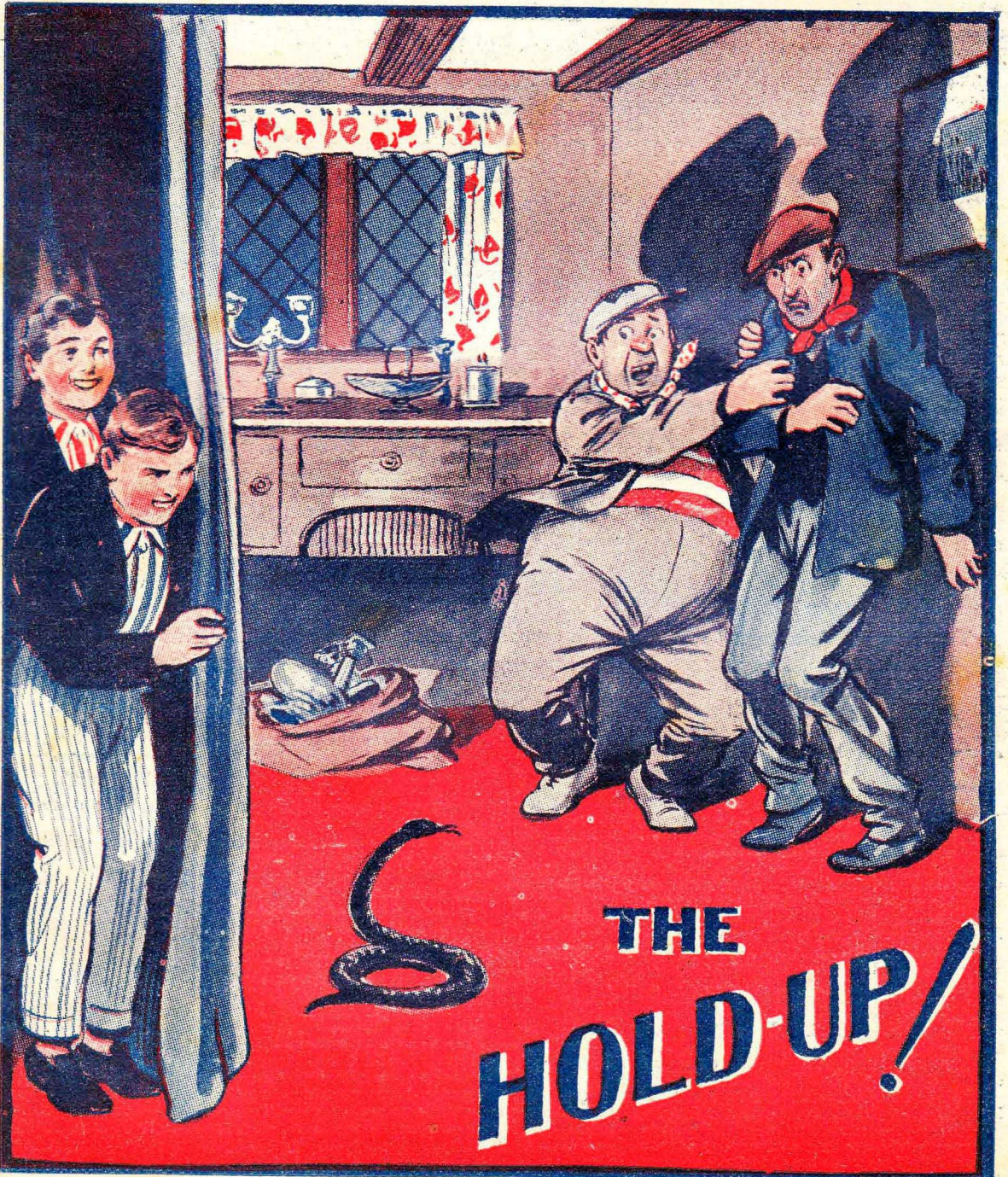


WHAT HAPPENED TO D'ARCY'S WATCH? See the ripping long complete St. Jim's school yarn INSIDE!

The GEM 2^d



The TERRORS of



Two burglars thought they were the terrors of Huckleberry Heath! But they found out that there were worse terrors—when Tom Merry & Co. came along!

CHAPTER 1. An Amazing Letter.

DEAR me! I wonder what this can possibly mean?" Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, wore a puzzled look. He was sitting in his study at St. Jim's, and he had a letter in his hand. He had read it through once with an expression of surprise. Then he adjusted his pince-nez and read it through again, his surprise deepening to absolute amazement.

"Dear me! I wonder— Ah, Mr. Railton, I am glad to see you! Will you kindly glance through this letter, and tell me if you can understand what it means?"

Mr. Railton, the athletic master of the School House at St. Jim's, entered the Head's study.

"Certainly, sir!"

He took the letter and glanced at it.

"It is from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess," Dr. Holmes explained. "Miss Fawcett's letters are never—never exactly—er—commonplace, but really I never read anything so extraordinary as this in my life before."

Mr. Railton's face was growing as amazed as the Head's as he read.

"Can you make anything of it, Mr. Railton?" asked Dr. Holmes, as the Housemaster lowered the letter.

"It certainly seems a little—a little incoherent," said Mr. Railton, with a smile. "I imagine that Tom Merry's

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governess wrote this letter under the influence of great agitation."

"So I should think," said the Head dryly. "If I did not know that Miss Fawcett was the very soul of propriety and decorum I might really be inclined to suspect that it was written under the influence of—of something else. That, of course, is impossible; but really the letter is most incomprehensible."

Mr. Railton looked at the letter again, and wrinkled his brows thoughtfully over it.

"Perhaps if you read it out," suggested the Head, "we might be able to unravel the meaning between us. They say that two heads are better than one, though really I think half a dozen heads would not be too many to undertake the task of disentangling the meaning of that letter."

Mr. Railton nodded assent and began to read the letter of Miss Priscilla Fawcett aloud in his deep, clear voice.

"Dear Dr. Holmes,—I hope that you will find it possible to accede to the request I am going to make. They have been seen in the neighbourhood, and I am convinced that it is the lace my brother sent me from India that they are after. I dare say you will think I am very nervous, but I have reason to be; and it would be a great comfort to me to have Tom at home until my brother arrives."

"My dearest boy was not looking at all well when I saw him last. His cheeks were very red and his eyes very

—IN THIS THRILLING YARN OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

HUCKLEBERRY HEATH!



By
Martin Clifford.

bright, and I am afraid that these are symptoms of a feverish state. I should be glad to have him under my own care for a time; and he is of so studious a disposition that I am assured that his education will not suffer. If two or three of his friends could come home with him it would give me a greater feeling of security. What could I say to my brother if they succeeded in purloining the lace, which is worth thousands of rupees?

"You will probably consider me nervous and foolish, but I know perfectly well that it is the lace they want. I saw a strange man looking into my garden to-day, and, though he only begged for some bread, I am certain that he was one of them in disguise. He had a wicked look in his eyes.

"I am anxious about his health, too. Under my own care he would soon become quite strong again, and could return to St. James' Collegiate School quite a new boy. He has never met my brother since he was quite a child, and will not remember him, and so the meeting will be a great pleasure to both. I shall take every precaution to prevent them from stealing the lace, but I do not feel secure.

"Please let Tom come home for a few days till my brother arrives, and let some of his friends come with him. It would not be safe for him to come alone, as they might not be afraid of one. I hope you will accede to my request."

Mr. Railton looked up from the letter.

"It is certainly amazing," he said; "but it seems clear that Miss Fawcett is in a state of fright about something."

"Yes, certainly. But—but why should she think that the man who looked into her garden was one of Tom Merry's friends in disguise?"

Mr. Railton laughed.

"I do not think she means that, Dr. Holmes, though the words would certainly seem to bear that construction."

"Then she says definitely that she is afraid that her brother and Tom Merry will purloin her valuable lace, and later she fears that Tom Merry's chums will take it. It is really most incomprehensible."

"Ha, ha, ha! I do not think she means exactly that, either."

"I suppose not. But what does she mean?"

"Ah, that is not so easy to decide! It is possible that bad characters have been seen in the neighbourhood of Huckleberry Heath of late, and that Miss Fawcett has been thrown into a state of terror by their appearance."

The doctor nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes; that may be the explanation."

"She would naturally feel, under such circumstances, more secure with her ward in the house, and some of his friends with him," the Housemaster remarked. "It is rather an unusual request to make, I am sure."

"Yet, if Mr. Fawcett is returning in a few days from India, the boys could then come back to the school," Dr. Holmes remarked. "Tom Merry, naturally, would go home to see Mr. Francis Fawcett; the others—"

"It depends upon whom Tom Merry selects to go with him," said Mr. Railton. "I know the lads he usually chums with, and some of them would not lose by a few days' rest, while others, I think, should not be taken from their studies."

The Head passed his hand thoughtfully over his chin.

"I must, of course, accede to Miss Fawcett's request if I can," he said. "She is evidently in a great state of nervousness, and she is such a good soul that it is always my desire to oblige her if possible. I cannot forget, either, how liberally she subscribed to the funds for restoring the chapel. I think we may let Tom Merry go, and allow him to take, say, three or four others with him."

"I quite agree with you, sir."

"Then I leave the matter in your hands, Mr. Railton," said the Head. "You will decide which boys shall be his companions."

"Certainly, Dr. Holmes."

And Mr. Railton quitted the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes put Miss Fawcett's letter in a pigeon-hole in his desk.

"A most extraordinary letter," he murmured—"most extraordinary! But in many circumstances Miss Fawcett is a little—er—unusual. But a good soul, and a lady whom I greatly esteem."

Mr. Railton walked along the corridor into the School House, and met Jack Blake of Study No. 6 in the passage. Morning school was over and so was the early dinner of the Saints, and Blake was going out.

Mr. Railton beckoned to him.

"Do you know where Tom Merry is, Blake?"

"In his study, sir. Manners has caught a cold and is staying in, and Tom Merry and Lowther are with him."

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was with Blake. "He is twyin' to persuade Mannahs to take some of Miss Fawcett's medicine for colds, but Mannahs isn't takin' any, you know."

Mr. Railton smiled and went upstairs to the study occupied by the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther.

The door was open, and the Housemaster heard the voices of the chums of the Shell as he came up the passage.

"Gr-rrr—atchooo—atcnoooo—atchooooo-oo-ooo!"

"Sneezing again, Manners?"

"It's that beastly cold in my nose!"

"You ought to lay up with it."

"Rats! I'm not going to lay up with a cold in the nose!"

"Then take some medicine."

"Gr-r-rr—atchooo—atchooo!"

"I've got a nice assortment here," went on Tom Merry, the hero of the Shell. "You know, my old governess sends me a lot of medicine, and I never take any, so I've got quite an accumulation. Here's some of Dr. Bones' Purple Pills for Pinky, Peaky Patients. You take fifteen before every meal—"

"Oh, go and bury 'em!"

"Well, here's Dr. Bones' Specials—a really good line in pills—and you have to take only six daily—"

"Rats!"

"And here's cod-liver oil by the gallon. You take a deep, steady drink and it sets you up wonderfully."

"Drink it yourself."

"I'm not ill. If I were ill, I'd drink it like a thirsty horse—I don't think! I must say that you are hard to please, Manners, old man. But I haven't come to the end of my assortment yet. Here are the Terra-Cotta Tablets for Tiny Tots—"

"Am I a tiny tot, fathead?"

"Well, you were once, you know. You've only grown. And here are—"

Tom Merry's cheerful voice ceased, and there was a terrific crash in the study. Mr. Railton advanced more quickly to the door. He could not suppress a smile as he looked in.

Manners, with a nose looking a great deal like a beet-root, was standing amid the wreck of a heap of medicine bottles, of which the contents ran in streams all over the study carpet.

He had evidently had enough of Miss Fawcett's valuable medicine, and had made a sudden onslaught upon the bottles, and strewn the floor with them.

Monty Lowther was giggling, and Tom Merry scratched his curly head as he looked at the ruins of all those valuable remedies.

"Well, my hat!" he exclaimed. "There's a lot of valuable medicine gone to rack and ruin! Think of all the pining invalids who would have been put out of their pain by using those medicines, Manners."

"Put out of their pain," grinned Manners. "Yes, that's right. But I don't want to be put out of my pain, thanks!"

"But really—Mr. Railton. Please come in, sir!" broke off Tom Merry, as he caught sight of the Housemaster standing in the doorway.

Mr. Railton advanced into the study with a smile.

"I have to speak to you, Merry. Dr. Holmes received a letter this morning from your governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. She wishes you to go home for a few days."

"Hurrah!"

"Miss Fawcett seems to be in a state of apprehension about something—as bad characters have, I think, been seen in the vicinity of Laurel Villa," said the Housemaster. Tom Merry became grave at once.

"Therefore, she wishes you to go home for a few days. Her brother is returning from India this week, and you will stay until Mr. Francis Fawcett arrives."

"Yes, sir; but—but—"

"Well, Merry?" said Mr. Railton.

"Can I take anybody with me, sir?"

"Miss Fawcett makes that request, also, and I have decided that you may take, if you please, four companions."

"Thank you, sir! Lowther and Manners and—"

The Housemaster held up his hand.

"Manners is not in a state to travel, as he has a cold," he said. "You may take Lowther, if you wish."

"It's all right," said Manners, with a grimace. "I couldn't come with this rotten cold, Tom. Never mind."

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"I shall have to supervise your selection, Merry," said Mr. Railton. "So please tell me whom you would like to take?"

Tom Merry reflected.

"I should like to take the four chaps in Study No. 6, sir. Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, and Digby."

"Not Digby, I am afraid," said Mr. Railton. "He has only just returned to the school after a long absence. You may take the other three, however."

"I—I don't want to look greedy, sir," said Tom hesitatingly; "but—but could I take a chap from the New House, too?"

"Well, that would depend upon Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House," said Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry's face fell.

"Well, I should like to take Figgins," he said, "but I know that Mr. Ratcliff would not give him permission."

"I will speak to the Head about it," said the Housemaster. "Figgins is perfectly proficient in his studies, I believe, and there is no reason why he should not go. If Dr. Holmes agrees with me, he will speak to Mr. Ratcliff on the subject, and there will be no difficulty."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry gratefully.

And the Housemaster quitted the study of the Terrible Three.

"I'm sorry you can't come, Manners," said Tom Merry. "You're not fit, I know, but—well, it can't be helped."

"It's rotten," said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Manners. "If I did come, your dear old governess would fill me up with medicines to cure my cold, and I might never come back to St. Jim's alive. You fellows go and speak to the chaps in Study No. 6, and I'll snuggle over the fire."

And Manners snuggled over the fire, and buried himself in the latest number of the "Ranger," while Tom Merry and Manners went forth in search of the chums of the Fourth Form.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry's invitation.

"I WEFUSE! I distinctly wefuse!"

Tom Merry grinned as he came up the passage towards Study No. 6, and heard the well-known tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House.

"Now, Gussy, don't be an ass!" said Blake's voice.

"I object to bein' called an ass! I—"

"Are you going to blow up that fire?"

"No, certainly not! I should pwobably cover my face with blacks, and spoil my collah. Let Hewwies do it."

"What about my face and my collar?" demanded Herries.

"That is not of so much importance, deah boy."

"Isn't it? You image—"

"Now, look here, Gussy, I've peeled the potatoes, and Herries has fetched the bacon from the shop, and Dig has laid the table, and you've got to do your little bit."

"I am perfectly willing to do anything consistent with my dig, Blake. But I wefuse to wun the wisk of sootin' my face and collah."

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther entered the study at this moment.

The four chums of Study No. 6 were all looking rather excited, and there would probably have been warfare in the room but for the opportune arrival of the Terrible Two.

"Peace, my children!" said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand. "Let dogs delight to bark and bite; it is their nature to, but youngsters like you should—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Blake, with a sniff. "Keep that for the next number of the 'Weekly.' What are you bounders shoving yourselves into a respectable study for?"

"Yaas, wathah! What do you wottahs want?" said Arthur Augustus

"They've come in at the door, and they want to go out by the window," said Herries. "Collar them!"

"Yaas, wathah! Collah the wottahs!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Pax! Don't get your wool off! We've come on a peaceful errand."

"Well, what is it?" asked Blake suspiciously. He was always suspicious of the chums of the Shell—especially when they were all smiles. He feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands, so to speak.

"I've been thinking," said Tom Merry, with a considerate air, "that you kids, except Dig, of course, have been working very hard lately, and I know that work doesn't agree with the constitutions of the Fourth Form fags."

"Does a thick ear or a black eye agree with your constitution?" asked Blake. "If not, your constitution had better look out."

"And, therefore," said Tom Merry, unheeding, "having turned the matter over in my mind, I have come to the conclusion—"

"Thank goodness for that, at least. Get out, then, if you've come to the conclusion. I was afraid you were never coming to it."

"I've come to the conclusion—"

"Then shut up!"

"I've come to the conclusion—"

"Yaas, wathah! You've told us that before, deah boy!

which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere in his delight at the joyous prospect.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Moderate your giddy transports. Give a chap a chance to breathe!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Blake, slapping Tom Merry on the back.

"Hurrah!" shouted Herries, thumping him wildly on the chest in his excitement.

"Hip-hip!" shrieked D'Arcy, pounding on the shoulders of Tom Merry. "Hip-pip! This is weally what I should chawactewise as wippin'!"

Tom Merry tore himself away, gasping.

"I shall hit out, I warn you, if you thump me again! Do you think I'm made of indiarubber?"



"CRASH!" As Figgins waltzed Tom Merry round the study, tables and chairs went flying, and in a moment the room was reduced to a shambles!

Pway shut up, now that you have come to the beastly conclusion, you know, and twavel!"

"I've come to the conclusion," said Tom Merry obstinately, "that a holiday will do you good. And after consulting with Railton, I have decided—"

"Eh?" said three voices, in unison.

"After consulting with Railton, I have decided to let the three of you have a few days off."

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you are rotting—"

"Yaas, wathah! If you are wottin', Tom Mewwy, we shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"I'm not rotting," said Tom Merry. "The fact is, I'm going home for a few days, and I have permission to take you bouders with me. Of course, if you don't want a holiday—"

Tom Merry was interrupted.

Three Fourth-Formers rushed at him simultaneously and hugged him, even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy forgetting his placid calm and throwing to the winds the repose

"What about me, Tom Merry?" demanded Digby. "Railton won't let you off, old man. You only turned up the other day, you know."

Digby grunted.

"Hard luck, Dig! But jolly for the rest of us!" said Blake. "Work is a good thing, you know; but it sometimes strikes me that it's a jolly good thing to get away from. So you're going home, Tom?"

"Yes; Miss Fawcett is nervous about something, and she wants me home till her brother comes from India. He's coming in a few days. She's asked the Head to let me take a few friends, and I've selected you."

"Well, I always said you were a chap of really good taste, Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You couldn't have made a better selection," went on Blake. "We'll do you proud. Do you remember what a ripping time we had at Laurel Villa at Christmas? We'll wake up Huckleberry Heath again. My hat, this is glorious!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "When do we go?"

"To-day."

"Then I will immediately pwoceed to pack my twunks!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "As it will be only for a few days, I shall not need more than thwee twunks."

"Ha, ha, ha! And how many hat-boxes?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Only thwee. Of course, if there are to be any special celebrations, I should like to go pwepared."

"Ha, ha, ha! There's nothing special on, unless it's a burglary," said Tom Merry. "Do you wear a special suit of clothes for that?"

