

COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD-Part 1 On Sale TO-DAY 1/3

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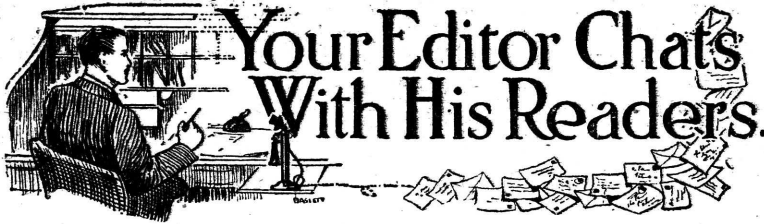
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"THWASHIN'S FOR THWEE!"

Great fighting man as he is, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy expected some difficulty in knocking out the Terrible Three, but strange to relate he had no difficulty at all. (An incident from the grand long complete school story contained in this issue.)



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"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
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MY DEAR CHUMS,—It is a matter of common knowledge that you always get the best yarns in the "Gem." Next week's issue carries on with the topping record the Wednesday story paper has carved out for itself. The St. Jim's story for next week is a corker.

"LEN AT ST. JIM'S!" By Martin Clifford.

Len, the waif, is met with under the most surprising conditions in this prime tale of the old school. Everybody was eager to hear more concerning Len. He is, as Tom Merry & Co. think, a little, ragged down-and-out, but a remarkable change comes to pass in the mysterious youngster's life. A wonderful chance comes to him bang out of the blue. Len leaps into amazing prosperity.

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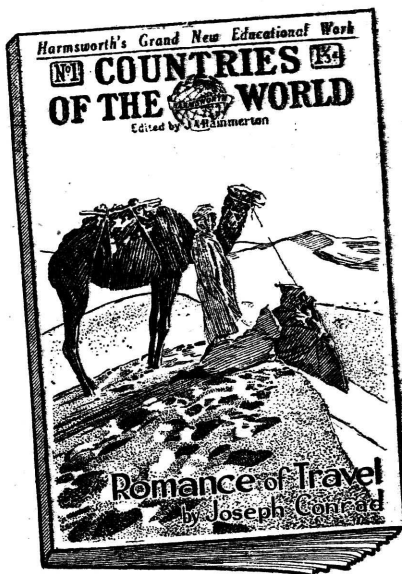
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Tom Merry's surprise could not be wondered at when he found a newcomer to St. Jim's in the name of Leonard Pomfret, nephew of a man evidently rich and of good position, closely resembled Len Lee, whom he had previously met as the outcast of Wayland Wood!



LEN'S LUCK!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Very Well!

"I MUST weally wemark—"
"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"
"That I told you so—"
"B-r-r-r-r."

"I am suah that you thwee fellows must distinctly wemembah that I told you so!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly.

Undoubtedly Arthur Augustus was in the right. But, like many fellows who are in the right, he was not, for the moment, popular.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were not in the slightest degree solaced by the knowledge that Gussy had told them so.

It was raining—hard!

The four juniors were walking back from Wayland to St. Jim's, and there was not an umbrella in the party.

The British climate, never very reliable, was in a jesting mood that afternoon.

A mild and fine winter's afternoon had tempted the Terrible Three of the Shell to walk over to Wayland to see the Ramblers' match. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form had walked with them. The fine weather had lasted through the match, and until the juniors were half a mile out of Wayland on their homeward way. And then the rain had come on suddenly. It had looked cloudy and threatening as they left Wayland for a few minutes, and then sunshine had supervened. And then, half a mile from everywhere, the rain came down in torrents.

"We've got to get out of this!" growled Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! And I must say—"

"There isn't a dashed shelter within a dashed mile of this dashed place!" grunted Monty Lowther.

"Yaas; and—"

"Why grouse?" said Tom Merry cheerily. "We're wet, and we can't get much wetter. Keep going."

"Yaas; but—"

"The rain isn't so bad as Gussy's chin," said Monty Lowther ferociously. "Can't you give it a minute's rest between the rounds, D'Arcy?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"B-r-r-r-r!"

"I am bound to wepeat," said Arthur Augustus firmly, "that I told you so. I wemarked that the weathah looked thweatenin' when we left the football gwound—"

"Dry up!"

"I suggested takin' a taxi—"

"You silly ass!" roared Manners. "Who's got ten or fifteen bob to blow on a taxi?"

"I have, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Oh, rats!"

"I should have been vevy pleased to stand the taxi—"

"Well, we shouldn't have been vevy pleased to sponge on you, ass! So cheese it!"

"Wubbish! Now we are all feahfully wet, and you fellows certainly ought not to forget that I told you so."

It was the fact—Arthur Augustus had told them so. But in pointing this out so emphatically to three fellows who were drenched with rain, Arthur Augustus was really not displaying his usual tact and judgment. Instead of comforting them, it seemed to have an exasperating effect on the chums of the Shell.

"If you say 'I told you so' again," said Lowther, in concentrated tones, "we'll sit you down in the next puddle!"

"I should wefuse to be sat down in a puddle, Lowthah. And as a weasonable chap you can scarcely deny that I told you so."

"That does it!" hooted Lowther. "Collar him!"

"Weally, you fellows— Whooooop!"

Splash!

It was unfortunate for Arthur Augustus that he had told them so, or at least that he insisted upon making that circumstance so clear. Manners and Lowther were fed-up. They were walking on either side of the swell of St. Jim's, and they suddenly grasped him and sat him down.

He sat in a puddle. Muddy water splashed over the Terrible Three as he sat. It almost swamped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself.

"There!" gasped Lowther. "Now perhaps you'll sit there and tell us again that you told us so."

"Yawwooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three tramped on, with heads bent and coat collars turned up, in the heavy downpour. Arthur Augustus scrambled out of the puddle and rushed after them.

"You feahful wuffians—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to come on a step until I have thwashed Lowthah and Mannahs!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop, you wottahs—"

Instead of stopping, the Terrible Three broke into a run. Arthur Augustus broke into a run after them. The tail of his beautiful coat was dripping mud as he ran.

"You uttah wottahs, stop!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you as wotten funks! I ordah you to stop and be thwashed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus' orders seemed to have a cheering effect on the Shell fellows. They chuckled as they ran through the rain.

"Here's the footpath!" exclaimed Lowther at last. "It will be a bit better under the trees."

The Shell fellows jumped over the stile, which gave admittance to the footpath through Wayland Wood. Arthur Augustus, a few yards behind them, clambered over the stile in his turn.

It was not much better under the leafless trees. The Terrible Three trotted on through thick rain. Tom Merry halted.

"Hold on, you chaps!" he said. "We'd better get out of this!"

"How, ass?" grunted Manners.

"There's a woodman's hut off the footpath. We can wait there till the worst of it is over."

"Oh, good!"

Arthur Augustus came panting up.

"Now, you wottahs—"

"Don't play the goat, Gussy!" said Lowther, fending off the incensed swell of St. Jim's. "This isn't the time for your comic turn. We're going to look for shelter."

"You are goin' to be thwashed!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"You have wuined my coat—"

"Blow your coat!"

"You have drenched my twousahs—"

"Bless your trousers!"

"Put up your hands, you wottah!"

"You silly owl!" roared Tom Merry. "Chuck it!"

"I wefuse to chuck it! I—"

"Then sit down!" snapped Manners.

"Oh cwumbs!"

It really was not a time for Arthur Augustus to take vengeance, even for a muddy overcoat and drenched trousers. At any other time the Terrible Three might have given Gussy his head, as it were; but in a drenching downpour of rain they had no time to waste. As Arthur Augustus insisted upon war, the Shell fellows collared him and sat him down in the footpath. They left him sitting, and vanished into the wet underwood.

"Oh deah! Oh cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. The early winter dusk was closing in, and it was very shadowy under the trees. Tom Merry & Co. had vanished from his sight.

"Come back, you wottahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

Only the echo of his voice answered him.

"Tom Mewwy, you wuffian! Lowthah, you bwute! Mannahs, you wascal! Bai Jove, the feahful funks are dodgin' me! I will give you funks a, thwashin' all wouind when we get to St. Jim's!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

But only the echo replied; and Arthur Augustus, realising that vengeance had to be postponed, restarted after the interval, so to speak, and trotted on towards the school.

CHAPTER 2.

The Wanderer!

"**B**EASTLY dark!" growled Manners.

"Rotten!" agreed Lowther.

"Cold, and wet, and altogether putrid!" said Tom Merry.

Evidently the Terrible Three were not in their usual sunny spirits. But their surroundings were not cheering.

They were very wet—their caps were almost wringing water. The woodman's hut was some sort of a shelter, but it did not amount to very much. The woodman who had once used it had long since gone, and the hut was in a tumble-down condition, with the front open to all the winds that blew. Weeds, nettles, and brambles grew all over and inside the hut. Still, the remains of a sloping roof kept off the worst of the rain, and in spite of their grumbling, the juniors were glad to get there. They stood in the thickening dusk, listening to the plash of the downpour outside. The winter evening was closing in, and they could scarcely see one another's faces in the gloom.

"We shall be late for calling-over," Manners remarked presently, perhaps in want of something cheerful to say.

"Blow call-over!" growled Lowther.

"Blow everything!" agreed Manners. "And everybody!" he added, as an afterthought.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Railton will let us off for missing call-over when we tell him how we were fixed," he said. "Things might be worse. I wonder where old Gussy is now?"

"The ass!" said Lowther morosely. "Why didn't he come along with us and get shelter, instead of playing the goat?"

"I thought he would follow."

"Well, hé hasn't."

Tom Merry peered out into the rain and darkness. There was no sign yet of a cessation of the downpour; but he remarked hopefully that it was too fast to last. Neither was there any sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Apparently he had kept on his way to the school, instead of seeking shelter like the Terrible Three.

The dusk deepened into darkness, and still the rain came down.

"I hope Gussy's gone on, as he's not come in here," said Tom, at last. "He couldn't be ass enough to be looking for us in the wood, could he?"

"Isn't he ass enough for anything?" demanded Lowther. "I've told Blake lots of times to keep him on a chain."

"Well, he will get a good wash, if he's still out in this," remarked Manners. "I jolly well wish we'd taken that taxi now."

"Not much good being wise after the event," said Tom Merry philosophically. "Hallo! That's Gussy, I fancy."

There was a sound of someone moving through the wet underwoods towards the old hut.

"He can't have been all this time finding us!" murmured

Manners. "Didn't the ass know there was a hut here? Anyhow, he's coming. Collar him when he gets in, and make him make it pax. We don't want any of his dashed funny business now."

"Good!" said Lowther.

A dim boyish form appeared in the gloom before the hut, and stepped through the broken old doorway.

Three pairs of hands were laid on him at once as he stepped inside, and he was lifted neatly off his feet, and sat on the floor.

Bump!

"Oh!"

"Landed!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Now, you silly owl, are you going to make it pax, or shall we bump you on these broken bricks?"

"Better make it pax, you dummy!" advised Manners.

"Make it pax, Gussy, old man," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"What—who—Oh!" It was a startled voice from the boy in the grasp of the Terrible Three, and it was not the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Tom Merry, letting go at once.

The Terrible Three realised that they had captured somebody who certainly was not Gussy.

They jumped back in surprise.

The stranger scrambled to his feet. He put up his hands for defence and peered into the gloom that surrounded the Shell fellows.

"What the dickens is this game?" he demanded. "Who the thump are you, and what do you mean?"

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry politely. "Quite a mistake—"

"Took you for somebody else—a friend of ours," explained Manners.

"If that's how you treat friends of yours, I'm rather glad that I don't know you," said the other. "I thought you were a gang of footpads, for a minute."

"Oh, my hat!"

"What the dickens are you doing here?" demanded the stranger.

"We might as well ask you that question," retorted Monty Lowther. "What the dickens are you doing here, if you come to that?"

"We got in here out of the rain," said Tom Merry mildly. "I suppose that's why you're here too, isn't it?"

"I'm camping here."

"Camping here!" exclaimed the Terrible Three.

"Yes, and I'm not wanting visitors. Still, you can stay till the rain stops, if you like."

"We shall jolly well stay till the rain stops, I can tell you!" exclaimed Lowther hotly. "Do you think the place belongs to you?"

He extracted a box of matches from his pocket, and struck a match, to take a look at the stranger.

The anger died out of his face as he looked at him.

The boy was about the age of the Shell fellows, or a few months younger. He was of a sturdy build, and his face was quite good-looking. But his cheeks were thin, and his clothes were old and ragged and clumsily patched. From his voice and accent, the juniors had taken him for a fellow somewhat like themselves in the dark. But from his clothes and general appearance of want, he might have been a tramp in hard luck.

His eyes, of a deep blue and very keen, rested on the three, in the light of the match. A rather bitter expression came over the handsome though thin and worn face.

"Public school chaps—what?" he said.

"Yes," said Tom.

"You're lucky."

The match went out.

"You don't seem to be very lucky," said Lowther, very gently. "I'm sorry we've butted in, kid, if you're camping here, and if we're in the way. If we're in your way we'll clear, and chance it."

"Certainly," said Manners.

The boy laughed slightly.

"You're not in the way. Stay as long as you like. I've no rights here—I'm only a tramp, and I camped in this hut yesterday because I happened on it. That's all."

"But—but you're not a tramp!" said Tom.

"I am."

"You've not always been one, then."

"No; I began the game this winter. Last term—"

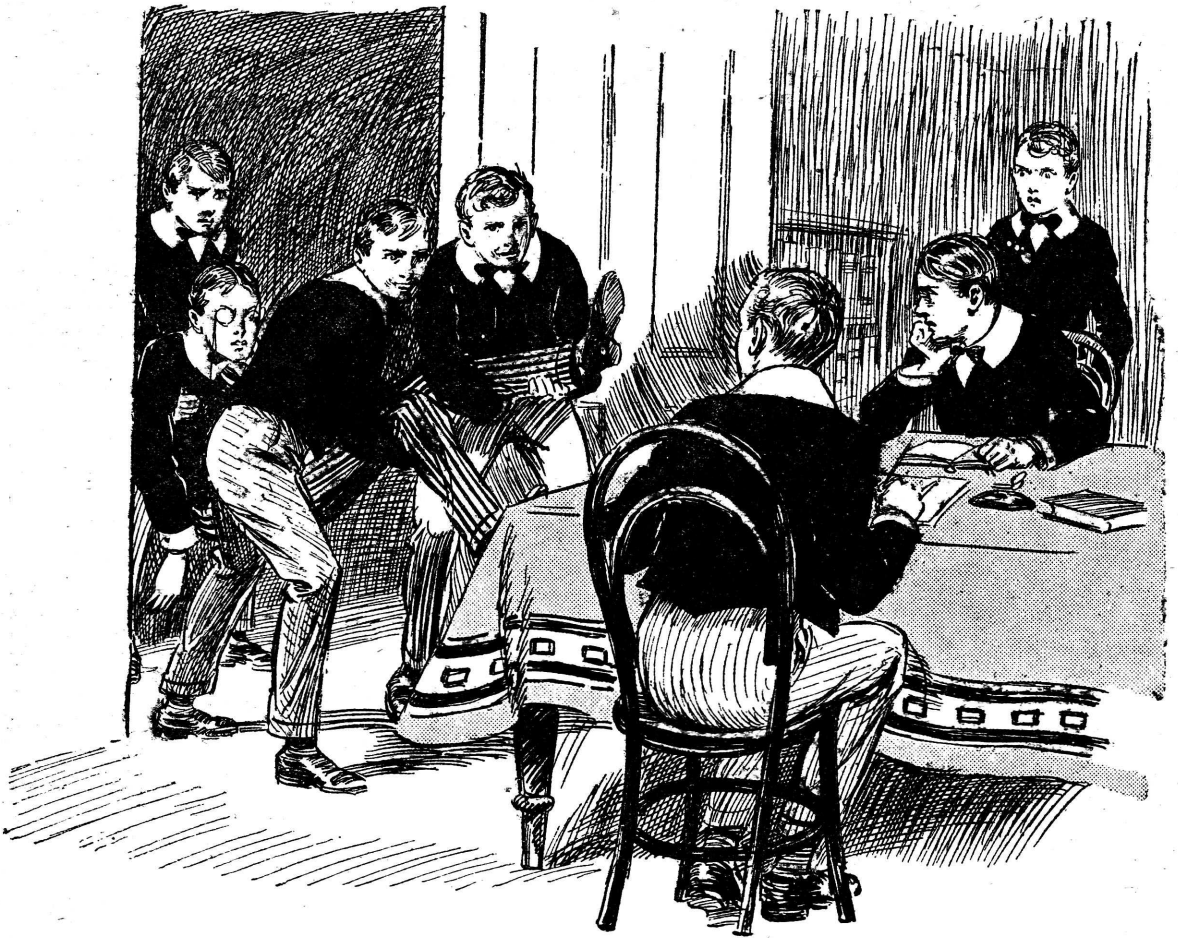
"Last term?" repeated Manners.

"It's time I got out of speaking like that," said the stranger, with another laugh that had a bitter ring. "A tramp shouldn't speak of such things, should he?"

"You've lately left school?" asked Tom, in wonder. All three of the St. Jim's juniors were interested in the stranger now, the interest of kindness and compassion.

"Yes; I left at the end of the Christmas term. But it wouldn't interest you."

The boy moved away in the gloom, and a match glimmered. A stump of candle was lighted, in a sheltered corner of the



Struggling and wriggling, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was borne along to Study No. 6 by the Terrible Three. Tom Merry kicked open the door and the party marched in. "This belongs to you, I think, Blake," said Tom Merry. "Yes—that's ours!" said Blake, glancing up from his prep. "Dump it down somewhere!" (See page 10.)

old hut. From under an old board the boy drew out a package, and opened it. Half a loaf, and a hunk of cheese came into view. The three juniors watched him, in the glimmer of the candle, as he sat on a heap of old bricks, and began a meal. He met their glance with a rather mocking expression.

"Do you mind if I dine while you stand there?" he asked. "I'm aware that it's not an elegant meal—nothing like what you're used to seeing. But this is lunch and dinner and tea for me."

"Don't mind us," said Tom Merry softly. "I'm awfully sorry to see a chap up against it like this."

"Thanks!"

"I mean it," said Tom. "If there was anything a fellow could do—"

"Thanks again! Nothing!"

The juniors fell silent, and the boy ate his meal quietly. When he had finished he wrapped up the remains of the loaf and the cheese carefully. Then he blew out the fragment of candle.

Darkness fell again, and only a faint shadow remained to show the Terrible Three that they had a companion in the solitude of the old hut.

CHAPTER 3.

A Strange Story!

TOM MERRY broke the long silence. The rain was falling less heavily now, and it was time for the St. Jim's fellows to think of making a move. But all three of them were concerned for their queer companion in the shelter of the woodman's hut. The boy had evidently known better things; he was new to the hard and terrible life he was now following. It was no wonder that there was bitterness in his tone and manner. The world was using him harshly at an early age.

"Are you going to sleep here to-night, kid?" asked Tom.

"Not if the rain eases off."

"I hope you've got a better lodging than this?"

"I may be able to sneak into a barn, perhaps. But if it's not too rainy I shall keep on the road for Lexham."

"Looking for work?" asked Manners.

"Yes."

"Look here," said Tom quietly, "I don't want to butt into your affairs, kid, but this isn't a life you ought to be leading. I suppose you haven't run away from school—"

"Oh, no!"

"Or from home?" asked Tom.

"I fancy if I'd run away from any kind of home, I should take the quickest road back to it!" chuckled the stranger.

"I don't happen to have a home."

"You're on your own?"

"That's it!"

"But your people—"

"I haven't any."

"That's pretty rotten," said Lowther.

"It's not nice, is it?" agreed the stranger. "But there you are! There are ups and downs in life. I've had the ups, and got through them—now I'm getting the downs. The fellows who used to know me at school would stare a bit to see me now."

"A school in these parts?" asked Tom.

"Oh, no; up in the north! A jolly well-known school, too—but I won't mention its name. I'm not doing it credit at present."

There was another silence. This time it was the stranger who broke it.

"It's pretty decent of you fellows to speak civilly to a scarecrow like me. I wonder if I should have done the same when I was as well off. I dream sometimes that I'm back at"—he paused quickly—"at my old school. It's like old-times to hear you talk. But the rain's stopping—time you got going, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Tom. "But—look here, isn't there anything we can do to give you a helping hand?"

"What could you do?"

"Well, we've got some tin," said Tom hesitatingly.

"Keep it!"

"But—"

"Thanks; I haven't come to begging yet. I dare say that will come, in good time. But I haven't got there yet."

