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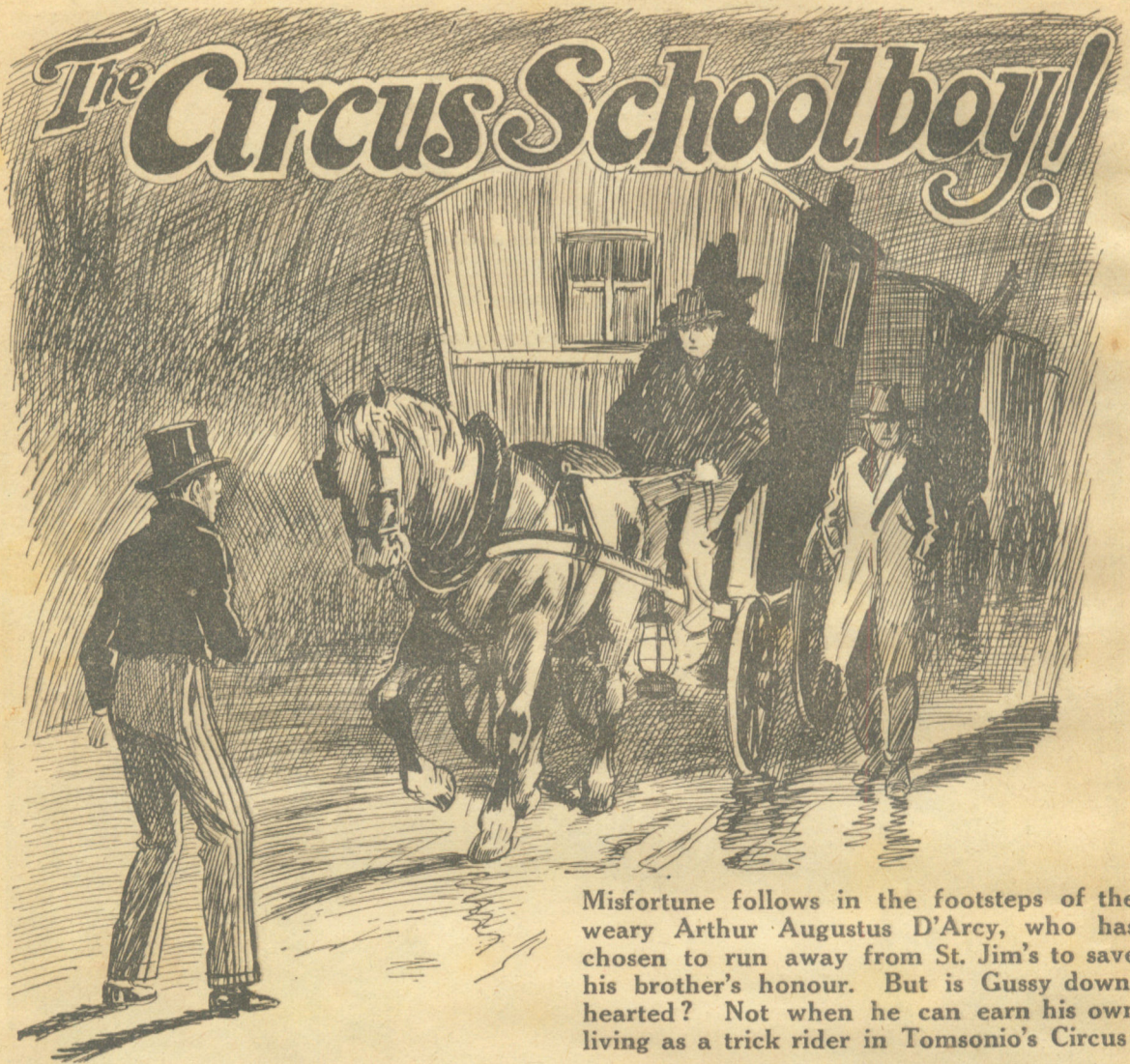
The GEM

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Misfortune follows in the footsteps of the weary Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who has chosen to run away from St. Jim's to save his brother's honour. But is Gussy down-hearted? Not when he can earn his own living as a trick rider in Tomsonio's Circus!

CHAPTER 1.

Where's Gussy?

MORNING school was over at St. Jim's. It was a fine, clear day, and, as a rule, there would have been a rush of juniors into the quadrangle the moment the welcome hour of dismissal came. And Tom Merry & Co. would probably have been the first to rush out and rejoice in their new freedom.

But this morning was not as usual.

The boys left the Form-rooms quietly, and went out into the passages or the quad with serious looks and lowered voices.

They gathered in groups and talked, with grave faces, in the quad, or hung about the passages, discussing some all-absorbing topic in low tones.

And Tom Merry & Co., instead of rushing out among the first, did not appear in the quadrangle at all.

There was evidently "something on" at St. Jim's—something which had quite disturbed the even tenor of life at the old school.

Tom Merry left the Shell Form Room with serious looks, and went up to his study in the School House. Manners and Lowther, his chums, followed him.

The three of them went without a word or a smile.

In the study they stopped and looked at one another, and Tom Merry spoke at last.

"Well, what do you chaps think of it?"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Very rotten!" said Manners.

"What's going to be done?"

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"I don't know."

"Ask me another."

"Poor old Gussy!"

"Yes, rather; it's rough!"

"I passed the word to Blake to come here," said Tom Merry. "I think we ought to put our heads together, and think of something."

"Yes, rather!"

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth Form came in. The three chums of Study No. 6 were silent and worried, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—who usually made a fourth with them—was not there.

Where was he? That was a question which no one in St. Jim's could have answered.

Tom Merry nodded to his new arrivals.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" said Blake.

"What do you think of it?"

"Rotten!" said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"We had already reached that important conclusion," remarked Monty Lowther. "Taking for granted that the whole thing is rotten, what's to be done?"

"That's the question," said Manners. "Something's got to be done."

Blake nodded.

"I know that; but what?"

"There's the rub."

"We must do something for Gussy."

"Good! But what?"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

There was silence.

In the curious and unprecedented pass that affairs had come to in the School House at St. Jim's, the juniors were all agreed that something must be done; but the question, as to precisely what, remained unanswered.

There was a sound of a kick at the door, and it flew open again, and a long-legged junior presented himself.

It was Figgins of the New House. Behind him appeared Kerr and Fatty Wynn, both looking as serious as Figgins himself; and Figgins was looking as serious as any of the School House juniors.

"I say," said Figgins awkwardly, "we're awfully sorry about—about what's happened."

"Thanks, old chap!"

"It's rotten!"

"The opinion seems to be unanimous on that point," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Don't be funny, old chap, at a time like this."

"Who's being funny?"

"Well, nobody," said Blake; "but I thought you were trying to be."

"Look here—"

"Shut up, Lowther!" said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"Order!"

"We gave you a look-in because we thought something ought to be done," said Figgins.

"Exactly!" said Kerr.

"That's the idea," observed Fatty Wynn. "D'Arcy's gone. He may get into any sort of scrapes—may have to go without meals, and that sort of thing. It's awful!"

Even in the serious solemnity of the meeting, the juniors could not help a grin at the gravity with which Fatty Wynn expressed his uneasiness.

To go without a meal was one of the most awful things that could happen to Fatty Wynn, and he would have felt sorry for the worst enemy in such a dreadful plight.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "I was thinking that we ought to hold a meeting on the subject, and come to some sort of a decision."

"Good!"

A handsome, sturdy lad looked in at the door. It was Harry Noble of the Shell—otherwise known as Kangaroo, from the land of his birth.

"I say, are you chaps going to do anything about this affair of Gussy's?" he asked. "I think something ought to be done!"

"Come in; we're just consulting."

Kangaroo came in. He was looking unusually serious. There was a cloud upon all St. Jim's, and the cloud was darkest upon the fellows who had known and liked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—the junior who was in trouble.

Tom Merry glanced over the meeting.

"Well, we'd better decide what's to be done, because the sooner it's done, the better," he remarked. "You all know how the case stands."

"Yes; it's rotten!"

"Agreed!" said Monty Lowther.

"Look here—"

"Gussy was a witness of D'Arcy minor, or somebody, chucking tar over Mr. Selby, the master of the Third—a worm who deserved all he got, by the way."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gussy very properly refused to give the name of the chap, regarding that as sneaking, which is barred."

"Hear, hear!"

"The Head ordered him to give the name, and Gussy ought to have given it; but then, if he thought he was bound to stick out, it was a fault on the right side."

"What-ho!"

"Therefore, we must all agree that Gussy was quite right in the matter, from his point of view; and the Head was quite right, too, to order him a flogging for being insubordinate. They were both right!"

"Good!" said Lowther. "This reminds me of Gilbert and Sullivan:

"And you'll agree, so I expect,
That he was right, to so object;
And I am right, and you are right,
And everything is quite correct."

"Shut up, Lowther!"

"Rats!"

"Order! Order!"

"To get on with the washing," resumed Tom Merry, with an admonishing glance at Monty Lowther, "Gussy thought that the flogging would be derogatory to his dignity. He somehow unlocked the door of the punishment-room, and bolted before he could be flogged."

"Just like Gussy!"

"And we were all called together in Hall to witness the blessed flogging, and it never came off—jolly good thing, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Quite so. But Gussy has bolted, and I wonder whether the Head will ever allow him to come back to St. Jim's?"

"Oh, he must!"

"Then Gussy will have to take the flogging!"

"That's better than leaving St. Jim's!"

"But at present Gussy is out in the wide world alone," said Tom Merry. "He had all the morning to get clear. I know that Kildare and the prefects have been out looking for him since, but they haven't come in yet."

"I don't suppose they will find him. He's had hours."

"He must be found!" said Tom Merry. "I suppose it comes to that: Gussy will have to be found and saved from making an ass of himself."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's better for him to be brought back, even to be flogged, than to be expelled from St. Jim's!"

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"Of course, if the Head knew that it was Gussy's own brother who tarred Selby, he would understand better, and I think he would let Gussy off the flogging. But we can't tell him. Young Wally wanted to own up, but Gussy forbade him."

"Just like Gussy!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Now, Gussy's got to be found, and brought back, and I think we've got to do it. No good leaving a thing like that to the seniors," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "And the juniors all shook their heads solemnly, too."

"No good at all!" said Kangaroo.

"Then," said Tom Merry, coming to the point at last, "what price asking the Head for permission to go out and look for Gussy?"

"Good!"

"He'll refuse," said Manners.

"Well, we shan't be any worse off if he does; but he mayn't."

"Let's go in a body and see, anyway," said Blake.

"It's a jolly good idea," remarked Herries. "If we get leave to go out, we can take my bulldog, Towser, and he will pick up the trail in no time. What are you sniffing about, Blake?"

"I suppose a chap can sniff if he likes," said Blake.

"Let's get to the Head, and never mind Towser!"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

And the juniors crowded out of the study. As they went downstairs, they paused at the sight of a fag standing in the recess of a window. It was Wally D'Arcy—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's minor.

Wally was as untidy and ink-fingered as usual, but his usual careless brow was lined with thought. He did not see the juniors; he was evidently buried deeply in reflection. The trouble that had come upon his brother—caused unintentionally by himself—evidently weighed heavily upon D'Arcy minor's mind.

"Cheer up, kid!" said Tom Merry kindly. "We're going to find Gussy; and it will all come out right somehow."

Wally started.

"Hallo! I say, this is rotten!"

"Passed unanimously," said Monty Lowther.

"Shut up, Lowther!"

"I don't know where Gussy's gone," said Wally. "He wouldn't go home, because the gov'nor would send him back like a shot. Awfully strong on discipline, the gov'nor! Gussy's gone out into the blessed wilderness, and he's about as fit to take care of himself as—as Skimpole!"

"We're going to look for him, if the Head will let us!"

"I'm going to look for him, anyway!" said Wally. "But it's no good bringing him back, if he's going to have a flogging when he comes. I'm going to clear up that biznax."

Tom Merry started.