"That is a fwivolous wemark, Tom Mewwy. I should not like to twavel in a wig-out inconsistent with my dig. It would be quite imposs. If you will excuse me, deah boys, I will go and see to my twunks at once."

"With pleasure!" said Blake politely.

And the swell of St. Jim's hurried off in a state of great excitement

"Anybody else coming?" asked Blake.

"Figgins, I think. The Head is going to speak to Mr. Ratcliff and get him off. Hallo, here he is!"

There was a pattering of feet upon the stairs, and the long-legged Figgins, the chief of the juniors of the New House, rushed into the study.

Figgins & Co. might be at war with the School House juniors, but under the outward rivalry there was a real good fellowship, as Tom Merry had shown in thinking of Figgy as soon as there was a prospect of a holiday.

Figgins rushed straight at Tom Merry, clasped him round the neck, and waltzed him round the study, in spite of his frantic wriggles.

The study was small, and Figgins was large, and the waltz was not accomplished without disaster.

The tables went flying, and books and inkpots mixed themselves on the floor, and the clock was swept from the mantelpiece, and the paper screen went down, and Figgins' foot went through it. Then Tom Merry tore himself loose, and the New House chief sank gasping into a chair, and grinned at the wreck he had made.

"Thanks!" he gasped. "I hear from Ratty that I'm to come with you for a little run down to Huckleberry Heath, and I thought I'd run over and thank you."

"I wish you'd do it a little more gently, then!" growled Blake. "Look at the muck you've made of our study!"

"Rats! Who thinks of such trifles at a time like this? We're going on a holiday. Buck up and look cheerful! I wish the Co. were coming, and old Marmaduke."

"So do I, and Digby, too," said Tom Merry. "But it's imposs., as Gussy says. I can't take more than five, so there you are. Kerr and Wynn and Marmy can kill the fatted calf when you return." The hero of the Shell looked at his watch. "What do you say to catching the four o'clock train to Wayland? Then we shall be at Huckleberry Heath comfortably in the evening."

"Good enough!"

And the juniors were soon in a hurry packing for the holiday.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy is Hurried.

"ARE you ready?"

"Yes, quite."

"Almost weady, deah boy! I find that my necktie is a little cwoked, and I must tie it over again," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking round from the looking-glass, as Tom Merry put his head into Study No. 6 in the School House.

The hero of the Shell laughed.

"Well, buck up, Gussy. The cab has come from the station, and Taggles is putting our bags on it."

"Wight-ho, Tom Mewwy! I shan't be more than three or four minutes."

"You won't be more than twenty seconds," remarked Blake. "Will he, Herries?"

"Not much," said Herries. "Count the seconds, Tom Merry, and we'll run him out on his neck if he isn't ready."

Tom Merry took out his watch to count.

"I wefuse to be huwried," said D'Arcy. "It is extremely undig. to huwwy, and I always find huwwyin' so beastlay exhaustin', you know."

"You'll find it more exhausting to go downstairs on the back of your head," said Blake warningly. "How much time gone, Tom Merry?"

"Thirteen seconds."

"You hear that, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to pay any weward to such a widiculous thing," said D'Arcy, his fingers idle while he talked. "It is most ungentlemanly to huwwy."

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"Do you think we're going to lose the train while you tie your blessed necktie over and over again?" demanded Monty Lowther from the doorway.

"We could have a special twain, if necessawy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "I like the idea of a special train, so that Gussy can have time to tie his necktie. Isn't time up, Tom Merry?"

"Just up," said Tom, closing his watch with a snap.

"You hear, Gussy? Are you ready?"

"No, wathah not! I have not even commenced to tie my necktie yet. You have only delayed me by your widiculous conversation!"

Blake made a sign to Herries, and they seized the swell of the School House by the shoulders.

"Wefuse me!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I cannot possibly go without tyn' my necktie! It would look such shockin' bad form!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bundle him along!"

Tom Merry and Lowther politely made way, and the swell of the School House was rushed downstairs. He dared not struggle very strenuously, for if he had done so his fancy waistcoat would have been ruffled, his coat creased, and his silk hat would probably have fallen off and been trampled underfoot.

D'Arcy, still feebly protesting, was rushed out of the School House into the station hack, the roof of which was loaded with bags and portmanteaux. The swell of the School House collapsed into a corner seat, and Herries plumped down beside him to hold him there.

A crowd of juniors had collected to see the popular chief of the Shell off. Kerr, Wynn, and Marmaduke came up with Figgins, and Figgins threw his bag on the roof and shook hands with the Co. Manners leaned out of the study window and sneezed out a hearty good-bye.

The chums tumbled into the ancient vehicle, finding none too much room there. The hack rolled away, and a cheer followed them through the gates.

"My word," said Tom Merry, "I wish they were all coming, especially Manners, Dig, Kerr, Fatty Wynn, and Marmaduke! Never mind, we shall all be together again in a few days' time. The weather seems as if it's going to be fine, and I hope we shall have a ripping holiday!"

"Not much doubt about that," said Figgins. "It's awfully jolly at Laurel Villa! I say, what's the matter with Gussy?"

"There's nothin' the mattah with me, Figgins," said D'Arcy. "I'm only feelin' extremely indig., that is all. I have been tweated with great diswespct."

"Awful!" said Figgins solemnly. "Shocking! Un-speakable!"

"Oh, don't wot!" said D'Arcy. "I feel quite cwoss! I have been huwried off without time to tie my necktie pwovably, and I feel it vevy much!"

"Well, tie it now."

"It is impossible for me to tie it to my satisfaction without a lookin'-glass."

"Behold!" said Figgins, producing a pocket-mirror. "There you are!"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"Thank you vevy much, Figgins! You are a shockin' boundah sometimes, but now you are weally and twuly a fwend in need. Hold it up, will you?"

"Certainly!" grinned Figgins.

And the New House junior solemnly held up the pocket-mirror while the swell of the School House tied his necktie. D'Arcy beamed upon his companions when this important task was accomplished.

"Now I feel bettah," he said. "It is so extwemely ungentlemanly to be at all slovenly or careless in one's personal appeahwance, you know. And you must wemembah that we are goin' to see Miss Pwisicilla Fawcett, a lady whom we all wespct vevy highly."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rylcombe!" said Tom Merry, looking out of the window as the hack rolled into the ancient High Street. "We're in good time."

The hack rolled into the station yard, and the juniors alighted.

"Shove those bags into the train for Wayland," said Tom Merry to the porter, who came bustling out. "Get them labelled for Huckleberry Heath."

"Yaas, wathah, and be vevy careful with my twunks and hat-boxes," said D'Arcy, walking on into the station.

There were a couple of minutes to wait for the train. The luggage made its appearance on a trolley, and D'Arcy glanced at it. There was no sign of the trunks or the hat-boxes. The train came snorting in.

"Wayland train!"

"Where is the west?" asked D'Arcy excitedly, tapping the porter on the arm.

The man stared at him.

CHAPTER 4.

In Danger!

"Beg pardon, sir!"

"Where is the west?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. He meant the rest of the luggage, but the station porter could not be expected to understand D'Arcy's beautiful accent.

He looked simply bewildered.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir. Wayland train!"

"Where is the west?" yelled D'Arcy.

"There, sir, I suppose," said the porter, pointing to the farther end of the platform.

That was certainly the west, geographically, but that was not exactly what the swell of St. Jim's was inquiring.

D'Arcy stared up the platform, which was quite unoccupied, at the end the porter was pointing to.

"It is not there!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "You must have left the west on the hack!"

The porter staggered back.

"He's mad!" he gasped. "Stark, staring, raving mad!"

"The wascal has been dwinkin'!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "The twain is goin', and the west of our luggage is not here!"

"Mad as a 'atter!"

"Where is the west?" shrieked D'Arcy, almost frantic at the thought of going without his trunks and hat-boxes.

The juniors were taking their seats in the train.

"What's the matter here?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "The guard's put the luggage in, Gussy. It's all right!"

"E's mad!" spluttered the porter. "He asks me where's the west, and I points to the west, and then he sez I left it on the 'ack, he says. 'E's mad!"

"Ha, ha, ha! He means the rest—the rest of the luggage!"

"There ain't no more!"

"My twunks!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "My hat-boxes!"

"There wasn't any!"

"There were thwee twunks and thwee hat-boxes."

"I brought in all the luggage on the trolley, sir," said the porter, considerably calmed by a shilling which Tom Merry slipped into his hand. "You must have left the rest at the school, sir."

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Blake! Hewwies! You feahful wottahs! My twunks and my hat-boxes have been left behind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries. "I never thought a word about them! Why didn't you look after your giddy luggage yourself?"

"He was too busy tying his blessed necktie!" grinned Blake. "I'm sorry, Gussy, but it can't be helped now!"

"That's so, it can't be helped," said Tom Merry comfortingly. "We're all pretty well provided, and we'll have a whipround to rig you out, Gussy, so—"

D'Arcy gave him a withering look.

"If you think I can dwees in clothes not made for me, Tom Mewwy—"

"All aboard!" sang out Figgins. "You'll be left behind as well as your trunks, Gussy, if you don't get a move on!"

"I am extremely sowwy, Tom Mewwy, that I cannot, aftah all, accept your geneuwous invitation," said D'Arcy, drawing back. "I could not possibly appeah on a visit extendin' ovah days in a single suit of clothes, and sleep in bowwowed night garments. I am sowwy—"

"Urry up, there!"

"Get in, you ass!"

"I am extremely wegwetful—"

"Collar him!" yelled Blake.

Figgins jumped out of the train again, and lent Tom Merry a hand. D'Arcy, gripped by either arm, was projected into the train. He disappeared among a forest of legs, and Figgins and Tom Merry followed him in.

Only just in time! The whistle screamed and the engine puffed, and the porter slammed the carriage door behind them as the train moved out of the station.

D'Arcy sat among the feet of the juniors.

"I wegard your conduct as vevy wuff, Tom Mewwy!" he said.

"My dear Gussy, you see we couldn't part with you. You shouldn't be so charming," said Tom Merry. "If we left you behind, you see, it wouldn't be like a holiday. Better anything than that!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet with a beaming smile.

"If you put it like that, Tom Mewwy, of course—"

"Of course I put it like that," said Tom Merry. "Where would the fun be without Gussy? What should we have to make us laugh?"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

But the protests of the swell of St. Jim's were lost in the laughter of the juniors. D'Arcy was booked for the journey now, and while the train rushed on through the wide countryside the three trunks and the three hat-boxes remained in solitary state in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

"UCKLEBERRY 'EATH!"

"Here we are!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The long journey was over at last. Tom Merry threw open the carriage door and jumped out, and the juniors followed him, glad that the journey was over. The little station was lighted by a couple of dim lamps which served to make the darkness visible. Night had long fallen.

"Here, portah!" said Arthur Augustus. "My word, where are all the portahs, Tom Mewwy?"

"They're all at the other end of the platform, and he's coming," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "You see, there's only one of them—or him."

"Oh, weally! Pway tell him to call a cab. We had bettah have a four-wheelah, I think, as we could not all get into a beastlay taxi, you know."

Tom Merry roared.

"Taxis, my dear kid, are off. The natives of Huckleberry Heath have never even seen a taxi. They would not know one if they saw it. There is certainly a four-wheeled contrivance to be had, if we could find the driver and wake him up, and then he could wake up his horse, and then if his horse felt strong enough to move after being woken up, and—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I would have wired for a conveyance," said Tom Merry, "only a telegram at Laurel Villa has the same effect as an earthquake anywhere else. So we shall have to walk. Lucky you forgot your luggage, Gussy. We can all carry a bag apiece, but I don't see how any of us could have negotiated three trunks and three hat-boxes."

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We should have had to leave them to be sent on. However, as you were so thoughtful to forget them—why—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "I like that! Well, here's your bag. I'll carry yours, Herries, if you like, and you can carry mine—it's smaller!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Thanks! Why, you boulder, your bag is twice as heavy as mine."

"Yes; you see it's packed closer," said Blake, walking off with Herries' bag. "Come on, we've got a long way to go!"

"I did not weally forget my twunks," said D'Arcy. "It was Blake and Hewwies wushin' me off in that wude mannah that caused them to be overlooked, you know. I suppose there are places in Huckleberry Heath where a fellow can do some shopping?"

"Oh, rather!" said Tom Merry, with a wink at the others. "You can do as much shopping as you like to-morrow."

Somewhat comforted by this information, Arthur Augustus, who had nothing to carry, walked beside the laden juniors from the station. They emerged into the quaint old High Street of Huckleberry Heath, but soon left its lights behind for a shadowy lane.

The lane ran over the dim heath towards Laurel Villa, which stood at a considerable distance from the village. It was very dark; but Tom Merry knew the way from childhood, and he led the way without a fault. Big, dark trees overshadowed the lane, and shut out what little light came from the stars in the wide expanse of the dark heavens.

"I say, Tom Mewwy!" said D'Arcy, breaking the silence after some minutes. "It has just stwuck mo—"

"What has? Who has struck D'Arcy?"

"I mean, a thought has just stwuck me."

(Continued on the next page.)

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"How beastly rude of it!"
"Oh, don't wot, Tom Mewwy! It has just struck me—"

"Did it hurt?" asked Blake sympathetically.
"I weally wish you would not intewwupt me."
"Go hon! Expound the valuable thought which has just struck you," said Figgins. "Great thoughts can never die!"

"Pway dwy up while I speak! It has just struck me that if there are bad chawactahs lurkin' in the neighbourhood of Lauwel Villah, we may possibly wun into them in the beastly dark lanes, you know."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Monty Lowther. "Have you got your cornet with you, Herries?"

"No," said Herries. "Why?"
"You might have started playing it, and scared them off. Still, it would be a bit rough on the cattle on the heath."

"Look here, Monty Lowther—"
"Can't; it's too dark. But I say, there's something in that, you know, although it's Gussy who thought of it. Six well-dressed and distinguished-looking young fellows like us would be a valuable prize for a giddy highwayman to—"

"Stop there!"
It was a hoarse voice from the darkness.
"Rats!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "You can't take us in with a transparent trick like that, Tom Merry. I know your voice, you see."

"Stop, I say!"
"I tell you the wheeze won't work, Tom! I— Great Christopher Columbus!" Monty Lowther broke off in surprise and alarm, as a burly figure in a cap, pulled down over his eyes, loomed up before him in the dimness of the shadowy lane.

"Don't try to git away!" went on the rough voice.
"There's nigh on a dozen of us 'ere, and you'll get smashed up, so I warn yer!"

The juniors halted. The ruffian had a huge bludgeon in his hand, and a second figure loomed up behind him in the gloom. How many more of them there might be the juniors could not guess, though they did not believe for a moment that there were really a dozen.

"What do you want?" exclaimed Tom Merry sharply.
"How dare you stop us?"

The big ruffian chuckled.
"That's good, ain't it, Micky?" he grinned. And his companion chuckled, too. "We wants your spare cash, you gents. Likewise, your watches. Likewise, your tie-pins, and any old vallybles you has about you. We ain't particular—are we, Micky?"

"No, we ain't, Bilker."
"And the things hover!" went on the owner of the hoarse voice. "We don't want to 'urt you. But we'll brain you all round if you don't 'and 'em over! Won't we, Micky?"

"That we will, Bilker!"
"You hear me?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry. "Allow me to point out that this is highway robbery, and that you will get sent to prison—"

"He, he, he! Funny young gent, ain't he, Micky?"
"He, he, he! He are, Bilker!"

"'And hover them bags to start with, then the rest of the loot—and sharp!"

Tom Merry set his teeth. He believed that these two were all the foes that they had to contend with, as no others had shown themselves or spoken. For six St. Jim's fellows to allow themselves to be despoiled by a couple of tramps was impossible. The bludgeons looked dangerous; but the juniors were plucky.

"Now, then—"
"Weally, my deah fellows," said Arthur Augustus, "we must wefuse to comply with your most unweasonable wquest. I must twouble you to stand out of the path while I pwoceed on my way."

"If you don't 'and hover— Oh!"
There was a sudden "biff!" Tom Merry had handed over his bag, but not in the way exactly that the footpad wanted it. The hero of the Shell suddenly swung it into the air, and sent it hurtling into the ruffian's face, and before he could avoid it the bag smote him heavily on his rugged features.

The rascal was bowled over like a ninepin, and went with a crash on his back to the hard road. The other scoundrel, swearing savagely, sprang forward, slashing with his weapon; but Figgins, with great quickness, caught the blow on his bag and stopped it, and Blake swung round the bag he was carrying and smote the rascal on the side

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of the head with it. There was a yell from Micky, and he measured his length in the road.

Tom Merry sprang to his bag and picked it up again; Bilker was just staggering to his feet. Tom swung the bag round and caught him under the chin with it, and sent him fairly flying, feeling as if every tooth in his head had been loosened.

A bludgeon, as it was dropped, fell upon the foot of D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a yell. He picked up the weapon and lashed out with it at the footpad, and the unfortunate Bilker gave a yelp and squirmed away into the darkness. There was a sound of running feet.

"Huwwy!" shouted D'Arcy, forgetting the pain in his toe in his triumph. "Huwwy! I have put the feahful wuffian to flight! He is wunnin' like anythin'! Let me get at that othah wascal!"

And D'Arcy rushed at the man Micky, who had risen to his feet, looking very dazed, and delivered a terrific blow, in his excitement, which would probably have brained the rascal if it had taken effect.

But Micky did not wait for it. He dodged through the hedge and disappeared across the heath, running as fast as his legs could carry him.

The bludgeon, meeting with no resistance, crashed down, and D'Arcy had a narrow escape of reducing his own toes to pulp.

"Huwwy!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "He's wunnin', too!"

"Bravo!" cried Blake. "It was D'Arcy did it! He did it with the terror of his glance—"

"Or the horror of his chivvy!" said Lowther.

"Lowthah, I wegard that as a wude wemark. I have defeated these wuffians, who would otherwise have wobbed us, and I weally think—"

"Oh, get along!" cried Figgins. "There may be a gang of them in the vicinity. And suppose they come back in force?"

The suggestion was enough to make the juniors lose no time in getting on their way. They had had a lucky escape, but if Micky and Bilker returned with a gang of scoundrels to aid them, a different tale would be told.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry; and the party strode on at a rapid pace.

They did not exactly run, as that would not have been dignified, but they kept up a good pace, and nothing more had been seen of the ruffians when they arrived at Laurel Villa.

Tom Merry paused as he reached the gate.
"I say, you chaps," he said slowly, "if you don't mind, we won't say anything about that little adventure. It will alarm Miss Fawcett."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "It won't do any harm to keep mum, excepting that it will deprive Gussy of his glory as the heroic deliverer."

"Oh, weally, Figgins—"
"It's understood," said Blake. "But while we're here, Tom, we'll have a look for the rotters, and lay them by the heels before we go back to St. Jim's."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Mum's the word!"

They marched up the garden path to the house, and Tom Merry knocked a thundering knock at the door.

CHAPTER 5.

At Laure! Villa!

"TOMMY!"

The door flew open, as if by magic, almost before Tom Merry had let go the knocker, which seemed to indicate that Miss Priscilla Fawcett had been watching from the window and had seen the juniors coming up the garden path.

It was Hannah, Miss Fawcett's favourite maid, who opened the door; but Miss Fawcett was immediately behind.

"Tommy—dearest Tommy!" Miss Fawcett rushed at Tom and clasped him to her heart. "Dearest Tommy! I am so relieved—so glad you have come! I have been so—so terrified! You have come to save me!"