"I didn't mean to offend you," said Tom. "I don't see why fellows shouldn't help a chap who's down on his luck. We could make up a quid among us."

"I know you mean it decently. That's all right. But I couldn't touch it, all the same. The rain's nearly stopped."

But the Terrible Three did not go. It went against the grain to leave the hapless fellow alone, unhelped, in the dreary, rainy winter evening.

They saw him dimly as he sat on the old bricks, leaning back against the shaky wall of the hut. His face glimmered white in the gloom.

"You've had no luck looking for work?" asked Tom.

"None! You see, a public school education doesn't exactly fit you for the labour market—as you fellows would find if you ever came up against it. I was considered very good at Latin verse." He laughed. "I was quite a marked man in my mathy set. But the butcher in Wayland doesn't seem to have any use for Latin verses, and the grocer doesn't want a keen hand at mathematics to carry his basket. Even the way I speak is against me; it seems to be considered rather cheeky not to drop your 'h's' when you're asking for a job."

The bitterness in the boy's tone gave Tom Merry a pang as he noted it.

"But what the thump am I running on like this for?" exclaimed the stranger impatiently. "I'm not asking you fellows for sympathy any more than for money."

"Well, you can't prevent us from handing out sympathy, anyhow," said Tom, smiling. "I wish we could help you somehow."

"Well, you can't."

There was a pause, and then the boy went on. In spite of an assumed rudeness of manner, it was evident that he found relief in talking to the St. Jim's fellows.

"Don't mind my bad manners," he said. "I've roughed it too long to have any polish left. I know you're decent chaps, and I know I ought to be civil. I'm sorry!"

"That's all right," said Tom cheerily; "I quite understand. But can't anything be done? You must have some relations somewhere."

"Not a soul! I've got some cousins and an uncle somewhere, I know, but I'm not asking them for anything. I've never even seen them, and don't know them, except by name. Pretty long faces they'd pull, I expect, if I marched in and claimed relationship, especially in these clothes." He laughed sarcastically. "As I said, I'm not a beggar, and I'd as soon be a beggar as a poor relation asking for charity."

"I dare say that's right," said Tom. "But, dash it all, if you were at school, somebody must have kept you there, and that person—"

"Dead!"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"I don't mind telling you. I dare say you can see that I'm glad to see somebody decent to talk to for once. I was at—never mind where—but it was a big and expensive school in the north. I don't remember my parents; my grandfather sent me there, and paid my fees. He never wanted to see me. I stayed at school for the holidays, excepting when I was asked away by fellows I knew. My grandfather died a few months ago. He had been supposed to be a rich man. It turned out that he had spent every penny of his income as fast as he had it, and wasn't even insured. He left a crop of debts behind him that will never be paid. He doesn't seem to have given me a thought. Perhaps he thought he'd done enough for me in keeping me at—school. Anyhow, there it was. My fees were paid for the current term, and I had the clothes I stood in, and what money I had in my pockets. I left, when the other fellows did, at the end of the term."

The juniors listened in silence.

"That's my giddy history. Old Tin-ribs—that's my old headmaster—gave me a jawing when I left. He was sorry, and hummed and hawed; but he couldn't tell me to come back next term, of course. He had written to my uncle, in the south of France, and his letter hadn't even been answered. Nunky didn't want a jolly old orphan on his hands, that was certain. He told me he'd written a second time, and registered the letter to make sure; and still there was no answer. That fed me up with an idea of bothering nunky. The Head asked me what I was going to do. I told him I was staying over Christmas with a friend, and after that—well, I didn't know. That was all. I fancy he was glad when he saw the last of me."

"And then—"

said Tom. "I stayed with my school pal over Christmas. One day I told him what had happened, and you should have seen his face. The poor chap fancied I had some idea of planting

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myself on him and his people. I cleared off from the place the next morning."

"Rotten!" said Tom.

"And since then—"

said Tom. "Since then I've been on the road—getting lower and lower down. The money—what money I had—went. The clothes followed. I learned what the inside of a pawnbroker's was like, soon enough. You learn a lot of things when you're up against it. At first I thought there were a lot of things I could do. My education had cost my grandfather hundreds of pounds. I found I could do nothing that was any use. The old man would have done better to apprentice me to a bootmaker or a chimney-sweep, if he'd only known it, or cared. Odd jobs are all that I can do; nobody seems to want me to construe Virgil or Livy for him."

"It's hard cheese," said Manners.

"Look here," said Tom Merry. "Something's going to be done. You can't go on like this. Will you tell me your name?"

"Leonard Lee—Len for short."

"Mine's Tom Merry. Look here, Lee, let me see you again. I'll speak to my Housemaster—"

"Rot!"

"He's a real brick, and he would advise you, at least. Look here; come up to the school with us now—"

"In these clothes?" said Len bitterly.

"Oh, bother your clothes! Come with us, and I tell you old Railton will give you some good advice, and a helping hand—"

"Rot!"

"Look here, Lee—"

"Nothing doing!" said Lee quietly. "I've told you I'm not a beggar. I've heard there are jobs going at Lexham, and I'm trying my luck there to-morrow. Blessed if I know what I've been chinning to you fellows like this for; I'm not much of a talker, as a rule. Good-bye!"

"But look here—"

"Good-bye! I'm going to get some sleep."

Len Lee folded his ragged coat closely about him, and lay down among the bricks. Tom Merry & Co. stood looking down at him; in the gloom, for some moments. Then, slowly and thoughtfully, they left the old woodman's hut, and turned their steps in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

Tea in Study No. 9.

"YOU wottahs!" The dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy greeted the Terrible Three as they came into the School House at St. Jim's. There was a warlike expression on Gussy's noble face; evidently he had let the sun go down upon his wrath.

"Hallo! What's biting the old bird?" asked Monty Lowther genially.

"Weally, Lowthah, you wuffian—"

Kildare of the Sixth called to the late-comers.

"You three report in Mr. Railton's study!"

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

"I will let you off till you are through with the House-mastah, you cheeky wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Run away and play, old bean!" said Lowther.

The Terrible Three repaired to the Housemaster's study, to report their late arrival. Mr. Railton received them with a rather severe look; but his brow cleared as the juniors explained why they had been late. On the way home the three juniors had discussed the strange story they had heard in the woodman's hut, and had come to a decision, which Tom Merry now proceeded to put into effect.

"There's something I think I ought to tell you, sir," he said.

"You may go on, Merry."

And Tom explained about the meeting with Len Lee, and what the chums of the Shell had learned about him. Mr. Railton listened attentively, with surprise in his face.

"The boy did not tell you the name of his school?" he asked.

"No, sir; only that it was a well-known public school in the north," answered Tom.

The Housemaster knitted his brows in reflection.

"It is possible that you may have been deceived by some impostor," he said. "But—"

"He wouldn't take any help from us, sir."

"You offered it?"

"Oh, yes, sir; we'd gladly have given him all the cash we had about us!" said Tom.

Mr. Railton smiled.

"That certainly looks genuine," he said. "You say the boy remained at the hut after you left."

"Yes; he was going to sleep."

"Then doubtless he is there still. If the lad's story is true, he has been very badly treated," said the Housemaster.

"Certainly something ought to be done to assist him. It is a pity that he refused to come with you here."



"What—who—who are you?" There was a sharp, startled exclamation, and a fierce hand gripped Len Lee by the shoulder. Helpless as an infant in that powerful grasp, he was dragged into the bright light of the car, and the man he had saved stared savagely into his face! (See page 11.)

"We'd fetch him, sir!" began Lowther. "We'll jolly well make him come, if you'd like to see him, sir!"

The Housemaster smiled again. "I will do that myself," he answered. "At all events, I will walk to the hut, and question the boy, and ascertain whether he has told you the facts. If he has, I shall see that something is done. You may go now, my boys."

And the Terrible Three left the Housemaster's study, and proceeded to change their clothes. They came down to Study No. 10 in the Shell, for a late tea, in a cheery mood. Mr. Railton's decision had relieved their minds on the score of Len Lee.

"Railton will see him through all right," said Tom Merry, as they came into Study No. 10.

"If he wasn't pulling our leg—" said Manners.

"Oh, he wasn't; I'm sure of that!" said Tom confidently.

"I'm sure he's as straight as a die."

"Well, I think so, too; but Railton appeared to have some doubts."

"He hasn't seen him yet, you know."

"That's so," agreed Manners.

"Hallo, the fire's out, and there's nothing in the cupboard!" said Monty Lowther dismally. "Tuckshop's closed, and it's too late for grub in Hall. This is what comes of getting caught in the rain, and listening to the woes of giddy orphans. Think we could stick Study No. 6 for a late tea? Gussy ought to stand us one, as we took him to a football-match this afternoon."

"I think we'll give Gussy a miss," chuckled Tom Merry. "Let's try Talbot—"

"Hallo! You fellows back!" Levison of the Fourth looked in at the doorway of Study No. 10. "Had your tea?"

"No! Just wondering whom we could stick for a tea," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"When we got there the cupboard was bare," explained Lowther; "and so the poor dog had none."

Levison grinned.

"Come along to Study No. 9," he said. "We're having tea late, and it's a spread. We'll be glad to have you."

"Good man!" said Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry hesitated a second. Levison's study-mates were Clive and Cardew; and between Tom Merry and Cardew there had been a feud that had lasted long, and had only lately come to an end. Ralph Reckness Cardew, certainly, seemed to have forgotten all about the feud already, and acted as though there never had been any trouble between him and Tom—which was quite like Cardew. Levison laughed as he saw the hesitation in Tom's look.

"It's all right," he said. "Cardew will be glad to see you. He's not keeping up old grudges, if you're not."

"I'm certainly not," said Tom, at once. "After all, Cardew voted for me at the last election, so I suppose he has buried the hatchet. But—"

"Oh, come along!" said Levison. "You know what Cardew's like; I really believe he's quite forgotten that he ever was up against you. It's all over and done with."

"Mustn't bear grudges—especially at tea-time," said Lowther. "Come on, Tommy!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom cheerily. And the Terrible Three walked along to Study No. 9 in the Fourth with Ernest Levison.

Sidney Clive was making toast, and the table was set for tea. Cardew was reclining in the armchair, watching Clive as he piled toast on a dish in the fender. He rose to his feet as Levison appeared with the guests from the Shell.

"Welcome, little strangers!" he said gracefully. "So jolly glad to see you, little old beans, still alive! I understood that Gussy was raging for your gore. He came in nearly drowned, and I hear that he had been waiting ever since for you to come in, to strew the hungry churchyard with your bones. Did you sit on his hat or somethin'?"

"Only sat him down in a puddle," said Lowther. "He asked for it, too—in fact, begged and prayed for it. But some people are never satisfied when they get what they ask for!"

"True—too true!" sighed Cardew. "Look what the fellows got when they got me as captain instead of Tom Merry! From the sublime to the ridiculous—what?"

"Oh!" said Tom, laughing. "Is that how you look at it?"

"Just how," said Cardew. "Since the election I've told every fellow who voted for me that he was a silly ass. I'm a whale on speakin' the truth—sometimes! Now the fellows have changed back from the ridiculous to the sublime, and everythin' in the garden is lovely. Now that I've put it like that, Tom Merry, the least you can do is to offer me a place in the eleven for the Greyfriars match."

"That will depend on your form," said Tom, with a smile. "Then it's no go—wash it out!" said Cardew. "Finished the toast, Clivey?"

"Yes. I thought you were going to put the butter on it," grunted Clive.

"Now, I wonder what can have put that idea into your head?"

"Fathead!"

"Of all the slackers——" said Levison.

"Same old tale!" sighed Cardew. "They used to call me a slacker when I was at Wodehouse. They call me a slacker here. Old Railton's jawed me for slacking, just as old Tin-ribs used to. What a life!"

Tom Merry gave a start.

"Old who?" he asked. Manners and Lowther looked curiously at Cardew.

"Old Tin-ribs!" answered Cardew. "My jolly old headmaster. It wasn't his name, but we always called him Tin-ribs!"

"Oh!" said Tom.

He said no more; but his glance met his chums'. Len Lee, in the woodman's hut near Wayland, had referred to his old headmaster by the same nickname; it was a strange coincidence, at least. Wodehouse School was in the north, too. The same thought was in the minds of all three of the Shell fellows—they wondered whether Len Lee had ever been a schoolfellow of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Sit down, you fellows," said Levison. "Give your chin a rest, Cardew, and lend a hand."

"Anythin' to please such a nice chap as you are, Ernest," said Cardew. And Study No. 9 and their guests sat down to a very cheery tea; the half a dozen juniors chatting away amicably. Evidently the feud with Tom Merry was a thing of the past, and the memory of it seemed to have vanished from Cardew's volatile mind—he alluded several times to his brief term of captaincy, but only in a jesting vein. And Tom Merry was glad enough for that old trouble to be forgotten.

CHAPTER 5.

The Vials of Wrath!

I PWESUME——

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, holding forth in Study No. 6, had got no further than that, when Blake interrupted him. Study No. 6 were settling down to prep, and possibly Blake and Herries and Digby regarded conversation, on D'Arcy's part, as superfluous.

"Don't!" said Blake.

"Don't what, deah boy?"

"Don't presume!" said Blake severely. "You really ought to know better than that, Gussy—you, the son of a lord, too, and the younger brother of a giddy viscount!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Never presume, Gussy," said Dig, looking up. "The proverb says that presumption is the thief of time."

"Weally, Dig, the pwoverb says that pwocestination is the thief of time, you know."

"Well, then, there's another proverb that says that presumption is the something of something-or-other," answered Dig. "Don't presume!"

"No, don't!" agreed Herries. "Never be presumptuous, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass in his noble eye, and surveyed his three chums. They all looked quite serious. Apparently it was a misunderstanding.

"Weally, you fellows, when I say I pwesume, I do not mean that I pwesume," said Arthur Augustus.

"That makes it quite clear," said Blake. "Clear as mud, in fact!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Now Gussy's finished talking, we'll get on to prep," added Blake.

"I have not finished yet, Blake!"

"My mistake—I know you've never finished talking," conceded Blake. "But I suppose you're going to leave off for a bit? You can finish some other time."

"Wats! To wesome what I was sayin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I pwesume——"

"There you go again!" exclaimed Blake. "Blessed if I ever heard of such a presumptuous chap!"

"I pwesume——" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Don't! It's bad form, I tell you."

"You uttah ass! I do not wequiah instwuction in good form from anybody in this studay. I have wepeatedly told

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all of you that your mannahs would disgwace a bear-garden. I wepeat, I pwesume that you fellows are backin' me up! When I say I pwesume, I do not mean that I pwesume, I mean that I take it for gwanted. I am goin' to thwash Manners——"

"Poor old Manners!"

"And Lowthah——"

"Alas, for Lowther!"

"And Tom Mewwy——"

"Poor, poor fellow!" said Blake, wiping his eyes, while Herries and Dig chuckled.

"Are you thrashing them all three at once, or on the instalment system?" inquired Dig.

"One aftah anothah, Dig. Are you fellows backin' me up, or are you not backin' me up?" demanded Arthur Augustus warmly.

"My dear man, you don't want any help in thrashing three Shell fellows," said Blake. "Just wade in and obliterate them. Mind, you're not to kill them outright—that's against the law!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Of course, the law is an ass, as somebody said long ago, and we don't think much of it," said Blake. "Still, it's considered good form to keep within the limits of the law. I must make a point of this, Gussy! Stop short of actual manslaughter."

"You know what you are when you're roused, Gussy," said Robert Arthur Digby solemnly. "One of your fearful blows might do no end of harm, if—if it happened to hit anything. Of course, that's not likely."

"Weally, Dig——"

"In case of fatal results," went on Blake, "I think we'd better stay here. Looking on, we should be accessories before the fact, or accessories within the meaning of the act, or whatever the legal expression is. As your pals, however, we shall be prepared to come and bail you out afterwards, if you're taken up by the police. If you can be bailed out for not more than three shillings, this study will do it."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Dig heartily.

"If you fellows cannot take this mattah seriously——"

"But aren't we taking it seriously?" asked Blake, in surprise. "You haven't slaughtered the Shell fellows yet, and here we are making arrangements to bail you out afterwards. We're getting ahead faster than you are!"

"My clobbah was wuined," said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard. "I was sat down in a mudday puddle! I was tweated with gwoss diswospect. I feel that I have no wescource but to thwash those fellows all wound. I think you fellows would undahstand my indignation, if you saw the state of my twousahs when I came in."

"Of course we understand!" said Blake. "That's why we're going to stand by you right up to the finish, when you're executed for the massacre of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. I give up my point—I'd forgotten your trousers. Finish them off! Fellows who would treat trousers as they did deserve no mercy! Finish them off! We'll get on with our prep while you're at it!"

Blake & Co. got on with their prep. Arthur Augustus surveyed them through his eyeglass for a full minute, and then walked out of the study and slammed the door. Slamming a study door was not really in accordance with the code of good manners, as practised in the best circles; but Arthur Augustus did slam it, hard! Whereupon Blake & Co. grinned at one another, and continued their prep. Prep was one of the things that had to be done; and probably they felt assured that their noble and indignant chum would come to no great harm in Tom Merry's study.

With wrath in his brow, Arthur Augustus strode along to Study No. 10 in the Shell.

He found the Terrible Three there, with Talbot of the Shell. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had returned from tea in Study No. 9, and Talbot had dropped in to talk of football matters for a few minutes before prep. The four Shell fellows looked round as Arthur Augustus loomed up in the doorway, frowning and wrathful.

"All serene, Gussy," said Monty Lowther, before the swell of St. Jim's could speak. "You needn't worry."

"What?"

"Levison stood us tea," explained Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I am not intewested in knowin' whethah Levison stood you tea or not, Lowthah."

"Oh! You weren't worrying about us?" asked Lowther blandly.

"Certainly not."

"You weren't afraid that we had missed our tea?"

"I nevah gave the mattah a though, Lowthah."

"Then you've looked in to ask us whether we got wet?"

"Nothin' of the kind."

"Or whether we caught colds?"

"No!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me!" said Lowther, in perplexity. "Then what have you looked in for, Gussy? Merely to show us a handsome, pleasing countenance, and an elegant suit of clothes?"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard. "I have come heah, Lowthah, to thwash you all wound—you and Mannahs and Tom Mewwy—for your wuffianly and wascally conduct this afternoon!"

"Help!" gasped Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah, you wottahs! I am goin' to thwash you one aftah another, and you can choose your turns," said Arthur Augustus. "Talbot can see fail play."

"You're not going to thrash Talbot, too?" asked Lowther. "Certainly not. Talbot has not tweated me in a wuffianly and wascally mannah."

"Still, while you're on the job, you might as well make a clean sweep of it," suggested Lowther. "I am sure you could thrash the four as easily as the three."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, old man—" said Talbot, laughing.

Arthur Augustus waved a lofty hand at him.

"Pway do not butt in, Talbot, exceptin' to see fail play. These young wascals have acted outrageously, and I am goin' to give them a feahful thwashin' all wound." Arthur Augustus peeled off his elegant jacket and turned back his spotless cuffs. "You first, Lowthah! I wegard you as the worst and most wuffianly!"

The Terrible Three exchanged a grinning glance.

"Well, if we're for it, we're for it," said Tom Merry resignedly. "I've got some boxing-gloves here. Talbot will keep time."

"Certainly," said Talbot.

"Man in!" said Tom.

And the boxing-gloves were donned, and Monty Lowther took up his stand, to face the wrath and vengeance of Arthur Augustus, and to suffer for the serious offence of having ruined the most beautiful trousers at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6. Thrashings for Three!

CRASH!

"Man down!" said Talbot.

Monty Lowther lay on his back on the study carpet, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stared down at him in some surprise.

At the very beginning of the first round Lowther had been fairly knocked out.

Undoubtedly Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a great man in war. He had no doubt about it himself. But even Arthur Augustus was surprised to see Monty Lowther stretched on the study carpet so swiftly and easily. He was not quite sure where he had hit Lowther—indeed, he had not been quite aware of having hit him at all. But there he was—on his back on the carpet, groaning.

"Bai Jove! You're not knocked out yet, Lowthah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Groan!

Talbot droppet on his knees beside Lowther.

"Got it bad, old chap?" he asked, lifting the Shell fellow's head.

Groan!

"I twust you are not severely hurt, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus.

"I—I give you best, D'Arcy," said Monty Lowther faintly.

"Help me to a chair, Talbot."

"Yes, old man," said Talbot gravely. "Lend a hand here, you fellows."

Tom Merry and Manners lent a hand. Monty Lowther was lifted up and placed gently in the armchair. There he sank back in an evident state of exhaustion.

