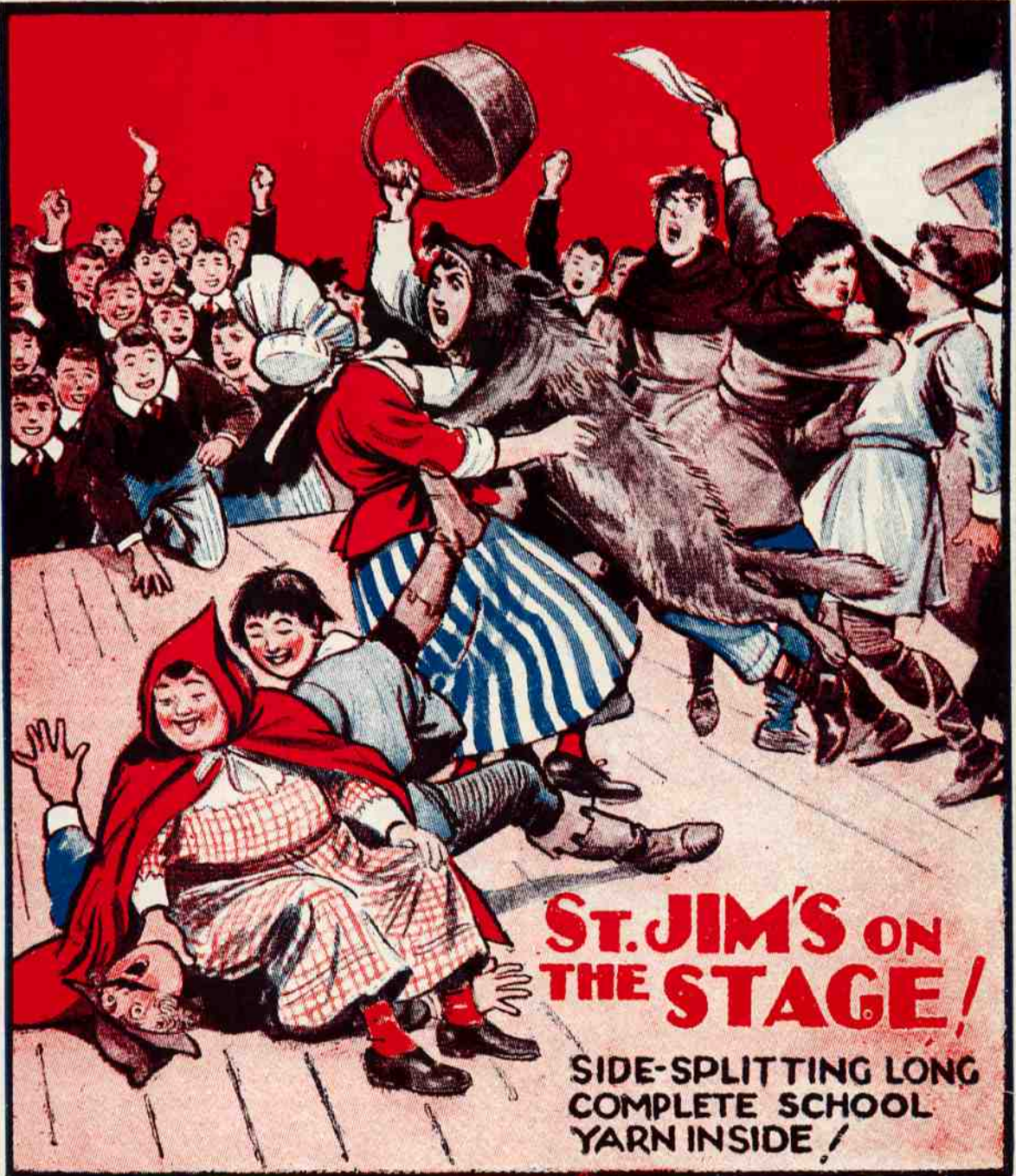


TOM MERRY & CO.—THE MERRY MIRTH-MAKERS! MEET 'EM WITHIN!

The GEM

2^d



ST. JIM'S ON THE STAGE!

SIDE-SPLITTING LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL YARN INSIDE!

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CHAPTER 1.

A Mysterious Meeting.

HERE was something on in the School House at St. Jim's.

In the corridor, upon which the studies belonging to the boys of the Shell opened, a little crowd of juniors were collected, just outside Tom Merry's door.

Tom Merry's door was evidently the centre of attraction, and the juniors, just as evidently, were very curious to know what was going on inside that door. But it remained closed, and one bold youth who tried the handle discovered that the door was locked. This discovery added to the intense curiosity that reigned in the corridor.

"There's a little game of some kind on," said Gore. "What is Tom Merry up to this time?"

There was no reply to that question.

The juniors stared at the door, but the solid oak panels told them nothing. From within came a faint murmur of voices, but the words were indistinguishable. Something was certainly "on," but what it was the juniors had no idea.

The mystery had started when Tom Merry and his chum Manners, known, in the absence of their chum Lowther, as the Terrible Two, had been seen whispering together in the Shell class-room. Some brilliant idea was undoubtedly being discussed by the Terrible Two, and the others naturally wanted to know what it was about. But not a word of explanation could they get.

Gore, who was not above listening when his curiosity was aroused, had caught the words "triple alliance," uttered by Tom Merry; but as to what they could possibly mean he was completely in the dark.

It was not likely that Tom Merry and Manners were discussing European politics in whispers in the class-room at St. Jim's, but Gore was sure he had caught the words "triple alliance." It was a very deep mystery.

When the Terrible Two, after school, were seen to walk off to their study with rapt faces and most mysterious expressions, the curiosity as to what it all meant became intense.

Quite a little crowd of juniors were in the corridor, staring at Tom Merry's door as if they could, by the intensity of their gaze, read the secret in the oak panels, when Jack Blake came along the corridor.

Blake stared at the youngsters, and stopped at Tom Merry's door and knocked.

"Who's there?" came a voice from within.

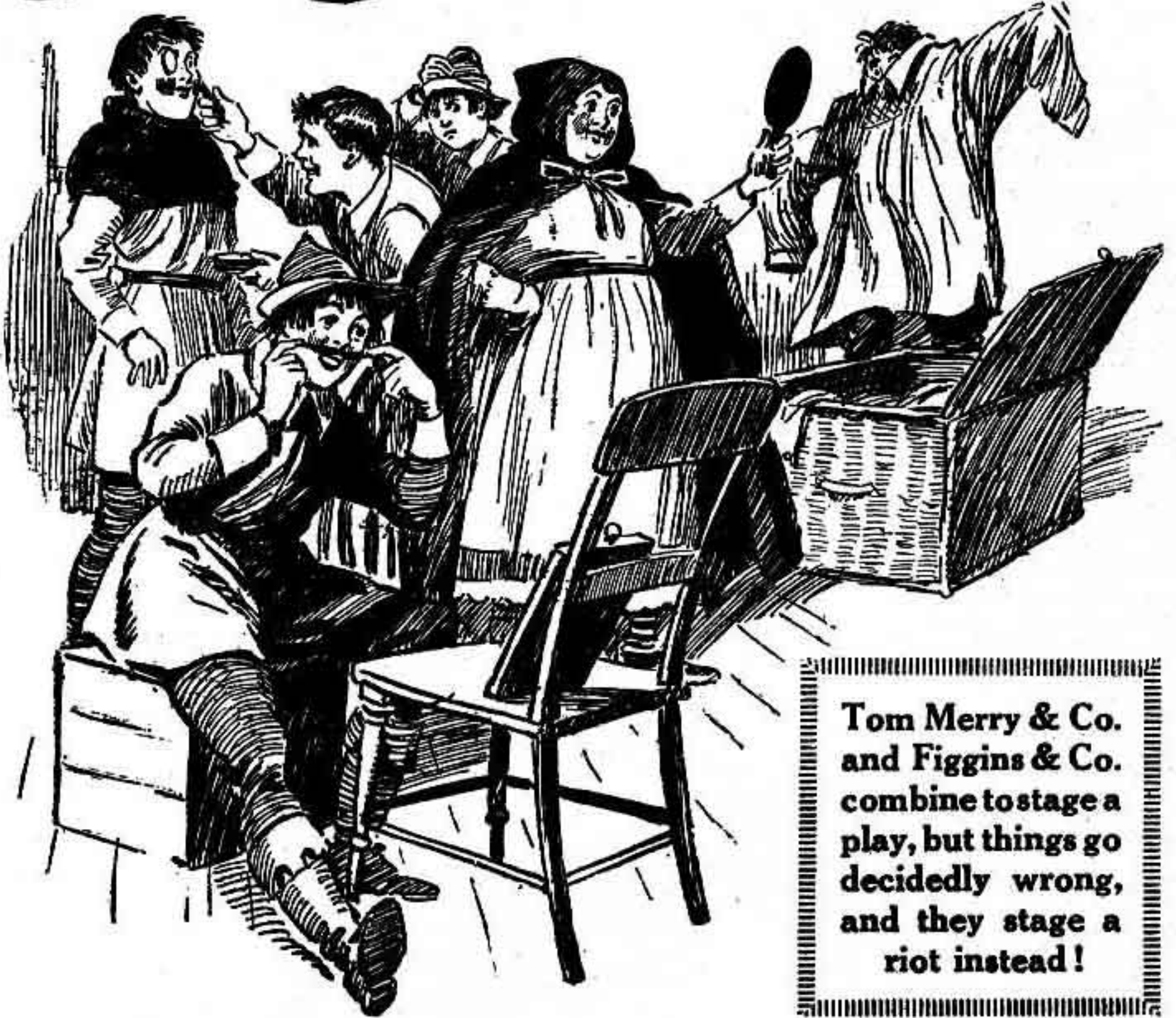
"Blake."

The door was opened and Blake entered. It was instantly shut again.

"What on earth's the giddy game?" ejaculated Gore. "I suppose Tom Merry and Manners ain't turning

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ST. JIM'S ON



Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co. combine to stage a play, but things go decidedly wrong, and they stage a riot instead!

Bolshies, or anything of that sort? Blake and Tom Merry are always on the warpath against one another, and now they let him into the study as if he were a giddy conspirator going to a blessed meeting of a secret society!"

"Hallo, here's another!" exclaimed Jimson.

Herries, Blake's chum, was coming along.

He stopped and knocked at the door, just as Blake had done, and the voice from within asked the question again.

"Who's there?"

"Herries."

The door was opened. Herries passed into the study and the door closed, and the click of the key was heard. During the moment that it had been open the juniors craned their necks to look in; but they saw nothing but the table littered with books and papers and the rather worn patch of carpet. So far as they could see, the interior of Tom Merry's study wore its accustomed aspect. What was all the mystery about, then?

"Hallo!" said Long. "Here's another!"

The third of the chums of Study No. 6 was coming along the passage.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the crease in his trousers and the beautiful hues of his waistcoat showed that he had changed his clothes after school, doubtless for the purpose of coming to the meeting in Tom Merry's study.

D'Arcy came solemnly up the passage, surveyed the excited juniors with a languid stare through his eyeglass, and then knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" came the now familiar question.

"It is I, deah boy."

A LONG COMPLETE YARN OF UPROARIOUS FUN!

THE STAGE!

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Is it D'Arcy?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Why can't you say so, then, fathead? Come in!"
 The door opened.
 Arthur Augustus did not enter.
 "Come in, fathead!"
 "I wefuse to entah, Mewwy, unless you withdwaw those extwemely obnoxious expyressions," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "I am not accustomed to bein' tweeked with such extweme diswespsect."

"Come in, lunatic! Enter, fathead! Get inside, cuckoo!"

Tom Merry was evidently growing impatient.

But to these polite invitations Arthur Augustus made no response. He stood frigidly waiting for the apology to which he considered himself entitled.

"Are you coming in?"

"I am not comin' in, Tom Mewwy, until you have withdwawn——"

"Silly ass!"

"You are extwemely wude. I stwongly object to bein' addressed in such a mannah."

"Blake, that thing belongs to you, so I leave you to deal with it."

"Right-ho!" the voice of Blake was heard to exclaim heartily.

Blake came out of the study.

He fastened a gentle grip upon the right ear of Augustus.

"Come in, ducky!"

"Blake, you are hurtin' my eah, and I stwongly object——"

"In you go!"

Blake propelled the swell of the School House into the study, and the door closed again and cut off the objections of Arthur Augustus from the ears of the grinning juniors outside.

"Now they're all in!" exclaimed Jimson. "No, by Jove, here's another!"

Figgins of the New House at St. Jim's had come up the stairs and along the corridor, and now he stopped at the door of Tom Merry's study.

If the spectators had been amazed to see the chums of Study No. 6 enter Tom Merry's quarters as they had done, they were simply astounded to see Figgins about to do the same. For the juniors of the New House were generally at warfare with the School House boys, and while Blake and Tom Merry disputed the leadership of their side, Figgins reigned undisputed chief of the New House youngsters.

To see him come into the School House at all was rare; but to see him march up to the door of Tom Merry's study and knock for admittance, with the evident expectation of a friendly welcome, was amazing.

If Tom Merry had been giving a feed the fellows could have understood it.

Tom was a generous fellow, and would invite his rivals of the New House to partake of his hospitality at times, as well as his rivals nearer home in Study No. 6.

But that was not the case now. There were no signs of a feed in the study; besides, a feed would not have been observed with such mysterious secrecy.

Knock!

"Who's there?"

"Figgins."

The door opened and Figgins went in, and it closed again. Gore stared at Jimson, and Jimson stared at Gore, and the others stared at both of them.

"Figgins is in it, too," said Gore. "My only maiden Aunt Matilda Mary Jane! What on carth is the wheeze?"

"Ask me another," said Jimson.
 Gore strode towards the study.
 "I'm going to see," he exclaimed.
 He knocked at the door.

"Who's there?"

"Gore!"

"Gore? Gore, eh?"

"Yes, Gore."

"Go back to Colney Hatch, Gore!"

And the door did not move.

Gore rejoined his companions, and his colour was heightened as he saw them grinning. His attempt had failed.

"Well, we're not going to leave it at that," said Jimson. "I'll have a try."

He rapped on the door with his knuckles.

"Who's there?"

"Jimson."

"Go and eat coke, Jimson!"

And Jimson retired, unsuccessful.

"It's no go," said Gore. "But I'll tell you what. Wherever Figgins goes, you're pretty certain to find Kerr and Wynn. Figgins & Co. are always together. The Co. will be along soon for a dead cert, and when they go in we'll rush the door with them, and see what Tom Merry is up to in there, anyway."

"Good idea!" said Jimson.

"Jolly good!" said the rest.

And they stood ready for the rush. Sure enough, before ten minutes had elapsed, two youthful forms came along the passage and stopped at Tom Merry's door.

They were Kerr, the canny Scotsman, and Fatty Wynn; the Falstaff of St. Jim's, the true and tried chums of the great Figgins—the three generally going by the name of Figgins & Co.

"Here's the Co.," whispered Gore. "Stand ready."

Kerr and Wynn knocked at the door simultaneously.

"Who's there?"

"Kerr and Wynn."

The door opened. Kerr and Wynn walked in, and at the same moment Gore, Jimson, and the crowd of juniors made a rush to follow them.

But someone inside had his foot against the door, and it had opened only just wide enough to admit the two juniors from the New House, and it did not budge in the slightest when Gore hurled himself upon it.

Gore was flung back against Jimson, and Jimson staggered away. He went over, and several of the juniors, eagerly rushing on, fell over, and piled themselves on him. A hand from within gave Gore a shove which added him to the heap, and then the door was closed quickly and the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER 2.

The Triple Alliance.

TOM MERRY looked round his study.

"Now we're all here," he remarked, "the meeting is opened."

"And the door shut," said Blake.

"Don't be frivolous, Blake. This is a serious, solemn, and important occasion."

"Then I vote," said Figgins, "that we all proceed to be serious, solemn, and important. Blake, how dare you smile?"

"Blessed if I know," said Blake. "Gussy, how dare I smile?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Silence, kids!" said Tom Merry, waving his hand. "I——"

He was interrupted by a question propounded simultaneously by Blake and Figgins.

"Who are you calling kids?"

"I withdraw the expression," said Tom Merry. "I forgot for the moment we were not on the war-path. I should have said, young gentlemen of the School House and Monkey House—I mean, the New House."

Blake was appeased, but Figgins looked rather warlike.

"While you are on the subject of apologies, Tom Mewwy, you had better express yourself in a gentlemanly manner for the wide expressions you used——"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I refuse to dry up!"

"Kill him, somebody! When Gussy starts talking I always get that tired feeling," said Manners plaintively. "In the interests of humanity, I think Gussy ought to be painlessly slain."

"Mannahs, I think——"

"No, you don't; you haven't the necessary apparatus," said Manners.

While D'Arcy was turning this over in his mind, trying to comprehend what Manners meant, Tom Merry resumed the broken thread of his discourse.

"Gentlemen of the School House and the Monk—New House," he said. "As you are all here, I conclude that you have all received the little notes I sent you——"

"My dear chap," said Blake admiringly, "it's easy to see why you get on so well with that detective chap, Ferrers Locke. That deduction you have made is worthy of the late lamented Sherlock Holmes."

"Blake, you are called to order. Don't interrupt!"

"Oh, get on!"

"I explained in those notes that I wanted a general meeting called to discuss a certain matter, and you've all kindly come——"

"Do you mean to insinuate that I haven't any brains, Mannahs?" demanded Arthur Augustus, the meaning of Manners' little joke having by this time dawned upon him.

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I refuse—I distinctly refuse! Mannahs has passed a wide remark, and I refuse to be shut up unless Mannahs——"

"Back-pedal!"

"Ring off!"

"Dry up!"

"I refuse——"

Blake laid a gentle hand upon D'Arcy's collar.

"Are you going to shut up, Aubrey, or shall I sit on your neck?" he inquired pleasantly.

"You are soilin' my collar!"

"Will you dry up?"

"Y-a-a-a-s, wathah!" gurgled D'Arcy, as Blake began to shake him.

"Weally, Blake——"

Shake!

"I protest——"

Shake!

D'Arcy subsided into silence.

"Some of the Sixth Form," said Tom Merry, "have got up a dramatic society, and they're going in for Shakespeare, and so on——"

"They boned the idea from us," said Figgins. "The New House Amateur Dramatic Society was the first at St. Jim's."

"My idea," said Tom Merry, "is to form a dramatic society of our own—a better one than the seniors' one——"

"Your idea?" hooted Figgins. "I tell you, the New House——"

"I know all that, Figgins——"

"Amateur Dramatic——"

"Let me speak!"

"Society was the first at St. Jim's."

"You'd better shake Figgins, too, Blake," said Tom Merry. "He's worse than Gussy."

"Somebody had better try to shake me," said Figgins.

"Do you think I couldn't?" asked Blake, in an inquiring, friendly tone.

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"Yes," said Figgins. "I think you couldn't—I think——"

"Order, order!" said Manners.

"If you kids are going to fight," said Tom Merry, in a tone of resignation.

"Pax, old Figgy!" grinned Blake. "Shut up, and listen to the oracle! You don't seem to get on very fast explaining your idea, Tom Merry."

"How the dickens can I explain my idea when you keep on interrupting?"

"He hasn't any ideas," said Figgins. "The New House Amateur Dramatic Society was the first——"

"Blow the New House Amateur Dramatic Society!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What I mean is, to form a society embracing juniors of both Houses for the purpose of——"

"Any ladies in the society?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Ladies? No!"

"Oh, that's all right! I don't want to be embraced by——"

"You don't understand. I mean, including juniors of both Houses."

"Anyway, the lady would have to have a jolly long reach to embrace you, Fatty," said Blake, with a glance at Wynn's ample proportions.

"Look here, Blake——"

"Don't interrupt! Get on with the washing, Tom Merry!"

"You look as if you could do with some, some of you School House kids," said Kerr.

"If you want a dot on the boko, Kerr——"

"For goodness' sake," said Tom Merry, "shut up, some of you! How am I ever to get to the point?"

"Well, you don't seem to be very likely to get to it, anyway. You're a jolly lot too long-winded, Tom Merry!"

"Look here! Listen, you noisy kids—I mean, young gentlemen of the Fourth Form and the Shell. My idea was to form a triple alliance."

"A what?"

The big words duly impressed the assembled juniors, and even Arthur Augustus forgot his crumpled collar and looked at Tom with interest.

"A triple alliance," said Tom, pleased with the impression he had made. "The School House and the New House are always having rows, and here in the School House this study and Study No. 6 are generally at loggerheads. My idea was an alliance of the three parties, and that's the triple alliance—see?"

The juniors admitted that they saw.

"In the interests of art," said Tom Merry, "all small matters of personal strife should be forgotten; minor disputes should sink into insignificance before the all-important, all-embracing interests of art."

The juniors gasped for a moment.

"He's been looking up those words in a dictionary," said Blake with conviction.

"I haven't; I——"

"I know where he got 'em!" cried Figgins suddenly. "They're out of an essay on Ruskin or somebody, in one of the old Sixth Form examination papers."

Tom Merry turned red.

"Let's get to business!" he said hastily. "We've wasted enough time in talk. The seniors are making a lot of fuss about their acting business, and I believe we could give them the kybosh if we put our beef into it."

"I think we can get ahead of the seniors in most things," said Manners, looking round.