"Ye-e-es!" grunted Tom, trying to extricate himself, but very gently, for fear of appearing unaffectionate.

He had a real and affectionate regard for his old governess, who had been kindness itself to him since he was a tiny tot; but he never fully appreciated public demonstrations of affections, especially as Miss Priscilla, with feminine obstinacy, persisted in regarding him as a little boy after he had reached the ripe age of fifteen.

"Darling Tommy! How good of Dr. Holmes to let you

come, and how good of you to come! You came because I was in danger!"

"Exactly!"

"I have been so frightened! You will stay till my brother comes, dear Tommy—you and your friends?"

"Rather!"

"Yaas, watah, Miss Fawcett! We have come to see you through this dangah!" said D'Arcy. "Pway be welieved at once of all your tewwors!"

"Dear Tommy, but it is such cold weather for travelling! You are sure you have not caught cold in the train?"

"Quite!"

"You put on your special chest-protector before starting?"

"I—I—I——"

"And you took six of those green pills I sent you, to be taken with a glass of hot water immediately before starting on a journey?"

"Er—— You see, I——"

"And you are quite sure you kept your feet dry?"

When Tom Merry inquired into the nature of the terrible peril that hung over Laurel Villa, Miss Fawcett gave him a graphic description of the cause of her fears.

In a small village like Huckleberry Heath, the presence of any strangers was naturally noted and commented upon; and the fact that several rough characters had been seen in the neighbourhood had alarmed all the old ladies for miles around.

Hannah had detected a roughly dressed man looking over the wall into the kitchen garden, and on another occasion a tramp had begged for a crust at the gate. These circumstances were quite sufficient to alarm Miss Fawcett.

"They want my lace," explained the old lady, with a nod of conviction—"you know, the valuable lace my brother sent me from India, Tom. Your friends shall see it tomorrow. It is wonderful lace, a century old at least, and has been worn by princesses in the Court at Delhi. Francis sent it home to me as a present, and it is worth a fabulous sum. I am convinced that the thieves have heard of it——"



"OW!" Arthur Augustus yelped and leapt about on one leg as the Anglo-Indian seized his hand in a vicelike grip!

"I say, the chaps are waiting in the cold——"

"Oh, how very, very thoughtless of me!"

Recalled to hospitable duties, the anxious old lady made immediate amends. She greeted the juniors of St. Jim's with a heartfelt cordiality that went straight to their hearts at once.

Dinner was over at Laurel Villa, but, in anticipation of the possible arrival of Tom Merry that evening, a goodly supply of tempting viands had been kept warm for the party. But the cook of Laurel Villa would willingly have cooked a dinner in the middle of the night, if need had been, for Tom Merry. He was the idol of the household at home, as he was of the Form at St. Jim's. His sunny nature made him a favourite wherever he went.

After the long, cold journey the juniors were in a humour to do the late dinner full justice.

Miss Priscilla beamed on her guests from the head of the table, and saw to it that everyone had what he required; and, in fact, more than he required.

The old lady had evidently been in a state of nervousness, from which the arrival of her ward and his chums had relieved her.

"But how could they hear of it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, these horrible people have ways and means of finding out everything!" said Miss Fawcett. "I have been informed that they can always discover when a house contains valuables, and my old lace is worth hundreds of pounds!"

"But you are taking great care of it, of course?"

"Oh, yes! It is safely locked up in a chest, hidden away in a cupboard!" the old lady said triumphantly. "They won't find it very easy to discover when they break into Laurel Villa!"

"I should think they're more likely to come after the silver," said Monty Lowther, with a glance at the sideboard.

Miss Fawcett's silver was very old and massive and valuable, but she had evidently hardly given it a thought. She shook her head at Lowther's remark.

"Oh, no, it is the lace they are after! But they will not dare to come, I think, now that Tom is home with you dear boys," said Miss Priscilla. "You will stay until my brother Frank arrives, and all will be safe!"

The boys went to bed early that night, and were up correspondingly early the following morning. Arthur Augustus was first out of bed, in the big room where the six slept, as in the dormitory at St. Jim's, in a row of beds.

"Hallo, Gussy! Wherefore this early rising?" asked Figgins, looking at the swell of St. Jim's as he hopped out of bed. D'Arcy looked very baggy in a suit of Tom Merry's pyjamas.

"You forget that I have some shopping to do," said D'Arcy. "I wish to get into the village as soon as the shops open, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! We'd better all go with D'Arcy, kids, and see that he does his shopping in proper style!"

"Yaas, wathah! I think I had bettah get a new silk hat while I am on the bisnez, you know, as well as some clothes. I should like your opinion on it, deah boys."

"Good!" grinned Tom Merry. "You won't find Huckleberry Heath exactly Bond Street, but there's no doubt you can get a silk hat—if you like the style!"

The juniors were prompt to time for breakfast. Miss Fawcett was beaming, as usual, in the breakfast-room, into the wide windows of which the early sunshine fell cheerily.

"Good-morning, nurse!" said Tom Merry, kissing her on the cheek. "We've scared off the desperadoes already, you see. There was no alarm in the night."

Miss Priscilla shook her head. "I heard someone moving outside the house at midnight," she said.

"Perhaps it was the dog."
"No; I am convinced it was someone after the lace; but he did not attempt to break in."

"Well, that was lucky for him! We should have been on his neck in no time!"

"Yaas, wathah! I say, chaps, while we're shopping to-day in the town, you know, I weally think we had bettah buy a wevolvah apiece—"

"A what?" shrieked Miss Fawcett.
"A wevolvah," said D'Arcy. "I cannot shoot vevy stwaight, but if I get vevy close to the burglah and put the muzzle of the wevolvah close to his head, I am certain I could blow his bwains out, you know!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Miss Priscilla.
"Of course, it would make a feahful mess about the place," said D'Arcy; "but it would be a lesson to him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It's no laughin' matter, Figgins, especially for the burglah, if I blow his bwains out. Mind you don't forget to get the wevolvahs, that's all!"

"You must not do anything of the kind!" almost shrieked Miss Fawcett. "Dear me! I should never sleep again if I thought there were firearms in this house!"

"But, you see, my deah Miss Fawcett, we should be able to give the wottahs a feahful lesson if we have a wevolvah apiece!"

"No, no, no, no, no!"
"If we blew out the bwains of two or thwee of them, the othahs would give the house a wide berth, you know, and it—"

"No, no, no! I would rather lose my lace than any such dreadful thing should happen. Besides, you might shoot the wrong person."

"I think that's very likely, if Gussy starts monkeying with a revolver!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Fawcett," said Figgins. "We won't let him get any freirons. He isn't really half so bloodthirsty as he sounds. He has never really killed anybody yet."

"Oh, weally, Figgins—"
"We'll watch him," said Monty Lowther. "Besides, I don't suppose you can buy revolvers in Huckleberry Heath."

"No, that is very true."
"Of course, I should be extwemely sowwy to do anythin' that would alarm a lady, and that lady our esteemed hostess," said D'Arcy, with a bow. "We will give up the idea of the wevolvahs. After all, it would be quite simple to bwain a burglah with a pokah if you get to close quartsahs with him."

"You—you cannibal!" said Tom Merry, rising from the table. "Come and buy a silk hat, that's more in your line."

And, breakfast over, the six juniors sallied forth. The morning sun was shining on the wide heath, and the lane that led down to the village. The juniors, stepping out cheerfully, passed the scene of the previous night's encounter. A dirty fur cap was lying under one of the hedges—sole memento of the conflict.

Monty Lowther stirred it with his feet and kicked it out into the lane.

"I say, Gussy, it won't be necessary for you to buy that silk hat!" he exclaimed. "This cap will suit you down to the ground."

D'Arcy turned his head.

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"What is that, Lowthah?"

"Catch! Look out in goal!"

Lowther lifted the cap neatly with a running kick, and it fled towards D'Arcy; but the swell of St. Jim's was just adjusting his eyeglass, and was not looking out in goal.

Biff!

The elegant scion of the house of D'Arcy gave a shriek as the cap biffed on his nose and dropped to the ground at his feet.

"Goal!" shouted Herries.

D'Arcy looked at the cap and looked at Lowther. Then he made a wild rush for Tom Merry's chum.

Blake caught him by the shoulder and swung him round, grinning.

"Steady, Adolphus!"

"Weleaze me, Blake! I insist upon your weleasin' me immediately, while I give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'!"

or your life, Monty!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Weleaze me! He has kicked that howwid wag in my features, and I will give him such a feahful thwashin'!"

"Rats! Steady on!"

"I wefuse to steady on! I distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the kind! I am not angry, but it is impos for me to forget what is due to my dig. I have no alternative but to inflict a thwashin' upon Lowthah!"

"Hold him while I escape!" gasped Monty Lowther.

And he started down the lane at a wild run.

Blake released D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's started in hot pursuit. The chums followed, laughing too much to be able to keep pace.

"Lowthah, stop! I insist upon your stoppin' immediately! I am wunnin' myself quite out of bweath!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" floated back from Monty Lowther; and the race went on right into the village street.

Monty Lowther dodged into the little station, and the swell of St. Jim's followed him breathlessly. There was a sudden yell as D'Arcy went into the little doorway of the station at full speed.

A little gentleman, with a face as brown as a berry, and a travelling-bag in his hand, was just coming out. D'Arcy met him at full tilt, and sat down in the doorway and gasped. Lowther, almost convulsed with laughter, ran to the assistance of the foreign-looking gentleman, and saved him from falling.

"My word!" gasped D'Arcy. "Sir, I must weally say that it was careless of you to come out of the station without looking where you were goin'. You have given me a feahful shock to the system."

"You impertinent young rascal!" roared the little gentleman, and, brandishing his umbrella, he made a rush at D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's made an effort to dodge, but too late. The umbrella came down on his silk hat, and smashed it into a concertina shape at one fell swoop, and the brim lopped over D'Arcy's eyes.

"Ow!" yelled the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's. "Ow! My hat! The howwid wuffian has wuined my hat!"

"There!" exclaimed the little brown gentleman, dancing round the junior, who sat in the doorway with his ruined hat about his ears, overwhelmed by this calamity. "There! Impertinent young rascal! Hah! Yes, young villain, that will teach you! Hah!"

And the little man marched out of the station, travelling-bag in one hand and umbrella in the other, looking very triumphant.

Tom Merry & Co. came up at a run, and passed the stranger, and poured into the station to see what had become of Lowther and D'Arcy.

They found Lowther hanging to the rail in front of the booking-office, helpless with laughter, and D'Arcy sitting on the floor, with his ruined hat in his hands, looking at it in unspeakable woe.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "Hear me smile!"
D'Arcy rose to his feet.

"Did you see a dangewous-lookin' wuffian pass you, Tom Mewwy?" he asked excitedly.

"No, I didn't notice one," said Tom. "What was he like?"

"A little dwied-up lookin' chap, with eyes like black beads, and a face the colour of—of bwown leathah, with a bag and an umbwellah."

"Oh, yes; he passed us!" said Blake.

"He stwuck me with the umbwellah," said Arthur Augustus. "He wan into me in the most clumsay way, and then stwuck me on the hat with his beastlay umbwellah. He has wuined my hat. It has just stwuck me—"

"What has—the hat?"

"Pway don't wot! I am on the twack."

"On the track of what, whom, which?"

"That dangewous wuffian is one of the gang who are twyin' to wob Miss Fawcett!" said D'Arcy, with conviction.

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry. "I didn't look at him."

but he has really treated D'Arcy's hat in a beastly rude manner, and a man who is capable of damaging a silk hat is capable of robbing his own grandfather of ninepence!"

"I wish you would be sewious, Tom Mewwy. I am convinced that I am on the twack, and I weally think we ought to keep that wascally wuffian in sight."

Herries looked out of the station.

"He's gone!" he said. "Disappeared!"

"That is extremely unfortunate. We might have captured him. I know perfectly well that he is a leadah of the wuffians, pwobably the wing-leadah. Pewwaps we shall fall in with him again."

"Let's hope so!" grinned Tom Merry. "Now we'll go and do the shopping."

"I have not yet unwashed Monty Lowthah."

"Gussy, I'm surprised at you! How can you be so discourteous?"

"Eh?" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, touched in his tenderest spot. "I weally hope you do not considah me capable of wudeness, Tom Mewwy?"

"You want to thrash one of my guests."

"Weally, deah boy, I did not look at it in that light. I will leave the thwashin' till we get back to St. Jim's, Lowthah."

"Thanks, Gussy!" said Lowther, with becoming humility. "I will make my will as soon as we get to the school again, and give a last feed in the study, and then I shall be ready. You will shed a few tears over my grave, won't you, chaps?"

"We will, we will!" said Blake; and he sobbed in anticipation. "It will be a relief to hear no more of your puns and those things you call jokes; but we shall m-miss you, you know."

Arthur Augustus turned away in haughty disdain.

"Come along," said Tom Merry. "We've got to get home to lunch at one, and you know what a time it takes Gussy to do his shopping."

"Let us go to the hattah's first," said Arthur Augustus. "I cannot wear this thing any more. I am vewy unfortunate with my hats. I had two silk hats wuined on our twip to town a week or two ago, you know. It is wathah wotten."

Tom Merry knew Huckleberry Heath inside out. He led the way to a little shop in the ancient High Street, which was a clothier's, hatter's, outfitter's, and stationer's, -post office, and pastrycook's.

D'Arcy looked at the place rather disapprovingly.

"Is this the best place in this fearful hole, Tom Mewwy?" he asked.

"Quite the best," said Tom Merry blandly. "This is where the fashionable folk of Huckleberry Heath do their shopping, you know."

D'Arcy still looked dubious, but as there was evidently no choice in the matter he followed Tom Merry into the shop.

CHAPTER 6.

D'Arcy Doesn't Buy a Hat!

THE shop was small and crowded with goods. There was just about enough room for the six juniors to crowd into it. Tom Merry rapped on the counter, and then gave the foremost place to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

A stout gentleman with a very red face came out of the little parlour behind the shop after the juniors had been waiting some minutes.

"What can Oi do for 'e?" he inquired politely.

"I want a new hat," said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose you have a silk hat? My hat has been wuined by a blow fwom an umbwellah, and I must have a new toppah."

"Certainly, sir."

The shopkeeper, with the slow and deliberate movements natural to a native of Huckleberry Heath, dived down behind the counter and produced a box. From the box he unrolled several wrappings of paper, and then he disclosed a hat. It was a silk hat, of a date about fifteen years back, and the shopkeeper laid it on the counter with an air of pride.

"There you are, sir," he said.

D'Arcy surveyed the hat with a decidedly disparaging glance.

"That doesn't look my size," he said.

"Try it on, sir," said the obliging shopkeeper. "You never know what's the fit of a 'at till you try it on."

D'Arcy tried it on. It was a couple of sizes too large, and looked about fit for his grandfather to wear when he had got it on. The juniors nearly choked in their endeavours to keep solemn as they stood round D'Arcy to give advice.

"Is it too small, sir?" asked Mr. Slocum. "I can easy stretch it a little."

"It's too large, vewy much too large."

"Then I can easily pad it under the band inside, sir."

"Are you suah that is the latest fashion, my deah fellow? It looks a bit different fwom the hats I have been weawin'."

"Latest fashion!" repeated Mr. Slocum. "I should say so, sir! Why, that 'at hasn't been in my shop more'n two years!"

D'Arcy gave a sort of gasp.

"Never't you any others?"

" Haven't keep more than one in stock, sir," said Mr. Slocum. "There ain't much demand for 'igh hats in 'Uckleberry 'Eath, sir."

"I suppose not," said D'Arcy. "But do you weally mean to say sewiously that you call yourself a hattah, and have only that one antiquated toppah in your shop?"

"The latest thing, sir! That 'at hasn't been in the shop more than two years and a half, and I assure you—"

"Have you got a looking-glass so that I can see it?"

The man scratched his head.

"No, sir, I'm afraid not; but if you walk down the street to the 'Uckleberry Arms, I am sure the landlord would let you look in his big glass if you mentioned my name."

Arthur Augustus gave a sniff.

At the thought of the swell of St. Jim's walking down the street in that hat the chums could no longer restrain themselves. They burst into a simultaneous yell, which made Mr. Slocum jump, and awoke every echo in the little shop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy looked round at the convulsed faces, and then handed the hat back to the owner.

"I'm afraid that hat won't suit me," he said. "I'll take a cap, if you've got any, to last me till I can buy a hat."

D'Arcy found a cap which he thought he could possibly wear for a few hours. Then he turned to Tom Merry.

"Pwaw lead the way to the outfittah's," he said.

"Here you are," said Tom Merry.

"What! You mean to say that—"

"Same place, old kid."

"I can supply anything, sir," said Mr. Slocum, rubbing his fat hands. "Anything in the line of Eton suits, fashionable overcoats—"

"Where are the fashionable overcoats?"

"There's some 'angin' up behind you, sir."

D'Arcy turned round and surveyed the overcoats.

"Do you mean those wags?" he asked.

"Rags! They're the—"

"Wats! Tom Mewwy, surely there is a shop in this town where I can buy some respectable clothes?"

"I'm afraid this is the only one," grinned Tom Merry.

"Mr. Slocum supplies all the inhabitants of Huckleberry Heath with clothes, and they're satisfied. Fashions never change here. But if you want something really smart in smock frocks—"

"Oh, don't wot! This is a sewious situation, with all my beastlay luggage left at St. Jim's, and no place to do any shopping!"

"Why don't you buy that hat? It gives you a nice venerable appearance."

"Pwaw be sewious! I wegard this as a beastlay pwactical joke, to bwing me to a place where I cannot even purchase a beastlay necktie!"

"Lots of neckties, sir," said the obliging Mr. Slocum. "I can show you a great variety of neckties, sir. I've had six new ones in this year."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Show us the neckties."

Mr. Slocum produced the neckties. They were terrible-looking things, with nearly every colour in the rainbow worked into them, and of huge dimensions.

D'Arcy looked at them, and looked at Tom Merry and was silent. Words failed him.

"Take this nice one with red and yellow spots," urged Figgins. "It will match your waistcoat, and if you don't like it as a necktie you can use it for a cummerbund in the summer, kid."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Then there's this beautiful thing with pink stripes on a green background, and bars of crimson and yellow," said Blake, "warranted to kill at forty yards—I mean, a very striking article, sir! Do have that one, Gussy!"

"If you cannot be sewious, Blake, pwaw be silent."

"But you can't worry Mr. Slocum for half an hour without buying anything," said Monty Lowther. "Fair play's a jewel. You must have the hat or the neckties."

"Oh, I don't mind the tin, you know," said D'Arcy, laying a pound on the counter; "but I should not like to be found with those neckties about me. Suppose anybody thought me capable of weawin' one of them."

"Awful! But, I say, they will do to tie up the burglars if we capture them," Figgins suggested. "It would serve the rascals right to have those neckties round them."

"Yaas, wathah! I never thought of that. I will take all the neckties, my good man; but about the hat, I should weally advise you to take it away and buwy it."

"A very good hat," said Mr. Slocum, restoring the valuable tile to its box and wrapping it up in paper. "The latest thing! I haven't had that 'at in my possession more than three years or so."

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"I say, it's time we were off. We've wasted a lot of time, and we shall have to buck up to be back for lunch. Miss Fawcett is awfully punctual."

The neckties were wrapped up and paid for, and D'Arcy put the bundle under his arm and they turned to the door.

"Anything more I can do for you, gentlemen?" said the obliging Mr. Slocum. "I can show you some of my new stock of gloves that came down last year."

