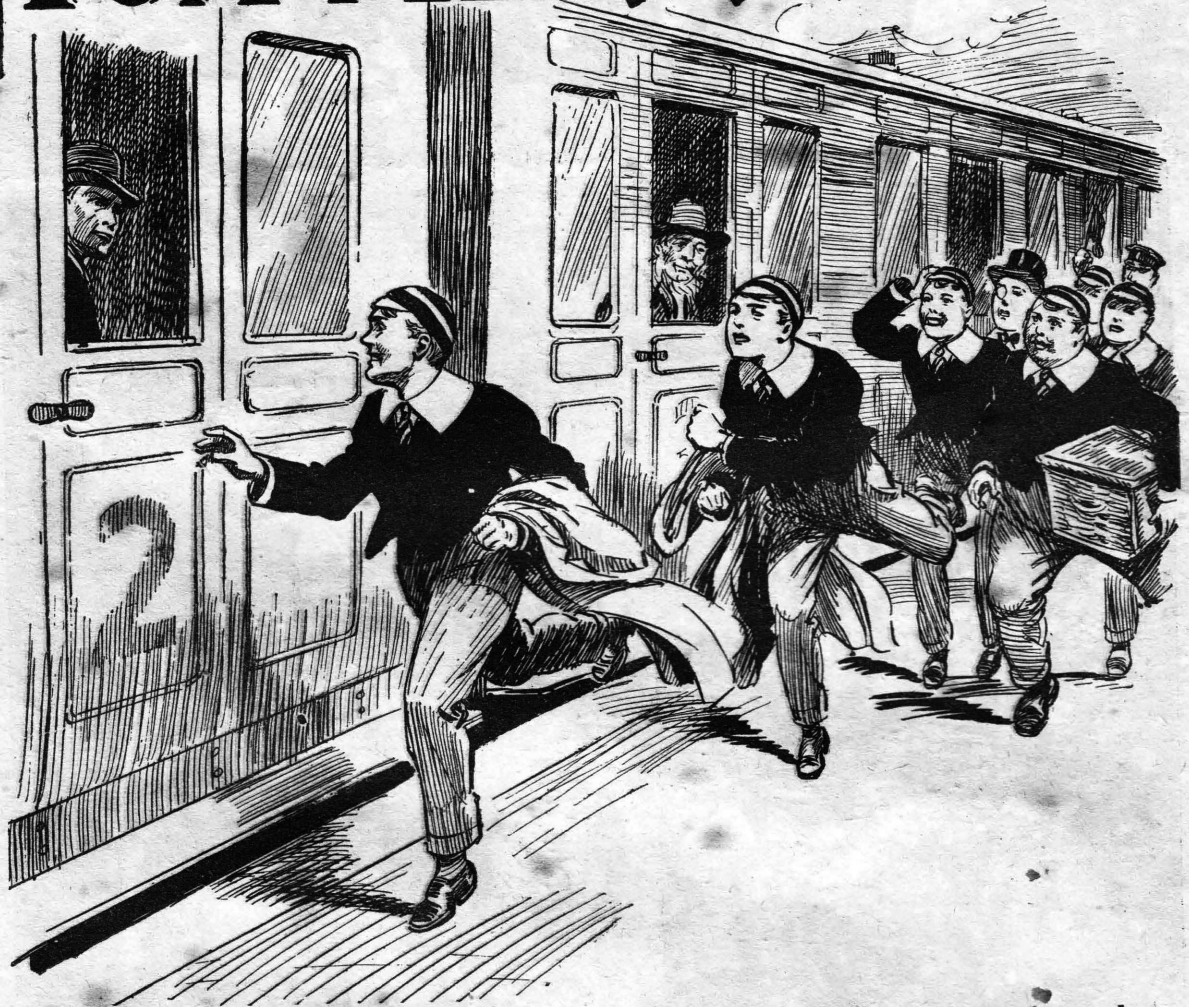


"THE WORLD WRECKERS!" —THRILLING ADVENTURE STORY STARTS INSIDE!

The GEM 2^D



TOM MERRY & CO!



When opportunity offers a glorious spree, Tom Merry & Co. take a trip to the sea. Taking "French leave" doesn't seem very sound, but as they're in for a penny, they make it a pound!

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy's Brain-wave.

"DO you know, deah boys, I've been thinkin'—"
It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's who made that remark at the tea-table in Study No. 6 in the School House. It was a simple remark enough, and yet its effect upon Blake, Herries, and Digby was staggering.

Jack Blake started to his feet, sending his chair backwards with a crash into the fire-grate. Digby dropped the teacup he had just drained, and it fell in a dozen fragments in the saucer. Herries laid down his knife and fork, and stared across the table at D'Arcy with wide-open eyes.

Arthur Augustus seemed rather surprised at the effect of his statement. He put up his eyeglass, and surveyed his chums one after another.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"You've been thinking!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How?" demanded Herries.

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"What with?" asked Digby.

"With my bwain, of course," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I weally wish you fellows would not start wottin' diwectly I open my mouth. You have intewwupted the thread of my ideahs, and thwown me into quite a fluttah."

"Well, you shouldn't spring a statement like that on us suddenly," said Jack Blake, recovering himself, and setting his chair upright. "You've thrown us into a flutter, and there's Dig's teacup done in, too!"

"I wegard Dig as an ass!"

"I was startled," said Digby. "But look here, Gussy, I'm not going to take that statement of your bare word. It's too surprising."

"Weally, Digbay—"

"Of course, things happen sometimes that have never happened before," said Blake. "Still, in a case like this, we—"

"I wefuse to listen to your wot, Blake. I have been thinkin' sewiously, and I am goin' to tell you the weseult—"

"Pass the jam."

"Bothah the jam! I have been thinkin'—"

"Yes; but you can tell us the result of that new and

ON THE SPREE!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

startling experience while we're getting on with the grub," said Blake. "Pass the jam."

"Oh, wats!" Arthur Augustus passed the jam, however, and resumed the thread of his discourse. "I have been thinkin' about—"

"Pass the butter."

"Bothah the buttah!"

"Bother it as much as you like, only pass it along. Don't be greedy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave Blake a look that ought to have withered him up on the spot.

"Gweedy! Weally, Blake—"

"Well, pass the butter!"

"I have no objection to passin' the buttah, but I do not like bein' incessantly intewwupted by fwivolous wemarks. There is the beastlay buttah, and if you intewwupt me again, I shall wefuse to wesume my wemarks."

"Now, don't be cruel, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to be intewwupted. I have a gweat and bwiliant ideah, and if it is not weceived in this study with due respect," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity—"there are othahs."

"Other ideahs, do you mean?" said Blake.

"No, I don't; I mean othah studies. I am gweatly inclined to go along and take my gweat ideah stwaight to Tom Mewwy, who would be certain to jump at it at once."

"Or to jump on you for bothering him—"

"Weally, Blake, that is imposs, for I should uttahnly wefuse to be jumped on. Howevah, to wesume. I have been thinkin' that as the end of the term is appwoachin'—in fact, as it has almost awwived—it would be the pwopah thing to do to give a farewell suppah."

"By Jove!" said Blake.

"I wogard it as a weally good ideah," said D'Arcy. "A farewell suppah in the Fourth Form dormitow, to all the juniahs of the Lowah School."

"Ripping!"

"I am glad to see that you have sufficient intelligence to appreciate my wippin' ideah at its weal value," said D'Arcy loftily. "I think it's brilliant. I am not a conceited sort of chap, but I know a good ideah when I see one, and I have no hesitation in sayin' that this is a weally wippin' ideah."

"Good!" said Blake. "But have you come into a fortune?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then where is the tin coming from?"

"Oh, that is a twivial detail!" said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose the expense would be considerable, but that need not twouble us now. A farewell suppah is quite the thing, you know. We couldn't give a farewell tea to more than eight or nine chaps, as we have no woom here; but in the dormitow it is different. There is woom in the Fourth Form dormitow for all the juniahs of St. Jim's to have a wippin' feed."

"But the tin—"

"Oh, there are ways and means of waisin' the tin. We can all wite to our governahs, explainin' that we want some cash for a vewy important purpose. I am pwetty certain of gettin' a fivah fwom my governah, and I shall willingly contwibute the whole of it. Then there are a lot of things we have here, which we can't take home for the holidays, and which we may not need next term. We can sell them to one anothonah, and waise a lot of money that way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally do not see anything in my wposition to cackle at, deah boys, to say nothin' of the fact that cacklin' at a fellow's wemarks is wathah bad form."

"When you get into the House of Lords, Gussy, you ought to get a post in the financial department of the Government," said Blake seriously. "You would make a ripping Chancellor of the Exchequer. That's a jolly good scheme of yours for raising money. Suppose I sell my bat to Dig for five bob—"

"And I sell my rod to Blake for five bob," said Digby.

"That will be ten shillings," said Heggies. "Half a sovereign raised already, you see."

"Yaas, wathah! The pwocceeds of both sales to be subscowbed towards the fund—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"My deah ass, we might as well subscribe the cash without botherin' about making the sales first of all."

D'Arcy rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Bai Jove, so you might, you know! Well, there is no objection to your doin' that, deah boys. We can waise the money, anyway, somehow—that is a twivial point. If you think the ideah is a good one—"

"Oh, it's good enough."

"My ideah is to stand it the last night before bwreakin' up," explained D'Arcy. "It will cast a final womantic glow, as it were, over the close of the term. We haven't much time to make pwepawations, eithah."

"We shall have to get up a subscription," Jack Blake remarked thoughtfully. "Let me see; there will be roughly a hundred fellows, and suppose that the supper can be stood at half-a-crown a head—you can get a jolly good supper for that, by taking quantities—that's two hundred and fifty shillings."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Twelve pounds ten," said Digby.

"Exactly. Now, we shall have to raise twelve pounds ten by subscription. Some of the fellows, especially in the lowest Forms, won't be able to raise half-a-crown, or anything like it."

"And a jolly good many in the Fourth and the Shell, too," said Heggies. "Money is tight at the end of the term."

"Therefore—"

"I shall be pwetty certain to have a fivah fwom my governah—"

"There," repeated Blake, "the subscription must be made larger than half-a-crown, to cover deficiencies. Those who can pay will have to pay for those who can't. That's the secret of finance."

"But then those who won't pay will pretend they can't and get paid for."

"Well, you have to risk that. Only a rotten cad would do that, and if a fellow's a cad, it can't be helped. We'll fix the subscription at five bob—"

"Better still, make it an unfixed sum—everybody contwibutes according to his ability."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that's a good plan, too!"

Blake finished his cup of tea, and rose.

"D'Arcy's suggestion can be worked up into a good scheme—"

"I wefuse to allow you to put it like that, Blake. The scheme is mine!"

"It will want thinking out—"

"I have thought it out."

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. This is my scheme, and I am goin' to wope in all the honah and glorwy," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am goin' to go wound collectin' the beastlay subscriptions."

"Very well," said Blake. "We'll make Gussy collector, as the first suggestion came from him. Of course, he will make a bungle of it—"

"I shall wefuse to make a bungle of it!"

"And then we will come to the rescue and help him out," said Blake generously.

"We will," said Heggies and Digby.

"I shall not wequiah anybody to come to the wescue and help me out," said Arthur Augustus obstinately. "I have a little book heah to enter all the subscriptions in, and I may as well start now with you fellows. How much are you goin' to contwibute, Blake, deah boy?"

Blake turned out his pockets.

"Ninencepence."

"Weally, Blake—"

"End of the term, you know. And that leaves me stony."

"Well, I suppose I had bettah take the ninencepence," said D'Arcy, collecting it. "I shall entah your name at the head of the list, you know. But ninencepence is a wotten small sum to start a twelve pound ten subscruption with."

"Don't blame me," said Blake. "This affair is in your hands, not mine, and it's for you to devise some remedy if the subscruptions fall short."

"Weally, Blake."

"I wash my hands of it," said Blake, with a lofty gesture. "There's the ninencepence. Make the best of it!"

"Perwaps you are wight. Now, Dig, how much are you worth for this laudible object?"

"Fourpence!"

"Eh?"

"End of term, you know," said Digby blandly. "Last fourpence, too, and now I shan't be able to stamp my letter home unless someone lends me a stamp!"

"Fourpence isn't much—"

"That's your affair."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Don't bother me with details of a scheme which is wholly in your hands," said Digby. "Don't make a bungle of it, that's all. See that the full sum is raised. You can use any methods you like."

"How much is your contwibution, Hewwies?"

Herries laid a French penny on the table. D'Arcy looked at it, and then adjusted his eyeglass and looked at it again.

"I pwesume you are jokin', Hewwies?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Herries.

"I wefuse to take a foreign coin which cannot be passed."

"Well, you can take it or leave it!" said Herries. "End of the term, you know. That's all I've got."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"I call on the other fellows to witness that I've tendered my subscruption. That's all that concerns me."

Arthur Augustus picked up the coin.

"Well, I weward this study's contwibution as wathah wotten," he said. "I am goin' to start myself with five shillings and weally, upon the whole, I think I had bettah put that at the head of the list. It would be more appwopwiate, and the sum looks better than Blake's wotten ninencepence."

And D'Arcy made the entries carefully, and the subscscribers initialled them, and the swell of the School House closed the book with a snap.

"I hope you chaps will have some wemittances before bweakin' up," he remarked. "If only for the cwedit of the study. I am goin' out to collect subscruptions now."

And Arthur Augustus picked up his silk hat and quitted Study No. 6, leaving the chums grinning.

CHAPTER 2.

A Misunderstanding!

"It looks to me as if there were something on," Tom Merry remarked.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell at St. Jim's, were sitting on the stone balustrade of the School House steps, sunning themselves. Afternoon lessons were over, but the summer sun was still blazing.

Two figures had just passed before the view of the chums of the Shell—those of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House. They were walking in the quadrangle deep in conversation, and quite oblivious of the glances of the juniors.

"Looks like it!" said Manners. "Somebody's been up to something, I suppose. It isn't us this time. We've been remarkably good lately—so far as they know, at all events."

"Perhaps it's something to do with the end of the term," Lowther suggested, rather hazily. "They may be getting up something or other for us."

"Getting up what?"

"Well, we had a magic-lantern show once, at the end of the term, and—"

"H'm! Might be something of that sort, certainly. But did you see what the Head had in his hand?"

"A paper of some sort."

"Exactly. And I caught something on it—and it was the diagram of a ship."

"A ship?"

"Yes, and a diagram; kind of thing you go by, you know, when you're selecting your cabin at a steamship company's office."

"My hat! What can he want with the plan of a steamship?"

"That's what I was thinking."

"I dare say it's simple enough," said Manners. "Perhaps Dr. Holmes is going abroad for his holidays, and is asking Mr. Railton's advice about the ship."

"Only I happen to know that he's going to Devonshire as usual," said Tom Merry. "So do you, if you thought for a moment."

"Well, then, perhaps Mr. Railton's going—"

"Then what is there in that for them to chow-chow about so seriously?"

"Well, what's your idea, anyway?"

"There's something on."

"Perhaps the Head is getting up a little surprise for us, to keep him in our minds during the vac," said Lowther, with a grin; "general distribution of a chocolate, or something of that sort."

"Hallo, here comes Gussy—and he looks as if he had something to impart, too," said Tom Merry, as the swell of the School House came out of the doorway. "I say, Gussy, my son, is there anything on?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of the Shell straightened up at once, and looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with great interest. This confirmation of Tom Merry's theory that something was "on" came rather unexpectedly.

"How do you know?" asked Manners.

"We've just been talkin' it ovah in the study."

"Then the other kids know, too?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"I wefuse to be chawctewised as a kid."

"The other asses, then—they all know?"

"I decline to be called an ass."

"Look here, do Blake and Herries and Dig know what's on?" exclaimed Tom Merry, getting exasperated.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I'm blessed if I understand it, then," said Manners. "I don't see how those kids could have got on to the thing, whatever it is."

"I shall be vevy pleased to explain—"

"Honour bright, Gussy—you know what's on?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then explain what it is."

"With pleasuah, deah boy! There's to be a farewell supper given to all the membahs of the Lower Forms at St. Jim's, to celebrate the close of the term and the beginning of the midsummer holidays!"

The Terrible Three gazed at Arthur Augustus, and at each other, in blank amazement. That Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton could be so earnestly discussing such a project as that of giving a farewell supper to the juniors of St. Jim's seemed to them absolutely incredible. Yet D'Arcy spoke positively.

"You are sure, D'Arcy?" asked Tom Merry, at last.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But how do you know?"

"Well, I wathah ought to know, as the ideah owiginated with me."

"With you?"

"Certainly, deah boys!"

"And it has been taken up?"

"Yaas; and it's goin' to be cawwied out, too."

"Blessed if I can understand it," murmured Monty Lowther. "There's a misunderstanding somewhere."

"Nothing of the sort, Lowthah. There is no misunderstandingin'. There is to be a big farewell suppah to all the juniahs of St. Jim's, and it is to be given in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House."

"To all the Fourth?"

"Yaas, and the Shell as well, and the Remove and the Third."

"What about the New House?"

"The New House fellows will be included, of course. The feed is to be given to evewy membah of the Lower Forms at the coll."

"And who stands the expense?"

"We stand it ourselves by subscruptions."

"Oh, I see! The Head doesn't pay for it?"

D'Arcy stared.

"The Head! Why should the Head pay for it?"

"Well, under the circumstances, he might."

"I see nothin' in the cires to justify the ideah that the Head might pay for it. The Head won't know anythin' about it."

Tom Merry jumped.

"The Head won't—what?"

"He won't know anythin' about it. The feed will be given in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House affah lights out. If the Head knew anythin' about it he would put it down at once, wathah!"

The Terrible Three stared at Arthur Augustus.

"I weally fail to see the cause of your surprisew," said

Arthur Augustus. "The New House fellows will have to get into the dormitory by a wope up to the window, or a wope-laddah, you know, and it would hardly do to let the Head know anythin' about that, you know."

"Look here, Gussy, if you're not off your rocker—"

"I am certainly not off my wockah."

"Then what do you mean by saying that the Head's giving a farewell feed that he doesn't know anything about?"

It was D'Arcy's turn to stare.

"I weally fail to comphehend the dwift of your wemarks, Tom Mewwy. Who said the Head was givin' a farewell feed?"

"Why, you did!" howled the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"I certainly said nothin' of the sort!"

"Look here, D'Arcy, we asked you if you knew what was on—"

"What I want to know is, what have the Head and Mr. Railton got on their little chests?"