"Rather!" cried five voices. And another voice added emphatically: "Yaas, wathah!"

"Then, is it a good idea?" asked Tom Merry. "I've asked you all to come here and discuss it, and you've been good enough to come."

"I thought there was a feed on," said Fatty Wynn.

"Good old Fatty," said Blake. "Always on the scent of the grub!"

"What do you say, chaps?" asked Tom Merry. "As for the feed, I am thinking of giving a feed to celebrate the inauguration of the triple alliance."

"So you ought!" gasped Blake. "We want a pick-me-up after having words like those fired at us."

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Figgins; but whether he was referring to the triple alliance or the feed was not quite clear.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Figgy. You——"
 "Of course, you'll admit that it wasn't your idea? The New House Amateur Dramatic Society was the first——"
 "Oh, I know all that, Figgy! The triple alliance business is my idea. Let us stick together, and we'll cut out the seniors."

"We will!" exclaimed the juniors heartily.

There was one point upon which New House and School House, Shell, and Fourth Form were agreed, and that was in asserting the dignity of their position against the Upper Form fellows. Some of the Sixth-Formers went about, as Tom Merry complained, looking as if they had never heard of the existence of the Fourth Form or the Shell. Which, of course, was not to be tamely endured by the heroes of the lower school.

"Let's put it to the vote," said Manners.

"Hands up for the triple alliance!" said Tom Merry.

He started the voting by putting his own hand up. Six more hands followed suit. Only one good right hand remained down, and that belonged to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House.

"Hallo, Gussy! What objection have you got?"

"Before I join any twiple alliance, or anything of the sort, Tom Mewwy, I must insist upon your withdwawin' the wude expressions you used before I entaked this study."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Blake, if I had that thing in this study I should kill it and bury it under the floor!" he exclaimed.

"I am compelled to considah my dig," said D'Arcy. "I am not accustomed to being tweated with wudeness, and I weally insist——"

Blake caught him by the collar.

"Blake, I have asked you before not to be so extwemely wuff. I am afwaid that our fwiership will have to cease if——"

"Put his hand up, Herries!"

Herries caught D'Arcy's right wrist and dragged his hand into the air.

"I pwotest——"

"He's voted, Tom Merry!" exclaimed Blake. Tom grinned.

"Good! The voting is now unanimous, gentlemen; the objections of the single dissentient having been overcome."

"Weally——"

"After voting, any further objections cannot be considered. It is too late to say anything more, Gussy. You had better shut up."

The voting being now unanimous, the juniors proceeded to the discussion of details.

"So far," said Tom Merry, "we've kept the business a dead secret. There are a lot of curious kids in the passage out there who want to know all about it, but we're not going to let it get out till matters are ripe."

"Hear, hear!"

"We are going to select a play," went on Tom, "and rehearse our parts. We are going to get it all ready and then ask the Head's permission to use the lecture-hall for the performance."

"Hear, hear!"

"I believe you kids—I mean, you young gentlemen of the Fourth Form—gave a sort of entertainment a short

time before I came to St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "It ended in a bust-up, I think."

Figgins grinned. It was an old story of a concert which had been planned by the New House juniors, and which the School House boys had got wind of, and forestalled their rivals by giving one the evening previous to that fixed by Figgins. But Figgins & Co. had had their revenge by turning off the gas at the meter in the middle of the performance, and the concert had ended, as Tom Merry had put it, in a general "bust-up."

"That's so," said Blake. "It was rather a ghastly frost, owing to——"

"Never mind what it was owing to," said Tom Merry, fearing recriminations which would detract from the harmony of the newly formed triple alliance. "I suppose it was due to a row between School House and New House. As we're allied now, that can't happen again, and so the performance we give is bound to be a success."

"Hear, hear!"

"And Kerr, especially, is a jolly good actor, having taken us all in when he made up as the German master that time."

Kerr placed his hand on his heart and bowed.

"Kerr's father is an actor, I believe——"



Tom Merry & Co. jumped as there was a fearful concussion on the door, which flew open, revealing a number of juniors holding a form. "Those kids!" hooted Blake. "Sock into them!"

"That's so."

"And so I propose making Kerr chief of the wardrobe and grease-paint department," said Tom Merry. "The funds will be placed in his hands, and he will provide all the accessories that are necessary."

"Hear, hear!"

"You couldn't find a better fellow for the job," exclaimed Figgins, much gratified by Tom Merry's tribute to one of the "Co."

"I'll do my best," said Kerr modestly.

"But what about the play?" asked Blake.

"Ah, that's the question!"

"The play's the thing," observed Fatty Wynn. Figgins & Co., the shining lights of the New House Dramatic Society, had been rehearsing "Hamlet," and Fatty Wynn was simply bristling with quotations from the great bard. "The play's the thing, and——"

"Exactly! Now, what ideas have you chaps got on the subject?"

"Hamlet" said Figgins & Co. in one voice.

"Merchant of Venice," said Blake and Herries.

"The Wood to Wuin," said D'Arcy.

"Dick Turpin," said Manners.

Tom Merry looked rather worried.

"We don't seem to be unanimous on that point," he remarked. "We must discuss——"

Tom Merry was interrupted by a fearful concussion on the door, which seemed to shake the whole study. The lock gave way and the door flew open.

CHAPTER 3.

The Play's the Thing.

TOM MERRY gave a jump.

"What the—who the——"

"It's those kids!" shouted Blake. "Sock into them!"

It was indeed the "kids."

Jimson and Gore had brought a form out of one of the class-rooms and used it by way of battering-ram on the door of Tom Merry's study.

Excitement and curiosity in the corridor had risen to fever-heat, and this desperate expedient was the result.

The crash of the form on the door smashed the lock, and the door flew open with a bang, and the form fell in the doorway.

"Come on!" howled Gore.

He led a valiant rush into the room.

Jimson and the rest followed him.

The members of the triple alliance lined up to meet the invaders.

"Sock into them!" roared Blake.

"Hurrah! Kick them out!"

The eight juniors rushed into the fray with hearty good will.

Where Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins led, victory was certain to follow, unless the odds were very great indeed.

Gore received a clump on his nose which laid him on his back, and Jimson was soon laid across him; and then the rush of the invaders was stopped, and they were driven back into the passage.

Blake was rushing on in wrathful pursuit, but Tom Merry pulled him back.

"Come in, Blake! We've no time to waste. Help me to chuck these cheeky bounders out."

"Right-ho!"

Blake and Tom Merry seized Gore by the feet and shoulders.

Gore wriggled.

"Lemme alone!"

"You're going out."

"What are you kids up to in here?"

"Don't you worry about that."

"What's the giddy secret?"

"One that we're going to keep."

"Look here, I tell you——"

"Out you go!"

Gore went, landing with a thump in the passage. Herries and Manners were helping Jimson out in the same way. The door was slammed shut.

There was a crash on it from without.

Gore had returned promptly to the attack. But Tom Merry had his foot against the door.

"Give me that chair, Manners."

Manners brought the chair, and Tom jammed the back of it under the broken lock. This held the door shut as fast as the lock could have done.

"Now we're rid of them!" said Tom Merry, a little flushed from his exertions. "It's surprising how curious some kids are about things that don't concern them."

"Amazing!" said Blake. "Now to get to business."

"Let me see, where were we?"

"You were on the table, and I was sitting on the locker."

"I don't mean that. What were we discussing? Oh, yes, the play!"

"The play's the thing," said Fatty Wynn, "wherein we'll catch the——"

"Just so. Now, I think you New House chaps said 'Hamlet'?"

"Yes."

"'Hamlet' is a jolly good play," said Tom Merry; "I'm not saying anything against 'Hamlet.' I admire Shakespeare, and I think he was an awfully clever chap, but I hardly think that 'Hamlet' is suitable."

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"Why not?" demanded Figgins & Co.

"Well, you see——"

"It's splendid!" said Figgins indignantly. "There's the lines—have you ever heard anything grander. Lemme see——"

"To be, or not to be. That is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to shuffle——"

"Suffer," said Kerr, who was stage-manager prompter, and general providence to the New House Amateur Dramatic Society. Figgins nodded.

"The stings and arrows of outrageous fortune——"

"Slings and arrows," said Kerr.

"I can't see much difference," said Figgins; "stings are as poetical as slings any day in the week. But have it your way."

"The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of bubbles——"

"Troubles," said Kerr.

Figgins gave a snort.

"Look here, Kerr, you're talking rot! A sea of bubbles is a sensible thing, but a sea of troubles is rot. I'm pretty certain it's bubbles."

"It's troubles, fathead!"

"Bubbles!"

"Troubles!"

"Oh, blow your bubbles and troubles!" said Tom Merry. "We'll take the rest of the quotation for granted. Now——"

"That isn't the best thing in 'Hamlet,'" said Fatty Wynn. "There is my speech as Polonius:

"Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice; Take each man's measure, but reserve——"

"Censure," said Kerr.

"Censure? What do you mean by censure?"

"It's censure, not measure, fathead!"

"I don't believe it!" said Fatty Wynn obstinately. "Take each man's measure and reserve thy judgment' is good enough for me."

"Costly thy rabbits as thy purse can buy——"

"Habit."

"Ass! It means that Laertes was going to buy some white rabbits, of course!"

"It doesn't! It means his togs, you ass!"

"Rot!" said Fatty Wynn. "I learned up the lines once, and though I forget some of them, I'm pretty certain about that. What do you say, Figgy?"

"Well, I know Kerr is strong on Shakespeare," said Figgy, "but I really think Fatty is right this time, Kerr, and it's rabbits."

Kerr snorted.

"Look here!" said Manners. "We're not rehearsing 'Hamlet' now. Chuck it!"

"Right!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "As I was saying, I don't think 'Hamlet's' quite up to the mark. We should want a girl to play Ophelia, and we haven't any girls in the school, unless you think Mary, the housemaid, could do it."

"I don't see why we couldn't leave Ophelia out."

"Might as well leave out the Prince of Denmark."

"Well, if we don't have 'Hamlet,' what are you chaps thinking of?" demanded Figgins. "We don't want to be unreasonable. Let's hear your views."

"'Merchant of Venice,'" said Blake and Herries once more.

"That's a jolly good play," said Tom Merry. "I'm not saying anything against it as a play, but——"

"My dear chap," said Blake, "I've been through it, and I know it's just the thing. Why, think of the very opening lines:

"In sooth, I know not why I am so bad, It wearies me——"

"It isn't bad," said Kerr; "it's sad."

"Perhaps you know more about it than I do?" said Blake, with a withering look.

"Oh, give us a rest, all of you!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't got much furrarder yet. The 'Merchant of Venice' is no good, for the same reason. We haven't a girl for Portia, and the 'Merchant of Venice' without Portia would be like—like a sandwich with the ham left out. I really think we shall have to bar Shakespeare. He was an awfully clever chap, as I've said, and you'll agree, but he won't do."

"Well, what's the next idea?" asked Blake resignedly.

"I suggested 'The Woad to Wuin,'" said Arthur Augustus.

"'The Road to Ruin'?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "That sounds a little too much like—well, rather lurid. We mustn't get up anything to shock the innocent ears of masters and prefects."

"It's awfully good, I believe," said D'Arcy. "I've never seen it or wead it, you know, and I don't weally know anything about it, deah boys, but my cousin told me a fellah said it was awfully good, you know."

"Well, that's such an exceedingly strong recommendation that I really think we ought to have it," said Blake.

Tom Merry grinned.

"Roads to ruin are barred. Now, Manners said 'Dick Turpin.'"

"Dick Turpin was a jolly good sort," said Tom Merry. "He used to buzz round on a black horse and have a high old time. There's the ride to York, you know; we could make a lot of that."

"Have you got the play?" asked Blake.

"No," said Manners. "My idea was to write it ourselves."

"By Jove," said Blake, "that's a good idea! Shakespeare and those chaps are awfully clever, you know, but they're a bit out of date. I've no doubt we could knock up something between us that would be a good deal better for our purpose than 'Hamlet' or the 'Merchant of Venice,' though it might not be quite so good as those in itself."

"I was thinking of 'Little Red Riding Hood,'" said Tom Merry. "Figgins could play the wolf so well with his face—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You let my face alone!" said Figgins.

"I meant that as a compliment. Then Fatty Wynn would have done for little Red Riding Hood herself, because his face is smooth, you see, and the clothes would cover up plumpness. Never mind, 'Dick Turpin' will be all right."

"Of course," said Blake casually, "I shall be Turpin."

"Of course you won't!" said Figgins. "That's the part that's just cut out for me!"

"Well, I was thinking of being Dick Turpin myself," said Manners.

"How singular!" Herries remarked. "It struck me at once that Turpin was a part I could do rippingly!"

"It is weally stwange," said D'Arcy, "but I have been thinkin' that Dick Turpin is just the chawacter I should be able to wepwesent in a weally wippin' mannah."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "And I had earmarked that part for myself, too! And I dare say Kerr and Wynn both thought it was a very suitable part for themselves."

"Just so," said the Co.

"We shall have to give and take," said Tom Merry. "One has to make up one's mind for a little self-sacrifice in these matters, and a chap ought to be willing to give in to the rest for the good of the cause, so I think I had better play Turpin."

"Is that what you call giving in for the good of the cause?"

"You don't understand. It's you others who are to give in for the good of the cause," Tom explained patiently.

"Well, of all the check!"

"Put it to the vote," said Manners.

"That's right," said Tom. "Each of you sing out the name of the chap who is to play Turpin."

It was done, but it did not improve matters, for each of the histrionic aspirants sang out his own name.

"We haven't got much furrarder," said Tom Merry, "I'll set the example of giving in, and I cast my vote for Manners, as the originator of the idea."

That settled the matter. Manners was cast for Dick Turpin.

"And after giving in like that," said Tom, "I think I ought to be awarded the part of Tom King, especially as I have the same name as that chap."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

The same difficulty arose as before, each of the juniors considering that he was specially entitled to play the part of Tom King. But Manners voted for Tom Merry, and that settled it.

"That's all very well," said Blake. "It seems to me that this study is getting all the cream of the thing. You two chaps vote for each other."

"There's some more ripping parts," said Tom Merry. "We had better bring in Jonathan Wild, I think."

"Right!" said Blake. "I'll be satisfied with that."

"No, Blake; we must be fair."

"Fair! What do you mean?"

"Two principal parts have been awarded to the School House, and it's time the New House had a look in."

"Rather!" exclaimed Figgins emphatically.

"So I propose Figgins for Jonathan Wild."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake. "You chaps are awfully generous after you've looked out for yourselves. Let Figgy have it."

"Blake can be the landlord of the inn," said Figgins.

"All right. How do you like that, Blake?"

"Good enough," said Blake. "Consider me a giddy landlord."

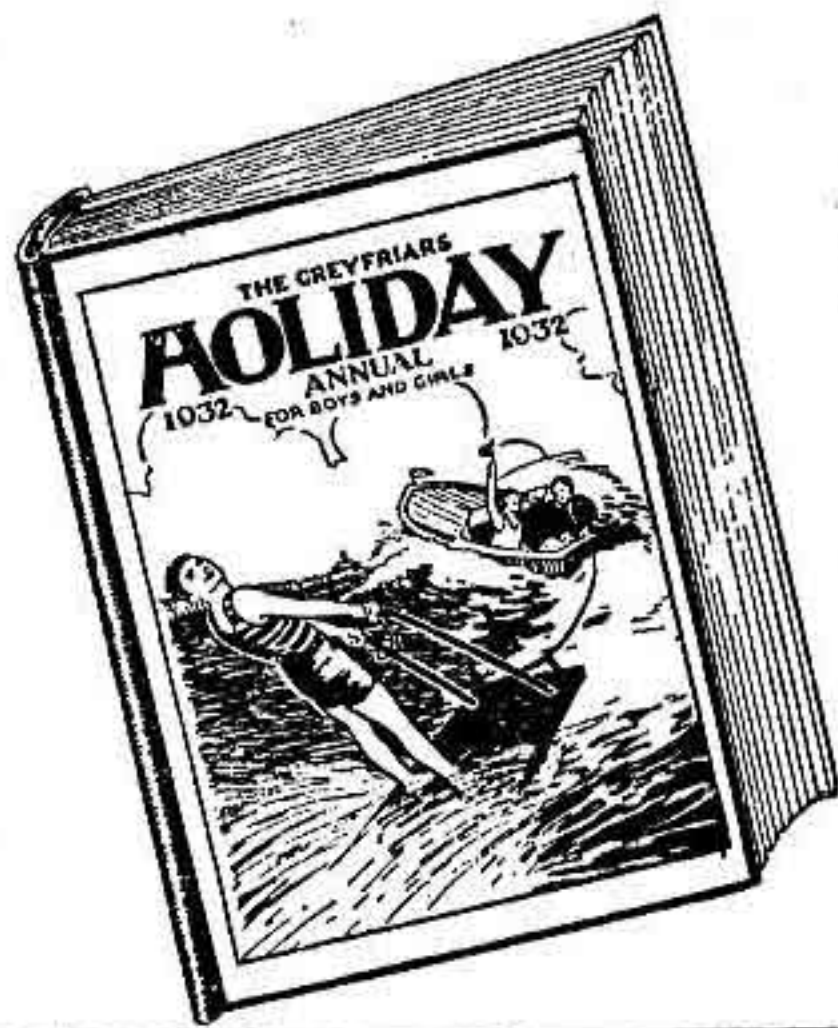
"Let me see, I suppose there are some more characters?" said Tom thoughtfully. "It's a bit difficult setting the parts before the play is written. Never mind. We shall want an ostler, and that will suit Kerr."

"Good!" said Kerr.

"Then a couple of tipstaves," said Tom Merry. "How do you like that, Herries and Wynn?"

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"All right," said Herries.

"I'd rather be Dick Turpin," said Fatty. "Still, I don't want to make trouble. I'll be a tipstave, if you make it a speaking part."

"Well, of course, you won't have much to say—"

"Shan't I? We're going to write the play ourselves, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"Then each of us had better write up his own part, and then he'll be sure of getting a look-in," said Fatty Wynn.

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Kerr.

"We'll settle that afterwards," said Tom Merry hastily. "There's one more part wanted, and that's for D'Arcy."

"I propose D'Arcy for Black Bess," said Figgins solemnly.

"Oh, weally, Figgins!" said Arthur Augustus.

"We want a girl at the inn," said Manners.

"Yes, that's the part for Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"He'll make a nice girl of the inn, if we make him up for the part, and take his eyeglass away."

"Then it's all settled," said Blake. "But what about the horse? We can't have Dick Turpin without the horse. Besides, if he's going to ride to York, he can't ride on foot, can he?"

"I've thought of that," said Tom. "We are going to have Taggles' pony."

"Taggles' pony? But he's a grey-blue-pink-sandy sort of colour."

"Easy enough to paint him black."

"And I've ridden him," said Manners. "He'll make a good enough Black Bess."

"But what will Taggles say?"

"He's agreed to let us have the pony for the occasion for ten bob," said Manners, "and a bob each time for rehearsals."

"Well, that's reasonable. But have you got the Head's permission to have the pony on the stage in the lecture hall?"

"We shan't mention the pony when we ask for the hall for the evening," said Tom. "No need to go into details. The pony will come as a pleasant surprise after the audience are all seated, and then it will be too late for the Head to put his foot down."

"That's jolly deep of you, Tom Merry. We shall have to keep the secret awfully close, or it will leak out."

"Of course, mum's the word!"

"Those kids will be asking a lot of questions when we go out."

"Let 'em ask."

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"It's high time for tea!" he exclaimed. "We've got a pretty good supply of tommy in the study, as it happens. Will you chaps stay to tea?"

"Thanks awfully!" said the chaps.

Further details of the plan were discussed over tea, and the idea which had originated with the Terrible Two, began to develop itself. Meanwhile, Gore was looking through the keyhole. He rose with an expression of disgust.

"It's only a feed, after all!" he exclaimed. "They were jolly mysterious about it, but that's all it is—just a feed!"

"We've been taken in!" said Jimson wrathfully.

And the juniors bestowed a shower of kicks on the door and marched off in a state of extreme indignation.

CHAPTER 4.

Baffling Behaviour.

THE triple alliance seemed to be a great success—at first, at all events.

An unaccustomed calm came over St. Jim's. The sounds of warfare were no longer heard in the quad or the gym, and Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co., and the Terrible Two would meet without chipping each other or passing any kind of rude remarks.

The other fellows in both Houses were amazed at first. Surely the world must be coming to an end when the leaders in the rival Houses ceased from troubling, and the School House and the New House were at rest.

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Questions were showered upon Figgins & Co. in the New House, but Figgins said there was a truce, and that was all there was about it.

"But ain't we going for the School House kids any more, then?" demanded Pratt wrathfully.

"Go for 'em if you like," said Figgins. "Who's preventing you?"

"But ain't you going to lead us?"

"No."

"Then we'll jolly well elect another leader!"

"Go and elect him, then!"

"But—"

"Go and elect him, or go and eat cokernuts, or anything you like, but get out of this study and don't bother me!" said Figgins.

"Look here, Figgy—"

"Oh, travel!"

And Pratt travelled.

Such was the satisfaction Figgins & Co. afforded to the inquirers.

And inquiring souls in the School House met with similar disappointments.

"I say, Tom Merry," remarked Jimson, one day, "those Fourth Form bounders are getting awfully bumptious; it's time we took 'em down a peg or two."