"You're not going to own up about chucking the tar over your Form master?"

"Yes!"

"Gussy told you not to. Look here, the Head has sentenced the chap, as soon as he's found out, to be expelled. You'd better think twice about it."

Wally grinned.

"I've thought of a dodge."

"Oh! What's the dodge?"

"Come along to the Head's study and you'll see!"

"We're just going there!"

Wally nodded, and joined the juniors as they made their way towards the dreaded apartment of the Head of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry tapped at the door, and a deep voice bade him enter.

CHAPTER 2.

Wily Wally.

DR. HOLMES glanced at Tom Merry as he entered, and his face expressed surprise, growing stronger and stronger as the crowd of juniors followed him in. The crowd seemed quite enough to fill the study.

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form, was with the Head, and he looked very sourly at the juniors—especially at Wally. There was no love lost between D'Arcy minor and his Form master.

"If you please, sir—" began Tom Merry.

"If you please, sir—" began Wally.

"Shut up, Wally!" whispered Blake.

Wally sniffed.

"What do you want, my boys?" asked the Head mildly.

"I want to speak to you about my major, sir," said Wally, taking the field with a triumphant glance at Tom Merry.

"It's important, sir!"

"Oh, go on, D'Arcy minor!"

"I—I don't know whether I can speak out, sir," said Wally, with an altogether new bashfulness. "Arthur wouldn't tell you who chucked the tar—ahem—who threw the tar over Mr. Selby, sir."

"Quite so."

"I—I could tell you, sir!"

The Head's brow darkened. If there was anything he detested, it was "sneaking," or any sort of tale-bearing among the boys, and it was a thing he never dreamed of encouraging.

True, he had ordered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to reveal the name of the perpetrator of the tarry jape upon Mr. Selby; but for a boy to offer willingly to betray another was revolting to Dr. Holmes.

He looked very coldly at D'Arcy minor.

"Indeed!"

Mr. Selby looked eager. He had no scruples about benefiting by tale-bearing, and the remains of the tar that stuck to his ears and his hair still exasperated him. Mr. Selby would have given a very great deal to discover who the culprit really was.

He leaned forward a little towards Wally. He had never liked the fag, but he felt as if he could pat him on the shoulder now.

"You know the perpetrator of that outrage, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Were you on the spot at the time?"

"I wasn't far away, sir."

"Then you saw it done?"

"From beginning to end, sir."

"Indeed!" said the Head coldly. "You should have come forward with this statement, if at all, at a time when you would have saved your brother from unpleasant consequences."

"I didn't think of the dodge then, sir. I—I mean, I—"

"Who was it?" asked Mr. Selby.

Wally hesitated.

"You see, sir, it's called sneaking to give a chap away," he said. "What I mean is, that I know the chap, and Gussy, my major, had jolly good reasons for not owning up who it was. It was a chap he cared about a great deal."

"I see," said the Head.

"You must tell us the name now, D'Arcy minor," said Mr. Selby. "It is your duty to do so."

Wally still hesitated.

Tom Merry & Co. were looking at him in silence. A dim idea of Wally's dodge was dawning upon them, and they stood silent, dumbfounded by the colossal nerve of it.

"You see, sir, I—I'm afraid," murmured Wally.

"Afraid?" said Mr. Selby. "You mean that the boy might injure you? You need have no fear; he will be expelled from the school."

"Certainly!" said the Head.

"Ye-e-es, sir; but—"

"But what? You imagine that his friends may punish you? My dear boy, if you do your duty to your Form master by revealing the name of the perpetrator of that infamous outrage, you can depend upon protection," said Mr. Selby. "You may rely upon it that I shall allow no harm to come to you."

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"Oh, certainly!" said the Head restlessly.

Wally brightened up.

"Well, sir, I—I feel rather afraid; but—but if you promise me that I shan't be punished at all by anybody—"

"I promise you," said Mr. Selby at once.

"And you, sir?"

"Yes," said the Head.

"Thank you, sir!"

"And now you need not have any further hesitation, D'Arcy minor," said the Third Form master, leaning forward. "Tell me who the guilty party was."

"It was I, sir!"

"Eh?"

"It was I, sir!" said Wally.

Mr. Selby stared at him with wide-open eyes.

Tom Merry & Co. drew a deep breath, and waited for the thunderbolt.

The Head seemed dumbfounded. He looked blankly at the hero of the Third Form.

Mr. Selby found his voice at last.

"It was you—you, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir."

"You—you were guilty of that outrage?"

"It was a jape, sir."

"You hurled that tar over me?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you dare to admit it to me?" said Mr. Selby, his voice trembling with rage.

"Yes, sir; since you've promised—"

Mr. Selby started.

"You promised that I should not be punished, sir."

The Third Form master gasped. Something like a smile glided over the face of the Head of St. Jim's.

Wally stood with an innocent smile upon his face.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unsuccessful Search.

MR. SELBY seemed to be troubled to find his breath. He gasped several times, like a fish out of water, his face growing more and more crimson as he realised how he had been tricked. He turned quite a furious countenance towards Dr. Holmes.

"Dr. Holmes, you see the culprit before you?"

"Apparently, Mr. Selby," said the Head quietly.

"He has owned up to his guilt."

"Undoubtedly."

"The sentence of expulsion still holds good, I suppose? D'Arcy minor will be expelled from the school?" exclaimed Mr. Selby heatedly.

The Head frowned.

"Impossible!"

"But, sir—"

"You forget the promise we have both just made to D'Arcy minor," said Dr. Holmes quietly. "I am afraid that D'Arcy minor purposely misled us; but a promise is a promise. Both of us have promised D'Arcy minor that he shall not be punished for the affair."

"But—but—"

"Our word is sacred."

"But—but it was a trick!"

"Possibly; but a promise is a promise."

Mr. Selby rose to his feet. He was in such a rage that he could hardly control himself, even in the presence of the Head. He went to the door and left the study without another word. He could not trust himself to speak.

The Head looked curiously at D'Arcy minor.

He seemed to be struggling between a desire to laugh, and the necessity of looking grave. The astounding impudence and nerve of Wally's dodge struck the reverend Head of St. Jim's as comical.

"So it was you, D'Arcy minor?"

"Yes, sir," said D'Arcy meekly.

"You threw the tar over your Form master?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you do this, D'Arcy minor? You know that such an action was outrageous, and far beyond the limits of what you would call a jape."

"He sent me in to be caned for nothing, sir."

"Ahem! I am afraid I cannot listen to any statement of that sort," said the Head hastily. "The matter may drop as you have my promise—a promise which I was certainly tricked into making."

Wally flushed red.

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" he exclaimed. "I—I don't mind if you take the promise back. I thought it was a good dodge, but I didn't mean to trick you, sir. I—I can stand the row."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"Not at all, D'Arcy minor. I appreciate your feeling in the matter, and the promise holds good. But I understand more clearly now the painful position your brother was



While Gussy slept the tramp cautiously bent over him, and with the light, deft touch of a practised pickpocket, went through his pockets. "This 'ere's a bit of alright!" breathed Mr. Bowers.

placed in, and if he returned to the school at once, I would pass over the flogging."

"That's what we came to you about, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "Will you let us go and look for him, sir?"

The Head smiled again.

"Mr. Railton and several prefects are already searching for D'Arcy," he replied. "I hardly think you would be more likely to find him."

Tom Merry's face fell.

"I think we might have a chance, sir."

"I have no doubt he will shortly be found and brought back."

"We're very anxious about him, sir."

"Yes; I can understand that," said the Head kindly.

"However, I do not think he will be absent long. I have very little doubt that he will be here before nightfall."

"But—but if he isn't, sir?"

The Head did not reply for a moment.

"If he doesn't come back to-night, sir? We're awfully anxious," said Blake.

"Well, if he is not here by to-morrow morning, I may consider your request," said the Head. "That is all I can say at present."

And he made a gesture of dismissal.

"Thank you, sir!"

The juniors retired from the study.

In the passage they paused and looked at one another.

"I suppose we must wait," said Tom Merry.

"I suppose so," said Blake. "The Head's so decent that it would be rotten to buzz off without permission."

"To say nothing of the licking afterwards," remarked Manners.

"Oh, we'll wait!" said Wally; and he walked away whistling.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

"As a matter of fact, we have a clue to Gussy's trail," he remarked. "There's no need to say so. If Gussy's going to be found, I don't see why we can't have the job."

"Good!"

"You remember he said that if he left St. Jim's he would try to find Tomsonio's Circus, and try the signor for a job," said Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Yes, rather," said Blake eagerly. "I suppose that's what he'll do, too. If we get permission to go to-morrow, we shall have to hunt up Tomsonio's Circus."

"That's the idea. We may find Gussy doing the rough-riding act—the same as he did that time we were at the circus, to oblige the signor."

And the juniors went their way.

D'Arcy's declared intention of finding the circus, if possible, and offering his services to Signor Tomsonio, was indeed a clue.

But it was a clue that Tom Merry & Co. felt justified in keeping to themselves.

They did not desire to see Arthur Augustus marched home between two prefects, and they did desire to get leave to look for him themselves.

Therefore they kept still tongues which, according to the proverb, showed wise heads.

The day wore away.

Kildare and several of the prefects were absent from the Sixth Form that afternoon. They were searching the highways and byways for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But they found him not.

They came in tired and dusty to tea, without any news of the runaway.

Telegrams had been sent in various directions, but none of them had elicited a satisfactory reply.

Lord Eastwood, the noble governor of the swell of St. Jim's, wired back that he had received a telegram from his son saying that he was safe, but giving no address.

It was evident that D'Arcy, with his usual thoughtfulness for others, had taken care that his people at home should feel no anxiety on his account, as they certainly would have felt if they had been suddenly apprised from the school that the junior was missing.

With the coming or going of telegraph boys, and dusty prefects and masters, St. Jim's was kept in a state of excitement for the remainder of that day.

The fellows, when they were not in classes, collected in groups and discussed the matter. Almost everybody in the school was concerned for Arthur Augustus, and took the matter seriously.

Mellish of the Fourth, who expressed the opinion in public that it mattered very little whether D'Arcy ever returned to St. Jim's, was ducked in the fountain for his pains; and after that he kept his opinions on the subject strictly to himself.

And the sun went down without news of Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry & Co. thought eagerly of the morrow. If Arthur Augustus did not appear at St. Jim's by dawn, the Head could hardly avoid giving them permission to go and look for the missing junior.

And with their usual confidence in their capabilities they had not the slightest doubt that they would succeed where others had failed, and would bring the swell of St. Jim's back in triumph to the school.

But would they?

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy on the Tramp.

"**B**AI Jove!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, that made that remark.

He made it in a terribly tired and somewhat exasperated tone.

Arthur Augustus was far from the scene he had adorned.

He was tramping slowly along a country lane in Sussex as the sun was sinking behind the trees and shadows lengthened in the road.

Arthur Augustus was clad with his usual elegance, but his elegant attire showed sad signs of travel.

His trousers still displayed their accustomed crease, but they were dusty, and his boots were covered with mire.

His collar was decidedly soiled, and his necktie was just a little out of the straight. His brow was damp with perspiration, and he had pushed back his silk hat a little to relieve it.

For all of which reasons Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not

looking quite as elegant as the fellows at St. Jim's were accustomed to seeing him look.

It was four or five hours since Arthur Augustus had alighted from the train at a station a considerable distance from St. Jim's.

Since then he had been on foot.

It was D'Arcy's intention to find Signor Tomsonio's Circus and hold the signor to his word. The signor had declared, after seeing D'Arcy ride at St. Jim's, that if the junior ever wanted a job he had only to come to the circus. And Arthur Augustus, in the present state of distress, had remembered those carelessly spoken words.

He knew the direction in which to look for the circus.

He had taken the train to the nearest point, and then he had started to track down the circus on foot.

He had news of it at various points, and once he thought he had found it when he came into a village in which every dead wall was flaring with multi-coloured posters.

But he was a day too late.