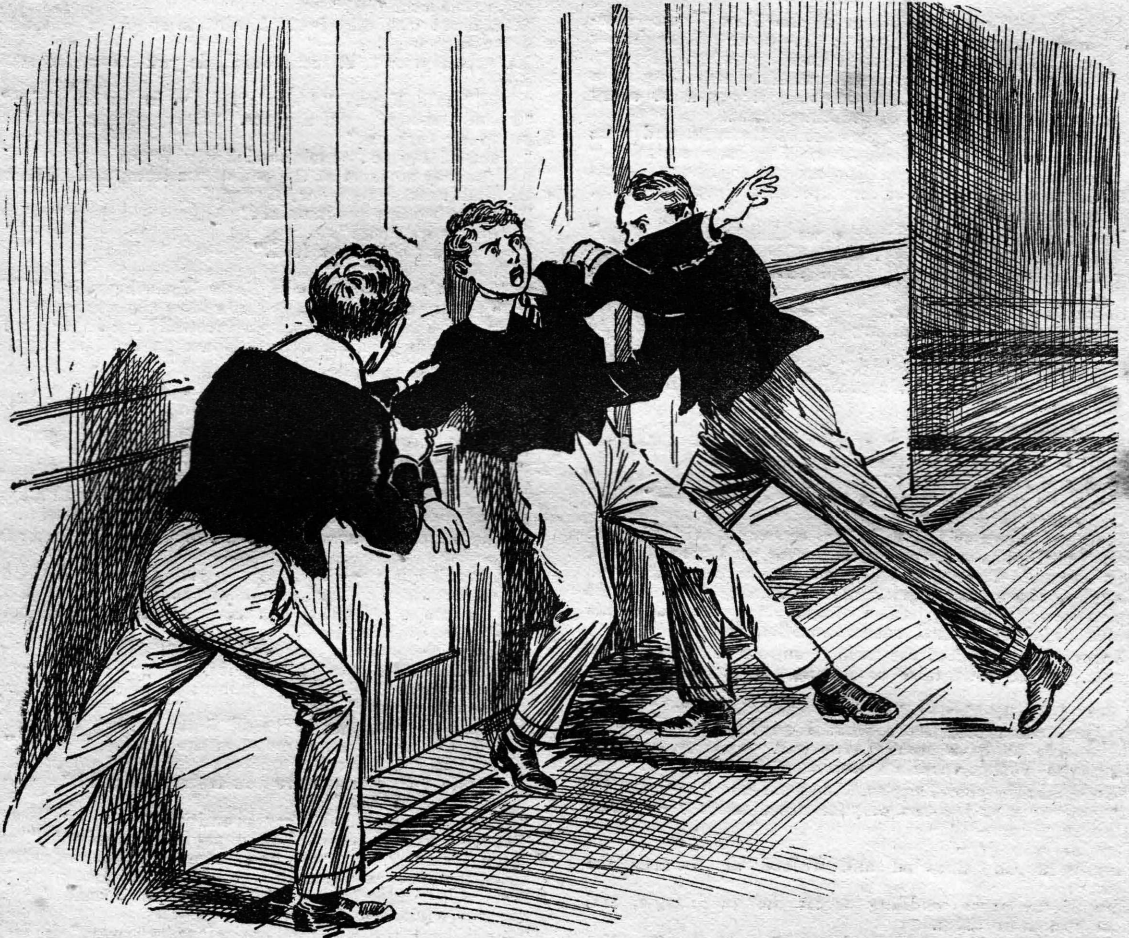
"I weally do not know, Tom Mewwy, and I take vevy little intewest in the mattah. All my attention at pwsent is given to this new ideah, which is a weally wippin' one. We are goin' to give a farewell feed in the Fourth Form dormitory to all the juniachs of St. Jim's, and we are twyin' to waise twelve pounds ten to covah the expenses."

"How much have you got as yet?"

"Six shillings and a penny, and a Fwench penny ovah," said Arthur Augustus, referring to his notebook. "That is the subscription fwom Study No. 6 alone."

"Rather an odd amount, isn't it?"

"Each chap contwibutes accordin' to his means and his genewosity," explained the swell of the School House. "If you are wich, you shove in a pound if you like, if you are poor, you put up a penny."



French and Jimson charged Tom Merry towards the class-room door with a terrific bump, and Tom landed against it with a crash that could have been heard all over the New House. "Oh!" gasped Tom Merry..

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you said you did—"

"And so I do, deah boy—"

"And you said it was a farewell feed to the juniors of the school—"

"And so it is, bai Jove!"

"And the Head—"

"The Head's got nothing to do with it. It is my ideah, and we've talked it over in the study and made all necessary awwangements. I am collectin' the subscriptions."

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Oh, I see! It's a misunderstanding."

"It looks to me more like stupidity," said D'Arcy. "I explained distinctly enough for any ass to understand that—"

"We asked you what was on, because we've just seen the Head and Mr. Railton chowing over something, and looking as solemn as boiled owls."

"Oh, I see!"

"And you started telling us about some silly wheeze of your own, as if there was anything interesting in that!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry winked at his chums.

"I see. I wish I were rich, for the sake of the subscription. But I am afraid I am poor."

"So am I," said Lowther. "End of the term, you know. Money goes."

"Same here," remarked Manners, with a sad shake of the head. "I can spare a penny exactly, and no more—but I won't make it a smaller sum than that. Gussy is welcome to my last penny."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Do you want us to sign anything?" asked Tom Merry. "I'll sign anything you like, Gussy, for the good of the cause. Here's my penny."

"If you weally can't spare any more."

"That's my last penny," said Manners.

"Vewy well. Small contwibutions are thankfully weweived and largah ones in pwoportion. That is thweepence anyway. Not vevy much towards twelve pounds ten, but I suppose evewy little helps."

D'Arcy entered the three pennies, and the Terrible Thra

initialled the entries. The swell of the School House put the book into his pocket and shut up his silver pencil.

"Thank you, deah boys. But I weally hope that some of the fellahs are in a wathah less stony state, or the subscriptions look like bein' a failure."

And the School House swell walked on with a thoughtful brow. The Terrible Three grinned at one another.

"I told him it was my last penny," said Manners, in a reflective way. "Nothing like telling the exact truth, is there? It was my last penny. I have some shillings and half-crowns, and a ten-shilling note, but that was my last penny."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked back as he heard the chums of the Shell roar with laughter, and wondered what they were laughing at.

CHAPTER 3.

Generous Juniors!

FIGGINS, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House—commonly known as Figgins & Co.—came off the junior cricket ground with their faces glowing. Figgins had a bat under his arm, and Kerr was slinging a cricket ball into the air and catching it again at every few paces. Fatty Wynn was breathing hard.

Figgins & Co. had been at practice at the nets, and were feeling very satisfied with themselves. Figgins was a mighty batsman, and there were few bowlers in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's who could make an impression upon his wicket when he was in form.

"Pretty nearly the last practice we shall get this term," said Figgins. "I can't say I don't like holidays, but I'm sorry to be leaving the school and you chaps for so long, too!"

"Same here!" said Kerr. "I wish we could fix it up to spend the holidays together; but I suppose it can't be done."

"Come along to the tuckshop," said Fatty Wynn, with a melancholy expression. "We can have another feed or two together, anyway."

Figgins grinned. "Well, of course, that's a great comfort," he remarked. "I shall miss Fatty more than anything else."

"Will you really, Figgy?"

"Yes. It's so entertaining to see you eat, and—"

"Oh, really, Figgins!"

"Let's get along to the tuckshop, anyway," said Figgins. "Mrs. Taggles has some new cream puffs, so I hear. Hallo, here's Taggy! Taggy, how do you do—quite well?"

Taggles, the school porter of St. Jim's, grunted. As Figgins had seen him half a dozen times that day, his anxious inquiries seemed rather uncalled for.

"Sorry it's the end of the term, I suppose, Taggy?" said Figgins. "You will miss us during the holidays, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall, Master Figgins," said Taggles; "and a jolly good miss, too, that's what I say! A honest man will be able to have some peace and quietness, without having you young varmint's worriting him!"

"We shall miss you, Taggles. We shall miss the beautiful blush you wear at the end of your nose, and the— Are you going, Taggles?"

Taggles was gone.

Figgins & Co. chuckled and walked on towards the tuckshop.

Tom Merry came scudding across the quadrangle, and almost ran into them.

"Hallo! Where are you running to?" exclaimed Figgins, getting into his way and throwing his arms round the hurrying junior. "Just saved you in time! Help me to save him, kids!"

The Co. promptly helped. Kerr took a grip round Tom Merry's neck from behind, and Fatty Wynn stooped and jerked his ankles off the ground with a great Rugger tackle.

Tom Merry struggled.

"Don't be an ass, Figgy! I'm on a message for Mr. Railton!"

"Oh, that alters the case!"

Figgins & Co. set Tom Merry on his feet.

The School House junior gasped for breath and set his collar straight.

"Where are you taking your giddy message?" asked Figgins. "You were bolting directly towards our House."

"That's where I'm going. Mr. Railton's message is to your Housemaster."

Figgins whistled.

"Oho! Mr. Railton doesn't often have much to say to old Ratty. Is anything on?"

"I believe so. I can't catch on to what it is, but there's something in the wind," said Tom Merry. "The Head

has been chow-chowing with Mr. Railton, both of them looking as solemn as a couple of boiled owls; and now, all of a sudden, Mr. Railton has sent me to ask Mr. Ratcliff to step over to the School House, to the Head's study!"

"Sort of consultation, I suppose," said Figgins. "What can it mean, I wonder? Somebody going to be expelled?"

"I don't think it's that. Railton didn't look like it. But I must be off!"

Tom Merry scudded off to the New House, and disappeared within its portals.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another.

"Something on," said Figgins. "I wonder what it is, I—"

"Bai Jove, is that you, Figgins? I've been lookin' for you, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up beaming, with a notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other.

"Well, you've found me now," said Figgins. "Do you want anything, or is it simply your wish to gaze upon my countenance and die?"

"Oh, don't wot, Figgins! I want to speak to you chaps about a subscription—"

"A subscription! A testimonial, do you mean, for somebody?"

"Rot!" said Kerr. "I don't believe in testimonials!"

"I don't, either," said Figgins. "Sorry, Gussy, but you'll have to go farther!"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn emphatically.

"With money so short at the end of the term, too. You can start that next September, Gussy!"

"It's no wotten testimonial!"

"What is it, then?"

"A subscription for a feed."

"Oh!"

"Now you're talking!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "Why couldn't you say so at first? Let's have the particulars."

"We are thinkin' of standing a farewell feed in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House on the last night of the term."

"Ripping good idea!"

"I am glad it meets with your appvowal, Wynn. It's to celebrate the occasion, and to alleviate the sowwow of partin', you know."

"That sounds rather contradictory," remarked Figgins.

"But go on. It's not a bad idea. Who stands the feed?"

"Ewevwybody. There's a genewal subscription, and all who have anythin' to give, give, and all who haven't, don't!"

"Jolly simple, at any rate. Let's look at the subscription list."

"I haven't got many names down yet. Most of the fellows seem to be wathah short of money, as it's the end of the term. Some of them, I am afwaid, are wathah mean. There's the beastlay list!"

Figgins read out the list, with a grin:

"J. Blake, ninepence; Herries, penny (French); A. Digby, fourpence; T. Merry, penny; H. Manners, penny; M. Lowther, penny."

"Fat lot of good that is!" said Fatty, with a sniff.

"I'm going to put my name in at the top for five bob."

"That will make six and fourpence for seven subscribers," said Kerr. "How much are you trying to raise?"

"Twelve pound ten."

"Then it doesn't look very promising."

"There's more pwomisin' than payin', I'm afwaid," said D'Arcy ruefully. "I've had pwomises fwom several fellows, but cash seems to be wathah scarce. I suppose you fellows will be able to contwibute somethin' decent?"

Figgins winked at the Co.

"We'll beat the Shell subscriptions, anyway," he said. "We'll put Tom Merry and his lot in the shady shade."

"Good!" said D'Arcy, beaming. "I'll wite your names down. There you are—Figgins, Kerr, Wynn. Now, how much?"

"Oh, double Tom Merry's subscription for me!" said Figgins, with an air of magnificence.

"Eh?"

"Same for me," said Kerr. "Double what Tom Merry puts up."

"Same here," said Fatty Wynn generously. "I'll double Merry's subscription, too. Here you are, Gussy."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, don't thank us, Gussy! We're backing you up like this because it's a really good idea."

"I wasn't goin' to thank you. I was goin' to wemark that double a penny is only twopence, and—"

"Did you work that out in your head?" asked Kerr, with interest.

"Oh, pway don't wot! It's all vewy well to talk about subscribin' double what Tom Mewwy has put up."

"We mean it," said Figgins seriously. "We feel called upon, in a case like this, to show that the New House can be depended upon to rally round in a good cause."

"If you call subscwibin' twopence apiece wallyin' wound, I can only say—"

"Don't say anything, Gussy. We don't want thanks. Take the tin, and don't say a word. There you are."

"I wegard this—"

"Tell Tom Merry we've subscribed twice as much as he has. Come on, you chaps, and let's get some cream puffs."

"But weally, Figgins—"

"Sorry I can't stop now, Gussy. I hope the subscription list will be a howling success. Come on, kids!"

Figgins & Co. entered the tuckshop, kept within the precincts of St. Jim's by Dame Taggles.

D'Arcy gazed after them.

"Bai Jove! I wegard this as absolutely wotten!" he murmured. "Double Tom Mewwy's subscwiptio! The wottahs!"

And D'Arcy snapped the book shut.

CHAPTER 4.

A House Row!

TOM MERRY tapped at the door of Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House. An acid voice bade him enter, and he opened the door.

Mr. Ratcliff, a tall, thin gentleman with a sour face, Housemaster of the New House, looked grimly at the School House junior. He had had his rubs with Tom Merry, and he did not like the frank, sunny-faced youngster. He did not like anything frank or sunny, as a matter of fact.

"What do you want, Merry?"

"If you please, sir, Mr. Railton says will you step over to the School House to Dr. Holmes' study, on an important matter?"

Mr. Ratcliff rose gingerly.

"H'm! I suppose so."

"I was to say that the Head wished it," said Tom Merry.

"Very well."

Mr. Ratcliff did not take the trouble to thank Tom Merry for bringing the message. In his opinion, politeness was wasted upon a boy. Tom might have been a paid messenger for all the courtesy he received from Mr. Ratcliff.

"You may go, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry left the study, and put on his cap again. The New House master, who was curious to know why the Head wished to see him, left the room at once, and walked away with his quick, nervous, irritable steps. There was a murmur in the passage as Tom Merry sauntered on, the New House master having passed him before he was a dozen paces from the study door.

"School House waster!"

Tom Merry looked round. Pratt and French and Jimson were looking at him from a side passage with threatening gestures.

The feud between School House and New House seldom slept. To see Tom Merry, the leader of the junior section of the School House, sauntering so calmly along a New House passage exasperated the rival juniors. They looked at Tom Merry, who smiled sweetly in return, and glanced after Mr. Ratcliff. Was the Housemaster too near for a rush upon the School House boy to be prudent?

Tom Merry kissed his hands to the New House juniors, and walked on.

Pratt snapped his teeth.

"Go for him!" he muttered.

French shook his head.

"Ratty's too near."

"He wouldn't hear us."

"Rats! He can hear a pin drop when you don't want him to. He's got the ears of a fox."

"Look here, we could collar the young rotter, and bump him into a class-room before Ratty had time to look round. Then—"

"Good egg!" said Jimson. "I don't see why we shouldn't risk it. Fancy that School House waster strolling around in our House as cool as a cucumber?"

"Come on then!"

The three juniors made a sudden, silent rush. Tom Merry, feeling quite secure from the fact that he was following in the Housemaster's footsteps, had not looked back again. He heard the stealthy footfalls, however, and half-turned—and then the grip of the enemy was upon him.

"Quick!" panted French. "Into the class-room!"

Tom Merry had been passing a class-room door. Pratt jerked at the handle in a twinkling, and French and Jimson bumped Tom Merry towards the door.

Had all gone well, Tom Merry and his captors would have been through the class-room doorway and out of sight in a second or so; and, Mr. Ratcliff, if he had looked round at the noise, would have seen nothing. But all did not go well. It happened that the class-room door was locked, and it did not open to Pratt's frantic jerk.

But there was no stopping French or Jimson. They brought Tom Merry towards the door with a terrific bump, and as it did not open, Tom bumped right on to it, with a crash that could have been heard all over the New House.

"Oh!"

Tom Merry gasped, and collapsed on the floor, all the breath driven out of him by the shock. French fell over him, and sprawled on the linoleum; and Jimson knocked his head against the door, and gave a howl. Pratt was still struggling blindly with the handle of the door.

Mr. Ratcliff turned round. He fixed his eyes upon the struggling group of gasping juniors, and a dark frown overspread his brow.

"Boys!"

Mr. Ratcliff's voice was not loud, but it had an acid, penetrating quality that made it clearly audible and more impressive to those under his authority—than a loud and angrier voice.

French staggered to his feet. He looked daggers at Pratt. "You ass!" he murmured. "Why didn't you get the door opened?"

"It's locked!"

"You ought to have opened it, anyway!"

"I couldn't—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"Boys!"

"Yes, sir," said Jimson, rubbing his head. "Did you speak, sir?"

"Yes, I did speak, Jimson. What is the meaning of this disgraceful disturbance?"

"Which, sir?"

"Don't pretend to misunderstand me, Jimson. What is the meaning of this? Why have you attacked Merry? Merry, get up!"

"Certainly, sir!" gasped Tom Merry, scrambling to his feet, and breathing very quickly. "It's all right, sir, I'm not hurt. It was only a joke."

"Silence!"

"But, sir—"

"Hold your tongue!"

Tom Merry gritted his teeth, and was silent. He knew what was coming, and all the dislike he had always felt for Mr. Ratcliff surged up in his breast, into almost hatred at that moment.

Mr. Railton took a good-humoured view of the House rivalry at St. Jim's, and on an occasion like this he would have been judiciously deaf and blind. Not so Mr. Ratcliff. If he could make several people unhappy and uncomfortable from a sense of duty he was in his element.

"What is the cause of this attack upon Merry?" demanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"Oh, nothing, sir!" said French, biting his lip. "It wasn't really an attack, sir. Merry knows we didn't mean anything but fun."

"Of course," said Tom Merry. "And I don't mind a bit—"

"Hold your tongue, Merry!"

"Very well, sir."

"Whether Merry objects to this or not, I object to having the passage of my House turned into a bear-garden," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You seem to have made an unprovoked attack upon Merry. Have you anything to say for yourselves?"

"It was only in fun, sir."

"That is no excuse. Jimson and French, as you belong to a higher Form, you will take two hundred lines each."

"Yes, sir," said Jimson and French dismally.

"You will take one hundred, Pratt."

"Yes, sir."

"And if anything of the kind occurs again I shall deal with you severely."

And Mr. Ratcliff marched on with rustling gown, leaving a savage bitterness behind him which a master of proper feeling would never have excited in the breast of his pupils.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry," muttered Tom Merry. "The beast knows it was only fun, and he pretends to take it seriously."

"It's all your fault, you School House rotter!" said French. "What do you mean by marching about our House as if you own it?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, draw it mild! It's the fault of your rotten Housemaster."

"You let our Housemaster alone," said Pratt, with all the loyalty of a New House fellow. He might detest Mr. Ratcliff himself, but he wasn't going to have him run down by a School House chap. "Let him alone, anyway. Get out!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, travel along!"

And Tom Merry travelled along

CHAPTER 5.

Dr. Holmes' Idea!

"A H, I am glad you have come, Mr. Ratcliff!" said Dr. Holmes. "Pray be seated. I have a rather important matter to discuss with you and Mr. Railton."

Mr. Ratcliff entered the Head's study wondering what was wanted. Mr. Railton was there, and both gentlemen were looking very thoughtful. On the table was spread out the plan of a huge steamship, and several letters with official-looking headings lay upon it.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at them as he sat down. That there was something in the wind he knew, but he could not guess what it was.

"Mr. Railton and I have hit upon a somewhat novel idea," said Dr. Holmes. "We wish to have your opinion, Mr. Ratcliff, and to consult you generally."

"Certainly, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff spoke quietly, but there was bitterness in his heart. Whenever the Head wished for counsel upon any point, Mr. Railton was always the man he turned to. It was probable that in the course of time Mr. Railton would succeed Dr. Holmes as Head of the school. Mr. Ratcliff always felt that he was in a secondary place, and that gave a keener edge to his dislike of the other Housemaster.

Mr. Railton knew very well how he felt, but the good old Head was quite unaware of it.

"St. Jim's is on the point of breaking up," said Dr. Holmes. "The idea has been suggested to me of planning a cruise for the summer holidays, to include practically the whole school."

Mr. Ratcliff started.

The idea was a novel one, with a vengeance.

"A cruise—for the whole school!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I dare say you know that the idea of a school afloat has been tried on a small scale, I believe successfully. For an establishment of the size of St. Jim's, and of the standing of this college, the matter is, of course, more difficult. Yet I think the idea is worth trying."

The Head paused a moment. It was evident that he had thought out the plan very carefully, and that he believed it to be an excellent one.

"My idea is this," he resumed. "The idea can be tried at first during the holidays. Such of the boys as choose to come, or whose parents decide that they shall come, will form the party. I have no doubt there will be many willing and able to share in the cruise. Mr. Railton thinks so."

