swell of St. Jim's rubbed his head as he spun round towards the stream. Tom Merry was struggling in the water a few yards from the bank, and as Gussy's startled gaze fell upon him he sank.

Splash!
 Arthur Augustus dived in promptly. The other swimmers were at a little distance, and did not seem to have observed the distress of the captain of the Shell. Fortunately, Arthur Augustus was there!

With rapid strokes D'Arcy reached the spot where Tom Merry had sunk just as Tom came to the surface again.

"Help!" he moaned.
 "All right, deah boy. Hold on to me!" panted Arthur Augustus.

The Shell fellow clutched his hair, and Arthur Augustus gave a howl, which turned into a gurgle as his head was dragged under.

"Yoooooogggghh!"
 D'Arcy's head came up, with Tom holding on to his hair with a frantic clutch. Gussy struck out for the bank in desperation.

Tom Merry was safely piloted ashore, and he sank down in the rushes beside Monty Lowther.

"Saved!" gasped Lowther dramatically.

"Bal Jore! I am vevy glad that I have saved you fellows, but I wessly wish you had not turged at my hair!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I trust you wessah now that it is wutshah luckay I am heah to look aftah you."

"Help!" came in a howl from the stream.

"Bal Jore!"
 Manners of the Shell was struggling wildly in the water. As Arthur Augustus stared at him he threw up his hands and sank.

"Oh cwikey!"
 Arthur Augustus plunged valiantly in. He was fatigued with his exertions; but a life was at stake, and the noble Gussy did not think of his fatigue.

Manners came up, struggling feebly, but in a few seconds Gussy's strong grasp was upon him.

"Help!" moaned Manners.
 "All sewens now!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I've got you. Hold on to my shouldah— Yawwoooooh!"

It was to Arthur Augustus's hair that Manners held on, and he held on like a limpet to a rock.

"Wessah my hair, Mannaah!" spluttered Arthur Augustus.

"I've sewin' you, you silly ass; but you need not pull my hair out by the roots!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "Wessah me, Mannaah, and I will get you ashore in a jiffy!"
 "Save me!"

"Oh cwumba! Oh deah! Yawwoooooh!"
 There was no help for it. Arthur Augustus had to get Manners ashore with that deadly grip on his hair.

Manners was landed in the rushes, and Arthur Augustus sat down, dripping and gasping, and rubbed his head.

He was still rubbing it when a wild howl came from Jack Blake in mid-stream:
 "Help!"

"Great Scott!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled up, and fairly blinked at Jack Blake as the latter struggled in the water.

Gussy was not a suspicious youth; but four rescues being required one after another was so remarkable that he began to have his doubts, especially as he observed that Dig and Herries appeared to be quite indifferent to Blake's peril.

"Hewwies!" he shouted. "Digby! Go and help Blake!"

The two juniors, apparently deaf, swam on. Jack Blake threw up his hands and disappeared below the water.

"Save him, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus had his doubts by this time; but he could not afford to leave Blake under water while his doubts were resolved. He plunged in and swam to the Fourth-Former's rescue.

Blake came up, and made a grasp at Gussy's head, evidently in search of his hair. Arthur Augustus backed away.

"Blake, you ass—"

"Save me!"

"I refuse to save you unless you let my hair alone!"

"Help!"

Blake went under again, and Arthur Augustus made a grab at him and dragged him up. The next instant Blake's grasp was on his hair.

"Yawwoh! Leggo!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"Save me!"

"Stop pullin' my hair, you beast!"

"Help!"

"I am perfectly aware that you are only wottin', you wottah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You are not in any dangah at all, you boundah! You have been pullin' my leg!"

"And now I'm pulling your hair!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter from the bathers.

The Terrible Three on the bank roared; Dig and Herries in the water yelled; and Blake chorled cheerfully as he held on to Gussy's hair. It was only too plain now that Gussy's aristocratic leg had been pulled. The little comedy had been arranged among the caravanners for his especial benefit—in return for his fatherly attention.

"You uttah wottah, Blake! I shall punch your nose if you do not let go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus jerked his head away, and swam ashore. As he scrambled out of the water he fixed a stern glance upon the Terrible Three, which ought to have withered them on the spot. But it didn't. They only yelled.

"This is a twick!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly.

"Has that dawned on you at last, old top?" asked Menty Lowther blandly.

"I wegard you—"

"You haven't rescued Herries and Dig yet," said Manners.

"What?"

"Help!" yelled Herries and Digby together in great excitement.

"Ha, ha! Save us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah-ases!" roared Arthur Augustus in great wrath. "I wegard you all as a set of practical jokin' wottahs! Wats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three, quite recovered now, plunged into the water again; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a state of great wrath and indignation, proceeded to towel himself down.

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CHAPTER 3.

DOES BROWN!

"GREAT SCOTT!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation a few minutes later.

Tom Merry & Co. were still in the stream; but Arthur Augustus had proceeded to the thicket where the clothes had been left.

Then the startled exclamation reached the ears of his comrades.

"Hallo! Anything up!" called out Blake from the stream.

"Yass, wotbah!"

"That's the matter!"

"The clobber's gone!"

"What!"

Six startled youths scrambled out of the stream, and rushed to join Arthur Augustus.

The clothes had been left on the green-sward in the thickets, quite out of sight of anyone passing through the wood or along the lane—and, so far as the bathers were aware, no one had passed.

But the clothes were gone.

A straw hat and some boots and a couple of socks remained, and that was all. But pinned to a tree was a slip of paper, and on the paper was written, in a rather sprawling hand:

"Thanks!—G. F."

Tom Merry & Co. blinked at the paper. They knew the "G. F." of George Figgins of the New House at St. Jim's.

"Figgins!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Figgins & Co., they've taken our clobber!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I—I'll give 'em thanks!" ejaculated Herries. "The New House rotters! They must have been watching us all the time!"

"Oh dear!"

The seven School House juniors of St. Jim's stared round them in search of the enemy; but there was no sign of Figgins & Co. to be seen. It was pretty clear that the New House-Co. had been keeping an eye, from a distance, on the caravanners; and the vanners' bathing excursion had given them an opportunity that was too good to be lost.

"Bai Jove! They never weally wode on 'at job! they left us!" said Arthur Augustus. "They must have stopped, and watched us, you know, lookin' for a chance to play a wrotten New House twick on us!"

"The rotters!"

"The worms!"

"You fellows have been vewy careless. I must say. Now our clobber is gone!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Your fault, as much as anybody's, as!" snapped Herries.

"Wontly, Hewwies—"

"Well, isn't it!" roared Herries.

"Pway do not argue, Hewwies. There is no time for arguin'," said the swell of St. Jim's. "The question is, where are those boundahs, and where is our clobber!"

"They can't be far away," said Tom. "Anyhow, we've got some other clobber in the van."

"We can scarcely proceed to the caravan, Tom Mewwy, in our present atiah. The van is by the open lane, and anyone might pass—"

"Let 'em pass!"

Tom Merry wrapped his towel round him and started for the caravan. His comrades followed his example—Arthur Augustus the last, and after considerable hesitation. They hurried through the trees, and reached the open-grass where the caravan had been halted.

But there another surprise awaited them.

The caravan was no longer there!

They had left Circumstances in harness and tethered to a tree, and he certainly could not have wandered. But he was gone!

But on the tree to which Circumstances had been tied a slip of paper was pinned. It bore an inscription with which they were now familiar:

"Thanks!—G. F."

"The—the—the van's gone!" murmured Blake dazedly.

"Oh ewiker!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another.

They were deserted, in a lonely Derran lane, in the light attire of bathing-costumes and towels, and clothes and horse and van were gone—captured by their old rivals of St. Jim's!

Words could not have done justice to their feelings.

Arthur Augustus was the first to speak.

"You uttah asses!" was what he said.

"You burbling jabbberwock!" was Blake's reply.

"A look-out ought to have been kept, as we knew those New House boundahs were in the neighbourhood!" said D'Arcy, with great severity.

"Why didn't you keep it, then?" shrieked Blake.

"Oh, pway don't argue! I nevah saw such chaps as you fellows for arguin'. We've got to get our clobber back. I presume that even those New House wuffians cannot intend to leave us stwanded like this!"

"Well, hardly!" said Tom Merry.

"Hallo! Here's Figgins!"

A cyclist came gliding cheerfully up the lane. George Figgins grinned and waved his hand to the sparsely-clad caravanners under the trees.

He stopped within speaking distance, with a foot on his bike, ready to mount again at a moment's warning.

"Hallo! You look cheerful, crew!" he called out. "Looking for your van?"

"Bring us our clobber, you wottah!"

"Baw-wow!"

"Look here, Figgins—" began Tom Merry.

"We'll scrag you!" roared Herries.

"Come along and do it!" grinned Figgins.

The caravanners made a move towards him—and Figgins put his leg over his bike. Tom Merry & Co. halted. It was clear enough that they had no chance of getting to close quarters with Figgins unless he chose.

"Hold on!" said Tom. "We shall have to make terms with the bounder. Look here, Figgins, you're done us, and we own up. Now hand us back our clobber."

Figgins shook his head.

"We shall be back at St. Jim's before long," he said. "You School House worms make out that you're cock House at St. Jim's. We're going to start the new term with a written admission from you that you're not. I want seven signatures to this paper, and I'll give you a quarter of an hour to think it over."

Figgins tossed a paper towards the School House crowd, and mounted his bike and rode off the way he had come, deaf to the wrathful remarks that hurried after him. The paper fell in the grass, and Tom Merry went forward and picked it up. And with his brows the seven caravanners were written on the paper in sprawling hand.

"THIS IS TO CERTIFY that the undersigned members of the School House, own up that the New House cock House at St. Jim's, and that we humbly crave pardon for having maintained otherwise.

"As witness our signatures—"



The Terrible Three on the bank roared as Blake held on to the unfortunate Quay's hair. "Slap pull! my hair, you beast!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I am perfectly awash that you are only wotkin', you watah!" (See chapter 2).

CHAPTER 4.

Surrender!

TOM MERRY & CO. looked at one another.

Tom crumpled the precious document in his hand.

"Tear it up!" growled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're in rather a fix, though," remarked Maxima. "If those bounders don't give us back our clobber—"

"We can't go into a town like this!" said Lowther.

"We can't even be seen on the road!" said Blake. "They're got us by the short hairs this time, and no mistake!"

"What a fearful fix, dear boys! But we cannot sign that papah—we shall be hanged to death by St. Jim's next term. These bounders will show it all orah the day!"