"Is it?" said Tom cheerfully. "Go and take 'em down a peg or two, then."

"Ain't you going to help?"

"Nix!"

"Why not?"

"I'm busy!"

"What are you busy about?"

"Minding my own business!"

And that was all the information Jimson could get.

Mellish looked into Study No. 6 in an inquiring frame of mind, and found Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy so busily occupied that they did not notice him. He stood there looking and listening in amazement.

Blake had a big white apron tied round his waist, and was in his shirt-sleeves. He held a large inkpot in his right hand.

"Ale—good brown ale!" he exclaimed. "My good brown ale is what you want, gentlemen, after your hard ride in the heat o' the sun!"

"Aha—good landlord!" said Herries. "Hast seen a couple of horsemen ride by in haste? By my halidom—"

"Look here, Herries, a tipstave wouldn't say 'By my halidom.' You're not a giddy Crusader!"

"It sounds jolly well!"

"But it's out of place. What is a halidom?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Well, don't you start bringing things into the play that you don't know anything about."

"Well, I can't say, 'By Jove!' or 'My hat!'"

"No; that would sound too modern. Sav—lemme see—'By my sword!'"

"Eh?" said Herries, who was rather dense.

"'By my sword!'"

"I've got one."

"Got one what?"

"A sword."

"Well, of course you have. What are you getting at?"

"I don't want to buy your sword—"

"Ass! I said 'By my sword,' not 'Buy my sword!'" howled Blake.

"Eh?"

"B-Y, by; not B-U-Y!" roared Blake. "That plain enough?"

"Yes, that's plain enough. I can't see why you can't explain what you mean at the start."

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"By my sword," said Herries, "there I behold the rascals drinking in thy garden! Aha, Dick Turpin and Tom Merry—I mean, Dick Turpin and Tom King! I must e'en away and tell this to Figgins—I mean, to Jonathan Wild!"

"Now then, Gussy!"

"These gallant widers shall not fall victims to the hate of their cwuel foes, if I can save them," said D'Arcy.

"I will warn them of their pewil!"

"Good old Gussy! Hallo, Mellish, what do you want?"

"I want to know whether I've come to Colney Hatch by mistake," said Mellish. "What are you thundering idiots doing?"

"Oh, talking! Get out!"

"I've come to speak to you—"

"Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Look here, Blake, what's the game? Those bounders in the Shell want taking down a peg—"

"Scat!"

"They're putting on airs—?"

"Bunk!"

"They say Study No. 6 is played out, and the Fourth Form—"

"Travel!"

"Some of them say we're going to fag for them, as if they were seniors—"

"Roll off!"

"We ain't—"

"March!"

Blake lifted the inkpot high into the air, and Mellish fled, slamming the door after him.

"Those kids in Study No. 6 are off their rockers," Mellish confided to Jimson of the Shell. "They are talking a lot of piffle about Dick Turpin, and Blake had an apron on and an inkpot in his hand. Herries said there was somebody drinking in the garden, and I know jolly well there wasn't!"

Jimson scratched his head.

"I suppose they're a bit barmy in the crumpet," he remarked. "Tom Merry and Manners seem to be off their rockers, too. Manners was cavorting about on Taggles' pony to-day, and saying that he was going to ride to York. Why, Taggles' pony would fall down dead before he got a tenth part of the way, and, besides, he wouldn't be allowed to go."

Fatty Wynn's brilliant suggestion that each character should write-up his own part, to make sure of getting a fair share of the "fat," was partially adopted.

There was a certain difficulty in giving an ostler or a tipstave as big a speaking part as a principal character, but, as the ostler and tipstave said, why should they be left out in the cold?

Meanwhile, Kerr had carried out his part of the bargain, and the necessary funds being placed in his hands, he had obtained the supplies needed for the representation of the thrilling drama, "Dashing Dick Turpin!"

The triple alliance had gone into the thing with keen enthusiasm.

Even games were somewhat neglected in these days, and the Junior House-match itself ceased to wholly occupy the thoughts of the eight juniors. Careless of the comments of outsiders, the enthusiastic eight went their way.



Mellish's eyes opened wide in amazement as he looked into Study No. 6, for Blake stood, with a white apron round his waist, holding an inkpot in his hand, and he and Herries were making extraordinary remarks.

"Of course he wouldn't," said Gore, joining them. "But Manners isn't half so barmy as Tom Merry. What do you think I heard Tom Merry say to-day?"

"Give it up!"

"He said—I was passing his study door: 'Slain! Slain! And by the hand of my dearest comrade! Fly, Dick—fly!'"

"Great Scott!"

"I buzzed into his study like one o'clock!" said Gore. "I thought he was hurt, or something, though I didn't see what he wanted to call Manners 'Dick' for. It isn't his name."

"And what did you see?"

"Nothing. Tom Merry chucked a dictionary at me, and told me to scoot. I scooted."

"Mad as giddy hatters!" said Jimson. "That's the only explanation."

Mad or sane, the triple alliance went on its way serenely. The juniors rehearsed their parts in their own studies, and sometimes met together in a secluded spot for a general rehearsal.

The play was gradually written, mended, remended, improved, added to, subtracted from, till it began to assume a really business-like shape.

Tom Merry had asked for the use of the lecture hall on a certain Saturday evening, and it had been granted.

He had carefully refrained from mentioning the part Taggles' pony was to take in the representation.

The date of the performance having been fixed, the juniors threw themselves into the work of rehearsing more keenly than ever.

Naturally enough, the matter was in their minds at times which were supposed to be devoted to study. The masters of the Shell and the Fourth were sometimes puzzled, and sometimes exasperated, in consequence.

"Merry," exclaimed Mr. Linton, in the Shell class-room one morning—"Merry, what were you whispering to Manners?"

Tom gave a jump.

"Whispering, sir?"

"Yes; do you deny that you were whispering?"

"N-no, sir," said Tom, who, whatever his faults might be, never told an untruth.

"Then what were you saying?"

"Nothing of any consequence, sir."

"I insist upon you repeating whatever it was aloud. Private matters should not be discussed in the class-room."

The whole form," said Mr. Linton severely, "are entitled to hear everything that is said in this room."

"Yes, sir."
"Therefore kindly repeat aloud what you were saying to Manners."

"Yes, sir."
"I am waiting, Merry."

"Shoot—shoot, and I will risk it!" said Tom.

"Eh?"
"Shoot—shoot, and I will risk it!"

"Are you mad, Merry?"

"No, sir."
"Then what do you mean by such an utterly meaningless reply to me?" shouted Mr. Linton.

"You asked me what I said to Manners, sir."

"Is that what you said to Manners?"

"Yes, sir."
"And why did you say such a thing?"

"It's—it's a line from a play, sir."
"Oh, indeed! And what play, pray, contains such a line as that?"

"'Dashing Dick Turpin,' sir."

"What? There is no such play!"

"Yes, there is, sir; we've written it ourselves."

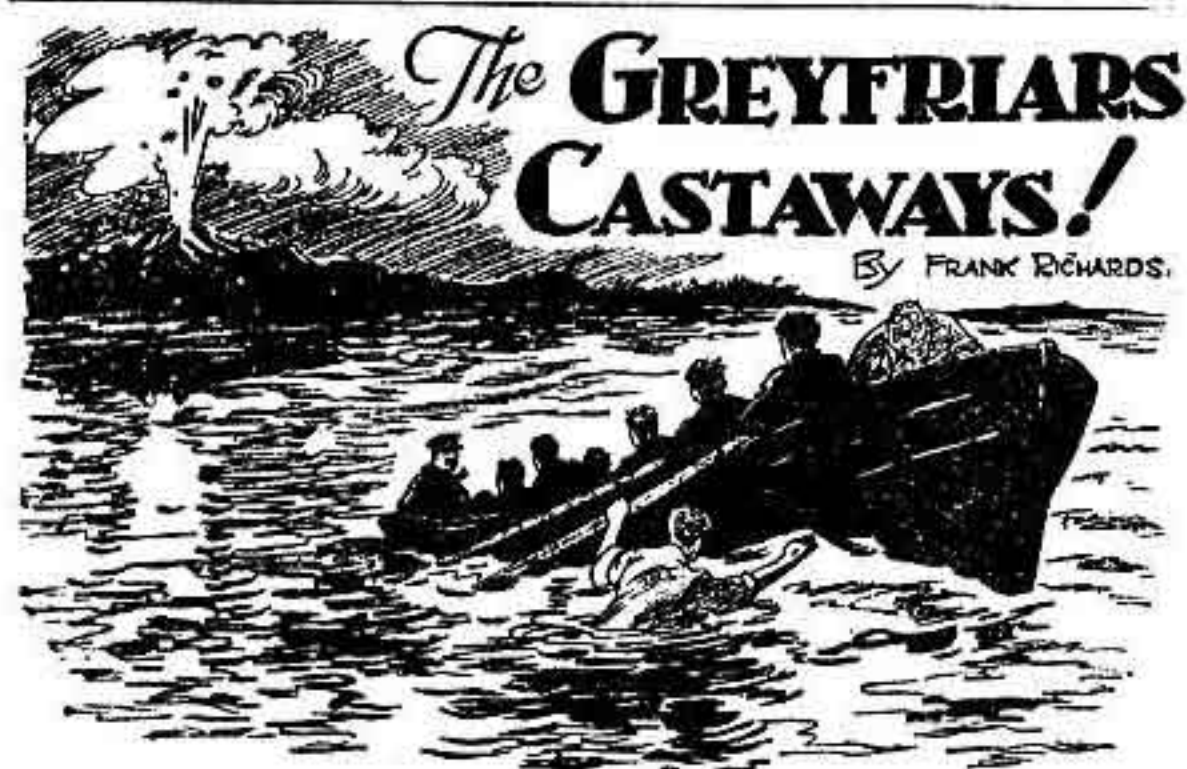
"Oh, I perceive! That is what is taking up your attention to the exclusion of your lessons," said Mr. Linton witheringly.

"Yes, sir," said Tom, in his cheerful way.

"Then you will write out a hundred lines from the 'Enid,' Merry, as a reminder that there is a time for all things," said Mr. Linton.

"Certainly, sir."

Mr. Lathom, in the Fourth Form, had his worries, too. Figgins & Co., and Study No. 6 all belonged to the Fourth,



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and they would compare notes in class, and sometimes make absent-minded answers.

"Urbs antiqua fuit," Herries started construing one morning. "And ancient city there was, York—"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom.

Herries turned red.

"I mean Carthage, sir."

"You may go on."

"'Italiam contra Tiberinaque longe ostia—'"

"You may construe, Herries."

"Fronting Italy," said Herries, "and the mouth of the Thames—"

"The what?"

"The Tiber, sir. And—and—"

"You may go on, Blake."

Blake came out of a brown study.

"Ale, good brown ale!" he exclaimed. "What you want is my good brown ale, gentlemen, after your ride in the heat of the sun."

"Blake!"

Blake's countenance assumed a charming crimson hue.

"I—I mean, sir, 'Ostia, dives opum, studiisque asperima belli—'"

"You will take fifty lines. Figgins, go on where Blake left off!"

"Give us deep tankards of thine ale, landlord," said Figgins. "'Truly we have ridden far and hard, and with good reason. Ha, ha!'"

"Figgins!"

"Yes, sir."

"What is that rubbish you are talking?"

"I—I—you told me to go on where Blake left off, sir," stammered Figgins.

"I was referring to Virgil, Figgins. You are evidently thinking of something else. Take fifty lines. D'Arcy, construe."

"These gallant widers," said D'Arcy, "shall not fall victims to the hate of their cruel foes if I can save them."

"Take fifty lines, D'Arcy!" shouted Mr. Lathom. "I think the class has lost its senses. The next boy who makes an absurd answer will be caned."

And the amateur dramatists woke up to their surroundings at that warning, and no more quotations from "Dashing Dick Turpin" were made for a time.

But little incidents like this, of course, soon put the other fellows on the track.

"It's a giddy play they're getting up," said Mellish to Gore. "I wonder we didn't tumble to it before!"

"I've just found out that Tom Merry has got permission to use the lecture hall next Saturday for what he calls a dramatic representation," remarked Gore.

"Yes, that's the secret. They're going to do 'Dick Turpin.'"

"Oh, now I understand!" Jimson exclaimed.

"Understand what?"

"I just heard Tom Merry say to Blake, 'in the old barn at five sharp, and tell Figgins!'"

"Aha! That means a rehearsal," said Gore. "A rehearsal of the whole lot of them. And that's what Tom Merry meant by the triple alliance."

"That's it."

"Well, I think it wouldn't be a bad idea to get 'em an audience," said Gore. "Let's get all the fellows to go and catch 'em spouting their silly piffle."

"Good wheeze!"

And Gore's idea was instantly taken up, and nearly all the Shell and the Fourth Form joined in the idea.

CHAPTER 5.

Ructions at the Rehearsal!

TOM MERRY looked round the old barn.

It was very near to St. Jim's, and easy of access, and as it was in a ruinous condition and never used for anything, it was very convenient for rehearsals.

"Are we all here?" asked Tom.

"We're here," said Figgins & Co. "Manners hasn't come in yet."

"He's gone for Taggles' pony," said Blake.

"He won't be a minute," said Tom Merry. "May as well start. The next rehearsal will be a full dress one, but this time we'll go through as we are. Manners will be here with Dobbin by the time his call comes. Got your parts, all of you?"

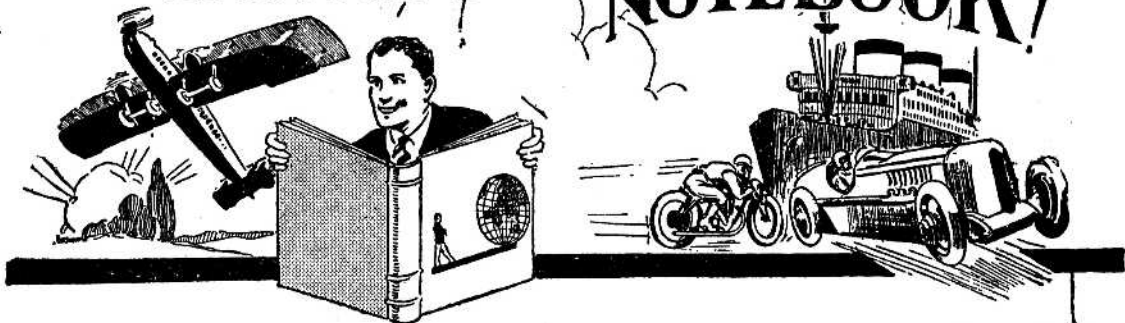
"I haven't," said Herries. "I know mine by heart."

"You've a rotten memory, though. You know the way you chop up Shakespeare. Never mind; if you're word perfect, it's all right. Blake, you're the landlord of the inn, standing at your door with an empty tankard in your hand. That's the first scene. D'Arcy is the girl looking

(Continued on page 12.)

THE NEWS OF THE WEEK COMES FROM—

The Editor's NOTE-BOOK!



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

WHAT have we got for next week? Well, chums, it's not necessary for me to glance at my notebook to jog my memory regarding next Wednesday's story of the Chums of St. Jim's. I read it for the second time, quite recently, and the yarn so impressed me that it will remain vivid in my memory for some time. You know how, when you have read an exceptionally good story, you remember it for quite a long time afterwards—well, I feel sure, good as all the GEM yarns are, you won't forget next week's yarn for a long time to come! The title is:

"THE GREAT STAMP MYSTERY!"
and it is told by popular Martin Clifford in his most fascinating style.

Owen Conquest, too, has written "the goods"—a really ripping Rookwood yarn of Jimmy Silver & Co., and his merry men of the Fourth. The chums receive a set-back when Hansom & Co. of the Fifth, score over them, but you can be sure the Fourth get the last laugh with Jimmy Silver leading them! You'll get a large-sized laugh, too, when, in

"THE REFORM OF THE FOURTH!"
you read how the Fifth are "dished."

I have received many letters already from GEM readers, praising the thrilling series:

"THE WINGER!"

and I am heartily pleased to know that my choice is proving so popular. You'll thoroughly enjoy reading next week's gripping story of the super-crook and his Cockney opponent, Snap Fano. In it, Snap joins up with "The Winger," which, no doubt, seems surprising. But the young detective has very good reasons for doing so, as you will learn when you read this thrilling yarn.

To conclude these notes on next week's splendid programme, Potts, the Office-boy, "does his stuff" in his usual laugh-provoking manner, and there will be some more interesting news from your Editor.

Now, where's my notebook? I've got some good facts for you to read.

WRITING MADE EASY!

"Two hundred lines? Poo! That's easy!" That's what you would say when your Form master handed out a stiff imposition if you possessed the remarkable qualities of Thea Alba, the German girl. This amazing girl can write with both hands, and—wait for it—both feet as well! Hardly sounds believable, does it, yet Thea Alba satisfied a group of famous

medical men that her claim is genuine, for in their presence she wrote the words Rome, London, Paris, and Sofia with both hands and feet working simultaneously but independently of each other, while the learned medical men were gasping. It has been suggested by more than one reader, that Martin Clifford writes with both hands at the same time—how else his enormous output? But I do know for a fact that he can't write with his feet!

WAKING TO MUSIC!

No need to shudder and say nasty things at the alarm-clock when it rouses you from your slumbers these days, for a very special alarm-clock has just been invented that wakes you to music! Instead of that hideous tocsin on the bell, which tells you that it's time to turn out, there is a soothing melody, selected overnight, which starts to play the moment the appointed time comes round. This new gramophone attachment to the much abused alarm-clock will doubtless attract many admirers, but it is doubtful whether it will serve as useful a purpose as the old alarm, for music in the morning may induce sleep instead of wakefulness!

HEARD THIS ONE?

Father (examining school report): "Son, this is disgraceful! Here am I, paying for special tuition in arithmetic, and after two terms of it all you can do is to count up to ten. What on earth will you be when you grow up?"

Son: "A boxing referee, father!"

HOW DOES THE BUSY BEE . . .

Tap, tap, tap! The bees are walking. And as they walk into their hives, so a cunningly concealed microphone records each tap for the benefit of the hive owner who can now determine just how many bees there are in each of his hives! But if they FLY in, you may say—what then? The answer is they don't fly in; they can't. The entrance to the hive is made so small that the busy bees simply have to walk over the microphone or else stay outside. The microphonic taps are amplified in their turn, and so set working a complicated apparatus that counts the number of bees entering the hive. The number of stings that rewarded the intrepid merchant who first fixed the microphone in the hive entrance, is not recorded, but doubtless he can tell with more truth than his precious instrument can just how many bees make a hive.

THE TREKKER!

Porridge, bacon-and-eggs and hefty slices of bread, butter, and marmalade must have been a frequent dream of young Jimmy Shields, the wanderer, about whom all Australia recently has been talking, when he woke up morning after morning, "somewhere in Australia." Jimmy—a hardy four year old, filled with the spirit of the wanderlust, had disappeared from his home for six whole days. He was found eventually at a camp in Hillston, forty-five miles from his home, very torn and bedraggled and very hungry. On being questioned, he told the astonishing story that he had lived entirely on grass for the six days he had been absent. The weather had been intensely cold and ditto wet; but Jimmy's diet had apparently kept him going, and he is no doubt none the worse for his experience. Hikers, take note!

THE SPEED CRAZE!

"You want measuring for a motor-cycle, sir? Come this way." No, it's not the tailor speaking—it's the streamline expert of the motor-cycle factory doing his stuff. The craze for speed is reaching such heights that a motor-cycle has actually been built and fitted to its rider to ensure a hundred per cent streamline effect. This particular machine is said to be capable of 170 miles per hour. From a head-on view it presents a weird and formidable appearance, is armour plated, and fitted with a specially-designed super-charger. At the moment there is no talk of adding a special streamlined carrier for a pillion-rider, but that, doubtless, will not be overlooked!

THE WARNING FOOT!

Honk, honk! The fellows in a Chester garage were amazed beyond measure to hear a car singing away on its horn without any sign of a human being in attendance. Their wonderment increased when they spotted the noisy car, for it was ablaze and the entire contents of the garage seemed in imminent danger of following suit. Fortunately, the local fire brigade arrived in time, and succeeded in emptying the garage of the other vehicles before any real damage could be done, but the unfortunate car that had sounded the warning, and so saved its fellows, was a total wreck. The car in question was not a Singer!

SCHOOLBOY HOWLER!

A Persian cat is a cat that puts.

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"St. Jim's on the Stage!"

(Continued from page 10.)

out of the window? Dick Turpin and Tom King ride up, or, rather, Dick Turpin rides up. Tom King comes in on foot, having left his horse behind the scenes——"

"Where are you going to get the other horse from?" asked Herries.

"There isn't any other horse."

"But you say Tom King leaves it behind the scenes."

"Yes; but he hasn't one, fathead!"

"How can he leave it behind the scenes if he hasn't one?"

"Fathead!" shrieked Tom Merry. "The audience suppose that he leaves it behind the scenes."

"They won't suppose anything of the kind! You can't take in a lot of chaps like that."

"I tell you Tom King comes in on foot, and the audience can think what they blessed well like!" said Tom Merry. "I shall be wearing spurs, and so it will look as if I've just left my horse to an ostler. Manners gets off Black Bess and gives it to Kerr."

"What does he give it to Kerr for?"

"Kerr's the ostler at the inn."