"Certainly!" said the School House master. "I am sure of it!"

"The expense will, of course, be great, but the charges made will cover it—just cover it, and no more. During the holidays the idea will be tried, and it will be seen how the idea of a school afloat can be made to answer. If quite successful, there is no reason why a part, at least, of St. Jim's should not begin the next term afloat."

Mr. Ratcliff stared.

"It is a novel idea," he said.

"Yes, but consider its advantages. Given a large vessel of sufficient accommodation, such as that of which I have a plan here, any number of passengers can be taken. The saloon will be turned into a class-room. Classes can proceed just as if the boys were at home at St. Jim's. They will have the great advantage of fresh air and healthy exercise. Cricket will have to be given up for the time, except upon a limited scale, but other sports can take its place."

"I shall see to that," said Mr. Railton.

"Whether Michaelmas term shall commence afloat or ashore can, however, be left undecided for the present," said Dr. Holmes. "There is no reason at all why the school should not try the idea during the vacation."

Mr. Ratcliff nodded.

"You are in favour of the idea, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Well, it comes as a great surprise to me, sir," said the New House master slowly, "but I do not see why it should not be a success."

"Mr. Railton thinks so."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Railton, "I regard the scheme as an excellent one, for the holidays, at any rate. Whether it is continued during term-time can be settled later. I have no doubt that a large proportion of the boys will be glad to come."

"I think so, too."

"But the arrangements?" said Mr. Ratcliff. "What ship

are you thinking of? You are not intending to purchase one, surely?"

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"I intend to charter one. I have the plan of it here, and the offer of it has been made to me at a reasonable figure. Look at this plan."

The New House master glanced at it.

"The name of the ship is the Condor," resumed the Head. "As you see, it is a large vessel—five hundred feet in length. There will, I think, be ample accommodation for the number we shall require. This vessel is at our disposal, and is lying now at Southampton."

"Then you have decided?"

"Practically, yes; but I wished to have your opinion before finally doing so," said the Head, "for, as it happens, it will be impossible for me to accompany the cruise—at least, at first. If I can join the Condor later I shall do so. Meanwhile, the boys will be in charge of Mr. Railton and yourself."

Mr. Ratcliff nodded. There was a gleam in his little, narrow eyes. He was senior Housemaster at St. Jim's, and consequently expected to be in authority when the Head was no longer there.

"The division of the boys into New House and School House," continued the Head, "will not be interfered with. I believe that most of the boys would resent this distinction being removed."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Railton.

"They have their little rivalries and feuds," said the Head, with a smile, "which sometimes cause disturbances, but are, upon the whole, I am convinced, productive of more good than harm. A spirit of emulation is good for lads. This distinction will not be removed. The New House boys will occupy one part of the ship, the School House boys the other."

"Very good!"

"In fact, there will be no change at all, except that the school will be afloat instead of ashore."

"I understand."

"I wish you to take charge of your House, as at present," said Dr. Holmes. "Mr. Railton will be in authority over the School House section, the same as heretofore."

"And in case of a clash——"

"There will surely be nothing of the kind."

"Probably not, yet opinions might differ upon some point even amongst the most reasonable of men."

"I suppose so."

"In that case——"

"In that case, you two gentlemen would, of course, consult, and come by discussion to some working arrangement."

"Exactly," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have not the slightest doubt that this will be perfectly easy, yet in case of a remote contingency I think it should be understood that the final authority rests with the senior Housemaster."

The Head paused. This had not occurred to his mind, so far, but it was undoubtedly a matter that would have to be settled. His natural inclination would have been to give authority to Mr. Railton. But it could scarcely be done.

Mr. Railton was a much younger man than the other Housemaster, and he had not been so long at St. Jim's. In both senses Mr. Ratcliff was the senior. Without a marked slight to the New House master, it was impossible to give Mr. Railton the upper hand. Authority, in the absence of the Head, would naturally rest with the senior Housemaster, and on board the ship, where the two parties would be thrown so much in contact, some such regulation was needed.

Mr. Railton kept his eyes on the carpet. The Head was in a difficult position, and there was but one decision that he could properly make.

"Yes—er—quite so," said the Head slowly. "As I have said, I hope that no friction of any kind can possibly arise."

"I am sure it will not," said Mr. Ratcliff suavely. "Yet in case——"

"Of course, the senior Housemaster in that case has the deciding voice," said Dr. Holmes; "both, however, will be answerable to me as they are here at St. Jim's."

"Quite so."

"Then I may take it that this prospect of a voyage is agreeable to you, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Very agreeable indeed, sir," said Mr. Ratcliff, with unusual animation. "I shall look forward to it with pleasure."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"I presume an announcement will be made to the school?"

"Yes. I wish both Houses to be assembled in the great Hall this evening, and then I will speak to them."

"Good. I will see to it, sir. At what hour?"

"Before junior supper, I think—say at eight o'clock."
 "Very good."

After a little further discussion the New House master took his leave. He left Mr. Railton still in consultation with the Head.

But the little eyes of Horace Ratcliff were glittering with a new satisfaction as he walked out of the School House.

At St. Jim's, senior Housemaster as he was, he had never been able to take the upper hand, much as he wished to do so.

The two Houses were quite separate, and each master reigned supreme in his own sphere, and in case of any clash there was always the Head to judge and set matters right.

On board the Condor it would be different. There the two Houses, and the two Housemasters, would be thrown into contact, and disputes would probably arise—or could easily be made to arise. The Head would not be there

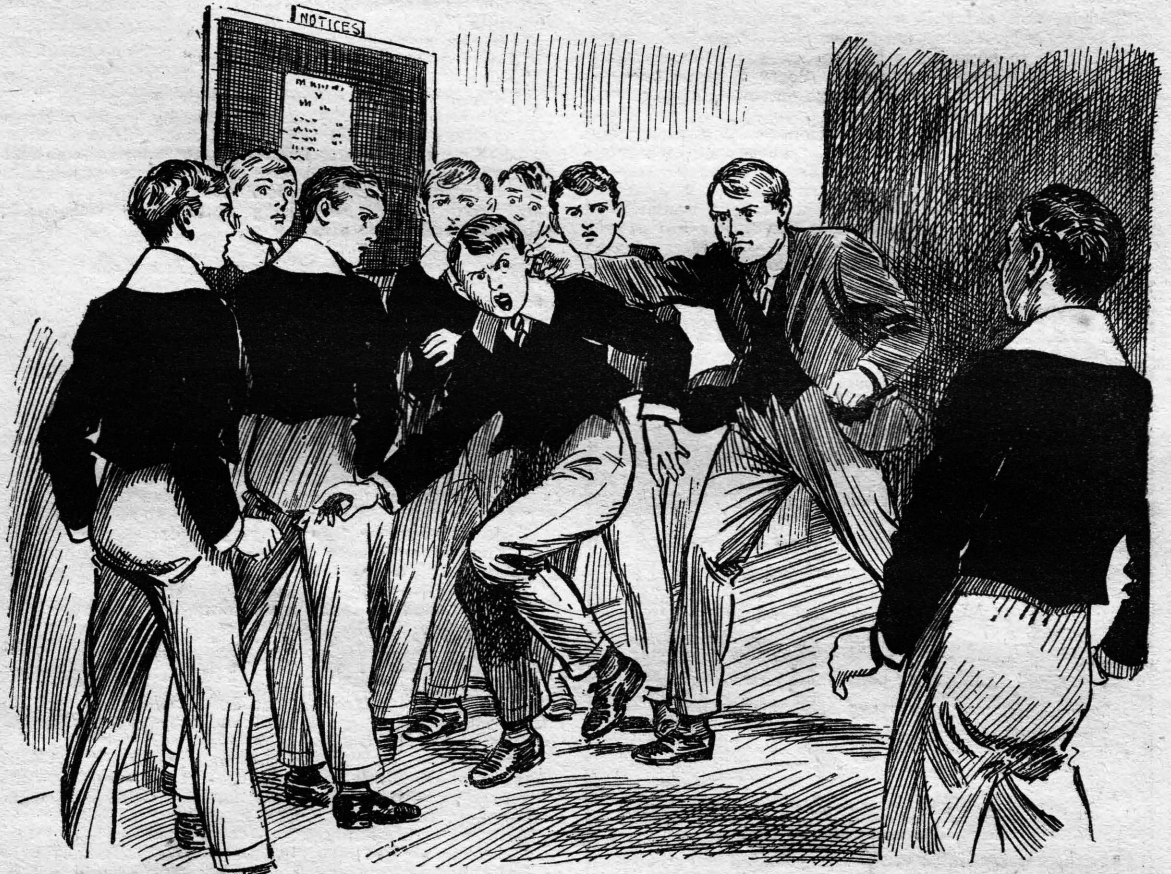
"Yes, I believe he never smiles except when somebody is going to have a hot time," he remarked. "I wonder who is catching it now?"

CHAPTER 6.

Not a Success!

REILLY of the Fourth came out of his study and almost ran into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was coming along the passage with a notebook in one hand and a pencil in the other.

Reilly was member for Belfast in St. Jim's junior parliament, an institution which had afforded much fun to the juniors. There was always a certain amount of friction between the Belfast boy and the swell of the School House. The reason was that Reilly, according to Arthur Augustus, never really treated him with proper respect. But D'Arcy waived all such considerations now. He could not



"You know as well as I do that Knox of the Sixth smokes in his study," said Mellish. "And—Ow!" A finger and thumb closed upon Mellish's ear from behind, and he twisted to see Knox glaring at him!

to judge or pacify. There would be an unbounded scope for the exercise of Mr. Ratcliff's new authority.

And the Housemaster's thin lips set, and his eyes gleamed at the thought. His feelings towards the younger, healthier, more good-natured and good-hearted master of the School House had always been harsh. He disliked Mr. Railton, and on several occasions when he had ventured to interfere in the School House he had been severely snubbed. But his time was coming now.

Mr. Ratcliff, smiling sourly, walked across the quadrangle with a light step. He passed the Terrible Three, but, deep in his pleasant reflections, he did not notice them. They stared after him.

"Did you notice?" said Monty Lowther.

"Yes, he was grinning."

"What he would call a smile, I suppose," said Manners. "Kind of twisting up his features as if he had been sucking a sour lemon. I know what that smile means, too. Some poor rotter is going to have a flogging."

Ton. Merry nodded.

allow personal prejudices to interfere with getting his subscription list filled.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Reilly, stopping. "Where are you running to?"

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye.

"I was not wunnin' anywhere," he replied, with dignity. "I was walking along at a leisurely pace, Weilly. It was you who nearly ran into me. As it happens I was comin' to your study to see you."

"Oh, were you?" said Reilly, apparently not particularly gratified by the information. "You were going to my study?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you can go there. I'm going out."

"Pway stop a moment, Weilly. It's wathah an important mattah."

"Anything to do with the junior parliament?" asked Reilly, stopping.

"It's nothin' to do with that, deah boy. It's a subscription."

"Oh, what for?"

"A farewell feed to be given in the Fourth Form dormitory to celebrate the bweakin' up for the midsummer holidays. I am twyin' to waise twelve pound ten by subscriptions. How much shall I put you down for?"

"Let's look at the list," said Reilly.

"There you are, deah boy."

Reilly took the list of subscriptions and glanced over it and grinned.

"You see, Weilly, ewewybody contwibutes accordin' to his means," explained D'Arcy.

"Or according to his meanness."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yaas, that is wathah funnay."

"These chaps are getting at you," said Reilly, tapping the subscription list with his forefinger. "They are only rotting."

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass tighter into his eye and gave the boy from Belfast a crushing stare.

"What did you say, Weilly?" he asked in freezing tones.

"I say that these chaps are only rotting you."

"Weally, Weilly—"

"They're not taking it seriously," grinned Reilly. "You must be a simple chump not to see that, Gussy."

"I wefuse to be called a chump."

"Well, you are one, you know. Sorry I spoke now. It would have been funny to see you go on collecting pennies."

"You wibald wottah!"

"I don't mind making a contribution, as far as that goes," said Reilly, feeling in his pockets. "There's nothing mean about me."

D'Arcy resumed his serenity of aspect.

"In that case, Weilly, I will ovahlook your wemarks. I was goin' to administah a feahful thwashin', but if you make a geneuous subscription—"

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"Faith, that's what I mean to do."

"How much?"

"Let me see; I should like to make it five pounds."

"Oh, that would be wippin'."

"But I had better contribute according to my means."

"Oh, yaas, wathah!"

"So I shall make it a farthing."

"Eh? A what?"

"A farthing."

Reilly extracted a coin of that denomination from his waistcoat pocket, and solemnly extended it to the swell of the School House.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon it and surveyed it as if it were some curious specimen submitted for his inspection.

"I suppose you are joking," he remarked.

"Sure, and it's serious I am."

"You have the feahful cheek to offah me a farthin'," said D'Arcy, his wrath rising. "You offah me—me—a farthin'!"

"Certainly; here it is. I can afford it."

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy, closing his book with a snap. "I am extwemely weluctant to pwoceed to violence, but you leave me no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, run away and play!"

"I wefuse to wun away and play."

"Bunk!"

"I decline to bunk. I am goin'—ow, you wottah!"

Reilly took hold of Arthur Augustus by the shoulders and swung him round. But the swell of St. Jim's was not to be handled with impunity. His eyeglass dropped to the end of its cord, his notebook and pencil flew in different directions. He hurled himself against Reilly, and the impact sent the boy from Belfast staggering against the wall, D'Arcy clinging to him like a cat.

"Oh!" gasped Reilly.

"You wottah!" gasped D'Arcy. "You uttah wottah! I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Faith, and I—"

"What's the row here?" exclaimed Blake, coming out of Study No. 6 and looking along the passage. "Hallo, is that you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

Reilly had recovered himself, and in twisting his leg in D'Arcy's he caused the School House swell to reel, and promptly throwing his weight forward, he brought Arthur Augustus with a bump to the floor.

D'Arcy gasped, and gasped again, and strove in vain to rise, as Reilly sat on his chest and pinned him down.

"You wottah! You extwemely wotten wottah!"

Blake came along the passage laughing.

"What on earth are you doing now, Gussy?" he exclaimed.

"I'm givin' Weilly a feahful thwashin'."

Blake roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! It looks to me more as if you were getting one."

"Nothin' of the sort. I slipped, that is all. Merely a twiflin' accident. I am goin' to give Weilly a thowough lickin'."

D'Arcy made a great effort and rolled Reilly off. But the Irish junior clung to him, and they rolled over like a couple of cats on the linoleum.

"What the dickens is the matter here?" exclaimed Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, coming along the passage with a cane in his hand. "What do you mean by making this fearful uproar?"

"It's all right, Kildare."

"It doesn't sound all right, Blake. What the dickens—"

"It's only D'Arcy and Reilly giving each other a feahful thwashin'."

Kildare laughed.

"Then I may as well wade in and help them both."

And the big Sixth-Former waded in. He made rapid play with the cane, distributing his attentions impartially between both combatants.

D'Arcy and Reilly yelled in good earnest, and soon separated.

"Faith, and it's hurting me ye are!" roared Reilly.

"Weally, Kildare, I weward this as absolutely bwatal—ow—it is wathah wotten of you—ow—ow—I considah you a wuffian—ow—ow—ow—wow!"

D'Arcy cut along the passage in one direction, Reilly in the other. Kildare kept the cane busy as long as they were within reach, and then stopped, too much overcome with laughter to pursue either of them.

Blake was leaning against the wall gasping with merriment.

Kildare looked at him.

"I think you ought to have a little, too, Blake," he remarked meditatively.

Blake became grave at once.

"Oh, not at all, Kildare! I was only a looker-on, honour bright."

Kildare shook his head warningly and walked away.

Blake, grinning, returned to Study No. 6.

A few minutes later the door of the study was opened somewhat violently, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in.

There was a gloom upon the brow of the swell of the School House. He looked at Blake with a lofty expression of dignity, and fumbled in his pockets.

Jack Blake watched him curiously.

D'Arcy extracted a sixpence and three pence from his pocket, and jingled the coins down upon the table before Blake.

The latter stared at them.

"Hallo, what's up, Gussy?"

"That's your subscription."

"My subscription!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have you raised the twelve pound ten without my ninenpence to help, then?"

"I have not waised twelve pound ten."

"Then what do you mean by returning my subscription, ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"Well, what do you mean?" bawled Blake.

"I am not deaf."

"You—you—you—"

"Pway don't be wude, Blake. I should be sowwy to have to thwash you, as I am wathah exhausted aftah thwashin' Weilly, I am returnin' your subscpiotion, because the thing is off."

"The subscription's off?"

"Yaas, wathah. I am givin' up the ideah," said D'Arcy, with great dignity. "I do not considah that I have had a pwopah backin' up in this study."

Blake grinned.

"Well, you see, you would run the thing your own way without assistance."

"If I had been pwopahly backed up the thing would have been a howlin' success. I attribute the failure to the lack of patwiotism in this study. I am returnin' the subscpiotions. There are not many to return. Not a word, deah boy. I have quite made up my mind."

And Arthur Augustus walked away before Blake could speak again, leaving the ninenpence on the table.

CHAPTER 7. The Notice!

"HAVE you seen the notice?"

Tom Merry was coming downstairs when Gore of the Shell met him with that query. Gore was looking excited, and so were several other fellows who were standing near.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, what notice?"

"It's on the board in the Hall."

"Anything unusual?"

"Rather! Something to do with breaking up for the holidays, I expect, though I don't see what the Head wants to talk to us to-night specially for."

"What is it, then?"

"A general meeting," said Mellish, generally known as the "cad of the Fourth." "Somethin's on. Old Ratty was over here a while back, chow-chowing with the Head and Railton. The Head and Railton have been chow-chowing on and off for a long time."

Tom Merry walked on to the notice-board in the Hall, curious to see what the excitement was about. Half the School House, seniors as well as juniors, seemed to be gathered there. There was a buzz of comment and conjecture. Kildare and Darrell and Rusden of the Sixth looked as interested as any of the juniors.

The notice was in the Head's writing. It was concise enough.

"All Forms will assemble in the lecture hall at eight o'clock precisely."

The notice was signed by the Head.

"Bai Jove! I wondah what's up?" Arthur Augustus remarked, as he stopped and looked at the board. "Have you any ideah. Tom Mewwy?"

"Not at all."

"Have you, Blake?"

"Not the slightest."

"I dare say it is some surprisew for the holidays," said D'Arcy meditatively.

"Or some chap going to be expelled," said Mellish. "Perhaps the Head has got to know about Sefton's little games."

"What little games?"

"Oh, I know what I know! Perhaps it's Knox!"

"What's the matter with Knox?"

"Well, you know as well as I do that Knox of the Sixth smokes in his study, although he's a prefect, and— Ow!" A finger and thumb closed upon Mellish's ear from behind and he twisted round to see Knox, the prefect, glaring at him.

"What's that, you young hound?"

"N-nothing, Knox. I—"

"Smoke in my study, do I?"

"I—I was only joking, Knox. Ow! My ear!"

"Am I hurting you?"

"Y-yes. Ow!"

"Good! Does that hurt, too?" said Knox, pinching the unfortunate junior's ear harder.

"Ow! Yes. Ow!"

"You young rascal! I'll teach you to chatter behind my back!"

"Ow-wow-wow!"

"They're not lies," said a voice in the crowd. "You do smoke in your study, Knox!"

Knox released Mellish and glared round.

"Who said that?"

Whoever had spoken did not seem in a hurry to own up. Knox scowled round and walked away.

Mellish rubbed his ear savagely.

"The bully!" he muttered.

"Well, you couldn't expect him to be pleased at your suggesting that he was to be expelled," said Tom Merry.

"It's all rot!" said Blake. "It can't be anybody going to be expelled; there would have been some sort of a row first. It's just a speech from the Head."

"I don't see why we should have to turn up for an extra speech!" grumbled Gore. "We have enough already, goodness knows!"