"They're bound to give us our clobber or later!" growled Herries. "I'll stick it out."

"I will," said Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell still held the document in his hand, and he made no attempt to tear it up. The fact was, that he realised that the New House Co. was the whip-hand, and that there was nothing doing. "There was much debate among the exasperated caravaners, while fifteen minutes passed; but no decision was arrived at, when there

was the whir of a bicycle in the road again.

George Figgins appeared in sight, grinning; and he halted at a safe distance, as before.

"Made up your minds!" he called out.

"You wottah!"

"New House cad!"

"We'll smash you!"

Figgins chuckled.

"We've had a nice tea in your caravan," he remarked. "We found every thing we wanted. Fatty told me to mention that the cake was good."

"Oh, you rotters!"

"I'll give you another hour to think it over, if you like," said Figgins generously. "I wouldn't hurry you for anything. But you can bet on it that you won't get your clobber back, or your van, either, till you've put your fists to that giddy document."

"Waddy, Figgins—"

"We're going to put it up in the study at St. Jim's next term," explained Figgins. "Worth being framed, I think. What do you think?"

"I regard you—"

"I'll give you another hour!" said Figgins, putting his leg over his bicycle again.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry desperately.

"Well?"

"You can't keep us without our clobber—"

"Wathah not!"

"My dear chap, if you don't sign that paper before dark we're going on with your van, and you'll be left stranded. That's a tip!"

"You wouldn't dare!" yelled Herries.

"Wait and see!" grinned the New House junior. "This is where you School House bounders get it in the neck, and don't you forget it!"

"Oh, you rotters!"

"You—you worm!"

"Thanks! I've had enough compliments," said Figgins cheerily. "I'm off. I'll see you again in an hour. Fatty will have made a pretty deep inroad on your grub by that time. He was going strong when I left him. You don't mind that!"

The exasperated caravaners made a move towards Figgins.

"Hallo! Here come some ladies!" remarked Figgins. "You fellows know best whether you're fit to be seen."

There was a wild rush into the trees. Two girl cyclists came skimming along the lane, and they passed Figgins—the caravaners lying very low in cover. The girls passed on and disappeared, little dreaming of the remarkable scene they had very nearly witnessed. Not till they were quite gone did Tom Merry & Co. venture out of cover.

"You—you—you New House rotter!"

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gaped Tom Merry as he came into view again.

"Good-bye!" said Figgins.

"Hold on—"

"Surrey—can't stop!"

"We—we'll sign the paper!" howled Tom Merry in desperation.

Figgins dismounted again.

"Now you're talking!" he remarked, "Sign it, dear boys—you know you've got to, and you may as well get it over!"

"I wufeso to sign that papah, Tom Mewwy! I wogard it as an infraction of my personal dig to do so!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Oh, rats! You can sign it if we do!" growled Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Any chap who doesn't sign the paper won't get his clobber," said Figgins.

"Gussy's at liberty to go about clad as a South-Sea Islander if he likes. He may get run in."

"Bai Jove! If you weally mean to sign the papah, Tom Mewwy, powwaps I had betnah sign, too."

"We haven't any pen—" began Tom Merry.

"I've got a fountain-pen for you, old top," chuckled Figgins. "It's ready if you want it."

"Chuck it over!"

There was no help for it; the caravanners had made up their minds to sign. They were feeling a good deal as the Huns must have felt when they signed the Peace Treaty.

"We'll get the dashed paper back, somehow, before the new term!" muttered Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry caught the fountain-pen as Figgins tossed it over. The paper was spread on a flat stone, and the caravanners signed it in turn. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

Seven signatures adorned the document of surrender, Figgins watching the proceedings from his distance with a cheery grin.

Tom Merry held up the paper.

"Here you are, you rotter!"

"Good! It's pax now!" asked Figgins.

"Pax for to-day!" said Tom.

"That's all right. Honest Injun, you know."

"Honest Injun!" answered the caravanners.

The word of Tom Merry & Co. was their bond; and George Figgins advanced and received the paper. The caravanners looked at him as if they could eat him; but their word was passed, and Figgins was safe.

"Good enough!" said Figgins cheerily.

"You shall have your old van back now. Ta-ta! You look a happy family, and no mistake!"

And Figgins, chesting, mounted his bike and rode away. Ten minutes later the St. Jim's caravan came rumpiling up the road. George Francis Kerr was driving, with a smiling face; and Figgins was going a bike and wheeling Kerr's machine. Fatty Wynn was riding his bike, too, with one hand—the other holding a cake, from which he took an occasional mouthful. The fat and shining face of David Llewellyn Wynn testified that he had had a good time in the caravan laider.

Kerr jumped down, and took his bike.

"Here's your old bus!" he remarked. "Come on, Figg! We'll ask you fellows over to our study next term to see your signature in a gilt frame!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins and Fatty Wynn.

The caravanners did not reply; they were under a strong temptation to rush on Figgins & Co. and smite them big and thigh. But they restrained their wrath. They had made it pax, and pax was sacred. Figgins & Co. rode on, chucking, and the caravanners hastily dived into the van in search of their clothes.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ahook a wrathful fist from the window after the departing trio. Figgins waved a paper in the air in return, and the chums of the New House disappeared.

CHAPTER 5.

A Mystery!

"I CONSIDAH—"

"Pax the chips, Gussy!"

"Heah are the chips, Blake. I considah—"

"Any more eggs?"

"Betnah the eggs! considah—"

"Pour-out the coffee, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

The caravanners were in camp on the borders of Dartmoor. They were hungry after their day's march, and they were enjoying their supper, though they had by no means forgotten their defeat at the hands of Figgins & Co. That defeat had to be wiped out somehow; but, in the meantime, the hungry voyagers enjoyed their supper.

"I considah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass sternly upon his comrades—"I considah, dear boys, that it is necessary for us to recapture that papah from Figgins & Co."

"Passed unanimously!" yawned Tom Merry.

"You haven't poured out the coffee, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

"Don't slack, you know!" urged Blake.

"I am speakin' at the present moment, Blake!"

"Why specify the present moment?" murmured Monty Lowther. "Is there ever a moment when you're not speaking, Gussy?"

"I wufeso to reply to that, Lowthah! I wogard you as a silly ass! I was goin' to say—"

"Coffee!"

"I was goin' to say that cawavannin' is all very well, but cawavannin' will have to stand orah until we have wecaptured that document. We shall netah be able to face the fellows next term if Figgins stieks that ridiculous papah up in his study at St. Jim's."

"My dear man, that's all decided, settled, finished, and done with," said Blake. "If you've got any suggestion to make how it's to be done, that's a different matter."

"It has got to be done, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "And I have a suggestion to make."

"Not much good, I expect! I'd rather you poured out the coffee! Don't forget the strainer!"

"My idea is—"

"You've got an idea!" inquired Lowther.

"Yaaa, wathah!"

"Whose?"

"My own, you ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "If you are goin' to be a funny ass, Lowthah—"

"Not at all. That's your job, old top, and I won't poach!"

"The question awises," said Arthur Augustus, with a withering glance at the humorist of the Shell, "how—"

"How we're going to get any coffee!" asked Blake.

"Certainly not! How are we goin' to win down Figgins & Co. and get them disgorge that papah. And I've an ideah. Those boundahs are awooding the country, and it is neessary to go followin' them in the cawavagons go verry verry verry much slowah cawavagons."

"Not really!"

"Yaaa, wathah! My ideah is to heah for a bit, and I will take and go scoutin'."

"What for?"

"To win down Figgins & Co. I have run them down, you fellows old well up—"

"When!" murmured Monty Lowther.

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"As a fellow of tact and judgment, I wathah think I shall wun them down easily enough. It will be quite easy to make inquiries afah three fellows like Figgins & Co.—one a lanky boundah, and another as fat as a bawel, and the third a sanday-coloured duffah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They are bound to put up some wath, or camp some wath, or something," said Arthur Augustus, "I am gin' nest or the bike wath suppah, and I wathah I shall bring you news in a very soon time. You fellows must be wedy 'low my lead."

"Who's going to wash up?" inquired Herries.

"Bothah the washin'-up!"

"It's got to be done, though."

"I must wemark, Hewies," said Arthur Augustus severely, "that it is like you to think of such things as washin'-up when the honah of the School House is at stake! Wats!"

And Arthur Augustus, having finished his supper, wheeled out the bike, listlessly disregarding the prossic question of the washing-up.

He lighted both his lamps carefully, and started.

Tom Merry & Co. grinned as the swell of St. Jim's disappeared in the dusk. They were very anxious to get to close quarters with Figgins & Co. and wipe out their defeat; but they did not suppose that Gussy would be successful in running down the New House juniors. Indeed, if he was successful, it was only too probable that he would succeed in running his noble head into a hornets' nest.

Moreover, pax had been declared for the day, and until midnight the School House chums were on their parole, as it were; and certainly they were not likely to turn out in the small hours of the morning to go on the war-path under Gussy's lead. So there was no hurry to scout for the enemy; but they gave Arthur Augustus his head to save argument.

They chattered over supper. And after supper there was washing-up, and the horse was attended to and the tent erected, and the caravanners prepared to turn in.

Arthur Augustus had not returned by that time.

Jack Blake looked rather anxiously along the dusky track over the moor. It occurred to him that the swell of St. Jim's might easily lose himself in that lonely region, and might spend the remainder of the night finding his way back.

"Turning in?" called out Tom Merry. Blake came back from the road.

"Well, I suppose it's no good waiting for Gussy," he said. "He can turn in when he comes back. If he's lost his way, he mayn't come home before the milk in the morning!" said the captain of the Shell with a smile.

"The ass!" grunted Blake.

The Terrible Three turned into the tent, and Blake & Co. into the tent. There was a place there for the noble Gussy when he came back—if he did back.

Caravanners, tired with their day's work, were soon asleep.

And the stars glistened in the sky as the night wind sighed in the foliage of the moor. The caravanners slept soundly enough, but Tom Merry was on his elbow in the bunk, and was listening.

Buzzzzzz! Ting-ling-ling!

It was the sound of a bicycle-bell on the road across the moor, twenty yards or so from the spot where the caravanners had camped.

Buzzzz!

The ringing of the bike-bell was almost continuous.

"Billey ass, whoever it is!" grunted Tom Merry. "What the thump does he want to buzz like that for? Blow him!"

There was a sleepy voice from Messenow bunk.

"What thumping thump is kicking up that row?"