"I lead it away," said Kerr. "I hope Dobbin will go quietly. Taggles has taught him to look out for us, you know, and he shies sometimes when we go near him."

"Hallo! Here's Dick Turpin!"

Manners came into the barn leading Taggles' pony by the bridle.

The pony was a plump little animal, but though he was usually of a quiet nature, he looked a little restive now.

"Here we are again!" said Manners. "All ready?"

"Yes; and waiting for you. Get on!"

"Give us a bunk-up, somebody!"

Manners received the required bunk, and sat astride of the pony.

"Now, Blake," said Tom Merry, who was stage-manager as well as a highwayman, "get on with the patter! You're standing at the door of the inn."

"Right-ho! 'A fine, bright sunny day,'" said Blake.

"Ha! What is that I see? Two horsemen, riding in hot haste towards mine inn; and, by my soul, 'tis Dick Turpin and Tom Merry——"

"Tom King, Tom King, Tom King!"

"Yes, that was a slip. 'And, by my soul, it is Dick Turpin and Tom King! Welcome, gentlemen!' You've got to come in here now, you two."

"Come on, Manners!"

Manners dug his heels into Dobbin's flanks, and dashed up to the door of the imaginary inn. Blake made a spring to get out of the way.

"Look out!" he yelled. "You'll be over me in a minute!"

Manners dragged on the rein and succeeded in stopping the pony.

"Good landlord——"

"Take care of the beastly pony!"

"Good landlord, we have ridden hard to-day!"

"Ale, good brown ale!" said Blake. "What you want is my brown ale, gentlemen, after your ride in the heat of the sun."

"Give us deep tankards of your ale, landlord," said Tom Merry. "Truly we have ridden hard, and with good reason. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed Herries.

"Stop that cackling, Herries! You don't laugh! You're not on in this show at all."

Tom Merry turned to Blake again.

"We will repose ourselves awhile in thy garden, good host," he said. "Take our horses, I prithee, ostler, and give them good cheer."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr. "I mean, 'I will e'en do so, good gentlemen, for truly I know you are of the right sort.'"

Manners slid off the back of Dobbin. Dobbin turned to trot out of the barn, and Kerr dragged on the bridle.

"This way, you brute! Come on, you stupid beast!"

The pony reluctantly allowed Kerr to lead him to the back of the barn.

"Let us drink and rest in this fair garden, Tom King," exclaimed Manners. "It will not be long ere we shall be forced to ride again, if Jonathan Wild and his myrmidons get on the track. Come on, I prithee!"

"Gaily will I drink to the life of the road!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What life so gay as that of a giddy highwayman—— I mean, 'a bold highwayman!'"

And the two heroes strolled off arm-in-arm into an imaginary garden.

Enter Herries.

"Aha, good landlord," said Herries, "hast seen a couple of horsemen ride by in haste? By my sword, there I behold the rascals drinking in thy garden! Dick Turpin and Tom King! I must e'en away and tell this to my master, Jonathan Wild!"

Exit Herries.

"Now, Gussy!"

"Yaas, Tom Mewwy, what do you want?"

"I want you to say your part, ass!"

"Oh, I am weally sowwy! 'These gallant widers shall not fall victims to the hate of their cwuel foes, if I can save them,'" said Arthur Augustus. "I will warn them of their pewil."

"Now, then, Blake!"

"Go! Haste, good lass, and warn Dick Turpin and Tom King, that Fig—Jonathan Wild is on the track with his tipstaves!" said Blake.

"Good mastah, I will fly!"

"Brave lads are they!" said Blake. "They spend their gold right freely, and we will baffle the wiles of the thief-taker."

"We will, weally!" said Arthur Augustus. "If they were taken it would lie upon my consh!"

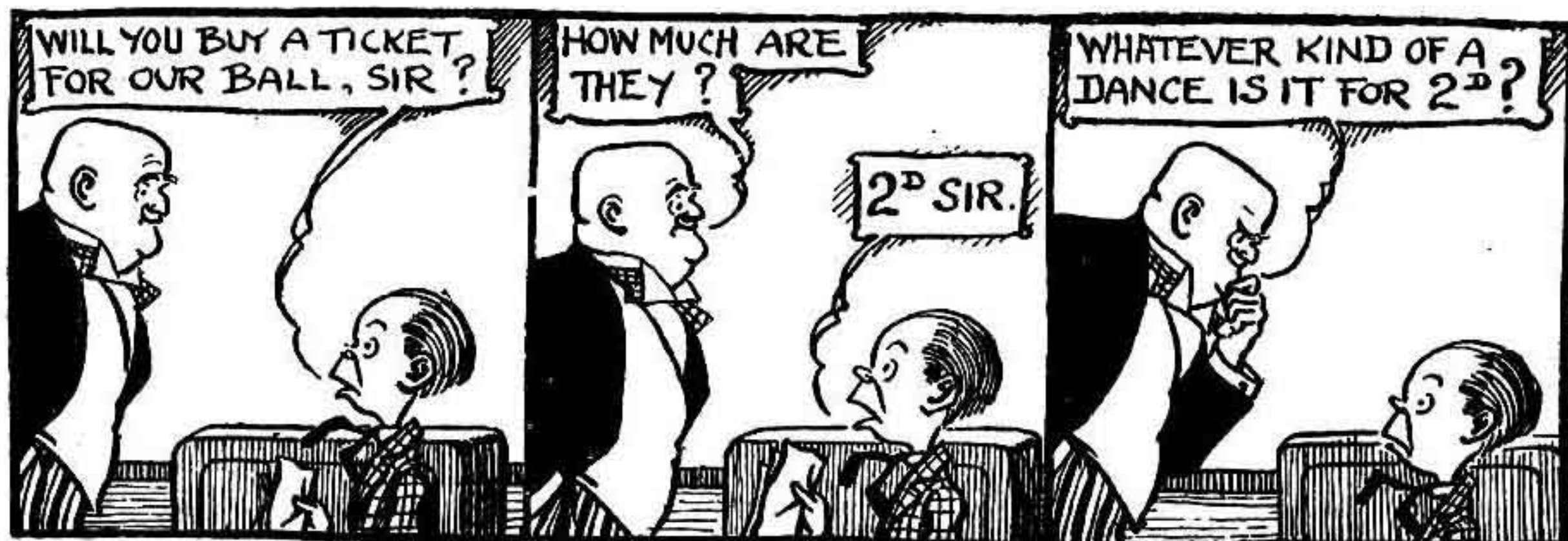
"Your what?"

"My consh."

"What the dickens is a consh?"

"Weally, Blake, you are most dense! Conscience, deah boy!"

Potts, the Office Boy!.....



"Do you think they talked that silly rot two hundred years ago?" roared Blake. "Make it conscience."
 "It is extremewly wude of you to chawactewise my wemarks as wot!" said Arthur Augustus. "It would not be consistent with my dig to—"

"I'll dig you if you don't stop playing the giddy goat!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "We'll out the word out," said Tom Merry hastily. "Let's change the line to 'If they were taken it would make me suffer great grief.'"
 "I'm not an unweasonable fellah," said D'Arcy. "I am quite weady to accept your suggestion, Tom Mewwy. 'If they were taken it would make me suff gweat gwief.'"

"Suffer, aas!"
 "Suff, deah boy!"
 "Oh, change it again!" said Blake. "It's no good talking to Gussy when he gets on the high horse!"
 "If they were taken," said Tom Merry reflectively, "'it would break my heart!'"
 "Vewy good!" said D'Arcy. "'If they were taken it would bweak my heart!'"
 "Then warn them at once, good lass, ere it be too late!"
 "I will huwwy!"

D'Arcy dashed into the imaginary garden.
 "Dangah!" he cried. "Good fwriends, you are in deadly dangah! Jonathan Wild is on the woad with his extremewly wuff followahs—"

"His rough followahs, fathead!"
 "His wuff followahs, fathead!" said D'Arcy. "Fly—fly, my fwriends, ere the wascal can awwive!"
 "My horse—my horse!" cried Manners. "Bring me my bonnie Black Bess!"
 "My horse—my horse!" cried Tom Merry. "Ha, it is too late; the enemy is here!"

Enter Figgins.
 "At last, Tom King, I have hunted thee down!" cried Figgins. "Surrender, villain, to the officer of the law!"
 "Shan't—I mean, I defy thee, base and crawling myrmidon!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Ha, would you lay vile hands upon me?"
 "Rather!" said Figgins.

And he laid his vile hands upon Tom Merry, and they began to struggle.
 Meanwhile, Kerr had rushed in, leading Taggles' pony, and Manners, not without some difficulty, had clambered upon his back.

A huge, old-fashioned pistol was in Manners' hand.
 "Release my comrade, base spy!" he shouted. "Release him, or I shoot!"
 "Rats! I mean, 'Never—never! Tipstaves, to my aid!"

Herries and Wynn rushed in.
 "We are here, good Master Wild!"
 "Seize this villain!"
 "Shoot—shoot, and I will risk it!" shouted Tom Merry.
 "I fear I shall hit thee, Tom."
 "Shoot—shoot, and I will risk it!"

Click!
 Manners had pulled the trigger.
 "Slain—slain, and by the hand of my best comrade!" cried Tom Merry. "Fly—fly, Dick!"
 "Horrors!" said Manners. "I have slain my comrade, and the base myrmidon has escaped. I will not fly; I will die by his side!"

"Fly—fly! They are too many for you!"
 "Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.
 "Ass! You say, 'Fly—fly!'"
 "Fly—fly," then, said Arthur Augustus.
 "Yes, I will fly!" said Manners. "Jonathan Wild, if you would find me, seek me at York!"
 "At York?"
 "To York—to York!" cried Manners.

And he wheeled Taggles' pony and dashed away. In his excitement he forgot that he was in the barn, and Taggles' pony had a narrow escape of knocking his brains out against the wall. Manners dragged him round towards the door.
 There was a yell in the doorway. It was blocked up by juniors laughing themselves hoarse and husky.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore. "Did you ever see such piffle?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Hear us smile!"
 "Get out of the way!" gasped Manners, trying in vain to pull Dobbin in. "Get out of the way, you silly asses!"
 The pony, thoroughly frightened by the uproar, was bolting.

The juniors scattered before its rush, and it darted through the wide doorway like an arrow, Manners dragging at the reins in vain.

The rest of the amateur actors rushed after the unfortunate Dick Turpin, and stared after him in dismay, as they saw him streaking across the field, trying in vain to control the frantic pony.
 "My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Suppose the brute did that in the lecture hall on Saturday!"

The pony was making for the gate, to get back to the school. A motor came hooting and snorting down the lane, and that added the finishing touch to the excitement of Dobbin.

He dashed across the lane and into the open gates of St. Jim's, and instead of stopping at Taggles' lodge, he continued on his wild career.

Round the quad he dashed with flying heels, Manners having all his work cut out to stick on his back and save himself from a bad fall.

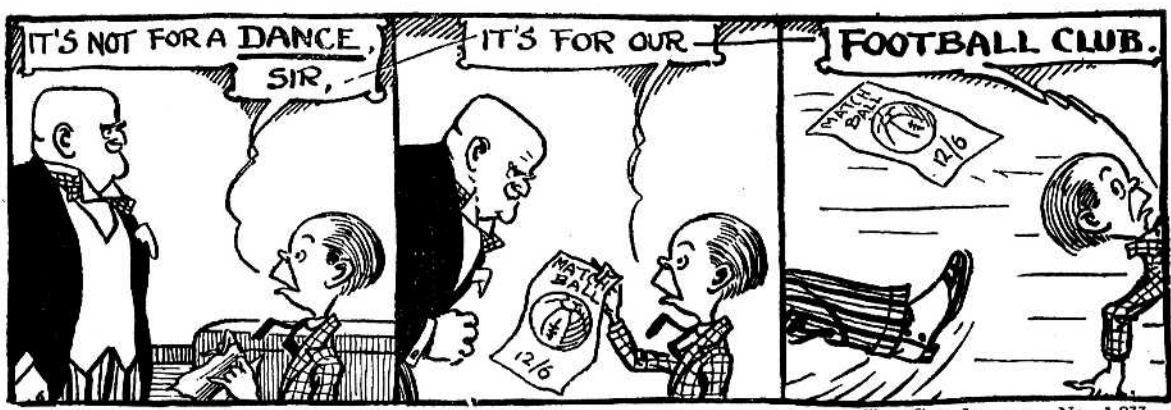
Tom Merry and the rest of the triple alliance, and Gore and his party, followed fast, fearing an accident; and they looked on in dismay as the pony trampled over the Head's favourite flower-beds.

"Hi, there!" roared Taggles. "What are you doing with that pony?"
 "It's rather, what's the pony doing with him?" murmured Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

Taggles rushed to secure Dobbin. He usually had no difficulty with the pony; but Dobbin was not now in his usual mood. He reared and bucked away from Taggles, and went off in a new direction, trampling along a gravel path.
 Taggles pursued with shouts and gesticulations, which only added to the pony's excitement.
 Tom Merry gave a sudden yell.
 "Look out, Herr Schneider!"

The German master of St. Jim's was walking slowly along a path, his spectacles on his nose, and a German newspaper held in front of him. He was reading the paper as he walked, a really careless habit.

“GOAL!”



"Look out, Schneider!"

"Get out of the way!" gasped Manners.

He dragged desperately on the reins.

Herr Schneider looked over the top of the paper, and stood petrified as he saw the pony rushing at him full tilt.

"Mein Gott!" he gasped.

Not a movement did he make to save himself. There was no time.

Manners dragged on the rein till his arm seemed to be coming out of its socket, and at the last moment Dobbin swerved, missed the German master by about a foot, and rushed past him.

Herr Schneider tottered.

"Mein Gott!"

He sat down in the gravel, and remained there gasping. The pony dashed on.

But Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had seen the wild career of Manners from his study window, and had come out of the School House.

It was quick work for the captain to seize the pony's bridle and force him to stop. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was also coming up. He gave Manners a hand to dismount, and then laid a hand on his collar.

"What does this mean, Manners?" he inquired pleasantly.

"The blessed animal bolted, sir!" gasped Manners.

"What were you doing on Taggles' pony at all?"

"I—I—I—"

"Taggles, take your pony!"

"Yes, sir."

"What was Manners doing, riding your pony?"

"They was a-re'earsing, sir," said Taggles.

"A what?"

"A-re'earsing."

"What does he mean, Manners?"

"Rehearsing, sir."

"Oh, and what were you rehearsing?"

Manners was silent. He realised that if he replied to Mr. Railton's question, the secret would be out.

"Did you hear me, Manners?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, answer me, then. You may take your pony away, Taggles, and I think you had better not lend it to Manners again."

"I'll take jolly good care of that," mumbled Taggles, as he led Dobbin off the scene.

"Now, Manners, what were you rehearsing?"

"A—a—I—I—"

"Mein Gott, I vas startled out of mein life und skin after! I have nefer been so much startled out of mein skin sometimes before!"

"I am sorry, sir," said Manners.

"Ach! But I have been made to joomp after! I have been injured in te nerves by te shock. Mr. Railton, you vill cane tat poy pefore!"

"Unless you explain to me immediately, Manners, I shall certainly cane you."

Manners cast a helpless glance at Tom Merry, who had now come up.

"Merry, I suppose you know all about this. What was this rehearsing in which Taggles' pony seems to have taken the principal part?"

"We—we were— You see, sir—"

"Ah! I hear that you have asked the Head for the hall on Saturday evening for a play to be produced by the Juniors of both Houses?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were rehearsing the play?"

"Ye-e-es."

Tom Merry made the reply reluctantly, but there was no help for it.

"Then Taggles' pony is intended to take part in the representation on Saturday evening?" asked the Housemaster.

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Indeed! What is the name of your play?"

"'Dashing Dick Turpin,' sir."

"Oh! And Taggles' pony is Black Bess, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"And if he bolted in the lecture hall—"

"Oh, he wouldn't do that, sir."

"How do you know he would not?"

"Well, I—I don't think he would."

"That is hardly convincing enough, Merry. I am afraid it will be necessary for you to change your programme, or else abandon the scheme altogether. It will be quite impossible for Taggles' pony to be admitted to the hall."

"Oh, sir."

"I am sorry to cause you any disappointment, Merry," said the Housemaster, kindly enough, "but the idea was

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an extremely reckless one, and it is fortunate that I have learned in time what your absurd intention was."

"We could get another horse, sir," said Tom eagerly.

"I'm not particularly gone on Taggles' pony. It's a sandy coloured brute, anyway, and we should have to do a lot of painting him. I could get a horse in the village—"

"Merry, understand me once and for all—it is impossible for any animal to be taken into the lecture hall."

And Mr. Railton, with a warning wag of his forefinger, walked into the School House.

The members of the triple alliance stood looking at each other in dismay, and they were not comforted by the grinning and jeering of Gore, Jimson, and the rest.

"Come to my study and talk it over," said Tom Merry dolefully.

And the triple alliance went into that famous apartment to hold a council of war.



CHAPTER 6.

A Change in the Programme.

TOM MERRY sat on the table and wrinkled his boyish brows in deep thought.

The triple alliance waited for him to speak. They were all looking considerably glum.

"Well," said Tom, looking round, "this is a bit of a setback, and we can't get over it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Railton says we can't have the pony or any other quadruped in the lecture hall. There's no bucking against what Railton says."

"Then what's to be done?" asked Herries.

"I vote that we scrag Manners for giving the show away," suggested Figgins.

"Good idea!" chimed in the Co.

Manners reached out in a casual way for a cricket stump. But Tom Merry waved his hand to enjoin peace.

"That wouldn't do any good," he said, "Besides, it

wasn't Manners' fault. Gore and those other kids frightened the pony by yelling, and it was really their fault that Dobbin bolted. It was a stroke of bad luck."

"Yaas, wathah."

"We've got to take things as they are," continued Tom. "It's no good thinking of what might have been. The cat's out of the bag now, and we can't have any Black Bess on the stage. That seems to me to knock 'Dick Turpin' on the head."

"'Dick Turpin' without Black Bess would be a bit off," agreed Blake. "But we've written the whole blessed play—"

"It can't be helped."

"And learned our parts—"

"I know it's rotten."

"And there's only three days to Saturday."

"Yes, it's fearful bad luck."

"So if we don't give Turpin and Black Bess, I don't see, for one, what we're going to give."

"Give up the ideah," suggested Arthur Augustus.

Every eye was turned witheringly upon him.

"Dry up!" said Tom Merry. "After asking for the hall, what silly asses we should look to go sneaking round and saying that we didn't want it, after all."



Dragging desperately at the reins, Manners endeavoured to stop the frightened pony as it dashed towards the petrified Herr Schneider, but without success. "Get out of the way!" gasped the junior.

"And how the chaps would ship us," said Blake. "It's all over the school that we're going to give a dramatic representation on Saturday evening, and if we don't give one we shall be chipped to death."

"That's absolutely certain."

"We must give something!" exclaimed Figgins. "'Dick Turpin' without Black Bess would be rot, so it will have to be something else. The question is, what?"

"'The Wood to Wuin,'" said D'Arcy.

"Rot!" was the general verdict.

"No, weally, a fellah told my cousin that it was—"

"Don't make any more suggestions, Gussy. Sit tight, and dry up."

"I wefuse—I distinctly wefuse—"

"Brain him, somebody. Now, I said all along that 'Hamlet' was the thing," said Figgins.

"What price the 'Merchant of Venice'?" demanded Herries.

"Oh, don't start all that again!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"We've barred all those. We shall have to come back to my original idea."

"Never knew you had any," said Figgins. "The idea of a dramatic society was boned from us. The New House Amateur Dramatic Society was the first—"

"My idea was 'Little Red Riding Hood,'"

"I don't think much of that."

"You don't think much at all, in my opinion, Figgins."

"Well, we must decide on something," said Blake, "and I think you'll agree that we couldn't learn our parts in 'Hamlet' or 'The Merchant of Venice' in three days."

"N-no, I suppose not."

"We've got to have the thing for Saturday."

"That's a dead cert. Whatever we give has got to be given on Saturday, at the time arranged, or else we shall be sniggered at all over St. Jim's, so I suggest 'Little Red Riding Hood.'"

"Have you got the thing written out?" asked Figgins.

"I wrote out a lot of it," said Tom. "We can soon knock it into shape."

"What about the parts?"

"Well, Figgins will make a good wolf," said Tom. "His face—"

"I don't want to quarrel with anybody," said Figgins; "but any remarks about my face will lead to a row."

"Well, anyway, you're all right for the wolf. Little Red Riding Hood will be Fatty Wynn, as he's got a smooth phiz."

"I'm ready," said Fatty.

"You won't make a very slim girl, that's certain," said Tom; "but it can't be helped. I think you chaps might see he doesn't gorge as much as usual the next few days."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "He shan't have any pastry or sweets again till after Saturday."

"Here, what's that?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

"No more sweets or pastry till after Saturday."

"Catch me!"

"If I catch you eating any, my boy, I'll warm you!" said Figgins. "Do you think we are going to have a Red Riding Hood as fat as a barrel because you must go on eating like a giddy rhinoceros? Not much!"

"That's settled," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Now, I think I shall do very well for the huntsman."

"Good enough!"

"Herries will do for the grandmother, because he's got a bad memory, and the old girl won't have to say much."

"Oh, I don't care!" said Herries.