The juniors poured out of the shop. D'Arcy's face was very thoughtful as he walked down the street with his companions. Some idea was evidently working in his mind.

"Penny for your thoughts, old kid," said Tom Merry.

"I was just thinkin', Tom Mewwy, whethah you could possibly excuse me to Miss Fawcett if I did not return to lunch."

"Why, where do you want to lunch, then, image?"

"It is imperatively necessary for me to have a new hat. Some occasion might arise upon which I shall wequiah a toppah, and you can imagine how I should feel if I actually was without one at the time."

"Yes, rather! You would feel an awful ass. But that oughtn't to worry you, as you are one, you know."

"P'way be sewious. I think I must take the twain to the town and buy a silk hat, and return to Lauwel Villah in time for tea."

"Do as you like, old boy, but don't miss your lunch. You can get a fine lunch here at the Huckleberry Arms for ninepence—boiled bacon and cabbage and—"

"Ow!" said D'Arcy, with a shudder. "I will lunch in the town—Southminster, I think it is called. Then I will go and catch my twain and wejoin you latah. You will be sure to make my excuses to Miss Pwisicillah."

"Oh, certainly!" grinned Tom Merry.

"I say, old kid, you can have my topper if you like," said Figgins.

"Thank you vevy much, Figgins, but I weally could not wear that dreadful-lookin' thing you call a toppah," said D'Arcy. "I don't want to appeah ungrateful, of course, but I ask you sewiously, could I wear a toppah that only cost seventeen-and-sixpence in the first place, and has had the wear and tear of a month since?"

"You won't get the offer a second time, you horrid image!" said Figgins wrathfully. "It's a jolly good topper, I can tell you. I've had it only a month, and it's stood a lot!"

"Yaas, wathah—it looks as if it has!"

"Look here, if you're going to catch the train to Southminster, Gussy, you'd better buzz off," said Tom Merry. "There's only one train in an afternoon, and it goes in five minutes!"

"Weally! P'way excuse me, deah boys; I must wun like anythin'!"

And D'Arcy dashed off to the station, and the juniors, laughing, took the road to Laurel Villa.

CHAPTER 7.

A Slight Mistake.

TOM MERRY uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hallo, look there!"

The juniors had made good pace, and they were close to Laurel Villa when Tom Merry pointed out a figure in the lane in advance of them, just stopping at the gate of the long garden.

"The dangerous ruffian!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I say, he's going in," said Blake. "Is it possible that D'Arcy was right? He's usually a giddy ass, you know, but he may have been right for once!"

Tom Merry looked serious.

"Well, the old chap looked a bit fierce, though I only caught a glimpse of him," he said. "You saw more than I did, Lowther. What do you think of him?"

"Peppery sort of customer, I thought," said Lowther. "He bashed D'Arcy's topper a treat! Had a foreign look about him."

"Some foreigner, looking out for what he can lay his hands on," said Herries. "He's certainly gone into the garden. Come on, and let's see what he's up to, anyway!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors ran on swiftly. It did not seem likely that a burglar would make any attempt upon Laurel Villa in broad daylight; yet the situation was a lonely one, and there was no man in the house other than a wheezy old gardener. Daylight robberies had been perpetrated before, and would be again.

The juniors arrived in a moment or two at the gate. Tom Merry looked across it, and the figure of the stranger came into view again.

The dining-room windows, looking out on the lawn, were wide open. They were french windows, and gave easy access to the house. The stranger had left the path up to the door, and was walking towards the open windows.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"You see him, kids?"

"Come on!" muttered Blake. "He's plainly one of them, and he knows there are only women in the place. Quick!"

"He's one of the gang," muttered Lowther. "See? He's stopped, and he's looking in to see if anyone's about!"

It was true.

The stranger had paused at the french windows of the dining-room, and was looking in as if in doubt whether to enter.

"It's the silver he's after," said Herries. "He's got that bag to carry it away in, of course."

"I'll wager it's the silver more than the lace," said Blake. "Look, he's gone in! Come on, and we shall nab him in the very act!"

It seemed impossible to doubt longer. If the man had been an accustomed visitor of Miss Fawcett Tom Merry would, of course, have known him by sight. For a stranger to enter the house, unannounced, by the french windows, looked like a proof of dishonest intentions.

The juniors crossed the lawn at a rapid run. Tom Merry

Potts, the Office Boy!



held up his hand as a sign of caution as they drew near the french windows.

He looked in silently. The stranger was standing in the room, looking about him with an air of coolness that got Tom's back up at once. His glance came towards the window, and he saw Tom Merry.

Tom Merry waited for no more. It was useless to give the villain time to draw a revolver or a concealed bludgeon. The hero of the Shell simply hurled himself in, and was on the stranger's neck in a moment.

Taken by surprise the man went backwards and thumped on the floor, and Tom Merry sprawled over him pinning him down.

"Come on!" he yelled. "Buck up, St. Jim's!"

The juniors hardly needed the call. They were already pouring in, and they swamped the stranger as he struggled and attempted to throw Tom Merry off.

With Tom astride of his chest, and Figgins kneeling on one arm and Herries on the other, Lowther sitting on his legs, and Blake, with his fingers in his collar, the stranger was quite helpless.

"Don't resist, my man," said Tom Merry—"we've got you!"

"You—you young rascals!"

"Oh, ring off! Shut up and take it calmly!"

"Great Juggernaut! You young villains!"

"No nonsense now! You're fairly caught, and you may as well own up! I wonder how much plunder he's got in that bag?" asked Figgins.

"Let me get up!"

"Rats! Where are those neckties? Oh dear, that ass, D'Arcy, ran off with them under his arm! Take off your braces to bind the beast with, Figgy!"

"Let me get up!"

"Not this time! I say, we'd better phone for the police!"

"Are you mad? I am—"

"Are you really?"

"I am—"

"Whatever is it?" cried Miss Priscilla, who had, of course, been alarmed by the uproar. "My dear, dear boys, what ever has happened?"

"Don't be alarmed, dear—"

"What ever—what ever is it?"

"Pray don't be alarmed! It's a burglar, but we've got him safe!"

"A burglar! Oh, help—help!"

"Calm yourself, Miss Fawcett," said Lowther. "We've got him tight, and if you'll get us a blind-cord or something we'll bind him hand and foot!"

"Yes, yes, yes—at once!"

"Let me get up!" roared the prisoner. "Have I got into a private lunatic asylum by mistake? Cannot a man enter his own sister's house without being taken for a burglar?"

"Francis!" shrieked Miss Fawcett.

The juniors were electrified. They rolled off their prisoner as quickly as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

"Francis!" shrieked Miss Priscilla again, staring at the stranger.

"Priscilla!" exclaimed the little gentleman, staggering to his feet. "Who—what—how— Is this the greeting I receive when I return home after twenty years in India? Ha, Juggernaut! You set of rascally budmashes! What are you doing in this house?"

"Francis!"

"One moment, madam, while I drive these young scoundrels out of the house!" exclaimed Mr. Francis Fawcett, brandishing his umbrella.

"Francis!" screamed Miss Fawcett. "It is Tom Merry!"

"Tom Merry! My old friend General Merry's nephew?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

Mr. Fawcett threw down his umbrella.

"My word! Hah! And this is how you greet your old nurse's brother, is it, Thomas Merry?"

Tom's face was crimson.

"I—I am awfully sorry, sir," he said. "I—we—us—that is, we—we took you for a burglar, sir!"

"Hah! A burglar! Pah! Bah! Hah!"

Mr. Fawcett's ejaculations were expressive of the most profound contempt. But Tom Merry's penitent look softened him.

"You see, sir, I didn't know you by sight," said Tom Merry, "and I saw you walking into the house by the french windows—"

"Ha, ha! Yes, I suppose it would look rather strange, when I come to think of it. I expected to find my sister there. Why, you young rascal, that is how I used to come into the house thirty years ago—before you were born!"

"You see, sir, we—we knew there were dangerous characters hanging round the house, and when we saw you sneaking in—I mean going in—"

Mr. Fawcett laughed. He certainly had a peppery temper, but his storms were like those of the tropical land he came from—furious but brief. He was soon all smiles.

"Well, if you took me for a burglar it was plucky of you to tackle me," he said. "Are you not the boys I saw at the station?"

"Yes, sir; we didn't know you then."

"And the boy who ran into me?"

"He's coming in later. You bashed in his hat, and he's gone to Southminster to buy a new one," laughed Tom Merry.

"Hah! I'm sorry! Ha, ha, ha! It was very funny, though. Well, I forgive you. I'm glad to see you, Tom. Priscilla, my dear sister, you have not kissed me yet. Now introduce all your young friends, Tom."

Tom Merry presented the juniors of St. Jim's, and Mr. Fawcett gave them a hearty handshake all round. The Anglo-Indian was a wiry little man, with a great power of grip, and his handshake caused some facial contortions among the juniors. It was possible that he knew the strength of his fingers, and put on a little extra grip to repay the scramble on the floor, in which he had got decidedly the worst of it.

"I hope I am in time for lunch?" said Mr. Fawcett.

Tom Merry smiled at the idea of a man coming from India after twenty years' absence and asking whether he was in time for lunch.

"Certainly, Brother Frank," said Miss Priscilla. "I will show you to your rooms at once myself. They are all ready; though I did not know you were coming to-day for certain."

"Steamer made extra good time," said Brother Frank. "Got into Southampton this morning, and I caught the first train on."

"Where is your luggage?"

ACCOUNT RENDERED!



"Here," said Brother Frank, picking up his bag.

"But—but—"

"I am an old globe-trotter, Sister Priscilla. I have crossed half the world with precisely this amount of luggage. I shall be glad to see my rooms."

And Mr. Francis Fawcett followed Miss Priscilla from the room.

The juniors looked at one another.

"Well, that was a ghastly bloomer, and no mistake!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes; but he's taken it very well."

"He's a good old sort!" said Herries. "Lots of men would have lost their tempers, and borne a grudge for the handling we gave him."

"That's so," agreed Figgins. "But, I say, after that tussle I want a brush up. And you look as if you want the same. Follow the man from Cook's!"

And the juniors trooped up to their own quarters. They came down in time for lunch, and found Brother Frank all ready at the table. Lunch was served to the exact minute, as it always was, and as everything was at Laurel Villa. And the only one absent of the party was Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 8.

A Narrow Escape for Gussy.

BROTHER FRANK proved to be an entertaining little gentleman. The sun of India had dried up his skin, but not his heart, and he had a kindly, though rather dry nature. His little black eyes twinkled sometimes very humorously; looking like black beads in the brown of his sunburned face.

The juniors rather took to him from the start. His abrupt way of speaking was a thing to grow accustomed to, and before lunch was over Tom Merry was calling him Uncle Frank—though, as a matter of fact, Miss Fawcett and her brother were the most distant relations of the hero of St. Jim's.

And "Uncle Frank" he soon became to all the juniors. His little brown face wrinkled up seriously at the story of the burglars, for one of whom the juniors had mistaken him. He smiled in his dry way when Miss Priscilla stated her firm conviction that the rascals were after her lace, and not after any more substantial valuables.

"My dear sister," said Mr. Fawcett, "they are after your silver, if they are after anything."

"But my beautiful lace—"

"Nonsense! They are after the silver!"

"I have taken every precaution," said Miss Fawcett, unheeding. "I have wrapped up the lace carefully, and placed it in an old chest, double-locked, and hidden it away under a heap of things in a cupboard, and—"

Uncle Frank grunted. He had a very expressive grunt, which could mean almost anything, and on the present occasion it seemed to mean that he considered Miss Fawcett's elaborate precautions quite unnecessary, and wide of the mark.

"They are after the silver, sister, if they are after anything," he said.

"I am sure that—"

"My dear girl," said Uncle Frank, apparently having forgotten the two decades which had elapsed since last he had seen Priscilla. "My dear girl, I tell you I know better. They are after the silver!"

"Oh, very well, Brother Frank!" said the old lady, giving in at last.

"But they shan't have the silver," said Uncle Frank, flourishing his fork—"not while I am here, sister!"

"I feel so safe, now that you are home, Frank!"

"You are safe, indeed, my dear. I should like to see the burglar that would break into the house where I was!" said Uncle Frank, looking very warlike.

After lunch the Anglo-Indian had a number of Oriental curiosities to show the boys, in which they were keenly interested.

There was one article especially among the curios Mr. Fawcett produced from his bag that attracted their attention.

It was a little idol, not more than six inches in length, but well executed, and apparently made of solid gold.

The countenance was hideously repulsive, and a bizarre effect was imparted to it by the two eyes formed of glittering rubies, real or imitation.

"Ugly little beggar!" said Lowther, examining the idol.

"I suppose this is worth a lot of money, Mr. Fawcett?"

"I have been offered a thousand rupees for it," replied Uncle Frank, with a smile.

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"My hat! Really!"

"Yes; and by a great collector of curios, whom I met on the steamer. He was so taken with the little god that I really thought he would steal it. In fact, an attempt was made, and I was almost certain that the delinquent was Mr. Solomonson. But I could not be sure, and, as you see, I had the idol safe."

"Where did it come from?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

"I can only tell you the tale that was told me by the Hindu I bought it of," said Mr. Fawcett. "The same tale I told the collector on the steamer. It was stolen, according to his account, from the great Temple of Benares, and the Hindu priests have been hunting for it ever since it was taken. That is why he was willing to part with it for a small sum."

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla. "With so many valuables in the house—"

Crash!



While the chums of St. Jim's watched, breathless, smoke and flames, a snake, twisting

It was a tremendous crash of the knocker at the door. Miss Priscilla gave a slight shriek, and the boys started.

"The burglar!" gasped Miss Priscilla faintly.

"Oh," said Uncle Frank, "nonsense! Burglars don't usually come with a loud, double knock, unless manners and customs have greatly changed since I was last in England."

Night had fallen, and the lamps were alight in Laurel Villa. Hannah was heard going to the door, and there was another loud knock before she could get it open.

"Thank you vevy much!" gasped a voice. "I have been wunnin' like anythin'!"

"Gussy!" exclaimed the juniors; and they rushed out into the hall to see what was the matter with the swell of St. Jim's.

Mr. Fawcett did not go out. He only grunted.

"Hallo, Adolphus!" exclaimed Figgins. "Wherefore this thushness?"

"Oh, pway, don't wot!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "They are aftah me!"

"Who are?"

"Those feahful wuffians we met last night—Bilkah and Micky they called each other. I was comin' along the lane with my hat-box, when they suddenly spwang upon me, and I wushed off like anythin'. I came near dwoppin' my hat-box, but, fortunately, I had the pwesence of mind to save it."

And the swell of St. Jim's set a hat-box, evidently containing a silk hat, down on the floor, and gasped again.

"Bravo!" said Tom Merry. "You've saved the topper. and, after all, that was the most important. I suppose that was what they were after?"

"Certainly not! What would be the use of a silk toppah to those wuffians? They were aftah my watch and chain, you know, and my tin, and weally it would have been a gweat pwize to them, as I have a fivah in my waistcoat



... flames rose from the table, and in the middle of the smoke appeared a ... and writhing!

pocket, you know. They went aftah me like anythin', and followed me wight up to the gate."

"I suppose they're gone now," said Figgins, looking warlike. "I'd like to—"

"Yaas, wathah! The scoundwels! I wecognised their voices, you know, and they were the same two feahful wuffians. But I believe that wascal we met at the station to-day belongs to the same gang."

"I say, Gussy," said Tom Merry hastily, aware that Mr. Fawcett was within hearing.

"You wemembah that wottah," said D'Arcy, unheeding. "He wan into me, and then bashed in my toppah in the most wuffianly way. I wegarded him as a dangewous wuffian from the moment I saw him—"

"Gussy!"

"He had a wicked old face, and his eyes were those of a burglah or a murdewah," went on D'Arcy. "I nevah saw a more shockin' countenance in my life!"

"Gussy, you ass, he's in this room—"

"I am here," said Mr. Fawcett, appearing in the doorway. "I am very glad to hear such a flattering description from Master D'Arcy! Ah!"

D'Arcy stared at the Anglo-Indian in amazement.

"That is the wuffian!" he gasped.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry. "That is Uncle Frank—Miss Fawcett's brother!"

"What! That same bwown-coloured wascal—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Uncle Frank. "I am sorry I damaged your hat, and I will buy you a new one, or you must allow me to pay the seventeen-and-sixpence."

D'Arcy drew himself up to his fullest height.

"I pwesume you are jokin'!" he said.

"Not a bit of it!" said Mr. Fawcett heartily. "I mean it—every word. I spoiled your hat, and I'll pay for another just as good."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins.

But D'Arcy did not laugh. He fixed his monocle in his right eye, and seemed to be trying to paralyse the Indian with a glance.

"If you think, sir, that I ever wore a seventeen-and-sixpenny hat, you are labowin undah a gweat mistake," he said. "I always give a guinea and a half for my toppahs!"

"Do you?" said Mr. Fawcett; and he grunted. "Ah, then you are an ass, sir! Yes, an ass! Understand me! I say an ass!"

D'Arcy looked round through his monocle.

"I suppose this is a little jape," he said languidly. "Whethah this is a burglah or not, I am convinced that this wude person is not the bwother of our amiable and extwemely esteemed host, Miss Pwisicillah."

"Yes, I am, sir!" roared the Anglo-Indian. "And I regard you as an ass!"

"And I wegard you as an extwemely wude person."

"Frank! D'Arcy!" said the distressed Miss Priscilla.

Blake and Herries had seized D'Arcy by the shoulders, and were fiercely muttering in his ears; but, between the two, the swell of St. Jim's could not comprehend.

"Don't be a silly ass—"

"It's Mr. Fawcett—"

"You must apologise—"

"Stop acting the giddy ox—"

"Chuck it—"

"Don't you understand—"

Arthur Augustus jerked his head free.

"I weally wish that you would not muttah in my eahs!" he said loudly. "I cannot understand a word you say, either of you!"

Blake and Herries could have wiped up the floor with him. Tom Merry and Figgins were laughing too much to be able to speak. Lowther gripped D'Arcy by the arm.

"Ass!" he exclaimed. "Don't you understand?"

"I object to bein' called an ass!"

"You owe Mr. Fawcett an apology. You are frightening Miss Priscilla."

That was enough for D'Arcy. The politeness of Arthur Augustus was never known to fail him in the most difficult situations.

"Weally, I am extwemely sowwy!" he exclaimed. "Miss Fawcett, I hope you will overlook any remarks made in the huwwy of the moment, and I hope you will do the same, Mr. Fawcett, if you are weally our esteemed hostess' bwother. I am extwemely wegwetful of havin' said anythin' that might give offence—"

The Anglo-Indian grinned.

"Say no more!" he exclaimed. "Let bygones be bygones, and you shall pay for the hat yourself, to show that there is no ill-feeling."

D'Arcy looked rather puzzled. He did not quite see how that was made out; but he assented at once.

"Give us your fist!" went on Uncle Frank, with a malicious gleam in his eye; and he held out his hand.

"With great pleasuah, sir!" said D'Arcy.

He shook hands with Uncle Frank. The wiry fingers of the Anglo-Indian closed on his hand with a grip like steel. Arthur Augustus gave a wriggle, but after the warm words that had passed, he did not like to try to withdraw his hand. The grip on it closed tighter and tighter, and D'Arcy's face became wryer and wryer.

"Ow!" he exclaimed at last involuntarily.