"Some ass of a cyclist on the road!" answered Tom.

"Go out and slaughter him!"

"Too sleepy!"

Buzzzzzz!

The bike-bell rang on and on and on. It was rather difficult to sleep, in the circumstances.

"I say, can it be Gussy coming home?" ejaculated Monty Lowther, from the bunk below.

"No reason why he should stay on the road ringing his bell, is there?" asked Tom.

"Not that I know of. But why should anybody do it? And somebody's doing it," said Lowther.

"Some potty chump, I should think."

"Blessed if I can sleep!"

Buzzzzzz!

Tom Merry put a leg over the side of the bunk.

"It's a bit too thick!" he said. "Whoever is kicking up that row has got to be stopped. Let's go out together and mop him up."

"Good!"

Blake's voice was heard at the door of the van.

"You fellows awake!"

"Yea, rather! We can't sleep in that racket! We're going out to kill the cheerful lunatic!"

"So am I!"

The Terrible Three came down from the van half-dressed, and they found Blake and Herries and Digby outside. The Fourth Formers had found it equally impossible to sleep while the raucous solo was being played on the bicycle-bell twenty yards away.

Breathing wrath, the six juniors started for the road, with the most ferocious intentions towards the unknown cyclist who was recklessly disturbing the repose of the tired caravanners.

CHAPTER 6. Gussy's Luck!

"THERE he is!" murmured Tom Merry.

Buzzzzzz!

The jarring clang of the bicycle bell rang on.

In the dim starlight the juniors could only make out the figure on the road.

The cyclist was standing beside his machine, holding it by the handles, and buzzing the bell for all he was worth.

Why any cyclist should halt on the road, and buzz his bell as if for a wager at two in the morning was a deep mystery. But the chums of St. Jim's were not so keen on solving the mystery as on bumping the cyclist. They considered that he was asking for drastic treatment, and they were quite prepared to administer it.

"Collar him!" muttered Blake.

The bushes beside the road screened the juniors as they crept on towards the enemy. They were very careful to advance in cover. They did not want the cyclist to jump on his machine and pedal away and escape vengeance.

Rush him!

Six juniors came through the bushes with a swoop, and pounced on the dim, shadowy form of the cyclist.

Crash!

The cyclist went down in the road, and his bike went with him. Then there was a wild yell.

"Yawwooop!"

"Gussy!" roared Blake.

"D'Arcy!"

"It's that ass!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Whease me, you uttah asses!"

Yawwooh!

The astounded juniors released the cyclist. They had not supposed for a moment that it was Arthur Augustus.

They could not be expected to guess that Arthur Augustus, on his return, would stop twenty yards from the camp and ring his bell successfully.

"You thumping idiot!" roared Blake.

"What's this game?"

"Gussy playing practical jokes on his pals!" growled Herries. "Give him a jolly good bumping!"

"Yea, rather!"

"You fearful duffahs!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Can't you see I'm tied to the bike, you uttah asses! Whease me!"

"Tut-tut-tied to the bike!" stammered Blake.

"Yass, wathah! Ow!"

"My hat!"

Tom Merry turned on the light of his electric torch. The juniors simply blinked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

His wrists were tied to his handle bars with a loop of cord, just allowing him freedom enough to ring his bell. Another loop of cord attached one of his legs to a pedal.

"What—what—what the merry dickens are you playing this game for, Gussy?" howled Blake. "What have you tied yourself up like that for?"

"You uttah ass! Do you think I tied myself up!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Who did, then?"

"Figgins & Co., you ass!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing to laugh at, you duffahs!" howled Arthur Augustus, blinking up at the juniors. "Whease me at once, as I summons! I am in a very uncomfy posiah. Yow!"

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

It was evident that the School House scout had found Figgins & Co. after all, not according to expectations. But quite according to expectations, in finding them he had found a hornets' nest.

Blake, gasping with excitement, untied the cords. It was rather a long process.

"Why did you fearful asses wash on me like that?" demanded Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Why did you kick up that thundering row and wake us up?" retorted Tom Merry.

"I was twirly to attract your attention, you duffah! I called out several times, and you did not hear me, so I wang the bell to wake you up!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "If you had come soonah you might have collahed Figgins & Co. Now they are gone!"

"Did they bring you here?" grinned Blake.

"Yass, wathah! I wam them down, just as I told you I would!" gasped D'Arcy. "They were campin' on the moor, some miles away, and I wam them down by their lampights. Somehow, they spotted me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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eye open. And they collapsed me quite willy, and that beast Figgins said it was very late for a little boy to be out alone.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh wats! And they brougnt me back, wheehin' my bike, you know, and they actually stuck a pin into me to make me march, you know, the awful wullians! And when we awvired heah they tied us like this, you know. I could not wheel the bike into the camp with my leg tied to the pedal, so I wried to wake up you fellows. Oh deah!"

The juniors roared.
Blake succeeded in getting the cords unfastened at last, and Arthur Augustus was free. He jammed his eyes into his eye, and surveyed the chortling caravaners wrathfully.

"When you silly asses hare done cackin'—" he began hotly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Fewwaws you will follow me, and we will mop up Figgins & Co. They are probably not more than a mile away."

"Soren of us on one bike!" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove, no! But—"
"Then how are we going to catch them on foot, when they've got a mile start, and they're on bikes!"

"Bai Jove! I nerval thought of that. Howevah—"

"I'm turning in!" grunted Herries.
"If you kick up any more shindies to-night, Gussy, we'll slaughter you!"
"Woolly, Hewwies—"

"You can go scouting again if you like," chuckled Monty Lewther. "If you do, don't come home till morning!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The caravaners returned to their camp chortling. Arthur Augustus followed them, sniffing. He did not go scouting again. He was fed up with scouting for that night.

CHAPTER 7.

Recaptured!

"I'VE got an idea!"
George Francis Kerr, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that remark.

And Figgins and Fatty Wynn replied:
"Go it!"

Figgins & Co. were taking it easy. It was the day following their encounter with the School House party—an encounter which had cost very much to the satisfaction of the New House trio. The afternoon sun was streaming down on the three cyclists as they lay resting on a green bank by the road, their machines close at hand.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's scouting expedition the previous night had rather disturbed the night's rest of the three cyclists. They were making up for it by a rest in the grass in the sunny afternoon. It was very pleasant in the thick grass, with the sun shining upon them. A few yards away from them ran the white road, on which motor-cars buzzed by every now and then, and heavy market-carts rumbled slowly along.

"I've been thinking," continued the Scottish junior, "now we've dropped on these School House duffers, we can get a little harmless and necessary entertainment by pulling their leg. Now, I suppose you chaps know we're on Dartmoor!"

"Of course we do, ast!"
"What is Dartmoor famous for?"

"Blessed if I know," said Figgins.
"It's jolly good air here."

"Haven't you ever heard of the convict prison?"

"Yes, now I come to think of it. What

about it? We're jolly well not going to visit it."

"Convicts escape sometimes," said Kerr.

"Do they? I hope we sha'n't meet any."

"I was thinking that there would be some excitement among those ruddy caravaners if they met an escaped convict."

"Ha, ha! I dare say there would!" Figgins chuckled. "But I suppose you're not thinking of helping a convict to escape, just to give them a scare?"

"That's exactly what I'm thinking of."

"Well, you ast!" said Fatty Wynn. "I say, FERRY, have you got any more toffee?"

"No."
"I knew you didn't get enough," said Fatty plaintively. "I told you at the time, Fergy, that you weren't getting enough toffee."

"Bother the toffee!" said Figgins.

"Look here, Kerr, what are you burling about? I suppose it's a jape you're thinking of!"

"That's it! Have you forgotten the N.H.J.A.D.S.?" said Kerr. "Aren't they the leading lights of the New House Junior Amateur Dramatic Society? When we were playing 'Convict 99'—didn't I look the part?"

"Just as if you were born in it!" agreed Figgins. "But—"

"Well, we could borrow the things easily enough," said Kerr. "We could bike into Okehampton for them. There's bound to be a place there where you can

get things for amateur theatricals. And an escaped convict dropping in on the caravaners—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

Fatty Wynn chuckled.

"We should have to get on their track again," said Kerr. "But that's easy enough—they can't be very far away, and it's easy enough to inquire for a red caravan. And—"

There was a rumble on the road, but the New House juniors did not heed it—scores of vehicles had passed them as they lay in the grass. But the sound of a familiar voice suddenly startled them, and Kerr broke off abruptly.

"Bai Jove! Those New House wotahs!"

Figgins & Co. bounded to their feet.

The St. Jim's caravan was rolling along the road, with Blake driving, and the other caravaners walking. It was an unexpected meeting, and for a moment the rivals of St. Jim's blinked at one another.

Then there was a rush of the caravaners.

"Collar them!" roared Blake, throwing down the reins and leaping from the caravan.

Before Blake's feet touched the ground the other School House juniors were rushing to the attack.

Figgins & Co. had no time to get on their bikes; no time, indeed, to lift the machines from the grass.

They had to put up their hands in defence as the caravaners swooped up the sloping bank and rushed on them.

Six against three was long odds, and the next moment it was seven against three. Figgins & Co. were driven back, resisting manfully.

"Book it to them!" roared Herries.
"Yas, wathah! Go for the boundsah!"

Back went Figgins & Co., retreating before the onslaught.

"Collar the bikes!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries and Dig and Manners seized the three machines, and wheeled them into the road. Then the rest of the caravaners ceased the pursuit of Figgins & Co. and returned to the van.

On the grassy bank beside the road, the New House trio halted, panting and breathless.

Tom Merry waved his hand to them. "Thanks for the bikes!" he called out.

"They will come in useful."

"Yas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

And the caravaners roared.

"You—you—you School House rotters!" gasped George Figgins.

"You're not going to collar our jiggers!"

"I wathah think we are, Figgay!"

"You can do Devon on foot!" grinned Monty Lewther. "Pedestrianism is a very healthy exercise—a quite nice way of spending a vacation. You shall have your jiggers next term at St. Jim's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—" roared Fatty Wynn in great wrath.

"Good-bye!"

"Give us our jiggers!" yelled Figgins.

"Tut, tut top!"

The caravan moved on, the victors of the School House juniors wheeling the tired machines. Figgins & Co., in dismay, came down the grassy bank the road, and followed. It was not use their attempting to recapture the machines; the odds were too great. They tramped furiously after the grinning caravaners.

"Look here—" shouted Figgins at last.

Tom Merry glanced back.