"Oh, you're a pig, Gore!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Goah as a feahful pig! By the way, I wondah if this notice applies to the New House, deah boys!"

"Let's go and see Figgins. He'll tell us."

Several of the School House juniors crossed the quadrangle to discover whether the New House was included in the notice to assemble. Figgins & Co. were in the quad, and they were discussing some matter with great interest.

"Hallo, Figgy! Have you heard—"

"About the notice?"

"Yes. You've got one in the New House, too, then?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather," said Figgins. "So it applies to the School House as well. I was thinking of coming to ask you."

"The whole school, then, at eight o'clock," said Blake thoughtfully. "Well, it's a quarter to eight now, and so we shall soon see what it's about."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How's the subscription getting on, Gussy?" asked Figgins.

D'Arcy brought his eyeglass to bear upon the chief of the New House juniors.

"The subscription is not gettin' on at all, Figgins," he replied frigidly. "The subscription is off. The cash is bein' returned to the subscwibers."

"Giving up the idea?"

"Yaas, as I have not been pwopahly backed up. If you like to call in at Study No. 6 you can have your twopence back."

"Oh, send them to us in registered letters," said Kerr; "that will be all right."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"I'm rather sorry," remarked Fatty Wynn. "That idea of a farewell feed was a good one, and it ought to be carried out. We ought to be able to raise twelve pound ten out of a hundred or more chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! If I had been backed up—"

"We might form a committee and work it," said Figgins.

"Bai Jove, that's all wight! I should be perfectly willin' to become chairman of the honouvable committee!"

"The committee might not be willing, though."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Well, I'm going to get a good place in the lecture hall," said Tom Merry. "First come, first served, you know."

"Good idea; I'm coming, too."

The juniors began to crowd into the hall. Each Form knew its place, and the seniors, the Fifth and Sixth, walked into them with stately dignity. Among the juniors there was something of a scramble for front places. The chums of Study No. 6 were in the first row, the Terrible Three and Figgins & Co. in the second.

There was a buzz of excited chatter in the lecture hall when the door suddenly opened and Dr. Holmes, rustling in cap and gown, accompanied by Mr. Railton, entered.

CHAPTER 8. Exciting News!

DR. HOLMES coughed a little as he looked upon the crowded room, the familiar cough the boys of St. Jim's knew so well. He looked a very imposing figure in his gown, standing there on the dais in the electric light.

The buzzing ceased.
"I have called you together, my boys," began Dr. Holmes in a pleasant voice, "to tell you of a decision I have come to, one affecting you all."

All eyes and ears were on the headmaster of St. Jim's.
"We are about to break up for the midsummer vacation," continued Dr. Holmes. "The plan I have formed is one which, I think, will keep a large number of us from separating as usual during the holidays. I have chartered a steamship—a well-known vessel of which some of you have doubtless heard, named the Condor, a short time ago a passenger vessel in the service of the Southampton Steamship Company—"

There was a faint buzz.
"This vessel I destine to be the home, for some time, of a large number of boys of St. Jim's. It is my intention to try the experiment—which has been tried before with success—of a school afloat."

A gasp from the crowded audience followed the words.
"Such of the boys of St. Jim's as desire to come, and can obtain the full approval of their parents, will embark on the Condor," said Dr. Holmes, "and the cruise will last during the August vacation. This matter has been discussed by me and the governors of the school. It is proposed that Michaelmas term, at the end of the summer holidays, shall commence afloat, but this is not yet decided upon."

There was a buzz again.
"This is what I wish to tell you," said Dr. Holmes. "You will reflect upon the matter. Such of you as wish to pass your holidays on the Condor will send in their names to-morrow morning, and will write to their parents asking permission and approval. I have already had letters sent to the parents of every boy here on this subject, which will be received by them to-morrow morning. I have thought out this idea for your good. I hope that a sufficient number will take advantage of it to render the scheme practicable."

Dr. Holmes paused.
For some moments the lecture hall was silent. The novelty of the thing held the boys dumb.

Then a well-known voice was heard from the ranks of the Fourth Form.

"Bwavo!"
It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
D'Arcy's little chirp was a signal for a ringing cheer. The juniors simply jumped at the idea. The novelty, the sense of adventure, combined to carry them away.

"Hurrah!"
It was a mighty shout.
"Hip, hip, hurrah!"
The rafters of the old hall rang with it.

Dr. Holmes smiled slightly.
He had hoped that the idea would "catch on" with the boys of St. Jim's, but he had hardly expected such an enthusiastic reception.

"Hurrah!"
Silence was restored at last as the Head was seen to raise a hand and move his lips.

"It appears that you like the idea, my boys—"
"Hurrah!"
"I am glad of it. I hope most of you will elect to accompany your Housemasters. I, unfortunately, shall not be with you. The ship will be in the charge of a capable captain and crew; and you yourselves under the orders of Mr. Railton and Mr. Ratcliff, as at present. Separate quarters in the vessel will be assigned to the New House and School House."

"Bravo!"
"Before embarking you will be allowed to visit the ship on a tour of inspection with any of your friends and relations who care to come. I shall myself be there to see the Condor sail on her voyage. The vessel is at present lying at Southampton in readiness for us."

There was a fresh round of cheering, and in the midst of it the Head retired with the masters. The assembly broke up, excitedly discussing the startling news.

"Well, I thought something was on," Tom Merry remarked. "I hardly expected anything of this sort, though."

"Yaas, wathah! It has come as a surprize to the whole school."

"By Jove!" said Figgins. "It's a ripping idea! I shall get permission to come easily enough. It's a good wheeze to take a cruise all together for the midsummer holidays."

"Yes, rather!"
"I was thinking of taking a party down to Huckleberry Heath," Tom Merry remarked. "This beats the country hollow, though."

"And I had decided to take you all down to my governah's place, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "But this is weally more wippin'!"

"Wonder what the ship will be like?"
"Oh, the Head will see to it that we have comfy quarters!"

"I hope he will pay proper attention to provisioning the ship," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "It would be pretty awful to find ourselves out of sight of land and the grub running short."

"Fearful!" said Jack Blake. "Still, so long as the bread lasted, we could melt you down into dripping, and manage on that. You'd make about a ton—"

"Look here, Blake—"
"I say, you chaps, we've got to have a think over this," said Tom Merry. "Come into the club-room for a jaw."

And Tom Merry & Co. separated themselves from the excited crowd, and withdrew to the disused study that was used as a club-room by the Merry Hobby Club. The Terrible Three, Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. entered, and the hero of the Shell lighted a candle.

There were only one or two chairs, but several of the juniors seated themselves on the table, while others sat on the floor. Arthur Augustus, having failed to obtain a seat, decided to stand, as the floor might spoil his "clobbah"!

"Gentlemen—" began Tom Merry.
"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther.

Blake locked the door to keep intruders out, and then turned round and looked at Tom Merry in the candle-light.

"Hold on a minute!" he exclaimed.
"What's the matter?"
"We've come here for a jaw over the situation: not to hear anybody make a speech. Speeches are barred."

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Gentlemen——"
 "Blake is wight, bai Jove! I call upon Tom Mewwy to shut up!"
 "Very well," said Tom Merry. "I withdraw the word. I am sorry that I addressed Blake and D'Arcy as gentlemen, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy——"
 "Let's come to business," said Lowther. "Gussy can talk after the meeting's over and we've gone. Tom Merry has an idea——"
 "Whose?" asked Blake.
 "My own," said Tom Merry warmly, "and a jolly good one, too! Gentlemen——"
 "Speeches are barred."

"To-morrow's a half-holiday," went on Tom, heedless of the interruption, "the last of the term."
 "Everybody knows that——"

"But everybody doesn't know what to do to-morrow," retorted Tom Merry. "And my idea is for us to make up a party, and slide off——"
 "Slide off, where?"
 "To Southampton!"
 "Southampton?"

"Yes; and inspect the Condor."
 The meeting fell into silence for a moment. Tom Merry's proposal was a decidedly unexpected one.

"We haven't got permission to go," Digby remarked.
 "That will make it all the more fun. We shall have to dodge away. Of course, it's not forbidden. It it were, we couldn't go. It's not."
 "But it's not permitted."

"That needn't make any difference to us. After all, the Head said that we could inspect the ship before we went aboard. We're the heads of the Lower School——"
 "Hear, hear!"

"So it's only right and proper that we should be first, and inspect the steamer before the other fellows come messing round," said Tom Merry. "I think we ought to satisfy ourselves that it's all right before we allow the scheme to proceed."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Hear, hear!"

"Lowther and Manners and I are going, at all events. We thought you chaps would like to come into the wheeze. That's all."

"So we would!" exclaimed Blake. "The idea is a surprisingly good one for you, Merry. I wonder how you came by it?"

"It is certainly a good idea," said Figgins. "We'll come along and keep you out of mischief."
 "You'll come along and be kept out of mischief——"
 "Oh, rats!"

"Well, if we're all going, we must be ready immediately after morning school to-morrow," said Tom Merry. "And we must keep this dark. I need not say if it gets out we shall be stopped."

"You say lots of things you need not say," Blake remarked. "It seems to be a sort of mania with you."
 "Yass, wathah! I considah——"
 "The meeting is now dissolved," said Tom Merry,

tapping on the table. "The honourable gentlemen can now bunk."
 And the honourable gentlemen accordingly "bunked."

CHAPTER 9.

Off to Southampton.

THE sole topic of conversation in study and dormitory that night was the coming cruise of the Condor. It possessed inexhaustible interest, and on the following morning the School House and the New House alike were still discussing it with great animation.

Many of the fellows looked forward to the trip to Southampton and the tour of inspection of the ship; but ten juniors were looking forward to a much sooner inspection. That afternoon Tom Merry & Co. intended to take the train to Southampton.

Most of the fellows wanted to go on the cruise, as was soon evident. There were some whose arrangements were definitely made for the holidays, and these could not come. Others there were who had to go home for various reasons. But it was certain that a large proportion of the boys of St. Jim's would join the "school afloat."

Morning lessons were conducted through an intermittent buzz of comment, conjecture, and surmise. But at the end of the term the masters were lenient. Only in the Fifth Form, which had the misfortune to have Mr. Ratcliff for a Form master, did impositions fall thickly. But the victims comforted themselves with the reflection that, the breaking-up being so near at hand, they would be able to dodge most of the lines.

When morning school was over and midday dinner disposed of, the boys had the rest of the day to themselves till evening calling-over. Then, one by one, Tom Merry & Co. slipped quietly away, and met in the road outside the school gates.

Tom Merry had fixed the rendezvous outside the walls in order to avoid attracting attention. If the idea had spread abroad it was probable that a crowd would follow, which would, more likely than not, result in pursuit, and the whole party being brought back at Wayland Junction, where they would have to wait for their train.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of course, was the last to arrive. The swell of St. Jim's had done himself down, as Blake expressed it, very beautifully for the occasion. If anything about him equalled the glossiness of his silk hat and the immaculate whiteness of his shirt, it was the crease in his trousers, or perhaps the set of his necktie. The rainbow hues of his waistcoat contrasted nicely with his gold watch-chain.

"Late, as usual," grunted Lowther, as Arthur Augustus came up, with a pair of lavender kid gloves in his hand.

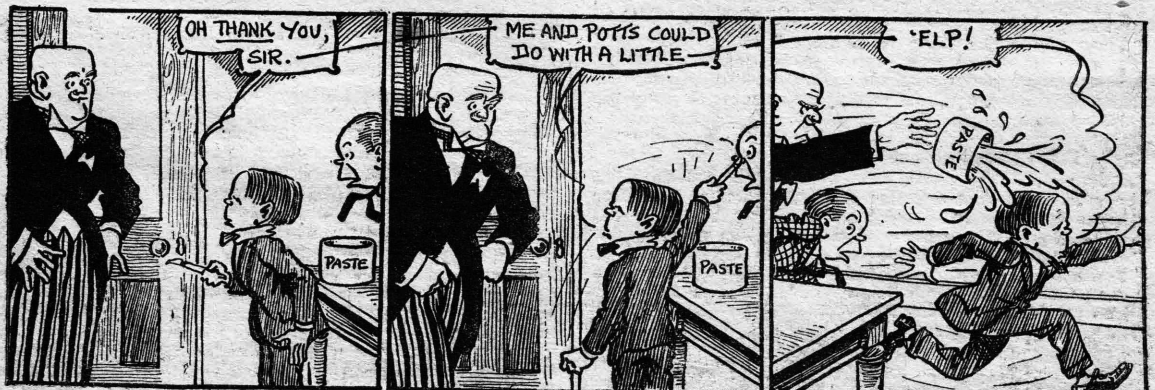
"I am extremely sorry——"
 "Well, let's be off."
 "You are intewwuptin' me, Lowthah. I am vewy sorry, but I had to dwell decently on an occasion like this."

"We've got a quarter of an hour to catch the local to Wayland," Tom Merry remarked. "Sharp's the word!"
 "Come on, then!"

The party set off down the lane towards the village. Tom Merry set the pace, and the others kept to it, and they arrived at Rylcombe Station in good time to catch the local train which was to convey them to Wayland Junction.



HELP!



D'Arcy settled back comfortably in a seat and began to put on his gloves. Fatty Wynn was fishing in his pockets.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Figgins, as the train moved out of the station. "Have you got the cramp, or what?"

"I'm trying to get a beastly parcel out of my beastly pocket!" gasped Fatty Wynn, red with his exertions. "It went in all right, so it's bound to come out!"

"Can I help you, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, who never failed to be polite, though he had had his rubs with Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, you can. Hold this!"

Fatty Wynn had already got out one parcel. He handed it to Arthur Augustus, who took the brown-papered parcel in his neatly gloved hand, and then commenced to wrench at his pocket with both hands.

"Coming out?" asked Tom Merry.

"I think so!" gasped the fat junior. "It's bound to come in time!"

"What is it?"

"A boiled steak-pudding. Mrs. Taggles gave it to me just before I started. It went into the confounded pocket, easily enough!"

"It will come out in wathah a mess, I expect," said Arthur Augustus, shifting a little farther away from Fatty Wynn—not an easy task in the crowded carriage. "Pway be careful what you do with the howwid thing when you get it out, Wynn! I'm thinkin' of my twousahs."

"Blow your trousers!"

"Go it, Fatty!" exclaimed Monty Lowther encouragingly. "Why don't you give him a hand, Figgy? Thump him on the back, Kerr!"

"Lemme alone! It's just coming!"

"Hurrah!"

"Here it comes— Oh!"

It came!

Fatty Wynn gave a final wrench that brought the recalcitrant steak-pudding out of the pocket, and as it came out it burst its paper wrapping, and the contents flew in all directions.

Herries gave a shout as a fragment of steak caught him in the eye, and Digby yelled from the impact of a piece of crust in his ear. D'Arcy gave a howl of anguish. A spurt of rich gravy came like a stream from a squirt over his waistcoat, which a moment or two before had been a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!

"Oh!" gasped D'Arcy. "Oh, you wotten ass!"

"Sorry!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "All the gravy's wasted now!"

"My waistcoat—"

"My gravy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Don't you regard this as funny, D'Arcy?"

"No, I certainly do not! I wegard Fatty Wynn as an absolute beast! My waistcoat is spoilt. There is a lot of fat on your own twousahs—"

"Eh—what?" exclaimed Tom Merry, becoming serious at once.

He was wearing a pair of light trousers, and the trail of the steak pudding was over them with a vengeance. Tom Merry looked at the greasy smudges on the nice grey cloth, and then looked at Fatty Wynn.

"Utterly spoilt!" said Fatty Wynn disconsolately.

"Oh, never mind!" said Tom Merry, with an effort.

"I dare say I can get them cleaned."

"Get what cleaned?"

"My trousers."

"Who's talking about your trousers?" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "Confound your trousers! I'm thinking of the steak-pudding!"

"There's only one thing to be done," said D'Arcy. "I shall have to thwow this waistcoat out of the beastlay window, and go about with my jacket buttoned up for the west of the day. Fortunately, it is fashionable to weah the jacket buttoned."

"You'd better do the same with your trucks, Tom Merry," grinned Blake, "and go about with—"

"Take your wotten parcel, Fatty Wynn! Bai Jove, what filthy stuff is in that beastlay parcel?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly, glaring at a greasy stain on his beautiful glove. "You have stained my glove now!"

"Ham sandwiches."

"You howwid, gorgin' cannibal! Why didn't you tell me the parcel contained gwub before you gave it to me?"

"You might have scoffed it!"

The insinuation was too much for D'Arcy. That he, the elegant swell of the School House, might have "scoffed" the contents of that warm and greasy parcel, was a charge too exasperating to be borne.

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D'Arcy hurled himself forward, and there would have been a deadly combat the next moment, but Tom Merry caught the indignant swell of St. Jim's by the shoulders in time. He jerked him back, and D'Arcy sat down on his knees.

"Welease me, Tom Merry—"

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to hold on! I insist upon givin' Fatty Wynn a feahful thwashin' on the spot!"

"Rats! Keep the peace!"

"I absolutely decline to keep the beastlay peace!"

"Any fellow creating a disorderly scene in the carriage is liable to a penalty of forty bob, without the option of a fine—"

"Pway don't wot! I insist—"

"Shove him under the seat!" said Figgins. "That's the only way to keep him quiet. Now, then, all together!"

"I wefuse to be shoved undah the seat! You wottahs, you will absolutely wuin my beastlay clothes! Pway don't be a set of beastlay wuffians! You are spoilin' the nap of my beastlay hat! I will keep the peace if you like!"



As Fatty Wynn wrenched the steak pudding out of his pocket, pieces of the pudding caught Herries and Digby, and Gussy gorged.

"Mind you do, then! It's your last chance!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Order! This is where you cheese it!"

"You'd better get that waistcoat off if you're going to, Gussy," said Herries. "We shall be in Wayland soon, and there may be ladies on the platform."

"Bai Jove, you're wight!"

D'Arcy peeled off jacket and waistcoat, and was about to fling the latter from the open window, when Blake caught his arm.

"Have you taken the watch out?"

"Bai Jove, no; I nevah thought of that!"

D'Arcy cleared his valuables out of the greased waistcoat, and then hurled it upon the embankment beside the line. The train rushed on. The swell of St. Jim's carefully buttoned the lower buttons of his jacket. It did not set so trimly without the waistcoat under it, and D'Arcy noted it, and looked daggers at Fatty Wynn. But the fat junior of the New House did not observe that. He was eating ham sandwiches.

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy Is Too Obliging!

"WAYLAND! Changer'f'm'nline!"
 "Bai Jove, deah boys! I wondah what that chap is sayin?"
 "Wayland! Change here for main line," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Come 'on!"
 "We have ten minutes to wait for the Southampton train. It's coming from London—"
 "Time to have a look in the refreshment-room," said Fatty Wynn.
 "I wondah if there would be time for me to go wound and buy a waistcoat?" said D'Arcy thoughtfully, as he stepped out of the train.
 "No," said Jack Blake promptly.
 "I ought to have one. This jacket does not set pwopahly without one. I don't want people in Southampton to think me slovenly, you know."
 "The people in Southampton may be thinking of other things."



the paper wrapping, and the contents flew in all directions. I with anguish as a spurt of rich gravy squirted over his coat!

"Yaas, but weally—"
 "You couldn't wear a waistcoat you'd buy in Wayland," said Tom Merry hastily. "They are all fearful things, years behind date, and not more than three colours in any of them."
 "Bai Jove, I forgot that! Upon the whole, I'll leave it till I get to Southampton. I have heard that that is a vewy fine city, and I have no doubt I shall be able to get a weally decent waistcoat there, deah boys."
 "Then we'd better carry out my idea of looking in at the refreshment-room," said Fatty Wynn. "We've got a long journey before us, and the express stops at only one or two places."
 "Well, perhaps some grub wouldn't be out of the way," agreed Blake. "We can take it into the train with us."
 "A lunch-basket in the thing."
 "Good! A lunch-basket it shall be, and we'll stand our whack."
 "It had better be a good-sized one, too," said Fatty Wynn. "Don't forget there are ten of us, and we shall get hungrier as we get nearer the sea."