Tomsonio's Circus had been there the evening before, and had moved on the same night after the performance, and was supposed to be now at the next town, a distance of some six miles. There was no conveyance of any sort to be had in the village, and Arthur Augustus had started out to walk it as the evening came on.

He was already a little fatigued, and this long walk was beginning to tell upon him. And, as is not uncommon in the country districts of England, the signposts were far from sufficiently clear, and he was soon doubtful of his way.

He might be making for Little Burford, where the circus was supposed to be—or he might not. He tramped on in hope.

Now he had reached crossroads, innocent of any trace of a signpost, and which road to take he did not know.

He paused at the corner and adjusted his eyeglass and looked up and down each road in turn.

Long lanes stretching away between trees and high hedges—and no sign. No wonder the tired and exasperated swell of St. Jim's ejaculated "Bai Jove!"

What was to be done?

There was no one in sight, not even a tired labourer going home from his work; nothing living of any sort, except a cow in one of the fields.

"Bai Jove! This is wotten!"

Arthur Augustus sat down on the top rail of a fence and rested.

Upon the whole, it would perhaps have been wiser for him to have stayed in the last village for the night, and to have started out fresh in search of the circus in the morning.

But it was too late to think of that now.

So far as he could judge of the distance he had traversed, he was about half-way to Little Burford, without the faintest idea which road to take to finish the journey.

"Gweat Scott!" said D'Arcy, addressing the trees. "What's a fellow to do?"

There was nothing for it but to take a rest, and then tramp on again—unless in the meantime some Good Samaritan came by who could direct him. Arthur Augustus, with his monocle jammed in his eye, kept a look-out up and down the road.

He uttered an exclamation of relief at last.

"Bai Jove! Here's somebody, at any rate!"

A battered bowler hat had come in sight in the lane, and it dodged up and down over the hedge for some time till the owner came into view.

D'Arcy's face fell a little as he saw him.

The stranger was evidently a tramp.

He was dressed in the seediest of clothes, and the battered bowler was not more dilapidated than the ancient, patched trousers, the frowsy coat, or the red-spotted handkerchief.

But, after all, it was a human being; and, tramp or not, he could doubtless direct Arthur Augustus on his way.

The swell of St. Jim's slipped from the fence and stepped out into the lane. With his usual urbanity he raised his hat to the tramp as he addressed him.

"Pway excuse me," he remarked, "but can you diwect me to Little Burford?"

The tramp stopped and stared at him. Probably he had never been addressed with so much politeness before, and perhaps that aroused his suspicion that the swell of St. Jim's was taking a rise out of him.

"Who are you getting at?" he inquired.

D'Arcy glanced at him through his monocle.

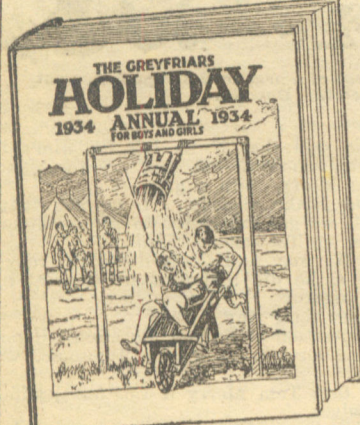
"I fail to compwhend you, deah boy," he remarked.

"Wot I says is, who yer gettin' at?" said the tramp aggressively.

"You weally do not undahstand me. I asked you to diwect me to Little Burford."

The tramp looked at him more attentively.

The seriousness of Arthur Augustus' face assured him that



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the mode of address was not intended as a joke, and something like a grin stole slowly over the stubbly, dirty countenance of the vagrant.

"I'm going there myself," he said, after a pause.
 "How extremely fortunate!" exclaimed D'Arcy.
 "Pewwaps you would not object to my company on the woad?"

The tramp grinned.
 "Not at all, sir."
 "Thank you vevy much."
 And Arthur Augustus, greatly relieved to find a guide on his way, fell into step beside the slouching tramp. The man looked at him curiously out of the corners of his narrow, cunning eyes.
 "I am lookin' for Signor Tomsonio's Circus," Arthur Augustus remarked as they went on. "Have you heard of it?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"
 "Pewwaps you know it?"
 "I know it well."
 "Vevy good! Then pewwaps you can tell me for certain whethah it is at Little Burford?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, yes," said the tramp readily; "it's there, I know it for a fact!"
 "That is extremely satisfactory."
 "So you are going to the circus, sir?" asked the man, eyeing D'Arcy again, and evidently not knowing in the least what to make of him.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm joinin' it," explained D'Arcy.
 The tramp stared.
 "Joinin' it?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "I don't quite catch on."
 "I'm goin' to join it as a wuff-widah," explained Arthur Augustus.

The tramp chuckled.
 "I weally fail to see any cause for mewwiment," remarked the swell of St. Jim's with a great deal of dignity.

"He, he, he!"
 "Weally, my fwient—"
 "Oh, it's all right, sir!" said the tramp, changing his tone. "I'm sometimes taken like that, sir. I mean no 'arm, sir. I'm going to join the circus myself."

"Are you weally?"
 "I am, sir. I was brought up to the circus. Perhaps you've heard my name—Billy Bowers, sir, the famous acrobat."

"I am afwaid I have nevah heard of it, but I weally know vevy little on the subject," said Arthur Augustus. "I am vevy pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Bowahs."

"Thank you, sir."
 "I trust we shall both be successful at the circus."
 "Oh, yes, sir! This way, sir."

The tramp stopped at a stile that gave admittance to a footpath leading away through a dark and shadowy wood. D'Arcy glanced round.

"Do we have to leave the woad?" he asked.
 "Oh, yes! This is a short cut, sir. It saves two miles."
 "Bai Jove, that's worth savin'!"
 And Arthur Augustus unobtrusively followed the tramp over the stile.

They walked on, and the evening shadows grew darker and darker on the lonely and sombre path through the wood.

"Bai Jove, how fah is Little Burford now?" asked Arthur Augustus, when the last gleam of daylight had disappeared, and they were tramping on in darkness.

"I'm not sure that I ain't missed the way," said Mr. Bowers thoughtfully. "It's a long time since I was in this part."

Arthur Augustus gave a little gasp of dismay.
 "Missed the way?"
 "I'm afraid so, sir."
 "Gweat Scott!"

The swell of St. Jim's did not utter a word of reproach. Mr. Bowers was guiding him, and if he had missed the way, well, D'Arcy was no worse off than he would have been without him. And Mr. Bowers had meant kindly, and the swell of St. Jim's would not have said a word to hurt his feelings.

"It's bad," said Mr. Bowers. "I don't see how we're to find the way agin in the dark, do you, sir?"
 "Wathah not?"

"I'm really sorry, sir."
 "Oh, it's nothin'!" said D'Arcy, though his heart was sinking. "You couldn't help it, of course. Don't worry about it. But what's to be done?"

"There's only one thing to be done, sir," said Billy Bowers slowly.
 "And what's that?"
 "Camp out here."

CHAPTER 5.

Stranded!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS drew a deep breath. Camping out was one of the greatest delights of the juniors of St. Jim's—and camping out at night, especially, was peculiarly attractive.

But then, of course, it was necessary to be prepared for camping out. To camp out with a travelling-bag and a silk hat was not quite so comfortable.

But evidently there was no help for it. Arthur Augustus was almost dropping with fatigue, and he felt that he could hardly have walked another half-mile, even if Mr. Bowers had known the way.

"Bai Jove! I shall be glad of a west, anyway!" he remarked.

"We can get a lot of fern to sleep in," said Mr. Bowers. "And the night's mild, too; we shan't 'urt."

"Oh, no; that's all wight!"
 "Ere's a good place."
 "Thank you, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus dropped wearily into a bank of fern. The weather was fairly warm, and D'Arcy could have slept anywhere just then.

He put his silk hat carefully aside, and placed his bag under his head by way of a pillow, and reposed.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked Mr. Bowers' voice from the darkness.

"Yaas, wathah! How are you?"
 "Oh, gorgeous!"
 "I can lend you a w'ap if you like fwom my bag to keep the chill off your head," said D'Arcy. "I have a silk w'ap."

"A silk what?"
 "W'ap."
 "Oh, a wrap! It's all right, sir; I'm comfy."

"Wight-ho!"
 "Good-night, sir!"
 "Good-night!" murmured D'Arcy.

And he fell asleep. He was fagged out. He had had an exciting day, and a very tiring one. He slept soundly, and his regular breathing soon showed that he was safe in the arms of Morpheus.

Then Mr. Bowers sat up in the grass. Mr. Bowers did not seem at all sleepy. His light eyes were glittering in the darkness as he turned them towards the slumbering junior.

He waited patiently—with the patience of a man long practised in waiting patiently to carry out deeds of rascality with safety.

An hour passed, with hardly a sound in the deep woods. There was a faint glimmer of silver on the trees as the moon sailed slowly up; but few of the rays penetrated to the dark footpath.

Mr. Bowers spoke at last.
 "Are you awake, sir?"
 Only a regular, steady breathing responded.

"Are you awake, sir?"
 Mr. Bowers repeated the words in a slightly louder tone. But there came no reply from Arthur Augustus. A gun fired close to him would hardly have awakened him.

Mr. Bowers rose silently. He bent over the swell of St. Jim's, and with a light, deft touch of a practised pick-pocket, went through his clothes, removing everything that he cared to take without disturbing the sleep of his victim.

"This 'ere's a bit of orlright!" breather Mr. Bowers. Then he slipped the bag from under D'Arcy's head, pushing a mass of ferns in its place, still without awakening the swell of St. Jim's.

Mr. Bowers rose quietly to his feet, the bag in his hands. All D'Arcy's possessions that were of any value had passed into his possession.

It was a haul such as Billy Bowers had seldom made. With quiet steps and a subdued chuckle, Mr. Bowers retreated down the woodland path, and Arthur Augustus was left alone.

He slept on. The moon rose higher over the wood, and silver light streamed down on the trees, penetrating at last to the path.

The light fell on the sleeping junior's face. Perhaps it awakened him. His eyes opened, and he stirred.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. He felt that the bag was no longer under his head. But he was too sleepy and tired to think about it. He was feeling cold, too.

He huddled up in the fern and fell asleep again. The swell of St. Jim's did not awaken again until the morning sun was streaming down through the trees.

Then he sat up, yawning, and for the moment not having

the faintest idea where he was. The remembrance of the previous day's experience had gone from his mind.

He stared round him, amazed at not finding the familiar walls and beds of the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!"

He rubbed his eyes. But recollection returned in a few seconds, and he smiled. He remembered the camping out with Mr. Billy Bowers in the wood.

He was feeling cold, and he rose to stretch his limbs, and to restore the circulation by a little exercise.

He glanced round for Mr. Bowers. The tramp was not to be seen.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I suppose he has gone to look for some steam to have his mornin' bath. I think I had bettah do the same."

The idea of a morning bath would probably have caused an explosion from Mr. Bowers, if that gentleman had been near enough to hear D'Arcy's conjecture. But he was at a good distance now, not taking a morning bath, either.

"Vevy thoughtless of me not to bwing a towel," murmured D'Arcy. "But, of course, I nevah foresaw campin' out like this. Afthah all, I can use one of my handkerchiefs for a towel."

And he looked for his bag. Of course, it was not to be seen.

D'Arcy searched among the ferns for it, but no trace of it was to be discovered. And he gave it up at last in surprise and dismay.

He could not imagine in the least where the bag was. He distinctly remembered placing it under his head the previous night before he went to sleep. What had become of it was a mystery.

"Pewwaps Mr. Bowahs could tell me," thought D'Arcy.

"He may have moved it for somethin'."

Which certainly was the case.

Arthur Augustus gave a look round once more, but there was no sign of the vagrant. Then D'Arcy shouted:

"Mr. Bowahs—Mr. Bowahs!"

The wood echoed back the shouting, but that was all.

D'Arcy began to feel uneasy.