"Blake will be Little Red Riding Hood's fiancee."

"Her what?"

"Her fiance. Her giddy young man, if you like that better."

"She never had one."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I never heard of him."

"There are lots of things you never heard of, Blake. What you don't know would fill a book."

"Oh, keep your wool on!"

"Well, don't criticise, then. We must have eight characters, or some of us will be left out. You'll be a fiance, and we'll put it on the programme, and show the Upper Form fellows we know French as well as they do."

"Well, there's something in that. Shall I have to fiance?"

"To what?"

"To fiance? I suppose that's what a fiance does?"

"You're not going to fyongs with me, whatever you mean by fyongs!" said Fatty Wynn.

"We'll settle what you're to do afterwards," said Tom Merry. "We're fixing up the parts now. Now, we've got Figgins as the wolf, Herries as the grandmother, Fatty as the girl, Blake as her fiance, and myself as the huntsman. Kerr, D'Arcy, and Manners will have to be villagers."

"That's rather a come-down after Dick Turpin," said Manners.

"Oh, don't grumble! It's all for the good of the cause."

"I'm not grumbling."

"It's settled, then," said Tom. "Kerr will have to see to the costumes. It's lucky he got the last lot on hire instead of buying them, as we thought at first. You must see to all that by Friday, Kerr."

"Trust me!" said Kerr.

And the meeting of the triple alliance broke up. They felt rather proud of themselves for having so quickly repaired the programme which had been "busted" by the Housemaster's decision.

"Talking does make one hungry!" said Fatty Wynn, feeling in his pockets as he went out of the School House.

Figgins looked at him suspiciously.

"Where are you going, Fatty?"

"Only across to the tuckshop. I'll catch you up."

"That you won't!" said Figgins, catching him by the collar. "You'll come along with us, my pippin!"

"What are you up to, Figgy?"

"You heard what I agreed with Tom Merry about. You're not going to have any more pastry or sweets till after Saturday."

"Oh rats!"

"I'm going to keep my word. We can't have a Little Red Riding Hood weighing half a ton. Come along!"

"I won't!"

"Won't you? Take his other arm, Kerr."

Kerr promptly obeyed. Fatty Wynn made a desperate attempt to escape, but his comrades held him fast, and he was marched into the New House.

Figgy was a man of his word. Not once did they take their eyes off Fatty till the school tuckshop was closed, and then he was allowed at large again. All his pleadings were in vain, though they were most pathetic.

"I've had a beastly small tea," said Fatty—"only a few eggs, and a cake, and some ham, and a couple of potatoes, and some sardines, and some bread-and-butter. I'm fearfully hungry!"

"You must be," said Figgins. "I hope it will do you good for a change. Anyway, here you stick till the tuckshop's closed!"

And he did!

CHAPTER 7.

Fasters for Two.

"WHAT have you got there, Blake?" asked Pratt curiously.

Pratt was behind Blake in the Fourth Form room, and he had observed that the chief of Study No. 6 had something under his desk that he seemed to take a great interest in. Blake looked round.

"Nothing in particular, Pratt."

"I know you've got something there!" the New House junior asserted suspiciously. "Is it toffee?"

"Nix."

"Well, it looked like it!"

"Lots of things look like what they're not!" said Blake oracularly.

"If it isn't toffee, what is it?"

"Nothing that you need worry about, Pratt."

"Toffee?" said Fatty Wynn, who was next to Pratt. "Has Blake got any toffee there?"

"I believe he has, but he doesn't want to hand it round."

"I say, Blake, old chap—"

"Hallo, Fatty! Fat as ever?"

"Have you got any toffee there?"

"My dear kid, you know you're not to have any toffee till after Saturday!"

"Look here, Blake! I'm fearfully hungry! They don't feed you any too well in the New House."

"They don't feed me there at all."

"I mean, I don't get enough to eat."

"Yes, you look as if you don't."

"Appearances are deceptive!" said Fatty Wynn mournfully. "I am always hungry. I've had no breakfast to speak of—only a rasher of bacon and a few sausages! That beast Figgins—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Took a couple of eggs off my plate and said I wasn't to have any. He won't let me go to the school shop."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If this keeps on I am going to secede from the company."

"Oh, Fatty!"

"I shall indeed. Give me some of that toffee!"

"Don't be greedy, Fatty!"

"Aren't you going to give me some?"

"No, I'm not!"

"Then you're a beast!"

"Go hon!"

Mr. Lathom, the short-sighted master of the Fourth, was craning his neck towards them.

"Who is that talking? Ah, it is you, Figgins! Take fifty lines!"

"I wasn't talking, sir!"

"I distinctly heard someone speaking on that form!"

"It wasn't I, sir."

"Who was it, then?"

Figgins did not reply.

"Well—well, I will not ask that question," said Mr. Lathom. "I shall cane the next boy that talks! We come here to work, not to talk!"

The lesson proceeded. As soon as the master's attention was turned away Fatty Wynn leaned over his desk and nudged Blake.

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"I say, Blake—" he whispered.

"Shut up!"

"I want some of that toffee!"

"Rats!"

"You're a pig!"

"You're another, and several sorts of an ass!"

"Someone is talking again," said Mr. Lathom. "Take fifty lines, Pratt!"

"I—"

"Not a word! I am determined to maintain discipline in this class-room. Where are we? Ah, we were landing in Britain for the second time! Let us go on."

"Blake, I'm fearfully hungry!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "If you don't give me some of that toffee I'll never speak to you again!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I am suffering awfully! Just a little bit!"

"Talking again!" exclaimed the master of the Fourth, peering angrily through his spectacles. "Kerr, take fifty lines!"

"I never—"

"Silence, sir! Don't answer me! I will have work done here, not idle chatter!"

Figgins pinched Fatty Wynn.

"If you go on, Fatty, you'll get impots for the whole class!" he growled. "Now, if you say another word, I'll stick a pin in you!"

"But—"

"Dry up! You're like a beastly gramophone for talking!"

Fatty Wynn dried up, but he kept his eye on Blake's desk. He meant to have some of that toffee. He saw Blake take out the little packet and glance at it again, but Mr. Lathom's eye was on Blake.

"Is that sweets you have there, Blake?"

"No, sir," said Blake, slipping it back under the desk.

"You know, it is forbidden to bring sweets into the class-room, but I do not think you would tell me an untruth. Whatever it is, leave it alone."

"Yes, sir."

"What a ghastly fibber!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "It was toffee. I saw it as plain as anything! I never saw such a howling fibber! But I'll have some of that toffee. It would only serve him right."

Blake did not move the mysterious article again, and when the class was dismissed he had apparently forgotten all about it, for he left it on the ledge under his desk.

Fatty Wynn grinned as he noted it. He marched out with the rest of the boys, assuming as indifferent an air as he could, and when they had dispersed to the four quarters of St. Jim's, he stole back quietly to the class-room.

The master was gone and the room was quite deserted.

"Good luck!" murmured Fatty.

He stepped quietly into the class-room, and made his way towards Blake's desk. He looked under it.

"Here it is! Ha, it isn't toffee; it's butterscotch, I believe," murmured Fatty Wynn.

In a moment the prize was within his grasp. There was a footstep in the corridor. The fat boy of the New House started. Was it Blake coming back to see if his toffee was safe? He should come back too late, anyway, Fatty Wynn mentally resolved, as he buried his teeth in the tempting stick of—

Toffee—butterscotch? Toffee or butterscotch never tasted like that before.

"Gerooh!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "Gr-r-r-r-rooh!"

Blake looked in at the door.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you, Fatty?"

"Gr-r-r-r-rooh!"

Fatty's face was strangely contorted, and he was making frantic endeavours to expel the greasy, horrible substance from his mouth.

"Yah! Booh! Gr-r-r-r-rooh!"

Blake roared.

"Do you mean to say you've been trying to scoff my stick of grease-paint, Fatty?"

"Gr-r-r-r-rooh! I thought it was t-t-toffee! Gr-r-rugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty made a frantic rush from the room to get his mouth washed out, leaving Blake leaning against the door and yelling with laughter.

The joke was too good to keep, and Fatty Wynn was chipped unmercifully by the whole Form; and after he had got rid of the taste of the grease-paint he found it harder to get rid of the chipping.

But an idea was working in Fatty's brain. A disappointment in the matter of feeding was the very thing to set his wits most actively to work.

After school Blake went to look for Figgins & Co., to gather them in to a rehearsal of "Little Red Riding

Hood," and he came upon Fatty Wynn performing a trick that raised strong doubts in Blake's mind as to his sanity.

A walking-stick was stuck in a hollow in the trunk of one of the big elms in front of the New House, fixed horizontally at the level of Fatty's chin.

Fatty had his eyes upon that stick as if it fascinated him, and was seemingly unaware of Blake's approach, unconscious that the School House junior was regarding him with eyes wide open in amazement.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "That grease-paint's got into his head, or something, for if he isn't as mad as a hatter, I'll eat my Sunday topper!"

Fatty Wynn retreated slowly from the stick to a certain distance, where he had laid his cap on the ground to mark the spot.

Then he strode rapidly forward, and bent his head down a trifle, so that his mouth came on a level with the stick.

Three times he performed this extraordinary evolution, Blake staring at him the while. The School House junior wondered whether he had better rush off in search of Figgins and Kerr, or whether he had better attempt to reason with Fatty. That he was out of his senses did not appear to admit of the slightest doubt.

"I say, Fatty—"

Fatty Wynn was just striding forward again. He stopped as Blake spoke, and turned towards him with a nod.

"Hallo, Blake!"

"What on earth are you doing, Fatty?"

"That? Oh, it's a new gymnastic exercise."

"Oh, is it?" said Blake, relieved in his mind. "I see, I thought you were miles off your rocker!"

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"Ha, ha! You see, this is the trick, and it's awfully difficult. You have to start from the spot where I have laid my cap for a mark."

"Yes?"

"Then you've got to reach the end of the stick in exactly three strides, and take it in your mouth, and close your teeth on it—see?"

Blake measured the distance with his eyes.

"I should say that was a jolly easy thing to do, Fatty."

"You can say so if you like, Blake, but I'm pretty sure you couldn't do it," said Fatty.

"Oh, rot! I could do it with my eyes shut!"

"You couldn't do it with them open."

"I tell you it's as easy as falling off a horse."

"Well, if it's so easy, let's see you do it," said Fatty, with a smile of such evident unbelief that Blake's back was got up immediately.

"I'll jolly soon show you I can do it!" said the School House junior, nettled. "It's about the easiest trick I've ever seen."

"Let's see you do it, that's all."

Blake strode to the spot marked by the cap.

"That right?"

"Yes; you're on the right spot."

"Three strides, and then take the end of the stick in your mouth?"

"Exactly!"

"Why, any fool could do it!"

"You haven't done it yet. Never mind the rest of the fools; you do it."

"Look here, Fatty Wynn—"

"Oh, do the trick! You're not going to crawl out of it like that."

"Who wants to crawl out of it?"

"You do, I believe."

"I'll soon show you. I could do it on my head. Look here, then."

Blake calculated the distance, and made three exact strides to the horizontal stick. Then, inclining his head slightly, he seized the end of it in his mouth.

The trick was certainly simplicity itself; but the moment Blake had seized the stick in his mouth he gave a fearful yell, and let it go as if it were red-hot.

"Yah! Grool! Ugh! Oh! Ooooh! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins and Kerr, emerging from behind a tree, from which they had been watching the whole scene.

"Gerooh! Gerooh! Gr-r-r!"

"How do you like mustard?" screamed Fatty Wynn, laughing till the tears rolled down his plump cheeks. "Ha, ha, ha!"

For the end of the stick underneath was thickly covered with that fiery condiment, and Blake had his mouth almost full of it.

The trick was a simple one, but there was more in it than met the eye.

Blake coughed and sneezed and barked, the tears running

from his eyes in streams, and his nose gradually assuming a beautiful beetroot hue.

"You—you—you horrid bounder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Unrehearsed Act.

SATURDAY evening! The great day had arrived at last!

All the junior portion of St. Jim's was eagerly anticipating the performance of "Little Red Riding Hood," by the amateur actors of the triple alliance.

Many of the seniors, too, took an interest in it. A number of them declared their intention of being present in the hall to see the youngsters make fools of themselves.

Kildare and his friends, Darrell and Rushden, who were always good-natured, had promised to come, and set the example to the Upper Form fellows.

Some of the masters had received invitations, and had accepted.

Mr. Railton, who was really sorry for the mischief caused by the barring of the pony, willingly consented to be an honoured guest.

All the juniors of both Houses were determined to be there.

Gore and Mellish and some more wanted to interrupt, and cause as much trouble to the performers as possible by laughing in the most thrilling places.

Others were merely curious.

Many anticipated fun. Jimson said that the plan had been changed so suddenly that the players could certainly not know their parts, or would get them mixed, and that it would be the funniest thing ever seen at St. Jim's. He urged all those who liked a good laugh to be present.

And so when the time came round there wasn't any doubt at all that the triple alliance would have a very good audience.

An hour before the time fixed for the start the hall began to fill.

Juniors came in twos and threes after tea, and scrambled for the seats, and passed loud remarks upon what they expected the play would be like. But they admitted that the stage was very well got up, considering.

The scene represented a cottage on the border of a wood at the back of the stage. In the foreground was the cottage of Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother, arranged so that the audience could see right through it.

As it was impossible to rig up a curtain to let drop

(Continued on next page.)

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between the scenes, the trouble of changing scenes was obviated. The same one would have to do all the time; but, as Tom Merry said, the acting was the thing.

The costumes were really successful. They had been selected and hired by Kerr, who was well up in that branch of the business; and Figgy's wolf-skin, especially, was a great success.

The long legs of Figgy trailed out a little behind the wolf; but it is impossible to get anything quite perfect in this world, and when Blake said that the audience might smile, Figgy said they could smile and be hanged, which settled the question.

Eight o'clock was the time fixed for the start, but at eight o'clock there was no sign of the players.

The audience were in their places. The hall was very well filled, and the younger portion of the audience began to show unequivocal signs of impatience.

"Time!" shouted Jimson, stamping on the floor. "Time!"

"Play!" bawled Gore.

"Come on! When are you going to show up?"

"They've gone to sleep!"

Blake came out from behind the scenes. He was dressed as a shepherd of the olden times, and had nearly finished his make-up, only one cheek being left untinted.

"We're just coming on!" he called out. "Don't get impatient."

"Yah! Buck up!"

"Go and finish boiling yourself!"

"Time! Time!"

Blake retreated.

The noise increased. As the masters were not there in an official way, they did not think it fit to interfere unless there was a disturbance, and the juniors were allowed to make as much noise as they liked.

They liked to make a great deal. Shouting, stamping, cat-calling, and whistling penetrated behind the scenes, dismaying the histrionic aspirants, who were not half ready.

"I say, this won't do!" said Blake. "You ought to manage the thing better than this, Tom Merry."

"It isn't my fault if you're not ready in time."

"You're not ready yourself."

"Well, I don't come on till it's time for me to kill Figgins."

"Little Red Riding Hood ought to go on first," said Blake. "I really don't know why he takes such a long time to get ready."

"I'm just done," said Fatty Wynn.

"You ought to have been done ten minutes back."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh rats!" said Little Red Riding Hood.

"Get on!" said Tom Merry, helping Fatty Wynn with his rather troublesome garments. "I say, this skirt is too long, Kerr."

"Can't be helped now," said Kerr. "Fatty can pin it up. That's what he did in the rehearsal."

"Give me some pins," said Fatty.

"Anybody got any pins?"

"I haven't."

"No, I haven't either. Do you take me for a blessed pin-cushion?"

"I must have some pins."

"See if the audience have any to give away."

"They're cackling enough already without that. Here's a couple; you'll have to make them do, Fatty."

"All right."

"Now, get on, for goodness' sake!"

"Gimme me the basket."

"Here it is. Do get on!"

Fatty Wynn, whose smooth face looked girlish enough in its make-up under the red hood, came on the stage with his basket under his arm.

"Bravo!" shouted Jimson. "Good old Fatty!"

"Silence!" cried Kildare.

Little Red Riding Hood, blushing furiously, came forward to the footlights, which were composed of a row of bicycle lamps.

"How glad I am to take my dear old granny her supper!" said Little Red Riding Hood. "Every day I—

"I follow this path through the wood," came the prompter's voice from behind the scenes.

"I follow this path through the wood and—and—"

"And take the supper to my dear granny."

"And take the supper to my dear granny who lives in the cottage all alone. But I am so afraid of the wolf. And I—

"Now the song, fathhead!"

The audience heard these words as plainly as Fatty Wynn did, and the gravest person present could not help chuckling.

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"How does the beastly thing go?" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"I am Little Red Riding Hood—"

"That's right; I've got it."

"I am Little Red Riding Hood,
I wander gaily through the wood,
I—I—I—"

"Ger-r-r-r!"

It was a ferocious growl, and Figgins came on as the wolf, on his hands and knees, the wolf-skin covering up everything but his feet and ankles. He was greeted by derisive shouts.

"Hallo! There's Brer Wolf!"

"Look at his feet!"

"Enormous!"

"Tuck in your tuppenny, Figgins!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Hark! Don't he sound ferocious?"

"Silence!"

"Where are you going, Little Red Riding Hood?"

"I'm going to the inn to get on the track, if it may be, of those rascals Dick Turpin and Tom King," replied Fatty Wynn, in his confusion forgetting that he was Little Red Riding Hood, and not a follower of Jonathan Wild, as had been originally planned.

There was a yell of laughter.

"You ass!" came the prompter's voice. "You're going to take a beastly supper to your beastly grandmother!"

"All right!" said Fatty. "I'm going to take a beastly supper to your beastly grandmother, Figgins."

"You silly cuckoo!" said the wolf, and the audience yelled again.

"Here, for goodness' sake, let the villagers go on and frighten the wolf away!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in despair.

The three villagers rushed on. Herries, Kerr, and D'Arcy were all right as far as costume and make-up went. They shouted at Figgins, who wriggled away behind the scenes, his big feet being the last seen of him.

"Pursue the wolf!" exclaimed Kerr. "He must be slain!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

The audience shrieked at this remark from a villager.

"Go it, Gussy! Go and slay Figgins!"

The villagers disappeared behind the scenes.

"Oh, get on to the cottage, and get on, Fatty!" came the prompter's voice.

Fatty Wynn moved towards the cottage. His grandmother, alias Herries, was there, in a really imposing-looking cap. She would have greeted Little Red Riding Hood in a nice little speech, but Herries' memory was at fault.

"I've brought you your supper, grandmother dear," said Little Red Riding Hood, helping Herries out.

"Thank you, my dear," said Herries, recovering himself a little. "And are you going home through the wood?"

"Yes, grandmother."

"Then—"

Red Riding Hood's grandmother was interrupted by a voice from behind the scenes.

"Tom Mewwy, I wefuse to be called a silly ass; I distinctly wefuse!"

"Shut up!"

"I will not shut up! I wefuse to be chawactewised as a silly ass! Yaas, wathah!"

"If you don't leave off talking, Gussy, you will get a dot on the boko!"

"I wefuse—"

There was the sound of a yell, and then a villager came rushing on to the stage with the huntsman in excited pursuit.

"Hurrah!" yelled Jimson. "They're waking up now. Go it, Tom Merry!"

Right across the stage went villager and huntsman, to disappear behind the scenes on the other side, whence a voice was quickly heard in vigorous protest.

"Tom Mewwy, I no longah wegard you as a fwieud. Weally—"

"Here, this will spoil everything!" growled Blake. "Let's get on and do something."

"Get on, Figgins! They like the wolf part, and you can put in a bit extra," said Kerr.

"Good enough," said the wolf.

And Figgins crawled on to the stage and growled.

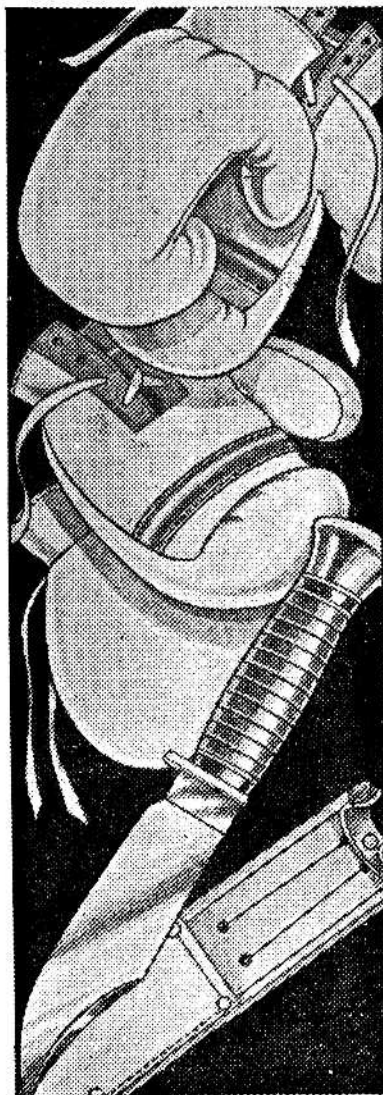
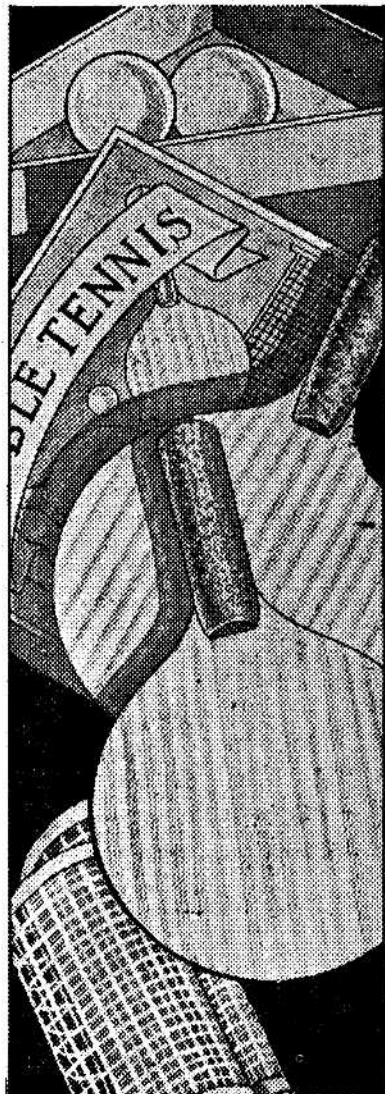
"The wolf! The wolf!" cried Red Riding Hood's grandmother. "Where is the huntsman? Buck up, Tom Merry! Where has that silly ass got to?"