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The juniors simply blinked as Tom Merry's torch shed a light upon O'Arcy. His wrists were tied to his handle-bars with a loop of cord. Another loop of cord attached one of his legs to a pedal. (See chapter 5.)

"Hallo! You fellows still there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want our bikes!" roared Kerr.

"You can wait, old chap!" grinned Blake.

"Like to come to terms?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully. "You've got a paper somewhere about you, Figgy, that we want."

"Yass, wathah!"

"We'll give you three bikes for it," continued Tom, generously. "That's a good price for a scrap of paper, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins breathed hard.

The document of surrender reposed in his pocket, and it was the intention of the Co. to have it framed and hung up in their study in the New House at St. Jim's. They had already looked forward to that triumph with satisfaction; but it looked now as if they had counted their chickens rather than their eggs. Certainly they were not prepared to give Devon on foot!

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Figgins.

"Exchange no robbery!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "When you make up your minds, you can come and change the paper for the bikes. Until then, we stick to the jiggers!"

"Yass, wathah!"

The caravanners swung on with the van merrily. Behind them tramped Figgins & Co. in great wrath and dismay. The rescue of the bikes was impossible; and Figgins realised that he had to come to terms.

But it took Figgins some time to make up his mind. A dusty mile had passed beneath their feet before Figgins could decide to swallow the pill.

"I—I suppose there's no help for it, you fellows!" granted Figgins, at last. Kerr and Wynn nodded assent. Evidently, there was no help for it.

"Stop, you School House rotters!" called out Figgins desperately.

Tom Merry glanced back again.

"Made up your minds!" he asked.

"Yes, blow you!"

"Trot out the giddy document, then!"

The caravan halted, and Figgins came forward with the precious document in his hand. Tom Merry took it, and examined it and tore it into small fragments, amid choruses from his comrades. Then Figgins was allowed to take the bikes.

The St. Jim's van rolled on, Tom Merry & Co. smiling cheerfully back at the New House trio. Figgins & Co. dis-

appeared on the road behind, and the caravanners wended their way merrily over the wide expanse of Dartmoor. But the School House caravanners had not yet seen the last of their old rivals.

CHAPTER 8.

The Convict!

"WHAT the dickens—?"

"What the thump—?"

What's the matter, Dig?"

The caravan was camped on the moor, and Tom Merry & Co. were preparing supper. Digby had taken Circumstances away to tether him on the open moor, while his comrades were busy with supper. And all of a sudden there was a clatter of hoofs, and Dig was seen speeding back to the camp at top speed, with Circumstances thundering along by his side.

The night was dark, and a few stars glimmered in the velvety sky. Dimly round the camp of the caravanners waved bunches of furze; nothing else was to be seen on the wide horizon. Tom Merry & Co. stared blankly at Robert Arthur Digby, as he came tearing back towards them.

Dig was running his hardest, and keeping Circumstances almost at a gallop by his side. He was panting with exertion as he ran.

"What's the match, dear boy?"
 "What the merry dickens—"
 "Look out!" gasped Dig, as he reached his amazed comrades.
 "Look out for what, ass? Is there a bull?"

"I—I saw him!" panted Digby. "He he—was lurking in the furze—"
 "Who was?" yelled Blake.
 "The convict!"
 "The what?"

"A—a—convict!" panted Digby. "I—I saw him! He made a move towards me, and—and I bolted! Look out!"
 "A convict!" said Tom Merry almost dazedly.

"Bat Jove!"
 The caravanners drew together. Their eyes scanned the deep shadows round the camp.

They were aware that the great convict establishment was not many miles away; but it had never crossed their minds that they might see anything of its inmates. Escapes from Dartmoor were infrequent enough; still, they occurred. And the thought that some desperate ruffian might be lurking about their encampment was not a pleasant one.

There was no sound, no movement, from the shadows, save the sough of the grass and furze in the night wind.

"Are you—are you sure, Dig?" asked Blake at last.

Dig was quite pale.
 "I tell you I saw him plainly!" he breathed. "He was skulking in a bush, and—and when I saw him—Oh dear!" Dig's voice faltered. He had evidently had a case.

"After all, he can't hurt us," said Tom Merry. "They're seven of us, and one convict can't be very dangerous."
 "No fear!"

"It's all right," said Arthur Augustus. "If he bothers us, dear boys, we'll recapture him and take him back to prison."

But the caravanners were feeling uneasy, all the same. They were strong in numbers, but some hulking, desperate convict was a dangerous enemy to tackle. They watched the shadows in great distrust. There was no habitation within miles of them, and no help to be had if they needed it.

Arthur Augustus jumped into the van and brought out the golf-clubs. The clubs might be wanted now.

"Look!" muttered Manners suddenly. The juniors caught their breath.

In the dim shadows among the bushes a creeping figure appeared in sight at last.

They felt their hearts leap.
 As it came closer they recognised the "broad arrows" on the garb of the slinking figure.

They watched the new-comer as if fascinated.

He was a short man—he did not seem taller than the juniors themselves—but he was very broad, and looked thick-set and strong.

His face, as they saw it in the shadows, looked very dark, and had what appeared to be a stubble of beard on the chin. It was also very dirty.

The eyebrows were very thick and heavy and black, and the nose was a dark red. Seldom or never had the St. Jim's juniors seen so savage and threatening a face.

They stood together in silence, the clubs in their hands, as the convict reached the camp.

The oil-stoves and a lantern shed a light over the camp, and they saw him more

clearly as he came into the radius of light. His eyes glittered at them from under his bushy brows.

"Who are you?" demanded Tom Merry, breaking the silence at last.

"What do you want here?"
 The convict's eyes glittered at him.
 "Food and clothes!" he muttered.

Tom shook his head.
 "Like your cheek to ask!" he said.
 "You know very well that we can't help an escaped convict. You'd better clear off!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 The man came closer. There was something grasped in his right hand which the juniors could not clearly see.

"You'd better keep your distance," said Blake, grasping the iron-headed club. "You'll get hurt otherwise, my man!"

"Put down those clubs!" growled the convict in a deep, savage voice.
 "Rats!"

"What are you doing here?"
 "Caravanning."

"Good! Put down those clubs!" The convict's right hand rose, and the juniors felt a thrill of horrified excitement as the light glimmered on a steel tube. "Do you want me to fire!"

"Look here—"
 "Drop those sticks at once!" snapped the convict. "I'm a desperate man. A man ain't particular arter three years in chock. What do you think 'appened to the do you want me to serve you the same? It's the rope, anyhow, I reckon, and one or two more won't make much difference to me."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.
 He was tempted to head a rush at the ruffian; but the glimmering tube of the firearm in his hand was too dangerous. If the ruffian had fired the juniors could never have got near him with the golf-clubs. And his brutal, stubbly face looked desperate.

The caravanners exchanged glances, and the golf-clubs were dropped into the grass at their feet.

They were utterly at the mercy of the convict, and it was no use asking for trouble that could only end one way.

"That's better!" muttered the ruffian. "Now give me some supper. I'm hungry."

The juniors obeyed in silence.
 The convict sealed himself on a wheel, with his back to the van, evidently so that he could not be taken from behind. The weapon did not leave his hand for a moment. Tom Merry brought him a plate of the sausages and chips that had been cooked for supper.

"Hold it while I eat!" grunted the convict.

With his weapon in his right hand, the convict ate with his left; but in spite of his wolfish look he did not seem very hungry. His supper was quickly finished.

"Do as you're told, and I won't hurt you," he said. "I'm going to turn in in your van; it's long enough since I slept in a bed. But mind, if you give any trouble, I'll pot you before you know what's 'appened to you!"

Tom Merry made no reply.
 The convict stepped into the van and closed the door. Outside, the juniors heard him tussle into one of the bunks.

At a distance from the van the caravanners drew together, speaking in hushed tones. They were not thinking of supper now; their terrible guest filled their minds.

"This is a pretty go, and no mistake!" murmured Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I think it is our duty, dear boys, to seize that wuffian, and hand him ova to the authorities!"

Blake grunted.
 "We can't touch him, ass, when he's got a revolver. If he's really killed a warden, as he says, he wouldn't make any bones about potting us."

"Yaas; but wally we can't let that feabful wuffian take possession of our van, Blake!"

"I'm not arguing with a convict and a pistol, I know that!"

"Not good enough," said Manners, with a shake of the head.
 "Somethin's got to be done, Mannahs."

"It's plain enough what's to be done," said Tom Merry quietly. "That ruffian has turned into the van to sleep. More fool he! What we've got to do is bring the police here."

"But how—"
 "We're about four miles from a town here," said Tom. "But we've got the bike, and one of us can go—"

"That's a good idea, Tom Merry. Who's going?"

"If the ruffian wakes up, and notices that one of us is gone!" muttered Herries.

"We can always run for it, if necessary, and leave him in the camp," said Blake. "Who's going on the bike?"

There was a whispered discussion, and it was settled that Blake was going. Jack Blake wheeled the bicycle away very softly across the grass to the road, and did not mount till he was out of hearing of the caravan camp. Then he lighted his lamp, jumped into the saddle, and rode away at a breakneck pace.

In the caravan camp Tom Merry & Co. waited with beating hearts. From the van there came no sound.

CHAPTER 9.
 The Capture!

"HOW long, I wonder!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

That was the thought in the minds of all the caravanners.

Supper was forgotten. The stores were out. The caravanners were only thinking of their strange and perilous situation.

Inside the van the convict was apparently sleeping. At all events, no sound came from him. The juniors heard him lock the van door and turn into a bunk. Since then they had heard nothing. The man's utter recklessness in sleeping in the van was amazing. He could not expect that the warden would take this invasion of their camp quietly. But it did not seem to have occurred to him that they would go for help.

If he would keep quiet in the van till help arrived, that was all the caravanners desired. When Blake came back with the police the ruffian would be dealt with fast enough.

Blake seemed a long time gone; but he had a good distance to go, and probably there might be delay at the police-station. It was possible that the junior's story might be doubted. Still, the police were bound to come, on his positive assurance that there was an escaped convict at the caravan camp.

When would they come?

Tom Merry & Co. watched the road and watched the van, in a state of great anxiety and uneasiness.

Still no movement or sound from the van. They concluded that the ruffian was tired out by his wanderings since he had escaped from prison. That was the only way of accounting for his recklessness in placing himself in danger of recapture in this way.

There was a sound on the road at last. "Heah they come!" It was the whir of a bicycle. "Blake at last! My hat! It's not Blake!"