"It's wawah wotten of him to leave me alone like this in a stwange place," he murmured. "I suppose I ought to remain here in case he weturns, and at the same time I feel that the pwopah capah would be to get some bwekker somewah."

He turned it over in his mind.

He wanted to get his breakfast and then resume the search for Tomsonio's Circus; and it was too bad to have to waste time for Mr. Bowers. But then, his bag—he could not go without that.

The sun was rising higher over the trees. Arthur Augustus felt for his watch to ascertain what the time was.

No watch was there!

The swell of St. Jim's stared down at his beautiful waistcoat in blank amazement. There was no trace of either watch or chain.

With a gasp of dismay the swell of St. Jim's ran his hands through his pockets. The terrible truth was dawning upon him now. His pocket-book was gone, and his only banknote in it. His silver pencil, his card-case—all were gone—even his silk handkerchief.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus uttered this exclamation in utter dismay. He knew that he had been robbed in his sleep now, and that Mr. Bowers was gone for good with his bag and his other possessions.

"Wobbed! Bai Jove! Wobbed! The wascal!"

Arthur Augustus stood quite still for some minutes looking round him in a helpless way. All his possessions were gone—he was penniless!

The last thought that ever entered D'Arcy's mind was to suspect anybody of dishonesty. He was taken absolutely by surprise. And his position now was not an enviable one.

He had yet to find the circus, and he was penniless; he had not even a copper or two left to pay for his breakfast.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated again.

He thought of searching the wood for Mr. Bowers, but the uselessness of it at once occurred to him. The tramp must have gone hours ago—he would not leave the robbery till near dawn. He might be twenty miles away by this time.

It was useless to linger there.

With a heavy heart Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started to tramp along the footpath. He did not know where it would lead him. He guessed that Mr. Bowers had deliberately led him out of his way in order to get him to camp out in the wood and make the robbery easier. Where he was now he had not the faintest idea. He tramped on steadily as the sun rose higher, inward pangs warning him that he needed breakfast—which was precisely the thing unobtainable.

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CHAPTER 6.

Friends in Need!

"I S this Little Burford, deah boy?"

"Yes, zur!"

"Have you seen a circus here—a circus called Tomsonio's?"

"Yes, zur!"

"Is it here now?"

"No, zur; it moved on last night."

Arthur Augustus' face fell.

The dialogue took place between the swell of St. Jim's and a stout red-faced countryman, as D'Arcy entered the village.

It was nearly noon, and D'Arcy, after losing his way several times, had reached the little village of Burford, only to find that Tomsonio's Circus was not there.

It was a bitter disappointment.

Arthur Augustus was tired, and he was hungry. Besides that, heavy drops of rain were falling.

"Do you know where the circus is now?" he asked.

"No, zur!"

And that was all D'Arcy could gain from the countryman. But he inquired further, and at the village inn he learned that the circus had taken the southern road towards the sea, and that it was the intention of Signor Tomsonio to stop the next afternoon at a place called Westbrook.

Arthur Augustus wearily turned his face to the south, and after what seemed hours of trudging to the tired junior, the rainy roofs of a village loomed up in the wet mist. D'Arcy heaved a sigh of relief. It was his destination at last—or was it? In the maze of country lanes he might very easily have missed his way.

He tramped into the village. The rain was still falling. A smith was at work in an open forge, and Arthur Augustus stopped in the red glow that fell out into the village street.

"Pway excuse me," he remarked. "But is this Westbrook?"

The blacksmith turned and looked at him.

"Westbrook," he said. "No; Westbrook is six miles from here."

D'Arcy's heart sank. He had missed the way, after all.

"You go through the village, turn round by the pump, and keep on past Harrison's Barn," said the smith; "then it's a straight road."

"Thank you vevy much."

D'Arcy was turning away, when the smith called to him.

"Stop a minute."

"Yaas?"

"Come in. You're wet!"

Arthur Augustus smiled a rather ghastly smile. He certainly was wet.

He came gladly into the forge. The glow from the furnace seemed to send new life into his chilled limbs.

The smith looked at him curiously.

"Going to Westbrook?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Got friends there?"

"Yaas!"

"You look worn out," said the smith. "What are you tramping in the rain for?"

"I—I'm in wathah a huwwy, you know."

"Sit down and rest."

"Thank you vevy much."

The smith pulled out a stool, and D'Arcy sank wearily upon it, warmed to the heart by the glow from the furnace.

"Hungry?" asked the blacksmith.

"Yaas."

"You can eat cold vittles, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

He could have eaten anything at that moment.

The smith watched him curiously as he ate. He was a big, muscular man, with a very kindly face. Arthur Augustus ate and ate. He finished at last, and gave a sigh of relief.

"Lie down and rest," said the smith.

"I—I think I had bettah be goin', thank you!" said D'Arcy. "I may miss my fwriends if I don't get to Westbrook."

"It's still raining!"

"Yaas. I shall have to chance it."

"You'd better stay and rest," said the smith, eyeing him.

"You're not in a state to travel. Are you sure you have friends at Westbrook?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I suppose you know your own business best, but—"

"I think I had bettah go, thank you!"

The smith nodded.

"You're an awfully decent chap," said D'Arcy. "I hope I shall have the pleasuah of wenewin' our acquaintance. I should like to shake hands with you."

The blacksmith, with a smile, held out a huge hand, into which D'Arcy's completely disappeared.

Then the swell of St. Jim's took his departure. The meal and the warmth in the forge had refreshed him, and he tramped on his way through the falling rain with a firmer step and a lighter heart.

The sun had quite gone now, and the road was dim with rain and darkness. Arthur Augustus found the turning and tramped on, but mile after mile crawled wearily under his feet, and he had not arrived at Westbrook. When he came to a fingerpost, it was too dark to read it, and he had to trust to chance.

He was certain that he had covered more than six miles, but there was no sign of his destination.

In the rain, and in the growing night, he met no one. The roads were deserted. The swell of St. Jim's stopped at last.

He was aching with fatigue, and he felt that he could go no farther. He crept into the shelter of a big tree, and

tried to guide himself by the sound of the chimes he had heard, but it was a difficult task.

The unfortunate junior was now walking along like one in a dream.

He swayed from side to side with exhaustion as he walked, and hardly saw where he was going, and more than once narrowly escaped falling into a ditch.

Through the night came sounds on the road that reached his ears, but without making any impression upon him.

There were sounds of wheels, of trampling animals, and of men's voices—sounds of a large party travelling through the night.

Dim forms loomed up ahead of him in the rainy darkness, but he did not see them.

He walked on blindly.

A glare of a lantern streaming through the darkness from



"Yow! Leggo!" roared the tramp as Tom Merry and Figgins gripped his arms and legs. "I'm in bad health!" "This will do you good, then!" said Figgins. "In with him!" Mr. Bowers sailed through the air and descended into the water with a loud splash.

snuggled into the wet fern that grew thickly round the trunk.

As he sheltered there, faintly from afar came the chime of a church clock, and he counted the hours.

Twelve!

It was midnight!

The blackness was thick round him, only broken by the glimmer of the falling rain and the puddles in the road.

Midnight!

If the circus was at Westbrook the performance would be over now, and if the signor was staying only one night, the caravans would be upon the road again by this time. D'Arcy's heart sank at the thought.

Again the circus had escaped him.

Would he ever find it?

He crept out of the fern and took to the road again. He

the shaft of a wagon-blazed into his eyes, and struck him at last, and he stopped dazedly.

Where was he?

What were those forms and those sounds round him? The junior stared about him blankly and dizzily.

There was a buzz of voices.

"What are you stopping for?"

"There's somebody in the road."

"Here, there! Get aside!"

"Out of the way there! Do you want to be run over?"

Even in his dazed state, Arthur Augustus was struck by a note of familiarity in some of the voices.

He staggered to the roadside, and fell out of sheer weakness. There was a thud as he dropped heavily into the wet grass.

"Hallo! By gum! What's that?"
 "Some drunken boulder," said a cool, clear voice.
 "Don't stop!"
 "I'm going to stop, Carson. He mayn't be drunk."
 "Nonsense! It is no concern of ours, anyway."
 "Rats!"
 A form leaned over D'Arcy.
 "Here, wake up! What are you doing there?"
 "B-b-bai Jove!"
 "Bring a light here."
 "You're stopping the show, Joey Pye."
 "I'll stop the show as long as I like, Jim Carson. This chap is a mere kid, and he's soaked with rain; and he's ill, I think."
 "Oh, rot!"
 "Bring a light!"
 "Here you are, Joey!"
 "Show it on his face. My only hat—by gum! It's the kid who rode the horse at the school! It's our Cowboy Dick! D'Arcy!"
 Arthur Augustus looked dazedly at the face above him.
 "Joey Pye!"
 Then he fainted.

But ere he lost consciousness he realised the truth; he had not found his friends, but they had found him.

CHAPTER 7. With the Circus!

A RAY of sunlight came in at a small, square window, and fell across the white coverlet. It was the first thing that met Arthur Augustus' eyes when they opened.

Where was he?

The swell of St. Jim's lay still, his brain in a whirl. Above him was a low roof, round him close walls, and that small window with the sunlight streaming through—sometimes sunlight, sometimes shadow.

And a strange motion made itself felt, too, as he grew wider awake; the bed in which he lay was not still.

Was he at sea?

It was not the motion of the sea, but the bed, the room, the furniture about him—none of these things were still for a moment.

There was a faint rumble some distance from him, and he gradually recognised what it was—the roll of heavy wheels on a hard road.

He was in a vehicle of some sort.

And, as he realised that, he remembered all.

He had fallen among friends, and the circus had picked him up on the road. He was in bed in one of the circus caravans, and it was morning.

D'Arcy lay and thought.

He was too weak still to move, but it was luxurious to lie there without the necessity for motion.

He was among his friends at last. He remembered now hearing the kindly voice of Joey Pye, the clown, and the cold, hard tones of Jim Carson, the Handsome Man.

He would soon see all his friends again now. Jack Talbot, the boy Tiger-Tamer; Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring; Samson, the Strong Man, and the fat, genial signor.

They had taken him in, and they would befriend him—he knew that. He was among friends at last.

There was a blaze of sunshine in the van as the door swung open.

A handsome lad of about D'Arcy's own age, but more sturdily built, stepped in. He came in without a sound, and glanced at D'Arcy, and as he saw that the junior was awake, he stepped to the bedside with a smile.

D'Arcy moved a feeble hand on the coverlet, and the lad grasped it.

"Talbot!"

Jack Talbot nodded cheerily.

"I thought I'd look in and see how you were getting on," he remarked. "Have you been long awake?"

"Only a few minutes, I think, dear boy."

"Feel better?"

"Much better—thanks! I think I could get up now."

Jack Talbot shook his head.

"Not yet, lad. Better have a good rest. Do you feel hungry?"

"N-no."

"You will when you get your strength back again. Think you could sleep now?"

"Yaas, pewwaps I could."

D'Arcy closed his eyes.

Jack Talbot stepped quietly from the van and closed the door.

The swell of St. Jim's sank into slumber again.

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He slept soundly, quietly, a healthy sleep. It was the halting of the caravan at last that awakened him.

He started into wakefulness again.

The van was at a standstill.

Through a little window the sunlight was streaming, and the shadow of a bunch of foliage was thrown into the van.

The door reopened.

"Awake?" said a soft voice.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Joey Pye came in. The fat, good-natured face of the clown was very kindly. There were still traces of grease-paint and chalk about his ears and his chin, relics of the previous night's make-up.

"Feel like getting up?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The clown eyed him curiously.

"You shall tell us presently how you came in this part of the country, and the state we found you in," he remarked. "Never mind now. Do you feel well enough to get up? You've had a bad time."

"Oh, yaas, I'm all wight now, thank you!" said Arthur Augustus.

He made an effort to rise.

But his strength had not come back yet, and he sank down again on the pillow.

Joey Pye shook his head.

"You can't get up," he said. "I'll bring you some tommy in here. You'd better lay up for the rest of the day."