"Come on! We can leave our coats and things on the seat. They'll be safe enough. We've no time to waste."
 The juniors crowded into the refreshment-room. Several of them had had remittances that morning, and D'Arcy had received the expected fiver from his governor. They were in funds, therefore, and able to purchase right and left, which they accordingly did.
 The lunch-basket was obtained and packed with purchases. Fatty Wynn saw to the quality and quantity of the contents, paying special attention to the quantity.
 There was a scream of a train-whistle, and Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.
 "The express!"

He hastily settled the account, and the juniors dashed out of the refreshment-room and across the platform. They caught up their coats, and rushed for the train, which was steaming into the station.

Tom Merry caught the handle of the nearest door. It was that of a second-class carriage, and the juniors were travelling with second-class tickets.

But the door did not open. A red-faced man looked out of the window.

"No room!" he jerked out.
 "Bosh!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "The carriage is empty. Let go the door."

Without waiting for the passenger to refuse, as he was evidently going to do, Tom Merry and Figgins united their strength and wrenched the door open.

The red-faced man gave an ugly grunt.

The door flew open, and the juniors poured into the carriage. D'Arcy was the last, and he trod on the red-faced man's foot on entering. He looked round in vain for a seat.

The carriage was designed for ten occupants, but six of the juniors had taken up the unoccupied side, three of them the other beside the red-faced man. Next to the latter was a seat to spare, but it was occupied by a small strapped leather bag. The initials B. T. were painted on the bag in rough lettering.

"Would you mind wemovin' your bag to the wack, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus, with great politeness.

"You can't have that seat."

"But the bag can vewy well go up on the luggage wack."

"It can't!"

"If you wefuse to put it there, will you give me your kind permish to place it there myself?" asked D'Arcy, with unshaken courtesy.

"Look here," said the red-faced man, "that seat belongs to a friend of mine what's getting in here, and that bag's his'n."

"Oh, I see!" said D'Arcy. "You should weally have explained that before. I should be extwemely sowwy to have the wudeness to take anothah gentleman's seat."

The red-faced man grunted.

"Get into another carriage."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Not at all. I don't mind standin'."

"But I mind you standing. There's no room. I don't like a crowded carriage."

"Change into another, then," said Tom Merry.

"You young rascals—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "For two pins we'd sling you out and your friend's bag after you."

The red-faced man murmured something under his breath.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy let down the window to its fullest extent, and looked up and down the platform. The last passengers were scrambling into the train, and the guard was slamming the door.

"Bai Jove! Your fwiennd will lose the twain, I'm afwaid!" said D'Arcy. "Are you suah it was at this station he was coming?"

"Yes, hang you!"

"Then he'll lose the twain."

"Oh, hang!"

"It is wathah wuff on him, as he will lose his bag, too. Suppose you hand the bag out to a portah and ask him to give it to your fwiennd when he turns up?"

"Mind your own business."

"Weally, my deah sir, I only wished to be obligin'."

D'Arcy was quite in earnest. The other juniors were grinning. They fully believed that the bag belonged to the red-faced man, and that he had told an untruth in saying that it belonged to a friend, hoping thereby to cause one of the juniors to leave the carriage.

But D'Arcy did not expect it. The swell of the School House would not have told a lie to save his life, and he was slow to suspect deceit in others. He was really concerned about the red-faced man's friend and that friend's bag.

Bang, bang!

The last doors were closing and the guard was waving his flag. The engine snorted.

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"Bai Jove! Your friend's lost the twain!"

The red-faced man grunted.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took a last look along the platform, and then hurriedly seized the bag and hurled it from the carriage window. It banged on the platform, and the next instant the train steamed out of the station.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus turned to the red-faced man with a beaming smile. The passenger sat apparently petrified.

"Just in time, bai Jove, sir!" said D'Arcy. "I am sowwy your friend has lost the twain, but he has got the bag, at all events."

The red-faced man spluttered.

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

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"I weally fail to see any cause for this mewwiment," he remarked. "It was only an act of politeness to throw the bag out for this gentleman's friend. It was bad enough to lose the twain, without losing the bag, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, my deah fellows—"

"You young scoundrel!" roared the red-faced man, finding words at last.

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Eh?"

"You young villain! What do you mean by throwing my bag out of the train?"

"Your bag?"

"Yes, you young—"

"I am afraid there is a misunderstandin'. It was your friend's bag I thwew out of the twain, so that he should not lose—"

"You—you—you— It was my bag you—you— Now it is lost. I shall have to telegraph along the line for it from Southampton, you—you—you—"

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and stared at the red-faced man with great dignity.

"It seems to me that you have deceived me," he said. "It was your own bag, was it?"

"Of course it was, you young fool!"

"I refuse to be chawactewised as a young fool. And I would wathah be a young fool, anyway, than an old wascal!"

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins.

"You told an untwuth when you said it was not your bag. It is entirely your own fault. I cannot say I am sowwy in the least. I am only sowwy that a man old enough to know bettah should descend to a mean untwuth!"

And D'Arcy sat down on the vacant seat where the missing bag had been.

The red-faced man seemed to be on the verge of apoplexy for some minutes. D'Arcy would certainly have received some rough handling if he had been alone; but Tom Merry & Co. were so evidently ready to make things warm for the red-faced man if he gave rein to his temper, that he found it more prudent to restrain himself. He sat and glowered at the juniors, and muttered indignantly to himself at intervals as the train swept on.

CHAPTER 11.

Aboard the Condor!

"HERE we are!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors of St. Jim's poured out of the carriage. There was a brisk keenness in the air from the sea, and a deafening crowd of passengers and porters with luggage.

The juniors gazed about them with great interest, and the red-faced man, with a final muttered word, passed them, and disappeared in the crowd.

"Yes, here we are," said Figgins; "but the question is, where's the Condor?"

"We're not likely to find it on the platform," said Monty Lowther rather judicially. "Let's get out of the station."

"If Lowther is going to be funny—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "The afternoon is getting on, and we haven't any time to waste. We've got to find the ship and explore it, and catch the train home, and there's only one home train that stops at Wayland, too."

"How do you know that, Tom Merry?"

"Looked it up in the time-table."

"Bai Jove! You know, that was wathah clevah! I should nevah have thought of that!"

"The things you wouldn't have thought of, Gussy, would fill an encyclopedia. Come on!"

The juniors pushed their way through the crowd. They were not encumbered by any luggage, except their coats and one or two small bags, and D'Arcy's gold-headed cane.

They made their way out of the great station and looked about them again.

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"We had bettah go down to the piah, deah boys, and then—"

"Good!" said Figgins. "Let's get to the pier. It was rather thoughtless of the Head not to tell us exactly where the Condor was."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There are a jolly lot of ships here, and I'm blessed if I can tell one from another," said Tom Merry. "However, we were born with tongues in our heads, and we can ask somebody."

"That's so."

The adventurers made their way to the pier. The place was crowded, and looked wonderfully busy and lively in the sunny afternoon.

"We'll ask this chap," said Tom Merry, with a glance towards the pier-keeper. "My hat! Do you see whom he's talking to?"

The keeper was speaking to the red-faced man, the juniors' companion in the carriage on the way down. The red-faced gentleman caught sight of them at the same time, and scowled. He had not forgotten the loss of his bag. He finished speaking to the pier-keeper and turned away, and the little crowd of juniors came up.

"Excuse me," said Tom Merry politely, "can you tell me which vessel here is the Condor?"

The man glanced down at them.

"She's five hundred feet long," said D'Arcy, by way of imparting further information.

The man grinned.

"She's out there, sir."

He threw up his bronzed hand with a wide gesture towards the harbour.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, I thought she was there; but where is she—and which is she?"

The keeper pointed.

"You see that craft with the black funnel?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove, that looks wathah a wotten little cwaft," said D'Arcy, adjusting his eyegless. "I don't think I shall go for a cwise in that."

"Beyond that," said the man calmly, "there's a big steamer."

"I see it," said Tom Merry.

"And to the left there's another, a smaller one; you can see the red funnels."

"I see it."

"That's the Condor."

"Oh!" said D'Arcy.

"Thank you very much," said Tom Merry, looking towards the red funnels. "But how the deuce are we to get to her?"

The man stared.

"You can't get to her. She's not taking in passengers now. She's empty, except for a few hands."

"Yaas, but we're goin' to look ovah her, you see."

"You can't."

"Quite a mistake, deah boy. We shall have to get to her somehow."

"You see," explained Tom Merry, "we're a part of a party that's going on a pleasure cruise in the Condor, and we've come down ahead to have a look at her."

"Oh! Then you ought to have spoken to the gentleman who was here just now—"

"That wed-faced person?"

"Yes. He is going on board the Condor, and he might have taken you wih him."

"Bai Jove! What does that wottah want aboard our cwaft?" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I stwongly object to his feahful cheek in goin' aboard!"

Tom Merry thanked the man for his information, and the juniors moved off. They had had a vague mental picture of the Condor moored to a landing-stage, whence they would step aboard and carry out their project of exploration. It nonplussed them a little to find that the vessel was anchored some distance out in the harbour.

But Tom Merry was quite equal to the occasion.

"We can't step over that distance," he remarked, "and we can't swim it. We can get a boat, though."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's that red-faced bounder talking to a boatman, too. I suppose he's got some business on board—something to do with the cargo, perhaps. I knew he had something to do with the sea from his cap," remarked Digby.

"He's rowing with the boatman, too," Herries remarked.

There was no doubt about that. A big, stolid boatman was looking at the red-faced man without moving a muscle as the latter grumbled and swore. The man in the seaman's cap seemed to be seeking to drive a hard bargain for a passage in the boat, and the boatman was not to be moved. Doubtless he saw the juniors, and guessed from their expressions that they wanted a boat, and so became independent, as he had other customers on hand.

"I will give you a shilling," said the red-faced man, as the juniors came up within hearing.

The boatman shook his head.

"I'll be burned before I give you a stiver more."

Another solid shake of the head.

"Hang you! I'll find another boat."

This time the boatman nodded. He seemed to have spoken hardly a word during the dispute, wagging his head in assent or dissent to save the trouble of talking.

The red-faced man stamped away, and Tom Merry & Co. came towards the boatman. The man touched his cap, with a cheerful grin.

"We want to be taken out to the Condor," said Tom Merry. "You know her?"

The man nodded.

"Can you take the lot of us?"

The boatman ran his eye over the juniors, and counted ten.

"Sixpence each," he said briefly.

"Good enough!"

The stalwart longshoreman picked up his oars.

The red-faced gentleman came stamping back.

"Look here, you thief, how much do you want?"

"Sorry, sir—engaged," said the boatman.

"Nonsense! Lies! How much do you want?"

The boatman shook his head. Tom Merry & Co. scrambled into the boat, and the man prepared to push off.

The red-faced man shook his fist.

"Will you take me out to the Condor?"

"I haven't room now, sir."

Tom Merry looked round.

"You can come if you like," he said. "We'll make room for you."

It was an effort of politeness, but Tom Merry was always polite. The red-faced man growled and grunted, but apparently made up his mind to accept the offer, for he came down the pier steps. But the boatman, perhaps, did not care to overload his boat, or he had had enough of the red-faced man and his mode of address. He pushed off, and a surge of water went up over the red-faced man's boots.

He gave a howl of rage.

"Come back for me, you scoundrel!"

"I say, can't you take him in?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Couldn't get back now, sir," said the boatman, bending to his oars. "And the boat's too full already."

"Look here—"

"You young scoundrels!" shouted the red-faced man, shaking his fist after the boat. "This is a trick! You young scoundrels! You young—"

His voice died away.

"Bai Jove, we don't want a rude wottah like that in the boat," said D'Arcy. "Pway don't take any furthah notice of him, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry nodded.

The boatman pulled on stolidly. Shore and buildings faded back into a line on the water. The red-faced man disappeared. The boat pulled past vessel after vessel in the great harbour, and the juniors looked at them with immense interest. Ere long they, too, were to sail the deep ocean, and to see the strange sights of a wider world than the one they had hitherto known.

The boatman jerked his head.

"There's the Condor, young gentlemen."

The ship loomed up on them, as it were, suddenly. Their eyes dwelt on the vast slopes of her sides, the huge funnels. Even Arthur Augustus was impressed.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "What a wippin' cwaft!"

"Magnificent!" said Tom Merry.

"I should have pweffered somethin' more wakish-lookin'," observed D'Arcy thoughtfully. "There is somethin' vewy ordinary about an ordinary ship. I should weally pwefer to sail in a wakish-lookin' cwaft."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We're getting close now," said Tom Merry. "They'll have to let down something to help us aboard."

"The ladder's down, sir," said the boatman, pulling gently.

"Good!"

A red, weather-beaten face looked down from the gangway upon the boatload of juniors.

"Hallo, there!"

"Hallo, deah boy!" responded D'Arcy.

"What do you want?"

"We want to come aboard."

"Now then, off you go. None of your larks here."

"Make fast," whispered Tom Merry. "It's not a lark," he went on, "we've got to come aboard on important business."

"Who are you?"

"Distinguished visitors."

The man above grinned a little.

"Well, you've got enough cheek," he remarked. "I happen to be the mate of this craft, so you can go farther on: Children and dogs are not admitted here."

D'Arcy fixed his monocle upon the weather-beaten man. "Weally, my deah sir, I wegard that we mark as distinctly oppwobwious," he exclaimed. "We are not children, and—"

"Oh, sail on!"

"We wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. We—"

"We've got to come aboard, on important business," said Tom Merry. "We're a party in advance of the passengers."

"Eh?"

"We belong to the school that is going to use this ship."

"Oh, I see! We hadn't noticed that you were coming," said the mate, looking down at the juniors searchingly. "I suppose it's all right. Captain Bolsover and Mr. Thropp, the chief mate, are away."

"Never mind; it's the ship we want to see."

"You can come aboard, then."

"You can lay by and wait for us," said Tom Merry to the boatman.

"Ay, ay, sir."

And the juniors of St Jim's were soon aboard the steamer.

CHAPTER 12.

The Chief Mate!

THE CONDOR was evidently not in order for sailing. The fires were out on board, and there were only a few hands to be seen. The second mate came towards the juniors with a rather puzzled expression upon his face.

When they looked at him more closely, the chums could see that he had a rather good-looking, pleasant face, with little twinkling blue eyes, and a deep bronze complexion. He was a somewhat young man, with a powerful frame and massive limbs.

"I don't know much about this," he remarked. "I suppose it's all right, and you can look over the ship. I suppose that's what you want?"

"That's it," said Tom Merry.

"Well, there's no harm in it that I know of. I suppose you had your headmaster's permission to come here?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We came away in such a hurry that we hadn't time to ask it," he replied.

"And he would have given it if you had, I suppose, sir?"

"Well, he wouldn't have minded us exploring the ship, but he might have thought the journey to Southampton too long," explained Tom Merry. "It's very kind of you to offer to show us over the ship, Mister—"

"Green's my name. But I haven't offered—"

"Well, you can offer now, Mr. Green. It comes to the same thing."

Mr. Green laughed.

"Ay, ay. I don't mind if I do, come to that. I'll show you over the craft with pleasure."

"Thank you very much."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard this as vewy kind and polite of our fwiend, Mr. Gween. I say, Mr. Gween, I suppose you have been at sea a long time, haven't you?"

"Forty years, man and boy," said Mr. Green solemnly.

"Bai Jove, I shouldn't have thought you ovah thirahy now!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with an amazed look at Mr. Green's bronzed, youthful face.

"We keep young on the sea, sir."

"Yaas, I suppose so."

Mr. Green turned away and began to show the juniors over the great ship. The afternoon sun was sinking behind a distant roof.

"These are the funnels," said Mr. Green. "Of course, you know a funnel when you see it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They are used for several purposes, among others for refrigerating the meat on long voyages."

"Bai Jove!"

"For what?" asked Figgins.

"Refrigerating the meat on long voyages," said Mr. Green.

"But I should have thought that the heat would have had quite the opposite effect," said Arthur Augustus; "to say nothin' of the smoke."

"It is the smoke that does it."

(Continued on page 19.)

ANOTHER PAGE OF INTERESTING NEWS FROM—



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

HALLO, chums! Now that you have sampled the first of the extra-special "Holiday" stories, featuring Tom Merry & Co. of St Jim's—which I promised you—I expect you are mighty impatient to read about the next stage of these cheery schoolboys' adventures aboard the good ship Condor. Well, the wait until next Wednesday is worth while, believe me. In

"ALL ABOARD THE CONDOR!"

you will find an ideal admixture of fun and frolic and thrilling adventure. Don't miss this latest story from the pen of Mr. Martin Clifford, whatever you do. The same applies to the next chapters of

"THE WORLD WRECKERS!"

This is a great story, which goes from strength to strength. Thrills on the ground, on the sea, and in the air—all are to be found in this smashing yarn, starring The Man Who Wanted to Blackmail the World. Yes, Potts the Office Boy will be "on parade" next Wednesday, so order your copy of the GEM in good time. Now for some news pats :

BY GEORGE!

He's got no chest measurement, can't talk or write, yet he is a marvellous pilot, capable of keeping to a set course on the darkest of nights. The Air Force have nicknamed him George—and George is in reality a piece of complicated machinery, built up of spinning gyroscopes and sensitive valves directly connected with the controls of the aeroplane. Thus if a pilot who is engaged on a long non-stop flight wants to turn in for "forty winks" he can do so, assured beforehand that George won't let him down in any sense of the word. Or if he wants to turn his full attention to the very important task of feeding, he just fixes George to the controls and tucks in to his heart's content. For four hundred miles it is reckoned that George can fly a plane with such accuracy that he can beat his human rivals, in many cases. This is a step in the right direction if we are ever to indulge generally in long-distance flights, but what about the future wars of the world? Shall we read that George successfully reached his objective, four hundred miles away, dumped his load of "eggs" on an unsuspecting target and returned to his base? If so, some of us will be remarking "By George!" with a vengeance!

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ANOTHER CRICKET RECORD!

No need to introduce you to Sutcliffe, of Yorkshire—every boy, and every girl, too, for that matter, knows of the prowess of this hard-hitting batsman. Yet it is worth recalling in these notes that "Herbert" has "done it again." In other words, he has set up another world's record—and a formidable one at that. He did the trick in Yorkshire's recent match against Northamptonshire, when in his innings of eighty-nine he scored his two thousand runs for the eleventh consecutive season. At the moment that record stands supreme, so those people who will insist that cricket is on the decline in this country should take fresh heart. Meantime "Bravo, Sutcliffe!"

HEARD THIS ONE?

Magistrate: "The constable has just remarked that you are the terror of the village!"

Burglar: "Shucks, I ain't such a terror as 'e is! Lumme, you should see the people hop it down our street when he turns up!"

BRITAIN SUPREME!

Bravo, Kay Don! The world will take a long time to forget his thrilling dash through the waters of Loch Lomond at the colossal speed of 119.81 miles an hour. It means that another world record has come to Britain, for the American water-speed record held by Gar Wood has been beaten by something like nine miles an hour. At one stage of his perilous dash, Kay Don hit up a speed of 120 miles an hour, which shows that Lord Wakefield's £40,000 craft, Miss England III, is all that experts—who work these things out in theory—expected. Bravo again to Kay Don—and his plucky mechanic who accompanied him on that record-smashing drive through the waters of Loch Lomond. For those of you who "collect" records, you will now be able to say that Britain holds the air speed record of 407.5 miles an hour; the land speed record of 246.09 miles an hour; and now the water speed record of 119.81 miles an hour.

FIREMEN ON SKATES!

A reader writes in to say that he was in Germany during a very bitter spell of cold weather, and he was amazed to see the local firemen tearing down the streets, in answer to a call, on skates. Behind them they dragged their fire-engine appliances. Perhaps I should have said in the beginning that a coating of ice covered the road surface which made the use of the ordinary motor fire-engine impracticable. But the idea of skating to the scene of a fire is not only a novel

method, but a brainy one, too, in the circumstances. Thanks, G. N., of Taunton, for this little tit-bit of unusual news.