"Tom Mewwy, I wefuse—"

(Continued on page 24.)

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CHAPTER 1. Rival Japers!

"HOW d'you spell 'affectionate'?" Tubby Muffin asked the question, and, like Brutus, paused for a reply.

The fat junior was seated at the table in his study. There was a pen in his hand and ink on his fingers, his nose, his hair, his cuffs, and spattered generally in blots over paper and table. Tubby was writing a letter, and when Tubby used ink he used lots of it.

"What d'you want to know for?" grunted Higgs. "Blessed if I ever knew you affectionate towards anyone—excepting your fat self. Look it up in the dictionary, anyway!"

"Mean beast! I say, Putty, you might help a fellow! How d'you spell 'affectionate'?"

Putty Grace looked up from the football boots he was greasing. But he was a good-natured fellow, and he obliged.

"A-f-f-e-c-t-i-o-n-a-t-e," he spelled out, with a grin.

"That's wrong!" said Tubby witheringly. "I know there's a 'k' in it. You're awfully ignorant, Putty. I think I'll jolly well rely on my own spelling!"

And Tubby did, and finished his letter. Then he chuckled as he read it over.

"That's the stuff to give 'em," he remarked. "If that doesn't fetch a decent tip

from Uncle Charlie nothing will! He, he, he! I say, like to read it, Putty? Give me a few ideas how to wangle tips out of giddy relatives, you know."

"Should be worth reading as you've written it, old fatty," grinned Putty. "Hand it over!"

Tubby handed the letter over, and Putty read it out aloud:

"Dear Uncle Charlie,—Thank you verry much for the five-bob you scent me which I wanted so badly, as you no, to buy a new lattin gramer and other books required for my studdies. Konsidering the few skool books I have (and I reely knead a lot more) I am making grate progres with my skool work, and am alreddy top boy in my form, as I think I have menshoned befoar. Mr. Dalton is verry pleased wi'h my progres, and thinks me wonderfull, and that I ought reely to be in the Fifth. You will be glad to no that I even made 150 not out when I captained the match against Grayfriars last Wensday, winning the match for my skool. Please eccuse more
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**Tubby had an Uncle Charles,
And only one had he.
But one fine day, to his dismay,
He found that he had three!**

now as being, as you no, captain of the form and lower skool makes me verry busy, and I have litle time for riting. Thanking you agane for the five-bob which I have used to buy knew skool books, which I knead badly to help koach the other setows, though I want a lot more, and hoping your roomatism is beter.

"Your afeckshionate neffew,
"Reginald."

"Rather neat—what?" grinned Tubby, as Putty finished reading. "You fellows don't know how to write."

"You—you awful fat fibber!" gasped Higgs. "Why, it's all a pack of fibs from beginning to end. You're the biggest duffer in the Form, and you don't know the right end of a bat; and as for being junior captain, why, you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Putty Grace. "Ain't it like Tubby, though! Hallo! I say, Jimmy, just come and squint at this!"

Jimmy Silver, with his chums—Raby, Newcome, and Lovell—happened to be passing the open door of the study, and they stepped in as Putty called to them.

"What's the joke?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"Read this and see!" gurgled Putty. "Ha, ha, ha! Any objection to them reading it, Tubby?"

"Eh? Oh, no—I think it's a jolly good letter!" grinned Tubby complacently. "You fellows don't understand the art of letter-writing, you know. No good being modest

when a chap's writing to his people. Modesty won't fetch tips, I can tell you. Read it, Jimmy!"

Evidently Tubby was very proud of his letter. He grinned expectantly as Jimmy Silver read the letter out aloud.

"Rather neat?" he remarked, as Jimmy ended with a gasp. "That should fetch five bob, at least. I say, who's got a stamp?"

"Stamp!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Why, you—you fearful fibber! You aren't sending this to—"

"My Uncle Charlie!" explained Tubby cheerfully. "He's a soft old bird, and will swallow anything, you know. The pater told me to write to him—fancy it's because the old buffer's rollin' in dibs. He, he, he!"

"You—you awful little spoofer!" stuttered Jimmy. "Junior skipper—eh! Great-pip! Supposing he comes to Rookwood and finds out that you're the biggest duffer—"

"He won't—he lives abroad, you know!" said Tubby airily—"South of France. He's never seen me, and I've never seen him. I'm blessed if I want to, either, so long

as he sends regular tips! Safe as houses! I say, Putty, lend a fellow a stamp. Lemme see, as it's foreign, I shall want—"

"Putty won't lend you stamps to send that rot off, I know!" snorted Lovell. "Tear it up, you fat rotter! Of all the fibs—"

"You dry up, Lovell! Now, Putty, old chap—"

"Nothing doing—not to send that little lot of fibs off, anyway!"

"Mingy beast! I say, Higgs, old chap—"

"I'll stamp on you—that's the only stamp you'll get out of me, you fat spoofer!" replied Higgs.

"Oh, all right—keep your blessed stamps!" grinned Tubby, folding his letter. "I think I'll send it without stamps—make the old bird think I'm too hard up, you know. He, he, he!"

And Tubby placed his precious letter in an envelope and hurried out to post it.

"Well, of all the fat fibbers!" said Jimmy Silver, unable to help laughing. "When his uncle gets that he'll fork out—I don't think, unless he's a mug! But it's funny, though—"

"And we're going to make it funnier," grinned Putty Grace, his eyes glimmering.

"I don't call it funny!" snorted Lovell. "The fat idiot ought to be stopped telling such fibs. He needs a lesson—"

"And he's jolly well going to get one!" said Putty Grace.

"I say, rather a lark if dear old Uncle Charlie did actually turn up," he added thoughtfully. "It could be worked—"

"What do you mean, Putty?" demanded Jimmy.

"I think it's generally agreed that Tubby needs teaching to be more modest in his statements," he remarked. "To-morrow's a half, and to-morrow Uncle Charlie's going to turn up to teach Tubby a lesson. See the wheeze?"

"Phew! You mean—" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"I mean, that I intend to turn up here to-morrow afternoon as Tubby's Uncle Charlie. You fellows know I can act," said Putty coolly and modestly. "I'll put Tubby through the mill, and make him more truthful and modest. I think it's a public duty to do that. Just tell the fellows we can trust, but keep it dark from Tubby. It's the jape of the term!"

"Ha, ha! I spot the wheeze! But—"

"Easy as falling off a form. Tubby's too big a duffer to tumble. To make sure he doesn't suspect, though, I'll get a telegram sent somehow from London first," grinned Putty. "Not much time, but— Columbus! Just the very thing! That Modern House chap, Towle, is going to London to-night—his sister's wedding to-morrow, or something."

"That's so, I believe!" grinned Raby. "But how—"

"Just the thing!" said Putty, with enthusiasm. "I'll get him to send it off in the morning from London. Great! Keep it dark, you chaps."

"You frabjous ass! But how—"

"Can't stop, old chap—must catch Towle!" snapped Putty Grace, and the Rookwood japer rushed away, leaving the Fistical Four grinning. They had their doubts about Putty's wonderful new jape, but they knew it was useless to express them to Putty. When Putty Grace once thought of a jape he was all enthusiasm, and doubts and warnings went unheeded.

"The footling ass!" said Newcome.

"The silly owl!" snorted Lovell.

"Bound to come unstuck somewhere!" said Raby.

"Putty's japes usually do."

"Still, it may come off!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "And if it does teach Tubby a lesson, well, it'll be something accomplished, something done! We'll back Putty up, anyway, for once!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

Meanwhile, the worthy Towle, booked to visit London that night, had also decided to "back up" Putty Grace in his latest jape.

Putty met him in the quadrangle, and though a member of the rival House, Towle pocketed the shilling for the telegram and agreed to send it off the next morning. He also agreed to keep it dark. But evidently Towle did not think this meant keeping it dark from his own pals. He came across Tommy Dodd & Co. on the Modern House steps, and Tommy Dodd asked him what the joke was.

Towle told him, and passed indoors, still chuckling.

"Rather an ancient wheeze!" commented Tommy Doyle, chuckling. "Got whiskers on it—just like all these Classical japes."

"H'm, yes!" said Tommy Dodd thoughtfully. "Quite so. H'm! I think we could improve on it, and I rather think we will—and put the giddy kybosh on those Classical bounders at the same time. M'yes, I think we could."

"What d'you mean?" asked Tommy Cook, looking interested.

"I mean that Putty Grace's jape would be improved if the real Uncle Charlie—otherwise little me!—turned up," smiled Tommy Dodd. "Two Uncle Charlies will cause some excitement, won't they? I'd bowl out Putty Grace as an impostor, threaten to call a bobby, and—ha, ha, ha!—what a chance to put those innocent Classics through it!"

"Phew! Good wheeze, Tommy!"

"Begorra, it is, Tommy!"

"Then we'll do it," said Tommy Dodd, with a chuckle. "Even if we get a free feed out of it, it'll be worth it. You blokes on?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then let's go in and talk things over."

And the three Tommies went indoors to talk the matter over. Putty Grace's new wheeze already looked like coming "unstuck."

CHAPTER 2.

Two Uncle Charlies.

"O H dear!"

"Hallo! What's the matter, Tubby?"

"Oh crikey!"

Never had Tubby Muffin sounded quite so dismal. Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned as they came upon Tubby in the Fourth Form passage. And they grinned at sight of the telegram in Tubby's podgy hand. They knew what was in that telegram.

It was the next day, after dinner. Nearly every fellow in the Classical Fourth knew about Putty Grace's great jape on Tubby Muffin; Putty liked an audience, and he had seen to that. The only fellow who did not seem to know of Putty's jape was Tubby Muffin.

As Tubby drew the telegram from the envelope, grinning juniors seemed to appear on the scene from nowhere.

"What's the matter, Tubby?" repeated Jimmy, though he knew the answer well enough.

Tubby groaned hollowly.

"Oh crumbs! It—it's awful, you fellows! M-my uncle's coming—this afternoon! M-mum-my Uncle Charlie! Oh crikey!"

"What? Not the nunkie you wrote all that pile of fibs to last evening?" asked Lovell, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, Oh dear! It's frightful, you fellows! I—I never expected the old codger to come here," gasped Tubby, almost tearfully. "I—I say, something's got to be done, Jimmy. L-look at this!"

He handed the telegram to Jimmy. It ran:

"Coming to Rookwood to-day. Expect me three o'clock.—UNCLE CHARLIE."

"It's nothing to grin about, Jimmy," wailed Tubby. "I know he can't have got yesterday's letter. But I've written heaps worse than that. I own up—I told him I was junior skipper, and top boy, and all sorts of rot like that. I told him my study mantelpiece was full of silver cups and pots I'd won at cricket and footer and rowing and running, and stuff like that, you know. He—he'll want to see 'em. And—oh crikey!—even if I keep out of the way he'll see Dicky Dalton and learn things."

"Well, serve you jolly well right for telling fibs, Tubby!" said Lovell. "Teach you a lesson!"

"You heartless beast, Lovell! I say, Jimmy, I've got a wheeze—a ripper! You be me for this afternoon—tell him you're Muffin, you know. You can have the tip he shells out—"

"Nothing doing, old scout!" grinned Jimmy.

"But he'll want to see the pots I've won—I mean, I haven't won!"

"Tell him you've pawned 'em; another fib won't make much difference!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! And he'll want to see the rotten books I've bought—I mean, that I haven't bought! Oh crikey!"

"Tell him you've loaned 'em to the chaps you're coaching."

"Beast! Look here, something's jolly well got to be done, Jimmy! I say, be a pal, Jimmy, and be me for the afternoon. He's never seen me, and won't know— Oh crikey!"

Tubby broke off. There was a heavy tread in the passage, and then a deep, husky, unfamiliar cough. It came from an elderly-looking gentleman, who came striding purposefully along the passage just then.

Tubby groaned in dismay. The strange gentleman sported a rather rusty frock-coat and silk hat. He was short, and

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inclined to be podgy about the waistline. He wore side-whiskers, and a pair of heavy, ferocious eyebrows. His features were brick-red, and heavily lined.

Even Jimmy Silver & Co. stared for a moment. Putty Grace—clever at make-up as he was known to be—had undoubtedly excelled himself.

But Tubby Muffin never even thought of Putty Grace. The moment he sighted the vision he knew it was too late to make arrangements to meet the case. Here was Uncle Charlie now!

"Oh dear!" he gasped. "I—I say, you fellows, here he is now!"

The old gent came up to the group and halted, frowning at them.

"Ah-hum!" he coughed. "Good-afternoon, boys! I am looking for my nephew, Reginald Muffin. Kindly direct me to his—"

"Here he is, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, indicating the shivering Tubby. "That's Muffin, sir!"

"What—what? Impossible, boy!"

The old gent almost staggered as his eyes lighted on Tubby. His eyebrows went up and down in his agitation and amazement.

"Impossible! Perfectly absurd!" he repeated angrily. "I refer to Reginald Muffin, who, I am proud to say, is the junior captain of Rookwood, and its most intelligent and outstanding athlete. This object, this over-fed and fatuous-looking youth, cannot possibly be my nephew, Reginald!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Tubby. "I—I say, sir—"

"I'm afraid you have been misinformed, sir," said Jimmy Silver coolly. "This is Muffin! I am junior skipper at Rookwood, and my name is Silver, not Muffin."

"I—I say, Jimmy—" gasped Tubby.

There was a world of pleading in Tubby's voice—dismay and reproach also. Jimmy Silver wasn't going to "back him up." Tubby had to have his lesson.

"If your nephew claims he is skipper, then he isn't telling the truth, sir," proceeded Jimmy ruthlessly. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir, but your nephew is actually a frightful duffer. He's bottom of his Form, and he's lazy and greedy, and a frightful fibber! He can't play cricket or any other games for toffee, sir. He's a hopeless dud, sir—lazy, and a regular artful dodger!"

"Oh—oh, really, Jimmy Silver—" gasped Tubby indignantly.

"Silence!" thundered the old gent. "I—I can scarcely believe my own ears! Is it possible that I have been grossly deceived—that my nephew has obtained money from me under false pretences? Good gad! Yet I can see the family likeness in this grossly over-fed, stupid-looking boy! My own eyes tell me it is so. Reginald, lead me to your study at once! This disgraceful deception must be investigated without delay—before I see your headmaster in order to arrange a suitable punishment. If the facts are as this boy states, then you must be put on a diet also, and subjected to a strict course of study and work. Ah-hum! Lead on, Reginald!"

Reginald jumped at the ferocious bark in his "uncle's" voice. He gave the grinning Jimmy Silver a bitter, reproachful glare and led the way to his study. The crowd followed, chuckling. Their chuckles increased the seething indignation and wrath in Tubby's fat mind. Instead of backing him up Jimmy Silver and the rest of the heartless beasts were clearly going to give him away, and make matters as bad as they could. Tubby was on the verge of tears with self-pity and dismay.

"Come along in, boys!" barked Uncle Charlie, as they reached the study. "I shall probably require you as witnesses of my nephew's rascally deception."

They crowded into the study until it was nearly full. Their chuckles made Tubby almost burst with indignation.

"Now," snapped the old gent, facing the hapless Tubby, "we can go into this matter. Never have I been so disappointed! You, Reginald, have led me to suppose that you were an outstanding athlete, a remarkable scholar, and the most popular junior captain Rookwood ever had. Instead, I find you are a lazy, greedy, untruthful slacker—a duffer at both work and play! What have you to say for yourself, Reginald?"

"Oh dear! I—I sus-say, uncle, it's all a mistake!" gasped Tubby. "You—you see, I was talking about Jimmy Silver in my letters! You—you must have misread—"

"Enough! Your only hope of mercy from me was in owning up—in confessing your disgraceful deception. But as you choose to add further untruths—"

"Oh dear! I—I say, uncle, it—it's all right—I'll own up!" panted Tubby. "I—I—"

"Silence! Where are the school books purchased with the money I have sent you, Reginald?"

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"I—I—I—" faltered Tubby.

"And where," barked Uncle Charlie, "are the silver cups and shields you are supposed to have won in sports and games? I see none in your study, Reginald. Bah! You need not confess, you young scamp! I can see for myself that you have deliberately deceived your dear Uncle Charlie! Your over-fed figure is enough. Why, you are so fat that I am convinced you are unable to touch your toes!"

"I—I can really, uncle—"

"Then do so—prove that you can!" barked the old fellow.

Tubby bent down obediently, and did his best. But it was a forlorn effort. His fingers missed reaching his toes by inches. He was still striving desperately, puffing and panting, when his uncle brought down his walking-cane with a terrific "whack" on Tubby's tightly stretched trousers.

Whack!

"Yarroooooop!" shrieked Tubby, jerking upright convulsively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughing matter, boys!" snorted Uncle Charlie. "It is tragic to discover that my nephew cannot touch his toes. I will now proceed to put him through several excellent physical exercises. I propose to request his Form master to see that he carries them out six times a day on his new diet of bread and water. Reginald, you will now stand on your head and remain in that position one minute. Each time you fall I shall chastise you with my walking-cane. Proceed, Reginald!"

"Oh dear! I—I jolly well won't, uncle!" spluttered Tubby, defiant now with seething indignation. "I know I can't do—"

Tap!

It was a tap at the door. Next instant it opened, and a form appeared in the doorway—an elderly-looking gentleman clad in frock-coat and silk hat. Like Putty Grace, the newcomer was short and rather stout, but unlike Putty he sported a beard instead of side-whiskers, and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. Unlike Putty also, his frock-coat and hat were quite smart and well-fitting.

Putty Grace had excelled himself as an impersonator, but Tommy Dodd of the Modern side had more than excelled himself. He looked an elderly, prosperous City man to the life.

"Good-afternoon, boys!" he said in rather a squeaky, high-pitched voice. "Is my nephew, Reginald, here? I have been told that this is his study. Ah!" The old chap seemed suddenly to sight Putty Grace. "Good-afternoon, sir! I presume you are Mr. Dalton, my nephew's Form master. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Mr. Charles Muffin, my nephew Reginald's Uncle Charlie!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Putty Grace.

There was a silence—a silence of horror and dismay.

CHAPTER 3.

And a Third!

"O II crumbs!" breathed Jimmy Silver.

It was a decidedly awkward situation, delicate in the extreme. That this was the real Uncle Charlie nobody doubted—even the startled Putty Grace suspected nothing. By an amazing coincidence, Uncle Charlie had actually turned up in the flesh—or so the Classical japers believed.

Putty Grace gave a hunted look at the door—which the new Uncle Charlie was carefully guarding. Tubby Muffin was gaping at Charles the Second like a fish out of water.

"M-mum-my Uncle Charlie!" he gurgled helplessly. "B-but you can't be! I haven't got two Uncle Charlies! This is m-my Uncle Charlie!"

He indicated the luckless Putty Grace. Charles the Second stared at Charles the First in astonishment, and then with growing suspicion and stern intentness,

"What—what? What's that? Is not this individual Mr. Dalton? Then what— Bless my soul! Reginald, my boy"—he grasped the bewildered Tubby warmly by the hand—"Reginald—yes, I know you at a glance, my dear boy! So like your father—well-covered and distinguished-looking! I'll warrant you are a boy who relishes his meals! I like a boy who is not afraid to eat. I care not if a boy is not brilliant at lessons or sports so long as he is handy with a knife and fork. Ha, ha! I'm delighted to find you looking so plump and distinguished, Reggie! Splendid! But did you say this—this shady-looking individual claimed to be myself—your Uncle Charlie?"

Tubby Muffin gasped. He did not hesitate long. Tubby much preferred Charles the Second to Charles the First! He still smarted from that terrific swipe. He glared at

Putty Grace. Now he came to look at him, Charles the First certainly was shady-looking.

"Yes, uncle; he jolly well did!" he spluttered warmly. "I don't believe he is my uncle at all—he's a rotten impostor!"

"Good gracious! Impostor, you mean, Reginald! This is very serious, boys!" snapped Charles the Second. "An impostor undoubtedly! Guard the door, boys! Do not allow the rascal to escape! Send for the headmaster! Telephone for the police without delay! Doubtless he entered the school under my name in order to rob and plunder! Telephone for the police at once!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Oh, great pip!"