"Is Lowthah finished?" demanded D'Arcy.

"Look at him!" answered Talbot.

"Vewy well. I do not wegard him as havin' put up much of a fight! Is it you next, or Mannahs, Tom Mewwy?"

Manners toed the line next.

"Time!" said Talbot.

Arthur Augustus came on with a rush. There was a crash of boxing-gloves, and then a crash of Manners falling on the carpet.

Gussy stood back, breathing hard, to give him a chance to rise. But Manners of the Shell did not rise. He groaned.

Talbot began to count.

"One—two—three—four—five—"

"Bai Jove! Buck up, Mannahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus encouragingly. "Don't be counted out, you know."

Groan!

"Six—seven—eight—nine—OUT!"

Manners was counted out. Solemnly Talbot and Tom Merry helped him to a chair, where he sat in a state of collapse, his hands hanging down beside him, and his chin on his chest.

"Do you call this a fightin' studay?" asked Arthur Augustus sarcastically. "I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you will put up a bettah show than those two fellows."

Tom Merry put on the boxing-gloves. He came up to the scratch, and Talbot called time again.

Again the swell of St. Jim's came on with a rush. Great fighting-man as he was, Arthur Augustus expected some difficulty with Tom Merry, the junior captain of the school and a well-known boxer. Strange to relate, he had no difficulty at all.

A tap on the chest that ought not to have hurt a fly very much laid Tom Merry on his back.

He did not rise again.

Talbot, with a face as solemn as that of a graven image, began to count. Tom Merry did not stir.

"Look heah, Tom Mewwy, you are not knocked out yet!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Groan!

"Are you weally hurt?"

Groan!

"I am sowwy if I have hurt you vewy much, you know," said the tender-hearted Gussy. "But I was bound to thwash you for wuinin' my twousahs, not to mention my coat."

Groan!

Tom Merry was counted out in his turn. Talbot of the Shell put away his watch.

"All over," he said. "D'Arcy wins all round. Shall I help you on with your jacket, D'Arcy?"

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!"

Tom Merry still lay on the carpet. Manners and Lowther sat in a state of collapse in their chairs. Arthur Augustus cast a glance at them, and left the study.

As soon as he was gone a sudden recovery set in. Tom Merry rose, smiling, from the carpet. Manners and Lowther, no longer in a state of collapse, detached themselves from their chairs.

"Dear old Gussy!" said Talbot, laughing.

And the Terrible Three chuckled, and resumed the football "jaw" which Gussy's warlike visit had interrupted.

Blissfully ignorant of the complete recovery of his victims in Study No. 10, Arthur Augustus returned to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, where Blake and Herries and Digby greeted him with smiling glances of inquiry.

"Thrashed 'em already?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I have thwashied them all wound."

"When's the funeral?" asked Dig.

"You uttah ass—"

"Must have been no end of a tussle," grinned Herries. "You've polished them off pretty quick, Gussy."

"I am wathah a hard hittah when I am woused, Hewwies."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And you left the lot of them lying in their gore?" asked Blake.

"Not in their goah, deah boy. I just waded in, you know, and knocked them out one aftah another."

"Great pip!" said Blake. "Are they seriously injured? I really hope you haven't left them for dead."

"The fact is, Blake, I am wathah wowwied. I am afwaid that I hit wathah hardah than I intended, and gave them feahful blows. Of course, they acted wottenly in sittin' me down in a mudday puddle, but I should be sowwy to cwock them."

Blake shook his head.

"Too late, Gussy! You've done it now."

"Aftah all, they are wathah thoughtless youngstahs," said the repentant Gussy. "I weally begin to wish that I had not hit them so hard. Pewwaps I had bettah tell them so."

"Better get on with your prep, and leave 'em to recover," suggested Blake.

"No; I feel that I ought to express my wegwet for havin' thwashied them so severely, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus—heedless of the chuckles of his chums—walked out of the Fourth Form study, and returned to Study No. 10 in the Shell. He tapped at Tom Merry's door and opened it.

"You fellows—" he began.

Then he stopped.

Instead of three fellows in a state of collapse he found the Terrible Three chatting cheerily with Talbot, and not looking a penny the worse for their experiences at the hands of Arthur Augustus. Arthur Augustus stared at them blankly in astonishment.

"Hallo, here's Gussy again!" exclaimed Lowther. "Have you come back to thrash Talbot, after all, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I—I—"

"Might as well put him on the list," said Manners. "I dare say he could recover as fast as we did."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the shell fellows.

Arthur Augustus gazed at them. Slowly but surely it dawned upon his noble intellect that his leg had been pulled.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated at last. "You fellows were only shammin'!"

"You don't mean to say you've guessed that?" exclaimed Lowther in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"What a brain!" said Monty admiringly. "Won't Gussy make 'em sit up in the House of Lords when he gets there! What an intellect!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus, in wrath. "I wefuse to have my leg pulled in this wiculous way! I am goin' to thwash you—"

"But you've done it," said Tom. "At least, you've done as much as you possibly could in that line."

"You uttah ass! I am goin'—"

"Peace, child, peace!" said Lowther, waving his hand soothingly. "You've done your funny turn—"

"I am not doin' a funnay turn, you silly ass!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Your mistake—you were! Now you've done your funny turn get off the stage. There's no encore."

"You—you—you—" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"It was funny—we admit that. But we don't want it over again," explained Lowther. "Retire gracefully behind the scenes, old man! If you like, we'll let you do it again tomorrow and get you an audience. I can't say fairer than that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed Arthur Augustus. He rushed into Study No. 10, evidently with the intention of tackling the Terrible Three all at once, and, strewing the study carpet with their remains. Whereupon the Terrible Three rose as one man and lifted Arthur Augustus from the floor and bore him struggling and wriggling into the passage. They bore him along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, still struggling and wriggling spasmodically, and Tom Merry kicked open the door, and they marched in.

"This belongs to you, I think, Blake," said Tom Merry.

Blake glanced up from his prep.

"Yes; that's ours," he said. "Dump it down somewhere."

Bump!

"Yawdooh!"

Tom Merry & Co. retired, leaving Arthur Augustus sitting on the floor of Study No. 6. It was some time before the swell of St. Jim's recovered his breath. When he did so, he used it to tell Blake and Herries and Digby what he thought of them. He told them at considerable length, and with many personal particulars. And then, having very little time left for prep, he decided to leave the Terrible Three over till the morrow. And it was to be hoped that by the morrow Arthur Augustus would have forgotten his just wrath.

CHAPTER 7.

Almost a Tragedy!

LEN LEE stood in the gloom in the woodman's hut and stared out into darkness and dropping rain. The footsteps of the Terrible Three had long died away.

The outcast was alone in the wood, with night thickening round him. The rain had almost ceased, but heavy drops still fell from the leafless branches overhead.

Len shivered.

His ragged coat was little defence against the cold, and there was a sharp winter wind moaning through the wood. As he stood there in the gloom the wanderer's face was dark and full of bitter thought. The contrast between his own outcast, hopeless state and that of the St. Jim's juniors had struck him forcibly; but his bitterness was not directed towards them. Indeed, the hapless boy blamed no one; he was in the grip of misfortune, but it was no one's fault, unless the fault was to be laid at the door of his dead grandfather. And even that old man, in the midst of many difficulties, had contrived to pay the boy's expenses at an expensive school, till a sudden death had taken him away. If Len sometimes thought of the old man, whom he had hardly known, with bitterness, it was only when he felt the hand of fate hard upon him; in more cheerful moments he admitted that old Mr. Lee had done much for him; and would have done more, all that he could, had not he been snatched away so abruptly.

Yet, though in calm moments he blamed no one, he knew that his fate was bitterly hard; the present dreary, the future dark and doubtful. What would become of him was a problem of which he could not even guess the answer. He had been in the Upper Fourth Form at a great and famous school; yet, in his wanderings he had often envied the lads he had seen with butcher's trays and greengrocer's barrows. Their education had not cost a tithing of what his had cost; yet they were better fitted to face the battle of

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life. Looking back on his schooldays—so recent and yet so far off—it seemed incredible to him that a few months ago his greatest trouble had been to scrape through in class when he had neglected prep, his keenest desire to get the captaincy of the junior eleven. The time—the long, long hours—he had spent in mugging up Latin—he thought of that with a bitter curl of the lip. What use was it all to him now that he was up against realities? It seemed to him now that, in the cloistered life of school, masters and boys alike were dreamers of dreams, devoting a ludicrous attention and energy to the things that did not matter.

It was not now prep he had to think of, as the shades of evening closed in; it was his evening meal, and where it was to come from. It was not a Form master he had to face in the morning, but a day's labour, or, worse still, a day's hunger. The outcast was learning the bitter lessons of life early.

A sigh dropped from the boy's lips. The talk with Tom Merry & Co. had brought back his old life to him clearly, painfully; the life of careless thoughtlessness, which had seemed once as if it would last for ever. But he gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders, and pulled himself together. It was over, and what was the use of thinking of it?

Those fellows had meant well and kindly by him. They were decent chaps. But between him and them there was a great gulf fixed. They could not help him, except in the way of charity. And in that way Len Lee did not want help.

He had lain down as if to sleep, but he was not thinking of sleep. After the juniors were gone he rose and stood staring in the direction they had taken—long, long after their footfalls had died away.

But he stirred at last.

He drew out his wretched bundle from the recess in the old hut, pulled his ragged coat round him, and moved away in the darkness. He tramped through soaked grass and dripping underwood to the footpath, and followed it to the Wayland road. He was anxious to get away from the spot where he had met the juniors. Who they were, excepting for Tom Merry's name, he did not know, or where or what their school was. But he did not want to know more of them, or to see them again. Perhaps he feared the strength of his own resolution—feared that if the kind-hearted fellows sought him again and renewed the offer of help he might yield and forget the resolve he had made long ago, that whatever might betide he would never beg his bread. For what could they do for him? If they told his story and interested some kind-hearted elder in him, what could come of it? To become a hanger-on, greedily snapping up the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table—his cheeks crimsoned in the darkness at the thought. Never that!

He came out on the Wayland road, and tramped on towards Lexham—many a long mile distant. The night was growing older, and rain was dropping again. The sky was thickly overcast, scarcely a star glimmered at intervals through rolling banks of clouds. Through the gloom bright lights shot out suddenly behind him, and there was the roar of a powerful car driven fast. The outcast jumped aside as the car roared past, splashing him with mud as it went.

Ahead of him, in the darkness of the road, the red rear-light of the car twinkled and grew smaller. But it did not vanish. As he tramped on it burned clearer. The car had halted.

He gave the matter no thought. It was no business of his if a motorist halted his car on a lonely road far from any dwelling at a late hour on a winter's evening.

But as he came close to the car he glanced at it.

When it had flashed past him a man had been sitting at the wheel, muffled up against the bitter wind. The man was not there now. Bright lights streamed from the car into the night, but the motorist had vanished.

The big car, handsome and well-fitted, stood deserted by the roadside. Len glanced round him. A wood bordered the road, unfenced, open to the passer-by. A light glimmered under the trees for a moment, and then went out, succeeded by a steady red glow, which Len knew was the burning end of a cigar. There was nothing inquisitive in Len's nature, but he stopped, curious in spite of himself. It was amazing that a man should stop his car on that dark and lonely road to smoke a cigar under the rain-dropping trees. And suddenly a voice was audible:

"Fool! Better get it over!"

Len started.

For a moment he fancied that the man under the trees was speaking to some companion. But the next moment he realised that the speaker was alone, and speaking to himself.

An arc of red light showed where the cigar was thrown suddenly away; there was a faint hissing as the burning end was extinguished in a pool of water. A metallic click followed.

The boy's heart beat suddenly fast.



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's ferocious rush sent Lowther crashing on the half-open door of Mr. Railton's study. "There, you cheeky wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. Monty Lowther sat up dizzily on Mr. Railton's carpet, while Arthur Augustus, in the doorway, glared down at him. (See page 16.)

He knew that it was the click of some firearm. In Heaven's name, what was happening in the wood? A shifting of the cloud-banks allowed a gleam of starlight to fall on the dripping trees, and Len had a glimpse of a man in a coat, standing a few yards from the roadside, with something in his hand that shot back the gleam of the stars.

It was a revolver.

The man was alone, with a deadly weapon in his hand, in that solitary spot. The muttered words Len had heard were full of a terrible import. In a flash he understood, and he sprang from the road into the trees, the only thought in his mind that of saving the stranger from a terrible crime—and from death!

Full on the coated, muffled figure the starlight gleamed now, and it showed a right arm raised for self-destruction. Len sprang forward and gripped the arm and dragged it away.

Crack!

The report of the revolver was not loud, but it rang like thunder in Len's ears. It had exploded even as he gripped the arm, but he had succeeded. The bullet was deflected, and it whizzed away among rainy trees. There was a sharp, startled exclamation:

"What—who—how are you?"

A fierce hand gripped Len by the shoulder. Helpless as an infant in that powerful grasp, he was dragged back into the road, into the bright light of the car, and the man he had saved stared savagely into his face.

CHAPTER 8.

An Amazing Offer!

LEN did not struggle.

The man held him in the glare of the motor-lamps, and searched his face with a savage stare. Len's eyes met his fearlessly. He saw a hard,

cynical face—the face of a man of about thirty, with deep-set eyes that glittered under dark brows, and a hard mouth. There was savage anger in the face at first, but it faded away.

"Who are you? How did you come here?" He shook the boy. "But that matters little," he went on, without pausing. "Why did you interfere, you young fool? What business was it of yours?"

Len panted for breath.

"Let me go!"

The man released him, and Len stood up, panting, in the glare of the motor-lights. The revolver was no longer in the man's hand—it had been dropped under the trees. Len noted that with relief. He knew that he was helpless in a struggle with the stranger, if the latter chose to carry out his fell intention in spite of him.

The man's anger had died away. A kind of cynical coolness had taken its place.

"You young fool! So you felt called upon to take a hand in my game?" he said, with a harsh laugh.

"Yes," panted Len. "So would anybody, I think."

"Did you think my life was worth saving?"

"I didn't think about it at all. I knew I ought to stop you," said Len.

The man's mood changed again suddenly.

"But for you it would have been all over now. Now it's before me—if I can screw up my courage to the sticking-point again. Can I?" He muttered a curse. "You young fool!"

"I did right, and you were doing wrong," said Len steadily. "Whatever you're up against, you've no right to do such a thing. It's wrong, and it's cowardly."

"Cowardly!" repeated the man.

"Yes—cowardly. I'm up against it, too," said Len bitterly. "But I'd never be mean enough to think of sneaking out of trouble that way."

"The way of modern knave and ancient fool!" said the other, with a hard laugh. "But you do not know what I am up against, my boy."

"You're better off than I am, I fancy," said Len, with a glance at the big car, and then at the man before him. "I imagine that your overcoat cost as much as I shall earn in six months if I get work."

"You're dressed like a tramp, and you look it, but you don't speak like one," said the man. "Who are you?"

"An outcast, down on his luck."

The man stood silent for a moment or two, in deep thought. He was not touching Len now, but the boy lingered. Once the man's deep-set, gleaming eyes wandered towards the trees, and Len knew that he was thinking of the revolver that lay there, somewhere in the wet grass in the darkness. But he made no move in that direction. The boy thought, and hoped, that the frantic impulse to suicide had passed; the man was in full control of himself now, at least. And the boy wondered. The man's coat had come

open as he dragged Len into the road, and the boy could see that he was well and expensively dressed, and the coat was worth fifty guineas at least. The car was worth over a thousand. So far as the world's goods went this man was one of the fortunate ones, if appearances went for anything. Was it, then, the fear of punishment for some crime against the law that had driven him to so fearful a way of escape? The hard, white face, grimly shown up in every hard line by the glaring head-lights, was not reassuring.

The man spoke again at last.

"Get into the car!"

"Why?"

"I want to speak to you."

The rain was dropping on them as they stood, and Len obeyed. The man followed him into the car. In the subdued light there, his face did not look so hard or so cynical.

He sat facing Len, his eyes on the boy's face. Some strange thought seemed to be working in his mind.

"Your name?" he rapped out suddenly.

"Len Lee."

The man started.

"Len! For Leonard!"

"Yes."

"A strange coincidence."

Len only looked at him. He did not see where the coincidence came in.

"My nephew's name is—or was—Leonard!" said the man, in explanation. "He was called Len."

"Oh! Was Leonard?" said the boy.

"He is dead."

"Oh!" said Len again. His heart softened. "Was it because of that that you—"

The man stared at him, and then burst into a strange laugh. "Yes! Because of that! Because the boy died—drowned, poor lad, when the ice broke under him when he was skating."

"I'm sorry!" said Len softly.

"His name was Leonard—a strange coincidence! And you saved my life—though not for long, unless I can think of a way out! Have I thought of it? Is it possible? Would it work? Could it work?"

The man was speaking to himself, but his gleaming eyes never left Len's face. He addressed Len again.

"Your name's Len Lee! Good! Who are you? Where do you come from? What is your history?"

Len hesitated. He had spoken frankly and freely to Tom Merry; but this man's hard face did not invite confidence. And his strange manner, and stranger words, made the boy uneasy. He wondered whether he had to do with one whose mind was unsettled.

"Speak!" said the man harshly. "You can trust me! It is in my mind to be a good friend to you. After all, you've saved my life! Speak freely, and it may be in my power to do much for you."

"I do not ask for anything," said Len. "I want nothing, unless it is work, and you cannot give me that."

"I could give you that if I chose, but I might offer you something better."

Len's face brightened.

"If you could help me to get a job where I could earn money, and earn my bread, sir, I shouldn't refuse that," he said. "Goodness knows I'm in need of it."

"Tell me about yourself, then."

The boy hesitated no longer. He told his story as he had told it to Tom Merry. The man listened attentively, without interrupting him once, but his eyes searched Len's face all the time. When the boy was silent at last, he snapped out questions.

"The name of your old school?"

Len was silent.

"Answer me, if I am to believe you."

"You can believe me or not, as you choose," retorted Len. "But I do not want to give the name of my school to anyone—I am a disgrace to it now."

"If you knew anything of the world you will have to fight, my boy, you would know that you will have to answer more questions than that before you get employment. Come, answer me."

"Wodehouse," said Len reluctantly.

"Wodehouse School? That is in the north—some hundreds of miles from here."

"Yes."

"All the better. Have you kept up any communication with your old school or school-mates, or headmaster?"

Len glanced rather bitterly down at his ragged clothes.

"None," he answered. "I fancy nobody there would care to know me now—and certainly I shouldn't care to be known by them."

"Better still! And you are on your uppers?"

"Quite."

"Looking for work?"

"Yes."

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"What kind of work?"

"Anything to keep me from starving."

"By gad!" muttered the man, staring hard at Len. "It is said that Satan befriends his own!"

He fell silent, still with his watchful eyes on the boy. Len did not venture to interrupt his thoughts. It was full ten minutes before the man spoke again.

"Listen to me, Len—I will call you Len! You've stood between me and an act of folly this night—in a word, you've saved my life. You do not know who I am, of course."

Len shook his head.

"My name is Claude Pomfret. I am a stockbroker in the City of London. I have a country house in Sussex—not many miles from here. Leonard Pomfret was my nephew and ward. He is dead. He was about your age—between fourteen and fifteen. I guess that to be your age."

"That is right."

"I am a rich man." A strange expression glided over the man's face for an instant. "Pomfret Lodge is a home such as you probably never saw in your palmy days. Leonard would have come there, had he lived, before going to a big public school in this county—a school called St. James—or St. Jim's. You may have heard of it?"

"I've heard of it."

"Leonard died," went on Pomfret. "He died in Switzerland. He had been there some years! I lost my nephew! How would you like to take his place?"

Len stared at the man, wondering whether he was, indeed, out of his senses.

"Take his place!" he stammered.

"I have surprised you, I suppose?"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Len.

"Yet it is simple," said Pomfret, watching Len as he spoke. Indeed, he had never ceased to watch the boy's face for a moment. "I was fond of my nephew. I was about to welcome him home when I received the news of his death. I am a bachelor—I have neither wife nor child. I offer to adopt you as my nephew, in Leonard's place. You will take the name of Len Pomfret; you will have everything that you can wish for that wealth can provide, and you will go to St. Jim's to finish your education—from there to the University. A change from tramping the roads and asking farmers for a job—what?"

"Yes!" gasped Len.

"Yes, or no, then?"

"But—but—but why should you do this for me?" stammered the boy, utterly bewildered.

"What does that matter so that I do it?" said Pomfret.