"I do feel wathah wockay," admitted the swell of St. Jim's reluctantly. "I'm an awfully stwong fellow as a wule, though."

"You've had a rough time."

"Yaas, it was wathah wuff. I am afwaid my clothes are wined."

The clown grinned.

"Well, they'll want some cleaning and pressing to restore their original brilliance," he remarked. "But you can change into some of Talbot's clothes when you get up. They'll fit you with a little pinching."

"Thank you vewy much! Whose van is this I am in, dear boy?"

"Talbot's and mine. We share it," explained Joey Pye. "When we picked you up last night you were simply soaked. We rubbed you down and shoved brandy down your throat, but you never came to."

"I am afwaid I was vewy wockay."

"You were, by gum! Then we shoved you into Talbot's bed and piled blankets on you. I'm jolly glad to see you looking so chirpy this morning. You might have had a serious illness."

"Oh, I'm pwetty fit, you know, and if a chap keeps himself fit, he can stand things," remarked Arthur Augustus sagely.

"Still, you'd better keep in bed to-day," said Joey Pye. "We're camping now—place called Fidle. We're staying here a day or two before we take the road again."

"How awfully lucky I met you!"

"Well, yes, it was—and quite by chance, too, of course."

"Oh, no, not quite!"

"How do you mean? You weren't looking for us, I suppose?" said Joey Pye, in surprise.

D'Arcy nodded.

"Yaas, I was lookin' for you. I have left St. Jim's."

"Left the school?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not for good?" exclaimed Joey Pye, in surprise.

"I don't know; pewwaps. You see, there were certain circs which made my posish there deuced awkward, and I had no othah wesoruce. I wemembahed that the signor had offahed me a job as a widah in the circus, and I came to look for you."

"By gum!"

"I missed you at two or three places, and then you found me," said Arthur Augustus. "It was awfully lucky for me."

Joey Pye looked at him directly.

"Look here," he said, "better speak out. Does this mean that you have run away from school?"

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"Pewwaps I'd bettah not say too much," he remarked.

"It is bettah for you not to know all the circs. If the signor is willin' to take me in I'll make myself usefule; it not, I'll go f'rhath on. But I'm not goin' back to St. Jim's, in any case."

"Oh!"

"I'm feelin' pwetty hungwy now."

Joey Pye nodded and left the van. He returned in a few minutes with a most appetising supply of provender, and D'Arcy, sitting up in bed and propped with pillows and cushions, did full justice to it.

Jack Talbot looked in to chat with him while he ate.

The meal finished, D'Arcy sank down in the bed again with a sigh of satisfaction.

Weariness was overpowering him again.

Joey Pye and Jack Talbot left the caravan quietly.

Arthur Augustus went to sleep.

He slept soundly while the circus camped, and made the preparations for the night's entertainment.

CHAPTER 8.

Gussy the Redskin !

JOEY PYE came away from the caravan with an unusually serious expression upon his fat, comical face. Signor Tomsonio was smoking his afternoon cigar, a big black one, that filled the air round him with a thick cloud.

The day was very fine and sunny after the night of rain. The scene was a very cheerful one.

Clotilde was seated near the signor, sewing. The girl glanced up at Joey Pye with her sweet smile.

Signor Tomsonio removed the black cigar from his mouth.

"How is the lad, Joey?"

"All serene, signor."

"Has he explained how he came away from the school?"

"No."

"It's odd."

"By gum it is!" said Mr. Pye, leaning against a tree.

"My impression is that he's run away from school."

Clotilde started.

"Run away from school?" exclaimed the signor.

"That's it."

"The young donkey!"

"But why should he do that?" exclaimed Clotilde, in wonder. "The boys at St. Jim's all seemed so happy; that was the last thing I should expect one of them to do."

Joey Pye nodded.

"Well, that's how it is, signor. Do you remember when the boys were at the circus one day they got us out of a fix, when Talbot was laid up and D'Arcy took his place, and Jack Blake played the Indian in the ring?"

"I remember."

"You told D'Arcy that if he ever wanted a job he had only to come to you."

The signor laughed.

"Did I?"

"Yes. Had you forgotten?"

"Yes."

"Well, the lad hadn't," said Joey Pye, with a grin. "He's left school, and he's come here to get a job."

The signor gave a jump.

"Impossible!"

"Fact!"

"The young donkey!" said the signor again.

"I don't see what you can do."

"If he's run away from school I can't take him in," said the signor. "He will have to go back."

"I rather think he won't."

"But—"

"And you can't turn him out," said Mr. Pye, with a shake of the head. "That's impossible. And I know he won't go back to school unless he chooses."

"I don't know whether I ought to communicate with his headmaster," said the signor, looking distressed.

Joey Pye shook his head.

"You can't give him away like that, when he's trusted himself to your protection, signor."

"Certainly not!" said Clotilde warmly. "And you do not know what reasons he may have had for leaving school."

"Exactly," said Joey Pye. "He's a decent lad, and I think he's probably had cause for what he's done."

"Well, it's an awkward situation," said the signor.

"It is," agreed Mr. Pye. "Still, I don't see what you can do, but keep your word. And he would be useful in the circus."

"Yes, that's so."

Mr. Pye strolled away to attend to his duties, and the signor was left to smoke his cigar and think it over. He glanced several times at Clotilde. Youthful as she was, Clotilde was a very sensible girl, and the signor often consulted her. The girl sat now with her eyes upon her work and a little pucker of thought in her smooth brow.

"Well, girlie?" said the signor at last.

Clotilde looked up.

"Yes, signor?"

"What am I to do?"

"You must take care of D'Arcy," said Clotilde. "If they want him at the school they can find him. So long as he has let his relations know that he is safe, that is enough. And you must keep your word."

The signor granted.

"I suppose so."

And he smoked in silence.

(Continued on page 12.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Fine footballs are awarded every week for the two best jokes received, and a half-a-crown is paid for every other joke that appears in this column.

THE CRIBBER.

Master: "Smith, I have seen you look at the next boy's composition three times."

Smith: "Yes, sir—he writes very badly!"

A football has been awarded to RONALD PURNELL, 11, Argyle Terrace, Twerton, Bath.

HIS MISTAKE.

The artist's latest picture was being admired by his friend. "It quite makes my mouth water," declared the friend.

"It's not such a bad sunset effect, is it?" said the artist.

"Sunset?" exclaimed the friend. "Great Scott! I thought it was a poached egg!"

A football has been awarded to D. FOSTER, 13, Monument Street, Peterborough, Northants.

IGNORANCE.

Gardener: "This is a tobacco plant in full flower, madam."

Old Lady: "How very interesting! And how long will it be before the cigars are ripe?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. FEARN, 109, Duke Street, Southport, Lancs.

A NATURAL START.

Rich Man: "Look at me; I'm a very rich man, yet I started life as a barefooted boy!"

Poor Man: "Well, what of it? I wasn't born with boots on, either!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. BORGEAT, 84, Coles Green Road, Dollis Hill Lane, London, N.W.2.

NOT HEIRLESS.

Ted: "Your father's completely bald, isn't he, Tom?"

Tom: "I'm the only heir he has left!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. HOWELLS, 38, Islwyn Road, Mayhill, Swansea.

ENOUGH SAID!

Manager: "A person who does not make himself understood is a fool. Do you understand me?"

Office Boy: "No, sir!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. WRIGHT, 13, Greenway Dagenham, Essex.

THE DAY'S WORK.

Reporter: "I shouldn't think you enjoy knocking other men silly."

Boxer: "Oh, yes; it's all in the day's (daze) work!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss D. PIMM, 1, Perth Terrace, Lombard Street, New Lenton, Nottingham.

IT WAS THE PROPELLER!

Old Lady (to pilot): "Surely, my man, it is cool enough up in the clouds without having that fan going all the time?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. CLIMO, 22, Lorne Park Road, Bournemouth.

It was nearly sunset when Arthur Augustus came out. He was dressed in some of Jack Talbot's clothes, which fitted him pretty well, and, though he was looking somewhat pale, he did not appear very much the worse for his rough experiences.

He had a cap belonging to Jack Talbot on his head in the place of his battered and rain-soaked topper, which was in too terrible a state to be worn.

He raised his cap to Clotilde as he met her, chatting with Jack Talbot and the signor outside the big marquee, which had been put up for the evening performance.

"Hallo!" said the signor. "So you're about!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"I am so glad to see you well," said Clotilde softly. "You must have had a terrible experience."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy. "My clothes were uttaly wuined, and my hat is a weck. But I am feelin' all wight now—only a little bit wockay."

"You're lucky," said the signor.

"I was vevy lucky to fall among fwiends," said D'Arcy. "I was lookin' for the circus when you found me. I wanted to see you, signor."

"See me?"

"Yaas; on biznay."

Jack and Clotilde smiled, and strolled away.

Signor Tomsonio looked a little uneasy. He lighted a fresh cigar.

"Go ahead, kid!"

"You made me an offah when I saw you last, signor."

"Did I?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we do these things, you know," said the signor tamely.

"I have decided to accept it."

"Oh!"

"That job will suit me down to the gground."

"Oh!"

"So I am willin' to be taken on at once, if agweeable to you."

"Oh!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and gazed inquiringly at the signor.

"Of course," he remarked, after a pause, "if you have wepented of your offah, I don't want to hold you to it for a moment."

"Oh!"

"I am quite willin' to welease you fwm the engagement, and twy my luck elsewhah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Not at all," said Signor Tomsonio hastily. "Not at all!"

"Then you take me on?"

"You see—er—you see—"

"Yaas, go ahead, deah sir!"

"I'm afraid you've run away from school," said the signor. "You'd better tell me if that's the case. Have you run away from St. Jim's?"

"Certainly not!"

"Oh!"

"I have wetiached fwm the school for a time," replied D'Arcy. "Wunnin' away is an undignified and surreptitious thing to do, and I should wegard myself with scorn if I wan away. I have wetiached fwm the school for a time, which is a vevy diffewent thing."

"What's the difference?"

"Well, you see, it's a question of dig."

"I don't know whether I ought to send a wire to your headmaster," said Signor Tomsonio, eyeing D'Arcy in a doubtful sort of way.

Arthur Augustus drew himself up.

"I should not wegard that as playin' the game," he remarked. "I twusted to your honah in comin' heah. But if you do not want me, I am not goin' to bothah you. I will wetiach fwm the place at once."

"Hold on!" exclaimed the signor, as the swell of St. Jim's was turning away. "Don't be a young ass, you know."

"Weally, sir—"

"I was speaking for your own good."

"Thank you vevy much!"

"It would be better for you to return to school."

"It is imposs, deah sir."

"If that is really so—"

"Honah bwight, sir!"

"You are determined not to return to St. Jim's, in any case?" asked the signor doubtfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite sure?"

"Quite."

"Then, I suppose I ought to stand by you," said the signor. "Anyway, the circus is your home as long as you need it. And if you like to work for your provender, I shan't say no. I can't give you any more definite engagement than that."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"That is quite satisfawty, sir."

"Good! Then you can join the show as soon as you're strong enough."

"I shall be all wight this evenin', sir."

The signor smiled.

"You are eager to begin—eh?"

"Yaas, wathah! I don't want to eat the bwead of idleness, you know."

"Very well; you shall begin as soon as you like."

"Thanks awfully!"

And so it was settled.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was duly enrolled as a new member of the circus company, and he settled into his place with wonderful adaptability.

Although he was not feeling up to his usual form yet, he was, as he said, quite strong enough to work, and he didn't want to eat the bread of idleness. He lent a hand at once, and there was no work too rough for him.

Jack Talbot, who had a sincere friendship for the swell of St. Jim's, willingly agreed to share his van with him for the present. Arthur Augustus' way of life had, of course, always been very different from that of the circus lad, but Arthur Augustus did not seem to be conscious of any social distinction between them. Arthur Augustus had many uncommon little ways; but there never had been anything snobbish about him.

