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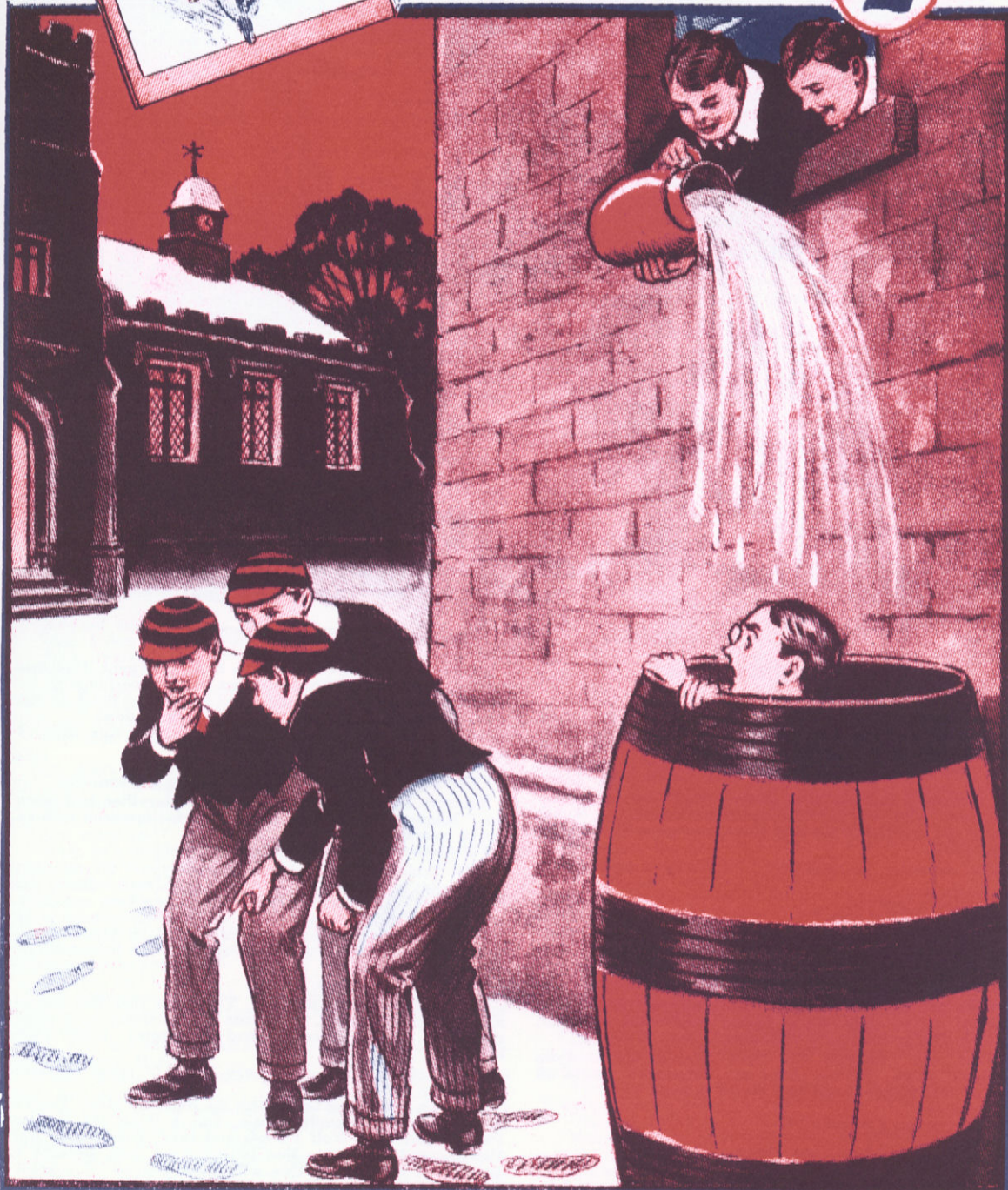
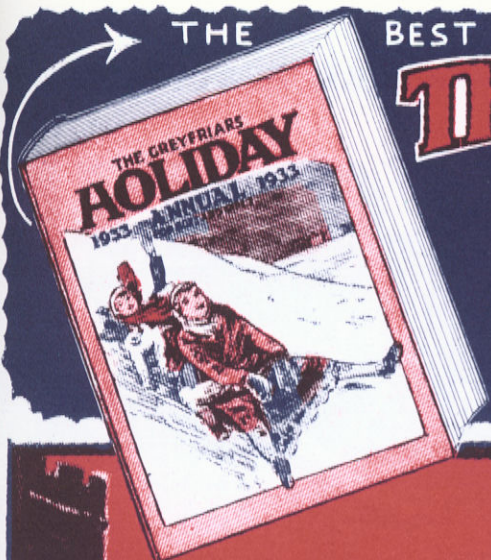
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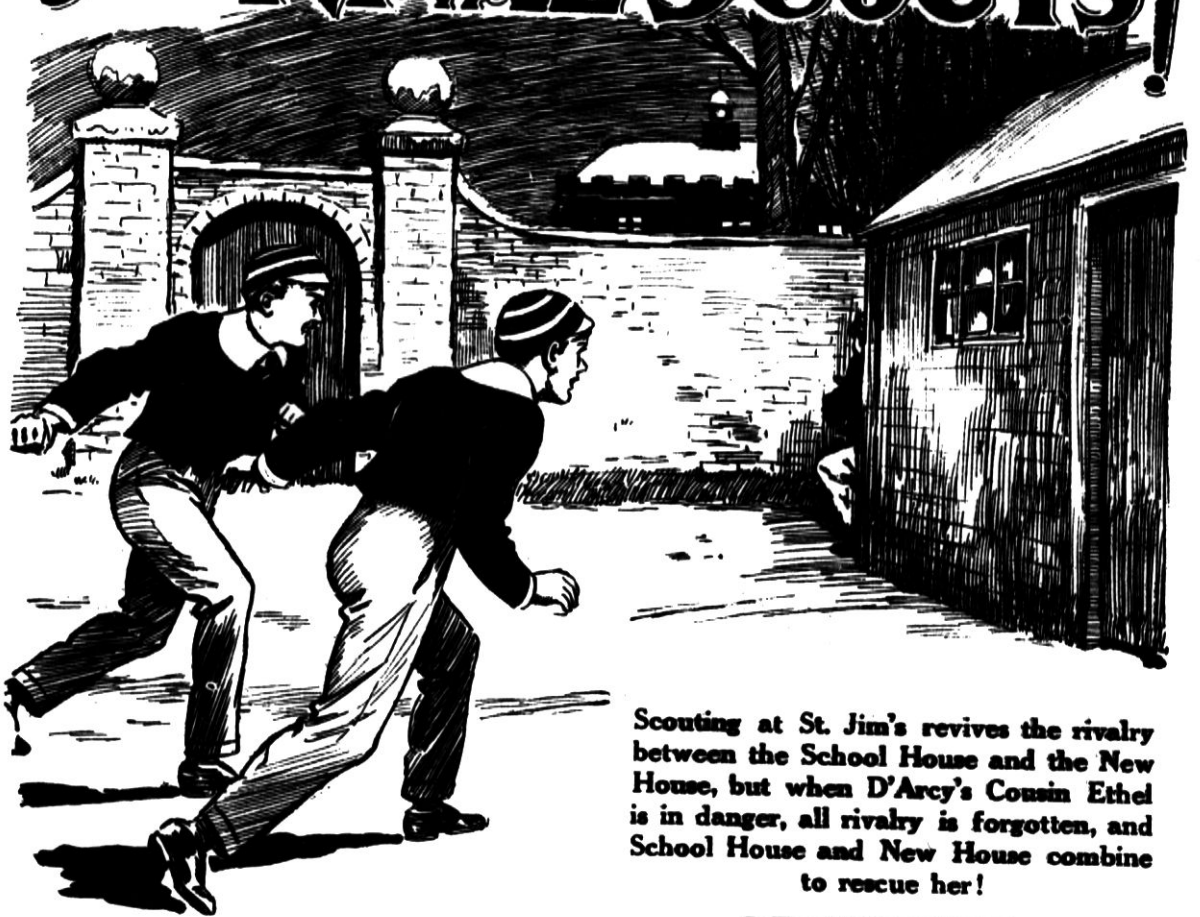
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2
A RIPPING YARN OF FUN AND ADVENTURE, FEATURING—

The RIVAL SCOUTS!



Scouting at St. Jim's revives the rivalry between the School House and the New House, but when D'Arcy's Cousin Ethel is in danger, all rivalry is forgotten, and School House and New House combine to rescue her!

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry—Scout Leader.

TOM MERRY looked into his study in the School House at St. Jim's, and found Manners and Lowther there. He came in opening a little leather-covered notebook, and wetting the point of a blunt pencil as he did so.

"I suppose I can put your name down?" he remarked. Manners, who was developing films, grunted. Monty Lowther sat upright in his easy-chair, and gave Tom Merry a lazy glance.

"That depends," he remarked. "If it's for a subscription, no."

Tom Merry laughed. "It isn't a subscription."

"If it's for a testimonial, good! You can put my name down for a testimonial to anybody," said Lowther generously.

"It isn't a testimonial."

"Well, you can put my name down, anyway, if you like, whatever it is, only don't bother me," said Lowther, yawning. "I'm reading a 'Magnet.'"

"Bless the 'Magnet'!" Tom Merry wrote down Lowther's name. "What about you, Manners? Leave off winking that idiotic thing, and attend to me."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Listen to me a minute."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Can I put your name down?"

"Rats!"

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Manners gave the little handle of the daylight developer another wind, and looked up at last with a cheerful grin.

"Now I can give you a minute," he said. "What do you want? What's that about putting my name down?"

"Am! I've got Lowther's, and I want yours next. I suppose you both want to be in it?"

"In which?"

"The Buffalo Patrol," said Tom Merry impressively.

Manners looked across at Lowther. Lowther laid down the "Magnet" on his knee and tapped his forehead with an air of commiseration.

"It's come at last," he said sadly.

"Oh, don't rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If you don't know what a patrol is, it's time you learned. Don't you remember Colonel Carr-Hilton coming down here and starting the Boy Scout idea? Well, we're going to take it up now in proper form, and I think the School House ought to be first, and as this is the top study of the School House we ought to begin."

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"Beginning to comprehend? You know that Boy Scouts are formed in patrols, I suppose half a dozen at a time, under a leader. Every patrol is named after some beast—"

"Going to call this the Merry Patrol?" asked Lowther innocently.

"No, ass, I'm going to call this the Buffalo Patrol. There's a lot in a good-sounding title, and I think the Buffalo Patrol beats your Wolf Patrols and Rook Patrols and Rat Patrols, and so forth. You fellows have been slacking a great deal lately, and this will buck you up. I suppose you are prepared to die for your King and Country?"

—THE OLD RIVALS, TOM MERRY & CO. AND FIGGINS & CO.!

By Martin Clifford.

"Ye-es," said Lowther. "I'd rather put it off a bit, though, if you don't mind. Suppose you ask me again in seventy years?"

"Oh, don't be funny! It's the duty of every Britisher to become a Boy Scout, and learn to track and shoot, and so forth. Suppose an enemy landed in England to-day!" exclaimed Tom Merry severely. "What would you do? A silly ass developing rotten films, and another silly ass sitting in an easy-chair reading the 'Magnet.' I am going to buck you up. Now I've got your names down, and I want four more to make up the Buffalo Patrol."

"Go and find 'em, then," said Lowther, apparently undisturbed by the terrible picture of a foreign foe landing in England and finding him sitting in an easy-chair. At all events, he did not rise from it. "Go and find 'em, my son, and give us a rest."

"Look here, it's time to buck up. Figgins & Co. are getting up something over in the New House, and I haven't much doubt that it's a patrol of Boy Scouts. We want the School House to be the first in the field."

"Well, go and find the rest of the patrol," yawned Lowther. "Go and preach the strenuous life to the chaps in Study No. 6. Go and rouse the whole House. Go and eat coke!"

"Yes, do," said Manners. "I know I shall spoil these films if you stay here talking, old chap."

"Slackers!" sniffed Tom Merry; and he closed his note book with a snap and walked out of the study.

Manners grinned and turned his attention again to his daylight developer; and Monty Lowther chuckled and went on with the "Magnet."

Tom Merry walked down the passage towards the Fourth Form studies. The sound of voices in altercation from Study No. 6 showed that the occupants of that famous study were at home.

"I object—I object most strongly!" It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "In fact, Hewwies, I must say that I'm absolutely wefuse to want my permish for anythin' of the sort!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Herries.

"I must say I back up D'Arcy in this," said Jack Blake. "I'm not particular, but I bar mangy bulldogs in a small study."

"He's not mangy."

"Well, I don't care whether it's mangle or distemper."

"Well, whatever it is—Hallo, you Shell-fish, what are you grinning at?"

Tom Merry looked in cheerfully. Herries, with a red face, was looking annoyed. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was pink and excited. Blake and Digby looked warm, too.

"You kids quarrelling?" said Tom Merry, in a chiding tone.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Blake. "What do you think, Herries' bulldog has caught the measles?"

"He hasn't!" roared Herries.

"Well, the small-pox, then."

"You utter ass!"

"Well, he's caught something, and Herries wants to bring him into the study to nurse him," said Blake. "What do you think of that?"

"Yaas, wathah! The bwute has already torn my twousahs on two distinct occasions, and weally—"

"He's gnawed up my Latin Grammar!" growled Digby. "I rescued it from him before he had finished, but all the deponent verbs are gone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to laugh at, Tom Merry! Fancy a silly ass wanting to bring a mangy bulldog into a study for gentlemen!"

"If you say my bulldog's mangy I'll punch your head, Dig!" roared Herries.

"Well, I don't care what his disease is, as long as you keep him at a distance."

"You're a set of rotters!" said Herries. "Poor old Towser has got a bit of a cold. He wants nursing up. I ought to have him in the study."

"Of course you ought," said Tom Merry encouragingly. "Where is there any objection to the presence of a really nice, quiet, tame, and kind-hearted bulldog in any study? That's what I want to know."

"That's what I think," said Herries. "These dummies say they can't do their prep with a bulldog nosing about the room. Why can't they do their prep in the Common-room downstairs, then? I don't suppose Towser will be seedy for more than a few days, and we're breaking up for the Christmas holidays soon."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "You chaps are in the wrong."

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"I agree with Herries entirely. If Towser wants to bite D'Arcy and gnaw his trousers, why shouldn't he? What are D'Arcy and his trousers for?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Then as to Latin Grammars, if Towser prefers them to dog-biscuits, I don't see why he shouldn't have his way. Latin Grammars are not expensive in plain bindings, and I don't suppose Towser cares much about an expensive binding."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Jack Blake. "You can have Towser in your study, but we bar any sort of sick beasts in here. It was terrible enough when Gussy had a cold, and I thought then that he ought to go out into the kennel somewhere till he got well."

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"I'll go and have another look at him," said Herries, rising. "If he's not any better he'll have to come into the House somewhere, I warn you!"

Herries quitted the study.

"Bai Jove, you know, I've thought of a good idea!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "As Tom Mewwy does not object to the presence of a bulldog in a study he can have Towser in his study till he gets well."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good wheeze!"

"I weally do not like wefusin' Hewwies, and that will set the mattah wight. He can shove Towshah in Tom Mewwy's study."

"Towser will die a sudden death if he does," said Tom Merry. "What I mean is, I can't see that it matters if a bulldog is shoved into a Fourth Form study. I couldn't have anything of the sort in my quarters. But I didn't come here to talk about bulldogs. Are you chaps ready to die for your King and Country?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"No, it isn't, ass! If you're ready to die—"

"Well, this is rather sudden," said Blake. "I'd rather put it off till after the Christmas holidays, if it's all the same to you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't interrupt me. If you are ready to die for your King and Country, like true-born Britons, you ought to enrol yourself in a corps of Boy Scouts. I am forming a patrol, the first in the School House, and I want you fellows to join. There can't be any of your usual rotting about the leadership on this occasion, as I was selected by the test proposed by Colonel Carr-Hilton when he was down here. I am the Chief Scout of the School House, and the leader of the Buffalo Patrol."

"The—the what?"

"The Buffalo Patrol. Every patrol is named after some beast or bird, and the signal of the members to one another is the cry of that beast or bird, whatever it is."

"Good! You had better initiate us into imitating the cry of the buffalo," said Jack Blake blandly.

"Er—ahem!—what sort of a row does a buffalo make?" murmured Tom Merry, a little puzzled. "H'm! Perhaps we had better have another name, after all."

"I suggest the Donkey Patrol, as it is only proper for a patrol to be named after its leader."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Digby and D'Arcy.

"And then the signal of the patrol members would be a donkey's bray," said Blake. "You could instruct us—"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Tom Merry. "Suppose we have a Dog Patrol, and then we could have a doggy growl for the signal. Now, are you fellows coming into it? Figgins & Co. are getting up a patrol over in the New House, I believe, and we want to be first in the field."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Blake. "You can't count on Herries, though. He's too busy looking after his beastly bulldog."

"Then we shall want one more. I'll ask Reilly of the Fourth. I'm to put your names down, then?"

"Oh, yes, rather! We'll help you out."

"You see, when the thing catches on, through our example, all the fellows will take it up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Then each of us can be the leader of a separate patrol. But one patrol for each House will be enough for the start."

I'll go and speak to Reilly, and you fellows turn up in the gym in half an hour for preliminary instructions."

And Tom Merry, full of his new idea, hurried off in search of the last recruit.