"My dear lad, there is nothing I like in a boy so much as a hearty grip of the hand!" exclaimed Mr. Fawcett, apparently not noticing D'Arcy's writhings. "It shows strength of muscle and a warm heart."

"Ow!"

"Another grip? Certainly! With all my heart!"

"Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

Mr. Fawcett released D'Arcy's hand at last. It was time, for the swell of St. Jim's seemed to be trying to tie himself up in a knot.

"I am sure we shall be friends," said Uncle Frank, beaming. And he led the way into the room again.

The juniors followed, nearly suffocated with laughter. D'Arcy was rubbing his right hand tenderly with his left, and making all sorts and varieties of contortions with his face.

"I—I considah that that was a beastlay pwactical joke, Hewwies!" he whispered. "If I were not a guest in this respected establishment, I should be stwongly inclined to chawactewise the action as wude. I weally feel vevy pained!"

"Go hon!" said Herries, grinning.

D'Arcy kept a suspicious eye on Mr. Fawcett after that. Come what might, the swell of St. Jim's was fully determined not to shake hands with Uncle Frank any more.

CHAPTER 9.

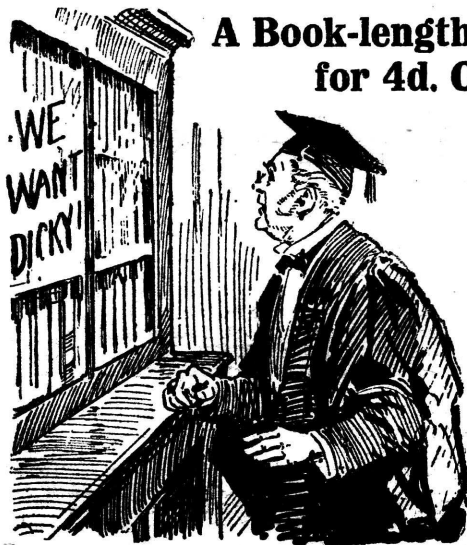
Indian Magic!

IT was a merry evening at Laurel Villa.

After dinner, which was very lively, Uncle Frank, having revealed himself as possessed of a considerable fund of dry humour, the little party prepared to enjoy themselves till bed-time came round.

Tom Merry had telephoned to the police station at Huckleberry Heath, concerning the attack made upon D'Arcy in the lane, it being useless to think of longer concealing the proximity of the ruffians from Miss Fawcett, of course, after the attack. The inspector replied through the phone that the rascals were being searched for, and that the police expected to lay them by the heels before morning. When Uncle Frank heard that he grunted—a most expressive grunt.

During the evening, Uncle Frank gave a little exhibition



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of Indian magic, and performed some really clever conjuring tricks. Miss Priscilla trembled when he made flames play round her curtains, and produced a snake from a china vase, but breathed freely again when no harm came of it.

Uncle Frank next asked for a hat, with the proviso that it must be a silk hat and quite new; and Herries kindly obliged by fetching in D'Arcy's brand-new topper.

"I say, Hewwies," whispered D'Arcy, as his chum came in with the hat-box, "what are you goin' to do with that hat, you know?"

"Give it to Mr. Fawcett for his magic."

"But I say, you know, that's my beastlay new hat, you know!"

"Well, I don't suppose he'll hurt it."

"Yaas; but he might, you know, and—"

"Hand over the hat!" said Uncle Frank. And D'Arcy subsided with a groan, and the new topper was passed to the conjurer.

Mr. Fawcett took it, apparently oblivious of D'Arcy's ill-concealed anxiety. D'Arcy prided himself upon his politeness, which could really bear a great strain, but it was put to a severe test now as Uncle Frank took the hat out of the box.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Uncle Frank, "I will now produce flame and smoke from this hat, and you will see it slowly crumble to pieces and be utterly destroyed while I hold it at the end of a pair of tongs."

"Oh, my-word!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Then I shall restore it to its owner, none the worse for having been destroyed," said Uncle Frank blandly.

"Good!" said Figgins. "I should like to see that done."

"But I must be assured that the owner of the hat has no objection, in case anything should go wrong," said Uncle Frank, fixing his gimlet eyes on D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus made a great effort and smiled.

"I weally have no objection in the world, you know," he said.

"You are quite sure of that?" asked Mr. Fawcett.

"Ya-a-as, wathah!"

"Then I will proceed with the trick."

The Anglo-Indian was certainly very clever in the conjuring line. The juniors felt almost certain that it was the same hat that he held up by the brim with a pair of fire-tongs. Smoke and flame issued from it for some time, appearing to cause no damage to the hat, and D'Arcy breathed again. But his hope was short-lived.

The flame gradually caught upon the material and burned it away, and with a flare the hat shot into flame and then died down in smoke.

Only a blackened cinder still hung in the grip of the fire-tongs in the hands of Uncle Frank. D'Arcy's hopes sank to zero.

"You see, ladies and gentlemen, that the hat is entirely destroyed," said Uncle Frank, holding up the incinerated wreck.

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry.

"Rather," said Figgins; "and if you're able to give D'Arcy back his tile, sir, I shall be astonished."

"Of course, there is always the danger of something going wrong in these tricks of magic," said Uncle Frank, staring intently at the hat. "I—I am afraid—"

He paused, and looked at D'Arcy with an expression of great distress.

Arthur Augustus gave him a stony glare through his eyeglass.

"You have destwoyed my hat!" he exclaimed.

"I am glad that I had your full permission to use it for the trick," said Mr. Fawcett. "And if you are not satisfied with the hat as I restore it to you, I will gladly provide three-and-ninpencc for a new one."

Arthur Augustus did not reply. If he had been insulted by the offer of seventeen-and-sixpence for a new topper, he was outraged by the mere suggestion of three-and-ninpencc. Words were unequal to the occasion.

"It is really too bad," said Uncle Frank, still staring at the wrecked hat; "but it gives D'Arcy on opportunity to show the real fortitude of his nature."

"Yaas, wathah!" faltered D'Arcy. "I—I—I don't mind in the least."

"Well said!" exclaimed Uncle Frank heartily. "I admire you for that, D'Arcy. I really believe that your courtesy would stand any strain."

"I hope so, sir," said D'Arcy, in his most stately manner.

"And if I asked you for something else for another trick—"

D'Arcy changed colour.

"You would hand it over without a murmur, I am sure."

"Ya-a-as, wathah!"

"Then, may I trouble you for your watch?"

"M-m-m-my w-w-w-watch!" stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, your watch. I am going to shatter it to fragments."

"You are goin' to shattah my watch to—to—to—"

"Yes; and then restore it to you quite unharmed."

Every eye was fixed on D'Arcy.

Tom Merry felt certain, by the twinkle in Uncle Frank's little black eyes, that he was only "japing" the swell of St. Jim's, and would do no harm to his watch. But Gussy was feeling extremely uneasy.

"If D'Arcy objects," said Mr. Fawcett, "I will use my own watch."

"Not at all, sir!" said Arthur Augustus, as Blake and Herries nudged him. "Not in the least, deah boy! Here's my beastlay watch!"

He unfastened it from the chain and handed it to the Anglo-Indian. Mr. Fawcett received it and hurled it upon the table—or, at least, appeared to do so. If the watch slid up his sleeve, and another was hurled on the table in its place, it was done so neatly and quickly that not a single eye detected it.

A shudder ran through Arthur Augustus.

The watch crashed on the table and the glass smashed in, and then Mr. Fawcett gave it a terrible crack with a poker, which settled the works. Then he threw it down on the floor and kicked it about a little and stamped on it; and finally he picked it up again. Then a very distressed look came over his mahogany face.

"Great juggernaut!" he was heard to mutter. "How the dickens does this trick go? D'Arcy, would you be very much pained to hear that I could not possibly restore this watch to its original condition?"

"Not at all, sir," said D'Arcy, with a ghastly smile.

Mr. Fawcett slipped the ruined watch into his pocket.

"Well, I am sorry," he said. "That is two tricks that have gone wrong. But, you see, I am only an amateur, and picked up my knowledge from the Indian jugglers for a few rupees, and so I cannot be expected to be absolutely successful every time."

"Yaas, wathah!" said poor Gussy. "That's all wight."

"You don't mind in the least?"

"Not at all. I—I wathah enjoy it, you know."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Then there is nothing to complain about. Now for the last trick. You see this little golden idol, which Mr. Solomonson offered me one thousand rupees for? It possesses magic properties, and can be changed into a serpent."

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake. "That's rather steep!"

"You will see. I shall light a fire on the table—"

Miss Priscilla shuddered.

"The table will not be harmed by the kind of fire I shall light," grinned Uncle Frank. "You need not be at all nervous, my dear sister."

He produced a little rosewood box and placed it on the table, and then spread some aromatic powders upon it. Then he placed the little idol in the box, performed some passes with his hands, and muttered some sort of incantation in Hindustani. The boys watched him eagerly.

Without any visible agency smoke began to rise from the box, and then blue tongues of flame appeared. The aromatic powders sent a strange, penetrating smell through the room, and the rosewood box was completely enveloped by thick smoke.

Figgins gave a sudden yell.

From the smoke a hideous form writhed suddenly—a snake, about two feet long, with a beautifully marked skin, and eyes that glittered like precious stones.

The juniors sprang away from the table, and Miss Priscilla shrieked as the snake squirmed away, dropped to the floor, and disappeared in a twinkling behind the window curtains.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"My word!" said Blake.

"But—but—but the snake!" said Miss Priscilla in shaking accents. "You will not allow it to remain in the house, Francis?"

Uncle Frank laughed.

"The snake has already undergone a second metamorphosis," he said blandly. "Master D'Arcy, will you kindly go behind the curtain and hand out what you find there?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Take care," said Miss Priscilla faintly. "The dreadful thing may bite you!"

"There is not the least danger," said Uncle Frank reassuringly. "D'Arcy will be quite pleased by what he finds there."

Arthur Augustus drew the curtain back. Then he gave a yell.

Tom Merry sprang to his side in a moment. But it was

not danger. The swell of St. Jim's was staring blankly at a silk hat, in which reposed a gold watch.

"My toppah! My watch!"

"My only pyjama hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

D'Arcy picked up the hat and the watch. Mr. Fawcett was watching him with a dry smile. The articles were passed round for inspection.

"That was weally vevy clevah," said D'Arcy—"it was weally, you know! You gave me a fright, you know; but it was weally vevy clevah! Yaas, wathah!"

"I hope I gave you a lesson, too!" said Uncle Frank dryly. "But all's well that ends well; and now it's bed-time!"

And, having said good-night, the juniors retired.

CHAPTER 10. The Burglars.

CREAK!

Tom Merry was wakeful at once. He knew that there was a loose board in the passage outside his door, and that it always creaked like that when it was trodden on. The old house was full of slight sounds in the midnight stillness, but that particular sound was well known to Tom Merry.

He lay in the darkness, wondering what the time was, and quite certain in his own mind that someone had just passed his door.

There was little doubt as to what had happened. The housebreakers had made their attempt at last.

Doubtless they were in ignorance of the fact that Uncle Frank had returned from India. They knew that the boys were in the house; that was all. Tom Merry slipped quietly out of bed and hurried into his clothes. The night was very cold, but he hardly noticed it in his excitement.

Figgins put his head sleepily out.

"Hallo! What's the trouble? Who's that getting up?"

"Hush, Figgy!"

"Right-ho! But what's the matter?"

"They've come at last!"

"Who have come?"

"The burglars!"

"My word! Are you sure?"

"Someone has just passed the door. They got in by the window over the outhouse at the end of the passage, I think. They're in the house."

"Lucky we're here," said Figgins, in a low voice. "Let's wake the chaps, and we'll go down in a gang and nab 'em!"

"That's the wheeze!"

The juniors were soon awakened.

"We'll go to Uncle Frank's room first," said Tom Merry. "The thieves are bound to be in the dining-room. Stay! You fellows wait here while I go and wake up Mr. Fawcett. Quiet!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Tom Merry left the room silently, and stole cautiously along the passage. He heard a faint sound below the staircase, and knew that the burglars had descended to the ground floor. He reached Mr. Fawcett's room, and passed in. A faint light streamed in at the open window.

"Uncle Frank!"

Twenty years on the frontiers of the Empire had taught Francis Fawcett to be a light sleeper, to wake at a sound and with all his wits about him.

In a moment a whisper came back from the darkness of the bed:

"Yes? Is that you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, sir. There are burglars in the house!"

"Hah!"

"They're in the dining-room, sir. We're all awake and ready to go for them, but I thought I ought to call you first."

"Haha! Quite right, Tom—quite right!"

"They're after the silver, of course, sir. We—"

"I'll be with you in one minute."

Tom Merry silently rejoined his chums.

"Is he coming?" murmured Figgins.

"Yes; he'll be along in a minute."

In deep silence they waited, and Uncle Frank came along the passage in dressing-gown and slippers, with something in his hand.

"Ready, sir?" whispered Tom Merry. "We ought to collar them as quietly as possible, sir, so as not to alarm—"

"Quite right, Tom. I hope my sister will not hear anything about it till the morning," said Mr. Fawcett. "Follow me!"

He led the way down the stairs in his slippers. The dining-room door was partly open, and a faint gleam of light came from within.

Mr. Fawcett looked in, and caught a glimpse of two dim forms.

Tom Merry was beside him, and he caught a glimpse, too, and there was something familiar in the figures that acquainted him with their identity at once.

"Bilker and Micky!" he murmured. "The roughts who attacked us in the lane!"

Mr. Fawcett made a sign for silence.

He made no attempt to enter the room, but appeared to be examining something in his hand which he had brought from his bed-room.

Suddenly his hand rose, and something jerked from his palm into the room and fell with a light thud upon the carpet.

There was a gasp of alarm from within the room.

"You 'eard that, Mickey?"

"I 'eard it, Bilker!"

The two ruffians stared about them uneasily. They were cramming the massive silver from the sideboard into a sack, and there was a musical clink of metal as Micky dropped the sack.

"Look!" gasped Micky.

He stared in blank terror at a small object on the floor. It had been invisible when it dropped from the hand of Uncle Frank, but now it was glimmering with a faint blue flame, with strange sparkles in it.

"Wot—wot is it?" gasped Bilker.

"It's a—a—a snake!"

From the little flaming ball a snake appeared to unroll itself, dimly seen, but terrible in the pale light, with a gleaming, scaly back, and glittering, red eyes.

Micky made a dash to the window.

"It's—it's a snake—a pizenous one!"

Bilker made a dash at the snake, a cudgel swinging aloft in his hand. He was evidently of a more determined nature than his companion. The cudgel came down with a crash on the writhing snake.

Then the burglar staggered back.

The moment the cudgel touched the writhing form it exploded into a stream of sparks, and the burglar was dazzled and bewildered.

He staggered away, half-blinded, and as he staggered a grip of iron was fixed upon him. He went to the floor, and a knee was planted on his chest. A round, cold rim was pressed to his forehead.

"Quiet, or I'll fire!"

The burglar collapsed utterly. He was helpless under the grip of Uncle Frank, and the cold rim pressed to his forehead sapped all the courage out of him.

"I—I— Don't fire!" he gasped.

"Quiet, then! Secure the other, lads!"

Micky turned snarlingly from the window as Tom Merry rushed at him, with the rest at his heels. There was a cudgel in his hand, but he had no chance to use it. Tom Merry's poker descended upon his arm with a crash, and the cudgel dropped to the floor.

Micky fell upon his knees.

A poker, a pair of tongs, a walking-stick, and a bronzo vase were brandished over him, and he would probably have been brained if he had not had sense enough to surrender.

"Don't!" he gasped. "Don't! I gives in!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Light the lamp, Herries, will you? Collar this rotter, kids!"

Micky was soon collared. Blake and Lowther and Tom Merry held him, while D'Arcy was sent scuttling off for the famous neckties. He returned in a few moments, and Micky was bound, hand and foot.

"Now serve this rascal the same!" said Mr. Fawcett.

The lamp was glimmering on the scene. Micky was in a state of fear and collapse; but Bilker's more determined face expressed rage and hatred. But the round, cold rim was still biting into the skin of his knuckly forehead.

"Hands first!" said Mr. Fawcett. "Mind, you rascal, strike a single blow, and your brains—if you have any—will be scattered over the carpet!"

Bilker's thick wrists were dragged together and bound fast with a gaudy necktie. Then the same attention was bestowed upon his ankles.

Mr. Fawcett then removed his knee from the ruffian's chest, and the cold rim from his forehead, and rose to his feet.

"Lucky you had that wevovah, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

Uncle Frank smiled.

"It was not a very dangerous one," he remarked, holding it up for inspection.

The burglar gave a howl of fury as he saw that it was the metal rim of a pipe bowl that had been pressed to his forehead.

"A—a pipe!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "My word! Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as extremely funny."

Apparently Bilker did not see where the fun came in, for he burst into a torrent of savage oaths. He was soon silenced, however.

"I will ring up the police station, and have these ruffians sent for," said Mr. Fawcett. "It was very fortunate you heard them, Tom Merry. You see, they had most of the silver in the sack ready to take it away."

Soon there came a car from the police station for the burglars, and Bilker and Micky were handed over to the tender care of a couple of men in blue. Miss Fawcett came down a little later, and was amazed to hear the story of the night's adventure. Uncle Frank pointed out that the silver was still safe, but his sister hardly listened to him.

"Yes, I suppose they were taking the silver because they couldn't find the lace," said Miss Priscilla contentedly.

"My dear sister—"

"My dear brother—"

"Breakfast!" announced Hannah.

So Uncle Frank finished the argument with a grunt, which might have meant anything, and they went into breakfast.

It was a merry party at Laurel Villa. The purpose for which the juniors had come from St. Jim's was effected. The burglars really existed, and they had been frustrated. But the boys did not return to the school immediately. They stayed at Laurel Villa till the end of the week, and when they finally departed they took an affectionate leave of Miss Priscilla, and Uncle Frank drove them to the station.

"Don't be surprised if you see me again before long," were his parting words.

And as the train buzzed off the juniors discussed them. Did Uncle Frank mean that he was going to pay them a visit at St. Jim's?

It was possible. And the juniors all agreed that if he did, it would be "jolly."

THE END.

(Uncle Frank turns up at St. Jim's next week in a ripping long yarn called "The St. Jim's Magician!" Don't miss it, it's a wow!)

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HALLO, chums! Have you enjoyed this week's programme in the GEM? Of course you have! Well, there's another good programme to look forward to in next week's bumper number, so order it right away. In the first place, Martin Clifford "turns up trumps" with another spiffing long story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled

"THE ST. JIM'S MAGICIAN!"

You'll get heaps of fun and entertainment out of this story, take it from me. Next on the list, so to speak, is a yarn by Owen Conquest which features your old pals, Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood. Then there is another thrilling episode featuring

THE SKY RAIDERS,

which will hold your interest at a high pitch. By way of a laugh Potts, the office boy, obliges us with another comic "strip," and if it's news you want, turn to this page. One more reminder—order your copy of the GEM in advance. That's the only way to make absolutely certain of it.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Teacher: "Jones minor, where is the capital of England?"

Jones Minor: "Please, I heard father say that most of it is in America!"

WHAT A NECK!