"This must be an awfully wippin' life, you know!" he remarked to Talbot, as he joined the circus lad in helping to put up the seats in the big marquee.

There was no time to be lost before the evening performance began, and nearly everybody was lending a hand. Jack, as a "turn" on the programme, and paid for riding and tiger-taming, was not called upon to help in this work

Potts, the Office Boy!



unless he liked, but he was not the kind of lad to stand idly by while others were working.

He wired in with a will, and did quite as much as any of the circus hands whose work it really was.

The preparations inside the tent were finished at last, and the performers retired to make up for the scene.

Arthur Augustus accompanied Joey Pye and Jack Talbot to their van, and was there provided with a Redskin rig-out for the cowboy act.

With assistance from his two friends, D'Arcy was made up as a Redskin, while Talbot donned the garb of Cowboy Dick.

Arthur Augustus' heart was beating faster.

The situation was new and strange to him, and he could not accustom himself to it as yet. Once before he had appeared for a turn in the circus to oblige Signor Tomsonio when Talbot was not fit. That had been an exciting and pleasant experience; but now he was on the regular bill, and to-night was to be his first essay at earning his own bread.

It was novel enough to the swell of St. Jim's.

When he was made up he went to the ring entrance of the tent, and, keeping out of sight of the public, he watched the turns.

He saw the Handsome Man's feats on the high trapeze with great admiration, and watched the juggling of Puggles, and the feats of Samson, the Strong Man, and gazed breathlessly at the barebacked riding of Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring.

He had seen the show more than once from the front, but he gazed upon it with a new interest now that he was one of the circus company.

A strange thrill went through him as he gazed, too, at the sea of faces in the crowded seats. St. Jim's seemed far enough away from him now. He could hardly believe that he was the same junior who had attended classes in the Fourth Form Room, sung in the choir on Sunday, who had been locked up in the punishment-room, and had run away from school to escape being flogged.

Between his past life and the present there seemed to be a great gulf fixed.

The time came at last for the cowboy scene.

Jack Talbot, looking very handsome as Cowboy Dick, tapped the junior on the shoulder.

"Ready?" he asked, with a smile.

D'Arcy started out of his reverie.

"Yaas, watah!"

"Here's your horse. We go on in a few minutes now."

"Jolly good!"

There were nine or ten "supers" made up as Indians, mounted on circus horses, and Arthur Augustus joined them.

Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, was to be chased by the Redskins, and rescued by Cowboy Dick. It was an act which afforded opportunities for a fine exhibition of riding skill, and it never failed to evoke applause.

The signal came at last.

A bunch of Redskins thundered into the arena, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the midst of them.

D'Arcy's heart was beating fast, and for the first few minutes he hardly knew where he was, or what he was doing. He galloped blindly round the ring in the midst of his companions.

But his brain soon cleared.

In a few minutes he was enjoying the scene keenly, and yelling with the loudest of the painted and feathered Redskins as he swept round the ring.

CHAPTER 9.

The Expedition!

TOM MERRY came out of the Head's study at St. Jim's with a bright expression on his face.

A group of juniors were waiting for him in the passage, and they all looked at him eagerly as he came up.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well?" said Herries and Digby.

"What's the verdict?" asked Monty Lowther.

"To go, or not to go?" said Manners. "Out with it!"

"Get it off your chest!" said Figgins.

"Shout it out!" said Kerr.

"For goodness' sake, let's know!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn.

As nearly all these remarks were made at the same moment, or almost so, it was not surprising that Tom Merry did not reply to all of them.

Blake shook his arm.

"Are we going after Gussy, or are we not?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Good!"

All the juniors said that together.

"This is how it is," said Tom Merry. "It's two days since Gussy disappeared from the school, and the masters and the prefects haven't been able to find him. All we know of him is that he wired to his gov'nor that he was safe and all right. The police can't find him, and I don't suppose they will till he chooses to be found."

"Yes, likely," said Lowther.

"Very likely!"

"We offered our services to the Head—"

"And he didn't jump at them, either," Monty Lowther remarked in a thoughtful way. "Obtuse, you know. These old gentlemen often are."

"But now he's come round," said Tom Merry. "He's given us permission to go and look for Gussy—"

"And us!" cried half a dozen voices.

Tom shook his head.

"I'm sorry!"

"What?"

"We're jolly well going!"

"Can't be did! The Head says I can go, and take Blake and Figgins and young Wally. Young Wally is awfully anxious about his major, and he's going about looking like a ghost. The Head says—"

"He said I could go, of course?" suggested Lowther.

"He didn't."

"He must have mentioned me," remarked Manners.

"Oh, no!"

"But I simply must go!" exclaimed Kerr. "No good going without a Scotsman to show you the way."

"Rats!"

"I think I ought to go," said Fatty Wynn. "As a matter of fact, I've made a big bundle of sandwiches all ready."

"Never mind, we'll take 'em," said Blake.

To this remark Fatty Wynn vouchsafed no response but a stony stare.

Wally of the Third came along the passage.

"Well, any news?" he asked.

"Yes. We're going to look for Gussy—four of us."

"I'm coming!"

Wally made that statement in the most matter-of-fact

SWATTED!



way, as if permission from the powers that be was only a little formality that could be dispensed with.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You can come if you like. We have permission."

"Good!"

"But I ought to come," said Herries furiously. "You see, I can take Towser with me, and then finding Gussy will only be a matter of time. You know how Towser is on a trail."

"Yes," agreed Blake. "He can track down a herring if it's held right under his nose."

"Look here, Blake—"

"Let's get ready!" said Tom Merry briskly. "You chaps can come down to the gates and see us off. I wish you were all coming, but it can't be did."

And the juniors who were not coming had to content themselves with giving Tom Merry and his companions a send-off at the gates.

Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, and D'Arcy minor left the school in cheerful spirits. They had little doubt of their ability to track down the missing junior.

True, the masters and the prefects had failed to get on the track. The county police had been applied to in vain.

But that made no difference to the self-confidence of Tom Merry & Co. They were going to find D'Arcy.

That he intended to follow the circus and join in it they knew—a piece of knowledge they had kept to themselves so far at the school.

Had he found the circus?

If so, it was only necessary for them to find Signor Tomsonio, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would be found, too.

And with this idea in mind they took the train at Rylcombe for the town in which they had last heard of the circus.

Needless to say, Signor Tomsonio's show was many a long mile away when the juniors of St. Jim's arrived there.

But at a village in the south of Sussex they learned of a junior who had inquired at an inn for the circus, and from the description they received, there was little doubt that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

They learned, too, that the circus was in the neighbourhood—or, rather, had been lately—and they set off again with high hopes.

"We may get to the circus to-morrow and find Gussy there," Tom Merry remarked hopefully, as they tramped along a woodland path in the sunset. "We shall have to stop for to-night at the next village, I think."

Blake nodded.

"Yes, we've had a long day."

"We're on Gussy's track, anyway," Figgins remarked.

"If we knew just where the circus was—"

"But we don't," said Wally.

"No, I know we don't," said Figgins. "Don't you chip in when your elders are talking, kid."

Wally sniffed.

"I shouldn't wonder if Gus has missed the circus altogether, and is wandering round," he said.

"Yes, but—"

"And he's bound to be in some trouble or other," said Wally restlessly. "You know Gussy. And I believe he had a lot of money about him, as well as his gold watch and his diamond pin."

Tom Merry's face clouded over.

"Well, there's no need to meet trouble half-way," he said.

"Now, there's no necessity to think Gussy has come to grief till we find that he has."

"I know that, but—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Figgins. "Look at that merchant!"

A tramp was lying in the grass beside the woodland road, basking in the setting sun. He was not a pleasant object to look at.

He was ragged and dirty. But that was not the worst; he was evidently under the influence of liquor, and had doubtless lain down in the grass there to sleep off the effects of the debauch.

His looks showed that he had been constantly imbibing strong liquor for days past, and the thought occurred to Tom Merry as he glanced at him that the tramp had been "bluing" the proceeds of some robbery, for he certainly did not look like a person who was likely to come into the possession of much money by honest labour.

The tramp sat up and blinked at the boys.

"Old on a minute, gentlemen!" he exclaimed in a husky voice. "Pity a poor man!"

Tom Merry gave him a look of disgust.

"I do pity you!" he exclaimed. "I pity any man who is in such a filthy condition as you are in. Why don't you get a wash?"

The tramp grinned in a sickly way.

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"My 'ealth is bad, sir, and—"

"No wonder!" said Figgins. "Let the whisky alone, then, and it will improve. You jolly well won't get any money out of us, anyway!"

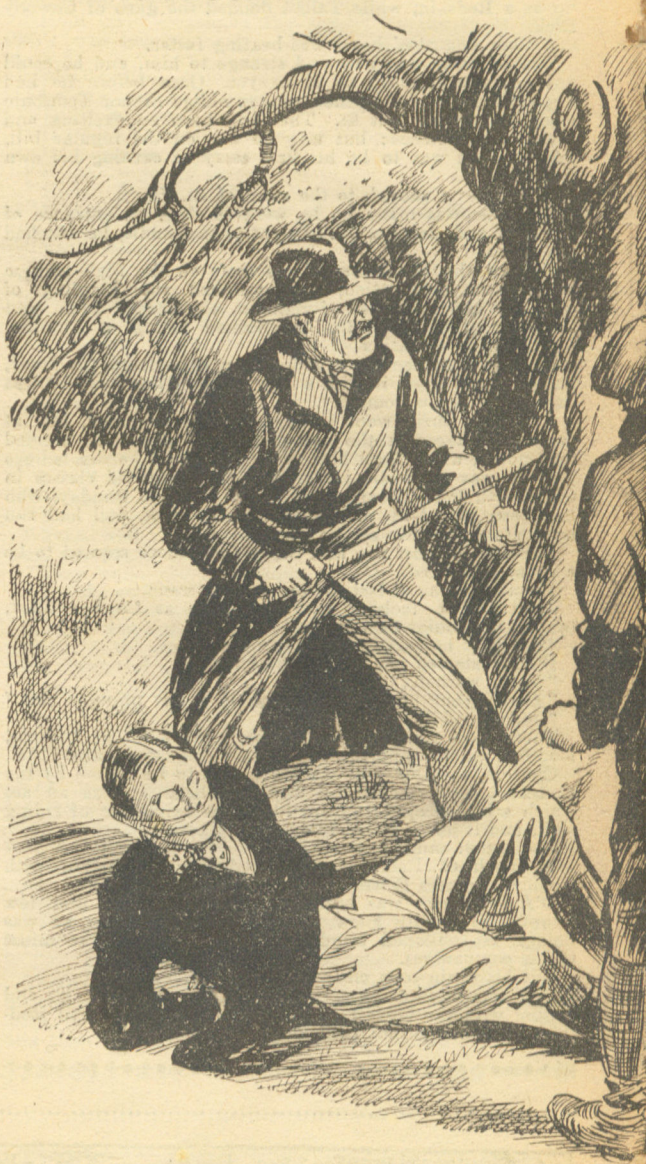
"Rather not!" said Blake with emphasis.

"Oh, let's get on!" said Wally impatiently.

"Old on a tick, gents!"

The tramp staggered to his feet. The fumes of liquor were still in his brain, and he stood unsteadily upright, holding on to a tree for a minute or two.

"I'm 'ard-up, young gents, and—"



Gussy was writhing under the blows from that hefty stic Tom Merry & Co. burst upon the scene. "Into them, to the

"Where do you get the money for drink, then?" said Wally, with a sniff.

"I—I—"

"Blessed if he doesn't reek of it!" said Blake. "Let's get away from him."

"I've got somethin' to sell," said the man, with a wink, fumbling among his rags. "It cost pounds and pounds, but you can 'ave it for a quid."

He drew something from his pocket that flashed and gleamed in the sun. He held it up to view.

It was a gold watch.

"Where did you get that?" inquired Tom Merry sternly. "Do you expect us to believe that you came by it honestly?"