CHAPTER 2.

The Dog Patrol!

"GR-R-ROOOH!" said Jack Blake expressively, as he put his nose out into the cold breeze of the quadrangle and drew it in again. "Jolly cold weather for scouting."

"Yaas, wathah! You see, it's freezin', and upon the whole it would be pewwaps bettah to put it off till next term."

"Oh, rats!" said Digby. "I'm not afraid of the cold, for one."

"If you infer that I am afraid of the cold, Dig, I shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"Rats! Come on!"

The chums of Study No. 6 descended the steps. It was a half-holiday, but the usual avocations of a half-holiday could not be followed. There was no footer owing to weather conditions, and nobody felt inclined for a walk in the frosty and foggy woods, and then the village tuckshop seemed too far off for a visit.

The Fourth-Formers crossed towards the gym. It was well into December, and Christmas was coming with a vengeance. Breaking-up was close at hand, but it was not quite close enough to please the juniors of St. Jim's.

As a matter of fact, the boys had a grievance on that score. Rylcombe Grammar School, the neighbouring scholastic establishment with which the youngsters were generally at war, broke up on December 15th, and St. Jim's on the 17th. St. Jim's had broken up for Christmas two days later than the Grammarians for centuries past, but, as Blake said, that was no reason why they should go on breaking up two days later for centuries to come.

If the Grammar School broke up on the 15th why shouldn't St. Jim's? Why should hardworked youngsters be heartlessly done out of two days of their vacation? That was how the juniors looked at it, and there had already been talk of a deputation to the Head to remonstrate. But Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, was not the kind of person to be argued with easily, and as yet the deputation was only an idea.

"Well, here we are," said Blake, looking into the gym. "Nobody here, of course. Nice ripping sort of a Scout leader Tom Merry makes—I don't think. I'm not very well up in the rules of Boy Scout corps, but I suppose it's permissible to depose a leader for being unpunctual and elect a new one?"

"Yaas, wathah! If you chaps care to elect me——"

"Yes; I can see us doing it," grunted Digby.

"Weally, Digbay, what is wequiahed for the post is a fellow of tact and judgment, and undah the circs you couldn't do bettah than elect me."

"Hallo, here's the Shell-fish!"

Manners and Lowther came in. They looked round the gym, and bore down upon Jack Blake and his companions.

"Where's Tom Merry?"

"Blessed if I know," said Jack Blake. "We're turning up here for preliminary instruction, and this is how we are getting it."

"Undah the circs——"

"Here he is!"

Tom Merry came in with Reilly of the Fourth. Tom Merry's lip was cut, and there was a bruise on his cheek. Reilly's left eye was closing up.

The Boy Scouts looked at them curiously.

"Been rowing with the New House?" demanded Lowther.

"Oh, no!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "House rows are off for a bit. Reilly didn't think it a good idea to follow the lead of a Shell fellow, and wanted to be captain. We argued it out."

"Faith, and I was convinced after the third round," grinned Reilly, with perfect good temper. "Sure, I'd follow any chap with an uppercut like Tom Merry's!"

"Now we're ready," said Tom Merry. "Let's get to work——"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "We were thinking of deposing you for unpunctuality, and electing a new Scout leader——"

"That's not in the rules. You must play the game, you know. Form up. I'm going to drill you a bit first, and teach you where to put your feet and how to hold your hands, and so on."

"Rats!"

Tom Merry took no notice of that rejoinder. He planted himself before his squad like a drill sergeant, and raised his hand.

"Quick march!"

"Left! Right! Left—— Here, clear off, you young monkeys!"

The exercise of the Boy Scouts had begun to attract spectators to the gym. A number of Third Form fags had crowded in, among them Wally D'Arcy, the younger brother of the one and only Augustus. D'Arcy minor was grinning gleefully.

"Clear off! Do you hear?"

"Rats!" said D'Arcy minor coolly. "We're allowed in the gym as much as you are, and I suppose we can form a patrol if we like."

Tom Merry deemed it better to take no notice of the fag. A row with a crew of inky Third-Formers was too undignified for the top boy of the Shell and the patrol leader of the Dog Patrol.

"March!" he sang out.

And the patrol marched, and this time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy managed to keep his place in the file.

CHAPTER 3.

In Training.

"LEFT!" yelled D'Arcy minor. "Right! Left! As you were!"

A dozen Third-Formers had formed up in no time. Wally flourished a diminutive cane, and directed them exactly as Tom Merry was doing with his patrol.

Every order that Tom Merry rapped out was immediately rapped out in turn by Wally, in precisely the same tone of voice.

The Dog Patrol marched off to the upper end of the gym, and the Fag Patrol immediately marched after them.

"Left!" said Tom Merry.

"Left!" said Wally.

"As you were!"

"As you were!"

"Quick march!"

"Quick march!"

Tom Merry's cheeks grew crimson. His own patrol were chucking, and the fags were yelling with laughter as they obeyed the orders of their leader.

"Double!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Double!" piped Wally.

"Charge!" yelled Tom.

Wally wasn't quite prepared for that. The Dog Patrol charged, and the fags were knocked right and left.

"Jump on the enemy—both feet!"

With wild shrieks the fags fled for their lives.

The Dog Patrol pursued them to the door of the gym, cuffing right and left, and shouted with laughter as the last fag vanished.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "That settles the fags! They've got to learn to treat the Dog Patrol with proper respect."

"Yaas, wathah! I shall always insist upon bein' treated with pwopah respect."

"I think that will do for the preliminary drill," said Tom Merry. "Of course, before we are a proper patrol, I have to swear——"

"Tom Mewwy!"

"I have to swear——"

"Tom Mewwy! Is that weally a necessary pwelim?"

"Certainly," replied Tom Merry.

"Then I am afraid that I must respectfully withdraw from the Dog Patrol," said D'Arcy, with a decided shake of the head. "I cannot remain here if Tom Mewwy is goin' to start sweawin'."

Tom Merry turned red.

"You unutterable ass——"

"I wefuse to be addressed as an unuttewable ass, and I wefuse to listen to any bad language from Tom Mewwy."

"Gag him, somebody! I say, I shall have to swear——"

"I shall wefuse to listen."

"——I shall have to swear in the patrol."

"Oh, I see! Why didn't you explain that at first, Tom Mewwy?"

"Did you give me a chance?" shrieked the patrol-leader. "Don't you forget that gag next time, Blake. I shall have to swear in the patrol, but we can do that in the study. At present we'll practise the secret sign and the signal. The signal, of course, is a dog's bark, or growl, as a bark would make too much row, and alarm the enemy——"

"What enemy?"

"Any enemy, fathead! The bark of a dog would be too loud."

"Besides," said Lowther, "if we were scouting in a wood it might lead to confusion."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, it might get confused with the bark of a tree——"

"Don't forget a gag for Lowther next time, Tom Merry," said Blake.
 "He's got too many gags already," grunted Digby, "ancient old moth-eaten gags that have died of old age everywhere else."
 "That wasn't a gag," said Lowther indignantly. "It was a new joke. I made it up on the spot."
 "Silence in the wanks, deah boy."
 "The growl of a dog will be the patrol signal," said Tom Merry. "Do shut up, you magpies. Now, how many of you can imitate the growl of a dog?"
 Blake gave a ferocious growl. Digby tried, and coughed violently. Manners and Lowther produced curious sounds, and Reilly seemed to be about to choke.
 "You see, you want practice," said Tom Merry. "Now listen to me, and make the same sound as I do."

Wynn—otherwise known as Figgins & Co., the chiefs of the New House juniors. Tom Merry turned and waved his hand at them.
 "Get out!" he shouted.
 "Eh?"
 "Get out!"
 "Shan't! Have you bought the gym?"
 "Charge!" shouted the exasperated Scout-leader.
 The Dog Patrol charged, Figgins & Co. went reeling right and left, and the victorious School House Scouts charged over them. Figgins and Kerr were up in a twinkling, but Fatty Wynn lay and gasped.
 "Chuck them out!" roared Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah! Buck up, deah boys!"
 "Hold on!" gasped Figgins. "Hold on, you dummies! We came here to—"



"My hat! What's—what's that?" It was not a growl this time—it was more like a roar. Something white flashed in the gloom and Tom Merry jumped clear of the floor, just in time to escape the teeth of a bulldog. "Ow!" gasped the junior.

And Tom Merry imitated the growl of a dog. It wasn't a very successful imitation, however, and the patrol stared at him.
 "Well, go on," said Blake. "When you've done clearing your throat, you might begin."
 "Ass! That's the growl."
 "Is it? I thought you were clearing your throat! Was that like the growl of a dog?"
 "Of course it was," shouted Tom Merry excitedly.
 "Then it must have been a dog that was expiring of bronchitis. I've never heard a dog give a wheezy grunt like that."
 "Faith, and it sounded to me more like a frog."
 "Or a pig with a bad cold."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "We'll leave the signal over for a bit," said Tom Merry hastily. "Now for the sign. You have to know the secret Scout sign, so that you can recognise any other Scout when you meet him. Now—clear off, you youngsters!"
 Some of the fags had returned, and were looking in at the door. As Tom Merry made a motion towards them, they scattered, and the patrol-leader went on with his instructions. The Scouts were practising the secret sign when three juniors came into the gym. They were Figgins, Kerr, and

"Yes, I know; you came here to chivvy us, and you're going out on your neck."
 "I—I—we—you—"
 "Outside!"
 And outside Figgins & Co. promptly went, landing in a heap in the muddy quadrangle. And the victorious Scouts went on with their training.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins & Co. Make Themselves at Home!

F IGGINS picked himself up out of the mud. Kerr followed suit, and then lent a hand to Fatty Wynn. Fatty had lately laid in a supply of good things at the school shop, and was rather short of wind.
 "What's the matter with the dummies?" growled Figgins. "Off their silly rockers, I suppose? What are they drilling in the gym for? I thought they had about enough of that from the sergeant."
 "Some new wheeze, I suppose," said Kerr. "No good talking to them now."

"Let's go and wait for them in Study No. 6 in the School House," suggested Fatty Wynn. "I saw Blake taking in a bag from the tuckshop this morning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm getting rather peckish, and it's a good opportunity for a House raid while they are playing the giddy ox in the gym."

"Fatty's right; come on."

The three heroes of the New House promptly entered the rival establishment. They went straight up to Study No. 6 and found it unoccupied. The fire was dying down in the grate, and the table was littered with books and papers. Fatty Wynn went across to the cupboard at once, and his eyes glistened as he looked into it.

"My word! Here's a beefsteak pie—one of the big ones that Dame Taggles makes—and half a ham."

"Ripping! I'm getting hungry myself," said Figgins. "I only had a few apples in the tuckshop, while you were putting away enough provisions for a siege."

"I didn't have much, Figgins; only some baked potatoes and sausages and tongue, besides the rabbit pies and the fish cakes. I get so hungry in this December weather, too."

"Well, trot out the grub, and I'll liven up the fire and make the tea."

"Ha, ha, ha! May as well make a feed of it."

And they did. The fire was raked together, and Figgins looked round for fuel. The coal locker was empty. In a corner stood a chair in the process of manufacture, the work of Blake, who was the amateur carpenter of the Hobby Club. Figgins looked at it, and then looked for a chopper.

"I'm sorry for that chair," he remarked. "I suppose Blake is working out a calculation—how many nails can be put into a given quantity of wood, judging by the look of it. I'm sorry to spoil his calculation, but we must make up the fire."

"Well, we can't be expected to sit here without a fire in December," said Kerr. "It was careless of them to have the coal locker empty."

Crash, crash, crash!

The chair, in spite of the number of nails in it, was very loosely held together, and Figgins soon had the legs off. They were soon roaring away in the grate, and Kerr jammed down the kettle on the fire.

Fatty Wynn laid the cloth and spread out the eatables. Doubtless Blake had intended to have some friends in to tea, for the supply was really generous.

"I'm glad we called," grinned Figgins. "This will be a pleasant surprise to Blake when he comes in. I'll carve the ham. Make the tea, Kerr old chap!"

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

The tea was soon made, the ham and the pie carved, and the New House trio settled down to a comfortable meal. It wanted a couple of hours to tea-time, as a matter of fact, but in the keen wintry weather the appetites of the juniors were good. As for Fatty Wynn, he was always ready for a meal.

Figgins poured out the tea. The fragrant odour filled the study, and it came to the nostrils of three juniors who were coming up the Fourth Form passage in the School House. The three were Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy, and they sniffed appreciatively as they scented the fresh-made tea.

"Well, this is all right," said Jack Blake. "Old Horries has left that rotten buildog to himself after all, and is making the tea ready for us. I call that decent."

"Yaas, wathah! Howwies is weally playin' up in a cweedible mannah."

"He's not waiting for us, though," said Digby, as a clatter of knives and forks came from the study. "He's starting."

The three juniors hurried on, and pushed open the door of Study No. 6.

"Hallo, Herries— Oh, my hat!"

Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy stared into the study in blank amazement.

Figgins & Co. were already seated round the table, eating and drinking at express speed, and already considerable gaps showed in the ham and the pie.

"Bai Jove!"

"Why, the—the—the check! The nerve!"

Figgins rose to his feet.

"Hallo!" he said hospitably. "Come in, you chaps! We've got plenty, and we'd like you to join us at tea, if you haven't had your tea yet."

Figgins' manner was so cool that for a moment Blake wondered whether he had wandered into the New House by mistake and entered Figgins' quarters instead of his own.

Fatty Wynn bolted ham against time. The feast was not by any means over, but it looked as if the reckoning were near at hand.

"The—the cheeky wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Our ham!" howled Digby.

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"Bai Jove! Our beefsteak pie, you know."

"My chair?" shrieked Blake. "What's become of the legs of my new chair?"

"We ran short of fuel," said Figgins. "But it's all right—you'll get the nails back when you clean up the grate, and you can start the calculation over again from the beginning."

"Calculation! What calculation?"

"Weron't you calculation how many nails you could drive into a given space?"

"You—you rotter! I'll teach you to burn up my furniture! Go for 'em, kids!"

Figgins drew the poker from the fire where he had left it to become red-hot. The chums of the School House jumped back from the glowing point.

Figgins made a playful pass at them with the poker, and they retreated hastily to the doorway.

"Come on!" said Figgins pleasantly.

"You howwid wottah! If you put that beastly pokah near my clothes I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Better make it pax," said Figgins. "We're only making ourselves at home, you know, as visitors ought to do. Come in and have tea, and make it pax."

"I'll pax you—I'll—"

"Rats! You can't argue with a red-hot poker. Besides, you ought to be grateful to us for not doing any damage."

"My chair—"

"Well, we were really doing you a service there. Suppose somebody had sat on it, and there had been an accident? Somebody might have sat on it, you know, by mistake."

"You—you ass! It was meant to be sat on!"

"Oh, I thought you were working out a calculation—how many—"

"Oh, shut up! Put that poker down!"

"Yo-es, presently. When you've made it pax."

"Bai Jove, Blake, we'd better make it pax, you know. Fatty Wynn is boltin' all the grub while we're talkin', and there won't be any left soon."

"Let's rouse the House, and have these rotters ragged bald-headed!" exclaimed Digby excitedly.

"But all the grub will be gone by then, and I'm wathah hungwy."

Jack Blake burst into a hearty laugh. He knew how to take a joke against himself.

"Right you are!" he exclaimed. "It's pax, Figgys. You can put that poker down!"

Figgins grinned, and the poker clattered into the grate. Fatty Wynn took his fifth helping of the beefsteak pie.

Kerr took up the carving-knife.

"Give it a name!" he said hospitably.

And he carved for the School House trio. Pax having been declared, the juniors banished all thoughts of warfare, and settled down to have tea together as if they had chummed in that study all their lives.

"Don't spare the grub," said Figgins generously. "You're more than welcome. Besides, we got this lot cheap."

And the Co. chuckled.

CHAPTER 5.

The Deputation!

FIGGINS poured out the tea. The juniors were soon feasting on the best of terms. Then Figgins came to business.

"We were coming over to speak to you when you went for us like a lot of asses in the gym," he said. "We were thinking—"

"Oh, we know what you were thinking of!" chuckled Blake. "You were thinking of starting a New House Patrol; but the School House was first, as usual."

"And you've guessed wrong, as usual," said Figgins, grinning. "It's not a bad idea, but that's not what we were thinking of. It's about the breaking-up for the Christmas holidays."

"Oh, I see! Pass the jam!"

Figgins passed the jam, and resumed:

"You see, the Grammar School break up on the 15th. Why shouldn't St. Jim's break up then, instead of waiting till the 17th?"

"Echo answers why. Pass the butter!"

Figgins passed the butter.

"Well, we've talked it over in the New House," he said. "We've come to the conclusion that this is a matter in which the two Houses ought to act as one."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My idea was to send a deputation to the Head—"

"We had thought of that already in this study."

"Well, you haven't done it, anyway. The idea is to send a deputation to the Head, consisting of fellows who will represent both Houses and both the Fourth Form and the Sholl."

"I wathah considah that I am the pwopah person to wewesent this study. What you wequiah is a fellow of tact and judgment."

Blake laughed.

"As the deputation will probably get a licking each, I don't care if Gussy takes my place," he said. "I'll leave it to you, Gus."

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy; "I accept. I shall be vewy pleased to wewesent this study. I wegard it as extremely pwob that when I have explained to the Head he will see weason and gwant our wequest."

"We'll give him a chance, anyway. Better put some exercise-books in your bags, in case it's more serious than a caning!"