HIS GOOD TURN FOR THE DAY!

He was a Boy Scout and very keen to get his life-saving certificate, so he put all he knew into his swimming when the great day came for the big test. But he just failed. Yet a few hours after this "upset" he happened to see a young fellow fall from his boat into Lake St. Clair. In dived our keen swimmer and saved him! His name? Vern Kildy, of Detroit, aged fourteen, and who says he is not worthy of a life-saving certificate after that?

A QUEER STUNT!

The ordinary motor-car is not good enough for some people in America, so some brainy stunt merchant hit on the idea of attaching a large parachute to the bonnet of the car and being pulled along in that fashion. The wind filled out the parachute, and very soon the car was bowling along at a speed of thirty miles an hour. What next?

TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS IN THE AIR!

At the time of writing this paragraph, America holds the "endurance flying" record of the world, meaning that for twenty-three days a plane stayed up in the air, receiving fresh fuel from planes which hovered over it, provisions for the pilots, and other necessities, without once coming to earth. Now a famous British lady pilot—the Hon. Mrs. Victor Bruce—is determined to wick that record and hand the laurels to Britain. In a great three-engined flying boat she and her husband, taking four-hour spells at the controls, will fly backwards and forwards from London to Southsea for twenty-eight days. Whatever the weather it is claimed that this three-engined monster of the air can be controlled with safety, for all the very latest "blind flying" devices will be at hand to assist the pilots. The task of re-fuelling the plane while it is in motion has been carefully and thoroughly rehearsed, and providing there is no serious breakdown in the three engines, success seems fairly certain to attend the Hon. Mrs. Bruce's plucky efforts. "Gemites" will wish her luck, anyway!

OUR 10,000-GIFT PLAN RESULT.

Our recent huge coupon-collecting scheme, in which many thousands of Fine Gift Books were offered, proved a tremendous success, and as a result readers all over the country are now enjoying the topping books they have won.

We congratulate them on the many magnificent totals of points scored—prizes were awarded for totals ranging from 32,700, sent by H. Leggetter, of Luton, down to 3,000—and we only regret that it is not possible to give all their names in the paper. All prizes for Home readers were, however, sent off promptly, and also personal letters from the Editor to all unsuccessful entrants.

The remaining 500 of the Prize Books offered are, of course, being reserved for Overseas readers—for whom there is a later closing date—and these will be awarded and sent as soon as possible after that date.

YOUR EDITOR,

TOM MERRY & CO. ON THE SPREE!

(Continued from page 17.)

"The smoke?"
 "Ay, ay! The smoke turns a small fan, which works a lever in connection with a dynamo, which generates a current of electricity which works the refrigerator."

"Bai Jove, that is weally remarkable."
 "I shall show you a great many remarkable things on this ship."

"I think you will," murmured Jack Blake, "if we believe them."

"Did you speak, sir?"

"Oh, no! Go on."

"This is the main hatchway. It is so called because it is here the hens are set, on long voyages, to hatch the eggs."

"Bai Jove!"

"This is the upper deck. I suppose you know why it is called a deck?"

"Because it is one, I suppose," said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's because this is the part of the ship which is decked out for visitors on important occasions," said Mr. Green.

"Bai Jove!"

"Here is the bridge. This is where the captain stands at midnight and steers the course by the stars."

"Bai Jove!"

"And this is the charthouse on the bridge, as I dare say you know—"

"Can we look into it?"

"No; I am afraid you would disturb the dying patients—"

"The what?"

"It is used as a hospital while we are in harbour," explained Mr. Green. "Several of the crew who are dying from the effects of sea-sickness have been laid there to pass their last moments in peace and quietness."

"Bai Jove!"

"Can we go on the bridge?" asked Manners. "I should like to, as the captain isn't here."

"It is impossible."

"How is it impos, Mr. Gween?"

"A strong current of electricity is turned on at the ladder, which would have the effect of immediately electrocuting any person who trespassed on the bridge."

"Bai Jove!"

"Let's go below," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I say, Mr. Gween, that's feahfully dangewous, you know. Suppose we hadn't met you on board, and had gone on the bidge—"

"The result would have been instantly fatal."

"Howwible! I weally think it is weckless of Captain Bolsover to allow cuwwents of electwicity to wandah about the ship in that way."

"We have to take some precaution against land-lubbers getting where they've no business," said Mr. Green. "There have been young idiots on board this ship who would go anywhere if they weren't stopped."

"Have there weally?"

"Ay, ay!"

D'Arcy wondered what his companions were giggling at again.

Mr. Green, whose face was perfectly solemn, led the way below. The juniors looked with admiration into the immense saloon. It had been freshly painted, and, though not quite completed, it was a splendid sight.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I think we can be quite comfy here, deah boys."

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "I suppose this will be turned into a class-room. I'd like to see the sleeping-berths, too."

"The Head says we are to have different parts of the ship accordin' to our Houses," said D'Arcy. "I think I pwefer the blunt end of the ship, you know."

Mr. Green stared.

"The what?" he asked.

"The blunt end. The New House wottahs can have the sharp end."

"That's uttah rot," said Figgins. "The—"

"I wefuse to have any wemarks chawactewised as uttah wot, Figgins."

"They are rot, all the same. You know perfectly well that the aft end of the ship is always reserved for better-class passengers, and so it stands to reason that it must be for the New House."

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Gussy?"

"Clear as Euclid," said Kerr.

"Yes, rather," remarked Fatty. "The blunt end is for the New House, of course."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort," said D'Arcy. "As the Cock House of St. Jim's, we natuwally take the best—"

"As the what?"

"The Cock House at St. Jim's—"

"I wegard that question as wicidulous."

"Well, you're going the right way to find one," said Figgins. "We all know which House at St. Jim's is the Cock House."

"Yaas, wathah—ours. I weally considah, Figgins, that you are an uttah ass. If it were not that we are the guests of Mr. Gween, I should be inclined to administah a feahful thwashin' to you on the spot."

"Cheese it!" exclaimed Blake. "Now—"

"I wefuse to cheese it. I say—"

"Oh, shut up, all of you!" said Tom Merry. "You can't waste Mr. Green's time while you wrangle like this. Let's get on with the washing."

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Green.

"Yaas, you are quite wight, Tom Mewwy. We owe an apology to Mr. Gween for wastin' his valuable time in this weckless way," said D'Arcy. "Mr. Gween, I hope you will accept my sincere apology for any seemin' wudeness. I was exaspewated for the moment by that howlin' ass Figgins."

"Ay, ay!" said Mr. Green, grinning. "This way, young gentlemen."

"But I say, my friend, in which part of the beastlay ship is there most accommodation—the sharp end or the blunt end?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Aft, of course."

"Good! That settles it, bai Jove!"

"Settles what?" demanded Figgins.

"Why, there are more School House chaps than New House chaps, so we shall have the blunt end," said D'Arcy triumphantly.

"Rot!"

"That's right," said Lowther, with a nod. "There's no getting out of that, Figgins. You'll have the fore part for a dead cert."

Figgins grunted.

"Well, come to think of it, our place is in advance," he remarked. "The New House always leads."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

"I wegard that statement as bosh. I considah—"

"Oh, ring off, and come on! We're wasting time," said Digby.

"This was the library, gentlemen," said Mr. Green. "The books have been taken out now, along with the other fittings."

"And that room?"

"That's the lounge."

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, looking into the lounge-room of the steamer, a very extensive apartment, with a glass dome, "this would make a very comfy juniah common-woom!"

"Yes; we're likely to get it, too!" said Blake.

"I suppose it will be a class-woom. I suppose that's the dining-woom there, Mr. Gween?"

"Ay, ay!"

"A fine big room, too," said Tom Merry. "Pretty nearly as big as the dining-hall in the School House at St. Jim's."

"There is a second-class dining-room, too—"

"Ah, that will be for the New House, of course," Lowther remarked.

"Will it?" said Figgins.

"It's smaller than this," said Mr. Green.

"There you are!" exclaimed Blake, with a grin. "You take the smaller size in everything, you New House bouders, except when it comes to swelled heads!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"This is the smoking-room."

"They won't admit us here," grinned Lowther. "I suppose this will be the master's room, kids. I say, who's that shouting?"

"There was a sound of a rough voice calling on deck."

Mr. Green gave a slight start.

"I think that must be Mr. Thropp," he remarked. "We'd better go up. Come up this way; this is the grand staircase to the boat deck."

The staircase was a wide and large one, such as is only found on the best-appointed passenger steamers. In the well of it was a lift, which at once attracted D'Arcy's attention. He adjusted his eyeglass and peered through the grille.

"I say, that's a beastlay lift, isn't it?" he exclaimed.

"Ay!"

"Isn't it working?"
 "Not at present."
 "Bai Jove, that's a pity! I find it wathah exhaustin' walkin' upstairs, you know. I suppose it can't be set workin'?"

Tom Merry gave the swell of St. Jim's a shove from behind.

"Get on, Gussy!"
 "I ~~wanna~~ to get on——"

Mr. Green hurried away as the voice was heard again. The juniors followed more slowly.

There was a curious expression on Tom Merry's face. "I say, I think I know that voice," he remarked. "I've heard it before."

"Seems familiar," said Figgins.
 "Come on, and let's see!"

The juniors hurried on deck. The rough voice was louder now, and it was addressing Mr. Green in language more forcible than polite. The eyes of the St. Jim's juniors turned upon the speaker, and they knew him again at a glance. Mr. Thropp, the chief mate of the Condor, was the red-faced man who had been their fellow-passenger in the Southampton express!

CHAPTER 13.

A Ducking for Mr. Thropp!

MR. THROPP turned his eyes upon Tom Merry & Co. at the same moment, and the brick-red hue of his face became a trifle redder. He strode towards them.

"So you're here!"
 Tom Merry looked at him calmly. There was evidently going to be a row, but the hero of the Shell did not shrink from it. He was not afraid of Mr. Thropp, with all his bluster.

"What are you doing here, you young scoundrels?"
 Tom Merry flushed red.
 "You cannot expect an answer if you address us like that," he said.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard this wed-faced wottah as a perfect beast, you chaps. What he weally wants is a feahful thwashin'!"

Mr. Thropp turned purple.

"Do you know that I am chief mate of this steamer?" he bawled.

"Are you weally?"

"I am."

"I dare say you are," said Tom Merry. "That does not give you the right to act as a bully and a brute, however."

"Quite wight!"

"Do you know I could have you arrested for trespassing on this ship?"

"I know you could do nothing of the sort," retorted Tom Merry. "We came to look at the ship, as we have a perfect right to do, as we are to stay in her next week."

"Where do you come from?"

"From St. Jim's."

"Ah, you belong to the parcel of brats we are to take aboard, I suppose!"

Tom Merry snapped his teeth.

"We belong to St. Jim's. This vessel has been chartered by our headmaster for a summer cruise. If you don't mend your manners, Mr. Thropp, I think it's very likely that you won't stay long aboard the Condor!"

Mr. Thropp gasped for breath.

It was true that prudence should have made him willing to meet the boys from St. Jim's on good terms, but he was an ill-tempered man, and the incident in the train had ruffled him too deeply for him to have recovered yet.

"You—you cheeky young villain!"

"Hold your tongue!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"You—you tell me, the chief mate of this vessel, to hold my tongue!"

"I would tell you so if you were captain. No one has a right to address me like that! We are ready to go ashore. Stop your abuse, then, and shut up!"

"I'll—I'll have you thrown into the harbour!" spluttered the chief mate!

"Rot!"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

Mr. Thropp glared. Those expressive remarks were jerked at him, as it were, by the juniors, and they exasperated him beyond bounds. He was used to making people shrink from his savage voice, and he forgot that the juniors of St. Jim's were not deck-hands at his mercy.

He turned to several grinning seamen who were looking on. Their faces became grave at once as his savage glance swept round.

"Fling these young scoundrels into their boat!" he vociferated.

The men looked at one another. There were three or four of them, to ten of the sturdy juniors, so the task would not have been an easy one. But Tom Merry & Co. did not want trouble with the hands.

"We will go without that," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Come on, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Mr. Thwopp as a beast!"

"Come on, Gussy!"

The juniors walked calmly to the side.

Mr. Thropp glared round, and his glance settled upon Green, who was looking very annoyed and uncomfortable.

"What do you mean by allowing these boys aboard here, Green?" he bawled.

"I saw no harm in it, sir."

"No harm in it! No harm in having a rabble of brats nosing about the ship! Are you a confounded fool, Jack Green?"

"I hope not, sir."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned round. He put up his eyeglass, shook off Blake's hand from his arm, and fixed a withering look upon Mr. Thropp.

"Pway undahstand," he said, "that's——"

"Come on!" said Blake.

"I cannot come on till I have spoken to Mr. Thwopp. It is impos for me to allow his remark to pass. He has referred to us as a wabble of bwats."

"Get off this ship!"

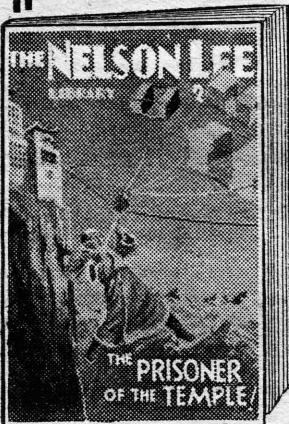
"I shall get off this ship with a gweat deal of pleasuah, Mr. Thwopp, if only to get out of the sound of your unpleasantly waucous voice," said Arthur Augustus. "But before I go, I wish you to distinctly undahstand——"

"We're all in, Gussy. Come on!"

"I wefuse to come on till I have spoken my mind to Mr. Thwopp. You will pway undahstand, Mr. Thwopp, that I uttably wefuse to be chawactewised as a wabble of bwats—I mean that my fwiends and I uttably wefuse to be chawactewised as a wabble of bwats!"

"Are you going?" roared Mr. Thropp, exasperated to a pitch of fury by the remarks of the swell of St. Jim's, and the irrepressible giggles of the ship's hands.

The Mystic EAST!

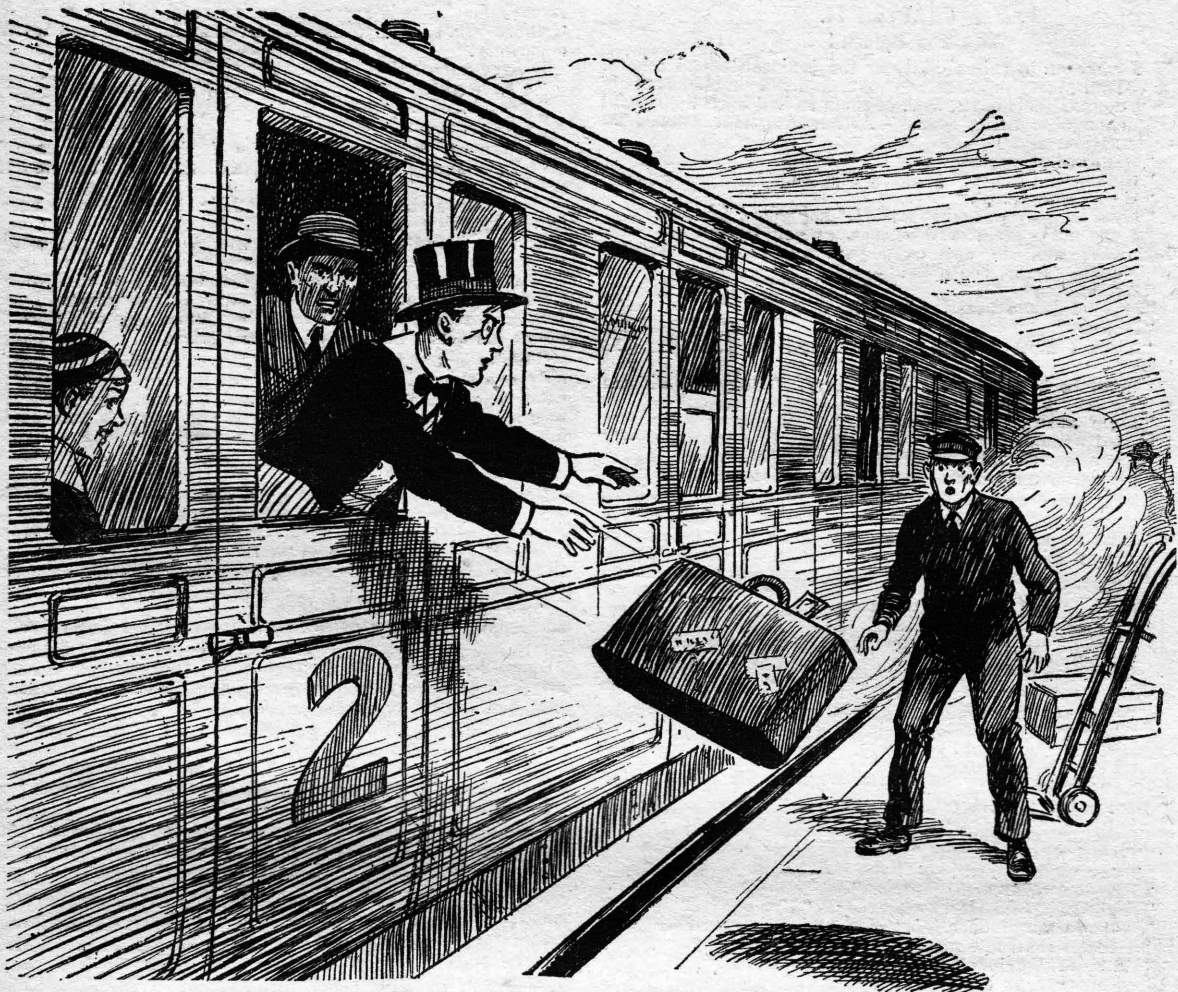


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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took a last look along the platform, and then hurriedly seized the bag and hurled it from the carriage window. It banged on the platform as the train steamed out of the station.

"Yaas, I am goin', but I shall finish my wemarks first. I wegard you as an extwemely unpleasant and ungentlemanly beast. What you want is a feahful thwashin'. When I come aboard the Condah for good I shall make it a point to teach you mannaahs in some way, or else I shall have to wequest the captain to discharge you. That is all."

And D'Arcy skipped into the boat just as Mr. Thropp, losing all patience, rushed at him to fling him there.

The chief mate shook his fist from the top of the ladder.

"Let me get at you!" he bawled.

D'Arcy looked at him frigidly.

"You are at perfect liberty to get as near as you like," he replied. "You can come down into the boat, but I warn you that if you do I shall thwash you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Green.

Thropp turned upon him savagely.

"What are you hee-hawing about, Green?"

"I wasn't aware that I was hee-hawing, sir."

"Well, shut up that row!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"I shall report you to the captain for this."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"As for you, you young rascal—"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a wascal. I wefuse—"

"Oh, shove off!" said Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to allow you to be impertinent to me, Mr. Thropp, and I shall certainly wequest the captain to discharge you!"

Mr. Thropp did not reply. His feelings were too deep for words. He ran down the wooden steps to get hold of the swell of St. Jim's. The boatman—perhaps intentionally—pushed off at the same instant, and instead of Mr. Thropp stepping into the boat, he stepped into a widening gap of water.

There was a splash, a gasping yell, and the red face went right under the surging waters. It came up the next moment, spluttering.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I wondah what that chap jumped into the watah for?"

"Help—ow—help—groooogh!"

"Where's that boathook?"

"Here it is!"

Tom Merry hooked the boathook into the red-faced man's collar, and jerked him towards the boat.

Mr. Thropp gave a gasp as he received a dig in the neck; but that, of course, could not be helped.

"Oh! Ow! Groooogh!"

"Have you got the wottah, Tom Mewwy?"

"I've got him!"