"But I may say that there is an empty place in my household that you may fill; and you saved me from crime and death to-night. I was Len Pomfret's guardian—I will be your guardian in his place, and in the course of time I shall cease to feel that he is dead. I, as well as you, will think of the future instead of the past."

Len sat silent, almost overwhelmed. The prospect opened before him was dazzling; and how could he doubt the sincerity of the man before him? Claude Pomfret had lost his nephew—perhaps a dearly-beloved nephew—whose name by a coincidence was Len's own. Len had saved his life, and so this thought had come into the man's mind. Was it grief for a lost loved one that had driven the man to his attempted desperate act? Did he find relief, solace, in befriending a friendless outcast? It was possible—and otherwise, the man's motive was hard to seek.

Pomfret allowed the boy to think it out; but Len's brain was in a whirl, and he found it hard to think clearly. After a time the man stepped from the car, and started up the engine. It throbbed in Len's ears. About him lay the dark, wet woodland, before him the dreary road—doubt and darkness, and perhaps famine, if he refused the offer. And why should he refuse? And if he accepted, a swift run in the handsome car to a luxurious home, comfort and ease, and life at a public school that would be like dear old Wodehouse over again.

It was a strange, bewildering situation for the outcast.

The man looked into the car.

"Have you made up your mind?"

"I—I—" stammered Len.

"It is not an offer that many homeless vagrants would refuse."

"I—I know! But—"

"But what?"

"Why do you offer this to me?" said Len desperately. "If—if I shall serve you in any way—if I can repay you somehow—I shall not feel like a beggar who is given charity. But—"

"Is that all?" Pomfret smiled, and his hard face became pleasant. "My boy, you need have no doubts! You will be serving me—you will be doing me an act of kindness—you will, I hope and trust, take the place of one whose loss drove me to desperation. You will be saving my life over again. Is that enough?"

"Yes," breathed Len.



A motor-car was waiting on the drive outside the house, and as Tom Merry came along, a gentleman in a silk hat and a fur-collared coat came out of the house with a boy walking by his side and mounted it. Tom's eyes fixed on the boy. It was Len Lee, the outcast of Wayland Moor! His rags were gone, he was well-dressed, and looked bright and cheerful and happy. (See page 16.)

"You accept?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

The man mounted into the car. Len leaned back on the soft cushions, whose soft luxury contrasted so strangely with his rags, and wondered, as the great car rolled away, whether it was all a strange, wild dream, and whether he would presently wake, shivering, in the woodman's hut at Wayland.

CHAPTER 9.

Arguing the Point!

"HAVIN' thwashed you fellows—"

"Eh!"

"What?"

"Havin' thwashed you fellows all wound, I am wprepared to let the mattah dwop!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy graciously. "You tweated my ovahcoat and trowsahs in a wuffianly and wascally way, but havin' thwashed you all wound, I wegard the mattah as closed, and I twust you do not beah malice."

The Terrible Three chuckled. It was the following day, and there was sunshine in the old quad at St. Jim's, after the heavy rain of the previous night. Morning lessons were over, and there were cheery faces and voices on all sides.

"My dear chap," said Tom Merry, "having thrashed us all round, it's all right, of course. Now, run away and brush your trowsers."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We were pulling your silly leg, ass!" said Monty Lowther warmly. "You know jolly well that we were pulling your silly leg!"

Arthur Augustus shook his noble head, and smiled. "I am vewy well awah, Lowthah, that you made out that you were pullin' my leg," he answered.

"Made out?" howled Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! But on reflection, I wealise that that was only gammon! I thwashed you all wound, and I must wemark that it was vewy easy. You fellows are not much in the fightin' line."

"Why, you cheeky ass!" roared Manners.

"I twust, Mannahs, that you are not still feelin' the effects of that feahful thwashin'?" said Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"I am vewy sowwy if I hit you hardah than a wathah soft fellow like you could stand."

"Why, you—you—you—" spluttered Manners.

The Terrible Three were waiting in the corridor, to speak to Mr. Railton when he came to his study, on the subject of Len Lee. But they forgot all about Mr. Railton and Len Lee as Arthur Augustus ran on. Evidently the swell of St. Jim's was satisfied, in his noble mind—after due reflection—that the thrashing for three, in Study No. 10 the previous evening, was quite a serious matter. He was so satisfied of that, on reflection, that he was quite concerned about the fellows he had thrashed.

"Of course, I know you have been wewpesentin' it as a joke, among the fellows," said Arthur Augustus kindly. "I weally do not blame you, in a way. It is wathah a come-down for your studay, for you thwee fellows to be thwashed, one aftah anothah, in your own studay, by a chap in the Fourth. But what is the use of blinkin' facts, deah boys, aftah all?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry.

"Facts are facts, you know," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "You cannot alth facts by gassin', you know. No good twyin'. And I am suah you fellows will admit that you asked for it."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Look here, fathead!" said Monty Lowther. "We were pulling your silly leg, ass, and you couldn't lick one of us, duffer, and if any of us hit you, chump, you would fall down dead, burbler! See?"

"Have you finished, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus calmly. "If so, I will merely wemark that I am sowwy that the thwashin' has left you in such a bad tempah. I will pass ovah the wude expessions you have used, because I weally do not think I ought to thwash you again to-day aftah thwashin' you yestahday."

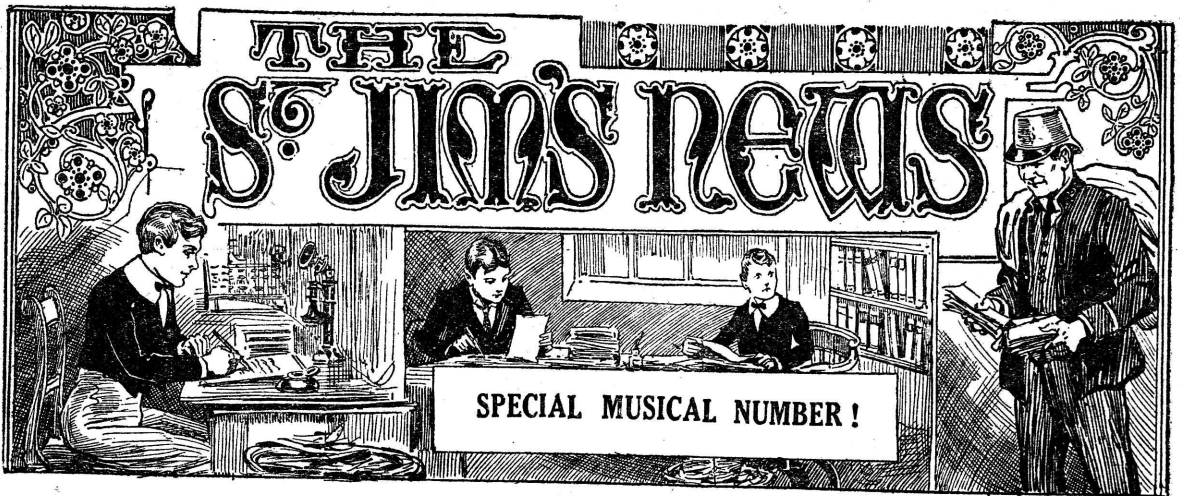
"Look here—" roared Lowther.

"Pway do not wear at a fellow, Lowthah! I have wemarked on vewy many occasions how I dislike bein' woared at."

"You silly chump—"

"I twust, Lowthah, that you will not dwive me to thwashin' you again, aftah thwashin' you so vewy severely in your

(Continued on page 16.)



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

"Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast." But there is precious little charm about the music we get at St. Jim's! There is plenty of noise about it, but very little melody.

I expect Herries of the Fourth, who is the school's maddest musician, will be very ratty with me for saying this. Herries has a cornet, and he never wearies of making hideous noises on his bent and battered instrument. He is also very fond of blowing his own trumpet! He considers himself a sort of Handel and Bach and Mozart rolled into one.

Herries isn't the only mad musician at St. Jim's. Not by any means! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy considers himself a polished pianist—the Paderewski of St. Jim's! Gussy also hugs the delusion that he can sing. But if he only knew the anguish he inflicts on his long-suffering schoolfellows, he'd never warble again. He doesn't sound a bit like a nightingale or a skylark, but like a soul in torment!

Jack Blake is very fond of the concertina. Figgins plays a flute, George Alfred Grundy beats the big drum. And Baggy Trimble, whose name rhymes with "cymbal," shows a partiality for clashing those noisy instruments.

Lots of my correspondents have asked me when I am going to publish a Special Musical Number of the "St. Jim's News." With the aid of my sub-editors, I have tackled the task, and the result is in your hands.

I must now conclude, for a fearful din is going on all round me, and it's impossible to concentrate. Herries is blaring on his cornet, Gussy is trying to sing, Bernard Glyn has got his gramophone going, and the St. Jim's brass band, under the control of George Alfred Grundy, is kicking up a hullabaloo in the corridor. So I must lay aside my pen and find something to relieve the internal pains caused by these merry, mad musicians!

Tom Merry

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MY FAVOURITE INSTRUMENT!

Some amusing confessions of the Merry Musicians of St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY:

I think I prefer the violin to any other musical instrument, because there is something soothing and restful about it. It doesn't cause such a pandemonium as a bugle or a cornet. Some fellows say that the violin is an instrument of torture, but that, of course, is a violin-sult!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY:

Give me a big drum to bang and bash, and I'm as happy as a sandboy! You can get quite a lot of sound out of a drum, if you give it a series of good, hefty swipes. I love to march proudly at the head of my brass band, with the big drum strapped round my waist. And I thump it so hard that some of the members of my band have become stone deaf. I shall have to buy a new drum now. I've hammered a big hole in both sides of the present one!

GEORGE FIGGINS:

The fellows all scoot when I play the flute,

For melodies weird I execute!

Yet the flute remains, I firmly say,

The finest thing that a fellow can play!

GEORGE HERRIES:

The cornet is by far my favourite instrument. I've had my present cornet ever since I could toddle, and it's beginning to look the worse for wear. It is bent and battered in about a dozen places, and it has long since lost its bright lustre. But I wouldn't part with my cornet for untold gold! I believe I'd sooner get rid of my famous bulldog, Towser! By the way, Towsy simply loves me to play to him on my cornet. Being an intelligent animal, he always appreciates my playing.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY:

"I must confess, deah boys, that my favourite musical instwument is the piano. I love to sit in the Common-room of a wintah evenin', an' entahtain my schoolfellows by playin' delightful ditties. But some of them are howwid beasts. They actually thwow things at me. Yaas, bai Jove! They do not realise that there is a celebated musician in their midst.

MUSICAL MATTERS!

By Dick Redfern.

The St. Jim's Brass Band, organised by George Alfred Grundy, has been going great guns of late. When Grundy's musicians are at practice the walls quiver and the ceilings shake. Grundy is talking of holding a special midnight rehearsal in the quad by torchlight. If he carries out this mad scheme, we fear it will be a "banned" band!

Grundy himself bashes the big drum. The cymbals are Trimble's. The violin belongs to Glyn—though we fail to see why Grundy should include a violin in a "brass" band! Herries plays the cornet, Wilkins plays the trombone, Gunn plays the bugle, and Monty Lowther plays the giddy goat!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy has taken to piano-playing. There's a piano in the junior Common-room, and Gussy's elegant form may be seen every evening perched on the music-stool. The fellows are coming to regard Arthur Augustus as a "thumping" nuisance!

Dame Taggles, who keeps the school shop, is very fond of music. She often hums a merry tune while she serves her customers; and Monty Lowther declares that even her sewing-machine is a "Singer"!

A coil of rope is missing from the woodshed, much to the annoyance of Taggles, the porter. Presently we shall be hearing him sing "The Lost Cord"!

There is a rumour that Wally D'Arcy has been appointed organ-blower at St. Jim's. The organ that he blows is a mouth-organ!

At the time of going to press we learn that Grundy's Brass Band is going to be disbanded—partly because the masters are complaining of the hideous hullabaloo it creates, and partly because Grundy is short of funds and can't afford to buy new instruments to replace the present ancient and battered ones. We always did say it was impossible to run a brass band without the "brass." And it is also impossible to organise a tin-whistle band without the "tin"!



The ST. JIM'S COMIC OPERA!

Written by MONTY
LOWTHER, and per-
formed to a crowded
audience in the St.
Jim's concert hall.

OPENING CHORUS (Merry, Manners, and Lowther):

"We are the Terrible Three,
And a jovial band are we,
Merry and bright from morn till night,
Holding our own in feud and fight,
Scattering troubles left and right—
Oh, a jovial band are we!

"Yes! We are the Terrible Three!
Eager for jape or spree.
We never get slack when things look black,
To worry and care we give the sack!
With a 'Ha, ha, ha!' and a 'He, he, he!'
We greet you now—the Terrible Three!"

TOM MERRY: "Thank you, gentlemen, for so kindly refraining from throwing brickbats and cabbages during our opening chorus. Evidently you are in a good humour; which is just as well, for I am now going to ask Gussy to sing to you!" (Laughter.)

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS: "Weally, Tom Mewwy! I considah that remark was most uncalled-for. The audience will simply go into waptures ovah my singin'. I will now pwoceed:

"I am the Swell of St. Jim's,
A fellow with wondahful whims.
I must confess I dote on dwess—
My coat-of-arms is a twousah-pwess!
I always appeah, fwom top to toe,
A polished awistocwat, you know!

Yaas, wathah!
I'm spick an' span fwom top to toe,
A polished awistocwat, you know!

"I dwess in perfect taste,
I've a slim an' slendah waist.
My garments fit me just like gloves;
My toppah ewevybody loves!
I always waise it in the stweet,
Whenevah a damsel fair I meet.

Yaas, wathah!
My mannahs are sedate an' sweet
Whenevah a damsel fair I meet!"

TOM MERRY: "Again I thank you, gentlemen, for being so patient and long-suffering. Even when the noble Gussy touched his top note, you endured it in Spartan silence. You refrained from hurling epithets—and missiles—at his illustrious lordship!"

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS: "Weally, Tom Mewwy, your wudeness is appallin'! I will administah a feahful thwashin'—"

TOM MERRY: "Keep cool, Gussy! Let Baggy Trimble administer a song first. I think the audience can stand it. If they can stand your warbling, they can stand anybody's! Gentlemen, I now call upon our plump prize porpoise to sing to you!"

BAGGY TRIMBLE:

"My name is Baggy Trimble, and my brains would fill a
thimble;
I simply live for tuck, and tuck alone;
I am somewhat slim and scraggy, yet the fellows call me
'Baggy.'

Which is quite a, deadly insult, you will own.
Though a dunce and ignoramus, as a sportsman I am
famous,

You should see me kicking goals on Little Side!
I am honoured and respected; when Form captain I'm
elected,
You will see my manly bosom swell with pride!

"Yes, my name is Baggy Trimble, I am active, smart, and
nimble;
I can race along the track in dashing style!
When a mad bull comes behind me, you are pretty sure to
find me
Beating every previous record for the mile!
I've the appetite of twenty, and I like good grub and
plenty;
At any time of day you'll see me stuffin';
For when it comes to eating, I have surely got the beating
Of Bunter, Fatty Wynn, and Tubby Muffin!"

JACK BLAKE: "I can bear out the truth of that last
statement. In a moment of weakness, I agreed to stand
Baggy Trimble a feed, and the bill came to over two pounds!"

TOM MERRY: "Baggy will burst one of these days!
He'll make a noise like a soda-water siphon, and explode!
But I should like our audience to explode, too—with merriment!
I therefore call upon George Alfred Grundy to give
us a song."

GRUNDY:

"Some talk of Alexander,
And some of Hercules;
But I'm a mighty giant,
More famous far than these!
You'd never catch me napping,
Not in a month of Sundays!
And not a soul, when scrapping,
Survives a blow of Grundy's!"

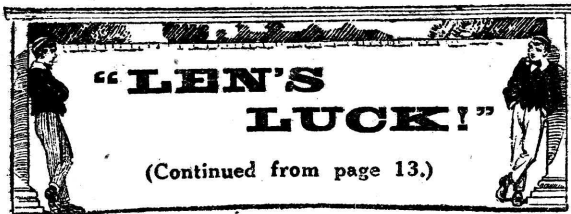
"Don't talk to me of Samson!
A puny weakling he,
Compared with that fine fellow,
The hefty G. A. G.!
I'm not a bit conceited,
I never brag or boast;
But I've never been defeated,
Or given up the ghost!"

TOM MERRY: "What a wonderful person Grundy is,
gentlemen—in his own estimation! No wonder you are all
rocking with laughter! You are wondering what Grundy is
doing on this side of the asylum wall. He ought really to be
muzzled!"

GRUNDY: "Are you looking for a whopping, Tom
Merry?"

TOM MERRY: "No; I'm looking for Fatty Wynn. He
promised to give us a song. But I expect he felt faint with
hunger, and crawled round to the tuckshop. So we'll bring
our little performance to a close by singing the final chorus:

"Ring down the curtain! Our revels are ended:
Some thought them awful, and others said, 'Splendid!'
Some thought them silly, and some murmured, 'Clever!'
Some shouted, 'Stop!' others, 'Keep on for ever!'
But now we must finish, of that we are certain;
For bed-time is here, and so—ring down the curtain!"



stoday yestaday—" Arthur Augustus broke off suddenly, as Monty Lowther gave him a gentle tap on his noble nose. "Bai Jove! You cheeky wottah— Ow! Cwumbs!"

Another tap on Gussy's noble chin followed the tap on his aristocratic nose.

That was enough for Arthur Augustus—in fact, too much! He put up his hands and rushed at Lowther.

"Chuck it, you asses!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Don't kick up a shindy just outside Railton's door—"

"Bai Jove! I am goin' to thwash you, Lowthah—"

"Get on with it!" grinned Monty.

"Monty, old man—" exclaimed Tom.

"All serene—I'm not going to hurt the silly ass!" said Lowther. "Only open his silly eyes, you know, and show him that he can't lick Shell fellows. Wooooop!"

Lowther gave a roar. In talking to Tom Merry, he had rather taken his attention off Arthur Augustus. That noble youth, in a state of great excitement, was rushing at him, and his rush came home. Monty Lowther was standing with his back to Mr. Railton's study door, which was half-open, the study being unoccupied.

Gussy's ferocious rush sent Lowther spinning backwards, with a thump on his chin, and a bang on his nose.

"Whoooooop!" spluttered Lowther.

Crash!

He crashed on the half-open door, and sent it banging back. Then he rolled over in the study.

"There, you cheeky wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Monty Lowther sat up dizzily on Mr. Railton's carpet. Arthur Augustus, in the doorway, glared down at him.

"Now then—" he gasped.

"Oh crumbs! Oh, my hat!" gasped Monty. "I—I—I'll—"

He jumped up, and jumped at the swell of the Fourth.

"Come on, you wottah!" panted Arthur Augustus.

Lowther came on, quite forgetful of where he was. As a matter of fact, the Shell fellow was bigger and older than Gussy, and rather too powerful for him. But the fighting blood of Arthur Augustus was up, and he put in a terrific fight. Monty Lowther, rather to his surprise, was driven back, right across Mr. Railton's study to the fireplace. There he rallied, and there was a terrific scrap on Mr. Railton's hearth-rug.

Tom Merry and Manners stared in at the doorway in horror. At any minute the Housemaster might come along—he had already finished in the Sixth Form room.

"You silly chumps, come out of it!" shouted Manners.

"Come out, you dummies!" roared Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I—"

"You silly ass! I—"

"What is all this?"

It was a deep voice behind Tom Merry and Manners, and they spun round to see Mr. Railton.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom.

The Housemaster stared into the study. Monty Lowther and Arthur Augustus dropped their hands and jumped back, recalled to themselves by the sight of the Housemaster's amazed face in the doorway.

"What does this mean?" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Is it possible that you are fighting in my study?" exclaimed the scandalised Housemaster.

"Hem!" gasped Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"N-n-not exactly fighting, sir," stammered Lowther. "Oh, no! N-n-not exactly! I—I was—was—was—"

"Yaas, wathah! N-n-not exactly fightin', sir! We—were—were—"

"We were waiting here to speak to you, sir!" gasped Tom Merry.

"And fighting to pass the time?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Hem!"

The Housemaster picked up his cane.

"You first, Lowther!"

Swish, swish, swish!

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"D'Arcy!"

Swish, swish, swish!

"Oh cwumbs!"

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"Now you may go," said Mr. Railton, laying down the cane. "I trust this will be a warning to you."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Monty Lowther faded through the study doorway dismally. They squeezed their hands under their arms as they drifted down the passage. Neither was feeling inclined for any more scrapping just then. Three hefty cuts each from the Housemaster's cane gave them plenty to think about.