"Weally, Blako—"

"That's settled!" said Figgins. "Now about the seniors."

"Hallo, there's the chap we want!" exclaimed Figgins. Tom Merry was coming upstairs. He stopped as Figgins came up, looking on his guard. He remembered the scene in the gym. But there was nothing hostile in the manner of the great Figgins.

"It's all wight, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "We've made it pax with these wottaha. We are goin' in a dep to the Head on the subject of bweakin' up for Chwistmas, and we want you to join us as a membah."

Figgins explained, and Tom Merry cocked his head thoughtfully as he listened.

"I don't know about asking Kildare," he said. "The seniors always make it a point to be down on a junior wheeze, and Kildare mayn't look at it in the same light as we do, you know."

"No harm in asking him, though."



"My hat!" gasped Blake. Tom Merry was dashing down the passage at frantic speed, with Towser clinging to him. Towser hung on like grim death, his legs sweeping clear of the linoleum as the junior dashed on.

I thought it would be a good idea to have some seniors in the deputation to the Head, to give the matter more weight, you know."

"You won't get any seniors to follow a junior's lead."

"Well, I won't mind making the seniors the leaders, so long as we gain our point," said Figgins. "The great thing is to break up on the 15th, instead of the 17th. I was thinking of Monteith, our head prefect, as chairman of the deputation, but he has declined for some reason. I suggest that we should approach Kildare on the subject. He is captain of the school as well as School House prefect, and is just the man for our purpose."

"Yaas, wathah! And it's best to stwike while the iron's hot, you know, so as soon as you've finished, Figgins, we'll go and see Kildare."

"I'm ready," said Figgins, rising to his feet.

"Hold on, Figgins!" said Fatty Wynn. "Give a chap a chance! I'm not done yet, by long chalks!"

"Keep on, then, till the grub's all gone," said Figgins. "Blake can watch you; it's as good as seeing the animals feed at the Zoo. Come on, Gussy!"

"I am weady, deah boy."

And Figgins and Arthur Augustus quitted the study, leaving the other juniors still discussing the good things on the table.

"Oh, no! I saw him go into his study a few minutes ago," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

A minute later they were tapping at the door of the St. Jim's captain. Kildare's pleasant voice bade them enter, and he looked up from his book.

The three juniors coughed a little, not exactly knowing how to begin.

The captain of the school looked at one after another inquiringly.

"Well, what is it?" he said at last.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "You see—"

"You see," said Figgins. "Ahem—"

"You had bettah leave the explainin' to me," said D'Arcy.

"This is how the case stands, deah boy. We—er—ahem!"

"You have caught a cough?" said Kildare.

"Not at all, deah boy. You see—er—ahem!"

"It's like this," said Tom Merry.

"Exactly," assented Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good!" said Kildare. "You've made it perfectly clear; and now would you mind getting out of my study? Shut the door after you!"

The juniors grinned at one another feebly.

"The fact is," said Tom Merry, taking the plunge—"the
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fact is, Kildare, that we are going to send a deputation to the Head, and we want you to be the chairman."

"You—you want me to what?"

"We're the deputation. We are going to represent to the Head that, as the Grammar School breaks up on the 15th, St. Jim's oughtn't to go on till the 17th. We think that if you were chairman of the deputation you could explain things to the Head, and he would be more likely to listen to a chap in the Sixth, too."

Kildare stared at the juniors in blank astonishment for some moments.

When he realised that it was not a case of "rotting" a smile broke over his face. He pointed to the door. Tom Merry glanced in the direction of his outstretched finger, and then glanced back again. He looked puzzled.

"What does that mean, Kildare?"

"It means—outside!"

"Don't you want to be our chairman?"

"I don't want to lick you," said Kildare, "but if you're not outside this study in three seconds I shall!"

The deputation were outside the study in the three seconds. Kildare grinned as the door closed behind them.

In the passage the juniors looked at one another uncomfortably.

"Kildare didn't seem to catch on to the idea," Figgins remarked.

"Well, he wasn't what you'd call enthusiastic about it," agreed Tom Merry. "I was rather afraid from the first that he mightn't like the idea. Shall we ask Darrell next, or shall we try it on without any seniors?"

"Oh, blow the seniors! Let's try it alone."

"Yaas, wathah! I'll tell you what's the pwopah thing to do, deah boy. Follow my lead, and I'll bwing you through all wight!"

"Come on!" said Figgins.

And in a heroic mood the deputation proceeded to the Head's own quarters. Their hearts were sinking a little. Kildare's reception had been, perhaps, an earnest of what they were to expect in the Head's study. But they had gone too far for retreat now. If they went back to Study No. 6 with their mission unfulfilled they would never be allowed to hear the end of it.

But when they arrived at the Head's door it was some moments before they could summon up sufficient nerve to tap.

"Are you going to tap, Figgins?"

"Eh—er—yes. I thought you were going to."

Tom Merry and Figgins tapped at the same moment. There was no reply from the study, and they tapped again. Still no reply.

"The Head's not there," said Tom Merry, with an involuntary breath of relief.

"There's a light under the door."

"Pewwaps he's stepped out for a minute."

"Tap again, anyway."

"Dear me! What are you boys doing here?"

The juniors stared at the sound of the Head's voice. Dr. Holmes had come up the passage behind them, and was looking down at them in surprise, evidently not expecting to find three juniors of the Lower School holding a debate outside his study door.

The deputation looked dismayed. They had come there to speak to the Head, but his sudden appearance had taken them by surprise. And, as a matter of fact, a great deal of their nerve oozed away as they found the clear, grey eyes of the Head searching their faces.

"Well, what is it, my boys?" said the Head, in a not unkindly tone. "Did you come here to speak to me?"

"Ye-es, if you please, sir!"

"You may come into my study."

The Head opened the door and went in, and the juniors followed. Dr. Holmes took his seat at his writing-table, and the three heroes stood in a row, feeling and looking a great deal like three culprits called up for judgment.

"Now, what is it, please?" said the Head.

The juniors exchanged dismayed glances. They found it even more difficult to explain to the Head than to explain to Kildare.

Dr. Holmes looked at them in surprise.

"You need not be afraid to speak out," he said. "What is your purpose in coming here? Come, be brief!"

"If you please, sir—"

"Pewwaps you had better leave it to me, deah boys. The case stands like this, sir. Wylcombe Gwammah School breaks up for the Christmas vac on the 15th of the pwesent month—"

"I am aware of that, D'Arcy."

"St. Jim's does not break up till the 17th."

"I can hardly fail to be aware of that also. If you have come here to say nothing but that—"

"Not at all, deah boy—I mean, deah sir!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir. We—the Lowah Forms of St. Jim's—think it would be a wippin' ideah to bweak up on the same day as the Gwammah School. We don't like the ideah of workin' two days longah to the term than the Gwammawian wotahs."

The Head's brow set severely.

"Preposterous!" he exclaimed, rising angrily to his feet. "We don't wegard it in that light, sir. The whole of the Lowah School thinks as we do, and the senihs weally agwee with us, only they don't say so."

"I am afraid the Lower School is in need of a lesson in discipline, then," said the Head angrily. "I never heard of such impertinence in my life!"

"But weally, sir—"

"If you will allow us, sir—"

"You may go!"

"Yaas, sir; but undah the circe we—"

"Boys," thundered the Head, "I regard your absurd request as a piece of unwarrantable impertinence. You may go."

The deputation looked at one another glumly, and went.

CHAPTER 6.

A Plot Against the Head.

"WHAT luck?"

Four or five voices asked the question as the crestfallen deputation re-entered Study No. 6. It was hardly necessary, however, as the looks of the deputies told the tale plainly enough.

"Rotten!" said Tom Merry frankly. "The Head wouldn't hear of it."

"Get a licking?" asked Jack Blake.

"No; but the Head was wild."

"He waised his voice in weply'n' to us," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as wathah ungentlemanly to waise the voice. I was thinkin' of pointin' that out to him, but I westwained myself."

"Ha, ha, ha! Jolly lucky for you you did. Well, I could have told you all along that it was no good," Jack Blake remarked, apparently having resolved to take up the role of Job's comforter.

"Oh, wing off, deah boy!"

"I say, I told you—"

"Don't cackle like a girl over it, for goodness' sake!" said Figgins.

"Figgins, I wequest you to withdraw that expression. I cannot allow any dewogatory wemarks concernin' the gentle sex to pass in my pwesence."

"Oh rats!" said Figgins crossly.

"Gentlemen, I must wequest that pwocedings be stopped for a few minutes while I administah a feahful thwashin' to Figgins. I could not, undah any circe, allow him to speak diswesppectfully of gals in my pwesence. I wondah what my Cousin Ethel would think if she heard him? And Cousin Ethel is comin' down to-morrow, too."

"Is sho?" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! I don't suppose she will speak to you, especially as you have such a wude and bwutal way of alludin' to the female sex."

"Oh, don't be a chump, old chap!"

"Unless you withdraw that oppwobwious expression applied to gals, I shall have to give you a feahful thwashin'. Any expression applied to myself," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "I can forgive. But I wegard any wude allusion to gals as an insult to the charmin' sex, and I weally—"

"I withdraw the expression," said Figgins humbly, "on condition that Blake agrees not to cackle like a parrot."

"Vewy good. I should have been sowwy to thwash Figgins—"

"You would have been sorry if you had started!" grinned Figgins.

"Never mind!"

"What are we going to do about the Head?"

"Sack him!" suggested Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Is this a time for cheap jokes?" said Figgins, rather heatedly. "Something's got to be done. We're close on the 15th now, and unless something is done we shall be sticking here fagging away while the Grammarian rotters are breaking up. Can't we do something?"

"I don't see how we can argue with the Head," said Digby, "and he's rather too high up in the school for us to rag him."

"Still, something might be done," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "Suppose the whole of the Lower Forms slack down. Things generally get rather slack at the end of the term, especially the Christmas term. They might get slacker."

"Good! Impositions don't count much now, as the masters never ask for 'em at the beginning of a term."

"No; all impots left over the Christmas holidays are as good as done. Of course, lickings are lickings at any time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But a few lickings aren't much in a good cause. Suppose we show the powers that be that we're not to be trifled with?"

"Good!"

"Ripping!"

"We can't depend on the Upper Forms to help us. If we win they'll be glad enough to break up on the 15th instead of the 17th. But they haven't the nerve to be pioneers. The old fogies of the Sixth are too sleepy for this sort of thing," said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

"Is it agreed, then—slacking and ragging and rows generally, till we get our way?" said Figgins, looking round.

"Agreed!"

to go to the village, but the hero of the Shell expected them to be back by this time. The study was dark when he reached it, and the door ajar.

"Not back yet!" he asked cheerily, peering into the study.

There was a growl from the darkness.

Tom Merry started a little, and then he laughed. He remembered the agreed-upon signal of the Dog Patrol.

"By Jove, that was good!" he exclaimed. "So you're here. I almost thought that was a real dog for the moment, kids."

He entered the study and groped for the electric light switch, feeling rather surprised that Manners and Lowther did not speak.

"Why don't you make a sound, you image?" he exclaimed.

Growl!

"Oh rats!" said Tom Merry. "Where's that confounded switch?"



A startling sight met the gaze of the juniors. Towser had left his basket, apparently having forgotten that he was ill. He was chasing Thomas, the cat, round and round the study. Periodically Thomas turned on his enemy, arched his back and spat and then ran on. "My only hat!" gasped Blake.

"And in case of a row we all stand by one another, and make every individual quarrel the quarrel of the whole of the Lower School?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's settled, then," said Figgins gleefully. "We'll raise Cain over in the New House, and you chaps do the same here in the School House. Come on, kids! My only aunt, ain't you finished yet, Fatty?"

"Shan't be a minute," said Fatty Wynn.

He wasn't more than a couple of minutes, as he was finishing the last remnant of the beefsteak pie, and there was nothing left to eat on the table. Then he rose, looking very fat and satisfied.

"I'll lend you a hand to roll him home, if you like," said Digby.

Figgins laughed, and pushed Fatty Wynn out of the study, and Kerr followed. The New House trio went back to their own House across the dusky quad, chuckling over the new scheme for bringing the Head to reason.

Tom Merry went up the passage towards his own quarters. Lowther and Manners had left him after the Scout practice,

"Growl!"

It dawned on Tom Merry that the Scouts were waiting for him to give the reply growl, as he was in duty bound to do, as leader of the patrol.

"Oh, it's all right!" he exclaimed. "I forgot."

And he promptly gave the reply growl. He did it rather well this time, too, and it sounded very much like the growl of a dog.

Growl!

The same answer came from the darkness of the study.

"Oh, ring off!" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently.

"'Nuff's as good as a feast, you know. We can't carry on a conversation in doggy language."

Gr-r-r-r!

There was a red glimmer of dying embers in the grate, and something dark was looming on the hearthrug. Tom Merry did not see it in the gloom, and he blundered right into it. It was a large basket, and his foot fetched it a powerful kick as he stumbled.

"My hat! What's—that's that?"

(Continued on page 11.)

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THE RIVAL SCOUTS!

(Continued from page 9.)

It was not a growl this time, it was more like a roar. Something white flashed in the gloom, and Tom Merry jumped clear of the floor, just in time to escape the teeth of a bulldog.

"Ow!" gasped the junior.
He made one bound for the door. He realised the fact at last. It was not the signal of the Boy Scouts he had heard in the study; it was the growl of a real dog!

He bounded through the doorway; and after him bounded the bulldog.

Tom Merry gave a yell as he heard the teeth snap behind him, and rushed frantically down the passage, with a heavy weight behind him. It was Towser, hanging by his teeth to the seat of his trousers.

CHAPTER 7.

Towser Takes Possession!

HERRIES had just come into Study No. 6 looking rather fatigued. He cast a somewhat dissatisfied glance at the cleared tea-table.

"So you've finished," he remarked. "I don't see why you couldn't wait for a fellow."

"You see, Figgins & Co. started, and we came in a bad second as it was," replied Blake. "There's the hambone left, and the piedish, if you're sharp set. Where have you been all this time?"

"Looking after my bulldog."
"Dear me! I hope he had a nice quiet end. I—I mean, I hope he's quite well."

"It's a bit of a cold he's got," said Herries. "That place where we keep the pets isn't warm enough or aired enough for him, now he's seedy. He ought to be taken into a warm, cosy place and looked after."

"I must really insist that no wotten bulldogs are brought into this study, Hewwies. If you want to bring a dog indoors you must bring him up to have some respect for a fellow's twousahs."

"Oh, I'm not going to bring him in here," grunted Herries. "You fellows make too much noise, anyway, for him to have any quiet. I've taken advantage of Tom Merry's offer."

His chums stared at him.
"Tom Merry's what?" said Blake.
"His offer," said Herries obstinately. "You surely remember him saying that he saw no objection to a bulldog in a study?"

"Ha, ha, ha! He was thinking of this study, not of his own, I imagine."

"I've taken him at his word. I suppose I've a right to take a fellow at his word. I've taken Towser up into Tom Merry's study in a basket and put him in front of the fire, and he'll be all right there if he's not disturbed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I'll tell Tom Merry as soon as he comes in, so that he won't go blundering in and disturbing Towser—"
"Ha, ha, ha! Tom Merry has been in a long time, and he has gone to his study," grinned Digby.

"Oh, hang! I hope he won't go blundering into Towser's basket. Towser hates being disturbed when he's taking a nap. I—"

"Hallo! What's that fearful row?"
"Bai Jove, it is a row, and no mistake."

Gr-r-r-r!
"Ow! Help!"

Gr-r-r-r!
It was indeed a "row." It came from the passage, and from the direction of the Shell's studies, and it was approaching.

Jack Blake rushed to the door and flung it open.
"What's the— My hat!"

Tom Merry was dashing down the passage at frantic speed, with Towser clinging to him. Fortunately, Towser's teeth had met only in the cloth, but they had gone near enough to the skin for Tom to know that they were there. Towser hung on like grim death, his hind legs sweeping the linoleum as the junior dashed on.

A roar of laughter from Study No. 6 greeted the unfortunate Tom, as he dashed into the light from the open doorway.

"It's Towser!" gasped Blake.
Herries uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"My aunt! I might have known he would have gone there bothering Towser!"

"Call him off!" shrieked Tom Merry.
"Here! Towser! Towser! Towser! Good dog!"
Towser refused to come off, but Blake rushed to the rescue with a cricket stump, and the bulldog was persuaded to let go.

Tom Merry reeled breathless against the wall.
"Hurt?" asked Blake, trying not to grin.
"N-n-no, I think not," panted Tom. "But—but I was startled. The beast was there in the dark, and when he growled I thought it was Manners and Lowther making the patrol signal—and then he went for me. The beast! He was in a basket or something stuck in front of the fire. Some utter ass shut him in my study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh rats!" growled Herries. "I suppose you'll say next that you didn't offer to have my dog in your study while he was seedy?"

Tom Merry stared.
"Blessed if I remember offering anything of the kind," he said. "I'd just as soon have a boa constrictor or a jabberwock."

Herries patted his savage favourite's head. Towser was sniffing round Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, apparently inclined to sample his nether garments. The swell of the School House backed into the study in alarm.

"Hewwies, keep that bwute away!"
"Well, you keep away from him!"
"I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry. "I'll put a bob towards buying a poleaxe for that dog. That's the only offer I'm going to make with regard to Towser."