"I bought it of a man who——"
 The tramp was interrupted by a loud yell from Wally, who sprang forward and seized his arm.
 "You scoundrel!"
 "Wally——"
 "Can't you see," shouted Wally, "that's Gussy's watch?"
 "Gussy's watch?"
 "Yes."
 For a moment the juniors stared; and then, with grim looks, they surrounded Mr. William Bowers.



When there was a sudden sound of footsteps in the grass, and 'u chaps!' shouted Tom, and the four juniors rushed forward in a line.

CHAPTER 10.
 Rough Justice.

BILLY BOWERS looked alarmed as the four juniors of St. Jim's closed round him, looking grim and hard. He tried to back away, but Tom Merry was in the way. He tried to sidle off to the right, but Figgins stopped him.
 The juniors were round him, and they evidently did not intend to let him escape.
 Wally grasped the hand that held the watch, and jerked the timepiece out of the dirty fingers of the tramp.
 He held it up for the others to see.

There, plainly engraved on the case, was D'Arcy's monogram; and, besides, now that they had a good look at it the juniors recognised the watch easily enough. It was a splendid "ticker," presented to Arthur Augustus on a birthday by his "governah," and it was supposed to have cost the noble earl twenty-five guineas. Such watches were not common in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. The juniors knew it well.

"It's Gussy's watch," said Tom Merry.
 "Right enough!"
 "Where did the scoundrel get it from?"
 "Look 'ere," said Mr. Bowers, in a blustering tone, "I'm not a-goin' to stand this! Look 'ere, you gimme that watch back!"
 "It's my brother's watch, you thief!"
 Mr. Bowers changed colour.
 Now that he looked at Wally he could trace some resemblance in his features to those of the junior he had robbed two days ago.
 He cast a hurried, hunted glance round him, but there was no escape.

Tom Merry took the watch and slipped it into his pocket.
 "I'll keep this for Gussy," he said.
 "Look 'ere——" began Mr. Bowers feebly.
 "Now, then, where did you get that watch?"
 "I—I bought it!"
 "Lie number one!" said Blake.
 "He might have bought it of the thief, some fellow like himself," Figgins remarked.
 "Well, that's possible."

"More likely he stole it from Gussy," said Wally. "Let's search him, and see if he's got any more of Gussy's property about him."
 "Good idea!"
 "Collar him!"
 Mr. Billy Bowers made a sudden spring.
 He had parted with the money he had stolen from D'Arcy in a long debauch, but the articles of jewellery he had not ventured yet to attempt to dispose of.

He had come to the end of his money, but the other things he had taken from the swell of St. Jim's were worth a great deal if he could dispose of them.
 But that was the difficulty.
 He could not have taken them into a pawnshop without being immediately arrested as a thief, and he could not hope to sell them.

In London he could easily have found a "fence" to take them off his hands, but he was many a long mile from London.

Hence his attempt to dispose of the watch to the boys, who might have bought it without asking questions.
 But that attempt had turned out very unluckily for Mr. Bowers.

Unless he was to lose all his ill-gotten gains, it was necessary for him to escape, and he made a desperate effort.

With a sudden sprint he dashed away.
 Blake clutched him and was hurled off, and Mr. Bowers ran as if for his life.

"After him!" yelled Tom Merry.
 "What-ho!"
 The juniors dashed down the footpath after the tramp. The swiftest sprinters in the Junior Forms at St. Jim's were not likely to be left behind by Mr. Bowers. They overhauled him rapidly.

The tramp gave a terrified glance behind.
 On the footpath he had no chance. He plunged into the wood, and ran on desperately through the tearing, clinging thickets.

Tom Merry was close behind him.
 Suddenly Mr. Bowers halted in dismay.
 Fairly across his path a stream was flowing. He came out upon the bank and his way was barred. The stream was too wide to jump, and Mr. Bowers stopped in blank dismay.

Before he could think what to do, Tom Merry's grasp was on his shoulders.

The tramp turned with a savage curse, and struck out at the boy's handsome flushed face, but Tom Merry's ready arm swept up the blow.

The next moment he had closed with Billy Bowers.
 "Collar him!" shouted Figgins.
 And he rushed at the tramp with Blake and Wally. The grasp of the juniors dragged the ruffian down, and he plumped into the grass, with the four juniors sprawling over him.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow!"
 "Do you give in?" roared Tom Merry.
 "Ow! Yes! Ow!"
 "Sit on his chest, Figgy!"
 "Right you are!"

NOTES AND NEWS FROM—



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

BETWEEN FRIENDS.

IT is with very deep appreciation that I have received the many messages of good will which have been pouring in from former readers of the "Nelson Lee Library," now combined with this paper.

Such kindly messages have helped me beyond measure in my pleasant task of editing a very old-established school story paper, the ranks of whose readers have been suddenly reinforced by a loyal band of new supporters.

I am determined to make the *GEM* a real friend and companion to every reader, new and old, and to that end I want each one of you to realise how much I value the letters you write to me. By this means and by the aid of the *Editor's Notebook*, I am able to keep in personal touch with many thousands of chums in every part of the British Isles and of the Empire beyond the seas.

Don't forget, then, how welcome your letters are to me. Write to me as often as you can and about any subject you like. The welfare of the old paper is my principal concern in life, and I know it is equally dear to countless thousands of you, my pals.

Remember always that the *GEM* is your paper—and the *Editor* thereof your friend.

SOME PERSONAL REPLIES.

This week I am replying to a few letters, selected at random from my post-bag, in the chat instead of by post.

John Scott, of Grimsby, considers that the *GEM* is the "boy's best friend!" Hear, hear, John! He sends in a joke which he hopes will make other readers laugh. It probably would have done, John, if it hadn't been rather too much of a "chestnut" to print. Have another try, old lad, at making the Jester smile, and better luck next time!

The same applies to you, Robert Williams, of Seacombe, Wallasey. Your joke was not quite up to the mark, Bob. Thanks for your words of praise for the *GEM*. As you say, "it is a gem amongst boys' books."

I note your views about the incorporation of "The Nelson Lee" with the *GEM*, Edna Iner, of Lee-on-Solent. It is something, isn't it, to have Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks' famous characters still going strong? The loyal readers of "The Nelson Lee," thanks to the *GEM*, can still read about their schoolboy favourites, in addition to reading of the adventures of world-famous Tom Merry & Co. Thanks for your good wishes. If you want another school story paper to read besides the *GEM*, why not take "The Magnet"? Try it.

The latter reply also goes for you, THE *GEM* LIBRARY.—No. 1,334.

William Leitch, of Aberdeen, and you, too, William Gibb, of Huntly, Aberdeenshire. Thanks for your interesting letters and good wishes. I will bear in mind your suggestions, William, of Aberdeen. Don't hesitate to write to me again, both of you.

Peter Davies, of Stowmarket, is another reader who has failed to hit the target with his joke. Better luck next time, Peter. Hope you enjoyed yourself on your holiday.

Now I think it's time we had a look at next week's programme. Topping the bill is another masterly effort from the pen of popular Martin Clifford—entitled:

"THE MYSTERY SCHOOLBOY!"

From time to time there have been all sorts of newcomers to St. Jim's, but none so amazing and bound up with mystery as Master Richard Thurnel, whose arrival at the school is dealt with in next week's ripping yarn. Thurnel's a real surprise-packet for Tom Merry & Co. He's a tough customer, too, and throws his weight about amongst the juniors. But the chums of St. Jim's show him "where he gets off"! You'll enjoy no end the exciting adventures of this mystery new boy.

So you will the next nerve-tingling chapters of

"ST. FRANK'S VERSUS FOO CHOW!"

The adventures of the St. Frank's chums in China are getting more and more thrilling every week. In the next instalment the one and only Handforth is in the thick of excitement again. Enough said! Look out for thrills.

LUCK!

It happened at Uckfield, Sussex. A motor-lorry reached the gates of a level-crossing just as a goods train was going by, but unfortunately the driver was unable to stop in time. He crashed into the gates, and the signalman thought that that was the end of the driver—so did the driver himself probably! What actually happened was that the sides of four wagons were torn off, the signal box was damaged, part of the crossing gate was driven into the train, and a section of the wall of a bridge was demolished. But no one was hurt at all! I think there must have been a black cat in that lorry!

UPSIDE-DOWN!

Do you know what the record for flying upside-down is? Some people say that we are all upside-down, anyway, so that when a man flies upside-down he is really flying right way up! Just take a minute or two off and work that one out! Anyway, Lieutenant Tito Falconi holds the world's record for inverted flight.

He obtained it for the second time recently when he flew wrong way up for 2 hours 8 minutes and 55 seconds. Some people have queer ways of passing their time!

ON SALE NOW.

Have you got your "Holiday Annual" yet? This year's issue is better than ever—and the price is now only five shillings. This wonder book contains a magnificent collection of grand stories of all types of healthy adventure. In it you can revel in the jolly escapades of Tom Merry & Co., Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, and Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, and its other stories include the Wild West, motor-cycle racing, flying, the sea, and old-time adventure, all written by star authors and copiously illustrated by the best artists. If you have not already got your annual, order it right away. It's on sale now, and there will bound to be a rush on this grand book.

Don't forget, too, that "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories" offers wonderful value at the price of 2s. 6d. This popular all-story annual has been considerably increased in size, and it now has 192 pages. Its thrilling stories of adventure are staged in all parts of the world, on land, at sea, and in the air.

THIS WEEK'S HEROES.

Brian Michael Eshelby, a fifteen year old Storrington boy, was riding on the pillion of his friend's motor-cycle. The motor-cycle skidded and the two boys were thrown from the machine. Eshelby was very badly injured, having a fractured skull; but, as is sometimes the case, he was able to walk. His friend, however, was unable to move, and it was obvious that he needed assistance. Despite his terrible injuries, Eshelby walked to the nearest house to get assistance, and succeeded in his effort before he collapsed.

William Parke is certainly deserving of the title of hero. There are, every year, many men and women who go to the rescue of drowning people, but few of them are of the age of William Parke. Parke is seventy years old, and he has not swum for thirty years—not until the other day, that is. A little girl, six years old, fell into the river at Norwich, and Parke dived right to the bottom to bring her out again. He was, happily, perfectly successful in saving the child's life. Here's to you, William Parke!

DIAMOND RAIN!

W. M., of Basingstoke, has heard that diamonds once rained down from the sky, and he wants to know if it's true. Astonishing as it seems, it is, and it has happened more than once. A number of meteorites, varying in size from a hailstone to a cricket ball, fell in Russia in 1886. When they were examined, small black crystals were found inside them, which proved to be diamonds. Six years later, this amazing phenomenon occurred again, this time at Devil's Canyon, Arizona. But this was a more sensational discovery owing to the large number of meteorites which fell, and which was stated to be a record. Many of the fragments of a comet contained diamonds, or crystallised carbon, which is what the diamond is, but the gems were given a thorough test before their genuineness could be believed.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE CIRCUS SCHOOLBOY!

(Continued from page 15.)

"Now, keep still, you beast!" said Tom Merry sternly. "You're a rotten thief, and you'd better own up. Did you steal that watch?"

"No!" gasped Mr. Bowers. "I'm an honest man, but I've been unfortunate."

"Have you anything else belonging to the same chap?"

"Ow! No!"

"Go through his pockets, Wally."

"What-ho!"

The juniors held the tramp pinned down, struggling feebly, while Wally went through his pockets in the most scientifically thorough way.

The hero of the Third turned out quite a curious collection. There were bits of string, and fragments of tobacco, and stumps of cigarettes, and copper coins, and a knife, and a bunch of keys.

Among the other things were D'Arcy's diamond pin, his studs, watch-chain, and card-case, and several other articles belonging to the swell of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry gave the tramp a poke in the ribs with his boot, and Mr. Bowers squirmed.

"You said you had nothing else," said the junior sternly.

"Ow! I—"

"Did you buy these things of the same man?" said Figgins.