Putty Grace fairly trembled.

"I—I say, sir—" he gasped.

"Silence! Not a word, villain!" thundered Charles the Second. "Send for the headmaster. Here, guard the man, and I myself will obtain assistance!"

He started to open the door. Jimmy Silver gasped and jumped forward. If the Head were fetched, the hapless Putty was booked for serious trouble.

"Hold on, sir!" he panted. "It—it's all right! It's only a lark! Own up, Putty, for goodness' sake!"

But Putty had already realised the urgent necessity of doing that and throwing himself on the mercy of this terrible Uncle Charlie.

"Hold on, sir, for goodness' sake!" he gasped. "It's only a jape. I'm one of Tubby's study-mates!" he yelled, in his

headmaster, boy! But justice must be done! You must be suitably punished for this—this amazing trick! Touch your toes, sir!"

Putty Grace hesitated, his face growing redder still.

"Very well! If you refuse to be punished by me—" Charles the Second started for the door. Putty gasped.

"Hold on, sir! It's all right! I—I'll touch my toes!"

"You are very wise, my boy! Now, Reginald! You are at liberty to give this rascal what he gave you! Bend down, sir!"

Putty groaned and bent down. Once again one of his wonderful wheezes had come "unstuck." Putty touched his toes gingerly. Tubby Muffin grinned, grabbed the walking-cane, and brought it swishing down.

Whack!

The vengeful Tubby fairly put his beef into the swipe. Putty's howl rang far and wide. Then Charles the Second took the stick. Evidently that swipe, terrific as it was, was



The Juniors and the Uncle Charles were about to have tea, when the door suddenly opened, to reveal Dicky Dalton, and behind him a stout, cheery-looking gentleman!

ordinary voice. "Tell him, Tubby—tell him I'm Grace, one of your study-mates! Oh crumbs!"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby, recognising Putty's voice and realising the truth. "Oh crikey! It's that—that awful beast, Putty Grace! It's a rotten jape!"

"What—what? Bless my soul!" Charles the Second stared blankly at Charles the First. "Good gracious! It is only a boy's voice! Reginald, is it possible that this—this shady-looking person is one of your schoolfellows?"

"Yes, uncle. It's Putty Grace! He's played a rotten trick on me!" hooted Tubby, understanding now. "Pretending to be my uncle! Swiping me with a cane, the beast! Oh, you beast, Putty!"

"Bless my soul!" said Charles the Second, closing the door again. "What an amazing masquerade! Do I understand that this wretched boy impersonated me, Reginald?"

"Of course, uncle! The beast! Made me touch my toes, and hit me with his stick, uncle!" gasped Tubby indignantly.

"Very serious indeed!" said Charles the Second, eyeing the hapless Putty sternly. "I shall not report this to your

not enough! Five more times Putty touched his toes and howled.

"There, that should teach you not to play disgraceful pranks on my nephew," said Uncle Charlie sternly. "Now, Reginald, we will have tea! I trust you have prepared a good one. I am exceedingly hungry. You may ask your friends to tea."

"Oh dear!"

Tubby had not prepared tea. Moreover he was in his usual stony state. He eyed Jimmy Silver & Co. appealingly.

"I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Tubby.

"We'll have to stump up," breathed Jimmy Silver. "This old codger might report us if we don't humour him. Rush round and get some grub together, for goodness' sake!"

"Yes, rather!"

There was a rush for the door. Uncle Charlie withdrew the key from his pocket, and handed it to Jimmy Silver.

Higgs and Putty Grace rooted out all the catables in the study cupboard. Jimmy Silver & Co. and the rest of the fellows went off to raid their own study cupboards, while

they all pooled resources to get tarts and cakes and lemonade from the tuckshop.

In a remarkably short space of time the table was laid and loaded with good things. Tommy Dodd—alias Uncle Charlie the Second—smiled reflectively. He was wondering if he dare risk sending for his pals, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle.

But he got no time to do more. Tommy Dodd had kept up his end with wonderful histrionic skill and resource. But he was not fated to enjoy the full fruits of his jape. For just as the crowd—quite cheery now—were sitting down to tea, there came a sharp tap on the door.

It opened, to reveal Dicky Dalton, master of the Fourth!

Behind Dicky Dalton showed a stranger—a stout, good-humoured looking gentleman in a tight-fitting tweed suit and soft hat.

There was a sudden silence in the study.

Everybody stared at the stranger behind Mr. Dalton. There was a certain vague resemblance between his features and the features of a certain fat junior now seated at the table. In fact, the stranger might easily have been taken for Tubby Muffin's father, or his uncle.

He proved to be Tubby's uncle. He proved, in fact, to be Tubby's Uncle Charlie—the real, genuine article this time!

"Come inside, Mr. Muffin!" said Dicky Dalton. "Yes, this is your nephew's study, sir! Muffin, this is your uncle—your Uncle Charlie, I believe. He has just flown over from the Continent, and has called in to see Rookwood before going on to your home. I will leave you, Mr. Muffin, go-to-to—"

Dicky Dalton stuttered and stopped. He had suddenly sighted Charles the First and Charles the Second. Naturally he was astonished, not to say astounded, at seeing two elderly gentlemen already in the study.

"What—what—Dear me! Who—who are these gentlemen, Silver?"

It was Tubby Muffin who answered. Only Tubby succeeded in finding his voice just then; the rest just gaped.

"M-mum-my Uncle Charlie!" he gurgled. "But it—ain't possible, sir! This is my Uncle Charlie, sir! He—he must be an impository, sir!"

"What—what? Muffin, are you out of your senses?" gasped Mr. Dalton, staring hard at Charles the First and Charles the Second. "Who—what—Ah!"

Mr. Dalton was exceedingly keen-eyed, and just then he made the surprising discovery that Charles the First's side-whisker was hanging loose. Putty Grace had forgotten to shed his get-up—unluckily for Putty.

But Putty knew instantly that all was up, and even as Dicky Dalton made a stride towards him, he acted. He leaped to his feet, sighted the open window, and went for it with a rush. He reached the sill, showed for a brief instant there, and then vanished.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

He was a second behind Charles the First in leaping up. But Dicky Dalton was already at the window. So Tommy Dodd chose the door. There was a crash and a yell, followed by a series of appalling crashes. In jumping up Tommy Dodd had upset the table. Cups and saucers, plates and dishes, cakes and tarts—all went sliding to the floor amidst yells and howls, as scalding tea spattered right and left. But Tommy Dodd neither heard nor saw the final results. He was already streaking out of the house, going, like Charles the First, whilst the going was good!

There was an inquiry, of course, and an explanation. But as Dicky Dalton never got to know the names of the daring impostors, the explanation was of little avail—excepting to make him laugh.

And the real Uncle Charlie also laughed. He forgave Tubby. Indeed, he seemed an older edition of Tubby Muffin, and was not much interested in sports or work. He neither asked to see pots won at sports, nor books bought for work. He just joined the crowd at tea, paying himself for fresh supplies from the tuckshop. It was a happy evening for Tubby Muffin, and when Uncle Charlie took his departure Tubby voted him a jolly decent and sensible old codger, and Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned and agreed with Tubby's verdict.

On the whole, even Tommy Dodd had to admit that the Modern jape had not been exactly a success.

THE END.

(The Fifth Form are no more successful when they come up against Jimmy Silver & Co. in "The Reform of the Fourth!"—next week's humorous complete story of Rookwood. Order your copy early.)

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St. Jim's on the Stage!

(Continued from page 18.)

"Where's Gussy? Gussy ought to go on now!" exclaimed Manners.

Arthur Augustus heard him, and he came on loyally; but he was in a state of excitement and confusion, and had completely forgotten his part.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"These gallant widers will never fall victims to their cwael foes if I can save them!" cried D'Arcy. "I will go and warn them of their pewil."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dangah!" shouted D'Arcy. "Dangah! Good fwiends, you are in deadly dangah! Jonathan Wild is on the woad with his extwemely wuff followahs—"

"Oh, hark at the silly cuckoo!" ejaculated the wolf. "This comes of letting these silly School House kids into it!"

"Hallo! What's that about the School House?" demanded Red Riding Hood's grandmother.

"I say you School House images are mucking up the whole thing!"

"You New House wasters are spoiling it, you mean!"

"Who are you calling wasters, Herries?"

"I'm calling you New House mongrels wasters!"

"Do you want a black eye or a thick ear?"

"I want 'em both if there's a New House kid who can give 'em to me."

"Well, here's one that can, by Jupiter!"

The next moment the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother were locked in a deadly embrace, and the sight of the old lady with her cap pushed back, and the wolf on his hind legs, staggering over the stage in combat, was really irresistibly comic. The audience were all on their feet now, screaming with merriment.

"Here, stop that!" exclaimed Tom Merry, seizing Figgins by the legs and attempting to drag him off Herries.

The loyal Co. at once rushed to the rescue, and in a moment Tom Merry was on his back on the stage, with Kerr and Little Red Riding Hood sitting on his chest.

That was naturally more than the other School House fellows were going to stand. Blake jumped upon Kerr, and Manners seized hold of Fatty Wynn.

The odds were against the New House contingent, and Figgins & Co. would soon have been defeated, but Figgins bawled for rescue. All thought of the play was over now; it was School House against New House, and the old feud which had slept for a time was fully aroused.

"Rescue, New House!" yelled Figgins.

"Hurrah! Down with the School House cads!" shouted Pratt, leaping upon the stage; and a horde of New House juniors followed him.

The School House juniors were not far behind. Half the hall seemed to empty itself upon the stage in a minute or less, and the scenes went crashing down under trampling feet, and the cottage of Red Riding Hood's grandmother was speedily a wreck.

Masters and prefects were doubled up with laughter, and for a minute or so there was no interference, and the combat raged wildly. Then Mr. Railton and Kildare and the rest shouted for order, and as their voices were not heeded, they invaded the stage and dispersed the fighting juniors by main force.

"Clear the hall, Kildare!" said the Housemaster.

The hall was cleared. The juniors went swarming out, shouting excitedly. They dispersed at last, and the New House party marched off to their own House. Tom Merry was gasping for breath.

"Well, we've beaten them, anyway!" he exclaimed.

Blake gave him a withering look.

"So this is the way your giddy triple alliance works out, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed. "Look here! Triple alliances are off from this night forward! If anybody comes to Study No. 6 again proposing triple alliances he will get slain!"

And Blake marched off with Herries, both of them having damage to repair.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, and followed his chums.

And from that day forward matters resumed their old footing!

THE END.

("The Great Stamp Mystery!" is the title of next Wednesday's sparkling long complete story of St. Jim's. You'll enjoy it immensely, so order your "GEM" early.)

THE MAN WITH A HUNDRED DISGUISES! THRILL-PACKED COMPLETE STORY.

THE WINGER!



CHAPTER 1.

Wise to the Winger's Plan.

"BUT, chief, it's too dangerous!" The Winger, the cool, aristocratic crook who kept London guessing, smiled at his burly companion. "The ethics of success are based on danger, Blake," he replied, blowing rings of blue smoke from his cigar.

"But, chief, it's asking for gaol to go to that dinner," protested Blake, the Winger's first lieutenant. "Why, Detective-Inspector Thomas, half of Scotland Yard, and goodness knows who else will be there."

"Therefore, my dear Blake, it should be a dinner well worth eating," sighed the Winger complacently. "Really, since that little cub, Snap Fane, has been interfering with us, I have scarcely been able to afford a really good dinner."

He flicked the ash off his cigar and smiled through the smoke at his companion.

"Don't worry, Blake," he said softly. "The Winger will never be caught. Not while he has such loyal pals as you and the rest of our company of free-lance gentlemen. Pass me the radio set, please."

Blake shrugged his shoulders and obeyed. He, like all London, knew that for sheer audacity, this debonair young aristocrat rivalled even Raffles of crook fame.

The Winger's methods were always simple—so simple that Blake always expected the police to catch him easily. If the Winger wanted money, he took it in the most obvious way.

"And also the list of guests who will be at the reunion dinner which the police force is getting up," added the Winger.

He placed the radio set beside him on the table, then scanned the list of police officers, from the highest to the lowest, who would be at the dinner which was to be held at the Hotel Glorious on the Thames Embankment.

Only the tuncful ticking of the gilded clock disturbed the silence of the luxurious room in which they sat, less than a quarter of a mile from Scotland Yard.

"This list gives six hundred names of guests, Blake, and allowing that each man has an average of five pounds in his wallet, that will give us three thousand pounds," smiled

the Winger. "Well, it isn't very much, but it's something to go on with."

"But, chief, you're mad to go and dine with six hundred policemen!" gasped Blake, in a final desperate effort to make his chief give up this mad-brained scheme.

"My dear Blake!" The Winger's tone was soft and silky, yet his green eyes flashed hard.

His delicate fingers uphooked the receiver of the radio set, which was an exact pattern of the very latest radio sets supplied to the police. It was small, weighing about two and a half pounds, and could easily be carried in the coat pocket. Also, it had a clear radius of over fifty miles.

"Hallo, sergeant—I beg your pardon, I mean, Detective-Inspector Thomas!" he called into the short wave-length transmitter. "Hallo, there—hallo, Mr. Thomas—"

"Not as alert as usual, Blake," he smiled, covering the transmitter with one hand. "Still, what can you expect of— Ah-ha!"

A gruff voice echoed in the room.

"Ah, is that you, Mr. Thomas?" asked the Winger politely. "Nice evening, isn't it?"

"Who's speaking?" demanded the gruff voice.

"Your old friend, the Winger, of course, sergeant—I beg your pardon; I'm always trying to disrate you, aren't I, Inspector Thomas?"

Inspector Thomas?" chipped the Winger. "By the way, they would promote you if you caught me, wouldn't they, old bean?"

"What do you want, Winger?" snapped Thomas.

"And they will soon be disrating you, or, at least, taking you off the rather difficult job of trying to catch me if you

don't succeed soon, won't they, Mr. Thomas?" chaffed the Winger.

"You rat! I'll get you yet!" snorted Thomas' gruff voice.

"Of course you will!" the Winger agreed. "Why, I shall soon be seeing you, anyhow. Better bring a lot of uniformed asses with you, because I shall have an escort, too. Bye-bye, old bean! Hope you enjoy your reunion dinner!"

The Winger cut out. Detective-Inspector Thomas pushed his radio set aside and jumped from his chair in his office at Scotland Yard.

"The infernal impudence of the crook!" he snorted angrily.

Lying in his homo-made paddle-boat which he worked by a pair of bicycle pedals, Snap Fane, the Cockney kid, whose one aim in life was to lay the Winger low, grinned across the darkness of Barking Creek.

On the thwart beside him stood a radio set which the London police had given him. Day and night he carried the radio with him, always tuned in to the Winger's own short wave-length.

THE WINGER ATTENDS A POLICEMEN'S DINNER and nearly robs the lot!

"Crikey! What's he up to now?" he grinned, tilting his snub nose to the lowering clouds.

Snap had also picked up that impudent conversation between the Winger and Inspector Thomas—every word of it.

"What's he mean when he told Thomas that he would be seeing him soon?" he asked the fleeting stars which peeped between drifting clouds.

"Hope you enjoy your reunion dinner!" muttered Snap. "Jingo, I wonder if he's going to be there?"

For a moment his ferret eyes shone with hope. Then he shook his head and began to paddle out into the Thames.

"Not even the Winger would dare risk going to a dinner where six hundred cops are," he told himself. "Anyhow, what would he go there for? He doesn't pinch precious stones or gold plate—Gee-whiz!"

Snap's keen brain suddenly started doing some mental arithmetic.

"Suppose every copper there had two quid on him, that would make twelve hundred pounds in that dining-room at the Glorious," he mused, as he paddled up-stream on the flood tide. "Gee, what a lot of money there can be in one room when a pile of fellers crowd together."

Snap was a bit out, for scarcely any of the guests would carry so little money on such a night.

CHAPTER 2.

The Kidnapped Detectives.

"**P**ERHAPS we might net four thousand, Blake," smiled the Winger. "By the way, are Numbers Four, Five, Seven, and Nine at Southampton?"

"Went down by road this morning, chief," said Blake sharply.

"Our country house in Essex—the one I rented for the week-end, all ready?" asked the Winger.

"Numbers Three, Six, and Ten are there, and plenty of food and wine," smiled Blake.

The Winger rose and smiled pleasantly.

"I'd just hate to do them out of their dinner, Blake," he said enigmatically. "Now, shall we go and meet police officers Densham and Pollack, of the Southampton Police Force?"

Slipping on an opera hat and cloak, the Winger and his lieutenant jumped into a magnificent saloon car, the Winger himself taking the wheel.

Through Piccadilly, down the Brompton Road, and out of London by the south-west arterial they went, the Rolls-Royce eating up the miles with silent grace.

Five miles the London side of Basingstoke, the Winger shut off his lights and drew into the side of the road. The clock on the dash showed half-past twelve. The countryside was deserted and silent.

Five minutes passed. The drone of a powerful car's engines sounded from afar. Three minutes later a large car appeared, sweeping down the road towards them from the direction of Basingstoke.

It stopped close beside the Rolls.

"Dinner!" called a man from the dark interior.

"Money," purred the Winger musically, giving the countersign to the password. "Well, gentlemen, is everything all right?"

Two men disembarked from the other car, carrying a long bundle between them. Two others followed, carrying another bundle, both of which they placed in the roomy rear of the Rolls-Royce saloon.

"Splendid!" smiled the Winger. "Make north, you chaps, just in case your car should have been especially noticed in Southampton. You know my plans?"

"By heart, chief; but—"

"I know," interrupted the Winger abruptly. "Too risky, eh? Blake's been dinning that into my ear all the night. We're going through with it. I'm broke, and so are most of you. Until to-morrow night, at eleven o'clock sharp."

The cars parted company. Two hours later the Rolls-Royce ran down the drive to a small, isolated country house in Essex. The Winger gave a tattoo of raps on the front door, which was instantly opened.

"Detectives Densham and Pollack are in the back of the car," he said. "Please bring them in."

Shadowy figures lifted the two long bundles out and carried them into a shuttered drawing-room luxuriously furnished. One was slim and about the Winger's own figure, although his face was not the pink-and-white complexion of that famous polished crook.

The other one was burly, red-faced, too, and a bruiser—just the figure of Blake, the Winger's second in command.

Both men were wound around in black sacks, swathed

in ropes. Only their heads protruded, and the mouths of both were heavily gagged.

"I apologise for this rather rough treatment, gentlemen," smiled the Winger, returning from another room where he had donned a skin mask which made his face look like a bladder of lard, with arched eyebrows. "Remove their gags, gentlemen."

The gags were removed, and the black sacks taken off. Then it could be seen that their ankles and wrists were firmly secured in regulation police manacles and silken cords.

"I regret that I had to kidnap you two gentlemen," smiled the crook politely, "but I am fearfully keen to attend the police reunion dinner this evening. I fear I am not a welcome guest, so I took the expedient of kidnapping two police officers with figures more or less like Blake's and mine, so that we can go in your places."

"Who the blazes are you?" snarled Detective Pollack.

"Rather a celebrity," replied the Winger. "All England has heard of the Winger."

"The Winger!" gasped both captured detectives together. The Winger bowed politely.

"You will be my guests here until Sunday morning, gentlemen. And so that you will not miss a good dinner, I am giving you a duplicate of the menu you would have enjoyed to-night at the Hotel Glorious. My friends will entertain you."

"You're going to our reunion dinner?" gasped Pollack, aghast.

"Good! They'll get you, Winger!" sneered Densham.

The Winger sat down and joined the tips of his fingers.

"How much money do you estimate every police officer will have on him this evening, gentlemen?" he asked coolly.

"The average, I mean."

"Why?" demanded Detective Densham.

"Because, whatever the amount works out at, I shall be that much richer by this time to-morrow morning," smiled the Winger. "Now, I expect you are tired. It is dawning, and I think a little sleep will do us all good."

Dawn found Snap Fane asleep in his home-made boat alongside the Embankment steps. At six o'clock the keen-witted boy was asking for a job as additional pageboy at the Glorious Hotel, where they were engaging temporary hands to wait on the six hundred policemen guests.

"Won't do any harm, and I might be right," he told himself. "The Winger might attend the dinner. Gee, what a cheek if he does!"

Snap found himself engaged for twenty-four hours. On the offchance that the Winger's sarcastic message had something to do with this dinner, he had decided to get the job as additional pageboy.

And while the Winger slept peacefully, Snap scurried about in the special dining-hall which had been set apart for the reunion dinner of six hundred police officers.

This room was in the west wing, well away from the ordinary part of the famous hotel. In this room the old soldiers could sing War-time songs, laugh, and talk loudly, without disturbing other guests in the hotel.

Snap surveyed the room carefully. Twelve feet above the floor ran a balcony, one side of which opened out on to the riverside gardens.

Dare the Winger come to this place?

"Gee! He'd stand as much chance as a chap in a cageful of Bengal tigers!" muttered Snap.

But, all the same, he knew the Winger. And when it seemed impossible to achieve a job, Snap knew that his enemy would most likely try it and, with sheer cheek and impudence, succeed.

In his pocket he carried his radio set, tuned in for any signals which the Winger might send out. The day passed without any. Evening came.