And he walked away.
Herries grunted discontentedly.
"It seems to me that there's a set being made against my dog," he said. "A nice, quiet old chap, too, only likes a little bit of fun at times. Well, as Tom Merry won't have him, and it's no good asking any of the other fellows, I don't see any way out of it but by having him in here!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"
"Take the brute back where he belongs," growled Digby.
"Blessed if I can see why you don't sell him and buy some white rabbits."

"Oh, go and eat coke! Now, look here, you chaps," said Herries appealingly. "Towser's not well, and I want to keep him indoors for a bit. If you all back me up we can keep it dark from the prefects, and he won't be discovered here. I think you might back me up for once."

"Well, if you put it like that," said Blake, relenting.
"Yaas, wathah! If Hewwies appeals to us on the grounds of friendship, I don't see that we have any alternative but to grant his request."

"Oh, let him keep the tripehound here, if he likes!" grunted Digby.

And the chums of the Fourth took their prep down to the Common-room and left Herries and his bulldog in victorious possession of Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 8.

A Cat and Dog Story!

MEW! Miao-ou-u!
"Hallo, that's Thomas!" Tom Merry remarked.
The juniors were going up to bed, when the musical voice of Thomas, the cat, was heard. Thomas was the House dame's cat, and Mrs. Mimms was very proud of him.

Thomas had the freedom of the School House, and was monarch of all he surveyed below stairs. Thomas was a quiet cat, as a rule, and would purr on the hearthrug in the kitchen or the House dame's room for hours together, only leaving off purring to lap up milk or lick himself.

Thomas had one strong aversion, however. He barred dogs. When a member of the canine tribe was near Thomas would bristle and glare, and his back would go up like a very much bended bow.

Miao-ou-ouu!
"Something's wrong with Thomas," said Monty Lowther. "Perhaps he wants to go over to the New House. Mrs. Kenwig's cat is on intimate terms with Thomas—"

Mew-mew-au!
"Well, I hope the brute will shut up soon," remarked Manners; "I shan't be able to speak with that row going on."

"He can niff your beast of a dog, Herries," whispered Jack Blake. "Thomas always makes a row when there's a dog about."

"I don't see how he can. Towser's shut up in Study No. 6."

"Shouldn't wonder if Thomas wasn't wandering round there looking for scraps."

"Then it serves him jolly well right if Towser pins him."
 "There will be a row if he does."
 "Oh, I don't know—he won't last long if Towser once gets a good hold on him!"
 "Ha, ha, ha! I mean a row with Mrs. Mimms."
 "Oh, Mrs. Mimms ought to look after her cat! Besides, there are lots of tom-cats!"
 There was the sound of a cricket ball thudding along a passage and downstairs, and the mew of Thomas ceased.
 The juniors went to bed, and soon were in the land of dreams. But in Jack Blake's dreams the mew of Thomas mingled with a curiously realistic effect; which was accounted for when he suddenly awoke and found that the noise was real.
 The juniors blinked in the darkness of the dormitory, listening to the noise.
 Miau-miau-sisisis!
 Thomas was on the warpath!
 A quarter chimed out from the clock-tower, and Blake knew that it must be a quarter past ten. He sat up in bed.
 "That blessed cat!"
 "Bai Jove!" came a voice from D'Arcy's bed. "I wogard that cat as a perfect howwor! I have been awake for ten minutes, you know!"
 "The beast is in the House, I think!" said Blake savagely. "I don't mind a mew or two in the quad when the brute is serenading the New House tabby, but it's a bit too thick to have it inside the House."
 "I wathah think the bwute is aftah that hambone in Study No. 6."
 "I shut the door when I left the study, though."
 "Yaas; but I think I left it open when I went back."
 "Ass! What did you go back for?"
 "I wefuse to be called an ass! I went back to bring away my hat-box and glove-box. I could not wun the wisk of leaving them in the study for Howvies' bulldog to gnaw. He was gnawing your football boots, as it was."
 "My football boots!" shrieked Blake. "He was gnawing my football boots!"
 "Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of it; I was feelin' so anxious about my silk hat! As I was sayin', I couldn't shut the door, as I had a hat-box in one hand and a glove-box in the othah!"
 "My football boots—"
 "Yaas; when you come to think of it, it is wathah wuff on your football boots, and I weally wish I had thought of mentionin' the mattah to you."
 "You—you—you—"
 Miau-miau-miau-ss-s-s-s-s-s!
 Gr-r-r-r!
 A terrific uproar rang through the silence of the School House.
 "My hat!" cried Digby, starting up. "What on earth's that?"
 "Something's disturbing my bulldog!" growled Herries.
 "Faith, and it sounds as if it were a cat entirely!" said Reilly.
 Blake hopped out of bed. He was anxious to get to Study No. 6 and stop the din before any masters or prefects arrived upon the scene. There was a very strict law in the School House that pets should not be kept within doors—especially dogs. A dog had got into the Head's library once, and chewed up his Catullus; and since then dogs had been taboo. The uproar from Study No. 6 increased rather than other-

wise, and it was pretty clear that a desperate cat and dog fight was in progress.
 "What does this mean?" shouted Kildare, coming along the passage in shirt and trousers, with a torch in his hand.
 "Sounds like a cat and dog," said Blake. "It might be a cheap gramophone, it sounds like a—"
 He dodged just in time. Kildare was not in a humour for funny remarks. The captain rushed in the direction of the noise, and several other seniors followed him. The juniors had to make way. They arrived in a crowd at the open door of Study No. 6.
 The din by this time was really terrific.
 A startling scene met their gaze as torches were flashed into the study.
 Towser had left his basket, apparently having forgotten that he was ill. He was chasing Thomas, the cat, round and round the study. Thomas could have bolted out of the open door, but either he was too frightened to think of it, or he was unwilling to abandon the hambone which had attracted him to the study.
 The hambone was on the floor, having been dragged out by either the bulldog or the tom-cat, and apparently it had been gnawed by both.
 Gr-r-r-r-r!
 Mew-ew-ew-s-s-s-s-s-s-s!
 Thomas turned on his enemy every second or two, and arched his back and spat, his eyeballs glaring like green fire.
 "My only hat!" gasped Black.
 Thomas had jumped upon nearly everything in the study in escaping from his foe. Half the loose articles in the room were strewn upon the floor. Blake caught a glimpse of a football boot in the basket Towser had occupied. It was gnawed pretty well through.
 "Who brought this dog into the House?" roared Kildare.
 Mew-ew-ew!
 Thomas was pinned at last!
 He went down on the carpet, with Towser's teeth in his fur, and there was a terrific screeching and spitting and yapping and clawing.
 Herries rushed forward.
 "The beast! He'll hurt him!"
 "Collar him, while I get Thomas away!" exclaimed Tom Merry, who had joined the investigators, half-dressed like the rest.
 Herries snorted.
 "Blow Thomas! I was thinking of my dog! Towser doesn't like being clawed!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.
 Herries' anxiety was all for his precious bulldog. Even Kildare could not help grinning. Herries dragged at the collar of Towser, and his hands were clawed by Thomas. Tom Merry was clawed, too, in getting the tom-cat away. But the combatants were separated at last.
 Tom Merry tried to stroke Thomas into a good humour, but Thomas was not to be pacified. He struggled and scratched, and flew out of the junior's arms and out of the doorway. The boys scattered to let him pass, and he whizzed down the passage.
 A little gentleman in glasses was coming along the passage with a torch in his hand, and Thomas dashed between his legs, and little Mr. Lathom gave a jump and sat down suddenly on the linoleum. There was a crash, and his torch went out.

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Dear me!" gasped Mr. Lathom.
 Kildare ran to help him up.
 "Dear me!" murmured the master of the Fourth Form.
 "Something's smote me on the leg—some animal, I think, with greenish eyes!"
 "It was the cat, sir!"
 "Oh, the cat! That cat is a terrible nuisance, and I must really remonstrate with Mrs. Mimms. I am a merciful man, but I really think that cat should be painlessly extracted—I mean, painlessly killed."
 "He was fighting with a dog, sir."
 "Dear me! But dogs are forbidden in the School House."
 "You had better speak to Herries about that," said Kildare firmly.
 "I certainly shall!" Mr. Lathom had arrived at the door of the study. "Herries, is it possible that you have so far disregarded the rules of the House as to bring a dog into your study?"
 "I—I—I—"
 "Pway let me explain, Hewwies. I can explain to Mr. Lathom ever so much better. Towsah was wathah seedy, sir, and Hewwies persuaded us to let him have the wotten bwute in the study. Hewwies has certainly bwoken a wule of the House; but, on the othah hand, he certainly deserves a pwize medal from the Woyal Humane Society for taking care of a howwid beast that anybody else would have shot at once."
 "Some of the juniors giggled, and Mr. Lathom blinked at Herries.
 "Herries, if your dog is really ill, I will excuse you for bringing him into the House, on condition that you never do anything of the sort again."
 "Yes, sir," said Herries, with a heavy heart. "I—I—must I take him out again, sir?"
 "Certainly you must! But if you wish him to be taken care of, I have no doubt that Taggles, the porter, will take him in charge for a—small gratuity."
 "Thank you, sir!" said Herries, brightening up.
 "Take the animal out of the House at once. And now, boys, go back to bed."
 And so the affair of Towser ended, and it was fortunate for Herries that he had had mild little Mr. Lathom to deal with. Towser was taken over to the porter's lodge and deposited there. Taggles, the school porter, had not many virtues, but he was fond of dogs, and a tip made him quite willing to take charge of Towser.
 Herries, somewhat relieved in his mind, went back to bed.
 Tom Merry bathed his hands and wrists where Thomas had scratched him, and went to bed.
 Five minutes later he sat up with an exclamation.
 Beneath the window sounded the musical notes of Thomas, the cat!
 Mew-miau-miau-ew-e-w-ew!

CHAPTER 9.

Tom Merry Misses the Cat!

TOM MERRY stopped out of bed with a blaze in his eyes. Thomas, the cat, had scratched him and clawed him, and he had not been angry. Thomas, the cat, had raised Cain in the School House, and wakened nearly everybody who had gone to bed, and had escaped scot-free. But when Thomas, the cat, started serenades under the

windows of the Shell dormitory, the time had come for the condign punishment of Thomas.
 "Miau-miau-in-au-au!"
 "The beast!" muttered Tom Merry. "The horrid brute!"
 "Miau-miau-au-au!"
 "Oh, it's all right!" yawned Lowther. "He's only serenading. He'll cross the quad scone, and they'll have the benefit of his sweet voice in the New House. He's serenading Mrs. Kenwigg's tabby."
 "He can't do it under our windows!" growled Tom Merry. "Where did you put your boots, Lowther?"
 "What do you want with my boots?" asked Monty suspiciously.
 "I want to chuck one at him."
 "Chuck one of your own."
 "It might get lost."
 "Why, you—you—you—"
 "Never mind; here's one of Manners' football boots!"
 "You let my football boots alone!" yelled Manners, who had not shown any signs of wakefulness hitherto. "If you shy my football boots at that cat I'll jolly well shy you after them."
 "Oh, blow your old football boots; I never saw such fellows like you two for making a fuss."
 Tom Merry groped in the darkness and found a shoehorn, and then made his way to the window.
 The window was high up in the wall, and could only be reached by standing on the head of a bed. Tom Merry dragged the nearest bed towards the window, and there was a startled gasp from the occupant, who happened to be Herbert Skimpole, the inventive genius of the Shell.
 "Dear—dear me! What is happening? Is it an earthquake?"
 "Oh, hold your row, Skimmy!"
 "Is that you, Merry? Is it an earthquake that is happening? It must be, as my bed has moved from its place of its own volition, and, in fact, is still moving. Ow!" gasped Skimpole, as the bed bumped against the wall. "What a terrific shock! Has any part of the roof fallen in yet?"
 "You utter ass! I'm moving the bed, to stand on the end—"
 "It is most remarkable," went on Skimpole, unheeding. "I must take some notes of this. Earthquakes in Sussex are very rare, and—"
 "Will you hold your row?" roared Tom Merry. "I'm dragging your bed here to step on the head to get to the window. I'll step on your head instead if you don't shut up."
 "Oh dear! Is that all it is, Merry? I was quite startled, and I had no doubt that a most remarkable phenomenon was occurring."
 "Well, you shut up, and that will be a remarkable enough phenomenon!" growled Tom Merry, as he clambered on the bed and gained the window.
 He pushed the window open and looked out. The night was dark, and he could see little or nothing.
 The mee-ew of Thomas, the cat, was still audible, but it was farther off.
 Tom Merry growled discontentedly.
 Thomas, the cat, as if scenting danger, had moved round an angle of the building, and, judging by the sound, was now seated on the stone balustrade of the School House steps, a favourite spot he had for sunning himself in the daytime.

THE OPTIMIST!



"Beast!" muttered Tom Merry, dropping the shoehorn in disgust.

There was a yell from Herbert Skimpole.

"Ow! Ow! What was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry! I forgot you were under there," said Tom Merry, peering downwards. "Did that fall on you, Skimmy?"

"Ow! Yes, Tom Merry. It gave me a most unpleasant crack on the head, and—"

"Too bad!" grunted Lowther. "It was cracked already, too!"

"Really, Lowther—"

Tom Merry jumped down, and bundled Skimpole's bed back into its place; then through the stilly night came a louder and more penetrating sound from the dusky quad.

Miau-miau-miau-au-au!

"My only Aunt Matilda Ann!" exclaimed Tom Merry, exasperated. "That has got to be stopped."

"Go out and look for him," said Lowther encouragingly.

"When you have found him, give him one for me."

"You come with me!"

"Well, it's so jolly cold. And you're out of bed already, you know."

Tom Merry picked up one of Manners' football boots without saying anything to its owner. Silence was golden, and saved argument. He left the dormitory with a boot in his hand and a vengeful look in his face.

Quietly enough he went down the passage.

The window at the end of the passage commanded a view of the School House steps, and from there it was possible to take a good aim.

Thomas, the cat, was warming to his work now, and the sound of his serenade was piercing the stilly air far and wide. Tom Merry meant that it should be interrupted forcibly. He was getting fed-up with the nocturnal music of Thomas.

He reached the end window and opened it cautiously.

Tom Merry peered out into the gloom. He could make out scarcely anything, but from the darkness below came the unmelodious notes of Thomas.

Tom Merry took careful aim with the boot, judging more by sound than by sight. There was a sound in the quadrangle, but he did not notice it. He only heard the music of Mrs. Mimms' pet.

He did not know that a dark form was stealing to the School House steps to execute vengeance upon Thomas. He had no means of guessing that Taggles, the porter, was also abroad cat-hunting.

Miau-miau-au-au!

The boot flew from Tom Merry's hand with avenging force.

There was a fearful yell from below.

Tom Merry had missed the cat.

But the missile was not wasted. Taggles, the porter, as he crept up, had caught the boot—with his head! And the yell that Taggles gave scared Thomas away as much as the football boot could have done. The cat made one bound, and disappeared.

Taggles sat down on the steps and grunted.

Tom Merry, with a quiet chuckle, crept back to bed. The voice of Thomas, the cat, was heard no more round the School House that night. But the things Taggles said cannot be reported.

CHAPTER 10.

The Slackers!

THE next morning the campaign against the Head opened. Towards the end of the term at St. Jim's, as at most schools, things became slacker.

Masters were less exacting, and pupils less inclined to take trouble. Thoughts were fixed on the approaching holidays, and the genial influence of Christmastide softened all asperities. Prefects forgot to cuff cheeky fags, and even among the Babes of the Second Form there were fewer scrimmages.

There was a great deal of slacking in the class-rooms the last few days of the term, but such an amount of slacking as now commenced had never been heard of before at St. Jim's.

The Shell slacked, and the Fourth Form slacked. The Third Form followed suit, and slacked also. Such a crowd of slackers was amazing.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, did not know what to make of it. His class that morning knew nothing. Things he had told them a dozen times had passed completely from their minds. They made the most random answers to the easiest questions.

Tom Merry was one of the best in the Shell in the Latin lesson, but Tom Merry construed that morning not only in a way that would have made "Quintilian stare and gasp," but in a way that made Mr. Linton feel inclined to tear

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his hair. Monty Lowther's old joke about Julius Cæsar giving three parties to Gaul was nothing to it.

"Profusus patriaque iramque parentis vitat Agenorides," said Tom Merry, with a face a preternatural solemnity.

"A profuse pater, the parent of a ram—"

"What?" shrieked Mr. Linton.

"A profuse parent, the pater of a ram."

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir?"

"It is impossible that you can be so stupid. You will take a hundred lines for impertinence!" thundered Mr. Linton. "Lowther, you will construe."

Tom Merry sat down, and Monty Lowther rose with a lurking grin on his face.

"A profitable pater, the parent—"

"Take a hundred lines, Lowther. You will construe, Manners."

"A pertinacious ram, the property of a pater—"



Tom Merry sprang between the ruffian and the trembling girl, he shouted. With a curse the tramp sprang forward.

"Two hundred lines, Manners! Construe, French."

"A profuse country with angry parents—"

"Three hundred lines, French! You will construe, Gore."

"A fugitive from an angry ram—"

"Four hundred lines, Gore! You will construe, Macdonald."

"A countryfied fugitive—"

"Five hundred lines!" shrieked Mr. Linton. "And the next boy to make a ridiculous answer will be sent to the Head!"

And the rag was stopped for a time.

But the Shell were in earnest, and they kept up the game. They found it rather exciting, and comical, too, and the impositions that were showered upon them as thick as leaves in Vallambrosa did not trouble them much. It was a physical impossibility to get all the lines written out before breaking up for the holidays, and all the traditions of St. Jim's were against carrying over impots into a new term.