"Those blessed giraffes again!" Thus a very disgruntled servant of the telephone service in East Africa as he surveyed the bare telegraph poles in his district. We all know that the giraffe has a long neck, but who could foresee that this "lofty" animal would be able to wreck in a few moments the work of years? It would appear that the giraffe in East Africa has a propensity for lifting its head to the wires stretching between the telegraph poles and, having no use for them at all, calmly pulls them from the insulators and stalks away. But if the giraffe has no use for the telegraph wires, the people of East Africa have, so much so that the first trunk line linking up 600 miles of country was opened recently. But now the engineers and mechanics responsible have made certain of putting it across the destructive, long-necked giraffe by stretching the wire cables between poles many feet higher than the usual ones. So now Mr. Giraffe will only get a stiff neck when he tries to tear down the cables—unless, of course, he manages to find a box to stand on!

THE WARNING BELL.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling! The furious and constant ringing of a bell in his home

caused the Yorkshireman owner to investigate. It was just as well that he did, for his house was on fire! But the strange part about that fire was the bell which gave him the alarm was the direct cause of the blaze! The fire-brigade discovered that the bell wires had short-circuited and set the place alight, but this same "shorting" had produced the effect of ringing the bell. Lucky, wasn't it?

ANOTHER RECORD!

While sportsmen have been setting up world records for motor-cars, aeroplanes, motor-cycles, speed-boats, and the like, a certain London hotel has been devoting attention to a "record lift." There are ten floors to this hotel, and the world's swiftest lift can shift at a speed of 500 feet a minute. Doesn't look very formidable on paper, but just imagine your sensations as you ask for floor number ten and whiz sky-wards at that pace! Calling to mind a famous advertisement, you might be tempted to say, as you shoot past the ninth floor, "that's the ninth floor, that was!" And the downward journey—imagine that topsy-turvy feeling in your tummy as you descend at 500 feet a minute!

BOADICEA'S CASTLE.

Did Queen Boadicea ever have a castle? And the answer is yes, according to the experts. They have reason for their assertion because, quite recently, part of the foundations of a castle were unearthed on the outskirts of Tiptree, in Essex. Other discoveries which proved the experts right were pieces of pottery, huge cut stones, and enormous bricks. The dusty pages of history hint that in the days of the Ancient Britons there was a castle on the very spot where these discoveries have been made, and the finding of the foundations indicates that the historians really knew what they were talking about. So, when you are asked in Form where was Queen Boadicea's castle, say: "Within two miles of the place now known as Gore Pit Corner." Here was the spot where this plucky queen put it across the Roman invaders, as is recorded in your history books.

THE REF'S WHISTLE.

Sometimes we like to hear the piercing blast of the ref's whistle—sometimes we don't! It just depends on our view of the offside law, etc. But a referee, living near Bury St. Edmunds, recently found his whistle to be of use off the football ground. That was when his house caught fire. He blew and blew on it until the fire-brigade arrived. We wonder, when the fire had been put out, whether this referee saw fit to blow a final long blast for full time?

THE DIVERS' BROADCAST.

Have you got a wireless set? You have? Good! Well, during the month of April keep your eyes skinned for the announcement from the B.B.C. telling of their intention to broadcast the voices of the divers engaged in exploring the sunken Lusitania, two hundred and forty feet below the water off Kinsale Head, County Cork. Here's a stunt, if you like! An expedition is being formed to investigate the Lusitania wreck, and divers will go down in a special chamber attached to the salvage ship by means of a long steel tube. The divers will be fitted out with microphones, and via these they will tell the world all that they see on the sea-bed. If present intentions are carried out, the B.B.C. will broadcast to the world the divers' impressions and comments, and these should be well worth tuning-in to. Don't forget—the attempt is to be made early in April!

UP THE POLE!

The weird craze known as "pole-squatting," which has created quite a stir in America, and incidentally provided big money for many people, has arrived in London. At a London skating-rink a competition was held in which men and women perched themselves on small platforms supported by poles determined to sit there till all was blue. While other folk skated these "squatters" grouped themselves in various attitudes and tried to pass the time away by reading and smoking. Periodically they were fed—sandwiches and hot coffee being passed up to them by an attendant with a long pole. As the hours went by some of the less determined "squatters" gave in and clambered down from their lofty platforms. But one hardy "squatter" remained on his eighteen-inch platform for over seventy hours! He deserved his prize, but we wonder whether he thought it was really worth it?

CAN YOU ANSWER THIS?

How many policemen's feet make a Scotland Yard?

PRACTISING WHAT HE PREACHES!

"Grooough! It's cold!" How many of us mumbled something like that and pulled the blankets closely round us during the cold spell the Weather Clerk saw fit to give us last month? But Lord Baden-Powell, better known to us perhaps as "B. P.," the Chief Scout, slept out of doors on the balcony of his Hampshire house through it all. For years this hardy Britisher, who inaugurated the Scout movement and has seen it spread to every part of the globe, has made a practice of sleeping out of doors, winter and summer. As Lord Baden-Powell is now seventy-five years of age and looks as fit as a fiddle, his advice to get into the open air as much as possible should not be ignored. Camping, hiking, and studying the ways of Nature are what he recommends to youth, and undoubtedly "B. P." knows what he is talking about.

A NOVEL LENGTH ST. JIM'S YARN!

Here's something worth knowing, chums. In this month's Schoolboys' Own Library No. 168, now on sale, there is a fine EXTRA LONG story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "THE CARDEW CUP!" This great yarn of schoolboy footer and adventure presents wonderful value, for the March issues of this famous Library are now thirty-two pages longer than they were previously. This means thousands of words more of thrilling excitement, but the price is the same—4d! Have a look at a copy when you visit your newsagent next.

YOUR EDITOR

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RIPPING COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN.

THE RIVAL THESPIANS!

By OWEN CONQUEST.



The Moderns present Shakespeare on the stage! The Classics present the Moderns with black eyes—also on the stage!

CHAPTER 1.

Stealing a March!

"ET tu, Brute!" breathed Arthur Edward Lovell, closing his eyes.

He lay full length on the rug in the End Study; about him were grouped Jimmy Silver, dagger in hand, Newcome, Raby, Mornington, and "Putty" Grace, each grasping a dagger tightly and all leaning over the prostrate Lovell with fierce and bloodthirsty expressions.

There was a pause.

Then Jimmy Silver spoke.

"Then fall, Cæsar!"

"What?" ejaculated Lovell, sitting up suddenly.

"Then fall, Cæsar!" repeated Jimmy Silver irritably.

"You don't have to say that—it's my line," said Lovell.

"Exactly; but you didn't say it. I'm prompting you," explained Jimmy.

"I don't need prompting!" snapped Lovell. "I was just going to say it if you'd given me time. I know every line in this rotten part better than you do. Besides, I don't want to play Julius Cæsar—"

"My dear chap, the part suits you down to the ground," said Jimmy Silver soothingly.

"But Julius Cæsar gets stabbed half-way through the play and doesn't come on again!" hooted Lovell.

"Just so, old fellow. The play will brighten up wonderfully after you've been killed," answered Jimmy.

"Look here—"

"Look here—"

"If you men have quite finished I'll do Mark Antony's oration," interrupted Mornington coolly. "'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears—'"

"Shut up, Morny!" roared Jimmy Silver. "We can't get on until we've got this stabbing bizney in order. Now look here, Lovell—you've got to die more convincingly. You've got to do down all in a heap—"

"The last time we rehearsed this scene I cracked my head on that chair!" snapped Lovell. "Let's leave it till the performance—it'll be all right on the stage."

Jimmy Silver drew a deep breath.

Like many another amateur play producer he was finding rehearsals a little bit wearing. Lovell had hailed the choice of Shakespeare's immortal "Julius Cæsar" with joy at first, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,255.

and had insisted on playing the title role himself. Lovell was then blissfully unaware that Julius Cæsar is stabbed early in the play, and naturally does not appear again. When he had discovered that fact there had been some difficulty in persuading him to go on; but all the other roles were allotted, so Lovell really had no choice.

Jimmy Silver was doing Brutus, the biggest role, and Mornington was cast as Mark Antony. Raby, Newcome, and Putty Grace were assistant conspirators—hence their daggers.

"Do you think Lovell will know his lines by Saturday?" asked Mornington sarcastically.

"I know 'em now!" roared Lovell, getting up off the study rug.

"Then why don't you say 'em?" asked Mornington, in surprise.

"Peace, my infants," interrupted Jimmy Silver tranquilly. "There's bound to be little hitches in the best of productions."

"With Lovell in the cast, I agree," said Mornington.

"We'll just go through that scene again," said Jimmy hastily. "Get ready to be stabbed again, Lovell, there's a good fellow!"

Lovell grunted.

"Better listen to my speech," murmured Mornington.

"Shut up, Morny! Go it, Lovell! Go on from."

"But I am constant as the modern star
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality—"

Lovell took a deep breath and began:

"But I am constant—"

The study door opened suddenly, and Bulkeley, the captain of the school, looked in.

"You fags are supposed to be doing prep!" rapped Bulkeley.

"Oh, are we?" gasped Jimmy Silver innocently.

"Yes, you are! Get on with it!" snapped Bulkeley.

"Yes, Bulkeley."

The rehearsal came to an abrupt and perhaps a timely end.

Mornington and Grace left the End Study, and the Fistica Four got out their books for prep.

"There's only one thing that's going to spoil this production," observed Lovell as he chewed his pen.

"And what's that?" asked Raby wearily.

"I ought to be playing Brutus, instead of Jimmy!"

"But you insisted on playing Julius Cæsar—"

"I didn't know he gets stabbed half-way through!" roared Lovell indignantly.

"That's your look-out!" responded Jimmy Silver, chuckling. "Remember, when you are on you're the giddy centre of attraction. When we do 'Julius Cæsar' on Saturday the Moderns will go green with envy!"

"I heard from Tubby Muffin that they've been preparing a play of their own in secret," said Newcome thoughtfully. "But whatever it is we shall put them completely in the shade—"

"Hear, hear!"

"... so long as Lovell doesn't forget his lines."

"Will you shut up about my lines?" demanded Lovell, poising a Latin grammar threateningly.

"One of us has got to ask permission from Dalton and cycle down to the village to order the costumes," remarked Jimmy Silver. "I'll go myself after prep."

Prep in the End Study was soon over, whether to Mr. Dalton's satisfaction on the morrow remained to be seen. Jimmy Silver put away his books and repaired to Mr. Dalton's study to ask permission to cycle to the village and see old Mr. Bloomfield about the costumes.

Mr. Dalton, perhaps surprised and pleased by his pupils' sudden interest in Shakespeare, readily gave Jimmy a permit, and "Uncle James" went down cheerily into the Hall, whistling.

"Going out?" demanded Tubby Muffin curiously.

Tubby was idling by the letter-rack, as usual.

"What do you think I'm wearing my cap and a rain-coat for, old fat man?" asked Jimmy.

"I say, are you breaking bounds?" asked Muffin, round-eyed.

"No; I've got a permit from Dicky Dalton."

"Oh! Where are you going?"

Jimmy Silver stared.

"Is there anything else you'd like to know?" he asked.

"I—I say, you can tell me, old fellow—I'll keep it dark!" said Muffin eagerly.

"There's nothing to keep dark," answered Jimmy, laughing. "If you want to know, I'm going to order the costumes for our play from old Bloomfield."

"Oh!" said Muffin, disappointed and disinterested.

"Quite sure you've no more questions?" asked Jimmy.

"Beast!"

Jimmy Silver laughed again and went out.

Tubby Muffin looked at the letter-rack for the fifteenth time, but there was still no letter for him. He was about to repair to his study when Tommy Dodd, the leader of the Modern section of the Fourth, entered the Hall.

Muffin stared at him curiously.

It was unusual for Moderns to cross the quad after dark, and Tommy Dodd must have some special mission. If so, Muffin was the fellow to find out what it was. Finding out was Muffin's chief interest in life—after sleeping.

"I say, Dobby—"

"Scat!" said Dodd briefly.

"I say, what do you want over here at this time of night?" demanded Muffin.

"Nothing that concerns you, old fat top!" answered Dodd.

"Look here, there's something mysterious in the wind, and I'm going to find out what it is!" said Muffin seriously.

"First Jimmy Silver goes out with a permit—"

Dodd stopped and gave Muffin a keen glance.

"Jimmy Silver went out, you say?"

"Just this minute."

"Wonder where to?" said Tommy Dodd casually.

"He said he was going to see old Bloomfield in the village, and order the costumes for the play," answered Muffin. "But I don't believe him."

"For the play?" repeated Dodd keenly. "Which play?"

"Julius Cæsar, of course."

"Julius Cæsar! Great pip!"

Tommy Dodd looked startled for a moment; then he smiled almost affectionately at Muffin.

"Thanks, Muffin!" he said genially.

"Thanks for what?" asked Muffin uncomprehendingly.

"Oh, nothing!" smiled Tommy Dodd.

He left Muffin to ponder on the mystery which surrounded the actions of both Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd that evening.

Tommy Dodd's objective was Mr. Dalton's study.

He found Mr. Dalton deep in the marking of essays, but the Form master looked up with a smile.

"I'd like to ask permission to use the Junior Common-room for a play to-morrow night, sir," began Tommy.

"A play?" said Mr. Dalton. "I see no objection. I suppose you know that Silver is producing 'Julius Cæsar' on Saturday evening?"

"Just so, sir," murmured Dodd. "We—we're doing 'Julius Cæsar,' too."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. We thought if we could have the Common-room to-morrow—Wednesday, sir—it—it wouldn't inconvenience Silver."

"Silver will be rather surprised at your stealing a march on him in this manner," said Mr. Dalton, giving Tommy Dodd a very discerning look.

"Oh, yes, sir! We want to give him a—a surprise," said Tommy Dodd, concealing a grin.

Mr. Dalton nodded.

"Very well! You had better put a notice on the board at once."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir!"

Tommy Dodd left his Form master's study as if walking on air.

Mr. Dalton was not unaware of the rivalry existing between the Classical and Modern members of his Form, but it was not his business to interfere unless there was open strife.

Tubby Muffin was standing at the corner of the corridor as Dodd passed. Dodd hardly noticed him. It certainly did not occur to the Modern junior that Muffin had been listening at Mr. Dalton's keyhole during their conversation.

Once back on the Modern side of the quad, Tommy Dodd allowed some time to elapse. It was an hour later when he entered the prefects' room, not without some stealth, and found it luckily deserted.

Dodd was satisfied now that Jimmy Silver must have returned from ordering the costumes for his production of "Julius Cæsar"—for Saturday.

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Bloomfield? Yes, this is Rookwood. About those costumes ordered to-night. The performance has been put forward. Can you let us have them immediately after lunch to-morrow—Wednesday? Thanks, Mr. Bloomfield! We'll expect your man."

Tommy Dodd rang off and slipped out of the prefects' room just in time to avoid Knowles and Catesby, who would not have been pleased to find him using their phone.

In his study Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle awaited their leader with grinning faces.

"Everything all right?" asked Doyle, as Tommy Dodd came in.

"Everything!" assented Dodd, with great satisfaction. "We've got the Common-room. We shall have the costumes immediately after lunch. And to-morrow night we shall have the biggest laugh on Jimmy Silver & Co. that we've had for terms—"

"And terms—" echoed Tommy Cook.

"And terms!" chortled Tommy Doyle.

CHAPTER 2.

Desperate Measures!

"I SAY, Jimmy Silver—" gasped Tubby Muffin excitedly, as the Classical Fourth trooped up to bed. Jimmy Silver apparently did not hear him. He was murmuring gently to himself.

"Remember March—the ides of March, remember! Did not great Julius bleed for justice' sake?"

"It's about the play, Jimmy!" gasped Muffin, fairly bubbling over with the information he had gathered at Mr. Dalton's keyhole during the Form master's interview with Tommy Dodd.

"For the thousandth time, you can't play Julius Cæsar, or any other part," answered Jimmy Silver, turning his head. "So shut up, and let a fellow on his lines!"

"I tell you I've got news!" roared Muffin.

"Rats! I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon, than such a Roman!"

"You'll look an awful set of asses when Tommy Dodd puts on 'Julius Cæsar' to-morrow night!" bawled Muffin. Jimmy Silver stopped conning his lines at that.

Lovell stopped murmuring "Et tu, Brute!" and stared at Muffin. Raby and Newcome and Erroll and Mornington and Putty Grace crowded round Muffin, who had suddenly become the centre of interest.

"Now, then, out with it!" snapped Lovell. "If you're trying to pull our legs—"

"I tell you I'm not!" protested Muffin. "Tommy Dodd and the Moderns are doing 'Julius Cæsar' in the Common-room to-morrow night. I heard him getting permission from Dicky Dalton."

"How did you hear him?" demanded Jimmy Silver sternly. "At the keyhole?"

"Yes!" gasped Muffin. "Nothing wrong in finding out what a Modern cad's up to, is there? I tell you the Moderns have stolen a march on you fellows. They've been rehearsing in secret, and now they're getting in ahead of you. You'll be the laughing-stock of the school for getting left by a set of Modern fatheads."

"Why—why, if that's true—" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"You can ask Daiton," said Muffin. "And Dodd will put up a notice to-morrow morning."

"Why, they can't do 'Julius Cæsar,' when we're going to do it!" roared Lovell indignantly.

"They can, and they will!" said Jimmy Silver, his eyes gleaming.

"We can't let this go on!"

"What are we going to do to stop 'em?"

"What are you going to do, Jimmy Silver?"

It was a regular chorus from the members of the Classical Players, and for once Jimmy Silver had no reply.

Tommy Dodd and his merry men had stolen a march, and it was too late to do anything. Indignation ran high, but indignation could not undo the cunning with which Tommy Dodd had outwitted the Classics.

"We can't do anything to-night," said Jimmy Silver finally. "But leave it to Uncle James. I'll think of a scheme in the morning."

The Classical Fourth were astir betimes next morning, and there was a general rush for the notice-board in Hall. Sure enough, there was Tommy Dodd's announcement—a huge sheet, ornamented with big red letters:

THE ROOKWOOD MODERN ART THEATRE
will present at 8 p.m. to-day, Wednesday,
in the Junior Common Room,
"JULIUS CÆSAR,"
by William Shakespeare.

Admission Free. Reserved Seats 6d.
Classicals will only be admitted on promise of
orderly behaviour.

Moderns will set them an example.

ROLL UP and IMPROVE YOUR EDUCATION!

"Cheek!"

"Sheer nerve!"

"Tommy Dodd wants lynching!"

"What's going to be done about it?"

Those heated remarks, and many equally vociferous, hummed about Jimmy Silver's ears as the Classical juniors read and digested that notice.

After painstaking rehearsals, the ground had suddenly been mown from under the feet of the Classical Players by the deadly rivals of the Modern side. What would be the use of presenting "Julius Cæsar" on Saturday, when the Moderns had done it on the Wednesday before? None at all! None, indeed, whatever! It was a bitter and humiliating pill for the Classical Players, and they could not swallow it!

There was an excited conclave in the End Study, the Fistical Four and Mornington and Erroll and Oswald and Putty Grace and Conroy and Van Ryn and Flynn all crowding in somehow or other.

Jimmy Silver, standing on the study table, addressed the meeting.

"There's just one chance," announced Jimmy, his listeners hanging on every word.

"What's that?" asked every listener at once.

"Tommy Dodd must be getting his costumes from old Bloomfield, the same as we are," said Jimmy. "If we slip down to his shop immediately after lunch, we may be able to get hold of them, and keep them till our performance on Saturday."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Putty Grace. "That's an idea! Tommy Dodd can't very well give Shakespeare in Eton jackets!"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Immediately after lunch, then!" said Jimmy Silver. "With luck, we'll scotch the Modern Art Theatre before it's born!"