"That boundah Figgins!" The light gleamed through the dusk as the cyclist came up. It was Figgins of the New House, alone. He slowed down as he saw the School House juniors on the moor.

"Hallo! You fellows are up late," he called out. "No larks, you know!" "We're not much in a humour for larks," grunted Herries.

"Wathah not?" "Why, what's happened?" asked Figgins, getting off his bike, and regarding the School House juniors very curiously.

Tom Merry pointed to the closed van. "There's a blessed convict—"

"What!" "An escaped convict from Dartmoor Prison—"

"Gammon!" grinned Figgins. "Weally, Figgay—"

"Honest Injun!" said Tom Merry. "Speak quietly, Figgay. We don't want to wake him up. He's gone to sleep in the van. Fagged out, I suppose. Blake's gone on the bike for the police."

Figgins jumped. "For the p-p-police?" he stammered.

"Yea, wathah!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We're expecting him back every minute with the bobbies," said Monty Lowther. "What are you grinning at, you dummy? It's not a laughing matter, I suppose!"

"You're not pulling my leg?" asked Figgins. "You've really got a convict in the van!"

"Yes, you ass!" "Why don't you collar him, then?" "He's got a pistol."

"Great Scott!" "Shush, deah boy! If the howwid bwite wakes up he may cleah off befoah Blake gets back with the peelahs."

Figgins whistled softly. "I reckon I'll hang on a bit, and see it out," he remarked. "Will Blake be long?"

"Any minute now." So George Figgins waited, plainly very curious and interested on the subject of the caravanners' unwelcome guest.

Again there was the whir of a bike on the rough road, and it was accompanied by the staccato beat of a horse's hoofs.

"It's Blake this time," said Martners. "And a mounted bobby—only one. Safer to have sent two or three, I should think," said Dig.

"Yaaa, wathah!"

Jack Blake came whirring up, and jumped off his machine breathlessly. A sturdy mounted constable drew rein, and regarded the schoolboy caravanners with a searching glance.

"What's this yarn?" he asked. "Where's the man?"

"In the van," said Tom Merry. "It's queer!" said the constable abruptly. "As soon as this lad brought in the news, the inspector telephoned to the prison, and was told that there had been no escape."

"Then they haven't found it out," answered Tom. "The man's here right enough, sleeping in the van at this minute. He's got a revolver, and he threatened us with it."

The constable nodded. "Well, I'm sent here to see into it," he said.

He dismounted from his horse, and strode towards the caravan. It was pretty plain that the constable had his doubts about the convict. Certainly his advance on the van was rather reckless, if the vehicle contained a desperate man armed with a deadly weapon.

"He thinks you're pulling his leg!" grinned George Figgins.

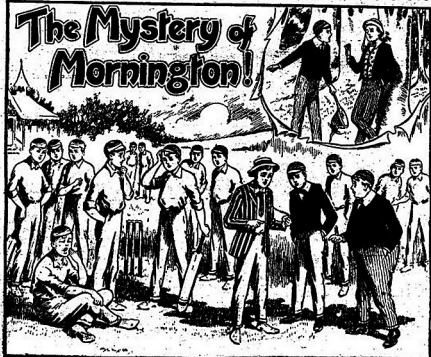
"He'll soon find out his mistake," said Tom. "Get the clubs, you fellows. We may have to help."

"Yes, rather!"

With the golf-clubs in their grip the juniors followed the constable. Reckless as he seemed to them, they were bound to help him in the struggle they expected to ensue.

The burly man tried the door of the van, and found that it was locked on the

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inside. He rapped on it with his truncheon.

"Open this door!"
"Bal Jove! Mind his wero/vrah!" called out Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously.

"Nonsense!"
"Oh, bal Jove!"
"Rap, rap, rap!"

"Open this door!" shouted the constable. "Who's there?" came a voice from within.

"You'll see! Open, in the name of the law!"

"All serene!"
The caravanners jumped as they heard that reply from within. The door of the St. Jim's van opened.

The juniors closed up behind the constable, clubs in hand, ready to help him in the expected struggle with the desperado. They expected the opening of the caravan door to reveal the ruffian in broad-arrow garb.

Figgins remained on the road, with a foot on his bike. He did not seem to see any necessity for joining in the fray. In fact, he was grinning, as if he did not take the affair seriously at all. Probably he didn't!

"Weady, deah boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Mind his wero/vrah!"
"Keep back, you boys!" greeted the constable. "Now, then, show yourself, my man! Come out!"

A figure appeared in the doorway of the van. The light was dim, but the stubby face and the broad-arrow garb could be seen. The constable jumped as he saw it.

"Surrender!" he rapped out, gripping his truncheon.

"Certainly! Shall I hand over my pistol?" asked the convict meekly.

"Yes—sharp!"
A hand came out of the doorway, holding the pistol by the hilt, with the butt extended for the constable to take it. Tom Merry & Co. blinked at the scene. This certainly did not look much like a reckless desperado. The constable took the pistol, and then he uttered an angry exclamation.

"Fish!"
"Bal Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus dazedly.

Now that they were close to it, the juniors could see the "pistol" plainly. It was a toy pistol, and was certainly not made to shoot with; its probable value was about half-a-crown. That was the deadly weapon with which the convict had held the caravanners at bay!

"What's this game?" demanded the constable. "Look 'ere, you get out, my man, and let's 'ave a look at you!"

"Right you are, corky!"
And with that unexpected and surprising reply, the convict jumped out of the caravan.

CHAPTER 19.

Only Kerr!

TOM MERRY & CO. blinked at the convict. The constable stared at him. From the road close at hand came a deep chorus from George Figgins. Figgies evidently found the scene entertaining.

The convict nodded cheerily to the constable, whose stare was curious and suspicious. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and calmly rubbed it over his face. The stubby appearance on his chin disappeared under the rub; it evidently was not a growth of beard! It had certainly looked like that; but it wasn't that!

"What's this game?" repeated the constable hurily.

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"Simply a transformation-scene," answered the convict, taking off his bushy eyebrows, giving his face a very different expression. And his voice was very different now, too!

Tom Merry gasped.
"I—I—I've heard that voice before! That isn't how he was speaking when he was—"

"Bal Jove! It's a twick!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from Figgins.

"Who are you?" roared Blake.
"What's this mean?" growled the constable. "I knowed very well there wasn't any convict 'ere. Pulling my leg, by gum! It's agin the law to pull the leg of the police, as you will find!"

"But—but who—what—?"
"Are you going to take me to Dartmoor Prison, officer?" asked the convict cheerily. "If you don't mind, I'll change my clothes first."

He ripped off the tunic, disclosing a Norfolk jacket underneath. His bulkiness was accounted for there.

While the caravanners watched him do this, the convict whipped off the remainder of his broad-arrow garb. He was in Norfolk under it, and though his face was not yet recognizable, the truth was dawning upon the School House juniors of St. Jim's.

"Twicked!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Spooled!" gasped Blake.
"Kerr!" roared Tom Merry, in great wrath.

"Kerr, bal Jove!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from Figgins. "I thought you fellows had got it wrong! It's not Convict 22 this journey! Ha, ha, ha!"

The "convict" grinned at the caravanners.

"What a pleasant evening!" he remarked. "Thanks so much for the supper and the rest in the caravan! So good of you!"

"You spooled rotter!" roared Blake furiously. "You—you—you've made me hike for miles, and—fetch a bobby, and—"

"Oh corky!"

The constable's face was growing grimmer and grimmer. That was natural under the circumstances. He had turned out at a late hour and ridden four miles, to discover a practical joker in a caravan! It was not likely that the officer of the law would see the humorous side of the matter at once.

He dropped a heavy hand on Kerr's shoulder.

"What I want to know is," he said grimly, "what's this mean! Now, then, what are you been up to?"

Kerr smiled at him cheerfully.

"Only a little joke on these innocent ducks!" he explained. "I thought it would entertain them to see an escaped convict! See?"

"You young raskil!"
"My dear man, take your paw off my shoulder!" said Kerr. "It's not agin the law to play amateur theatricals on a moor, that I know of!"

The constable blinked at him.
"I—I—I suppose it ain't!" he admitted.

He released the New Home junior. Kerr twisted his convict "clothes" into a little bundle, smiling at the School House juniors as he did so. The constable turned to them. He had no cause of complaint against Kerr, who was certainly within his rights as a British subject in playing practical jokes wherever he liked. But Jack Blake had brought the officer there, and the officer proceeded to tell Jack Blake what he thought of him, and his comrades what he thought of them.

Kerr, eyeing the School House juniors

warily, backed towards the road. They were rather too busy with the constable to attend to him just then.

"I'm awfully sorry I brought you here, officer!" stammered Blake, with a crimson face. "I—I thought—"

"Yes, wathah! We all thought—"
"You see, we supposed it was a real convict!" gasped Tom Merry. "We thought the dressed thing was—was a pistol, and—and we thought— Oh dear!"

"Oh, what a sell!" murmured Mottly Lowther. "I—I say, officer, c-can we offer you a c-cup of c-coffee?"

Smart from the constable.
"Which I've been brought 'ere four miles," he said. "Which I've got to make a report of this 'ere! Conveying false information to the police—that's wot it is!"

"Oh dear!"
"Oh corky!"

"But—but we thought—" gasped Manners.

"Wotly, officah, if it had been a real convict—"
"Yes, you see, if—if it had been a real one—"

"Four miles!" snorted the constable, empassioned. "Four miles for a joke! My eye! This 'ere will 'ave to be explained! You'd better all come with me to the station!"

"Oh, my, bal!"

"We're awfully sorry, deah boy—I mean, officah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Perrwaps—perrwaps you would allow us to make you some slight recompense for the trouble you have been put to!"

"Four miles—"
"Perrwaps a couple of pounds, deah boy—"

The constable softened.

It was probable that five shillings would have made the matter right; but Arthur Augustus never thought in shillings.

"Of course, young gentlemen, I don't want to give you a lot of trouble, when you seem to 'ave been took in, as it were," said the constable genially.

And from that moment the conversation took quite a genial turn; and when, five minutes later, the constable returned to his horse, his wrath seemed to have been quite appeased. Meanwhile, Kerr had joined Figgins on the road; and he was only waiting to see the end of the junior's argument with the majesty of the law. As the constable started for his horse Figgins put a long leg over his bike.

"Stop them!" breathed Tom Merry.