Herr Schneider took the Fourth Form and the Shell together that morning. He had had his hands full with them before, but never so full as on the present occasion.

It was never an easy task to drive his beautiful Deutsch into the heads of the juniors, but fellows like Lowther and Merry and Kerr had always been good German scholars, and had given him little trouble. But now the brightest fellows in the class seemed as dense as the dullest. Such a simple sentence as "Weinen wollte mit ihnen gern" was the cause of trouble at the start.

"Pour out the Rhine wine," said Monty Lowther demurely. Herr Schneider stared at Lowther fixedly.

"Vat did you say mit yourself, Lowther?"

"Pour out the Rhine wine, sir."

"You vas pretend tat you tink tat tat sentence tat I tell you is vat you say mit yourself after!" roared the herr, his English growing mixed as his anger mounted. "Lowther, I tink tat you te stupitest poy tat nefer vas after!"

"Yes, sir," said Monty Lowther meekly.

"Tat sentence have noting to do mit trinking vine. I ask



blenched, his eyes ablaze. "You cowardly ruffian! Stand back!" and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were dashing to the rescue.

you again vat it is," said Herr Schneider heatedly. "I have written him on te plackboard. Use your prains!"

"I haven't any, sir."

"Eh?"

"I haven't any prains, sir. I don't know what they are."

"Poy, I really tink tat you speak trooth, and tat you have no prains inside of your head before!"

"Oh, you mean brains, sir! We generally pronounce brains, brains in England, and not prains. I suppose you don't have brains in Germany?"

"Lowther, you vas take vun hundred lines!"

"Well, that's hard cheese, because they don't have brains in Germany!" grunted Monty Lowther, as he sat down.

"Morry, vill you tell me vat tat line be in Engleesh?"

"I should like to whine with you, sir."

The class giggled, and Herr Schneider turned pink.

"Take a hundred lines, Merry! You may speak, Plack."

Jack Blake wrinkled his brows thoughtfully at the sentence the herr had scrawled on the blackboard.

"I'll have a drink with you," he said.

"Take two hundred lines, Blake! D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir? Pway wait a moment while I adjust my

monocle. Yaas, I can do that as easily as anythin', sir. I would I had some wine to dwink with you, sir."

"Vun tousand lines!" roared Herr Schneider. "Ten tousand lines! Twenty tousand lines after!"

"Yaas, sir. Shall I do them at home during the vac, sir?"

"Sit down, D'Arcy! I tink te class have gone mad mit itself before!" said the herr. "You vas all know already pretty vell tat tat line say, 'Fain would I weep mit you. Fain would I weep mit you, you stupid poy!"

"But we're not weeping, sir," said Digby.

"Vat tat you say, Tigby?"

"We are not weeping, sir, so you can't weep with us."

"Tigby, take vun tousand—ten tousand lines before. Vat I say is te translation of tat line on te plackboard—'Fain would I weep mit you.'"

"We'd be glad, sir," said Blake. "Only we're not doing any weeping now."

"Himmel! I tells you—"

"If you'd like to weep, sir, don't mind us. We can wait!"

"Poy! Beasts! Idiots!"

"We don't mind, sir," said Tom Merry. "If you would fain weep with us, we'll try to do a weep, sir, to keep you company."

"I tell you—"

"Yes, sir, don't mind us, sir."

Herr Schneider picked up his pointer. He rapped the knuckles of a dozen boys nearest to him, and there were howls in the class, even if there was no weeping.

The German master glared at the juniors.

"I tink tat te class is insane mit itself dis morning!" he said. "But I tink tat I use te pointer venever toro is any sheek, ain't it?"

And for the rest of the lesson the unfortunate herr had a quieter time.

But when the morning lessons were over and the masters of St. Jim's compared notes, all the junior masters found that they had had a troublesome time.

Mr. Selby, the Third Form master, was gasping when he left the class-room, where he had been combating the amazing stupidity of the infants, and even in the Fifth Form there had been some signs of the "rag," and Mr. Ratcliff was looking as pleasant as a thundercloud after lessons.

The Sixth had been the only model Form that morning, anything like a rag being miles below the dignity of the grave and reverend seniors of the Sixth.

The Head was unconscious of the new departure of the hopeful juniors till after morning lessons, but when he met the masters he could not fail to see signs of disturbance in their faces.

He looked surprised and troubled when he learned of the unusual proceedings in the junior class-rooms.

"It is very curious," he remarked to Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, "I am aware that a little unruliness often shows itself near the end of a term, but really this seems to be passing all bounds."

Mr. Railton smiled slightly.

"I'm afraid the juniors are dissatisfied, sir."

"Indeed! Why?"

"It is an absurd idea they appear to have in their heads. The Rylcombe Grammar School breaks up on the 15th, and we remain here till the 17th. The boys appear to think they are entitled to break up two days earlier."

Dr. Holmes frowned darkly.

"Ah! I heard something of that yesterday; three juniors had the astounding impertinence to come to me, in a sort of deputation, to ask me to allow the school to break-up two days earlier than usual."

"Of course, it is utterly absurd. The establishment of the Grammar School in the neighbourhood cannot make any difference to us, except by some mental process peculiar to the junior mind." The Head smiled. "There is really no accounting for the fancies boys will get into their heads at times," he said. "But this really amounts to a plot against me—an attempt to coerce their headmaster! I am afraid the delinquents will have to be severely dealt with if there is any more of this absurdity."

And the Head looked as if he meant what he said.

CHAPTER 11.

The New House Patrol!

TOM MERRY & CO. poured out into the quad after morning lessons in high spirits.

The "rag" had commenced, and seemed to be going well. A few impositions did not matter, as they would never be written. The Terrible Three marched out arm-in-arm with gleeful faces. A crowd of juniors went to cheer under Mr. Linton's windows, but were scattered soon

enough when they saw the Shell master looking out. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, came out into the quadrangle, and looked severely towards the group of juniors chattering and laughing round Tom Merry.

Tom's face became grave all at once.
"I want to speak to Lathom," he said. "I'll join you in a minute."

"More rags?" grinned Blake. "What's the little game?"
"Oh, no! It's about that pass the other day."

"Eh? What about the pass?"
"You remember—we got Lathom to sign a pass for us, and he didn't know Figgins was hiding behind a hedge, and I wrote the pass for him to sign so that it would include the chaps he didn't see."

"Ye-es. I thought afterwards that I'd rather we had owned up."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Well, that's what I was thinking of doing," said Tom Merry frankly. "Lathom's a good little sort—but I won't mention names, in case it means a licking."

"Rats! It was my idea. No good too getting licked for one wheeze." But Tom Merry scudded off.

Mr. Lathom stopped as he saw the junior coming towards him. He looked rather severely at Tom Merry through his spectacles.

"You wish to speak to me, Merry?" he said majestically.
"Yes, sir, if you can spare me a minute. It's—it's about that pass the other day," said Tom Merry, colouring. "You may remember, sir—it was dark, and I wrote it out, and you signed it."

The Fourth Form master looked puzzled.

"I remember perfectly, Merry. Your pass had been accidentally burnt by the match one of you was holding, and I signed a new one."

"It—it wasn't an accident, sir. The pass was burnt on purpose."

"Why? Why was not the old pass as good as the new one?" demanded Mr. Lathom, looking very much surprised.

"I—I wrote out the second one, sir, and didn't specify the number of chaps it covered," stammered Tom Merry, "and you signed it."

"Well, Merry?"

"And—and you didn't see all of us, sir. The rest of us were hiding behind the hedge."

Mr. Lathom frowned.

"Then you—you were guilty of an imposition upon my—credulity, Merry? You passed in a number of truants by means of the pass so obtained."

"Ye-es, sir," said Tom Merry, lowering his head a little. "I didn't mean any harm, sir. It was more a joke than anything else."

"And you confess to me now that it has come to light, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, sir, it hasn't come to light."

"Oh! Then what is your motive for telling me about it?"

"I—I felt rather uneasy in my mind on the subject, that's all, sir. I made up my mind to tell you about it, and—and take my guel."

"Your what—oh, your punishment." Mr. Lathom paused. "Well, Merry, you have taken a very honest and manly course in telling me this. I am glad to see that you are so frank and truthful, at all events. You certainly deserve punishment for imposing upon a Form master. But—but in the circumstances I shall pardon you. You may go."

Tom Merry's eyes danced.

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

Mr. Lathom was smiling as he walked on. He liked Tom Merry, as everyone else at St. Jim's did. The open confession had done Tom more good than harm with him, though the hero of the Shell had not foreseen it.

The juniors had gone into the gym for further Scout practice, and Tom Merry joined them there. They had nearly an hour before dinner. Blake was standing in the doorway staring into the gym when Tom came up.

"Anything the matter?" asked Tom, as he caught the expression on Blake's face.

The Fourth-Form pointed into the gym.

"Just look!"

Tom Merry looked, and whistled. Six New House juniors were going through evolutions under the direction of the great Figgins. Kerr, Wynn, French, Pratt, Smith, and Roberts, of the New House, were the six, and it was evident that they were forming a patrol.

The School House juniors looked in somewhat indignantly. Figgins & Co. had not been long following their lead. The New House juniors took no notice of them. They went on practising with stolid faces.

"The patrol being known as the Rat Patrol, in honour of our respected Housemaster," said Figgins, "it will be necessary for the members to learn the squeak of the rat as a signal—"

"Squeak! Squeak!" came from some of the more humorous School House juniors in the doorway.

Figgins smiled blandly.

"You will be able to pick it up easily—"

"Squeak, squeak!"

"—because there are some of the animals in the gym now, squeaking away for all they're worth."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Rat Patrol.

And the School House squeakers looked rather sheepish. The Rat Patrol began to practise squeaking in deadly earnest, and Tom Merry stopped his ears.

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as a foahful wow," said D'Arcy. "Whenevah I hear a wat squeakin' in future I shall think of Figgins. I say, Figg, deah boy, I wish you'd stop that wow. It sounds like wusty hinges!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Figgins.

"I suppose you call yourselves a patrol," said Tom Merry, with good-tempered tolerance. "They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bosh!" said Figgins cheerfully. "It's not imitation to take up an idea and work it properly, instead of watching while others muck it up."

"Of course, you wouldn't compare your rotten Rat Patrol with our Dog Patrol."

"No, I wouldn't—there's no comparison," said Figgins disdainfully.

"Wats, Figgins! I must weally say—"

"Well, pit your patrol against ours, then," said Tom Merry at once. "We're ready to test you in anything you like."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins instantly. "What shall it be—running, riding, walking, scouting, tracking, boxing, wrestling—anything you like."

"Scouting, of course, as we're Scouts," said Tom Merry. "We've got time before dinner."

"We can't go out of the grounds—"

"No need; the quad is big enough. Look here, one patrol has to track the other, and then the other has to track the one. The patrol that uncovers the other party the quicker wins the test. Is that clear?"

"Clear as mud!" said Kerr.

"Don't you speak, corporal," said Figgins severely. "Silence in the ranks!"

"Silence in the wanks, deah boys!"

"It's all right," said Figgins. "We'll stay in the gym while you fellows go and get into cover. Then we track you down, and every fellow tracked down is a prisoner unless he can get back to the gym. Then you serve us the same. Go ahead!"

"Yaas, wathah! And I weally think, Figgins—"

"Never mind what you think, Gussy! Got a move on!" Tom Merry and Blake dragged D'Arcy away. The Dog Patrol left the gym, having arranged that the Rats were to give them three minutes grace. Figgins & Co. could be trusted, of course, not to look.

Tom Merry looked round the quad. There had been a light fall of snow, which was likely to show footprints very plainly when the juniors left the well-tramped path.

"Bai Jove, I can see a likely place!" said Arthur Augustus. "You can give me a bunk up, Tom Merry, if you like, and then cut off and hide yourself. Tom Merry! Bai Jove! Fancy a chap walkin' away while I'm talkin' to him! I shall have to manage it myself, I suppose."

The swell of St. Jim's hurried off.

Round the corner of the old School House was an ancient water-butt. It was no longer used for its original purpose, but it was still there.

D'Arcy reached it, scudding through the snow in too much of a hurry to notice that he was leaving tracks that a blind man could have followed.

He arrived at the water-butt and looked at it doubtfully for a moment. It was not over-clean, and it did not look inviting.

Arthur Augustus thought of his clothes, and hesitated. But he heroically nerved himself to the effort. He heard a shout from round the corner as he stood there, showing that Figgins & Co. were coming out of the gym.

"Bai Jove!" he muttered. "I must wisk it!" And he clambered over the side of the old butt.

To drop down inside was the work of a moment, and the swell of St. Jim's found plenty of room to crouch, so that his head would be below the level of the top.

There he hoped to remain secure till Figgins & Co. had gone further afield in search of the hidden Dog Patrols, and then a dash to the gym would be easy, and D'Arcy, at least, would be one of the winners.

If he had known that a couple of faces were looking out of the box-room window, and that Gore and Mellish had watched all his movements with much interest, he might not have felt so easy in his mind.

(Continued on page 18.)

"What the dickens is he getting into the water-butt for?" asked Gore, staring at the cad of the Fourth in amazement. Mellish chuckled.

"Figgins & Co. are after him, I expect. This is some of their patrol rot, you know; they're doing the Boy Scout wheeze. Rot, I call it!"

"So do I!" agreed Gore.

Gore and Mellish were just the fellows to call the Boy Scout idea "rot." They had gone into the box-room to smoke cheap cigarettes, pretending to enjoy them, and at the same time quaking with dread of hearing the footstep of a prefect.

Mellish flattened his nose against the window, but D'Arcy had disappeared into the water-butt.

The cad of the Fourth grinned.

"My hat! What a ripping wheeze!"

"What is it?"

"What price a jug of water on him? It would give Gussy a giddy ducking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gore.

"Don't make a row!" grinned Mellish. "He might hear. You get the jug of water while I get the window open."

"Right you are!"

Gore hurried away, and by the time he returned with the jug of water Mellish had succeeded in silently opening the window.

Arthur Augustus crouched in the water-butt, oblivious of his impending doom.

CHAPTER 12.

The Rival Scouts

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was listening with painful intensity. He raised his head above the level of the butt and looked round, and caught a glimpse of the trackers examining the snow at a short distance.

He popped down again like a jack-in-the-box.

Were they going to track him to the water-butt, or to pass on and leave him a clear run back to the gym?

He could not resist raising his head again to see, but at the same time he was careful to make no sound.

It was very cold and bleak in the water-butt, but duty compelled Arthur Augustus to sit tight.

The trackers were coming closer.

He could hear the sound of Patrol-Leader Figgins' voice, and the answering tones of Corporal Kerr.

Were they tracking him down?

He felt that he must have one more look.

His head rose again higher—and then a fearful screech left his lips and echoed through the silence of the quad.

"Ow! Wow! Gwoooooooogh!"

A flood of cold water had suddenly swished down over his head and splashed all over him.

The unfortunate swell of St. Jim's was drenched from head to foot.

"Ow! Ow-ow-wow-ooooch!"

Figgins gave a yell.

"There he is!"

Three or four New House Scouts dashed up to the water-butt. From the open window of the box-room Mellish and Gore were yelling with laughter.

Arthur Augustus was trying to scramble out of the butt, and Figgins & Co. laid violent hands on him and helped him out—so forcibly, that he bumped on the ground and yelled again.

"Got him!" roared Figgins.

"Welease me! You howwid wottahs, welease me! I wefuse to be dwenched with watah and bumped on the boastlay gwound! Welease me at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish and Gore yelled with laughter from the window, and the New House Scouts were yelling, too.

Arthur Augustus picked himself up.

"Got him!" shouted the Scouts. "You're a prisoner, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to—"

"Look out! There goes Tom Merry!"

The Scouts dashed away, without bestowing any further attention upon Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry was making a break across the quad for the gym, the way having been left open by the Scouts in the tracking of D'Arcy.

The New House patrol were tearing after Tom Merry in a twinkling, but the hero of the Shell was in first. He turned breathlessly in the doorway of the gym and snapped his fingers cheerfully at the Rat Patrol.

"Never mind," said Figgins undauntedly; "look for the rest."

And the Scouts recommenced the tracking.

Reilly made a break from behind a fence, and just got into the gym by the skin of his teeth, so to speak; but Manners and Lowther were both captured on the run,

Digby was run down in the bicycle-shed and captured, and Jack Blake was cornered behind the chapel.

But Jack Blake was a youth of resource. He was driven from cover, but he ran and dodged, and dodged and ran, till he was fairly cornered. Then he swung himself to the top of the wall by the ivy and ran along recklessly, and dropped into the Head's garden before Figgins & Co. quite knew what he was doing.

From that spot he had the choice of three or four ways back to the gym, and he got in safely by one of them.

Figgins & Co. were only about five seconds behind, and they came in breathless. Arthur Augustus had disappeared. He had gone in to get a rub down and change his clothes.

"Four captures and three escapes," said Tom Merry. "If we don't do better than that, Figgy, you can call yourselves the Cock House of St. Jim's as far as scouting is concerned."

"Well, we're ready to try."

"Where's Gussy?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking round. "We can't play the game fairly without our full number."

"He's gone in to change his things," grinned Blake. "The young ass! Ripping sort of a Scout he makes! Fancy a Scout in war-time going in to change his things! I say, Herries, come and be a Scout?"

"Right-ho!" said Herries, who was looking very cheerful. He had just had a favourable report from Taggles as to the state of Towser.