"I should be sowwy for him to be ddowned, though he is such a feahful pig. Don't dwag him into the boat; he will splash us and spoil our clothes."

"Get hold!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Don't let him come in heah, Tom Mewwy!"

But there was no help for it. Mr. Thropp was dragged, spluttering and gasping, and dripping with water, into the boat.

He sat up in a pool, gasped, and glared at the juniors. His cap was floating away, and he glared through a tangled mass of wet hair.

"You young scoundrels!"

"I wegard that as watah ungwateful, when he have saved your beastlay life," said Arthur Augustus. "Don't be a wotten cad, you know."

"You young—"

"Oh, shut up," said Tom Merry, "and get out of our boat! Bring her closer, my man."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the boatman.

The dripping mate clambered out of the boat. The boatman pushed off again, and pulled away. The dripping figure disappeared, and Mr. Green waved his hand cordially to the juniors, and they waved their caps back to him.

CHAPTER 14.
The Return!

IT came on to rain slightly as the juniors stepped ashore. Tom Merry paid the boatman, and the chums hurriedly donned their coats, such of them as had been thoughtful enough to bring coats. Arthur Augustus uttered an exclamation.

"Bai Jove, where's my coat?"

"Blessed if I know!" grunted Figgins.

"Where's my coat?"

"Look in your waistcoat pocket," suggested Lowther.

"I am not wearin' a waistcoat, as you knew vevy well, Lowthah; and, in any case, your suggestion is uttalyh wiculous. I say, boatman!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Have I left a beastlay coat in that boat?"

"No, sir."

"Then I must have left it on board the Condah, deah boys."

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "Come on without it!"

"I am sowwy, Tom Mewwy, but it is imposs for me to pwoceed without my coat. You see that it is wainin'—"

"Get under that shelter, then!" growled Manners.

"I must have my coat. It was a valuabul coat."

"Well, they won't steal it. It can stay there until we go on our cruise," said Tom Merry. "Come on, Gussy, and don't be an ass! We've only got half an hour before our train goes, and there's not time to pull to the Condor again and back. Besides, that pig Thropp wouldn't let us go aboard."

"I should insist upon goin' aboard."

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I weally wish you would not argue so much, Tom Mewwy. It is imposs for me to pwoceed without my coat."

"Oh, kill him, somebody!" said Kerr. "Let's get into the station."

"I wefuse—"

"Will you take my arm, Gussy?" asked Blake sweetly.

"Undah the circs, Blake, I must wefuse to take your arm. It is necessary to weturn to the steamah for my beastlay coat."

"Take my arm, Gussy."

"I decline to do so."

"Then I will take yours."

"Pway wefuse me!"

"Take his other arm, Herries."

"Right-ho!" said Herries heartily. "I've got it!"

"Wefuse me at once, Hewwies, or it is extwemely pwobable that I shall lose my tempah and stwike you."

"I'll risk it," grinned Herries. "Come along!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"Kick him, Tom Merry!"

"Certainly!"

"Hold on, Tom Mewwy! I wefuse to be kicked! Upon the whole I will come along."

"Then come, and shut up!" grunted Blake.

And the juniors made their way to the railway station. Under the shelter of the platform they heard the rain pattering without regarding it. Their visit to the Condor had been a success upon the whole, in spite of the unpleasant incident in connection with Mr. Thropp.

"We'll make that rotter sing small when we're aboard the Condor for good," Monty Lowther remarked. "We'll put him through it, and educate him."

"Yaas, wathah! I weward him as an absolute beast, you know. I weally hope that he will take care of my coat."

"I say, doesn't that seaside air make you feel jolly hungry?" Fatty Wynn remarked. "Do you fellows notice it?"

"We notice it about you."

"Well, I don't deny that I've got a healthy appetite," said Fatty Wynn.

"You wouldn't find many to believe you if you did," remarked Figgins. "I verily believe you could eat anything—"

"Except your fig pudding," said Wynn.

"Oh, leave my fig pudding alone," said Figgins crossly.

"Rather! I wouldn't touch 'em with a barge-pole," said Fatty cheerfully. "Don't I remember the last time you made a fig pudding?"

"Oh, cheese it," said Kerr; "you make me feel ill."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah—"

"What I was going to say is," went on Fatty Wynn, "that there's a jolly big refreshment place here, and that we have plenty of time for a really good feed."

"Trust Fatty to think of that!"

"Well, someone has to think of these things. It's rather important, too, considering that we have a long railway journey before us. What price another luncheon-basket for the train?"

"That's an important question, what price?" Tom Merry

remarked. "Funds are running low, and it looks to me as if there won't be anything left for that farewell feed in the dormitory."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry.

"I have given up the ideah of that, Tom Mewwy."

"Yes; but I haven't."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"However, we'd better have a feed before we start," said Tom Merry. "Come along, and let's see what we can get."

The pull on the salt water had helped to give a keenness to the appetites of the juniors. They were all hungry, and they soon found a feast to their liking. They did it ample justice—especially Fatty Wynn. The idea of the lunch-basket was not adopted, but several bundles of sandwiches were obtained, and Fatty Wynn stowed away several porkies in his pockets, and took a big paper bag of jam-tarts under his arm when he quitted the place.

"We've got a long way to go," he remarked. "There's only one thing I feel anxious about in connection with the Condor, and that is, that the Head may not have foreseen how hungry the sea air will make us and may not have made adequate arrangements about the provisions."

"Which would be tewwible."

"Here comes the train!"

The train was grunting along the platform. There was a rush of passengers, and the juniors of St. Jim's secured a carriage to themselves. They tumbled into it, and Fatty Wynn laid his bag of tarts on the seat, and then stood in the window to show everybody concerned that the carriage was full.

"No room," he said blandly to every applicant for admission; and, as a matter of fact, every seat was taken.

"Bai Jove, I am feelin' wathah exhausted," Arthur Augustus remarked, as he sank down heavily upon a seat.

"It will be dark before we get to St. Jim's, I'm afraid. I shall not be sowwy to get to bed."

"You will be sorry to get something else that's waiting for us," grinned Blake.

"I weally hope Mr. Wailton will not attach any undue importance to our havin' been absent fwom callin'-ovah."

"I rather think he will."

"Well, if he is angwy, I suppose it's no good weasonin' with him. We shall have to gwim and bear it."

"Hallo, we're off!"

"Yaas, wathah! The twain's startin'."

"Got the carriage to ourselves," said Fatty Wynn, turning from the window, with a grin of satisfaction upon his plump face. "We're entitled to it, as we fill all the seats. Where are my tarts?"

"Haven't you seen them?" said Figgins.

"I say, where are they?"

"Perhaps you've eaten them, in a moment of absent-mindedness," suggested Lowther. "How many were there?"

"Seven in a bag."

"You might have swallowed them, bag and all, without thinking."

"Oh, don't be an ass. Have you put them anywhere?" asked Fatty Wynn, looking anxiously about the carriage.

"No, honour bright! Where did you put them?"

"I put them on the seat. My hat! Oh, that young villain D'Arcy's sitting on them."

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

"Eh, what?"

"Get up!" roared Fatty Wynn. "You're sitting on my tarts!"

Arthur Augustus jumped up as if the bag of tarts had suddenly changed into a bag of red-hot irons.

There was a yell of laughter in the carriage.

The beautifully creased trousers of the swell of the School House were plastered with jam and crust. The paper bag had burst open as D'Arcy plumped his weight upon it, and the School House swell had sat fairly in the tarts.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn was the only one who did not laugh. He was furious.

"Look at my tarts!" he roared. "My jam-tarts! He's sat in them! My jam-tarts!"

"You howwid wottah!" gasped D'Arcy, squirming round so as to get a look at himself behind. "You beastlay, howwible wastah; you've jammed my twousahs all ovah."

"Blow your trousers! My tarts!"

"Blow your tarts! My twousahs—"

"They're spoiled."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "They're both spoiled."

"The clumsy ass!"

"The howwid, gorgin' wottah!"

The tarts were soft and pulpy. D'Arcy's trousers were in a terrible mess with the jam. He tried to scrape it off, the



"Get up!" roared Fatty Wynn. "You're sitting on my tarts!" Gussy jumped up as if the bag of tarts had suddenly changed into a bag of red-hot irons, and there was a yell of laughter in the carriage. The beautiful trousers of the swell of St. Jim's were plastered with jam and crust!

other juniors being too doubled up with laughter to offer him any assistance.

"Lend me a hand, Tom Mewwy. I weally think you might do somethin' and not sit there cacklin', Blake. You wottahs!"

The swell of St. Jim's turned to Fatty Wynn, his eyes gleaming.

"You fat wottah!"

"You clumsy ass; why don't you look where you're sitting!"

"You shwiekin' idiot! Why couldn't you put your filthy tarts on the beastlay wack, instead of on the seat?"

"You ass!"

"You duffah!"

"Here, stop them!" gasped Figgins, as the equally exasperated juniors flew at one another. "Stop them! Hold on!"

Tom Merry dragged Fatty Wynn back. Figgins gave D'Arcy a shove on the chest, which made him stagger back and sit down suddenly. He sat down upon the knees of Jack Blake, who gave a roar.

"Get off; you sticky duffer!"

D'Arcy scrambled off his knees. Jack Blake gazed at the jammy stickiness adhering to the knees of his trousers, and rose to his feet wrathfully.

"I am awfully sowwy, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "It was the fault of that beast Figgins. He shoved me ovah in an extremely wude mannah."

"You dangerous lunatic!"

"I wefuse to be called a dangewous lunatic."

"Sit down," said Blake, and he gave D'Arcy a twist that sat him upon the knees of the giggling Figgins. "There's some for you, Figgy."

Figgins ceased giggling suddenly.

"Ow! Get off! You're making me jammy!"

"I weally cannot say I am sowwy, Figgins," said D'Arcy, in no hurry to move. "You see, undah the circs—"

"Get off!"

Figgins pushed the swell of the School House off. The jam was getting wiped off by this time, and Figgins had not suffered so much as Blake; but he was pretty sticky.

"You utter image," he said. "How am I to get this off?"

"It's all the fault of Fatty Wynn. Why did he want to cawwy pwovisions wound with him enough for a siege, when he had eaten enough for a dozen navvies in the wewfeshment-woom?"

"Rot!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "We didn't have time for a really good feed. You fellows all saw what I had—a beef-steak pie, a few pork pies, a cold rabbit pie, and some odds and ends, and an apple-pudding and a bunch of bananas. There wasn't anything else, except the custard and prunes, and the chocolates, and the biscuits; had with the coffee."

"No wonder you wanted a bag of tarts in the train," said Tom Merry sympathetically. "Feeling peckish, I suppose?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I do feel a slightly empty feeling," said Fatty Wynn. "I think I had better have a sandwich."

And Fatty Wynn had a sandwich, which was followed by half a dozen more, while D'Arcy, Figgins, and Blake scraped off the jam. The scraping kept them pretty busily occupied for a time; but it did not all come off.

Arthur Augustus looked daggers at Fatty Wynn every now and then. In the journey down his waistcoat had been spoiled. In the up journey his trousers had been ruined. No wonder he looked at Fatty Wynn as if he could eat him.

Fatty Wynn looked at the sandwiches and pork pies as if he could eat them—and he did.

"Wayland!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly.

The train roared to a standstill. The juniors of St. Jim's poured out of the carriage. The rain had ceased, and it was getting dark.

The train swept on again towards distant London, and the juniors crossed the platform whence the local started to Rylcombe.

Arthur Augustus gave a sudden start.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I've left my beastlay cane in the cawwiage."

"Silly ass!"

"I wefuse to be called a silly ass! I have left my—"

"Too late now!"

"Wot! The twain must be stopped. That cane was a present from my governah, and it would be disrespectful to him to lose it. I say, you portah fellow—stop that twain!"

"Hey?" said the porter.

"Stop that twain—that beastlay express for London! Put up a signal or somethin'. I've left my cane in the cawwiage!"

The porter stared at him blankly.

"Do you hear?" roared D'Arcy. "Telegraph affah the beastlay thing, or something, and make the wotten twain come back. Don't you understand? I've left my cane in the cawwiage!"

The porter tapped his forehead significantly, and turned away.

D'Arcy gazed after him in astonishment.

"The fellah's uttably stupid!" he exclaimed. "He doesn't seem to undahstand!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is wathah unfeelin' of you to laugh, Tom Mewwy, and you, too, Blake, at such a sewious moment as this."

"Oh, come along, Gussy! I know you'll be the death of me some day!" gasped Tom Merry. "Come along. We'll leave information at the station about the cane, and it will be looked after for you!"

"Bai Jove, you know I never thought of that!"

The juniors had ample time to catch the local. They were somewhat fatigued, and during the short run from Wayland to Rylcombe some of them dozed.

"Rylcombe!"

Tom Merry started up.

"Here we are, kids! Look alive!"

"Wight you are, Tom Mewwy. Pway look wound, all of you, and see that I don't leave anythin' behind this time."

They bundled out of the train. D'Arcy was bareheaded, as he had put his hat on the rack while he leaned his head against Tom Merry's shoulder and dozed. In the excitement of the moment he did not notice it, however, and the train buzzed out of the station before someone called his attention to it.

"Where's your hat, Gussy?"

The swell of St. Jim's uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Bai Jove!"

"Where is it?"

"I've left it in the beastlay twain, on the wack."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard it as wathah unfeelin'—"

"Take hold of him, somebody, or he'll leave part of himself strewed about the station next," said Blake. "I suppose you haven't left your boots or socks lying about anywhere, have you, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Lucky it's left off raining. We shall have to hoof it to the school."

"I don't see how I am goin' without a hat."

"Borrow a cap of one of the porters."

"Weally, Lowther—"

"Well, I'm off!" said Tom Merry, and he led the way out of the station. "You can leave word about your hat, Gussy."

"I suppose there's nothin' else to be done."

"And be quick. We've missed calling-over, but we shall be in before bed-time, if we buck up."

The juniors did buck up. They made a quick walk down the lane to St. Jim's, and rang up Taggles with mighty peals on the bell.

The school porter came grunting sulkily to let them in. "Which Mr. Railton is waitin' for you," was his only remark, "and likewise Mr. Ratcliff."

"After the feast the reckoning," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Good-bye, Figgins!"

"So long!"

The New House juniors went towards their own House. Tom Merry & Co. walked meekly into the School House, and encountered Mr. Railton in the hall. The Housemaster looked at them grimly.

"You were absent at calling-over?" he said.

"We are sorry, sir—"

"Extwemely sowwy; but undah the circs—"

"Where have you been?"

"We thought that, as we are to cruise on board the Condor, sir, we ought to go and have a look at her," explained Tom Merry.

"You have been to Southampton?" ejaculated the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I am glad to see that you are not afraid to tell the truth as to your escapade," said Mr. Railton. "I cannot overlook this, all the same. You will all of you come into my study to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir."

"Weally, Mr. Waitlon—"

"You may go."

"But weally—"

They dragged D'Arcy away.

The Junior Forms were just going to bed, and the returned prodigals joined them.

"Well, after all, we've had a jolly good time," said Tom Merry. "We can face the music. It was a ripping little run!"

(Next week Tom Merry & Co. embark on their cruise! "ALL ABOARD THE CONDOR!" is a word of a yarn!)

THE END.

A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE!



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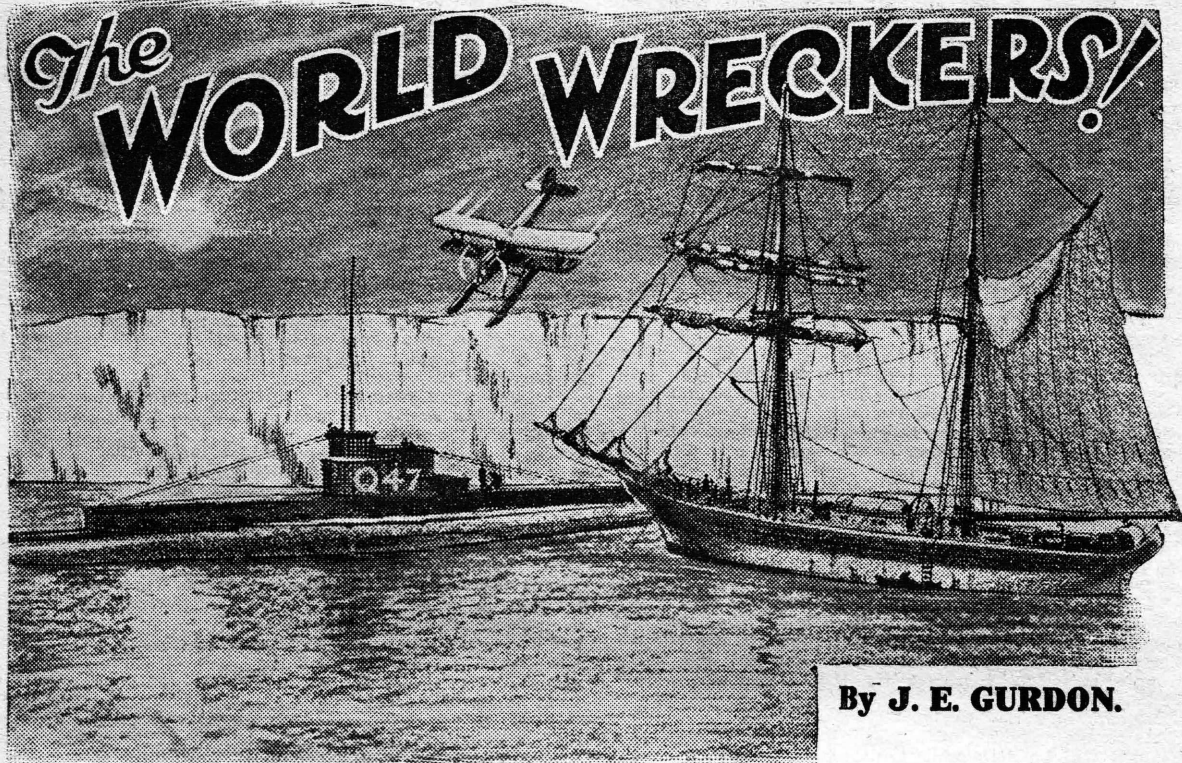
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CHAPTER 1.
Awaiting Orders.

THEY could wreck the whole world; smash civilisation; wipe out humanity!" exclaimed Captain Bruce, banging a huge fist on the chart-room table.

"They could," agreed his companion slowly. "And they will, too, unless we're commissioned to hunt them down." He shrugged and gazed thoughtfully at his wrist-watch. "Well," he went on, "in exactly twenty-one and a half minutes from now we shall know whether the Government has knuckled under, or whether we're going to fight. It is strange to think that at this very moment a group of elderly gentlemen in Whitehall are debating—"

A snort interrupted him. Captain Bruce heaved his mighty frame out of his chair.

"Come on the bridge!" he growled. "And stop talking about politicians!"

Commander Sherwell smiled as he followed the captain. In all circumstances he himself was precise, unruffled, and scientific, as befitted the skipper of a modern submarine. He, therefore, found his senior's irascibility both puzzling and amusing.

But then, he told himself, the Old Man had been trained in sail, and having to play conjuring tricks with acres of canvas and miles of ropes, was enough to make a ruin of any man's temper.

Out on the bridge of his brigantine Captain Bruce inhaled deep breaths of the keen air, and glanced proudly aloft at his tall masts and trim spars. Although she was only one hundred and twenty tons net register, he would not have exchanged the command of the Pursuit for that of the largest battleship or liner afloat.

"This," he grunted, "is a ship"—he nodded contemptuously towards a grey, steel shape, wallowing low in the water alongside—"that is a mechanically propelled monstrosity."

Commander Sherwell contemplated his submarine Q 47 with an affectionate eye.

"That," he murmured, "is mistress of wind, tide, and currents. This is servant of all three."

Like his own craft the commander was long and lean. His hatchet face now wore an amiable smile as he watched the effect of this thrust upon his burly friend.

But the captain could not trust himself to speak. He sighed and turned away to watch the sea, face red and eyes smouldering.