Mr. Railton turned a rather stern look on Tom Merry and Manners.

"You are here to speak to me, Merry?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Well, what is it?"

"About Lee, sir—the fellow I told you of," said Tom Merry. "I—I'd like to ask you, sir, whether—"

Mr. Railton's brow cleared.

"Very good, Merry. I visited the woodman's hut in Wayland Wood last evening, as I told you I intended to do."

"You found Len Lee there, sir?" asked Tom eagerly.

The Housemaster shook his head.

"No, Merry. I am sorry to say that I did not find him. There was no one in the hut when I arrived there. Apparently the boy left soon after you had left him there. I saw nothing of him."

Tom Merry's face fell.

"I am sorry," said Mr. Railton. "If Lee's story was true he was very deserving of help, and I have no doubt that something might have been done for him. I think you mentioned that he referred to some intention of looking for work in the direction of Lexham?"

"He told me so, sir."

"If you care to seek for him, Merry, I shall be very glad to have news of him. You may, if you choose, go on your bicycle after dinner; and if you are late in returning for lessons, I will speak to your Form master and he will excuse you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Tom, brightening.

"Not at all," said Mr. Railton, with a smile. "I am very glad, Merry, to see you take a kind interest in the unfriended and unfortunate. And if the boy is found, and his story proves to be true, something shall certainly be done for him."

That afternoon, while the rest of St. Jim's were at classes, Tom Merry was on his bicycle, on the high-road between Wayland and Lexham. The captain of the Shell started on his expedition with high hopes. It seemed to him very probable that he would pick up news of Len Lee on the long road to Lexham, or at the latter town itself.

But for the strange events of the preceding night, there was little doubt that Tom would have been successful. But of Len's meeting with Pomfret, and his departure from the vicinity in the car, Tom, of course, knew nothing and could guess nothing. Diligently did the Shell fellow pursue his quest; and it was not till darkness had fallen again that he turned back to St. Jim's, unsuccessful.

He was disappointed, and Mr. Railton seemed disappointed when he made his report. But it seemed that there was nothing more to be done. Len Lee, to all appearance, had passed out of Tom Merry's life as abruptly as he had entered it. And in the days that followed the memory of that strange meeting in the woodman's hut grew fainter in Tom's mind, and when he thought of Len Lee he never thought to see the outcast again. But the meeting was to come, and when it came it came amazingly.

CHAPTER 10.

A Shock for Tom Merry!

"GREAT Scott!"

Tom Merry uttered that exclamation in tones of amazement.

It was more than a week since the appearance, and the disappearance, of Len Lee. Tom Merry was coming up from the football-ground to the School House, after games practice, with several other juniors, thinking of anything and anybody but Len.

A motor-car was waiting on the drive outside the house, and as Tom came along, a gentleman in a silk hat and a fur-collared coat came out of the house, with a boy walking by his side.

Mr. Railton accompanied them to the porch, shook hands with them, and they mounted into the car. Then the Housemaster turned back into the House.

Tom Merry's eyes were fixed on the boy.

It was Len Lee!

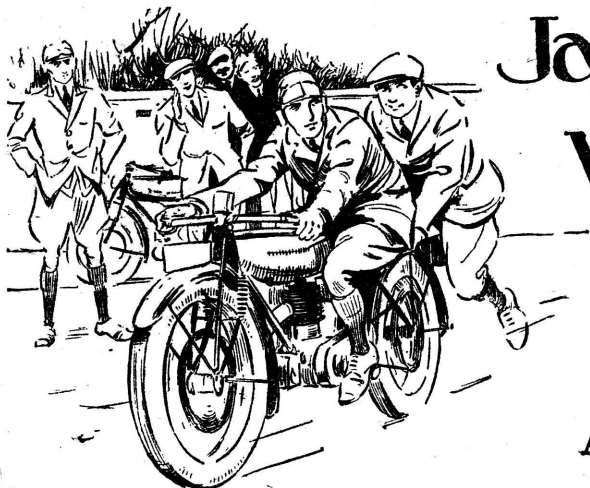
Tom had seen his face only by the candle-light in the woodman's hut, but it was imprinted on his memory. He knew the handsome face again at a glance.

But Len was changed in appearance otherwise. His rags were gone. He was well-dressed, and looked bright and cheerful and happy. He did not see Tom Merry standing at a little distance with a dozen other fellows.

The gentleman who sat by him in the car was a hard-

(Continued on page 23.)

It was only by a strange coincidence that Jack Hamilton obtained possession of the motor-bike, which, with his skill enabled him to win the coveted prize at Cranley Polytechnic.



Jack Hamilton's Wonder-Bike

by
Henry Valentine.

A SPLENDID YARN OF THE TRACK.

CHAPTER 1.

The Demon Rider!

CHUG, chug, chug! Br-r-r, chug, chug—

Only the most perfect of motor-cycles could have purred its steady "chug-chugging" so persistently. Not a break in the powerful throbbing. Music for the ears of even the most fastidious of motor-bike "fans."

There she came around the bend, like a great red dragon, the beam of yellow light from the big head-lamp cutting the darkness as with a knife. Couldn't she move! Like a lightning streak—zi-ip!—then gone, with only the fast-disappearing red of the rear-light to tell of her tempestuous passing.

Lucky fellow, with such a machine between his knees. The engine seemed to shout joyously of the speed which the piston was pounding out in the single cylinder. Look out for the corner! Nasty turn, that. Surely the cyclist will slacken speed? Not he!

Cr-r-ump! A shower of sparks. The machine is tilting at a hair-raising angle. Bump! That was the pedal. He's down! No! He's running her close. Daring fellow!

What sort of speed demon is this, bent low down in the saddle, the wind tearing and yelping at the groaning belt which just manages to hold down his leather coat? Face completely hidden in a deep helmet of the same material, and huge goggles behind which steel-blue eyes twinkle merrily, yet do not fail to watch the faint ribbon of the road. Pleasing eyes, those. Dare-devil fellow who owns them!

"Wants more air," he chuckles, and pulls over the lever.

The engine roars louder; machine seems to stagger and then to leap forward like a mad thing.

"Isn't she a beauty?" shouts the cyclist to the whistling wind. "Ah! Skidded there. Hold up, chum!"

He crooned to the machine as though it were a wonderful child which he loved. Unconsciously he patted and stroked the shining enamel, and murmured:

"Great stunt, this. Bert turned out a winner this time. Didn't look good at first. Couldn't get the old bus—new bus, I should say—to crawl an inch."

Musing thus, he forgot the road slipping rapidly away beneath him. He was driving mechanically, looking ahead with eyes that saw nothing. Dangerous practice on a powerful machine.

"Great fellow, Bert—"

A terrific shout cut him short abruptly, and harshly pulled him back to earth and realities. A quick glance showed him where the danger lay. Right in the centre of the yellow circle of light in front two boyish figures loomed up.

"Look out, you crazy chump!"

In spite of the danger, the cyclist grinned at the warning; but he had the situation well in hand. It seemed that he was right on top of the two lads when he wrenched round the handlebars. Still his speed did not slacken. He heard something crack, but the machine was game.

Round it came, the engine roaring protestingly. Now it was crashing for the ditch. But the strong hands on the handlebars never relaxed.

"She's done it!" breathed the cyclist. "Great bus!"

He was back in the centre of the road, and, turning in the saddle, bellowed:

"Sorry, chaps! I'm in a hurry!"

Then he was gone, chucking hugely.

He left behind two boys who gasped admiringly. They turned to each other in the darkened road and each face said as plainly as words:

"Gosh! There's speed, if you like!"

It was the shorter and tubbier of the two who spoke first.

"Didn't he move, Jack?"

His companion gasped.

"Move wasn't the word for it, Tubby. He'd beat lightning!"

All the time there was not one word of resentment against the cyclist who had nearly put finish to their youthful careers. Admiration was all they were capable of. It did not seem to have occurred to them that with a little less luck they might easily have been bound for a hospital or perhaps worse.

"Did it in twenty yards!" panted the taller of the two. "Did you see it, Tubby? Fairly lifted the front wheel off the ground! Pulled her round by main strength!"

"See it, Jack? Wasn't I just all eyes? The fellow was a marvel. Wonder what kind of bike he's got hold of? Didn't seem to be one of the ordinary makes."

Judging from which, it might have been gathered that two young chaps who had survived being knocked into the ditch by an apparently hare-brained motor-cyclist, and could only talk of that cyclist's skill and the beauty of his machine, must have been ardent lovers of motor-bikes themselves.

As a matter of fact, that summed up the position neatly. Tubby Hales and

Jack Hamilton! Ask anybody in the North-country town of Cranley, and you'd have got something like this.

"Jack and Tubby! Potty on bikes, those two lads. They dream about them; believe they'd eat the things if they could do it and live."

There was nothing else to it.

Jack and Tubby set off once more along the road to Cranley, and were quiet for a long, long time. Then, by an amazing coincidence, they both sighed at the same time. This caused them to look suddenly at each other and grin.

"Bet I know what you're thinking of, Tubby, old son."

"I'm taking no odds. You're right, Jack. Thinking of the Polytechnic competition; weren't you?"

"And how splendid it'd be if we had the machine that nearly fitted us out for an inquest?" supplemented Jack Hamilton, with a wistful smile.

"I was," retorted Tubby emphatically. "It's rotten when your pater's poor, isn't it?"

"Yes," agreed Jack. "In fact, worse than that. Wicked, Tubby. Here's a first-class race coming off for amateurs, and we're going to miss it because we can't put in a bike of our own. Tubby, I could cry and not be ashamed of it."

Which, although it was hardly correct, for Jack Hamilton was made of much sterner stuff, was pretty near the mark. Jack and Tubby had never been so sore about anything as they were about the coming Polytechnic motor-bike race.

Colonel Jarrett, who owned half of Cranley, and who was one of the finest sportsmen in the world, had offered a silver cup and a brand-new Indian machine to the winner of a cross-country race. Competitors had to enter their own machines, and only single cylinders were allowed.

And that was where, as Jack Hamilton put it, both he and Tubby were stumped. They did not possess a machine of their own. It was hard to think that the competition was the very event they had been waiting for, and yet could not enter it.

"Makes me a bit fed-up," Jack confided gloomily. "The fellow that just whizzed past us has probably got pots of tin and could buy a dozen if he liked. We can't even get an odd crock between us."

What more he might have said was cut short by a queer ripping noise, followed

by a crash. The sound came from the road in front of them, and Jack seized Tubby by the arm.

"It's the demon rider, Tubby! He's had a spill, and might be bad. Let's see if we can be of any use."

Jack broke into a run, with Tubby close behind. The loudness of the crash had deceived them, for it was some time before they came upon the scene of the accident. The motor-bike was lying on its side, its engine still running, while ahead was the crumpled body of its owner.

Even as the two boys reached the spot the fallen rider groaned and twisted over on to his side, his hands to his aching forehead.

"See to him, Tubby!" panted Jack, springing to the wrecked machine, and feeling for the lever controlling the petrol supply.

He found it and wrenched it over. With a few coughing grunts the engine ceased its roar, and the frame of the machine trembled no longer.

Jack sucked at his burnt fingers as he pulled his hand away.

"Crumbs! The engine's as hot as blazes!" he muttered ruefully. "Not surprising, though, considering the fellow's speed. Wonder if he's hurt much?"

He turned to join Tubby and the fallen rider, but his supporting arm was not needed. The man was on his feet, shaking a little, but grinning cheerfully.

"Some smash!" he stammered. "Thought I'd handed in my checks all right that time."

"Sure you're all right, sir?" Jack asked anxiously; but the cyclist waved a lordly hand.

"Good Lord, yes! Right as rain. I have about a dozen 'crashes' like that in a week."

Tubby stared open-mouthed. "My hat, do you?" he asked. "Must be made of cast-iron!"

The cyclist laughed heartily, recklessly. "I'm afraid the old bus is busted all right this time," he said. "Can't make out how she went like that. Going great at about sixty to the hour when something collapsed behind, engine began to whine like a frightened dog; then—whoop! Pitched me clean out of the saddle. Good job I fell on my head. Pretty tough there. No brains, y'know!"

He laughed again, and then suddenly peered closely at the two boys.

"Seems I've seen you two before," he began.

Jack and Tubby grinned. "You have!" they answered in chorus.

"And," Jack added, "it's just a bit of luck that we're seeing you again."

"Of course," chimed in the cyclist, "you're the two fellows I nearly ran down before. Called me a crazy chump!"

"Sorry!" replied Jack. "But it was pretty close, wasn't it?"

Again the cyclist waved his hand airily. "Don't mention it, laddy. You took it real sporting. I suppose you're chuckling now that I've come to grief."

The faces of the two boys turned red. "If you think—" spluttered Tubby, while Jack said hotly:

"We're not that kind of chaps."

The cyclist smiled kindly, and placed a hand on each of their shoulders.

"That's all right, boys," he said. "I was only trying you. And now, as you've been good enough to come to my assistance, perhaps you'll tell me what I can do with the old crock. It's rather upsetting she broke down like this. I was in a devil of a hurry."

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Jack looked at his chum, and Tubby nodded.

"Well, sir," he suggested, "it's not a long way into Cranley, and if you care to leave the machine with us we'll get it into town."

"You would? Come to think about it, you seem to know a bit about motor-bikes. Shut off the petrol pretty smartly, didn't you?"

Jack nodded. "I love bikes, sir, and so does Tubby; but—"

He paused. "Well, go on," prompted the cyclist. "Nothing much, sir; only—only—"

"We've got the love for the sport, but not the hard cash!" blurted in Tubby suddenly.

The two boys then turned their attention to the crashed machine, while the cyclist regarded them curiously as he took off his helmet.

"By gad," he murmured, "they're a couple of splendid lads! Why shouldn't I do it? Why shouldn't I?"

Apparently he answered the question for himself, for he crossed over to the boys there and then.

"Think you could do anything with this machine, you chaps?" he said suddenly.

Jack and Tubby stared at the cyclist open-mouthed. Not waiting for their reply, he went on:

"It's like this, I'm fed-up with the thing. A car's more in my line. If I get a bike I want something fool-proof. This old bus isn't. Really, you'd be doing me a favour if you took the crock off my hands!"

And apparently thinking the matter settled, he bade them "Good-night," and set off down the road at a terrific pace.

"After him, Jack!" Tubby Hales gasped. "We can't take this bike from him. Must be worth quids an' quids!"

But Jack Hamilton was already tapping the amazingly generous cyclist on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "It's awfully good of you, and—and don't think we're not grateful, but your machine is worth a lot of money, and we can't take it from you like this. Why, we don't even know you!"

The cyclist groaned. "Good gracious! Can't I get rid of the crock? Money, sonny! Why, I've got pots of it! Don't know what to do with it all! Won't you do me this little favour, and take the bike?"

Jack looked at him dubiously. "The favour's all on your side, sir. But if you really mean it—"

"I do."

"All right, then. I can't tell you all Tubby and I feel about it, but—"

"No 'buts,' laddy. Take it. Do what you like with it. Only never let me set eyes upon it again. No; I'm not so sure about not seeing it again. I'd like to know what sort of a job you fellows make of it. There's just one or two little points. This bike wasn't made by a big firm. Sort of mongrel, in fact. Friend of mine, name of Bert Fielder, made it."

Jack and Tubby were surprised. "Bit of a crank is Bert," continued the cyclist. "Invents things, you know. I told him he couldn't make a bike of his own that would do sixty on a single cylinder. He made it. And she did sixty. That's all. Must be getting along now. If you do anything with the old machine let me know."

He felt inside his leather coat and pulled out a card, which he handed to Jack.

"Don't forget," he shouted over his shoulder as he strode off. "Best of luck with the old bus."

The two chums watched him disappear down the road.

"Well," demanded Tubby reproachfully, "you let him get away, then."

"Couldn't do anything with him. Tubby. Simply refused to take back his machine. He gave me his card. Let's have a look at it."

They moved across the road until they could use the light from the still burning cycle-lamp. Then Jack thrust the paste-board in front of the glow, and both he and Tubby gasped.

"THEO. WAINWRIGHT,
The Gables,
Cranley,"

That was what they read. "Tubby," said Jack faintly, "it's Major Wainwright's son. Better known as 'Speed' Wainwright."

"And he can spare the machine as easy as we could a copper, Jack. Speed Wainwright. That machine's a winner!"

"Tubby," replied Jack solemnly, "the cup's ours!"

Then, joining hands, the two chums danced joyously around the wonder machine which had come to them so strangely.

CHAPTER 2.

The Mystery Bike!

A CROWD of wildly-excited boys crowded round the notice-board just inside the entrance to Cranley Polytechnic.

"The names for the competition are up, you fellows," bawled out a little chap with a mop of unruly hair.

He was Cliff Weldon, a favourite in the race because of his extensive knowledge of the track which had been mapped out.

"Come along and squint at them, Wilky," he shouted to a lanky youth who strolled up languidly, with a bored look upon his handsome face, marred, however, by the sneering mouth and the narrow eyes.

"What's all the fuss about, anyway?" demanded Wilky insolently. "You know who's going to win the blessed cup!"

"Little you, I suppose?" jerked out Weldon unpleasantly.

"Right first time, dear boy!" Weldon sighed.

"Suppose you're right, Wilky. Your pater's got the cash to splash on the finest bike put on the road. Otherwise you wouldn't smell the race, especially if Jack Hamilton was in it."

An ugly look swept over Wilky's face.

"Not so much of the Hamilton hero-worship, Weldon," he said. "I only wish the beastly pauper had a decent pater who'd buy him a bike, so as I could show him he's not the wonder rider you seem to think."

He swung off in the direction of the notice-board, rudely elbowing his way through the crowd of boys. But before he could reach his objective he heard something which drove the blood from his scowling face.

"My sainted aunt!" yelled a red-haired boy close to the board. "Jacky Hamilton's name's up, with Tubby Hales for his pillion man."

A roar followed the announcement. "Chuck the leg-pulling, Carrots! Y'know Jack hasn't got a bike, and it's not playing the game to rub it in."

But the youth addressed as Carrots stuck to his guns.

"It's up here in black and white!" he protested. "Think I can't read? Jack Hamilton and Tom Hales—"

He granted as he received Timothy Wilkins' bony elbow in the snall of his back.

"Here, Wilky, what's the idea?" "Out of the way!" snapped the bully. And pushing the other aside, he scanned the notice-board. He bit his thin lips when he spotted the name he hated.

"It's just bluff!" he snapped. "Yah! Windy!" jeered Carrots. Wilkins went on reading. "Doesn't give the name of his machine," he muttered thoughtfully. "Suppose it's some mongrel his pauper pater's faked up—"

He jumped as a voice spoke almost in his ear:

"Say that again, Wilky, and I'll cram the words down your measly throat! If my pater is poor, he's honest and hard-working, more than can be said of every-body!"

Wilkins swung round as though he had been bitten. He found himself facing Jack Hamilton, whose white face told of the indignation which seethed within him. He hesitated; then chagrin got the upper hand of him.

"Well," he drawled, "your pater is a pauper, ain't he, Hamilton?"

Smack! Jack's hand swept across his taunter's cheek. Wilkins staggered back, and then with a snarl of fury threw himself upon Jack, biting and kicking like a wild cat. "A fight!" yelled Carrots. "Make a ring!"

It was hardly a fight; more of a slaughter. Jack Hamilton winced as a heavy boot crashed into his shin, then his hands swept away Wilkins' fists, and his bunched knuckles caught the bully on the point of his weak chin, sending him sailing through the air, to fall with a crash against the wall.

Jack stood over him. "Take your words back, Wilky!" he cried angrily. "Say you're sorry, or—"

He grabbed the crouching bully by the shoulder and hauled him to his feet.

"Quick! Take 'em back!"

"All—all right!" muttered the discomfited bully. "I—I'm s-sorry!"

His tongue seemed to stick at the words. Jack swung him aside contemptuously.

"That'll teach you to leave my dad's name alone!" he panted.

Tubby took his arm as they left the Polytechnic.

"Forget him, Jack!" he said. "The fellow's not worth rowing about. Let's give the bike a run."

Mention of the machine drove the frown from Jack's forehead, and soon the old smile was rippling over his face.

"Great idea, Tubby! But"—he lowered his voice almost to a whisper—"the other chaps are following. Want to look at our mystery machine, I suppose. It won't do to show what she can do before the race."

He dropped his right eyelid in the broadest of winks, and Tubby grinned joyously.

"Let's have a lark with them, Jack!" said Tubby.

Together the two chums went round to the rear of the Polytechnic, where several solo machines were standing. Conspicuous among them was Timothy Wilkins' brand new machine; a likely first in the coming race for Colonel Jarrett's cup.