But there was no time to stop them. The bike was in motion, with Figgins pedalling and Kerr standing on the foot-rests behind, one hand resting on Figgies' shoulder. The bike shot away into the night, and a chuckle floated back from the New Home juniors.

"Aftah them, deah boys—"

Jack Blake rushed to his machine. But he stopped. Figgins was whirling away into the night, with Kerr behind; and there was no doubt that Fatty Wyn was somewhere near at hand. There was not much time, one fellow hurrying off in pursuit of these—

The constable rode off in an apologetic mood, and the clatter of his horse's hooves died away over the moor.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at another.

"Aren't we goin' to run 'em boundah down?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

Blake granted.

"We've been done!" said Tom Merry.

"Yess, wathah! And I consadah—"
"Fancy it being Kerr all the time—"

that New House boundah! We ought to have guessed!"

"Yass, I weally think you fellows ought to have guessed!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I must say I considah that you have wathah played the goat."

"Did you guess?" roared Herries. "P'ray do not wear at me, Hewwies!"

"You silly sis—"

"It throws me into a flutah when a fellow wears at me, Hewwies, as I have mentioned befoah. And now," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "if we are not goin' afah these boundahs, we had bettah have suppah. I am feashfully hungwy!"

And the St. Jim's caravanners sat down to supper—in rather a chastened mood.

It was quite a long time before Tom Merry & Co. were able to see the humorous side of their adventure with the carriage. It was Figgins & Co. who saw the humour of it—and they were smiling as they went on their way—and their smiles might have been heard at quite a considerable distance.

CHAPTER 11.

Back to St. Jim's!

"HALLO!"

"Hallo, deah boy!"

There was a crowd on the platform at Wayland Junction. St. Jim's fellows swarmed the platform from end to end. Train after train, from various points of the compass, disgorged them at the junction.

The vacation was over, and St. Jim's was gathering once more. And the caravanners, who had parted a week or two previously to scatter to their various homes, found themselves together once more on the platform.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was adorning the station with his noble person, with his brother Wally, when Blake and Herries and Digby joined him; and a little later the Terrible Three appeared in the offing. And the seven juniors, who had so many pleasant weeks on the road together, proceeded to compare notes.

"I was weally sowwy to part with the old 'bus," remarked Arthur Augustus. "It was weally a wippin' wun we had scrow the southern countries."

"Tip-top!" said Blake.

"Next vac I weally think we had bettah have anothah cawavan, and do the North of England," said Arthur Augustus. "I mean, next summah, of course. Is there anythin' to be seen in Yorkshire, Blake?"

Blake glared.

"More than in all the rest of England put together!" he answered.

"Bow-wow!" said Tom Merry. "What about Hampshire?"

"Yass, wathah!"

"And Somerset—"

"And Essex—"

"My dear men, they're not a circumstance to Yorkshire!" answered Blake.

"Still, it was a ripping run, and we did it well. Guess was always getting into scrapes, of course."

"Weally, Blake—"

"And we must admit that those New House bounners rather did us," said Blake. "Have you seen any more of 'em?"

"Not a hair!" said Tom Merry. "I hope they're here, or they'll be here if we'd run across them again in any wun we'd have mopped them up, of course. But—but we didn't!"

"W'll mop them up at St. Jim's," said Monty Lowther.

"Yass, wathah!"

"Hallo! There's Levison—and Clive—"

and Cardow! And old Talbot!" Tom Merry rushed off to greet Talbot of the Shell. There was a surge in the crowd, and three juniors came along, and one of them—a rather long-limbed youth—cheerily tipped Gusy's silk hat over his eyes.

"Bai Jove! Hallo, Figgins!"

Figgins, Kerr, and Patty Wynn grinned at their old rivals of the School House.

"Here we are again!" said Figgins merrily. "Did you School House kids enjoy your little trip?"

"Oh yass!"

"Meet any more escaped convicts?"

"He, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Figgay— Bai Jove, if you tip my hat again, Figgins, I shall punch your silly nose, you know!"

Figgins grinned, and playfully tipped Gusy's hat off, and walked on with his chums. Arthur Augustus breathed wrath as he recouped his topper, and then looked round for Figgins & Co. for vengeance—but the chums of the New House had disappeared in the crowd.

There was a surge towards the bridge over the line, and to the other platform where the local train for Rykcombe was waiting. It was a very special train, double its usual length, to convey the St. Jim's crowd to the station for the school. But, big as it was, it was likely to be very considerably overcrowded. There were piles and piles of luggage that looked as if they would never be dealt with; and fellows had bags in their hands as they crowded along the train.

D'Arcy minor and Reggie Manners and Levison were crammed at the window of one carriage, cheerfully keeping up a fusillade from pee-shooters on everyone in general. They kept it up till a coat landed—accidentally—on the nose of a kid of the Sixth, and then three or four seniors invaded the carriage, and the fags of the Third emitted loud howls of woe. Figgins & Co. had taken possession of a carriage, and thrown their bags in, and they held the door shut, with the firm intention of admitting only New House fellows. And there were loud tones of wrath when the Terrible Three arrived at the carriage with Talbot and demanded admittance.

"No admission for dogs or School House bounners!" said Figgins cheerily.

"Run away and play!"

"Why, there's lots of room in the carriage!" exclaimed Jack Blake, arriving with D'Arcy and Herries and Dig.

"Not for you, old-top!"

"Let that door open!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Bai Jove! We'll make them open the door, deah boys, and then chuck them out!" said Arthur Augustus.

"This way, Reddy!" called out Figgins, as Redfern of the New House came along with Owen and Lawrence.

"Clear those New House bounners off!" said Tom Merry.

"You bet!"

"Charge!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House juniors charged, with brandished bags, and Redfern & Co. were swept away. That was too much for Figgins; he couldn't stand by and see the New House defeated. He opened the door of the carriage and jumped out, with Kerr and Wynn close behind.

"Now's our chance!" murmured Blake.

The School House party rushed back. Figgins & Co. jumped back into the carriage in time, but they had no time to close the door. Blake had hold of it, and was holding it wide open. Tom Merry charged in, and the New House trio hurried him back; but he came in again, with Manners and Lowther and Talbot behind, and there was a battle-

royal in the carriage. Blake & Co. swarmed in after them, and the carriage was crammed. There was not much room for scrapping, and the odds were too heavy for Figgins & Co. The New House trio went down on the floor, and a dozen boots were planted on them to keep them there.

Blake drew the door shut.

"I rather think we're going in this carriage after all," he remarked.

"Yass, wathah! Where's my eye-glass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme gerrup!" roared Figgins.

"Get your boot off my neck, Manners, you chump!"

"My boot's all right there, thanks!" answered Manners cheerfully.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Gerrup my chest, Blake! You howl-ung ass, you're squashing me!"

"All serene—I don't mind!"

"Voop! Gerrup!"

"Any room in this carriage?" asked Darrel of the Sixth, looking in at the window.

"Not much," answered Tom Merry.

"There are fellows sitting on the floor already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's my beastly eye-glass?"

Darrel smiled and passed on. Redfern & Co. appeared at the door, and a couple of the School House juniors held it fast, and grinned at them through the window.

"Pass on, gents!" chuckled Blake.

"No room!"

"Rescue!" bawled Figgins.

"Quiet, old top!" chided Herries.

"If you yell like that I may tread on your features—"

"Rescue—"

"Jako that—"

"Yaroooooh!"

"There—I told you so!"

"Yerrrrggagh!"

Redfern & Co. dragged at the door; but the door did not open. A porter's voice yelled along the platform.

"Stand clear there! There's a second train—wait for the second train! Stand clear!"

"Wait for the second train, Reddy!" grinned Blake. "New House always waits, you know!"

"Rats! Leggo that door!"

"Bow-voiv!"

"Stand back there!"

The crowd remaining on the platform had to stand back. The crowded train moved out of the station, Blake waving his hand to the New House juniors on the platform, and Reddy shaking his fist in response.

Tom Merry's carriage was crowded. There were four of the Shell, and four of the Fourth, as well as Figgins & Co. As there were no seats for Figgins & Co. they had to remain on the floor; and as they had strong objections to remaining on the floor, an army of boots, planted on them, kept them there in spite of their objections.

The voices of Figgins & Co. were raised in indignant wrath as the train steamed away for Rykcombe. They were answered by choruses from the School House juniors.

"Will you let us gerrup!" panted Figgins, wriggling in vain under the School House boots.

"Not this journey!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Wathah not, deah boy! This is where we smile!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "It was your turn to smile at our last meetin', you know, old top! Now it is our turn!"

"Groooogh!"

"Oh, you dummies!" gasped Kerr.

"Look here, we'll make it pay!"

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"My dear chap, you're staying on the floor," said Jack Blake. "It's quite funny, if you look at it the right way—quite as funny as making up as an escaped convict, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh! Ow!"

The train steamed away merrily, and the New House trio remained on the floor. Eight pairs of boots were quite enough to keep them there, with a shove or two when they raised their heads.

It was not a happy journey for the heroes of the New House. It was their first experience as doormats. Fortunately for them, the journey was short.

The train ran into Rycombe Station, and Tom Merry & Co. swarmed out of the carriage. There was likely to be a rush for the brakes, and the School House chums meant to be early in the rush. Figgins & Co. scrambled up, dusty and breathless, and jumped out of the carriage after them. They were looking very red and very dishevelled.

"Our brake!" shouted Tom Merry. "Go for it!"

There were three brakes waiting, but there certainly were not enough for the fellows who had crammed themselves into the Rycombe train. One was boarded by seniors, in sedate dignity, and the other two were quickly swarming with juniors. One of them drove off, swarming, and the other was rapidly loaded. Tom Merry & Co. had their places on board, with Levison and his chums, and Trimble and Kerruish and Julian, and a crowd more of the School House, when Figgins & Co. arrived. Figgins & Co. made a rush for the brake as it was starting.

"Jever get left!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rush them!" gasped Figgins desperately.

The three New House fellows hung on desperately behind as the brake started down the old High Street of Rycombe.

"Whip behind!" shouted Dig.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was certainly no room for Figgins & Co. in the brake; but they were determined not to be "left." They hung on frantically, their feet kicking up clouds of dust behind. Monty Lowther leaned over, and gently squeezed an orange over Figg's upturned crimson face.

"Grooooch!" spluttered Figgins.

"Gimrose room!" exclaimed Herries.

"I've got a banana—he can have it down his neck!"

"Yarooop!"

Figgins let go as the banana was squeezed down his neck. It was rather too much for him. Levison leaned over and took hold of Kerr's nose with finger and thumb, amid yells of laughter from the brake.