Morning classes were a trouble and a trial to the Classical section of the Fourth that morning. Tommy Dodd and the Moderns, however, seemed remarkably cheerful. They were already envisaging their triumph over their rivals in the Common-room that evening.

If the Moderns had expected a "row" with the Classical Players after classes, they were pleasantly surprised. Jimmy Silver & Co. might have been unaware of the tremendous score which the Moderns were about to put over them.

"See you in the Common-room to-night, Silver?" called Tommy Dodd, as they left the Form-room.

"Oh, yes, we shall be there!" answered Jimmy equably.

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And the Moderns passed on, not a little astonished.

After lunch the Fistical Four and Mornington and Erroll lost no time. At the gates they found the carrier's cart drawn up, and the carrier just clambering in again, having apparently made a delivery at the porter's lodge.

The juniors knew old Cobb, the driver, by sight, and they nodded cheerily to him.

"Good-afternoon, Cobby!"

"Afternoon, young gents!"

Jimmy Silver and his chums hastened on towards Coomba village, little suspecting that old Cobb had just delivered the very costumes which they hoped to intercept! Mr. Bloomfield, after receiving Tommy Dodd's telephone message, had obeyed promptly, as befitted a good business man. He had delivered the costumes immediately after lunch, as requested, without suspecting that the request emanated from Tommy Dodd and not Jimmy Silver.

The carrier's cart rolled on one way, and the Classical chums headed the other.

Arrived at Coomba, they trooped into Mr. Bloomfield's little shop in force. Old Mr. Bloomfield, rubbing his hands together, shuffled from behind his counter to greet them.

"Well, young gentlemen, and what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Bloomfield.

"It's about the costumes," began Jimmy Silver. "You've been asked to deliver some costumes for 'Julius Cæsar' this afternoon, I believe?"

It was a shot in the dark, but Mr. Bloomfield did not appear surprised.

"Oh, yes, indeed! I have already sent them—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"The carrier should have delivered them immediately after lunch," said Mr. Bloomfield, smiling.

"The c-carrier d-delivered them!" gasped Jimmy Silver, his face a picture.

"We saw Cobb as we left the school!" ejaculated Lovell, in deepest mortification.

"Exactly," assented Mr. Bloomfield. "You will find them when you return, young gentlemen."

"Beaten again!" said Jimmy Silver dejectedly.

"The Moderns have got the costumes, and nothing can stop them!"

"Is there some mistake?" asked Mr. Bloomfield solicitously. "After you left yesterday evening, Master Silver, I had a telephone message asking me to send the costumes to-day, after lunch—"

"Jimmy didn't phone," said Lovell.

"Somebody phoned, and I took it to be Master Silver, or a friend of Master Silver's—"

"The Moderns must have got wind of this somehow," said Mornington.

Jimmy Silver, who had been silent, looked up with a glimmer in his eyes.

"It doesn't matter how they found out just now," he said coolly. "We've got to find some way of scotching Tommy Dodd & Co."

"Just so. But how?" demanded Lovell.

"Have you any more Roman costumes, Mr. Bloomfield?" asked Jimmy eagerly.

Mr. Bloomfield shrugged and shook his head.

"I am afraid I haven't another complete set, Master Silver," he answered apologetically. "But I have a number of gladiators' costumes, with short swords and shields, just as the Roman legions wore."

"Gladiators!" echoed Jimmy Silver, his face brightening. "Let's see them, Mr. Bloomfield!"

CHAPTER 3.

"Julius Cæsar"—Up To Date!

"LADIES and gentlemen—" began Tommy Dodd.

"Hurrah!"

"There aren't any ladies!"

"Get on with the washing!"

"Go it, Tommy!"

In spite of Tommy Dodd's announcement that the Moderns would set the Classics an example in orderly behaviour, both sets of juniors seemed to be making a considerable din in the junior Common-room.

The doors had at last been closed, and the house was full—full to overflowing. Tommy Dodd's appearance before the temporarily rigged-up curtain was the signal for a roar of cheering from the Moderns, and a roar of jeering from the Classics.

"We have the honour to present," bawled Tommy Dodd, "a play which we know is above the weight of our Classical friends, but which we hope will educate them to a higher plane—"

"Hurrah!"

"Shut up!"

"And all we ask," shouted Tommy Dodd, "is complete silence!"

With a last look round, Dodd gave the final command: "Curtain!" The curtains were dragged aside, and "Julius Cæsar" began.

To say that the audience was really interested would be an exaggeration.

Surprisingly enough, none of the characters forgot their lines, and, from an academic point of view, allowing for the absence of scenery, it was a passable performance of Shakespeare's tragedy.

Unfortunately, the audience was not academic—far from it!

There were yawns and shufflings as the play progressed.

But as the action warmed up, interest awakened, and the approach of Cæsar's murder before the Capitol aroused the audience to a pitch of excitement.

The mysterious absence of Jimmy Silver and several of the leading members of the Classical Fourth was by now completely forgotten.

When Tommy Dodd, alias Brutus, presented his petition to Tommy Cook, alias Julius Cæsar, a pin might have heard to drop.

Cæsar, in the person of Tommy Cook, knew that he was

The door of the Common-room at the back of the auditorium was thrown open, and up the narrow aisle between the seats rushed an army of gladiators, bearing shields and flourishing short swords, their leader bellowing: "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!"

For a moment the Moderns stood nonplussed.

In that moment the intruding gladiators took the stage like an angry flood.

They surged about the hapless conspirators almost as if Shakespeare's immortal play had suddenly taken a turn of its own and sent an avenging army to deal with Brutus and his friends on the spot!

It was a matter of seconds before the audience rose to its feet and joined recklessly in the struggle. Romans and audience were inextricably mingled when Bulkeley of the Sixth appeared in the Common-room doorway.

Bulkeley took one glance at the scene, and did not stop to ask questions. He laid about him with his ashplant. The legions of ancient Rome boasted that they yielded to nothing, but these legions yielded fast enough to Bulkeley's ashplant!

In a few minutes there was order again. Romans—very



Suddenly a band of Classical "gladiators" descended on the Modern "Romans," and in a moment the whole stage was in an uproar!

just going to be stabbed, and he was putting everything he could into his last few lines.

"Let me a little show it, even in this—
That I was constant Cimber should be banished,
And constant do remain to keep him so!"

Tommy Doyle, otherwise Cinna, knelt before him.

"O Cæsar—
"Hence! Wilt thou lift up Olympus?"
"Great Cæsar—
"Doth not Brutus bootless kneel?"

Casca, alias Lacy, leaped forward with a cry. A dagger flashed in his hand, and it sunk—apparently—between Tommy Cook's shoulderblades. Tommy Cook emitted a realistic groan, and as the rest of the conspirators rushed to plunge their daggers into him, he slumped to the floor.

Brutus leaned over him, and Tommy Cook gave a further final groan, reminiscent of Lovell on the rug in the End Study.

"Et tu, Brute! Then fall, Cæsar!"
As Tommy Cook "died," it was Cinna's cue to shout: "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!"

To the complete astonishment of Cinna and of the whole cast, the words were taken right out of his mouth.

bedraggled Romans—stood gasping while Bulkeley turned on his heel and walked out.

In the Common-room there was a roar of laughter—at Tommy Dodd's expense. For a moment the Modern leader considered going on with the performance, but he realised that it was hopeless. Everybody was cackling now, and certainly Brutus and the rest looked very unlike their majestic counterparts just then!

"You win, Silver!" said Tommy Dodd wryly.
"Of course!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "Never mind; you can come and watch us when we do 'Julius Cæsar' on Saturday!"

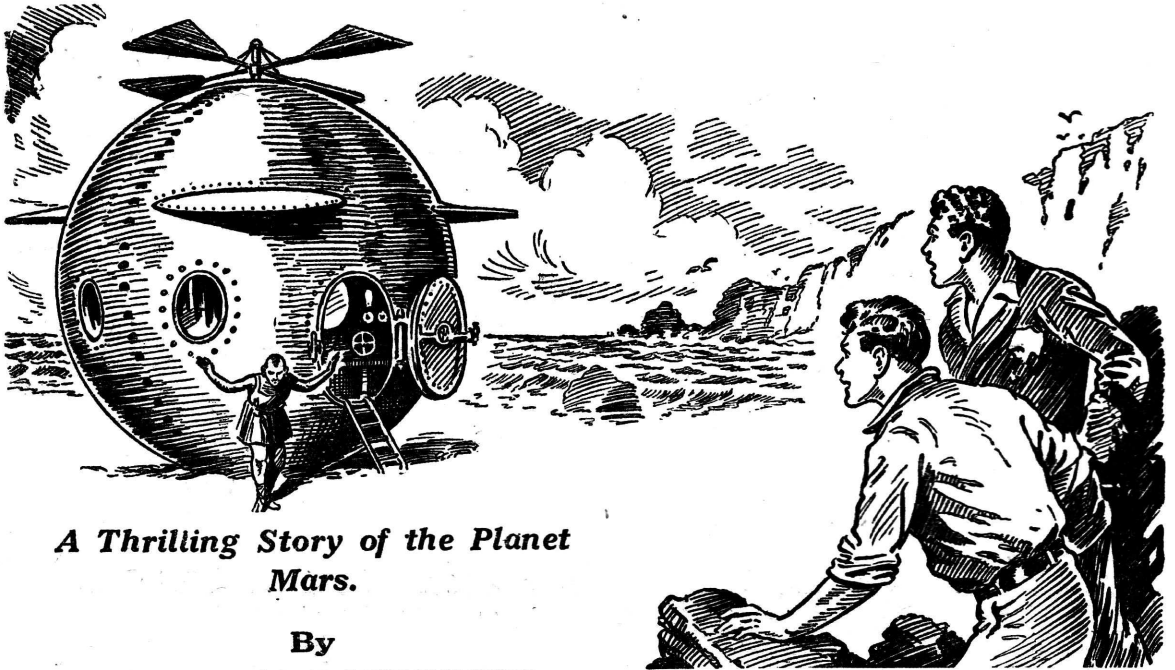
And though, on second thoughts, Jimmy Silver & Co. did not "do" "Julius Cæsar" on Saturday, it was a long time before they allowed the Moderns to forget the performance which did not go exactly as Shakespeare and Tommy Dodd had planned!

THE END.

(In next week's rip-shorting Rookwood yarn Lovell tries his hand as a leader—with amazing results! It's called "Letting Lovell Lead!" Mind you read it chums.)

GRIPPING ADVENTURE YARN.

THE SKY RAIDERS!



*A Thrilling Story of the Planet
Mars.*

By
JOHN SYLVESTER.

Weird monsters under the sea! The schoolboy explorers captured by Martians!

Captured!

SWOOSH!
Billy and Nick stepped into a weird-looking chamber, and before they were really aware of it, found themselves treading the sea-bed.

It was quite a novel experience to the two lads who had ventured to explore the planet Mars. But they were becoming accustomed to the strange sights and the blue-skinned folk who peopled the planet.

Osaka, the Martian youth who was their friend, gave them a reassuring glance. He, and a group of Martian warriors, had been forced to dive into the sea in their metal flying-machine, when they had been attacked by the Craws, their enemies on Mars. Now they were about to make one last bid for victory, and every man was clad in a diving-suit and armed with a long stick-like instrument, to the end of which was fitted a nozzle.

Fifty yards ahead a black wall loomed up. A high explosive was placed underneath this, and they drew back and waited.

The shock of the detonation knocked Billy backwards, but he picked himself up, and saw the others were hurrying—as well as their lead boots permitted—towards a gaping hole.

The wall had been badly damaged, but not completely pierced. It was then he saw the reason for the curious weapon each man carried. It was equivalent of what on the Earth would be an oxy-acetylene torch.

He fumbled with his own, and, on turning a small lever, was rewarded by a spurt of flame. It burned fiercely, although it was in water, and he saw that each of the others manipulated a similar jet.

They were cutting through the solid steel of the wall as easily as a knife through butter. The power of the torch was incredible, and if it slipped—

Suddenly he saw the man in front of him turn and wave one hand. Since shouting was impossible, this was the only

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kind of warning that could be given. Billy turned, and for a moment he gaped in astonishment.

Something enormous was crawling up behind them. Not a sea monster, as he thought for a fleeting second, but something infinitely more menacing. It was egg-shaped, and moved on tall, steel legs, the latter being drawn up, like tubes inside bigger tubes, shooting out again by some powerful mechanism.

It reeled towards them, a fantastic robot, and at its approach every man staggered away from the wall to confront the new danger.

It was plain enough what had happened. Their attack had been discovered, and this lethal engine had been sent out to stop them. But how would it act?

They were not left long in suspense. There was a sudden blinding flash. Billy was conscious of an agonising pain. He couldn't move. The whole of the water around him was converted into an electric field.

By what super-science this was possible, he didn't know. He felt as though he were paralysed. The man in front of him had toppled forward on to his torch, and it cut him clean in half. The sea was stained crimson, and Billy thought of those fish who discharge poison to render their victims insensible before they strike.

This thing would strike again. The stork legs were moving grotesquely. They could be drawn up to cross the sharp reefs on the bed of the sea. That was the reason for the design. But inside that oval body must be directing intelligences. If only—

He made a supreme effort. The electric discharge had lost its first power, and, to his relief, he was able to move. Blundering forward, he found himself right underneath the curved metal.

The torch was still in his hand. He raised it, every moment expecting to be electrocuted. But, somehow, he must have slipped under without being observed. As soon as the naked flame touched the flanks of the steel monster there was a shower of sparks.

He thrust the torch farther in, desperately, and to his

delight the red gash deepened, became a cavity into which the water was sucked.

"That's got 'em!" he muttered, and as he turned he saw that an emergency door had opened in the side, and weird-looking figures, in diving helmets, were tumbling out in panic.

The crew of the airship, meanwhile, had recovered, and they were hurrying up to the scene. He counted eight men among the enemy, and in view of their own casualties that meant they were slightly outnumbered. But how were they going to fight?

He gasped inwardly when he saw that the enemy were similarly armed with these torches that burned under water.

It was to be a duel with flaming swords. There would be no wounded in a battle such as this. The merest touch of those frightful flames spelt annihilation.

Already it had begun. Two combatants rushed at one another. The torch of one fell to the ground, still belching fire, and attached to it was an arm.

Looking swiftly away he was just in time to see a man coming straight towards him.

Flight was impossible. He must stand his ground. After all, he reflected, he had a fifty-fifty chance.

The searchlight still played upon them, and his opponent was now so close that he could see a yellow face behind the glass of the helmet. The teeth were bared, and, with a soundless cry, the man lunged forward.

A horrible death glittered in front of Billy's eyes. He ducked, conscious of a terrific heat. His opponent was thrown off his balance, and for a second Billy hesitated to use his dreadful power. Yet his life depended on it.

The other man was killed instantly. He simply shrivelled up like a piece of shaving brought near a furnace.

But more were coming. Billy's head would have been completely severed if someone hadn't intervened. He glanced to see who had saved him, and Nick grinned inside his helmet.

"Good lad! I'll return the compliment——"

A minute afterwards he had to. A man was crawling along the ground, torch in hand. Nick tried to jump out of reach, but forgot the weight of his lead boots. He would have lost both legs if Billy hadn't had sufficient presence of mind to throw his own torch.

It struck the head of the creeping figure. The effect was ludicrous and startling, like blowing off the head of a Guy Fawkes.

Billy was now without a weapon. Two men were bearing down upon him. He ran as well as he could. Actually he only floundered, and at the same time he realised why he had been deserted.

From the distance a number of other similar oval machines were advancing. They came strutting ridiculously on their long stee legs, the submarine version of tanks.

He counted nine, but beyond the range of the searchlight he fancied he could see still more. Reinforcements; and they were opening out, divers were jumping from the sides.

Escape was impossible. New torches flashed in the green water. They came nearer, brandished menacingly, and Billy saw he was being driven back to the wall of the under-water fortress.

He could not go farther back, nor could he go forward. With a slow, ungainly movement the enemy closed. They were only a few yards away. Billy was defenceless.

"It's the end this time," he thought grimly. "Well, we'll give 'em a dance for their money."

He waited. A torch was flung at him, but it missed and lay sizzling within inches of his foot. Next time he couldn't hope to be so lucky.

But there was no next time.

What really happened only became clear afterwards. Actually the pressure of the sea on the wall they had dynamited caused the thin remaining partition to collapse. The water rushed into the opening like a tidal wave.

Billy felt himself knocked backwards. He got a blurred impression of all those advancing divers being flung together, their torches turning destructively on themselves and their companions. It was more ghastly even than he realised.

He was whirled along with the current. It swept him into the opening just as an insect might be sucked down a drain.

He was no longer in the sea. He was in an enormous room, into which the water was pouring with a noise like thunder. Everything had gone black, and with a violence that made him wonder if he had broken any bones he was hurled against some invisible machinery.

He groped wildly, and his hands gripped something hard—the spokes of a colossal wheel.

The fact that he hadn't been stunned, and that the wheel was slowly moving, saved his life. The spokes went up, up, and he was clinging and going with them.

"But what's going to happen, when I reach the top?" he wondered. "If the wheel goes on turning I shall be carried down again—down under the water!"

It continued to crawl. He still went slowly upwards. His muscles ached and nearly gave way under the strain. How much longer could he hold out?

Then, all at once, the darkness dissolved, and a weird, red light flooded everything.

Nick had met with the same fate. Both he and Osaka spun like corks on that inrush of water. But Nick temporarily lost consciousness.

When he recovered, someone was unscrewing his helmet. He blinked and looked up.

"See, Osaka! Where's Billy?"

"I don't know," said the Martian gravely.

"You don't think they got him?"

"I'm afraid it's possible."

"But we must search. Where are we?"

His brain was still swimming, but he managed to struggle to his feet. The one thing uppermost in his mind was that they must find Billy.

"We can't do anything. In any case, we shall all die soon," said Osaka tensely.

Nick looked at him in surprise.

"Cheery blighter, aren't you? I'm going to look for Billy, and chance what happens afterwards."

"You can't!" Osaka caught his arm. "You have forgotten your promise. We came here to destroy the stronghold of the enemy. As we are the only survivors, it's for us to do it, whatever the consequences. The whole future of my country depends on the next few minutes."

"How?" asked Nick, after a moment's pause.

"Do you see this?" Osaka held out his hand, revealing what looked to Nick very much like a small grenade. "It is the most powerful explosive known to our scientists. Outside the fort it was useless, but inside is a different matter. I believe this passage leads into the power-room, where the invisible ray is generated."

He explained briefly how he had saved Nick's life. When they were swept in by the water he caught at an iron ladder and carried Nick up to the landing above on his shoulders. He got as far as this passage.

"We can now explore farther," he said. "But we must hurry, in case we are discovered."

Nick hesitated, still torn between his loyalty to Osaka and his desire to search for Billy. Yet how could he search? Where could he look?

"Well, carry on," he muttered. "I suppose it's the only way."

"We couldn't have a better chance. Think how closely they've guarded this place. It's even under the sea, for better protection. Yet we are inside. If we can blow it up they'll be helpless. My own country will send another fleet of airships, and they will be at our mercy."

"And I suppose they'll put up a statue in our honour," said Nick grimly.

"What happens to us is of no importance," replied Osaka, with a shrug that took Nick's breath away, although he recognised he was right.

This was war!

"Only we must be quick!"

They hurried along the corridor. A door in front of them had been left ajar, as though someone guarding it had left in haste. Osaka pushed it open, and they both halted in amazement at the sight that greeted them.