The last details of that huge dinner were completed. Three long tables ran the length of the dining-hall. Another one crossed the tops of each, this being where the Chief of Police and more notable guests would be seated.

Directly above this table was the gallery which opened out on to the Embankment gardens of the Glorious.

The stage was set. Six hundred policemen, every one of them an ex-Service man, would assemble there shortly to talk over the moil, murk, and joys of the Great War.

Rank would be forgotten. Colonel would sit next to private, police-constables would chat with commissioners and high detectives.

Would the Winger dare come there?

While Snap pondered this, the object of his thoughts was smiling at himself in a mirror of that little country house in Essex.

"Well, my dear Blake, I think even Mrs. Pollack would take you for her husband," he said, with a dry chuckle.

Blake, his second in command, laughed gruffly, and eyed his chief.

"Disguising yourself as Densham hasn't improved your appearance, chief," he remarked.

"No, but it's going to improve my pocket!" sighed the Winger.

CHAPTER 3.

Stand and Deliver!

THE guests were arriving. In the ante-room which adjoined the vast dining-hall Snap was busy taking the coats and hats of the war-scarred warriors. In groups they stood around, chatting together, while the Chief of the Police, a retired Army general, received the arriving guests.

Snap Fane kept his eyes open. As the police officers entered the room, he surveyed every one of them from head to foot.

"Gosh! If the Winger does come, I've got him for keeps!" he mused, as two men in evening dress came in through the swing door, one wearing a Victoria Cross and other medals.

"Hallo, Densham! Nice to see you again, old crock!" cried one erect man whom Snap knew to be the chief commissioner for a northern district. "Years since we met, old man!"

The officer wearing the Victoria Cross smiled and shook hands.

"Years since I met any of my old-time pals," he smiled, speaking in a soft voice. "I'm afraid my memory isn't as good as it used to be. Was it on the Somme or at the Dardanelles I was with you, sir?"

Snap edged around to take a look at the wearer of the Victoria Cross. His figure was familiar to the Winger, although he walked with a slight limp.

Snap moved away, thinking deeply. Somehow Captain Densham reminded him forcibly of the Winger. Yet the Winger's eyes were clear green—green as an emerald, and as hard.

This officer's were greenish-grey, and seemed filmed over. Then the limp. The Winger was straight as an arrow, and active as an acrobat.

The double doors leading to the dining-room were flung open. The Chief of Police led the way into the huge hall. In couples and threes the rest followed. Snap watched for Detective-Inspector Thomas, and as he passed he sidled up alongside.

"Have you ever met Mr. Densham, sir?" he asked softly. "Great Scott, it's Snap Fane doing pageboy!" exclaimed Thomas. "I say, Hull, here's Snap!"

Captain Densham, alias the Winger, just behind, flung a knowing look at Pollack, then walked past.

"Do you know that officer, sir?" asked Snap, indicating Densham, V.C.

"Know Densham—rather!" smiled Thomas. "Why, it was mo who got him his present job at Southampton. Densham and I were at the Dardanelles together. In fact, ho was my subaltern."

"Don't forget the Winger's message, Mr. Thomas," advised Snap.

Inspector Thomas and Sergeant Hull roared with laughter.

"You're Winger mad, Snap," said Hull. "Let's forget him for this one night. You don't think he'd be such a fool as to come here, do you?"

Snap made no answer. The guests were filing in to take their places. Eagerly he watched where Captain Densham and his friend sat.

Then the great doors closed. The strains of the orchestra resounded to the National Anthem. The dinner started. Old War songs were played on the organ—"Tipperary," "Pack Up Your Troubles," and all the rest.

With nothing to do but wait for the end of the dinner, Snap scouted around. Something told him the Winger was somewhere near—some indefinable feeling which kept his wits working and his nerves on edge.

Every time the dining-hall doors opened, Snap snatched a look inside. Speeches were being made and replied to. The clink of glasses mingled with the hum of six hundred men talking war.

Snap stole away from the ante-room, made a detour of the corridors, and reached a staircase which led to the balcony facing the Embankment.

It was nearly eleven o'clock. The dark shadow of a slip was passing down the river. The balcony was deserted. Palms in tubs stood here and there. Shafts of yellow light streamed sharply across from the open doors which led to the gallery above the dining-hall.

Snap crept to one of the doors, entered, and hid behind the folds of a heavy curtain. As he looked down into the



Taking a flying leap from the gallery, as the Winger fired, Snap landed on Blake's shoulders and crashed him to the floor!

dining-hall, the orchestra burst forth with "Tipperary," and a mighty wave of singing started.

"It's a long, long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go!"

Snap, looking down, felt he was wrong. That man down there could not be the Winger.

Captain Densham was singing loudly, waving an empty glass as he sang, and staring straight up at the gallery as if he could see Snap there behind the heavy curtains.

Then suddenly the orchestra stopped in the middle of a bar. The singers went on raggedly for a few seconds, then they, too, trailed off into silence.

Snap gulped. A shiver crept down his back.

The lights suddenly went out, plunging the great hall into darkness.

"Got Snap Fane, hiding behind first curtain on right of gallery!"

The voice came from Snap's own pocket. It was the Winger's undisguised voice.

Snatching out his radio set, Snap slid along the wall. Footsteps sounded, soft and padded, outside on the balcony. A shadowy figure stole towards the curtain where, a second before, he had been hiding.

Someone down below in the dining-hall was starting to sing again when, of a sudden, a clear, ringing voice drowned his song.

"The first man who moves dies! Stand and deliver!"

"Gosh, the Winger!" gasped Snap.

The man from the balcony reached the curtain, crouched, and sprang for it. At the same instant Snap hurled himself on him from behind, crashed his pocket radio set down on his head, and caught the sagging body in his arms.

Other shadows were coming in from the balcony and lining the gallery rails.

"Good-evening, Detective-Inspector Thomas!" laughed the Winger's icy voice. "I said we would soon meet again."

Down below men were beginning to shout and ask that this joke should stop. Then the shadow men lining the gallery started to roar out old War songs.

Snap dragged the gangster he had downed behind the curtain and looked back. Every singer around the gallery was shining a strong torch down on the upturned sea of white faces below.

And standing at the side of the table on a chair was the Winger, a brace of shining automatics held in his white hands.

CHAPTER 4.

The Winger Winged!

SWIFTLY Snap gagged his man, then stripped the mask off his face and put it on. Next he donned the man's evening clothes, even to the shirt and collar.

This took him five minutes or more, and when he peeped out again the sight he saw made him gasp.

The Winger was standing on a chair set back against the wall, his eyes gleaming even in the gloom. Every police officer present was standing with his hands above his head and his back to the table.

Pollack, alias Blake, was going round the room from guest to guest, taking their wallets and throwing them into a black silk bag. Arrayed around the gallery above were sixteen masked singers in evening dress, each with a brace of automatics in his hands and an electric torch attached to a wrist.

Pressed hard against the wall Snap stole out on to the balcony unseen by any of the Winger's gang. Then down the staircase and along the corridors to the ante-room door. It was locked.

He peeped through the keyhole but could see nothing. A second later he was on the telephone to Scotland Yard.

"Send a posse of cops to the Glorious Hotel—quick!"

He cut out and darted back to the gallery. With the automatics of the gangster he had downed, he took his place among the singers.

Down below the guests were being stripped of their money. The Winger still stood covering the whole room.

Blake was nearly finished. The black silk sack bulged with Treasury and banknotes. Empty wallets lay all around the room. Disguised and with his mask on, Snap edged closer to the man next to him, yelling out an old War song with the rest.

Blake was approaching the Chief of Police. Another half-dozen guests remained to be robbed.

Snap raised his automatic and took steady aim at the Winger's right shoulder. He must bluff, for five minutes' time would see the Winger and his gang away.

His finger curled around the trigger.

The man next to him turned at that moment.

Crack! His bullet sped to its mark, and there was a yell from the gangster who had seen him aiming at the Winger.

Crack! Swift as light the Winger looked up, his right arm limp by his side. But the pistol in his left hand spat straight at Snap.

"Ouch!"

Snap's left arm tingled. The Winger had shot him—winged him, as he did anyone who resisted.

"Come on, the cops!" yelled Snap, taking a flying leap over the gallery.

He landed astride Blake's shoulders, crashing him to the floor and upsetting some chairs. The singing stopped. The icy voice of the Winger rose above the melee of shouts and rushing feet.

Snap grabbed with his uninjured hand at the black silk sack.

"You ass! I fell over the gallery," he said to Blake. "What's up?"

Blake rose, and stood glowering at him. Then a shrill series of whistles thrilled above the noise and din.

A hammering on the ante-room doors rang muffled and low through the dining-room.

"Bring the swag and follow me!" shouted the Winger. Menacing the guests with his pistol, the Winger dashed clean across the table, scattering dishes and decanters in his flight. Blake beckoned to Snap, and followed.

Crash! The door of the ante-room was burst in. Heavy-booted feet dashed for the closed doors of the dining-hall.

The doors shook as they battered at them. Snap yelled to the astonished guests and dived under the table as the Winger turned and fired at him from across the room.

A pair of rope ladders were thrown down by the masked men above. Like sailors, the Winger and Blake swarmed up them.

The dining-hall doors crashed inwards, bringing with them a dozen uniformed policemen and a host of hotel servants.

"Got the money, Blake?"

The Winger stood poised for one second on the gallery rail, a sarcastic grin on his disguised features.

"No, chief. That chap of our band who fell from the gallery took it from me," replied Blake.

Snap peeped out from under the table. The Winger saw him, and his jaw set like a steel trap.

"You idiot, that's Snap Fane!" he roared savagely.

For a moment Snap thought the crook was going to come down again to wrest the sack of money from him. But as a uniformed policeman raised a heavy Service automatic the Winger sprang backwards.

Instantly the torches went out. There followed a scuffle of feet and shouts and cries from the raiding police, and then, weak from loss of blood, Snap's senses left him.

"Did you get him, Mr. Thomas?"

Snap opened his eyes, to find himself in Inspector Thomas' private office at Scotland Yard.

"Every man got away, except one we found in your page's clothes, gagged and bound behind a curtain on the gallery, Snap!" growled Thomas.

"But I saved the money, mister!" grinned Snap.

Inspector Thomas nodded gloomily and eyed the sack.

"It's going to be some job returning every guest his exact amount!" he growled.

Meanwhile, the Winger's fleet of motor-cars, which had been waiting close by on the Embankment, dashed through the night to the little furnished house in Essex which he had rented for the week-end.

The gang entered the house and stood around their chief.

"Dope Densham and Pollack, and leave them outside Scotland Yard!" he commanded icily.

Four of the gang disappeared.

"Blake, that kid Snap's getting a nuisance!" he said icily. "Not a bean out of this stunt. In fact, I'm out of pocket!"

He snatched up his radio set and tuned in.

"Hallo, hallo! Snap Fane! Snap Fane!" he cried into the instrument. "Listen here, Snap, I'm after you for this!" he barked savagely.

"Good, Winger! Then we're after each other!" answered Snap's cheery voice.

THE END.

(Once again Snap has defeated the Winger. But in next Wednesday's thrilling yarn, the young 'tec joins up with his enemy. He has good reasons for doing so, however. Make sure you read this story.)

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"Look out, Schneider!"
 "Get out of the way!" gasped Manners.
 He dragged desperately on the reins.
 Herr Schneider looked over the top of the paper, and stood petrified as he saw the pony rushing at him full tilt.
 "Mein Gott!" he gasped.
 Not a movement did he make to save himself. There was no time.
 Manners dragged on the rein till his arm seemed to be coming out of its socket, and at the last moment Dobbin swerved, missed the German master by about a foot, and rushed past him.
 Herr Schneider tottered.
 "Mein Gott!"
 He sat down in the gravel, and remained there gasping. The pony dashed on.
 But Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had seen the wild career of Manners from his study window, and had come out of the School House.
 It was quick work for the captain to seize the pony's bridle and force him to stop. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was also coming up. He gave Manners a hand to dismount, and then laid a hand on his collar.
 "What does this mean, Manners?" he inquired pleasantly.
 "The blessed animal bolted, sir!" gasped Manners.
 "What were you doing on Taggles' pony at all?"
 "I—I—I—"
 "Taggles, take your pony!"
 "Yes, sir."
 "What was Manners doing, riding your pony?"
 "They was a-re'earsing, sir," said Taggles.
 "A what?"
 "A-re'earsing."
 "What does he mean, Manners?"
 "Rehearsing, sir."
 "Oh, and what were you rehearsing?"
 Manners was silent. He realised that if he replied to Mr. Railton's question, the secret would be out.
 "Did you hear me, Manners?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "Well, answer me, then. You may take your pony away, Taggles, and I think you had better not lend it to Manners again."
 "I'll take jolly good care of that," mumbled Taggles, as he led Dobbin off the scene.
 "Now, Manners, what were you rehearsing?"
 "A—a—I—I—"
 "Mein Gott, I was startled out of mein life und skin after! I have never been so much startled out of mein skin sometimes before!"
 "I am sorry, sir," said Manners.
 "Ach! But I have been made to joomp after! I have been injured in te nerves by te shock. Mr. Railton, you vill cane tat poy before!"
 "Unless you explain to me immediately, Manners, I shall certainly cane you."
 Manners cast a helpless glance at Tom Merry, who had now come up.
 "Merry, I suppose you know all about this. What was this rehearsing in which Taggles' pony seems to have taken the principal part?"
 "We—we were—. You see, sir—"
 "Ah! I hear that you have asked the Head for the hall on Saturday evening for a play to be produced by the Juniors of both Houses?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "And you were rehearsing the play?"
 "Ye-e-es."
 Tom Merry made the reply reluctantly, but there was no help for it.
 "Then Taggles' pony is intended to take part in the representation on Saturday evening?" asked the Housemaster.
 "Ye-e-es, sir."
 "Indeed! What is the name of your play?"
 "'Dashing Dick Turpin,' sir."
 "Oh! And Taggles' pony is Black Bess, I presume?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "And if he bolted in the lecture hall—"
 "Oh, he wouldn't do that, sir."
 "How do you know he would not?"
 "Well, I—I don't think he would."
 "That is hardly convincing enough, Merry. I am afraid it will be necessary for you to change your programme, or else abandon the scheme altogether. It will be quite impossible for Taggles' pony to be admitted to the hall."
 "Oh, sir."
 "I am sorry to cause you any disappointment, Merry," said the Housemaster, kindly enough, "but the idea was

an extremely reckless one, and it is fortunate that I have learned in time what your absurd intention was."
 "We could get another horse, sir," said Tom eagerly.
 "I'm not particularly gone on Taggles' pony. It's a sandy coloured brute, anyway, and we should have to do a lot of painting him. I could get a horse in the village—"
 "Merry, understand me once and for all—it is impossible for any animal to be taken into the lecture hall."
 And Mr. Railton, with a warning wag of his forefinger, walked into the School House.
 The members of the triple alliance stood looking at each other in dismay, and they were not comforted by the grinning and jeering of Gore, Jimson, and the rest.
 "Come to my study and talk it over," said Tom Merry dolefully.
 And the triple alliance went into that famous apartment to hold a council of war.



Dragging desperately at the reins, Manners endeavoured to stop the frightened pony as it dashed towards the petrified Herr Schneider, but without success. "Get out of the way!" gasped the junior.

CHAPTER 6.
 A Change in the Programme.

TOM MERRY sat on the table and wrinkled his boyish brows in deep thought.
 The triple alliance waited for him to speak. They were all looking considerably glum.
 "Well," said Tom, looking round, "this is a bit of a setback, and we can't get over it."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Railton says we can't have the pony or any other quadruped in the lecture hall. There's no bucking against what Railton says."
 "Then what's to be done?" asked Herries.
 "I vote that we scrag Manners for giving the show away," suggested Figgins.
 "Good idea!" chimed in the Co.
 Manners reached out in a casual way for a cricket stump. But Tom Merry waved his hand to enjoin peace.
 "That wouldn't do any good," he said. "Besides, i;

wasn't Manners' fault. Gore and those other kids frightened the pony by yelling, and it was really their fault that Dobbin bolted. It was a stroke of bad luck."
 "Yaas, wathah."
 "We've got to take things as they are," continued Tom. "It's no good thinking of what might have been. The cat's out of the bag now, and we can't have any Black Bess on the stage. That seems to me to knock 'Dick Turpin' on the head."
 "'Dick Turpin' without Black Bess would be a bit off," agreed Blake. "But we've written the whole blessed play—"
 "It can't be helped."
 "And learned our parts—"
 "I know it's rotten."
 "And there's only three days to Saturday."
 "Yes, it's fearful bad luck."
 "So if we don't give Turpin and Black Bess, I don't see, for one, what we're going to give."
 "Give up the ideah," suggested Arthur Augustus.
 Every eye was turned witheringly upon him.
 "Dry up!" said Tom Merry. "After asking for the hall, what silly asses we should look to go sneaking round and saying that we didn't want it, after all."

"And how the chaps would ship us," said Blake. "It's all over the school that we're going to give a dramatic representation on Saturday evening, and if we don't give one we shall be chipped to death."
 "That's absolutely certain."
 "We must give something!" exclaimed Figgins. "'Dick Turpin' without Black Bess would be rot, so it will have to be something else. The question is, what?"
 "'The Woad to Wuin,'" said D'Arcy.
 "Rot!" was the general verdict.
 "No, weally, a fellah told my cousin that it was—"
 "Don't make any more suggestions, Gussy. Sit tight, and dry up."
 "I wefuse—I distinctly wefuse—"
 "Brain him, somebody. Now, I said all along that 'Hamlet' was the thing," said Figgins.
 "What price the 'Merchant of Venice'?" demanded Herries.
 "Oh, don't start all that again!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"We've barred all those. We shall have to come back to my original idea."
 "Never knew you had any," said Figgins. "The idea of a dramatic society was boned from us. The New House Amateur Dramatic Society was the first—"
 "My idea was 'Little Red Riding Hood.'"
 "I don't think much of that."
 "You don't think much at all, in my opinion, Figgins."
 "Well, we must decide on something," said Blake, "and I think you'll agree that we couldn't learn our parts in 'Hamlet' or 'The Merchant of Venice' in three days."
 "N-no, I suppose not."
 "We've got to have the thing for Saturday."
 "That's a dead cert. Whatever we give has got to be given on Saturday, at the time arranged, or else we shall be sniggered at all over St. Jim's, so I suggest 'Little Red Riding Hood.'"
 "Have you got the thing written out?" asked Figgins.
 "I wrote out a lot of it," said Tom. "We can soon knock it into shape."
 "What about the parts?"
 "Well, Figgins will make a good wolf," said Tom. "His face—"
 "I don't want to quarrel with anybody," said Figgins; "but any remarks about my face will lead to a row."
 "Well, anyway, you're all right for the wolf. Little Red Riding Hood will be Fatty Wynn, as he's got a smooth phiz."
 "I'm ready," said Fatty.
 "You won't make a very slim girl, that's certain," said Tom; "but it can't be helped. I think you chaps might see he doesn't gorge as much as usual the next few days."
 "Right-ho!" said Figgins. "He shan't have any pastry or sweets again till after Saturday."
 "Here, what's that?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.
 "No more sweets or pastry till after Saturday."
 "Catch me!"
 "If I catch you eating any, my boy, I'll warm you!" said Figgins. "Do you think we are going to have a Red Riding Hood as fat as a barrel because you must go on eating like a giddy rhinoceros? Not much!"
 "That's settled," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Now, I think I shall do very well for the huntsman."
 "Good enough!"
 "Herries will do for the grandmother, because he's got a bad memory, and the old girl won't have to say much."
 "Oh, I don't care!" said Herries.
 "Blake will be Little Red Riding Hood's fiance."
 "Her what?"
 "Her fiance. Her giddy young man, if you like that better."
 "She never had one."
 "How do you know?"
 "Well, I never heard of him."
 "There are lots of things you never heard of, Blake. What you don't know would fill a book."
 "Oh, keep your wool on!"
 "Well, don't criticise, then. We must have eight characters, or some of us will be left out. You'll be a fiance, and we'll put it on the programme, and show the Upper Form fellows we know French as well as they do."
 "Well, there's something in that. Shall I have to fiance?"
 "To what?"
 "To fiance? I suppose that's what a fiance does?"
 "You're not going to fyongs with me, whatever you mean by fyongs!" said Fatty Wynn.
 "We'll settle what you're to do afterwards," said Tom Merry. "We're fixing up the parts now. Now, we've got Figgins as the wolf, Herries as the grandmother, Fatty as the girl, Blake as her fiance, and myself as the huntsman. Kerr, D'Arcy, and Manners will have to be villagers."
 "That's rather a come-down after Dick Turpin," said Manners.
 "Oh, don't grumble! It's all for the good of the cause."
 "I'm not grumbling."
 "It's settled, then," said Tom. "Kerr will have to see to the costumes. It's lucky he got the last lot on hire instead of buying them, as we thought at first. You must see to all that by Friday, Kerr."
 "Trust me!" said Kerr.
 And the meeting of the triple alliance broke up. They felt rather proud of themselves for having so quickly repaired the programme which had been "busted" by the Housemaster's decision.
 "Talking does make one hungry!" said Fatty Wynn, feeling in his pockets as he went out of the School House.
 Figgins looked at him suspiciously.
 "Where are you going, Fatty?"
 "Only across to the tuckshop. I'll catch you up."
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