"Now we're up to the number again," said Blake. "Get off, you New House wasters, and we'll give you three minutes!"

And Figgins & Co. went out to take cover in their turn. Tom Merry and his patrol waited impatiently for the three minutes' grace to expire. The hero of the Shell snapped his watch shut at last.

"Time's up!"

And the School House patrol left the gym. There was no sign of Figgins & Co. in the quadrangle. There were plenty of tracks in the snow, but which were made by Figgins & Co., and which weren't, was open to question.

Tom Merry's eyes glistened as he caught sight of a shoulder behind the corner of the woodshed.

"There's one of the bounders!" he muttered.

"Faith, and it looks like Figgins' jacket!" muttered Reilly.

"Come on, then—quickly!"

"Sure, I'm wid ye!"

The two Scouts strolled off quietly through the misty quad. The others spread in various directions. Tom Merry and Reilly approached the woodshed with the stealthiness of real Scouts on the war-trail. They came closer—closer—closer—and all of a sudden rushed round the corner and pounced upon the junior there, and dragged him over in their victorious clutch.

"Got the beast!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Really, Tom Merry— Oh dear! You startled me! Please do not tread on my papers! Pray do not be so rough—"

"Faith, and it's Skimpole entirety!"

"Skimpole! The—the utter ass!"

Skimpole blinked at Tom Merry. He had chosen that quiet corner behind the woodshed for the purpose of going through the notes of his four hundred and forty-fifth chapter of his forthcoming book on Determinism.

His notes, like the graves of the severed family in the poem, were scattered far and wide now.

"Really, Tom Merry! Pray help me collect my notes—"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry wrathfully. "What do you mean by sticking there behind the woodshed and pretending to be Figgins?"

Skimpole blinked at him in amazement.

"But I didn't pretend to be Figgins, that I am aware of, Merry! I had chosen this retired spot in order to—"

"You shrieking ass! To give us all this trouble for nothing!"

"Pray help me collect my notes—"

"Oh, blow your notes!"

"Really, Merry! Pray stop a minute! This may seriously delay the publication of my great work, and possibly set back the clock of human progress for a considerable time! Dear me, even that fails to move him; he is gone. It will be very distressing indeed if the clock of human progress is set back through this unfortunate incident!" murmured Skimpole, groping for his precious notes.

Tom Merry and Reilly were dashing off. They had caught sight of Figgins now, making a desperate break for the gym, and they were after him like greyhounds.

Figgins ran well, but Tom Merry gained, and his hand touched the shoulder of the New House junior within six yards of the door of the gym.

The touch, however, seemed to act as a spur to Figgins, for he bolted away from it, and sprang desperately on. But

Jack Blake rushed in from a different direction, and charged the fleeing junior right over.

Figgins rolled in the snow, and in a moment Tom Merry had pinned him; and the next second Reilly came up and grasped him, too. In his excitement and determination that the prisoner should not escape, Reilly sat on his head and flattened him down in the mud, and the unfortunate New House junior gurgled and choked.

"Don't kill him!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Faith, and I've got him!"

"Yes; but don't suffocate him!"

"Faith, and it's a prisoner he is entirely!"

Jack Blake grabbed the excited Irish junior off.

Figgins was helped up, too winded to move a limb. He gasped and he leaned against the door of the gym.

"Well, you've got me!" he panted. "Any others in yet?"

"No. We've captured Skimpole by mistake, but he doesn't count."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins gasped for breath in the doorway of the gym, and Tom Merry, Blake, and Reilly rushed off in search of fresh captures.

Smith and Pratt were being marched towards the gym by Herries and Lowther, and so three prisoners were already captured.

A few minutes later Kerr got safely home, and the Scottish partner in the Co. was the first of the Rat Patrol to get safely in; and, as it proved, he was also the last.

One by one the Rat Patrol was run down and captured, until the collection of prisoners numbered six.

Figgins grinned rather ruefully.

"Well, you Dogs take the biscuit this time, I admit," he said. "But we'll give you another run for your money after school."

And it being nearly dinner-time, the fatigued Boy Scouts went in with extremely keen appetites to the welcome meal.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry is Sorry!

THE success of the morning had encouraged the plotters, and they came in to afternoon lessons ripe for further mischief.

Having caused Mr. Linton to lose his temper and Mr. Selby to fly into a rage and worried Herr Schneider to the verge of apoplexy and driven Mr. Lathom into a state bordering on hysterics, the juniors felt that things were going well. A little more, and they would have proved to everybody's satisfaction that the Lower Forms were a force to be reckoned with at St. Jim's.

But in the meantime, Dr. Holmes, as we have seen, had learned what was toward, and he had taken counsel with the masters. When the Shell resumed work at half-past two Mr. Linton was very quiet and calm—and ready for them.

He had the pleasure of conducting the Shell upon an excursion into Roman history. Tom Merry was the first to start the ball rolling. He informed his amazed master, in reply to a question, that Hannibal founded the city of Rome in the reign of Trajan; and Mr. Linton, prepared as he was, gasped.

"Merry, step out here!"

Tom Merry made a grimace and stepped out before the class. He expected punishment, and he was ready to take it; that was all in the game.

But Mr. Linton did not pick up cane or pointer. He wrote a few words upon a sheet of paper, gave it to Tom Merry to read, and told him to take it to Dr. Holmes.

Tom Merry turned crimson as he read the brief note. It stated concisely that Thomas Merry had been guilty of gross impertinence in class.

The junior stood fingering the note, with crimson cheeks and downcast eyes. As a matter of fact, the note stated the exact truth, only it had not occurred to Tom Merry in that light before.

Mr. Linton looked at him grimly.

"Well, Merry, do you need telling twice?"

Tom Merry turned slowly away and left the class-room.

A hush fell upon the Shell. To be sent in to the Head was a punishment too severe to be lightly encountered. That, and the absence of their leader, brought the juniors to order. The "rag" ended as suddenly as it had begun.

Tom Merry took his way to the Head's study with faltering steps. Dr. Holmes was not there, as he happened to be taking the Sixth that afternoon. Tom Merry knew where he would find him, and he went on still more slowly to the Sixth Form Room.

The door was closed, and he tapped on it. His tap was not heard, and he pushed open the door and looked in. Dr. Holmes and the Sixth were fighting over again the ancient battles of the Seven against Thebes, and the Head, at all events, was too deeply interested to note the entrance of so insignificant a personage as a junior.

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Kildare and Darrell glanced at him, as did Rushden and Drake, and they grinned a little at his crimson face. They knew what was going on in the Lower School.

Tom Merry came up to the Head, but Dr. Holmes did not look down. Tom dared not step out before him and attract his attention, nor would he venture to pluck him by the gown. He had the pleasure of standing there for several minutes, while the Head was expounding a difficult passage, with the eyes of all the Sixth Form upon him.

To judge by the colour of his complexion, all the blood in his body was being pumped into his face. The lurking smiles of the seniors were not lost upon him, although his eyes were downcast. He would have given a term's pocket-money for the floor to open and let him fall through out of sight.

Dr. Holmes became aware at last that the attention of the Sixth was not centred upon the speech of Eteocles. There was nothing comic in Eteocles' speech, but the Sixth were smiling.

The Head looked a little puzzled. He glanced round, and saw Tom Merry, and gave a slight start.

"Merry! What are you doing here? Why are you not in your class-room?"

"If you please, sir—" stammered Tom.

"You have a note for me," said the Head, seeing it in the junior's hand. "Very well; give it to me."

Tom handed him the note without a word.

Dr. Holmes glanced over it, and his brow grew very dark. He read through the note, and then looked at Tom's crimson face, and then looked at Mr. Linton's note again.

"So you have been guilty of gross impertinence, Merry?" he exclaimed at last.

"I—I—I—"

"It is very annoying that a Sixth Form lesson should be interrupted by the impertinence of a junior," said the Head. "I hope you realise what trouble you have made yourself, Merry. Go to my study and wait for me there."

"Ye-es, sir."

Tom Merry left the Sixth Form Room and made for the direction of the Head's study. There he waited in unpleasant apprehension for about a quarter of an hour, while the Sixth were getting through with the Seven against Thebes.

Dr. Holmes entered at last. His face was very severe, and the rustle of his gown was awe-inspiring. Tom Merry waited in silence for his doom.

The Head stood with one hand on his table, his eyes fixed upon Tom Merry. Tom did not meet his glance. There was silence for some moments, which seemed to Tom to last for centuries.

"Merry," said Dr. Holmes, at last, "I am sorry for this. You have a really good character in your Form, and I am very sorry to see you entering into this sort of thing. There are boys in the Shell whom it would not surprise me. But I did not look for it in you."

Tom Merry wished the caning or flogging, whichever it was to be, would begin. It would be better than this.

"You have been impertinent to your Form master," said the Head. "You do not deny the charge, of course?"

"I—I—I did not mean to be impertinent, sir!"

"What did you do?"

"N-nothing, sir."

"What did you say, then?"

"I—I made an incorrect answer, I think, sir."

"Indeed! Mr. Linton would hardly report you to me for impertinence if you had made only an incorrect answer," said Dr. Holmes. "I am afraid I must conclude that the answer was deliberately incorrect, and part of a plan. But what was the answer? Repeat it to me."

"I—I only said that Hannibal founded Rome, sir."

"You said what?" said Dr. Holmes petrified.

"That—that Hannibal founded Rome, sir, in—in the reign of Trajan."

"Indeed! I am surprised that you did not say in the reign of King George the Fifth," said the Head sarcastically.

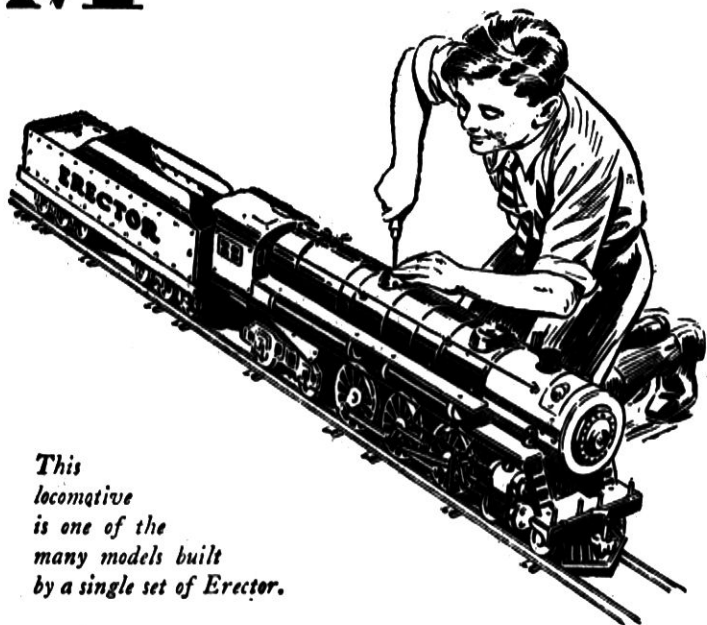
"You were deliberately pretending to be stupid, Merry, for the purpose of causing your Form master trouble. I believe that this is called a 'rag' in the Lower Forms. You know perfectly well that Hannibal was a Carthaginian general who fought against Rome, when the city had been in existence a very long time, and that Trajan did not reign till many centuries after Hannibal's time. You made the most absurd answer possible. I think I am not wrong in concluding that a 'rag' is in progress in the Lower Forms."

Tom Merry was silent. He wondered why the Head did not begin with the cane at once, without wasting time. But Dr. Holmes had other methods.

"Now, Merry," said Dr. Holmes, in a kinder voice, "you are not the sort of boy to lend yourself to insubordination in this way. I expect better things of you. I think you have acted without reflection, and I am sure I can depend upon your better nature. I shall not punish you."

(Continued on page 20.)

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THE RIVAL SCOUTS!

(Continued from page 18.)

Tom Merry's eyes opened wide. "I shall depend upon your reflection on this matter, and seeing how absurd and childish it is to rebel against constituted authority for a fanciful reason," said Dr. Holmes. "You may go, Merry."

"I—I may go!" stammered Tom Merry. "Yes; and reflect on what I have said to you." Tom Merry made a movement to go, and then turned back. At last his eyes met the Head's frankly.

"I am sorry, sir," he said. Dr. Holmes smiled genially. "Very good! I was sure I was not mistaken in you, Merry."

And Tom Merry left the study, mentally declaring that the Head was a brick, and that so far as he was concerned the 'rag' was at an end.

CHAPTER 14.

The End of the Rag!

TOM MERRY was a model for the rest of the afternoon. The Shell, accustomed to following their leader, did so on the present occasion, and Mr. Linton's worries were at an end. For which relief he was duly grateful, though a little puzzled.

When the Form left the class-room, Tom Merry staggered under two terrific thumps on the shoulders, administered by Manners and Lowther.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Manners. "Did you get a very bad licking?" exclaimed Lowther. "I didn't get a licking at all, and there's nothing the matter—except that I'm being thumped by a pair of dangerous lunatics."

"A lecture instead," said Lowther reflectively. "I'd rather have a licking, myself. Fancy turning over a new leaf like that all of a sudden. The rag fizzled right out."

"All the better." "You don't mean to say it's all up?" "Yes, it is, as far as I'm concerned," said Tom Merry, colouring a little, but speaking quite firmly.

His chums looked at one another. "He's been reading a goody-goody book," said Lowther, with conviction.

"I haven't!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "All about a good little boy who wouldn't take a plum out of the pudding," said Lowther solemnly. "And there was a bad little boy who did take a plum out of the pudding, and was tossed by a bad bull—I mean, a mad bull—and died in fearful agony, all through taking a plum out of the pudding while the good little boy was doing his home-lessons by the fireside, or weeping on the paternal shirt-front."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Lowther!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Manners giggled. "There's a difference between having a little sense and being goody, I suppose? The fact is, we have been playing the giddy ox."

"Well, I rather thought that all along; but it was fun." "Come to think of it, there isn't much fun in being silly asses. I'm done with the rag, and I'll speak to Blake and Figgy about it."

Blake was coming along from the Fourth Form Room, looking rather lugubrious. The Terrible Three stopped him. "Wherefore that pensive brow?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, it's rotten!" said Blake. "We started ragging Lathom in class, but it was a fizzle. It was a good wheeze, too. We started on him in decimals, and got him into a fix so that I thought he would begin to rave. Then the boarder sent us into the Head's study—Figgins and me."

"Licked?" "Poof! I wouldn't have minded a licking; but the Head talked to us like a Dutch uncle, and made us feel small. The fact is, you know, I begin to think that we've been playing the giddy goat, and it's time this rag stopped."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "What are you cackling at, you stupid Shell-fish? If you want a set of prize thick ears all round," said Blake, "you've only got to say so."

"It's all right, old son; keep your wool on. Only we've just come to the same conclusion." "So you've turned over a new leaf," said Gore, in passing. "I hear that you're turning the other cheek, Merry."

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He gave Tom Merry a tap on the nose. Tom's left came out like a flash, and Gore rolled along the passage.

"Must have been a false report," said Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!" Gore sat up, and then stood up. He pressed his handkerchief to his mouth.

"You beast!" he roared. "Can't you take a joke?" "You should have said it was a joke, then," said Tom Merry. "How am I to know your jokes unless you tell me so beforehand?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Gore walked away, scowling. The juniors looked out into the quadrangle. The December dusk was thick, and it was drizzling with rain. It was not an enticing sight, but, uninviting as the weather was, the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's were not put out by it.

"Bai Jove, it's not what you'd call attractive," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Fewwaps it would be better to stay indoors, as—"

"Rats! Don't be a molly coddle, old chap!" "I would refuse to be a molly coddle under any circumstances. Blake, I wasn't thinkin' of the cold, you know, but the dangah of 'poilin' our clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Never mind our clothes. When a foreign army lands in Britain, you don't want him to find you putting your trousers in the press, or brushing a silk hat, do you? If you are ever going to die for your King and Country—"

"Weally, Blake, we have had enough of that from Tom Mewwy. I am quite weady to go out scouting if you chaps are; in fact, I had better come if you do, as you are pretty certain to get into twouble without me."

"That settles it," said Tom Merry. "Gussy must come." "I wathah think you are wottin', you wottah; but you are wight, all the same. Besides, if we go towards the village, it is quite poss. that we may meet my Cousin Ethel."

"If you knew when she was coming—"

"Yaas, wathah! In that case we could meet her at the station; but, as a mattah of fact, she only said she was comin' to-day, and didn't say whethah she was walkin' ovah, or whethah she was comin' by twain, or which twain!"

"Just like a girl," agreed Blake. "Weally, Blake, if you mean that remark in a dispaingin' sense, I must take exception to it, as—"

"Oh pax!" grinned Tom Merry. "Let's get ready and have a run before tea. Kildare will always give us a pass for scouting, I know."

The pass was easy enough to obtain. Both patrols prepared for business. The motto of the Boy Scouts, "Be Prepared," was one that was taken in earnest by the Scouts of St. Jim's.

As the School House Scouts went out into the muddy quad, Figgins & Co. came over from the New House. The rival patrols saluted one another. But Figgins had something to say.

"I understand that Miss Cleveland is coming to St. Jim's to-day," he remarked. "Yaas, wathah!"

"But you don't know how or when?" "Yaas, deah boy! You see—"

"Well, I've an idea. She's certain to come in time for tea with Mrs. Holmes. I should think—at least, she usually does. Most likely she's on her way now, and on a night like this she ought to have an escort."