They were standing on a gallery that ran around a vast circular hall. Below them was an incredible mass of mechanism.

To Nick it resembled a wireless set on a gigantic scale. There were a dozen gigantic valves, each the size of a house, monster domes of glass, vibrating, and sending up a tremulous orange glow.

There were coils twenty feet high, labyrinths of wire, tubing, glass and copper cylinders, sealed machines that looked like dynamics.

It represented the mightiest effort of Martian genius. Here the terrible ray was generated which had brought down all those airships like a shower of red-hot coals. Here was the nerve centre of the Craw civilisation—a sinister type of civilisation, purely scientific, cold, inhuman brain, with no pity, no sentiment of any kind.

"Fire away!" said Nick, steeling himself. "What are you waiting for?"

"They've seen us! Look!"

Osaka had the bomb in his hand. On the opposite gallery a door had opened. Instantly there was a chorus of cries. Yellow-faced men—they looked like Chinese—rushed in, wearing long white coats.

They had weapons of some sort. All at once there was

a loud report, and a great puff of green smoke burst above their heads. The smell was like prussic acid, only sweeter.

"Poison gas," said Osaka. "But they were too late." He gave a triumphant laugh. Dizzy from the fumes, Nick watched him raise the bomb above his head. Then he threw it.

There was a roar like an avalanche. The whole building rocked to its foundations. A terrific flame spouted to the ceiling.

Nick tried to run, but he never really knew what he did. Debris was falling all about him. The walls had cracked, and the gallery on which he had been standing tottered and twisted into ribbons.

He seemed to be falling into a pit of darkness.

Billy felt it must all have been a dream. Surely he hadn't really been under the sea, fighting with those terrible torches! Surely he hadn't been clinging to that wheel, going round and round, under the water and up again, until it finally stopped!

He was on top, in mid-air, when it stopped. Then an awful thing happened. His air supply gave out. Struggling to get off his helmet, he fancied the place was on fire. There was surely smoke and flames issuing from somewhere. Only the struggle for breath made it impossible to think. And finally he slipped from his precarious seat in the spokes. He had lost consciousness before he touched the water.

"But where am I?" he cried aloud.

"In hospital," said a familiar voice. "And they are trying to decide whether to stick us alive into the Zoo, or dead into a museum."

"Nick!" he gasped. And he saw he was in a spotless white room. There was a bed on each side of him. Not only Nick, but Osaka. "How in Jericho did you blighters get here?"

"Ask me another," grinned Nick. "All I know is that Osaka tried the Casabianca stunt. You know—the boy on the burning deck. Only something went wrong, and we got rescued."

"Nothing went wrong," put in Osaka. "I've destroyed their power-station. They only saved us because they had learned you came from the Earth. If you'd both been Martians, you'd still be under the sea."

Billy sat up eagerly, but a sharp pain drove him back again.

"Gosh! I feel as though I'd been through a mangle! But we are still alive, even if we aren't kicking. Wonder what the next move is?"

"I've thought about it," said Osaka. "But somehow I've got an idea it won't be pleasant."

"You always were a cheerful beggar. But I don't mind admitting," said Billy, starting slightly as the door opened, "I wish I was sure of my return ticket."

Through the door came three men, dressed in white, their faces covered with antiseptic masks. They were wheeling a trolley.

"What—"

"Their interest in keeping you," said Osaka, "is simply scientific curiosity. I think they regard you as a new specimen of animal, for purposes of experiment."

The masked figures and the trolley came nearer. Billy repressed a shiver as he thought of a horrible possibility.

"I feel," he said, "like a moth being pushed into the killing-bottle."

"I'm afraid," said Nick, sounding more indifferent than he felt, "it looks like the museum, after all."

The Ultimatum!

BILLY obeyed the peremptory order to dress. In the white, tiled room of the underground laboratory he put on the tight-fitting brown overalls that were handed him by a yellow-skinned attendant.

"What's the big idea?" he asked Nick.

The other boy, Nick Redburn, shook his head.

"Looks as though they've made up their minds what to do with us. But I wish I knew what had happened to Osaka."

But since the first day of the capture by the Craws—a race of yellow men inhabiting the western hemisphere of Mars—they had seen no more of Osaka. Nor could they get any information from their gaolers.

He had been made to dress and was taken out one morning, but he had never come back. Since his own country was at war with the Craws, and also since Osaka had destroyed the power-house from which a new death-ray was generated, it seemed probable that he had been executed.

The reason they themselves had escaped was because they were visitors from the Earth. The Craws revered science

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above everything else, and they spared the two boys out of sheer curiosity as to what the inhabitants of the neighbouring planet were like.

For two weeks they had both been under stringent observation. They had been X-rayed, their blood had been examined, and at one time it looked as though they would be vivisected.

"I wonder," said Nick, as he buttoned up his overalls, "why the Brunak army doesn't attack? Now their precious ray is busted up, they are really defenceless."

"Perhaps our side doesn't know," suggested Billy. "Anyhow, they had a whole fleet of airships wiped out, and it's bound to take some time before they can attack again."

"That was a fortnight ago. You'd think—"

But he was interrupted by a sharp order to hurry from the attendant.

They followed him into a long passage, at the end of which they entered a small windowless chamber—walls, floor, and ceiling of a gleaming metal-like silver.

"By Jove, I believe this is a sort of life," declared Billy, as the ground vibrated after the shutter had been closed.

He was right. At least, it was one of the ingenious methods of moving about this extraordinary city, built entirely below the ground.

The capital of Macraw was like a vast honeycomb; you travelled from cell to cell by means of these lifts, which moved horizontally as well as vertically.

It was densely populated. There were underground streets and shops and factories. There was an elaborate system for providing ventilation and artificial sunlight.

Exercise was taken by everyone during certain regular hours in gymnasiums. These periods were as definite as meal-times, only the inhabitants took no meals. They lived on tablets of highly concentrated food.

The whole thing worked like clockwork. The people themselves were really like cogs in a complicated machine. Only convicts were compelled to go up into the open air.

"Makes me feel like a beastly ball-bearing," complained Billy, as the shutter was opened and they were ordered to step out.

He gave a start as he saw in front a wide balcony of some glistening metal. Underneath was a big square thronged with people craning their necks as they stared up.

"We seem to be the star turns," he murmured. "But what kind of show is it?"

"Look on your left. That must be the king or president."

The balcony was outside a large room, and emerging from the room was a tall man dressed remarkably like a Chinese mandarin, except that he wore a conical hat.

He was followed by a guard of sombre, black figures, contrasting with the scarlet and gold of his robes. As he appeared, a prolonged shout went up from the crowds below.

He held up his hand for silence and began to speak.

"Here," he said, "you see the prisoners. You know now that the rumour they were dead is a lie. You must choose for yourselves whether they shall be released or not."

Billy and Nick exchanged swift glances. They hadn't grasped the position yet, but they suddenly saw a number of coils of wire descend from the balcony above. Each wire had a hoop attached, and the guards in black hurried across and attached the hoops to their necks and hands.

"Are they going to hang us?" gasped Billy.

But the president continued:

"With one touch of my finger I can kill these creatures from the Earth. So long as I have that power we are safe from attack. I believe—"

But he was interrupted. An enormous voice filled the entire square. It might have come from some giant loud speaker. It seemed to penetrate throughout the whole city, into every room and cellar.

"Release the prisoners or you will be destroyed."

Billy blinked in stupefaction. He stared down at the crowd watching their excitement.

"Our reply," continued the president, "is 'No.' If we obey we shall certainly be annihilated. These two Earthmen are our hostages. I have sent a message calling our enemy's bluff."

The voice roared again:

"You have three minutes to decide. The attack is about to begin!"

"My reply," cried the president, "was that at the first warning of attack the prisoners will be executed."

Shouts of approval greeted his challenge; but there were also some uneasy dissentients.

The truth now broke upon the boys. The invaders—the Blue men—were outside the city. This was a state of siege. In some way they were issuing their ultimatum by wireless.

The terms were surrender and the release of Billy and

Nick. Otherwise the attack would begin. So they threatened; but the president and most of the citizens did not believe the threat would be carried out.

"If it is," reflected Billy, "we shall be electrocuted, or something equally unpleasant. In three minutes—two by this time."

Again he glanced at Nick.

"It's a question of saving us from our friends," he said, with a wry smile. "But how on earth did they know about us? I mean the Brunaks?"

Billy was about to shake his head, but suddenly his face lighted up.

"I've got it! Osaka must have escaped!"

"Jupiter!" Nick's eyes brightened with a swift hope.

"Still, if they attack, we are done for."

"They won't," said Billy confidently.

"Only one minute left!" boomed the voice.

Both of them had faced death often enough since that grey morning when they left the Cornish coast to adventure across space. But never before had they known such suspense.

One minute remained. If the Blue men were bluffing they would be safe; but if they were not—

have been over, so far as Nick and Billy were concerned. But the whole building seemed to shake, and, as though on a last instant impulse to avert disaster, one of the guards caught the president from behind.

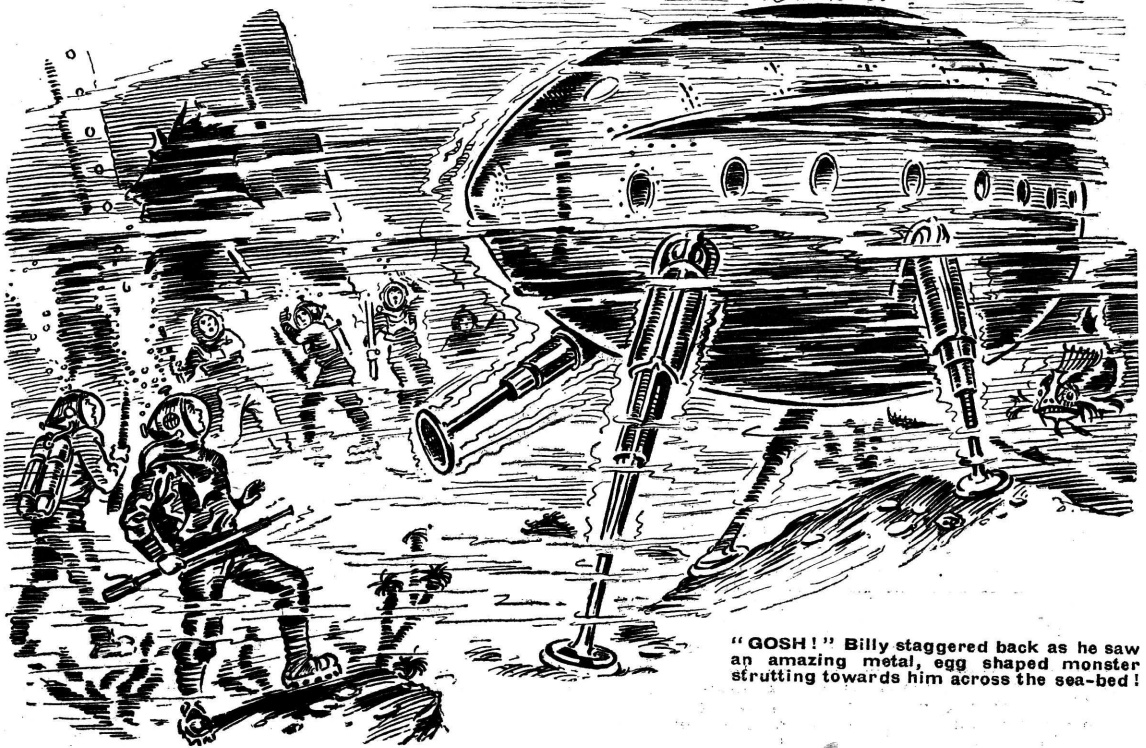
He was too late, however, to stop the doom descending on the city. Amid screams of panic Billy saw great rents appearing in the roof; and hurtling through were immense projectiles.

They were bright red, and shaped like cubes. They broke through the solid masonry as though it were paper. They descended with frightful violence on the struggling mob.

Pandemonium broke loose. But still these monstrous cubes poured down. Steel girders hung in ribbons; the great buildings might have been no more than houses of cards collapsing in a whirlwind. The crowds looked like a swarm of scattering insects.

Billy was speechless. He could only look on as though unable to trust his senses. And the same thing was happening all over the capital.

Above the ground the air was thick with these scarlet cubes. They were like mammoth crystals whirling from a cosmic explosion.



"GOSH!" Billy staggered back as he saw an amazing metal, egg shaped monster strutting towards him across the sea-bed!

Suspense was reflected on all the myriad upturned faces in the city square. There was an uncanny silence, and Billy could see the ivory hands of the president knotted so that the veins stood out like whipcord.

The Attack!

ONLY a few seconds remained now. He looked up at the illuminated roof. Above that were yet other buildings, and beyond again the crust of the earth and the sky.

Suppose there was an attack? How could the underground city be destroyed? Wasn't it proof against rays and explosives?

"I still can't make out why we should be thought so darned important—" he began.

He got no farther.

"Look!" stammered Nick.

He was aware of two things simultaneously. A crackling, rasping sound, increasing to a crash and roar; then the yellow hand of the president jumping to an electric switch.

A wolfish howl of terror went up from the assembled crowds. Had the president reached that switch all would

Ordinary matter seemed powerless to resist them. They went through the solid ground like stones flung into water. Down they poured in a crimson rain, vomited from a hundred airships, the size of ocean-bound liners; ships with great, flat decks, and no encumbering gasbags, suspended as though by a miracle, with wide funnels from which the stream of brilliant cubes poured.

"Gosh!" ejaculated Nick, recovering his breath. "If they could do this, why didn't they try before?"

"They can't have known. I mean, this can't possibly be the Brunaks."

"Then who is behind it? How did they learn of our existence?"

"It beats me," said Billy, mystified. "Look at those cubes down below! They are breaking in half!"

This was most astounding of all. Not only were the cubes still bursting in from every side, but on touching the ground they split.

For a moment Billy expected some noxious fumes to pour out. He was certainly not prepared to see men.

(Who can these mail-clad men be? Will they be able to rescue the schoolboy adventurers? See next week's gripping yarn!)

EASTWOOD SHIELD LEAGUE.

NEAR NEIGHBOURS OVERWHELMED!
ST. JIM'S SMASHING VICTORY!

By "Old Boy."

WE'VE made some changes, and you can get ready for a record licking!

Thus Dick Fane, the skipper of the Abbotsford team, to Tom Merry prior to the match.

Certainly Abbotsford could do with a reshuffle. They have had a bad season so far, partly due to injuries, and partly to lack of co-operation. Fane is a reckless leader, but not a great tactician, and his men are expected to play on their own initiative. Though quite near St. Jim's, they have never put up a challenge to the Saints in the manner of Gordon Gay & Co., of Rylcombe Grammar School.

Abbotsford took the field in bright red and gold jerseys, and one of their men immediately took a flying kick at a practice ball, landing it right in the net. There was a cheer, possibly ironic, and Aubrey Racke, who had been trying to get somebody to take a bet against St. Jim's, paused to have another look at the visiting side.

Abbotsford won the toss and kicked with the sun.

"Go it, you cripples!" chirruped Monty Lowther, standing with me on the touchline, having dropped out of the team with a groggy knee, Manners taking his place.

"And look out for that record licking!" grinned George Herries.

For a few moments it almost seemed that the record licking which Fane boasted of might be more than a mere possibility. The brilliant Abbotsford jerseys swept down on the Saints' goal, and a stunning shot from Fane himself gave Fatty Wynn plenty to hold. The Falstaff threw the leather out, but it came in again, and only by dodging among half a dozen players was he able to clear with a powerful punt.

"Rally, St. Jim's!" Tom Merry and his men were not shaken, however. Their exemplary steadiness

was never better shown than here. When a weak team springs a surprise on a strong one, it is easy for the strong team to get "nervy," and give away chances. Not so St. Jim's. Tom Merry sped through, tripping three defenders one after the other, and, running close in, he slammed the ball well down to the Abbotsford keeper's left hand.

"Goal!" "First blood to St. Jim's!" roared Monty Lowther.

It was the first—but not the last, by a long chalk! Blake went away, and, feinting past a wildly-charging back, sent in a terrific cross drive that gave the goalkeeper no chance whatever. Two up!

Warming to their work, the Saints took

complete control of the game, and a little later—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raced through to beat the custodian with a raking angle shot—three up!

Fane's team changes did not appear to have had the desired effect. Under continued pressure, the Abbotsford men began to kick anywhere, and a determined rush by St. Jim's culminated in a fourth goal—Levison deflecting the leather through with his head.

Four up, the Saints did not slacken. Goal average had to be thought of, and a hefty "bag" of goals would wipe off some of the total that Greyfriars had been piling up of late. Fane yelled to his men to pull up their socks, but it was useless. A team, once rattled, rarely regains its nerve, and St. Jim's gave them no opportunity to settle down. Tom Merry went through again, and passed close in to Talbot—and Talbot made no mistake. A minute later, Tom Merry headed through on his own—and half-time found the home team six goals in the lead.

Monty Lowther forbore to ask Fane about that record licking as he led his men out for the second venture. Fane's face was grim and set, and Abbotsford certainly began with plenty of dash.

But they were up against a championship team—and though they held their own for twenty minutes or so, the defence wavered again and eventually broke down completely.

D'Arcy scored with a long shot, and Kangaroo loped through to net number eight. Manners playing a great game in Lowther's place at left-half, took a chance and worked his way end through. Then, with the goalkeeper rushing at him, he unselfishly passed inside to Tom Merry, for Tom to score an easy goal.

Abbotsford were on their last legs when Tom Merry broke away once again, and, drawing the keeper out skilfully, side-stepped him and slammed the leather home for the tenth and final goal!

"Phew!" "What about that record licking?" murmured Monty Lowther.

Mercifully, he murmured it too softly to reach the ears of Dick Fane the Abbotsford skipper.

RESULTS.

ST. JIM'S	10	ABBOTSFORD	0
Merry 4, Blake, D'Arcy 2, Levison, Talbot, Noble, Teams: ST. JIM'S—Wynn; Figgins, Kerr; Redfern, Noble, Manners; Talbot, Levison, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy. ABBOTSFORD—Murray; Vance, Saunders, Fenn, Tupper, Gregory, Harris, Kirk, Fane, Williams, Edwards.			
BAGSHOT	1	RYLCOMBE G. S.	0
Pankley.			
BANNINGTON G. S.	0	ROOKWOOD	2
		Silver Dodd.	
CLAREMONT	1	REDCLYFFE	2
Baxter.		Mills, Forshaw.	
HIGHCLIFFE	1	GREYFRIARS	5
Courtenay.		Wharton 3, Nugent, Panfold.	
ST. JUDE'S	3	ST. FRANK'S	4
Raleigh 2, Lane.		Tregellis-West, Grey, Pitt, Nipper.	

LEAGUE TABLE TO DATE.

	P.	W.	D.	L.	F.	A.	Goals	Pts.
Rookwood	13	9	2	2	42	26	20	
Greyfriars	12	9	1	2	45	12	19	
St. Jim's	13	8	3	2	50	15	19	
Rylcombe	13	8	2	3	35	18	18	
Highcliffe	15	8	2	3	36	19	18	
St. Frank's	12	8	1	3	33	15	17	
Redclyffe	13	5	2	6	23	23	12	
Bagshot	13	3	3	7	14	32	9	
St. Jude's	13	1	6	6	15	39	8	
Claremont	14	1	4	8	13	30	6	
Abbotsford	13	0	9	13	58	4		
Bannington	13	1	2	10	7	43	4	

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