The chums' mystery machine was also conspicuous, but for vastly different reasons. It looked like nothing on earth. Wilkins' description of it as a mongrel was pretty near the mark. No two parts seemed to have been made for the same machine.

"Does look a bit of a queer bird, doesn't she, Tubby?" asked Jack.

But his expert eye could appreciate the lines of the machine—lines which spoke of wonderful speed. There was nothing superfluous about the mystery bike; she was built for speed only. Anything which might have interfered with that speed had been dumped in the making.

A chorus of chuckles came from the boys who had crouched behind the two chums.

"Disgrace to the Polly!" Wilkins sneered.

But this time Jack let the taunt go unheeded. He knew that the laugh might easily be on his side very soon.

"Isn't it an old crock?" Wilkins confided to Cliff Weldon.

But Weldon was looking very, very thoughtful. He had forgotten more about motor-cycles than Timothy Wilkins had ever known, or could ever hope to learn.

"I wouldn't cackle too much if I were you, Wilky," he muttered. "If I know anything about bikes, that queer-looking bus can move some. If you ask me anything, Wilky, the race isn't such a certainty for you, after all."

Wilkins shrugged his shoulders indifferently. He put down the warning to Weldon's jealousy. He chuckled loudly when Jack Hamilton jerked with his foot at the kick-start and no answering roar from the engine rewarded his efforts.

"Get off and push!" he jeered.

Jack appeared to be surveying the carburettor perplexedly. Then he altered the positions of his air and petrol levers, and had another shot at the kick-start. The valves moved feebly up and down, and then stopped dead.

"Bury it, Jack!" shrieked a boy in the crowd. "You're going in for a race, not a funeral!"

Jack and Tubby played their parts well. Tubby even managed a blush. They pretended to hold a consultation; viewed the magneto, and even went so far as to peer into the petrol tank, an action which raised a mighty roar of laughter.

But none of those who watched had the sense to see that Jack had purposely refrained from unscrewing the petrol tap, which would have allowed the "juice" to flow to the carburettor.

"Give her just a little, Tubby," whispered Jack; and covered his chum's movements with his body, as Tubby obediently turned on the tap.

This time the engine responded to the pressure on the kick-start. As the bike lurched forward Tubby launched himself on to the pillion, while the spectators cheered ironically.

"Wait till we get out of sight, Jack," Tubby shouted into his chum's ear; and Jack nodded.

He purposely gave the machine too much air so that the engine coughed and "knocked" in evident distress. Its progress along the road was jerky, and far from inspiring.

But once round the corner, and hidden from the view of those gathered outside the Polytechnic, he gave two or three twists to the petrol tank tap and got his mixture to a nicety.

The jerky coughing of the engine settled down to a steady "chug-chug!" and the speed increased quickly from ten to twenty—thirty—forty—forty-five.

"Leave her at that, Jack!" bellowed Tubby. "She's good!"

And at forty-five the mystery machine whizzed off into the country.

CHAPTER 3.
Wilkins' Spite!

BACK at the Polly, Timothy Wilkins grinned with satisfaction. To tell the truth, he had had his doubts about the race when he first saw the names on the notice-board. It was different now.

"What a show up it'll be for that bounder Hamilton!" he told himself, as he dropped his brand new machine from its stand and seated himself superciliously in the saddle.

There was no hesitation about the way his engine responded to the kick.



Just in time Jack Hamilton spotted the powerful motor-car drawn up on the wrong side of the road. His prompt swerve unseated Tubby Hales, whose legs flew out wildly, even as his arms closed around Jack's waist, saving him from a certain fall.

Soon she was speeding at a fair pace in the direction of Timothy Wilkins' home.

"That cup is mine!" boasted Timothy, looking about him to acknowledge the admiration of friends he passed on the road.

But Timothy Wilkins might have thought very differently had he been able to follow the progress of the mystery machine. The bike was running perfectly. The weight of the two boys seemed nothing.

"Gosh!" gasped Jack, bending down to escape the rush of wind. "For a single cylinder she's a marvel! I bet I'd get sixty out of her if I liked."

Tubby hunched himself up until he could bellow into his chum's ears.

"Cut across country, Jack! Try her out on the track!"

Obediently Jack slowed down until he could turn into a narrow path leading through a wood. The mystery machine responded gamely. The twisting, curving track worried her not a bit, and Jack was elated.

"Hold tight, Tubby!" he shrieked. "I'm going to try her at the water-jump!"

Even as he spoke he had turned the machine and headed for the shallow stream which bisected the wood. Jack shut off a little as they careered down the slope. Then, as the front wheel lapped the water, he pushed over the air lever.

For a moment nothing could be seen but the whirl of seething spray. Then the mystery machine was through and shot up the opposite slope without an effort. Jack's face was flushed, while Tubby was yelling with excitement.

"She's a winner, Jack! A win-win winner!"

They were on the main road once more, and here Jack narrowly escaped disaster. Just in time he spotted a powerful motor-car drawn up on the wrong side of the road.

His prompt swerve unseated Tubby, whose legs flew out wildly, even as his arms closed about Jack's waist, saving him from a certain fall.

The two boys then had a vision of a red-faced man standing up in the car, and heard his harsh curses as they careered out of sight round a bend.

Jack brought the bike to a standstill and turned anxiously to Tubby.

"Hurt, old son?"

"Not a scratch. Legs went, though, and I thought I'd pitch you out of the saddle the way I grabbed you!"

"What a brute!" declared Jack, referring to the motorist. "He must have known he was on his wrong side! By the way, did you spot who it was, Tubby?"

"Who?"

"Timothy Wilkins' pater. Hope he didn't recognise us. Might give the tip to his son that we've got a real speeder."

The thought made both of them decide to abandon their ride for the day, and they drove slowly on in the direction of Jack Hamilton's home.

Suddenly Jack pulled up once more.

"Anything wrong, Jack?" Tubby asked anxiously.

"Nothing, old scout. It just occurred to me that I'd like to take some wild flowers home to the mater. She just loves them."

Tubby was off the pillion in a trice and helped his chum to draw the machine to the side of the road, where they propped it on its stand and plunged into the wood.

They had hardly been gone a couple of minutes when a motor-cyclist came from the direction of Cranley. It was Timothy Wilkins, and he smiled sarcastically as he saw the machine drawn up at the side of the road.

"I hope they've had a break-down!" he snarled viciously. "Take a bit of the swank out of Jack Hamilton! I've a good mind to bust the old creak up for good!"

He jammed on his foot-break and was about to dismount, when he saw a motor-car coming up the road.

"Looks like the pater's car!" he grunted, and as the motorist drew level he waved his hand.

"Hallo, pop! In a hurry, aren't you?"

Mr. Wilkins jammed on his brakes and brought the car to a standstill, his engine still running.

"Looking upset, pater," observed Timothy. "Had a smash-up?"

His father grunted.

"It's those confounded whipper-snappers, Jack Hamilton and the youngster Hales. Nearly crashed into me with their stinking machine!"

Timothy leered.

"Stinkin' machine's right, gov'nor!"

There it is! Say, what d'you think? They've had the giddy cheek to push that old boneshaker in for the race for the colonel's cup! Isn't it rich?"

Timothy fairly doubled up with mirth. His father looked at him sourly.

"Boneshaker, eh? You'd talk differently if you'd seen it come out of that wood and flash past my car!"

Timothy looked up in alarm.

"What d'you mean, popper? That old creak can't move!"

"Hump! Can't it? They were doing fifty when I saw the rascals! Doing it easily, by gad!"

Timothy's jaw dropped, and he looked foolish.

"B-but, pater, I saw them at the Polly, and it took ten minutes for them to get her going!"

"Then they've been foolin' you. That machine's built for speed, and if it's entered for the race the cup's as good as lost to you."

Mr. Wilkins was evidently in an evil mood. He released his brakes and allowed the car to glide forward.

For a moment Timothy looked after him gloomily.

"I've got to get that cup!" he muttered. "If that beast Hamilton lands it I'll be chipped for weeks at the Polly! I've a good mind—"

He looked stealthily around him, and then, leaning over, picked a huge stone from the road. Swiftly he took aim, and then fung the stone at the mystery machine.

"Got the cylinder!" he gloated as he saw the bike stagger.

Then guilty fear seized him. He kicked up his own machine and drove crazily after his father.

Jack Hamilton's arms were full of flowers, and he was smiling cheerfully when he emerged from the wood with Tubby.

"String them on behind and I'll get the old bus going," he said.

Whistling lightheartedly, he jerked his foot on the kick-start. The engine spluttered, the valves moved jerkily, and then stopped altogether. Tubby Hales looked up sharply.

"Queer noise that, Jack. Try her again. Got the petrol on?"

"Petrol's on all right," replied Jack, again forcing down the kick-start.

This time the engine roared obediently, but there was something uneasy about its "chugging."

Jack's face fell.

"Something's gone wrong, Tubby. Perhaps we didn't fix her after the smash it had with Speed Wainwright. Although there wasn't much wrong. Pedal twisted, back spindle nut missing, and she wasn't getting her right amount of oil. Can't make it out, Tubby. Listen!"

Intently they listened to the hiccoughing of the plainly distressed engine. Suddenly Jack gave a cry. He was looking down at his shoe, which was now covered with oil-stains.

"It's the oil, Tubby. Where's she throwing it out?"

Tubby gripped his arm.

"Look, Jack! It's the cylinder! It's cr-cracked!"

For a moment the two chums stared blankly at each other. Then Jack spoke.

"But how did that happen?"

He bent down and looked curiously at the scratches on the broken cylinder. Then his gaze travelled to the huge stone which lay beside the bike. He picked it up and regarded it thoughtfully.

"Here's the explanation, Jack. Some mean cad slung it at the bike!"

Tubby stared blankly.

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"Who'd do a thing like that, Jack? Not—"

"Mr. Wilkins? Shouldn't think so. Now, if it had been Timothy I might have thought something."

He shrugged his shoulders despairingly.

"Puts us out of the race, Tubby."

There was a break in his voice, and Tubby put his arm about his chum's shoulder.

"Never mind, old chap. Perhaps your dad can fix it. Let's go and see."

The remainder of the journey into Cranley was accomplished at a crawl.

Arriving eventually at his home, Jack told Tubby to wheel the bike round to the back, and then darted into the house to find his father.

Bob Hamilton, the smartest engineer in Cranley, was more than distressed when he heard the news. He was quickly out in the yard, and soon had the engine down and the cracked cylinder off from the piston.

"It's finished," was his verdict. "Can't even weld it, because it's not only cracked in two places, but there's a fair-sized piece missing. And it's no use giving you the money for another. This machine isn't any of the standard makes. I'm sorry, Jack. I know how you feel."

The feelings of Jack and Tubby showed plainly in their faces. The race had meant so much to them, and now they were out of it! It was cruel luck! Suddenly Tubby's face brightened.

"Jack," he gasped, "there's still a chance!"

His chum looked at him hopefully. "We've forgotten Speed Wainwright. Didn't he say we could look him up? Let's go and see him; he might be able to do something for us."

Jack agreed. In a few moments they were running hard up the Cranley High Street, making for the top of the hill on which stood the Gables, the residence of Speed Wainwright. Up the wide drive the two boys pounded, and, on reaching the door, Jack rang the bell.

"Mr. Wainwright!" he panted to the maid who opened the door.

The girl hesitated, wondering what business these two youngsters could have with the master. And while she hesitated a jovial voice was heard in the hall.

"Somebody wants me? Show them in, Mary!"

The maid moved aside, and, stepping shyly, Jack and Tubby moved into the house. They recognised the handsome, debonaire Speed Wainwright at once.

"Ex-excuse m-me," Jack stammered; and then stopped dead. It had occurred to him that young Mr. Wainwright might consider their intrusion cheek. But Speed Wainwright himself came to the rescue.

"Go ahead, laddie," he said kindly. "What is— Jupiter, it's my young friends of the road! How's the bike, sonny? Come right in and tell me about it!"

He hustled the two lads into the drawing-room and sat them down in the most comfortable of lounges.

"Now," he said, "fire away and tell me all about it."

Thoroughly at his ease by the warmth of the welcome, Jack plunged right away into the story.

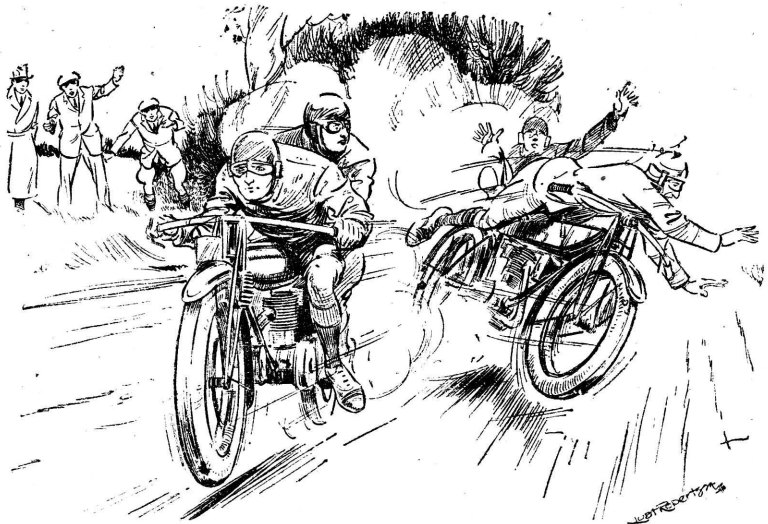
"And the race comes off to-morrow, Mr. Wainwright," he ended. "To-morrow, and the cylinder's busted! We thought, we hoped, y-you'd—"

"Help you, eh?"

"That's it, Mr. Wainwright," Tubby cut in.

The young man smiled.

"And that's just what I'm going to



As Tubby Hales flashed a look at the machine Jack was slowly but surely passing he saw something which frightened him. "Faster, for Heaven's sake, Jack!" he implored. As the speed of the mystery machine increased there was a crash from behind. "It's all right now, Jack!" shouted Tubby. "He's ditched! Serves him right! Tried to get his foot to our back wheel!"

do. Bert—that's my inventor friend, y'know—was always a careful bird. Always jaws me about having spare parts for a machine, and I've got another cylinder for the bike in my workshop at the back."

The two chums could hardly control their joy.

"That's great news, sir," Jack panted. "And will you really let us have it?"

"Bet your life I will, youngster—on one condition."

Jack and Tubby were on their feet.

"The condition is that you let me come to the race to-morrow."

Jack and Tubby were on their feet.

"Oh, do come!" they chorused, and Speed Wainwright crossed his fingers solemnly.

"I swear!" he said hollowly; and then chuckled. "Now, let's get round to the workshop and I'll get you that spare cylinder."

He led the way out, with two of the happiest boys in the world at his heels.

CHAPTER 4.

Victory!

TIMOTHY WILKINS could not understand. Here was the day of the race, and he had waited in vain for the withdrawal of Jack Hamilton's mystery machine.

"Couldn't have done it much harm," he commented gloomily.

He thought awhile, and then his jaw shot out at an ugly angle.

"I'm going to make doubly sure of that cup! I'll see Cliff Weldon about it."

He set off through the crowd of merry men and women who had come to see the great race. The Polytechnic had been gaily decorated for the occasion. A small table had been placed upon the green lawn at the back of the place, and on it rested the giant silver cup which Colonel Jarrett had offered.

Timothy Wilkins' eyes rested greedily upon the prize. He licked his dry lips.

"It's got to come to me," he muttered. "Ah, there's Weldon!"

He crossed over to the short lad and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I want a word with you, Cliff," he whispered.

The two moved off out of earshot of the crowd, and there Timothy Wilkins thrust his face to the other's ear.

"Look here, Weldon, you were right about Jack Hamilton. His machine is a wonder."

"Told you so, Wilky, didn't I?"

"Well, you needn't rub it in. There's something you've got to do for me. I want to get that cup, and it's up to you to see that Jack Hamilton and Tubby don't pull off the race."

Cliff Weldon stared at his companion.

"How d'you reckon I'm going to do that, Wilky? The mystery bike will leave me standing."

"It can be done. I've heard that Hamilton's not quite sure of the track, and on the outward journey he's going to hang on to your trail like a limpet. And that's your chance!" Here Wilkins lowered his voice and looked about him guiltily before continuing. "You can lead him into a trap. See!"

Cliff Weldon recoiled.

"I'll see you dished first, Timothy Wilkins!" he cried angrily. "I only hope Jack wins!"

"Oh, do you? And remember this, if Jack Hamilton does win, your father won't be foreman at my pater's works for long."

Cliff Weldon's ruddy face paled as he realised that his father's fate was in his hands. A brief struggle with his conscience followed, then he said shortly:

"Timothy Wilkins, I hate you; but I can't risk dad being thrown out of work, and I'll do what you ask. But I despise myself for doing it."

Then he turned on his heel, leaving the other gloating.

"That's finish for Master Jack Hamilton!" muttered the bully triumphantly, just as a cheery voice shouted behind him.

"Hallo, Wilky, you worm! Dreaming about the cup already?"

Wilkins found himself face to face with Jack Hamilton. He smiled bitterly.

"Still fancy the chance of your crock, eh?"

"Got great hopes," retorted Jack, "in spite of people who chuck bricks at my cylinder."

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The chance shot got home. Wilkins' face paled, and he covered. Jack regarded him with curling lip.

"So it was you, Wilky, you worm." He turned to Tubby Hales. "Come along, Tubby, the fellow's not worth troubling about. Makes me ill to have to breathe the same air as him!"

The two chums moved off to their machine, and wheeled it into line with the rest.

"Keep an eye on Cliff Weldon on the way out," Tubby muttered; and Jack nodded.

Cliff Weldon's eyes were very bright, although his face was as white as chalk. He hated what he intended to do, but he thought of his father and steeled himself to turn a deaf ear to conscience.

Colonel Jarrett, grey-haired and upright, was speaking.

"Remember, boys, the pillion-man must be carried throughout the race. Anyone disobeying the rule will be disqualified. The track is down the main Cranley Road, over the stream, through the wood, and to the old windmill, where one of the judges will be stationed. Then back by the same route. The track which has been mapped out need not be strictly kept to; but every competitor must pass the windmill. Are you ready? One—"

The colonel raised his pistol. Every driver's foot hovered above his kick-start.

"Two—three—"

The pistol barked loudly, and the roar of many cycle-engines followed.

Timothy Wilkins, Cliff Weldon, and Jack Hamilton were well in the front, already leaving the others behind. Cliff was leading, and Wilkins pushed his gear into top to come up alongside.

"Stop 'em," he panted; "or your pater'll suffer!"

Cliff Weldon nodded miserably to show that he understood.

"Where's Hamilton?" he yelled over his shoulder to his pillion-man.

"Coming up behind," was the reply. "He seems to be following us."

Suddenly Cliff turned into a side track, unheeding the shout of his passenger.

Jack Hamilton saw the move and cried:

"He's turned off somewhere, Tubby! What about it?"

"Follow him," was the reply. "It's probably a short cut."

Jack decided to risk it. He turned down after Weldon's machine.

But someone else had seen the move. It was Speed Wainwright, who was in a car drawn up at the side of the road. With a startled cry, he turned to his companion at the wheel.

"The young idiots have turned off the track, Bert!" he yelled. "They'll hit the stream where the bank is steepest!"

Bert was evidently a man of few words, and one of action. He slipped in the clutch, and soon the car was racing after the motor-cyclists.

"There he is!" panted Speed Wainwright, after a while, pointing to the mystery machine ahead on the narrow track. "They'll be smashed to smithereens. Send her along, Bert!"

Nobly Bert responded. The big car fairly leaped over the ground. But the wonder machine was moving, too.

Cliff Weldon was at the bend, and seemed to be slowing up. Jack's speed did not slacken. But the big car behind was almost level with Jack's machine. Now it had shot alongside. Speed Wainwright was on his feet. He made a megaphone of his hands.

"It's no good telling them to stop—"

going too fast!" jerked out Bert at the wheel.

In a flash Speed Wainwright changed his mind about attempting to stop the wonder machine.

"Faster, faster!" he bawled.

Tubby Hales was staring at him open-mouthed.

"It's Speed Wainwright, Jack!" he shouted. "What's he saying?"

The curve was very near now. Cliff Weldon's machine seemed to have stopped. No sound of an engine came from behind the bend.

"Faster, faster!" shrieked Wainwright. "The stream, the stream! Faster!"

Then Tubby Hales understood.

"He's telling us to go faster, Jack. The stream!"