"Snoooocooch!" came from Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say when!" said Levison genially.

And he squeezed.

"Ow! Ow! Oh! Grooch! Oooch!"

When! gasped Kerr.

And he dropped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn was still holding on; but he blinked apprehensively as Chiv opened a bottle of ginger-beer. The ginger-beer streamed over Fatty's plump, upturned face, and there was a spluttering gasp from the Falstaff of the New House.

"Oooocooch!"

And Fatty Wynn sat in the road. Jack Blake waved his hat.

"Hurrah! School House wins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the brake rolled on, amid cheers

and laughter from the victorious School House.

But later that day Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dropped into Figgins' study in the New House, with a genial smile upon his noble face. Figgins & Co. eyed him rather grimly, and Figg's hand strayed to the inkpot.

"Pax, dear boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "We are holdin' wathah a celebration in Studay No. 6, and we want you to come."

"Oh!" said Figgins, relaxing; and his hand was withdrawn from the inkpot.

"Yaaa, wathah! We have a wathah nice suppah—"

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.

"Now you're talking!" he said emphatically. "I say, Figg, we don't want to start House rows on the first day of term. We can mop up the School House any time this term. Let's begin good friends—what!"

Figgins grinned.

"Certainly, if there's a cake!" he assented.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. walked across the quad quite amicably with Arthur Augustus, and they were given a hearty welcome in Study No. 6, where they met Blake & Co., and the Terrible Three, and Talbot, and Levison & Co., and as many more fellows as could possibly be crammed into that celebrated apartment.

And the hatchet was buried—to be dug up again, certainly, by the rivals of St. Jim's; but for the first day of term, at least, all was calm and bright!

THE END.

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CHAPTER 17.

Working Under Difficulties.

"HALLO!" I shouted. "Have you turned your house into a kindergarten, Franky?"

Silence.

"Do you hear me?"

There was still no response, save for a crooning voice at the other end:

"Speak, speak, speak to me, Thora!"

In deep disgust I slammed the receiver on to the hook.

To attempt to converse with Frank Richards by telephone was hopeless. Accordingly, I despatched the following telegram:

"Get a more on with 'Magnet' story, and stifle profanity of printer.—Editor."

This wire was despatched at ten o'clock. Shortly before midday I received the following reply, which must have made quite a bolt in the sender's resources:

"Have been working on 'Magnet' story since Monday. Progress slow and painful. Interruptions frequent. Going posty. Will forward explanation from Hanwell.—Frank Richards."

That telegram gave me food for thought. Frank Richards wasn't the sort of man who went "posty" on the slightest provocation. Something very serious must have happened to delay the completion of his manuscript.

Perhaps inspiration had filled him. Perhaps he had made his latest story so involved that he was stumped, and unable to go on.

Further reflection, however, convinced me that the children's voices which I had heard over the telephone had something to do with the "slow and painful" progress mentioned in Frank Richards' telegram.

Between twelve o'clock and lunch-time the foreman-printer rang me up at intervals of five minutes.

"The 'Magnet'!" he shouted hoarsely.

"The 'Magnet'!"

"All right, old parrot!" I said. "You'll get the manuscript in due course."

But the foreman-printer, like Nabuchad of old, refused to be comforted.

"Why is it late?" he howled.

"Because cap rode a horse and the other rhododendron!" I retorted.

"Yes—yes—" stammered the printer.

And before he could make intelligible intelligible again I went out to lunch.

On my return to the office I fully expected to find a bulky package on my desk. I had hoped that Frank Richards would despatch a messenger post-haste with the manuscript.

The only new thing on my desk, however, was a note written by one of my sub-editors.

"The foreman-printer has rung you up twenty-eight times."

"Good!" I murmured. "If he keeps it up he'll make a century!"

And then, realising the extreme urgency of

the situation, I sent a further wire to Frank Richards:

"Unless 'Magnet' story arrives by six o'clock the foreman-printer throws himself off Blackfriars Bridge!—Editor."

At four o'clock there was a tap on the door of my manuscript.

"Come in!" I said hopefully.

"I expected to see Frank Richards' cheery laugh, and to least my eyes upon his neatly-typed pages.

Instead of which I beheld a small boy with a buff-coloured envelope.

"Telegram for you, sir!" said he.

"Put it down and get on for your life!" I hissed, snatching up an ebony ruler.

I was heartily sick of telegrams. This one ran as follows:

"Just starting last chapter. Terrible task. Distractions fearful. Sorry foreman-printer intends commit suicide. Does he want a partner?—Frank Richards."

I heaved a sigh of relief.

If Frank Richards were engaged upon the last chapter of his story, then surely I had no task to wait!

Nevertheless, it was nearly eight o'clock—the evening when Frank Richards' manuscript was to be handed in.

He looked a fearful wreck. His hair dishevelled, his eyes were bloodshot, his hands and clothes were smeared with ink and black-ink. His eyes were staring from their sockets.

I started to say my feet. "What-what does this mean?"

"It means," groaned Frank Richards, slinking into the easy-chair, "that I've just passed through the most terrible week of my life!"

"Great Scott!"

"There's your story!" he said, mopping his ink-brow. "And you're jolly lucky to get it!"

I stared at the manuscript in astonishment. Instead of the neatly printed pages to which I had been accustomed, I beheld a weird and wonderful mass of hieroglyphics.

"Why," I exclaimed, "this manuscript is hand-written!"

Frank Richards nodded.

"But, but where's your typewriter?"

"It was handed to the last itinerant buyer of old iron who called at my house."

"What on earth—"

"It was smashed to smithereens, you see!" cried Frank Richards.

"Phew! And what's that stain on the first page?"

"Butter!" said Frank Richards briefly.

"And what are those darker stains?"

"Cocoa!"

"It looks to me," I said, "as if you've been trying to write a 'Magnet' story by using your groceries as the ingredients!"

"I'm awfully sorry—"

"Why, there are bolts and screws on every page except the first!"

"Billy Bunter decanted into the water with a mighty splash. And somebody's inserted the mighty splash."

"That was Jimmy, when he upset the ink-pot."

"You seem to have had this story illustrated in advance, by means of soup, butter, ink, and cocoa!" I said. "Most of the manuscript is unreadable. I'm afraid I'll have to take it over to the printing works and dictate it to the compositor."

"I'm awfully sorry!" repeated Frank Richards.

"I can't understand what's come over you, I said. "You've never done this sort of thing before!"

"These blue manuscripts are usually models of neatness. And this—the most slipshod and slovenly thing I've ever set eyes on. You must put yourself together, Franky!"

"Frank Richards groaned.

"You don't understand," he said wearily.

"If you have any explanation to offer," I said, rather frigidly, "I shall be pleased to hear it."

"And then Frank Richards poured out his tale of woe."

"I started this story," he said, "on Monday last. I typed it as usual, and everything went swimmingly until Tuesday morning."

"When I received a letter from my married sister asking me to look after her two children for a few days, as she was taking a holiday."

"How very curious!" I exclaimed. "I should have thought your sister would have been only too pleased to take the children away with her."

Frank Richards smiled ruefully.

"She was jolly glad to get rid of them for a time," he said. "They're holy terror! The boy—Jimmy—is twelve, and the girl—Mary—is ten."

"And you volunteered to take them off your sister's hands?"

"I did. It was the worst day's work I ever did in my life!"

"It seems to me," I said, "that you found them beyond your control!"

"Absolutely! They hadn't been in the house half an hour when the first calamity occurred. I was smoking a cigar in the dining-room when I heard a deafening crash up above. On rushing up to my den to investigate, I found my typewriter—my good and faithful 'boob-lying in a mutilated condition on the floor!"

"It was on earth that happened?"

"Jimmy was practicing for a throwing-the-hammer contest for which he is shortly entering."

"Ha, ha, ha!" I roared.

"Yes, he has!"

"But, but what had Franky Richards done?"

"The kid had thrown my typewriter across the room. It was smashed to good recognition. I telephoned at once for a mechanic, and he could do nothing but remove the ink-stain. Can't you repair that?"

"I tried, but I shook his head sorrowfully. 'It's only fit for the scrap-heap,' he said. So I banded it over to the next old-iron man who came along."

(Continued on page 16.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:
THE MAGNET. Every Monday. **THE BOY FRIENDS.** Every Monday. **THE GEM.** Every Wed. **THE VERY POPULAR CRUSHER.** Every Friday. **THE GEM LIBRARY.** Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

MORE GOOD NEWS!

October 20th is the date upon which No. 1 of the new "Greyfriars Herald" will make its appearance.

Perhaps that seems a long time to you; but it isn't really very long. The weeks seem to go like lightning to me—too quick, in fact; for I have a constant rush to get things done in time.

All through the boiling-hot weather, too, I have had to keep busy. Not that, in the middle, of course; because I am certain that my work is going to be rewarded with a success that has never yet been experienced by any editor of school papers.

THE FIRST NUMBER

of the "Greyfriars Herald" is practically finished, and I am more than delighted with it.

It includes some of the most striking and original features that have ever appeared in a school journal, and which, I know, are going to be greeted with universal approval.

I say universal, because there are readers of the Companion Papers all over the world, and I am certain that they will rally round the new "Greyfriars Herald."

OCTOBER 20th

is going to be a great day for those who make up their minds to take advantage of the great feat. Among other splendid features, which I cannot tell you about now, is a novel photo-gallery scheme, which I am sure will give delight to every reader.

TUCK HAMPER

are going to form one of the great attractions of this new edition of the "Greyfriars Herald." Many readers of the Companion Papers possess glorious recollections of the Tuck Hampers which were given as prizes when the "G. H." first appeared.

To them it is not necessary to say much about the delights they bring; and to those who don't remember anything about our original hampers—well, every boy and girl knows what a Tuck Hamper is, and ours are the best worth a centence.

The competition for which these will be awarded as prizes will be open to every reader, and every reader will have an equal chance of winning one.

No. 1 of the "Greyfriars Herald" will contain all the particulars, so please, don't forget the date—October 20th. And take good care that none of your friends forget it.

"GREYFRIARS HERALD" October 20.

ONERS FROM SCOTLAND.

Robert D. J. Naismith writes from Edinburgh to tell me how delighted he was to hear that the "Greyfriars Herald" is coming out.