"Yaas, wathah!" "Well, suppose we spread round towards Rylcombe," suggested Figgins, "and scout on every path, so that some of us will be bound to fall in with her if she's coming. Some of us take the lane, others the footpath through the woods, and others the Wayland Road. Then we shall meet her if she's coming—some of us."

"Good wheeze!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Right-ho!" said Blake. "I'll take the Wayland Road, and Dig can come with me."

"Good! I'll scout towards Rylcombe Railway Station," said Figgins carelessly.

"Weally, Figgins, I think I had better do that," said D'Arcy. "That is the way Cousin Ethel is almost certain to come."

"Oh, she might take a short cut by the footpath," said Blake. "That is vewy unlikely."

"Still, she might," said Tom Merry. "You come with me that way, Gussy, in case she does. Manners, you come along, too, and Lowther and Reilly can scout on the lower footpath. The chap who meets Cousin Ethel gives a whistle as a signal, and the rest will most likely hear it."

"Agreed!" "But weally, Tom Mewwy—" "Oh, come on, and don't argue with your leader." And the Scouts left the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 15.

A Terrible Tussle!

TOM MERRY, Manners, and D'Arcy parted from their companions on the road, and the three took the well-used footpath through the wood, a short cut to Rylcombe.

Figgins & Co. went by the lanc. The Scouts scattered in their allotted directions, and the hunt was up.

"Bai Jove, it's jolly cold, you know!" Arthur Augustus remarked, as the three plunged into the gloom on the footpath. "The beastly wain's-turnin' to snow, too!"

"Well, what would Christmas be without some snow?" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "By Jove, it's dark here!"

know what may turn up. I've got an uncle in America, and I might go out to him some day—and another in India, too. I think it's very likely that a knowledge of Scout craft may come in very useful to me some day."

"Yaas, wathah; I was thinkin' the same. I wathah think I shall make an expedish, when I leave school, to the Wocky Mountains to shoot gwizzly beahs. I wathah fancy myself as a gwizzly beah huntah, you know."

"I rather think the bear would do most of the hunting," grinned Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly.

Through the silence of the wood a cry suddenly rang:

"Help!"

It was a girl's voice.

"Cousin Ethel!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Help!"

"Come on!" roared Tom Merry, as he bounded away like a tiger.

Whether it was Cousin Ethel or not, it was a girl in danger of some kind, and that was quite enough for the Boy Scouts to know.

The three juniors tore along the shadowy path at top speed.

Arthur Augustus caught his foot in a root and fell headlong, and Manners tumbled over him. He was up in a second; but Tom Merry was far ahead now. The hero of the Shell came out into the light of the stars where the trees were thinner, and caught sight of a slim, girlish form and a terrified face.



"Miau-miau-au-au-au!" The boot flew from Tom Merry's hand with avenging force. There was a fearful yell from below. Tom Merry had missed the cat, but the missile was not wasted. Taggles, the porter, as he crept up, had caught the boot—with his head!

It was lighter farther on, where the trees were thinner, and the light of the early stars had a chance of penetrating. Suddenly Tom Merry gave a start.

"Hold on! Quiet!"

"What is it?"

"Somebody on the footpath! Quiet!"

It might have been anybody on the footpath—most probably a labourer going home from his work, or a tramp taking a short cut to the village. But that did not matter. All was grist that came to the Boy Scouts' mill in the way of practice.

"Not Cousin Ethel?" asked Manners, as his leader stood still and listened.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, whoever it is, he's going the same way as we're going, and has jolly big feet. He's not very far in advance, either. We shall see him soon."

"Good; you're getting on."

"There's an awful lot of fun in learning to scout," said Tom Merry seriously. "And what we learn now may come in useful if we go abroad into a wild country—and we never

"Cousin Ethel!"

It was Ethel. A burly form was near her, that of a tramp of herculean build, undoubtedly the man whose heavy footsteps Tom Merry had detected on the footpath.

His hand was outstretched and clutching the girl's arm, and the open palm of the other hand showed that he was demanding money. The slight figure of the girl seemed to shrink and shake like a reed in his brutal grip. A torrent of threats were pouring from his lips, terrifying the girl too much for her to make even an effort to obey his demand.

But the tramp's flow of language was suddenly cut short. Tom Merry came tearing up, his eyes blazing, and without pausing a second he hurled himself at the ruffian.

There was a yell, and the tramp rolled over on the ground under the impact.

But he was up again in a second; and so was Tom Merry. As the ruffian ground out a brutal oath between his teeth, Tom Merry sprang between him and the trembling girl, his fists clenched, his eyes ablaze.

"You cowardly ruffian! Stand back!"

With a curse, the tramp sprang forward. Brave and athletic as the junior was, he was a child in the grasp of a powerful ruffian. Back he reeled in an iron grip, and in a moment more he would have been smashed to the ground with stunning force, but Manners was on the scene now.

Manners' fists came together upon the ruffian's face with a crashing blow, and he staggered and released Tom Merry. His fists swept round, and the blow sent Manners staggering three or four yards before he fell.

"Now your turn!" hissed the tramp, springing upon Tom Merry again.

"Help!" shrieked Ethel.

The woods rang and echoed the cry. Tom Merry struggled desperately in the savage grasp, raining blows on the brutal, stubbly face.

Arthur Augustus came tearing up and fastened upon the ruffian, and Manners, dazed as he was, staggered to his feet and joined in the conflict again.

Three sturdy juniors, fighting their hardest, gave the ruffian enough to do, powerful as he was.

They went down again and again under his furious blows, but they jumped up again with undiminished pluck, and there was always one of them clinging to him and hitting fiercely.

The punishment they received was terrible, and their clothes were torn in the desperate struggle, and smothered with mud. But they fought gamely, while Ethel's shrieks for help woke the echoes of the wood. The result of the struggle was still doubtful when there was a crash in the underwood, and Figgins & Co. came rushing upon the scene.

They saw what was taking place at a glance, and they fastened upon the tramp like so many cats, and dragged him down.

Tom Merry and Manners and D'Arcy were gasping and exhausted; the relief had come only just in time.

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Figgins & Co. were fresh, and they gave the tramp plenty to do, and a couple of minutes later Blake and Digby came up and joined in.

The ruffian, big as he was, had no chance then. He received a tremendous hiding, and was aching in every limb when he at last tore himself away and fled into the darkness of the wood.

"My hat!" gasped Figgins. "I call that exciting. So jolly glad we heard you, Cousin Ethel!"

The girl was still trembling violently, and Figgins took her hand to reassure her. Ethel leaned on his arm.

"Oh, I was so frightened!" she sobbed. "And Tom and Manners and Arthur—I am sure they are terribly hurt!"

"Bai Jove! I am feelin' wathah wotten!" said Arthur Augustus feebly. "The uttah bwute has completely wuined my clothes, you know."

"I don't think any of us would take a prize in a beauty show!" gasped Tom Merry. "How do you feel, Manners?"

"Rotten!" said Manners laconically.

"I am sorry, so sorry," said Ethel softly. "And it was so brave of you to come to help me as you did, against that terrible wretch!"

"Well, we couldn't leave you to tackle him, Cousin Ethel," said Tom Merry, laughing. "This is all right, you know. Boy Scouts have to swear—"

"Eh?" said Blake.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Blake! You Scouts have to take the Scouts' oath, you know, to stand up for those who are in need of help, and take their gruel without making a fuss. We've taken our gruel, and nobody's making a fuss except Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wefuso to be wogarded as makin' a fuss. I was merely wemarkin' that the bwute has spoiled my clothes."

"Well, he has, and no mistake!" grinned Blake, surveying the swell of St. Jim's. "You do look a scarecrow, old chap."

"I feel like one, bai Jove!"

"I am so sorry," said Cousin Ethel. "Hadn't you better get to the school as soon as you can, and—"

"Yaas, wathah! I should be vewy glad to get a beef-steak for my beastly eye, you know," said D'Arcy.

"And we'll see Miss Cleveland safe to St. Jim's," said Figgins blandly.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, kids! The sooner we are in the better. I want a beefsteak for my eye, too."

And the three juniors started off at a good pace for St. Jim's, leaving Cousin Ethel to follow more slowly with her escort.

But the pace of Tom Merry and his companions slackened before they reached St. Jim's. They were feeling quite done up, and they arrived at the old school at a walking pace. Even after their toughest fights with the Gram-marians of the neighbouring school, Tom Merry & Co. had never returned home in such a plight.

"Let's get in without being seen, if possible," muttered Tom Merry. "I don't want to have a crowd round me—in this state."

"Bai Jove! I quite agree with you!"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "Quiet does it!"

The Terrible Three slunk in at the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 16.

Heroes Three!

"B LESS my soul!"

Dr. Holmes uttered the words in a tone of absolute amazement. He was standing in the Hall, chatting with Mr. Selby, when three tattered and forlorn figures sneaked into the School House.

Tom Merry, Manners, and D'Arcy had hoped to cut upstairs without being seen; and it was certainly hard luck that they should run almost into the arms of the Head himself.

"Boys!" said Dr. Holmes in a voice of thunder.

The three juniors came to a halt.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "We're in for it now, deah boys! This is weally what I wogard as wotten!"

"Boys!"

"Ye-e-es, sir," said Tom Merry, blinking out of a half-closed eye at the Head.

"How came you in this state?"

"We—we—we—"

"You have been fighting!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir, and my clothes are uttally wuined!"

"They look ruined, D'Arcy. You all three look like disreputable hooligans!" said Dr. Holmes angrily. "I can forgive boyish fun, or even horseplay, but such absolute ruffianism as this it is impossible for me to overlook. Follow me to my study!"

"If you please, sir—"
"Do you hear me?"
Dr. Holmes strode away. The juniors exchanged dismayed glances and followed.

"Bai Jove, this is wotten!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "We can't vevy well explain to the Head. It will sound so much like blowin' our own twumpets, you know. I shan't say a word, for one."

Tom Merry nodded.
"Right-ho! We can't yarn about having played the heroic rescuer for the sake of getting out of a row."

"Wathah not!"
"It's hard cheese to be licked for nothing!" grunted Manners. "I fancy from the Head's chivvy that it's a licking to come."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry as cheerfully as he could. "It's a bit rough, but a Boy Scout can't grumble at that. We've got to face the music and grin and bear it!"

They followed Dr. Holmes into his study. In the bright electric light the three juniors looked even more tattered and torn and hopelessly forlorn than ever.

The Head surveyed them for some moments without speaking, a very grim expression upon his face.

"Disgraceful!" he said at last. "Absolutely disgraceful!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.
"Have you anything to say for yourselves?"

The juniors were silent.
"You admit that you have been fighting?"

"Yes, sir!"
"With whom have you been fighting?"

They were silent again.
"Then you refuse to reply?"

The juniors looked very uneasy, but they did not speak.
"Very well," said Dr. Holmes, compressing his lips. "I will give you five minutes to think over the matter. If at the end of that time you have not decided to speak out and give me the explanation I require, I shall flog you all three in public, assembling the school in Hall for that purpose."

"Bai Jove!"
The juniors were looking white enough now. A public flogging was the worst punishment, short of expulsion, that could fall upon them, and the words sent a shiver through them. But they were "grit" all through, and their determination never wavered. They had made up their minds not to speak, and they would not speak.

Dr. Holmes sat down, his face turned away from the three boys. They stood in an uneasy row, shifting from one foot to another. They were feeling very exhausted from the hard struggle they had been through and the injuries they had sustained; their eyes and noses were smarting, and most of their bones aching.

Dr. Holmes glanced at his watch and rose. His stern, indignant glance dwelt long upon the bruised faces of the three juniors.

"Now, my boys, have you any explanation to give me?"
"No, sir," said Tom Merry respectfully.

"Very well!" Dr. Holmes' face hardened. "Follow me!"
He opened the study door. A slim form was coming along the passage, and the Head paused as Cousin Ethel ran up to the study.

"Miss Cleveland, I did not know you had arrived," he said kindly.

"Oh, Dr. Holmes, I—I heard that—that Merry and Manners and my cousin were to be punished, and—"
"My dear child—"

"But let me explain, Dr. Holmes. I—"

"It's all wight, Ethel," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't twouble. We can gwain and bear it, deah boy—I mean gal!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Cousin Ethel firmly. "Dr. Holmes shall know how you came to be in that state."

The Head paused, irresolute.
"Do you know anything about this matter, Miss Cleveland?" he asked.

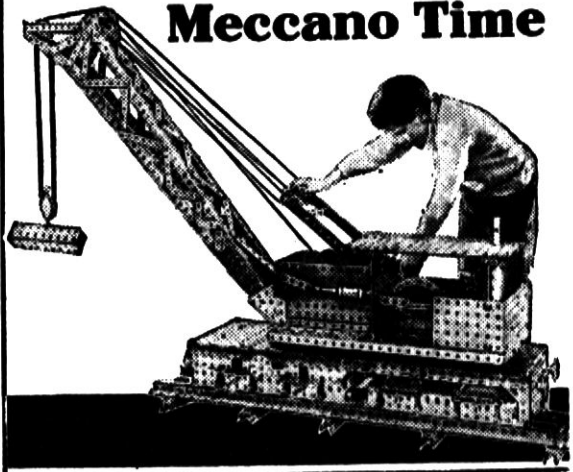
"Yes, Dr. Holmes. I was walking from the station, and thoughtlessly took the footpath through the wood, and—and was stopped by a horrible ruffian, who was going to rob me!" panted Cousin Ethel breathlessly. "Tom Merry and Manners and my cousin came to help me—"

The Head's expression changed.
"Do you mean to say, my child, that these boys were injured like this in defending you from a ruffian?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Dr. Holmes."

(Continued on page 24.)

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"Bless my soul! Merry, why did you not explain this to me?"

"Well, sir," said Tom Merry, hesitating, "you see, sir—"

"Pway allow me to explain, Tom Mewwy. I can manage it much bettah, I think. You see, sir, we wathah thought you might considah we were blowin' our own twumpet, you know, and bwaggin' about a little twife—"

"That's it, sir," said Tom Merry. "We are Boy Scouts, you know, sir; and Boy Scouts have to take their gruel without whining."

"Yes, rather," said Manners; "it was a point of honour."

"Yaas, wathah! As one gentleman to anothah, sir, I need not explain that we couldn't possibly give up a point of honah!"

The Head smiled.

"But you should have explained to me, my boys; you could have trusted me to judge you rightly," he exclaimed.

"I am only too glad that Miss Cleveland came in time to save me from committing an injustice. You were wrong not to explain, but I understand your motive, and I excuse you. I am sorry, Merry, that I misjudged you, even for a few minutes. You may go, my lads!"

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And the juniors went—with Cousin Ethel.

The Head looked after them with a glance that was very kind, and then he turned into his study with a thoughtful expression upon his face.

"Why not?" he murmured. "They deserve it! Why not?"

The boys of St. Jim's were surprised at being called to a general assembly in the Hall later that evening. All the Forms were convened, as upon important occasions, and they wondered what was in the wind.

"Bai Jove," Arthur Augustus remarked, "I hope the Head hasn't changed his mind—and decided to flog us, after all, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's not likely!" said Blake. "More probable he's going to make a speech on the subject, and hold you up to admiration, as an example for all good little boys to follow who don't want to be tossed by mad bulls."

"Weally, Blake—"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "I hope he isn't going to make any allusion to it in public—make us all feel fearful asses!"

The juniors crowded in and took up their places. When the whole school was assembled Dr. Holmes came in by the door at the upper end of the Hall.

There was a hush. The Head made an imposing figure in his rustling gown, and a sign of his hand was sufficient to restore silence.

"Boys," said the Head, "there has been some dissatisfaction in this college because the breaking-up is two days later than that of a neighbouring school. This dissatisfaction was unreasonable. The same date here has been observed for many generations. Yet for certain reasons I have decided to advance the date of breaking-up—"

An irrepressible cheer interrupted the Head.

"Bai Jove, that is wippin'!"

"Hurrah!"

Dr. Holmes raised his hand for silence.

"I am taking this step for the following reason—an act of great bravery on the part of some juniors of this school has come to my notice. Three boys of the Lower School have been injured in this act of bravery."

Every eye was turned in the direction of the three battered and bruised Scouts, who turned red to their very ears.

"As some acknowledgment of this act, I am going to accede to the wishes of the boys in respect of the breaking-up. I do not wish this to be understood as being a reward for the action of these boys! I know well that they do not desire anything in the nature of a reward. It is rather intended as a public acknowledgment of great pluck, which reflects credit on St. Jim's as a whole."

Dr. Holmes ceased, and a tremendous burst of cheering rang through the old Hall and made the rafters ring again.

This time the Head did not check it. There were cheers for the Head, and cheers for Tom Merry.

In the midst of the cheering the Head retired, and the boys dispersed at last, gleefully discussing the good news. Tom Merry and his chums celebrated the occasion by a big feed in the study, to which the chums of Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. were invited.

THE END.

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Jim Nelson and Phil Harris set out with their guardian, Colonel K, and his secretary, Rex Bruce, on a flight round the world. Engine trouble forces them down in Central Asia, where to their amazement they find a city called "Rome the Second." They become friendly with the Romans, and decide to help them fight against Dolabella, a Roman rebel, who has joined up with the Albani, another strange people who inhabit the town of Iolensis near by. The Albani triumph and the Roman army is overthrown. Fierce fighting takes place in the city itself, and Colonel K and the boys are in the thick of it. A party of Albani storm the steps of the Senate House, on which the boys are standing, in an effort to capture them.

Escape!