Jack kept his head. He understood the futility of trying to slow up. Over went his air lever to the fullest extent. Over, too, went the petrol. How the engine raced and roared!

"She's doing sixty!" was the thought which raced through his mind.

Now, the bend. Useless to slacken speed. Holding on by his legs, Tubby Hales leaned far out to the right to balance the machine as it swept around the bend.

"She's down!" he groaned.

But Jack was in the saddle. He fairly pulled the front wheel upright. A picture flashed before his mind. Drawn up around the bend he saw Cliff Weldon and his machine. He saw Weldon's passenger, shrieking like a maniac, and waving his hands. Then he saw the stream with its bank easily six feet high, and the opposite bank five yards across, rather lower.

"Hold tight!" he shrieked to Tubby. Straight for the bank top he headed the machine. The front wheel skidded on the mud, but Jack heaved on the handle-bars until his muscles cracked. Then the bike launched into mid-air.

The wheels revolved like mad. How the engine roared! The wonder bike was falling, falling—and still a yard to go to the farther side.

It was then that Tubby Hales did the only thing possible. He suddenly flung himself clear of the pillion and, relieved of his weight, the machine shot on to the opposite bank. Down it came on both wheels, but the treacherous, muddy surface offered no hold.

Jack just had time to shut off his petrol when the machine slipped away from beneath him. Even then he held on like grim death so that, instead of crashing, the machine came gently to rest on its side—undamaged.

Jack looked behind him.

"Tubby—Tubby!" he cried.

Over the top of the bank came the dragged figure of his fat chum.

"All O.K., here, Jack!" he sang out. "How's the bike?"

"Right as rain," replied Jack; and to prove his words he righted the machine and kicked her into action.

Tubby sprang on to the pillion, and the two plucky youngsters were off again.

"We've lost about five minutes!" Jack called over his shoulder. "What's Cliff's game? He's not the sort of chap to lead a pal into a trap."

Then he gave the attention to the machine and the track in front. They were speeding through the wood. At intervals, they saw machines pulled up at the roadside, the owners having given up.

"Wilky's ahead!" shrieked someone as they whizzed by, and Jack set his teeth.

"He's got the lead of us, Tubby! Hang on!"

The mystery machine was responding gamely. The "chugging" of her engine was faultless. Now the old windmill was in sight. They could see the judge standing at the cross-roads.

"Second!" he yelled as they passed. Tubby Hales groaned.

"He's going to take some catching, Jack! Let her rip!"

And let her rip Jack did. He entered the wood doing a steady fifty.

Two miles from home!

"Hark! What was that?"

"It's Wilky's machine!" shrieked Tubby. "Round the bend, Jack!"

At a terrific rate the bike snorted out of the wood into the main road, and the "straight" for home. There, not a hundred yards away, was Timothy Wilkins—all out. His pillion-man looked over his shoulder and spotted the pursuers. Then he shouted something to his driver.

The speed of Wilkins' machine increased, but so did that of the mystery machine. Now the two were neck and neck.

Frenzied spectators lined the road side, shrieking encouragement. Tubby flashed a look at the machine Jack was slowly but surely passing and saw something which frightened him. The other bike was edging towards the mystery machine.

"Faster, for heaven's sake, Jack!" he implored.

It seemed as though the bike, good as she was, could not do it. But a little more air and she shot ahead.

There was a crash behind.

"It's all right, Jack!" shouted Tubby. "He's ditched! Serves him right!"

Tried to get his foot to our back wheel—"

The rest of his words were drowned in a terrific roar of cheering as the mystery machine shot past the winning-post—first—and the only one to finish the distance.

Jack got his levers closed down just as several pairs of hands pulled him from the saddle. Someone caught the bike. It was Speed Wainwright.

"Didn't I say she was a beauty?" he yelled as excitedly as any schoolboy.

Aloft on the shoulders of his admirer, Jack could see Tubby raised to a similar height. In spite of his laughing protests, he was carried bodily to the little table where Colonel Jarrett was waiting to shake hands.

Later came the presentation.

A cheque for fifty pounds!

"For your pater and mine!" whispered Jack to Tubby, who nodded.

"One of the finest amateur races I have ever seen!" the colonel was saying; and the spectators cheered lustily and bellowed, "Hear, hear!"

"And I have much pleasure," the colonel continued, when he could make himself heard, "in announcing that I have decided to present an Indian machine to the pillion-rider as well as the one for the driver—"

Again the cheers rang out, but Tubby was whispering to Jack:

"Indian's all right, Jack. But it can't beat the old wonder-bike, can it?"

"Not in a thousand years," was the enthusiastic reply.

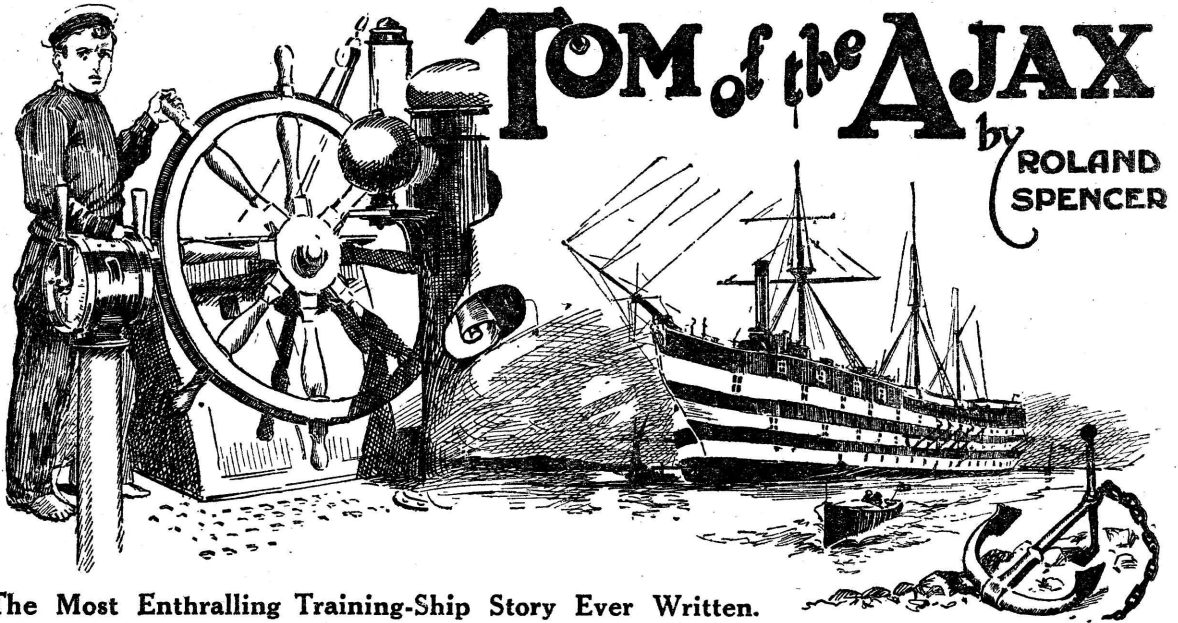
Then the two chums turned and gazed at the smiling Speed Wainwright.

Their thanks were hardly needed, though, for their eyes told Wainwright how grateful they were.

THE END.

(Look out for another thrilling adventure yarn next week, chums, entitled "A DEAL IN DIAMONDS!" You will enjoy it.)

Plucky Tom Gale bears up bravely in spite of his many misfortunes.



TOM of the AJAX

by ROLAND SPENCER

The Most Enthralling Training-Ship Story Ever Written.

The House on the Moor!

KALCHE peered out through the crack in the drawn blinds of the car. It looked as though they were drawing near to their destination, wherever that was. But from where he sat Tom could see nothing but the darkness and the rain-drops that gleamed like silver on the pane.

The car was travelling more slowly now, bumping and lurching over uneven ground. Once, Tom thought he heard the splash of water, as though they had passed through a ford.

His hands were not tied, and the handle of the door was temptingly near him. But Tom realised only too well how hopeless it would be for him to attempt to escape. Both men were on the alert, watching him. Kalche's long fingers played nervously on the black cloth of his heavy coat—he seemed to be a highly strung man, a man of restless force. Tom did not wonder that he was the brains of the great criminal organisation of which Avalanche Hume had told him.

"Where are you manded the training-ship youngster abruptly.

"Hold your tongue!"

Kalche's voice was harsh and rasping this time, his thin lips set in a cruel line. Almost as he spoke the car went into bottom gear, swaying and lurching more than before. The powerful engine droned loudly, and Kalche peered continually out into the night. The rain had ceased.

It was not long before the car jerked to a sudden standstill. Tom heard two men jump down from the front

seat, and he was ordered roughly out. The big man beside him had the youngster's arm gripped as in a vice as he was pulled from the car.

At first Tom could see nothing. The night seemed as black as pitch. Then the moon gleamed out through a break in the flying clouds, showing him a desolation of flat marsh land that stretched away on either side.

Not a building, not a tree was in sight. To his right shone a stretch of dark water, ruffled by the wind that screamed over the mud flats and through the shaking reeds near him. Dismal creeks, the exposed mud coldly glossy in the moonlight, where the tide was creeping; desolate tracts of saltings and black water. The dreariness of it all did more to undermine the youngster's pluck than anything else.

The two men from the front of the car were talking in a low tone to Kalche, while the man with the plastered-down hair kept his grip on Tom. Then they all turned down a broken, muddy track. Tom between his present guardian and one of the other men. The wind was tearing at his hair and at his clothes—he had lost his cap long ago. One of the men darted ahead into the darkness,

and a minute later Tom heard the splash of oars.

Not a word was spoken. In a few moments the youngster was taken off the track—he could feel mud squelching beneath his feet. Then the dark outline of a boat loomed out in the misty moonlight. He was bundled aboard.

Again the oars splashed, as the dirty little dinghy in which Tom found himself was paddled out into the creek. In a few moments the dark outline of a big, powerful motor-boat appeared through the greyness of mist and moonlight, and there was a scraping sound as the dinghy drew alongside. Two of his captors jumped on to the vessel, and Tom was hauled aboard.

He was taken below into the cabin beneath the big turtle deck forward. He heard the hurried movements above, and suddenly the deep purr of the engines broke the eerie silence of the marshes. Then a mutter of water round the bows of the motor-boat came to his ears—they were moving. He felt the smooth motion of the beautiful craft as it slipped almost noiselessly through the darkness.

"Where are we off to now?" Tom wondered.

He had been left in the charge of another of Kalche's men—a little rat of a man with sharp, quick eyes, who sucked at a cigarette by the door of the little cabin. A moment later the fourth of his captors appeared; he was a gaunt, sallow-faced man with a slight accent—evidently one of Kalche's countrymen.

The motor-boat sped on. By the twists and turns that he could feel, though he could see nothing, it was evident to Tom that he was being taken in

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM GALE a sturdily-built youth and chief petty officer of the starboard watch aboard the famous old training-ship *Ajax*, which is moored near the southern bank of the Thames a quarter of a mile down the river from Fleetheite, falls foul of

STONIKY BURR, C.P.O. of the port watch, a bully of the first water.

DICKY WEST is a cheerful ginger-headed youth and a staunch chum of Gale's.

Trouble arises when Tom Gale is detained, together with Stoniky Burr, as a hare in a cross-country hare-and-hounds that is to take place. Hot words and a fight follow, and Burr is thrashed and left. It is then that a mysterious, sinister man in green spectacles approaches Burr. He gives his name as **KALCHE**, and he enlists the aid of Burr in a plot against Tom Gale, without, however, giving any reasons for this.

Tom is puzzling the whole thing out in his hammock at night, when he is startled by a rending crash, and he feels the *Ajax* quiver from stem to stern. The next moment he utters a startled cry as a jagged hole appears in the ship's side, torn like paper by the stem of a huge red-rusty steamer which crashes into

the *Ajax*. In the ensuing melee a pair of hands grip at Tom's throat, and he recognises the face of Burr. Before Tom can recover he is sent hurtling off the ship into the water. He escapes, however, and is returning to the ship when he is waylaid by Kalche. His cries for help are answered, and a crowd of the *Ajax* boys rush to the rescue.

Following this Tom falls an easy prey to a trick of Burr's, is disrated, and struck off the list of boys detailed to sail on the annual cruise round the British Isles aboard the *Ulysses*.

A mad impulse seizes him, however, and, stealing out of his bunk at night, Tom plunges over the side of the *Ajax*, swims to the *Ulysses*, clambers aboard, and stows himself away in the chain-locker. His wild adventure comes to a sad ending, for, on reaching Harwich, he is taken ashore and delivered to the guard of an express for his journey back to the *Ajax* and punishment.

Aboard the train Tom is carrying out another daring escapade when a severe storm breaks out. A tree is blown across the lines, and the train is wrecked. Tom is crawling out of the wreckage when he is rushed upon, overpowered, and carried to an awaiting car, helpless in the hands of Kalche.

(Now read on.)

and out of the maze of creeks that divided the saltings and marshes into numerous tiny islands. But at last the engines were cut off. He was ordered out of the cabin, and found that the motor boat had been moored alongside an old, crazy wooden staging. The boards creaked uneasily at the weight of his footsteps and those of his captors, as though at any moment the lot might collapse into the waters of the creek.

The broken clouds suddenly veiled the moon again, and he could see nothing in the utter blackness. He soon lost all sense of direction as he was hurried along a damp track, with tall reeds and grasses, flanking the ditches that ran on either side. Then a wall appeared in the gloom, and the next minute he was led through a pair of rusty iron gates, half torn from their broken hinges, into a weed-choked drive.

"There's a house here," he muttered to himself. "They don't mean to let me escape now they've got me! In the heart of these marshes, on this island—"

Suddenly the moonlight shone out again between the cloud masses, and Tom saw the house itself—a gaunt, mist-wrapped building of decay and desolation. Kalche and the giant pug had gone on ahead, and suddenly a light gleamed out from the dark building. In another minute they were inside, and the great door at the head of the entrance steps was closed with a bang.

Tom found himself in a great, dingy hall, thick with dust, and festoons of cobwebs all but hiding the ceiling. An oil-lamp was burning at the foot of the stairs, where Kalche stood, with a smile on his face as he surveyed Tom.

"Our journey is ended, my young friend," he purred, "Follow me!"

Tom obeyed. Though the grip on his arms had been relaxed, he knew that he had no choice. But he held himself erect, and his jaw was set firmly. There was no touch of the white feather about the Hood youngster.

Kalche strode up the great stairway, where a worn strip of carpeting showed beneath the dust, evidently left by the last tenant—though Tom could not imagine anyone choosing to build a house in such a lonely, desolate spot. It was only afterwards that he learnt the house was an old priory, encroached by the sea, and converted for private use.

Kalche led the way past the first landing, up a second flight of stairs. The three other men followed, their feet echoing noisily through the great, bare building. Along a dark passage, down a short flight of stairs, and then Kalche swung open a door and passed inside. Tom heard the splutter of a match, and as he was pushed forward into the room beyond the sickly glow of a little oil-lamp shone out.

Kalche turned slowly and faced him with his cold, cold smile.

"Now, you young whelp—now I have you!"

Again Tom felt a shudder of repulsion, but he faced the man unflinchingly. Was he to learn at last the secret of Kalche's mysterious pursuit of him?

A Bolt for It!

"YES, you've got me all right!" echoed the youngster quietly. "And now I hope you'll tell me why—what you want with me, and all about it!"

Kalche laughed harshly. "So you would like to know that? It is not for the sake of your pleasant companionship, I fear. Your dear parents are—" Kalche broke off with another harsh laugh. "But I do not see why I should tell you anything! You have given me trouble, you young whelp; though this time you shall not slip through my fingers! You will not escape me again, now that I have you!"

Tom was staring at Kalche with a queer, startled look in his eyes. He cried quickly:

"My—my parents?"

Kalche shrugged his shoulders, with a sneer. Tom's eyes were gleaming, his lips parted breathlessly. What had his captor meant by those words? His parents! Like many another youngster aboard the Ajax, he knew nothing of his parentage. Could it be that Kalche knew something? And if so—what?

The burning thought drummed in his brain. Suppose his father and his mother were alive, that he was no orphan—and that Kalche knew!

"So it's my parentage—it's something to do with my parents—that's the reason you are after me?"

The burning words came with a rush. To the training-ship youngster the thought that he might have parents living—parents whom he might find—was wonderful, dazzling. He had always reckoned that the chances were his parents were dead—at any rate, he had never dreamed that some day he might learn who they were. But now—

"What do you know?" cried Tom fiercely, his fists clenched. The man was torturing him; it amused Kalche to see his excitement. Tom realised that, and the thought maddened him.

The figure before him, with those hidden eyes and sallow skin, smiled again. Kalche stroked his beard, and his eyes flashed cruelly behind their spectacles. He turned to his three companions and laughed.

"Our young friend is inquisitive!" he purred. "He wishes to know a great deal, does—"

And then Tom's control slipped from him. He sprang forward with flashing eyes, and the next instant his fist had crashed home on his tormentor's jaw. The man reeled back with a cry, and his spectacles fell with a tinkle to the bare boards.

Kalche struck the wall heavily—it was only by an effort that he maintained his balance. For a moment Tom had a vision of two eyes, red-rimmed and horrible, filmy with welling water. Then, with a scream, Kalche clapped his hands over them and rushed like a madman from the lighted room.

Tom stood panting and flushed, his right fist still bent. The spectacles were lying at his feet, and on an impulse he ground them savagely beneath his heel. But in another moment he was sent reeling back, half-stunned, against the barred window. The huge man with the plastered hair had sent a smashing blow full into his face.

He clutched at the bars of the window to support himself, but slipped, with swimming senses to the floor. The walls of the room seemed to be swaying round him. Then, when at last he was able to stagger to his feet, the door had been

slammed shut, and he heard the rattle of a bolt. He was left alone—safely caged! Tom put his hand to his singing head. Then he chuckled ruefully.

"Well, anyway, Kalche hasn't had things all his own way!" he said. "Avalanche Hume said that those eyes of his might be blinded by a strong light. Well, this rotten lamp isn't strong enough for that, worse luck; but I'll bet they touched 'em up all right, by the way he yelled!"

He listened, and could hear distant footsteps dying away down the stairs. Kalche's voice came to him—high-pitched and hoarse, the foreign accent very noticeable. Again Tom chuckled.

"Made 'em smart!" he muttered, dabbing his nose, which was bleeding from the terrible blow he had received.

The room was not entirely bare. One rickety chair was propped in a corner, and behind Tom was a tattered mattress against the wall. Tom surveyed his "furniture" ruefully.

"This looks as though they mean to keep me here some time," he told himself. "What on earth does it mean? And what did Kalche mean about my parents? What does the beast know?"

It was a problem that he could not put aside. It haunted him till he fell at last into a troubled sleep upon the half-rotten mattress.

When he awoke he judged that it was past midday; for the sun, as far as he could deduce—he could not actually see it—was already dropping westwards. Utterly worn out by his ordeal, after the horror of the train wreck, he had slept nearly twelve hours.

From that high-up, barred window he could see nothing but a wild, overgrown garden of stunted trees, with the damp, mouldering wall beyond, and behind that the desolation of marsh and creek-mazed saltings. There was no sign of human life, and he almost welcomed the sudden appearance of the little rat-faced individual with water and bread.

"He's not too lavish in the catering line," thought Tom dryly, when the man had gone without a word. "Suppose he's getting his own back here for that tap on the jaw I gave him."

The day seemed interminable, late though it already was. Night fell, enwrapping the lonely old building with ghostly mists from the damp earth—the whole place was heavy with an atmosphere of rottenness and decay. Tom strode like a caged animal before the little window; Kalche was still further venting his spite by leaving his prisoner in the darkness.

The moon appeared suddenly as it rose above the level of the mist. The bright white light gleamed in on to the dusty boards as Tom paced to and fro, and suddenly something caught his eyes. He came to a standstill, staring down at one of the boards by the broken fireplace.

"By gum—"

He stooped swiftly. As he had thought, a short board was loose, and it was the work of a moment to raise it. Beneath, he could make out dimly the stretch of a gaspipe.

"So that's why this board's loose—to get at that," the youngster muttered. "Funny having gas in a lonely spot like this."

Then he realised that the old house must have had its own acetylene gas generator—a common thing, Tom knew, in big country houses.

He was breathing quickly now. He had long ago given up all hope of escape, but now a new, wild hope had sprung into his mind. If he could only make a sufficiently large hole in the floor-boards he might be able to get at the

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plaster of the ceiling of the room underneath his. And if he could do that—

But first he slipped silently to the door and listened. There was no sound in the passages outside. Crossing to the window again, he peered out and saw that a light streamed into the garden from one of the ground-floor windows almost directly below him. It looked as though his gaolers were far away from his room.