He says: "Just a short note to let you know with what delight I hailed the announcement that the 'Greyfriars Herald' will be reappearing in the month of October. I read your announcement in last week's 'Magnet' that it was definitely settled that it should once more appear, even better than of old; it was the very first thing I saw, as I always read your 'Chat' first before commencing Mr. Richards' yarn. That evening when I came home from business, I sat down and wrote my various friends, some of whom reside in South Africa and Australia, to tell them the glorious news, in case, by any chance, they had not heard."

Thank you very much, my friend; that is the way to ensure success for the new edition of the "Greyfriars Herald." Spread the news wherever you go—and let your friends know

that October 20th is the date for the appearance of No. 1.

You will find a lot more interesting news about the great "G. H." on this page.

I am glad you like "Personal Recollections"; you are not alone in that. Hundreds of your fellow-readers have written to tell me how much they enjoy this feature.

All good wishes to you.

THOSE GIRLS!

I have received another letter from "Stole," of Greenwich, in which she tells me that although she thinks there is nothing like the Gem—which she could not possibly do without—she still thinks that the Gem girls are "awful."

"Stole's" complaint is that they are not half sturdy or brave enough.

Really, I cannot agree with "Stole" on that point. Though they may be girlish in their ways—which, after all, is what they should be—if occasion demanded they would be as valiant and courageous as anyone could be.

That incident in the papers a few weeks ago, about the brave young lady who rescued her lover from the furious attacks of a bull, was a splendid instance of what a girl can do when called upon to face a dangerous situation.

I say, without any hesitation—and all my readers will agree—that nobody could have acted more bravely in such a perilous position.

I am afraid "Stole" that, in a girl's case, the position against the Gem girls. They are quite all right, really.

Very many thanks for your letter!

NOTICES.

BACK NUMBERS.

H. Dickinson, 41, Clifton Street, Lamb, wants Hunter stories. Write first.

H. H. Head, Emory Lodge, Mooly Road, Meriton Park, Surrey, wants old covered Companion Papers, id. each, 2d. double numbers. Also volumes. Write first.

H. Beaumont, 106, Taunton Road, Waterloo, Ashton-under-Lyne, "Magna," 517-3. 3d. offered. Write first.

J. Greenmonth, 60, Dixon Street, Garshead-on-Ferry, Fife, wants old Gem, 6d. each offered. Also latest "Magnets," id. Write first.

A. Walker, Belle Vue Cottage, Exner Road, Gipsy Lane, Leicester, wants stories of the Boulder, and old "Magnets." Good prices. Write first.

George W. Drake, The School, Walsgarre, Bay of Flesky, New Zealand, wants "Magnets," "A Very Gallant Gentleman." Write first.

W. Toy, 38, Aldridge Road, Perry Barr, Birmingham—"Gems," "Magnets," and "Boys' Friends" before 1910. Write first, stating prices.

Leslie Dickman, 47, Cannon Street, Cape Town, South Africa—first numbers of "Magnets," "Gem," and "Nelson Leo" Library. Also wants "The Jew at St. Jim's," and "The Honour of a Jew." State price.

Edward MacMahon, 2300, Bickerton Avenue, Montreal, Canada—"Magnets" 253, 205, 292; 300, each. 81, 53, 103, 119, 133, 143, 150, 152, 162, 171; 5d. each.

G. P. D. Bennett, 33, Sinclair Road, London, W. 11—"Gems" with stories of Carder, Edgar Jones, 23, Park Road, Hingle, Liverpool, wants back numbers "Gem" and "P. P. Christmas numbers, 1915, 400 and 250; "Bunter the Footballer" and "School v. County." Good prices. Write first.

Edward Nelson, 71, Shortmarket Street, Cape Town, South Africa—"Magnets" and "Gem" Christmas Numbers, 1913.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

(Continued from page 15).

"What an unfortunate occurrence!"

"That was merely the kick-off," said Frank Richards. "When I next had occasion to visit my dear Madge I found a bundle lying in the grate. Jimmy and Madge were warming their hands by the fire."

"No harm in that," I said.

"No harm," stuttered Frank Richards. "Why, the bundle consisted of the first part of my story!"

"Oh!"

"I could have wept!" continued the "Magnet" author. "To think that a whole day's output had been consigned to the flames!"

"Did you speak Jimmy?"

"I couldn't keep him away from my dear Madge either. The place seemed to have an unhealthy fascination for them. They started playing at soldiers, and when kiddies start doing that the furniture goes awry! The damage done was immense! Between them was simply appalling!"

And Frank Richards shuddered at the recollection.

"It's a wonder you got your story written at all," I said.

"It is. It's one of the miracles of modern times. I couldn't write a word during the day. Those kids were everlastingly at my elbow. I had to sit up half the night—sometimes all night. It was awful!"

"It must have been," I said, my sympathies thoroughly aroused at last.

"When your first telegram came this morning, I still had these chapters to write. I couldn't wait till tonight, so I had to sit down and tackle the job right away. And those kids were buzzing round me all the time!"

"Great Scott!"

Madge scanned the first page with horror, and Jimmy emptied the contents of the soup-tureen on page two. Not a page was left untouched. Madge tilted the breakfast-cup over one page, and Jimmy tried his luck with the inkpot. And this—"Frank Richards pointed a warning finger at the manuscript—"this is the result!"

"Poor old chap," I said.

"Can you wonder at my nearly going off my trolley?" said Frank Richards. "Can you wonder at the fact that I became a suitable candidate for Maxwell or Colby Hatch? I came within an ace of slaughtering those kids!"

"Do they read the 'Magnet'?"

"Yes; and they're eternally squabbling about the stories. Jimmy's favourite character is Bob Cherry. Madge's favourite is Peter Todd. Jimmy swears that Bob could lick Teddy into a cocked hat, and Madge takes the opposite view. That's their favourite line of argument."

I recalled the conversation I had overheard on the telephone between Jimmy and Madge. Its significance was clear to me now.

"I shouldn't mind so much," said Frank Richards, "if they argued quietly. But Jimmy pulls Madge's hair, and Madge tweaks Jimmy's nose. And when Jimmy sees me praising Peter Todd in my story, he at once cuts it out. Madge does the same when I praise Bob Cherry. That accounts for most of those terrible blots and smears."

"And how long do you intend to put up with this sort of thing?"

"Not a moment longer! I've already wired to my sister at Brighton—"

"To what effect?"

"I said, 'Come and remove your terrible pack out of my house!'"

"Do you think she will?"

"If she doesn't," said Frank Richards, "I shall have to put myself under police protection."

"For some moments a silence fell between us."

"What about next week's story?" I said at length.

"It shall be sent in promptly to time. My first task is to get rid of those terrible kids; my second is to buy a new typewriter."

"You will be a ruined man if they stay in your house much longer," I said.

"Things can't be worse than they are. They've smashed up the happy home already. Every window in the house is broken; every breakable article of furniture is in fragments. My summer-house has been reduced to splinters. One would imagine, to look at my premises, that the aerial period had returned. When I succeed in getting a home together again, the first thing I shall do will be to insure myself against wanton and destructive juveniles!"

"I don't blame you," I said.

Just then my telephone-bell rang.

The weary voice of the foreman printer hailed me over the wires.

"Am I going to get that 'Magnet' manuscript for you next year?" he inquired.

"I've been waiting here since six o'clock!"

"Cheer up, old man!" I said. "The precious manuscript is here at last. I'm sending it over to you, together with the author."

"I'll murder him!"

"I'll mix him up with the printing-machine! He's robbed me of a night's sleep, confound him!"

"My dear, good fellow—"

"On second thoughts, I may not go so far as to kill him, but I shall certainly disgrace him for life!"

And the foreman printer rang off.

"Was that the printer you were speaking to?" said Frank Richards.

"No!"

"Not at all! He's in a most charming mood. But he wouldn't sell in his month. I told him I was sending you across with the manuscript."

"And what did he say?"

"Said he'd be simply charmed to see you! I should be surprised if he were to treat you to cake and sherry!"

"He's a toff!" said Frank Richards.

"Of course," I said, "when he catches sight of that astal manuscript he may threaten to have an apoplectic fit. You'd have to watch him carefully. Are you armed?"

"No," gasped Frank Richards.

"A pistol in your hip-pocket would be very useful. You may be called upon to use it in self-defence."

"Oh, help!"

Frank Richards gathered up the manuscript and his departure.

Next morning I expected to see a headline something like this in my newspaper:

"SAVAGE ATTACK ON FAMOUS AUTHOR! MR. FRANK RICHARDS PERMANENTLY BEURIDEN!"

It transpired, however, that Frank Richards had been successful in smothering the ruffled feathers of the foreman printer—to such an extent that they actually dined together on the evening they met!

In due course Jimmy and Madge, having completed their house-smashing crusade, were restored to their mother. They were restored intact—which was more than could be said of Frank Richards' furniture!

Shortly afterwards the "Magnet" author attended a typewriter sale in the City, and he was fortunate enough to secure a brand-new "Royal" machine for fifteen pounds.

And since that time Frank Richards' manuscripts have been forwarded to all authors to keep their nerves and napeaws at a safe distance!

CHAPTER 18.

Conclusion.

My task is almost done.

Perhaps I ought not to refer to the writing of these Recollections at a task; for it has been a labour

of love.

In putting the finishing touches to this serial I am aware of the fact that it is sadly incomplete. But, as I said at the commencement, I have written only of those things which have most vividly impressed themselves on my memory.

I could tell of other things—of long days and nights of toil and anxiety—of brief periods of leisure, spent in the congenial society of men like Martin Clifford and Frank Richards.

I could tell of hopes and disappointments, care and joys, and all the pleasures and penalties which fall to the lot of an editor, space—or, rather, the lack of it—furnish.

Much water has flowed under the bridge since I was privileged to occupy the editorial chair; but amid all the changes—I refer particularly to the Great War—the Companion Papers have not only kept their place, but have advanced rapidly in the esteem of the boys and girls of Great Britain and her Colonies—I forgetting the Emerald Isle.

The boys who read the "Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries at the outset are now men, playing a worthy part in the great world of work. Although they have left their schoolbags far behind them, many of them are still staunch readers of the Companion Papers.

As to the succeeding generations, there has been no lack of loyalty on their part. In spite of the numerous boys' papers which have flooded the market of late, the Companion Papers continue to steer a straight and prosperous course; and week by week new readers are garnered in.

We have had our dark days.

The war, and the consequent shortage of paper, closed the business of the little little "Greyfriars Herald"; but happily I am able to announce that it will appear again in October.

Concerning the future of the Companion Papers, I have no fears and many hopes.

(To be concluded.)

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