DECIUS CANIDUS PHILARIO, the young legate, who had been the Emperor's most trusted adjutant, disengaged himself from the thick of the fight, and came leaping up the steps to the colonel's side. Even as he did so, a spear flung from below whirred past him and shot over the explorer's head, missing him by inches.

"Colonnus, I beg of you not to expose yourselves thus!" he cried. "Your lives are in the utmost peril, for we can hold the Albani no longer! Flee to the Lake Palace while there is yet time! It would be disastrous for you to be taken or killed!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when abruptly the Roman line below crumpled and broke. The Albani, headed by the tall officer, had smashed it in the centre. And now, with a yell of triumph, they came bounding up towards the little group in the colonnade. Swiftly the colonel took command. He levelled the automatic which he still held in his hand.

"Come on, lads!" he roared in English. "Give 'em a taste of hot lead! All together now!"

His gun spoke as he finished the sentence. The tall officer, half-way up the stairs, stopped dead in his tracks, spun round, and plunged headlong back again amongst his men, killed instantly. A split second later Rex, Phil, and Jim were pouring a withering fire into the close-packed ranks that menaced them, and at such short range every bullet took its toll.

The Albani, dismayed by these spurts of flame which destroyed at a distance, halted irresolutely, and the momentary delay gave Decius Canidus his chance. A mere handful of legionnaires who had escaped being slain at the stair-foot, had rallied about him, and now he ordered them into the main doorway of the Senate. Then he swung around again to the colonel.

"Hasten, O Colonnus!" he said urgently. "My men will hold the door against the enemy whilst you leave by the secret passage. It is your only hope. You can do nothing more here."

His words were only too true, as a single glance out over the city convinced the explorer. Everywhere the Albani

were victorious. They had contrived to turn the tables on the Romans, and now the latter were in full retreat towards the Lake Palace, forcing their way in little wedges through streets filled with foes.

"Very well," he snapped in Latin, "we will go, and thou shalt come with us. I shall require thy aid later."

Loath though the young legate was to desert his troops, Colonel K was now his commanding officer, and he was compelled to obey. The two of them wheeled and raced through the doorway in the wake of the boys and Rex just as the Albani overcame their fear and started another charge up the stairway. The tiny band of legionnaires closed up behind them and formed a barrier across the entrance to the Senate.

It was a barrier which lasted just long enough to ensure the safety of the colonel and his party. When the Albani crashed through it after several minutes' desperate tussle, and burst into the great white amphitheatre in search of them, they found the place utterly empty. Swiftly they split up and ran up and down among the marble benches like terriers after rats, seeking the fugitives. One look round the antechamber with the mosaic floor had told them that it harboured no one.

And finally they were forced to the realisation that those they sought had disappeared right under their very noses. Then they remembered that the strangers could fly through the air in a bird chariot. In all probability they could fly just as well without it, and had escaped through the light-hole in the roof. How else could they have vanished so completely?

Disgruntled, they left the bare Senate to go in search of loot and to tell the marvellous story, with some elaborations, to their comrades. Nobody suspected the innocent-looking antechamber.

In the Lake Palace!

THE Lake Palace was the last stronghold left to the Romans. Set down in the centre of a wonderful blue mere beside the city, it was approached by a single narrow causeway. Its smooth, high walls, built of purest white marble that rose sheer out of the water,

afforded little hope of taking it by assault, and it was always kept amply provisioned in case of siege.

In it had now taken refuge Pomponius Quintus, the aged and feeble King of Roma Secunda, and Claudius, his grandson, the rightful heir to the throne. They must not be allowed to fall into the unscrupulous hands of Dolabella, the would-be usurper. At all costs the Lake Palace must be defended against the Albani.

The six fugitives from the Senate emerged from the underground passage to find themselves right in the heart of the royal fortress. The trapdoor was hidden in a quiet little chamber identical with the one they had left, but in the halls without they could hear an excited babble of voices and the tramp of armed men passing to and fro. The colonel turned to Decius Canidus.

"I beg that thou wilt inform his Majesty and the prince of our arrival," he said in Latin. "I go to the battlements to mark the course of the battle on shore."

"Even so, lord," replied the legate, saluting, and withdrew.

The colonel and his companions, led by Camillus, who had visited the palace previously, made their way through the crowded halls and courts to the terrace which overlooked the causeway. The slender link between island and shore now presented a very different appearance from its usual almost deserted one.

From end to end it was packed with marching men, all advancing towards the palace, the defeated legionnaires retiring from the city. The noonday sun glistened on their battered armour and ragged plumes, bloodstained tunics, and torn cloaks. The remnant of Roma Secunda's once magnificent army was indeed a sorry sight.

The gate by which they emerged from the town was held by the Romans for the time being, and cohort after cohort, moving along the causeway, passed under the arch of the strong guard-house, that marked its half-way point, into comparative safety. But even as the flyers watched, the living stream grew less and less, until the rearguard, hard pressed, could be seen fighting hand to hand with the Albani just inside the city.

"Look!" said Phil breathlessly. "They're shutting the gate!"

Slowly and ponderously the heavy portals that closed the entrance to the town were swinging to. An instant before they met the last few Romans slipped out between them, leaving the baffled enemy howling with rage and momentarily penned up in the street. The men who had operated the doors from the flanking towers appeared on the wall and descended the scaling ladders placed there for their escape. All together, the little band marched along the causeway to the guard-house, and its gate clanged fast on their heels.

Roma Secunda was abandoned to the foe. The garrison of the Lake Palace was complete.

Colonel K turned to his companions.

"Well, that's that!" he said in English. "We've allowed ourselves to be shut up here, and now we've got to get out of it again. I think we'd better go and have a look at the Albatross, to make sure she's all right."

The monoplane, which was equally at home on land or water, was floating peacefully, like a great white bird with scarlet wingtips, alongside the palace wall on the side away from the town. At the colonel's hail the cabin door shot open and his wizened little Welsh servant, Llewelyn, popped abruptly into view.

"Why, indeed to goodness, it's you, after all!" he exclaimed in tones of relief. "Look you, I was just making up my mind you'd all been killed, and wondering what was to become of me whatever!"

"No, we're not dead yet!" replied his master, with a chuckle. "We've just come along to see that all's well. Is the plane ready, in case we should want to leave hurriedly?"

Before Llewelyn could answer, a sudden commotion on the bank of the lake distracted the attention of everyone. Looking across, they saw a troop of Albani in full cry after a tall young man who was sprinting for the water at top speed. Very evidently his strength was failing, for his pursuers gained on him at every stride, and it seemed that he could not long evade capture. Breathlessly the group on the palace wall followed the thrilling race. Would the fugitive reach his goal in time?

Two of the Albani had outstripped the rest, and were bare three paces behind their quarry as they neared the lake. But just as they put out their hands to seize him he suddenly flung up his arms, and plunged down into the safety of the blue waters. He came up a few yards from the shore and struck out powerfully for the island, while the defeated foes stood yelling on the bank.

Every Roman could swim, but to the Albani it was an unknown art, since they had no big stretch of water in which to learn. Now they were forced to content themselves with

flinging spears and stones at the man who had escaped them so daringly, but he drew out of range without being hit. Nearer and nearer to the palace he came, but each succeeding stroke was feebler than the last, and it was plain that without help he was lost. Jim Nelson hesitated no longer.

"Here, take these!" he said, thrusting his torch and automatic into Phil's hands, and kicking off his shoes. "I'm going in after him!"

With a bound he was poised on the parapet, then he went rocketing down in a dive that cut the water as cleanly as a knife. Not for nothing was he swimming champion of Foxhurst School. He covered the fifty yards to the struggling man in record time, and then, as he caught sight of his face, gave a gasp of sheerest amazement. For a moment he thought he must be dreaming, but a second glance assured him of the incredible truth.

There was a blood-stained rag twisted about his head, and he was very pale, but there could be no mistaking him. The dead had come to life again. The man in the water was none other than Valerius Martius Donatus, Imperator of Roma Secunda!

"Ave (hail), Jacobus!" he greeted the boy wearily, though he attempted to smile.

"Ave!" replied Jim, which was practically all the Latin he knew. In English, he added, as he began to tow the Roman to safety: "My aunt! What a whale of a surprise everyone's going to get in a minute or two!"

His forecast was fully realised in the next quarter of an hour. Colonel K and the rest had climbed down into the Albatross, and they soon hauled the pair into the cabin. To say that they could not believe their eyes when they saw the Imperator is to make a mild statement. He and Camillus had a joyful reunion, while the others stood around wondering.

"But, man, we gave you up for dead!" exclaimed the colonel, when Valerius Martius had been provided with dry clothing and a hot drink. "We saw you and your body-guard go down before the Alban charge, and not one rose again! How did you escape?"

"It is true that my guard was slain to the last man," was the reply, "but I received merely a stunning blow on the head. When I recovered my senses it was dusk, so I divested myself of my armour, and slunk away from the battlefield. Since then I have been seeking to rejoin you."

The astounding news of the Imperator's return spread swiftly through the Lake Palace. He was well beloved by his men, and there were great rejoicings when it was known that he was alive.

Claudius, the young prince, came hastening to greet him, and the story of his miraculous escape was told over and over again.

But the Albani were far from being inactive while all this was going on. They soon opened the city gate which the fleeing Romans had closed upon them, and swarmed out to the assault of the causeway. The catapults and ballistæ on the guard-house wall repelled them time and again with volleys of arrows and stones, which could hardly fail to score hits at that range, but Colonel K heaved a regretful sigh as he watched.

"What wouldn't I give for an efficient machine-gun and unlimited ammunition!" he said. "We could simply mop them up, drive 'em back into the town, and perhaps even bottle 'em up there. I'm only just beginning to appreciate some of the advantages of civilisation!"

Rex Bruce chuckled.

"Look here, sir," he said, "you've wished for a machine-gun at least once a day since we've been in Roma Secunda. Why not let me get you one?"

The colonel stared.

"Get me one?" he repeated. "I ask nothing better. But where from?"

"From England, sir! Llewelyn and I could take the Albatross, pop home for your gun, and be back here in three days as easy as kiss your hand! What about it?"

Colonel K's blue eyes gleamed.

"By Jove, it's a chance!" he breathed. "If you're willing to take it, my lad, we are! Go on, be off with you! Leave us the guns and the spare ammunition from the plane; we may need it before you're back!"

Rex needed no second bidding. Eagerly he raced down to break the news to Llewelyn, and half an hour later the great white monoplane was ready to take off on her flying errand.

"Good-bye and good luck!" said the colonel, as he shook hands with his young secretary and Llewelyn. "Remember, every minute counts. Valerius Martius doubts whether we can hold out longer than three days if the Albani continue to attack as they're attacking now. So a lot depends on you two!"

"Don't you worry, sir!" returned Rex, with his usual cherry grin. "We'll be back within the time-limit, even if we have to sprout wings ourselves to do it! Good-bye, sir. So-long, laddies!"

"Good-bye!" chorused the two boys; then the cabin door slid to, and the Albatross began to taxi away across the smooth surface of the lake.

Hundreds of pairs of eyes watched her anxiously as she gathered speed until she was fairly racing over the blue water. Then, with a rush like a bird, she was in the air, circling about to get her bearings and gain height. With a final dip of her scarlet-tipped wings in salutation she headed away westwards towards the distant hills, and in an incredibly short time was lost to view.

Urged on by the colonel, the beleaguered tenants of the Lake Palace set themselves with renewed energy to combat the enemy at their gate. For when the bird-chariot returned it would bring something which would rid them for ever of the warlike Albani.

A Desperate Attempt!

"SISTER ANN, Sister Ann, do you see anybody coming?" inquired Jim Nelson, in musical tones, as he reached the head of the staircase.

Phil Harris, who had been eagerly scanning the dim line of hills to westward, turned about with a grin to face his chum.

"Hallo, Fatima!" he retorted pleasantly. "Did the colonel send you up here?"

"He did not!" was the emphatic reply. "I just toddled along of my own accord to see what chance there is of yelling, 'Whale-ho!' or 'Thar she blows!' before breakfast."

"Not much, I'm afraid," said Phil. "You know the old Albatross really isn't due back until noon, unless she crams on terrific speed. I came up to have a general look around."

Behind the two the eastern sky was slowly brightening with the dawn. A line of fiery light along the hilltops showed that the sun was rising, and every moment the details of the scene grew clearer. Little by little the great cliff-encircled valley was revealed to view.

The tower on which the boys stood was the highest point of a glorious white palace, set down apparently in the midst of a lake. Linking it with the city on the shore was a single, narrow causeway, barred half-way down its length by a battered guardhouse and gate. Sentries paced to and fro on the wall, their eyes fixed on the arched entrance to the town, about which there were signs of activity.

Suddenly a soldier in a strange winged helmet and coat of mail appeared on one of the flanking towers. Raising his long golden trumpet, he sounded a call that was taken up and repeated at all the other city gates. The great portal below him swung open at the signal, and a column of men in the same curious armour began to march out towards the causeway.

"Here they come!" said Phil. "Another day's fighting. And I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see the guardhouse fall this morning."

"Neither should I, my boy," said a deep voice behind them, and the two swung about to greet their guardian, the famous explorer, Colonel K.

"Do you mean to say that you think the Albani'll take the gate to-day, sir?" asked Jim.

"It's not at all unlikely," replied the colonel gravely. "If they get their ram working again, it won't hold an hour."

Leaning over the parapet of the tower, they had a splendid view of what was going on. Below them the Lake Palace was now alive with men. A fanfare of trumpets following the Alban reveille had aroused the garrison of the besieged stronghold, and the first day guard was hastening to relieve the night-watch at the all-important gate on the causeway.

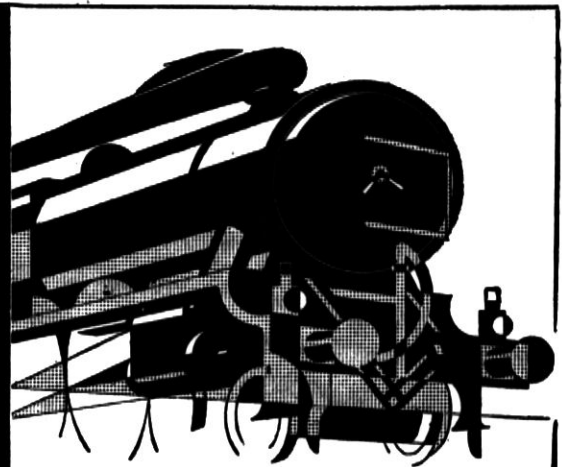
"By Jove!" exclaimed Jim, looking down at them. "Isn't it queer for us 'twentieth centuryites' to be living and fighting with these chaps from the year one? Every time I wake up in the morning and find that we're still here, I pinch myself to see whether I'm not dreaming!"

"Look!" said Phil suddenly, pointing down. "Here comes the ram!"

Out through the city gate was trundling the formidable battering-engine, drawn by many men. It was a long beam equipped with a great iron head, slung on a frame, so that it could be drawn back, and then let fly at its objective with shattering force. Slowly it was rolled along the causeway towards the guardhouse, the battlements of which now swarmed with busy legionnaires.

The wall above the gate was well armed with catapults and ballistae, or stone-throwing engines, for repelling attacks, and in the confined space of the causeway they did great damage to the enemy ranks. Dozens of the Albani, struck by flying missiles, lost their footing, and fell into the water, where many of them were drowned, and swimming was an unknown art to them. But for every man who died there

(Continued on next page.)



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(Continued from page 27.)

was always another ready to step into the breach, and steadily the terrible ram advanced.

"I must go down there," said Colonel K after a minute or two. "Have you boys had breakfast? No? Then you'd better get something to eat and join me presently at the guardhouse. We'll see what a few rounds of modern ammunition will do towards saving the situation."

Together the three hastened down the stairs from the tower, and the chums went off in search of food. In the main triclinium, or dining-hall, they found Camillus Donatus, a Roman boy of about their own age, younger brother of Valerius Martius, the general. He greeted them with a cheery hail.

"Ave, my friends!" he said in Latin. "I await you for breakfast! Where have you been?"

Slaves brought them food and drink, and while they made a hurried meal, Phil, who spoke Latin well, told him of the colonel's plan.

"You had better come, too," he said. "We've taught you how to fire a revolver, so you may be useful."

When they rejoined Colonel K on the gatehouse wall, he was deep in conference with Valerius Martius and several other high officers. The battering-ram had been got into position despite every effort of the Romans to prevent it, and already it had dealt one smashing blow at the heavy,

studded doors below. The crews of the catapults and ballistae were toiling like demons in an endeavour to make the working of it a sheer impossibility. They showered arrows and stones down upon it unceasingly, and the Albani were carrying off their wounded by scores.

But a constant stream of fresh cohorts was maintained from the city, and even as the boys reached their guard a second stroke from the ram shook the structure beneath their feet. The Albani meant to capture the Lake Palace and they cared little about the cost. Colonel K turned his wards.

"We've got to destroy that ram!" he told them briskly. "Valerius Martius is going to lead a charge through the gate, and try to throw it into the lake, while we cover them with our fire. Come on!"

A few minutes later the Albani were electrified by the sight of the gate at which they were pounding suddenly swinging open. Their first thought was that the Romans were surrendering, but it was not a thought they held long. Out through the archway slipped four figures—Colonel K, his wards, and Camillus. Without hesitating they opened fire on the nearest foes, sweeping all before them as they raced for the ram.

(Can the Romans hold out until the Albatross returns with the machine-gun? Look for thrills in next week's gripping instalment!)



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