With his strong wrists, and using the already loose board as a lever, it did not take Tom many minutes to prise a second board from its position. But in spite of his efforts he could not prevent noise, and his heart was in his mouth when he had finished. Had the sounds been heard?

He replaced the boards and waited. But still no footsteps sounded in the passage outside, and he breathed more freely. He slipped the boards from their position again. In the dark, square hole he could see the plaster of the ceiling below, pressed up between the slender laths. Surely it would not be impossible to break through into the underneath room?

"I'll have a mighty good shot at it, anyway!" Tom muttered.

But he found that first he must remove a third board, and this one gave him more trouble. But it was free at last, and, with the blood pulsing quickly in his veins, he set to work on the laths and plaster.

"By gum, there'll be some noise now!" Tom told himself ruefully. "But it can't be helped. My only chance is to get clear into the house and hope to dodge 'em when they come to see what the row is about."

And it was a noisy job! The smashing of the ceiling was as nothing beside the thunder of the falling plaster on to the bare boards of the room below. Like all the rooms of the old house, it was low; but as Tom dropped through the gaping hole it seemed anything but a short distance that he had to fall.

With a crash he landed. In a moment he had leapt to his feet. A door stood within a yard of him, and it was ajar. Without wasting a second Tom slipped through into the blackness of the passage beyond. And as he did so he heard from far below him, in the heart of the rambling old house, a shout, again a shout, and then the thunder of boots on the main staircase.

Tom's jaw was set. But the training-ship youngster was still quite cool. At the far end of the passage in which he found himself he could see the misty gleam of moonlight as it fell through a window, showing him a door that promised shelter. He turned and raced towards it. There was not an instant to be lost, he knew.

His flying feet seemed to him to be making a noise like thunder. His only hope was that the men below could not hear them above the crash of their own heavy footsteps. He reached the door, and his hand shot out to the handle, dragging it round. And then his teeth came together with a click. The door was locked!

And as he dragged vainly at it he heard a shout from the far end of the passage at the head of the stairs:

"Look! Crumbs, the boy's out! He's there!"

Answering shouts echoed through the old house. Tom gazed wildly round. The passage was a dead-end; he had put himself into a trap. Already the foremost man was racing down the passage towards him. He was caught like a badger holed.

And then a last wild hope leapt into the youngster's brain. The window! Could he possibly find escape there?

He turned swiftly, and a quick exclamation broke from him. Outside the window was a ledge, and the daring youngster did not hesitate. Although the window was old and stiff, his strong wrists had the lower sash opened in a moment. He heard a startled shout from behind him and the dark forms of his pursuers loomed out of the darkness scarcely five yards away. And then, with a reckless laugh of defiance, Tom dropped on to that narrow ledge that alone stood between him and a terrible death on the flagged garden path far below.

Even for the training-ship youngster it was a difficult job, needing every ounce of his pluck and strength. But somehow he managed to swarm along the ledge away from the window, clinging to the bare face of the wall itself, his nails scraping in the crevices of the weather-worn bricks. Behind him, though he did not look round, he could hear the men at the window shouting threats, and then the furious voice of Kalche.

"Fools, get down the stairs! We've got him, then!"

Tom, clinging grimly to the bare holds afforded him at that dizzy height, swarmed on along the ledge. To his sickening disappointment, there was no window opening above the ledge in the direction in which he was going. But then he saw something that spurred him on still faster.

At the corner of the big, irregular old building he could make out the dark outline of a half-ruined tower, and a brief gleam of moonlight, now obscured again among the clouds, had shown him the thick stems of ivy that wound upwards on the crumbling stone. If the ivy would support his weight there was still a chance that he could reach the ground before his pursuers.

Reckless of all danger, he hurried on. But it was with a quick breath of relief that he reached the end of the narrow ledge. Used though he was to great heights even the training-ship boy had felt the strain of that desperate climb, when one slip would send him hurtling to the ground to certain death.

There was a bare space between the end of the ledge and the ivy, and Tom nerved every muscle for the leap. He jumped sideways like a cat, and his hands clawed to the ivy. For a moment he felt his hands slipping, tearing through the slender trails of creeper, utterly helpless. He closed his eyes, wondering if the end had come.

Then a stout, woody stem held him for a moment, and desperately he claved at it. He was pulled up with a jerk, his temples throbbing, his breath coming in quick gasps. But he scarcely wasted a second in regaining his balance. The next moment he was swinging down, hand over hand.

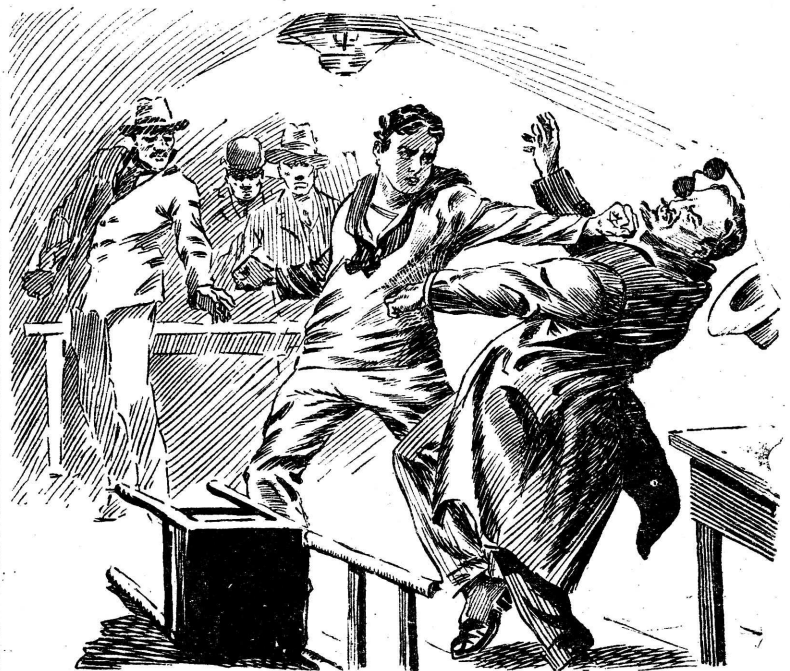
What followed was so swift that it was like a breathless dream to Tom. He reached the flagstones below just as the big front door crashed open. He heard shouts, saw four dark figures plunge out into the dark garden. For a moment the moonlight gleamed on a pair of green spectacles.

"So he's got another pair!" thought Tom, with a grim laugh as he raced off towards the wall that loomed up at the far end of the overgrown garden.

As he swarmed over it, he heard the thunder of pursuit. His feet flashed beneath him. Rough herbage, changing to sea-lavender in patches—narrow muddy guts over which he leapt desperately. And then he was at the edge of the water. He had come to the creek!

The men behind had already reached the edge of the saltings. There was only one thing to be done.

Without wasting a moment the youngster dived!



Springing forward with flashing eyes, Gale's fist crashed home on his tormentor's jaw. Kalche reeled back with a cry, and his spectacles fell with a tinkle to the bare boards.

At Bay!

AS Tom's head shot up above the icy-cold, muddy water of the creek he heard the men in chase shouting their warnings to each

other:

The sudden plunge had driven every ounce of breath from Tom's lungs, and the youngster gasped painfully as he fought his way out into deep water.

Normal breathing became possible after a minute or two, and then Tom could think clearly. The misty moon, at the moment, was unobscured by clouds, and, with a swift exclamation of satisfaction, Tom saw the outline of saltings—their clumpy growths of sea herbage jutting up above the surface of the water here and there.

"Once across, and I'll be able to give them a further run for their money," the boy gasped, as he bent his head to a powerful side-stroke. "It's another island there, for sure—"

A few strokes took the plucky young swimmer out into the strong current. The tides were highest springs, so they ran strongly—five or six times as strongly as at neaps, during the moon's quarters.

Tom grunted to himself as he felt the current grip him and swirl him down the creek. He raised his head to judge his drift, and a sudden cry of dismay broke from his blue lips. He had noticed that the creek was widening as he was swept down. Suppose he should be swept clear of the island he had seen? Perhaps there would then be no more land ahead of him.

"Gosh, I wish I knew something about where I am!" he muttered. "I must make that island! Here's for it, anyway!"

A perfect swimmer, Tom had specialised in Royal Navy styles of swimming. Now he profited by his practice and studies. Rolling flat on to his stomach, he arched his back, so that very little of his body went lower than a foot below the surface.

As he changed his stroke, the boy heard the shouts from the men renewed. Kalche's voice came distinct and hard to his ears:

"Follow down the creek, you fools! The tide is carrying him down. He'll not make the saltings. He'll have to come back!"

Come back! Would he? He'd swim all night first! Tom gritted his teeth. "Not make that island? Won't I? Kalche has evidently not heard of the Navy stroke!"

Lying like a board on the water as he was, Tom swept at the water on either side, over-arm fashion, but sinking his hands no deeper than a foot or so. He double-kicked with his legs, head down to it like a battering-ram, drawing in a breath at each sideways roll of his head.

He moved at a tremendous pace—for swimming. The current on the surface of the water is not nearly so strong as it is a foot below, and this stroke is taught to sailors to enable them to cheat a current when swimming across the tide.

Tom could not go far with the Navy stroke, but he could hold out for the distance between him and the saltings opposite. Speeding over the tide like a wounded duck flapping away from a wildfowler's spaniel, Tom at last reached shallow water.

He rose to his feet, his legs sinking into the mud, and turned to see what his enemies were up to.

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In the weak moonlight he could just discern the form of Kalche, standing like a statue at the edge of the water. The other three men had now run a good distance up the creek, and even as Tom spotted them he saw them plunge into the water one after another.

So they had altered their plans on seeing him alter his stroke! They could see that he would win over, so had run up the current a good distance, so that they, with their clumsy swimming, would be able to get over, too.

Tom squelched up to firmer ground as quickly as he could. What now would his plans be?

"Wish I knew what sort of an island it is," he chattered through his teeth. "It's a barren stretch of saltings, I should think. Perhaps I'll be able to find a hidey-hole. Maybe another channel between me and the mainland. Then I'll have a chance. Anyway, it's foot it lively, as much to keep me warm as dodge those brutes!"

The boy set off, bounding over the humps of sea-lavender like a young buck, leaping mud-guts, ploughing through the mud at channels too wide to leap.

He kept a constant direction by the moon. The blood began to course through his veins again, and the genial warmth of it bucked him up tremendously. He'd dodge them yet!

Higher ground was reached, but still the rough sea herbage predominated. It was interspersed, however, with patches of tussock grass. The mud-channels were less plentiful, so he made considerably better way.

As he ran, Tom kept a sharp look-out for his pursuers, but the moon became obscured by clouds once more, so he could not see for a great distance.

However, he could listen! And listen he did, his senses all on the alert, and his muscles strung up to high tension as he sped across the waste land.

Where could he be heading? What would be the end of his exciting journey? Had he shaken off his pursuers already?

"Can't hope for that yet," muttered the youngster. "But though I can't see those swabs, and they can't see me, I wish the old moon would show up again. If I do come to water, I won't know whether it's just another channel or the open sea!"

He ran on lightly, easing a bit in his pace now. He was certainly drawing away from the creek he had swum over, for the mud-guts were now conspicuous by their absence. The ground was somewhat hummocky, with very rough, springy, tussock grass everywhere. Sea lavender only appeared in patches. He was on real land of a sort. Perhaps an extensive marsh? If so, he would be able to dodge the men who had followed him over pretty easily.

The moonlight broke through the clouds again, and Tom immediately dropped down on his face. If his pursuers were anywhere near he was anxious to see them before they could see him. He raised his head cautiously to look round, then dropped down again, with a gasp!

Pounding heavily along over the rough ground, the big, pugilistic-looking man was running straight for him! He was only a matter of fifty yards away!

"Gosh, they'll get me now, for sure!" gritted out Tom. "What shall I—"

A triumphant, excited shout sounded to the right.

"Over there, Pug! Right in front of you. Saw his blinkin' head raised above the grass—"

There was no help for it. He must run again, and trust to his legs to dodge them now. Up jumped Tom, with a gasp of excitement, and off he sped like a hare, choosing the direction of least resistance—a bee-line between the two men.

Tom did not spare himself. He ran as if his life depended on it. They would not catch him if he could help it, even now, though he was nearly exhausted, had a terrible stitch, and was breathing heavily deep down into his stomach.

Calling loudly to each other, the chasers followed pretty closely. The third man had now shown up. He was the ferrety, shifty-looking man. He had more go in him than one would judge from appearances.

The now almost exhausted boy came to a bit of higher ground, with a cairn, or rounded heap of stones, on top of it.

"Wildfowler's cover for flight shooting," gasped Tom, as he made for it. "Jingo, I'll stop there, and stand up to them. I can sling stones at them, and perhaps make 'em keep off for a while. Anyway, I'll be taken fighting."

A few more bounds brought him to the stones. They were a rough, circular wall, about three feet high, with a break in it for entrance. Here Tom swung round to meet his enemies, a heavy piece of rock in his hands.

On pounded the men, all three arriving at about the same time. They leapt towards the lad with shouts of anger, and Tom sent the heavy stone hurtling towards them.

The rat-faced little man yelped and jumped sideways, and his gaunt, sallow-complexioned companion roared with pain as the heavy stone descended on to his foot. The big, broad-shouldered pug whipped out an oath and stepped back as Tom raised another stone. He sent this flying towards the men again, with a cry of defiance; but the words seemed to freeze on his lips as he noticed the smallest man draw a revolver and level the weapon at him.

Tom dodged down for cover; but he could have saved himself the trouble, for the great fist of the big man flashed upwards, striking the other's forearm with an ominous crack.

The revolver flew into the air, and as the man howled with pain the other cried:

"Not that, ye fool. Pot 'im, and Kalche'll put your light out for ye. You heard his orders—"

At this interruption, Tom seized his opportunity. He had regained his breath, and he cleared the stones behind him with one bound and was off over the marsh like a hare.

"After him!" yelled the sallow man. "He can't go fur!"

Tom ran on, desperation lending him the speed of a chamois. But he saw water ahead—a very wide stretch of water, glinting like silver in the moonlight.

Swimming would be useless to him now! He would have to turn again and be taken fighting.

The boy swung round to face his pursuers, who were pounding along about thirty yards behind. He stood there, head thrown high, fearless, fists clenched, ready to be as troublesome as possible.

The men were nearly on him, their faces grinning in evil triumph, the big, square-jawed man in the middle, and the other two closing in as flankers.

(Another thrilling instalment of this powerful serial next week, chums.)



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week--You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: **The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.**

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!

DIGGING UP THE PAST!

There are all sorts of ways of "telling the tale," and nearly all of them are quite unconvincing. But a man who was rather too fond of betting than was good for his bank balance extricated himself in the neatest way possible the other day, when his wife's suspicions were aroused; and, incidentally, he stuck rigidly to the truth. "James," observed his wife, in a rather ominous voice, "I found some very queer-looking tickets in your desk this morning." "Did you, dear?" replied James meekly. "Yes. One of them said, 'Pharos, six to one.' What does that mean?" "Ah--my archaeological studies, my love," responded James. "Relics of a lost race!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious tuck, has been awarded to Alex Dunn, 24, East Park Street, Cowdenbeath, Fifeshire, Scotland.

RAILWAY COMEDY!

In a first-class non-smoker of an express, sat several men, mostly acquaintances, and the compartment was hazy with smoke. Just before the departure a breathless stranger entered, and objected to smoking. A man opposite promptly retorted, objecting to the stranger's presence, asserting that he had a third-class ticket, and, as the stationmaster was passing, he drew the latter's attention to the fact. It was found true, and the late-comer, raging, was transferred to a third-class compartment. When the friend settled down again, one man asked the objector: "But how did you know?" "Well," was the reply, "I noticed yesterday, at the barrier, that his ticket was the same colour as mine!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Noel Barrington, Central High School (Boys), Whitworth Street, Manchester.

ALPHABETICAL ORDER!

Tramp: "I've asked for money, I've begged for money, and I've cried for money, mum." Lady: "Have you ever thought of working for it?" Tramp: "No, mum; you see, I'm going through the alphabet, and I ain't got to 'W' yet!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to George Akers, 205, Merridale Street, West, Wolverhampton.

THE BOY SCORES!

The report of the son's progress at school had arrived, and was being carefully perused by Tommy's father, when quite unexpectedly the "victim" walked in. "Tommy," said the bombastic parent, "your school report is very bad. Do you know that when George Washington was your age he was head of the school?" "Yes, pa," replied the scolded boy, "and when he was your age he was President of the United States!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Richardson, 129, Stanhope Road, South Shields, Durham.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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"LEN'S LUCK!"

(Continued from page 16.)

faced, prosperous-looking man, whom Tom had never seen before. Tom stood and stared in utter surprise.

He had not thought to see Len again, though he had hoped to do so; and certainly he had never dreamed of seeing him visit St. Jim's, well-dressed, in a thousand-guinea motor-car.

"Great Scott!" Tom caught Monty Lowther's arm. "You see him!"

"Lee!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Great pip!" said Manners.

The hard-faced gentleman was driving the car. It glided down the drive towards the gates.

Tom Merry, in great amazement, hurried into the House. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was lounging elegantly in the doorway.

"Yaas. Mr. Wailton intwroduced him to me, as he is comin' into my Form," said Arthur Augustus placidly. "He's comin' along in a few days, I think. His guardian brougnt him heah to settle the details to-day. He looks a wathah nice chap, but I twust they will not stick him into Studay No. 6. We are, four already—pwactically five, countin' Hewwies' feet."

"He seems to be in good luck now," said Tom, amazed. "Eh?"

"I'm glad of it," said Tom. "But—"

"Bai Jove! Do you know Pomfwet?" asked Arthur Augustus, surprised in his turn.

"Pomfret?" repeated Tom, staring at him.

"Yaas, that's his name—Leonard Pomfwet. The old scout is Mr. Pomfwet, his uncle."

"His—his uncle?"

"Yaas. Bai Jove! What is the mattah with you, deah boy?"

Tom Merry stood as if rooted to the floor, overcome with astonishment. It was Len Lee who had driven away in the car; he was sure of it. And he was coming to St. Jim's as Len Pomfret, nephew of a Mr. Pomfret! Tom Merry wondered whether he was dreaming.

Arthur Augustus' surprised glance dwelt on Tom's face, but Tom did not heed him. He almost ran to Mr. Railton's study and tapped at the door.

The Housemaster looked up with an inquiring glance at Tom's flushed face.

"Well, Merry?"

"Would you mind telling me the name of the fellow who's just been here, sir?" stammered Tom. "I—I think I know him."

"Leonard Pomfret," answered Mr. Railton.

"Oh! I—I thought—"

"I hardly think you can have known him, Merry, as he is only lately returned from Switzerland, where he has been at school," said Mr. Railton.

"Oh!" said Tom blankly.

"His name has been down for entrance at St. Jim's for a long time, however," said Mr. Railton. "His father, an old St. Jim's man, entered his name here many years ago. No doubt you have seen his name in the School Roll of Honour. Captain Pomfret was killed in Flanders. Leonard Pomfret will enter the Fourth Form here in a few days, Merry, and if you are already acquainted with him—"

"No, sir," said Tom, bewildered, "I don't know anybody named Pomfret. I—I must have taken him for somebody else."

Tom's brain was almost in a whirl as he left the Housemaster's study. This newcomer to St. Jim's was Leonard Pomfret, son of an old St. Jim's man, nephew of a man evidently rich and of good position. Yet he was Len Lee, the outcast of Wayland Wood—Len Lee, unless Tom Merry could not trust to his own eyesight.

"A jolly queer resemblance!" was Monty Lowther's comment, when the Terrible Three discussed the matter in Study No. 10.

"Might be twins," said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's the same chap," he said.

"Only it can't be, you know."

"I know it can't; but—"

Tom Merry gave it up. The mystery was too deep for him. That Len Lee, the outcast, and Leonard Pomfret, the rich stockbroker's nephew, could be one and the same person seemed impossible. Had the outcast told a false tale that rainy evening in the woodman's hut? Tom did not believe so for a moment. Was it merely a case of a strange and striking re-semblance? Tom could not think so. Was it a case of some strange, some amazing imposture? How could it be that? The boys' own uncle could not be deceived.

Tom Merry had to give it up. But he waited for the day when Len should arrive at St. Jim's, to take his place in the Fourth Form there; then he felt he would, and must, know the truth.

THE END.

(Look out for "LEN AT ST. JIM'S!"—the next of this magnificent series of stories by Martin Clifford—in next week's GEM.)

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