In any other mood even his travel-hardened senses would have been stirred by the magnificence of the scene.

Black along the gleaming curves of their troughs, ivory white where foam ridged their crests, the long Antarctic rollers advanced unendingly, to be shattered, one by one, against the cliffs of the Great Ice Barrier, some five hundred yards away to windward.

As far as eye could see that shimmering wall stretched to east and west, like a belt of marble set with opal, turquoise, and jade. All its length was pitted with caverns and grottoes that glowed with colours. Where the sea spray had frozen against its face there hung strange carvings. The sky above the ice was blue, as pale as a hedge-sparrow's egg.

"Another eight and a quarter minutes to go," observed Commander Sherwell, examining his wrist-watch. "Our elderly gentlemen in Whitehall must be getting nervous."

Captain Bruce, however, was not to be drawn. His gaze was fixed upon two figures pacing the deck below. Of these one was a man in the early thirties, sturdily built and square-jawed, the other a lad of eighteen, whose long limbs and easy movements suggested speed and poise. From the facial resemblance it was easy to see at a glance that the two were brothers.

The commander noted his friend's preoccupation, and nodded approvingly.

"Decent chaps, the Tempests," he remarked. "I knew Jim in '17 when he was commanding a flight in the Royal Naval Air Service. One of the best pilots we had. And young Rex promises to be as good as his brother, judging from the way he was handling that flivver of theirs this morning."

He jerked his head to the leeward, where a little amphibian biplane bucked and bobbed strenuously at her moorings.

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Her narrow wings and slender, rounded fuselage glowed in the thin Polar sunshine as though beaten from old silver. Protruding fore and aft beneath each plane on either side, flat against the lower surface, and close above the floats, were two plank-like objects curved upwards at their forward ends.

These were the skis, which could be dropped at will below the level of the floats by a crank operated from the pilot's cockpit. When lowered they, therefore, acted as a chassis for alighting on snow or ice.

Above the cowling there hovered a faint, blue haze, for the engine was still hot from the test flight that Rex had carried out.

"I rather think," said the captain slowly, "that more will depend upon these youngsters and their toy than upon either my ship or your animated sardine tin."

"Quite possibly. However, we'll know the verdict of the elderly gentlemen in Whitehall in precisely two minutes. No, I am wrong, for here comes Sparks with the fateful message."

The wireless operator approached and saluted. Captain Bruce almost snatched the slip of paper from his hand, read it without comment, and passed it to his companion.

He turned to the wireless operator.

"Tell the first officer," he ordered, "that the entire ship's company, with the exception of the watch, will assemble in the ward-room in ten minutes' time."

"And," put in Commander Sherwell, "see that the same orders are sent to Q 47, Mr. Cartwright to be in charge of the boats."

Alone once more the two officers eyed one another gravely. The commander drummed his finger-nails against the wireless message.

"This gives us all the authority we want," he said, "and now the future is up to us. With one brigantine, one submarine, and one aeroplane, we've got to destroy an enemy whose whereabouts can only be surmised, and whose strength is purely a matter for the imagination. Quite simple, isn't it?"

The captain smiled wryly.

"As simple as falling off a spar," he agreed. "No doubt the men will be delighted. Come on. Time to go below and break the glad news to 'em."

CHAPTER 2.

The Fight Starts.

IT was a silent gathering that awaited the captain and commander when they entered the ward-room. For several days the crews of the Pursuit and Q 47 had guessed that something unusual was about to happen. Now they knew that the moment of revelation was at hand. Captain Bruce's keen eyes swept the ranks that faced him.

"Where's Sweetley?" he snapped, after a pause. "This isn't his watch."

The bo'sun hurried out, to return a minute later, followed by Sweetley, the cook, whose round and jovial face wore an expression of apologetic distress.

"Ah wuz dryin' scal's meat, sir," he explained, "an' Ah didn't git t' order."

To this the captain grunted acknowledgment, then, without preamble, began the address to which he had given many hours of anxious thought.

"The purposes for which we are supposed to have come to the Antarctic are as follows: One—Pursuit is to explore the fringe of the Great Ice Barrier, and make observations of value to the whaling industry: Two—Q 47 is to engage in a hydrographical survey for the Admiralty: Three—Captain and Mr. Tempest, acting on behalf of the Royal Geographical Society, are to secure aerial photographs of the Antarctic Continent.

"Such were our objects as openly stated on leaving England, and a great deal of care was taken to make those objects as widely known as possible. The real reason for which the expedition was organised has, however, been known only to Commander Sherwell and myself."

"We were ordered to proceed to this rendezvous and await wireless instructions that the Cabinet would issue at a certain hour on this particular date. Those instructions might have been merely to carry on with the ostensible work of the expedition. They might have been, but, fortunately, they were not. On the contrary, we are now ordered to engage in a totally different enterprise, and one of the utmost importance.

"Before proceeding to explain this enterprise, I must inform you that every man present was picked with the utmost care, both for his proficiency and his loyalty. Every

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man will, therefore, see to it that the confidence reposed in him is justified.

"Briefly we are here to find and destroy an enemy who threatens the existence, not only to the British Empire, but of the whole human race.

"To understand what is at stake, I must remind you of three extraordinary freaks of weather that have occurred within the last few years—namely, the devastating floods that caused an incalculable loss of life and property in the plains of the Indus and the Ganges; the great drought of Canada, which ruined the entire wheat crop, and resulted in one of the worst famines ever known; and the astonishingly severe winters that have twice visited New Zealand, causing a set-back in progress that will affect two, or even three generations.

"Naturally the whole world has believed these disasters to be due to natural causes. They were not. They were brought about through human agency, and by artificial means. A group of men have discovered some method of controlling the earth's weather, and they are using that knowledge in an attempt to force the British Government to pay a fabulous sum as security against further catastrophes.

"In effect this gang say: 'Unless you agree to our terms and pay this money, we will destroy the British Empire piecemeal.'

"Now, of course, the Government realise that if they pay once, there'll be no guarantee that they won't have to go on paying for ever—which really means placing the whole of humanity in the power of an unknown crew of unscrupulous criminals. And obviously the only alternative to surrender is to discover the scientific secret, and round up all those who possess it. So we've got to fight! And, what's more, we've thundering well got to win!

"Now, what information have we got to help us in this campaign? Precious little! What we do know is this:

"A—That the enemy's headquarters lie somewhere near the South Magnetic Pole. That has been proved by the application of directional wireless to the messages received from them. Unfortunately the magnetic unrest of these latitudes makes it impossible to obtain any precise information by this method.

"B—That the headquarters lie on the shores of a large open sea, situated many hundred of miles south of the Great Ice Barrier. This information was given in a wireless message, picked up one night in New Zealand, and apparently sent by one of the enemy's gang. It seems that this fellow had quarrelled with his leaders, and wanted to blow the gaff. The message, however, ceased abruptly before he could give any details. It is thought, of course, that at that point he must have been caught.

"Well, now you know the job we've got to tackle. And this is how we're going to do it.

"Because we appear to be a harmless scientific expedition, there's a good chance that the enemy won't suspect that we're after them.

"Q 47 is, therefore, going to dive underneath the barrier, nose her way along in a general direction, pop up again when she comes to open water, and blow the blighters sky high.

"The Pursuit will search for, and find a channel through the ice that is believed to exist, and of whose whereabouts we already have some idea. The aeroplane will, of course, assist in this operation.

"Having found the channel the Pursuit will proceed to join Q 47. She will also act as base supply ship.

"That is all. If any man has any reasonable question to ask, I shall do my best to answer him."

In the silence that followed a peculiar noise made itself heard, and men glanced inquiringly at one another.

Jim and Rex Tempest, however, instantly recognised the sound. It was the distant note of a powerful aero engine.

The captain and Commander Sherwell also were not at a loss.

"I rather think," murmured the commander, "that the game is already on."

CHAPTER 3.

Lured to Capture.

IMMEDIATELY the ship became the scene of swift, well disciplined activity.

Within three minutes the last of the Q 47's boats had pushed off from the Pursuit. Within five minutes the submarine's huge steel hull was submerged.

If it were possible, Commander Sherwell wished to keep his presence a secret from the enemy, and the fact that the hostile plane had not yet appeared over the rim of the Great Barrier, gave him at least a chance of evading detection.

Jim and Rex were equally prompt and busy.

Their commands Captain Bruce had given them in a few words:

"Find out as much as you can!" he ordered. "But remember that all information is useless unless you get back with it."

Eagerly now Jim sat at the controls, his eyes fixed on the thermometer, waiting for the engine to be hot enough to take off.

In the back seat of the monoplane Rex tested his Scarfo mounting, swinging the Lewis gun from side to side, and up and down.

Slung underneath the wings, on either side of the fuselage, were a dozen objects like elongated pears with vanes attached to their stems. These were twenty-pound bombs, designed primarily for blowing channels through the ice whenever the Pursuit or Q 47 should become ice-bound.

Two more minutes sufficed to warm up the fourteen cylinder radial. Then, with vibrant thunder from her exhausts, and a hiss of foam about the floats, the amphibian tore across the water, and roared skyward like a rocket, tail down, wings flashing.

Once above the level of the ice cliff the two airmen saw their quarry, and understood why he had been so long approaching.

Less than two miles away a large biplane was circling between the ice and the sea. So low was the machine that the pilot could not possibly have sighted the masts of the brigantine, lying as she did in a narrow, ice-blocked bay.

For several minutes Jim and Rex watched while the biplane systematically curved every indentation of the ice fringe, now shooting a mile or more out to sea, now circling on vertical bank over one spot, but gradually working nearer and nearer to the Pursuit.

Jim chuckled dryly, opened full throttle, and climbed towards the sun.

At a height of five thousand feet he began a level patrol from east to west, manoeuvring all the time so as to remain between the sun and the biplane.

There he was quite content to remain, knowing that he had the advantage of height, and the stranger pilot would find it almost impossible to spot him.

Rex banged Jim on the shoulder and bellowed down the speaking-tube.

"Hi!" he yelled. "Jim, listen! Isn't that fellow looking for the submarine?"

"Yes," said Jim. "And since he's deliberately looking for it, he's bound to spot her. Q 47 would have been safe from a casual spy round, but she can't escape a careful scrutiny. The point is: Who could have given the blighters the tip to hunt for a submarine?"

"And what will that chap do to the Pursuit?" asked Rex apprehensively. "If he's got any bombs, he can blow her out of the water."

"Don't worry," came the calm voice of the old fighter at the controls. "That chap won't queer his own pitch. It's Q 47 that he's after, and he knows well enough that Pursuit is the submarine's base ship. As long as she's aloft she's easy to see, and he's only got to hang around her long enough in order to catch the sub on the surface. That's when he'll start letting off fireworks. And so shall we. He probably doesn't know anything about us yet, and he certainly won't see us on this trip, if I can help it. Hallo! What's that smoke coming off the Pursuit's deck?"

Tensely the two stared at the thick, black, greasy smoke that was rising in leisurely fashion from the brigantine, and slowly dispersing at a height of three hundred feet or more. The column was not continuous, but consisted of puffs following one another at irregular intervals.

"It's Sweetley!" yelled Jim suddenly, thumping the side of the fuselage with his gauntleted fist. "It's that fat sausage of a cook back at his old game of curing seal's meat! As things have turned out he hasn't done any harm, 'cause the biplane would, in any case, have spotted 'em within a few seconds. Still it was dashed careless of him! Great Scott! What's up now?"

The exclamation was wrung from him by the new and inexplicable behaviour of the biplane.

Instead of pursuing her placid circles the big machine was now standing on her tail, and tearing towards the sun like a howitzer shell.

"Golly, Sweetley's scared him!" began Rex, standing up in his cockpit the better to watch the biplane.

Then something like a steamhammer pushed him back into his seat, and a roar like a barrage of heavy shells almost stunned him.

Jim was calling upon every pound of engine power to beat the biplane in the race for height.

There was no longer any question of concealment. Obviously the biplane pilot had seen them, and was determined to make a bid for the lead. As to what he would do should he gain it—

Both Jim and Rex asked themselves that question, and they looked to their guns to see that they were loaded.

Of course, Jim told himself, he already held the advantage, and there could only be one end of the fight if he himself were to turn attacker.

But then he had no right to attack, since so far the stranger had given no actual evidence of hostility.

With a grunt Jim decided to climb and wait.

From ten thousand the needle crept to fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, twenty-nine, and there stuck quivering without advance.

The monoplane had reached her ceiling.

Looking down Jim saw that his pursuer had climbed to within a thousand feet of him, but obviously could stagger no higher. The biplane had also attained her limit, and was now hanging on her propeller like a trout nosing the under surface of a stream.

The goggles of both pilot and observer flashed in the sun as they gazed upwards. Jim waved a friendly greeting which was returned.

That the biplane was fully gunned he could see at a glance, but neither of the occupants was showing the slightest interest in his weapons.

"Rum!" mused Jim. "Perhaps we've got the wrong line on these chaps! They may be anxious to chum up for some reason or other."

Rex was equally puzzled. Also he was most anxious for the situation to be cleared up, one way or the other, so that they could either enjoy an invigorating scrap, or else go home and consume a cup of hot chocolate.

Shivering and growling Rex glowered around at the sun, the sky, the endless vistas of berg-strewn sea, the flat, white eternity of the Antarctic, and, finally, at the biplane that kept them up aloft like a cat in a tree with a dog underneath.

Then the growl died away in his throat.

For suddenly a multitude of thin, red streamers flickered back from beneath the biplane's engine cowling. A greyish, yellow vapour followed the flames, and mingled with them to form a tattered mantle that swelled until all except wing-tips and tail-planes was hidden.

Slowly the rudder rose, and the blazing wreckage, dipping like the bows of a sinking ship, began its long plunge earthwards.

Instinctively Jim followed, but he knew he could not render the slightest assistance. He realised to the full the horror and hopelessness of the strange airman's plight, and, second by second, expected to see two black objects fall and two parachutes open.

Once when he looked back his eyes met Rex's.

The brothers did not exchange a word, but turned their gaze once more upon the tragic fight that was being fought out between sky and earth.

For a fight it was!

Clearly enough now Jim and Rex realised that the biplane carried no parachutes. Had they been so equipped her occupants would have long since jumped.

But just as clearly they were not going to give in without a struggle.

Rex gave a whoop of encouragement as he saw, through a momentary rift in the smoke, a figure clamber out of the rear cockpit, and perilously swing itself on to the star-board bottom plane.

It was the biplane's observer getting at the blazing engine with his fire-fighting apparatus.

Although the dive had been steep at first, it had now flattened out to a gentle glide, heading south, with the port wing dipped to side-slip inwards.

Seeing this, Jim, who had been holding his breath, hissed with relief. He saw that the pilot had not been overcome by the flames and fumes, that he had his machine under control, and knew what to do.

By side-slipping he was blowing the fire away to one flank, and, if only the wings held together long enough, there still remained a chance of escape.

During what seemed a century of time, blazing biplane and watchful monoplane sank together.

So absorbed had they been in the drama of their companions that neither Jim nor Rex was aware of their loneliness, until the boy chanced to glance earthwards and saw a flat snowfield less than two thousand feet below.

"Hi, Jim!" he yelled, banging his brother's shoulders. "We're nearly down! Those chaps will get away with it, after all!"

Jim nodded, searched around, and selected a possible landing site. He noted the direction of the wind from a snowdrift, mentally prepared every turn of his approach, and then turned his attention again to the biplane.

The big machine was now side-slipping almost vertically, trailing behind a long smear of oily vapour.

"Quite right," reflected Jim. "The fellow's having one

last shot at blowing out the fire before he tackles his landing. Don't think he'll do it, though."

But he did. Suddenly the flames began guttering like a candle in the wind, then vanished as abruptly as they had appeared. "Stout fella!" howled Jim and Rex together, as the biplane swung back to an even keel and S turned to land. Swiftly then, however, relief changed to consternation.

Confused, no doubt, by his recent ordeal, the biplane pilot attempted to land cross-wind. Instantly the skis were torn from the chassis; a wing-tip dug itself into the snow, and the machine somersaulted, to come to rest suddenly on its back.

The amphibian's engine faded into silence as Jim throttled down. Quickly he cranked his landing gear into position, gently he eased back the stick as the snow streamed dizzily past.

A faint grunt from the shock-absorber, a few yards run, then the two were out of the machine, and racing towards the wreckage.

Nothing stirred as they approached. Both men must be badly hurt—even killed, perhaps.

It was, therefore, with considerable astonishment that Jim and Rex, on peering beneath the overturned wings, found themselves staring down the muzzle of a machine-gun, and heard a grating voice rasp out:

"Stick 'em up—both of you!"

**CHAPTER 4.
The Wreckers Strike.**

THERE was a quality in the voice that promised death as the immediate penalty of hesitation, and because neither Jim nor Rex believed in suicide, they obeyed promptly.

"Sorry to inconvenience you," observed a second voice amiably. "The formality is, however, unavoidable in the circumstances."

From behind the engine a tall, lanky figure appeared. The newcomer ran deft hands over the pockets of their flying suits.

"It's all right, Joe!" he called then to the man with the machine-gun. "They haven't even got a catapult between them!"

With a grin he nodded to the two seething captives.

"You can put 'em down now," he allowed. "But don't forget that the gun here in my fist has got a hair trigger, and I'm such a nervous sort of cuss that it's liable to go off if anyone makes a sudden movement."

Although he spoke quietly and chattily the tall man's pale blue eyes were cold and merciless, and his mouth, when shut, was a thin, hard line. His companion, who left the machine-gun to join him, was of a very different type—short, squat, swarthy, black-eyed, and coarse of speech.

"And how?" asked Jim, measuring his enemies from head to foot—"how do we amuse ourselves next?"

"A very reasonable question," laughed the tall man. "I'm glad you don't pretend indignation or surprise, or try to bluff. We both of us know quite a lot about the other, so why not be frank? I must confess, however, that although I really expected to find the Pursuit and Q 47 sneaking about somewhere near the barrier, I never even dreamt of you sitting up in the sun like a little cherub. In fact, I'd never suspected your existence. This meeting is, therefore, all the greater pleasure."

"How did you spot us, then, if you weren't looking?" asked Rex, who had been puzzling over this ever since the climbing race had started.

A crooked smile twisted the tall man's lips. "I received information," he replied briefly. "Then followed the bit of high-flying, the spool fire of flares and smoke screen to tempt you away into the wilderness, the deliberate cross wind landing, and here we are."

"As to how we amuse ourselves next—well, you can do what you like. Personally I should recommend starting off at once to walk the forty odd miles back to your ship. I'm no cold-blooded killer, so I'm going to leave you rations for five days, a pair of skis each, a rifle, and some ammunition."

"Joe and I are going to amuse ourselves by borrowing your quite serviceable plane to fly home in. Most probably we shall use same to-morrow, or the next day, to visit Q 47, and sink that objectionable tin can with a little high explosive. The brigantine we shall not harm, since she will be more useful to us as an unofficial ambassador to the British Government."

While speaking he had been rummaging in the damaged biplane, and laying out in the snow the equipment that he had promised.

"There you are," he concluded. "All present and correct. Fair exchange is no robbery, and, anyway, I'm glad to quit this lumbering old pelican of a kite. Well, so-long! Cheerio!"

Five minutes later Jim and Rex, speechless with mortification, watched their own machine circle gracefully overhead before speeding away, to vanish in the Southern mists.

"That," shrugged Jim philosophically, as the engine note died away, "is jolly well that! Serves us right for being such a couple of chumps!" He turned a cold, disapproving glance upon the biplane's wreckage. "And fair exchange," he ended grimly, "is no robbery. Hallo, youngster! What's the matter? Have you got frostbite, or are you practising for a little exhibition step-dancing?"

Rex ceased his capers of jubilation, and pointed to an object that was strapped against the under surface of the fuselage between the landing chassis struts.

(What is it that Rex has spotted? Don't miss next week's gripping instalment of "The World Wreckers!")

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