"Ow! I—"

"You'd better own up to the truth," said Tom Merry, taking a thick stick from the thicket with a jerk. "Look here, you see this?"

"Ow! Yes!"

"Well, I'm going to larrup you at every lie you tell. It will feel like that when I larrup you."

Thwack!

And Tom Merry gave Mr. Bowers a sample across the shoulders.

The tramp yelled.

"Yow! Yah!"

"You don't like that?"

"Ow—wow—yah—"

"I suppose that means that you don't. Well, you'll get lots of it if you don't tell the truth. You stole these things?"

"No!"

Thwack!

The stick came down with a sounding whack across Mr. Bowers' shoulders.

Mr. Bowers gave a fearful yell and wriggled.

"Groo! Yaroooooh! Yow!"

"Did you steal those things?"

"No; yes—yes!"

"From a boy?"

"Yes."

"Tell us how it happened, and where, and when—sharp!"

In jerks the story came out of Mr. Bowers.

Whenever Tom Merry thought he was wandering from the plain and unadorned path of truth, he gave him a touch with the stick, and the tramp roared and came back to the facts again. In this way the truth was gradually extracted from Mr. Bowers.

The juniors looked very grave as they heard it.

Arthur Augustus had been robbed and abandoned without a penny in his pocket, just before the late heavy rains.

It was a serious situation for the swell of St. Jim's. What had become of him since? Tom Merry, with a wrinkled brow, placed D'Arcy's property away in his pockets, and signed to his comrades to let the tramp rise.

"We've no time to waste now in handing him over to the police," he said. "Let him go. We've got to go and look for Gussy."

"Better give him a hiding."

"Well, he's had one."

"Not half enough!" said Wally wrathfully. "He spent all Gussy's tin, and Gussy may have got into awful scrapes without any. Look here! We're going to give this beast a wash. He needs it more than anything else."

"Good egg!" chorused the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" roared Mr. Bowers, as Tom Merry and Figgins gripped his arms and legs. "Yow! Leggo! I'm in bad calth! Ow!"

"This will do you good, then," said Figgins. "In with him!"

Mr. Bowers was swung to and fro, and then he sailed

through the air, and descended into the water with a loud splash. He disappeared for a few moments, and then came up gurgling and spluttering and gasping.

"Ow! 'Elp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I'm drownin'!"

"Go it, then!" said Blake. "We're not going to stop you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Bowers struggled through the rushes to the shore.

Blake stepped briskly towards him.

"Collar him as he comes out, and give him another!" he exclaimed.

"Yah!"

"Now, then—"

Mr. Bowers plunged back into the stream, and sought the other shore. There he scrambled out, dripping and furious.

Leaving him there, shaking his fist and saying things, the juniors of St. Jim's hurried away. They knew the spot where the ruffian had robbed Arthur Augustus, and they set off at once to reach it, and take up the trail afresh from there.

CHAPTER 11.

Gussy in Love!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wore a very thoughtful look.

He was standing by the caravan he shared with Jack Talbot and Joey Pye, and his hands were in his pockets, and his eyes on the ground.

He was thinking!

He had lately returned from a walk with Clotilde, and he had seemed like a youth in a dream ever since.

Joey Pye came out of the van and glanced at him.

"D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He did not even hear.

Joey Pye grinned.

He stepped off the van and came round in front of Arthur Augustus, and tapped him on the shoulder.

Arthur Augustus started out of a brown study.

"Hallo, deah boy!"

"Penny for your thoughts," said Mr. Pye cheerfully.

D'Arcy blushed red.

"Oh, weally—you see—"

"Yes, I see," said Mr. Pye sympathetically. "I suppose you first felt it coming on this morning?"

"Eh?"

"But going for a walk made it more serious?"

"Ye-es; but—"

"And now you can think of nothing else?"

"You—you guess my feelings exactly," stammered D'Arcy. "You are a vewy intelligent chap."

"Always considered so," agreed Mr. Pye. "The signor thinks I am an ass but that's only his jealousy. I can see these things. Now would you like some advice?"

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus dubiously.

"I should recommend lying down," said Mr. Pye genially. D'Arcy jumped.

"Eh?"

"There's nothing like it for that tired feeling."

"That what?"

"That tired feeling, you know."

"Wh-wh-what tired feelin'?"

"The one you're suffering from," said Mr. Pye, in astonishment. "The tired feeling that was brought on this morning, and made worse by going for a walk."

D'Arcy stared at him blankly.

"Were you speakin' of a tired feelin'?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"I—I thought you were talkin' about something else," said D'Arcy confusedly. "It's—it's all wright. I'm not tired."

"Oh, good!" said Mr. Pye.

And he walked away, chuckling.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and glanced curiously after the humorous Mr. Pye.

"I wondah whethah that chap guesses, and was havin' a little joke?" he murmured. "I should wogard it as extweme impertinence on his part. I wish I had somebody to confide in. I should like to talk to somebody about her."

Jack Talbot was coming towards the van.

Arthur Augustus caught sight of him, and his face brightened up. Talbot was just the fellow for a confidant.

He was a nice, kind, sympathetic fellow, who would be sure to understand exactly how the matter stood; and he was a great friend of Clotilde's, too.

Nothing could have been more opportune.

Arthur Augustus turned towards the circus lad, and Jack Talbot, seeing that he wished to speak, paused at the steps of the caravan.

"I— Can I have a few minutes talk with you, Talbot?" asked Arthur Augustus shyly.

"Of course! Go ahead!"

"I—I want to tell you somethin'."

"Fire away!"

Jack Talbot's manner was direct and matter of fact, and not exactly that of a confidant in a love affair. But there was no one else for the tender secret to be confided to, unless D'Arcy confided it to the singer.

The swell of St. Jim's coloured and hesitated.

"I—I—I—"

Talbot stared at him.

"I'm listening," he said.

"You—you see—"

"Yes—"

"I—I should prefer to talk in some quarter where we should not be overheard," said Arthur Augustus. "It's—it's wathah a peculiah mattah."

"Oh, all right!" said Talbot, considerably puzzled. "Come along here."

He walked out of the circus camp towards a clump of trees at a little distance, and the swell of St. Jim's followed him.

They entered the trees, which screened them from the camp, and then the circus lad looked inquiringly at his companion.

"Well, here we are," he said. "What's the matter? Have you been quarrelling with the Handsome Man again? He certainly got his knife into you over that last affair, when the circus was in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's."

"Oh, no, nothin' of that sort!"

"Had news from the school?"

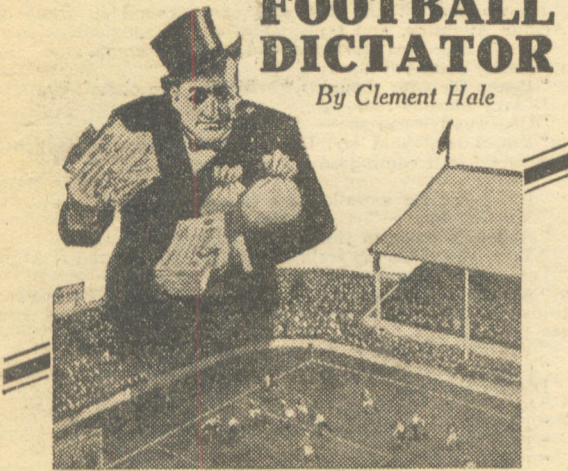
"Oh, no!"

"Anything gone wrong?"

"No; not exactly."

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"Then what is it?" said Jack, in wonder. "It's all right, though; don't hurry. I'm not in a hurry myself. There's plenty of time."

Arthur Augustus took full advantage of that. He was quite silent for three minutes, while Talbot waited patiently. The colour was deepening in D'Arcy's cheeks till it seemed as if all the blood in his body was pumped there.

"You see," he began at last.

"Yes, I see," agreed Talbot patiently.

"She is such a wippin' gal."

Talbot started.

"She!"

"Yaas."

"Who?"

"Clotilde."

It was out now. D'Arcy's eyes were on the ground, and he did not see the extremely peculiar look Talbot gave him.

"Oh, Clotilde!" said the circus lad slowly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, everybody likes her," said Talbot. "She is a favourite with the public, and with the circus company, too."

"Yaas, and I—I—I—"

"Well?"

"You see, she is such a wippin' gal!" said D'Arcy. "And a fellow can't help it, can he?"

"Can't help what?"

"I-i-it!"

"I'm afraid I don't quite catch on," said Talbot gravely.

"What is 'it'?"

"Of course, I'm not of age yet," said D'Arcy.

Talbot smiled.

"No; I suppose you need another six years at least."

"Yaas. And, of course, an engagement—"

"A what?"

"I shouldn't have the cheek to ask—"

"I shouldn't think you would," agreed Talbot cordially.

"Now, I won't pretend to misunderstand you, D'Arcy. You are a nice kid, and I like you. You can admire Clotilde as much as you like, but no bosh!"

"Eh?"

"Clotilde hasn't the faintest idea that you are playing the giddy ox," said Talbot. "Don't let her have. In a few years' time Clotilde will be old enough to think of these things, but then there is somebody else already for her to think about."

D'Arcy started.

"Bai Jove! Then I have a wival?"

Talbot laughed.

"Exactly—you would!"

"And who—who—"

"Can't you guess?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I have not seen anybody here who is worthy," he said.

"Of course, I'm not, eithah, as fah as that goes, but a fellow might have a chance."

"You are quite right," said Talbot cordially. "There is nobody in the wide world who will ever be worthy of our Clotilde. But there is someone who is going to look after her if he gets the chance."

"Who is that?"

"Myself."

D'Arcy stared at the circus lad; then he adjusted his eyeglass and stared again, and then he gasped.

Under the circumstances, it was most peculiar that he should have chosen Talbot as the recipient of his tender confidences.

"B-b-bai Jove!" he gasped.

Talbot laughed again.

"It's all right," he said cheerfully. "Let's forget all about it."

D'Arcy was very silent as they walked back to the circus.

CHAPTER 12.

A Mysterious Message!

DURING the next two or three days Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fell quite easily into his new way of life.

St. Jim's now seemed a great way off for him, his old life there a long way behind, and he thought little about it. He entered into the life of the circus, and he found it hard enough, but pleasant enough, too.

The circus had moved on to a new pitch at a village near the coast of Sussex, and Joey Pye had been in the village to make some purchases. He was coming back with a dozen or more parcels and bundles hanging upon his arms, or jammed into his pockets. The dusk was thickening on the common, and the trees and bushes were growing dim. In the distance loomed up the big marquee of the big circus camp.

"Hallo!" muttered the clown abruptly.

From the shadow of a large bush a dark form glided. Joey Pye stopped.

The figure hesitated a moment, evidently peering at Joey through the dusk, and then disappeared behind the bush again.

Joey Pye looked after it in amazement.

"Hallo!" he called out. "What do you want?"

There was no reply.

"Who are you?"

Silence reigned.

With a slight feeling of uneasiness as he passed the bush behind which the figure had disappeared, Joey Pye tramped on towards the circus. But he saw nothing of the form; it had quite vanished.

Twenty yards farther on, however, the clown caught a glimpse of a moving figure among the bushes. He quickened his pace.

"Hallo, there!"

The figure disappeared.

Quite puzzled, Joey Pye tramped on to the circus.

The thought occurred to him that the two strange forms might be footpads lurking about the camp for what they could find, but in that case it was odd that they had not interfered with him, for it would have been quite easy for the two to rob him and get clear away.

"Got the things?" asked Talbot, as Joey Pye came up to the caravan.

Joey nodded.

"Yes."

Jack looked at him quickly, reading his expressive face.

"Anything happened?"

"No," said Joey; "but it was odd."

And he related his experience.

"Footpads, very likely," said Jack. "Hallo! There's Carson coming in. Ask him if he's seen anything of them."

The Handsome Man was just entering the camp. He was the only member of the circus company with whom D'Arcy was on bad terms. The Handsome Man seemed to resent the boy's presence in the camp, and he showed it.

"I say, Carson!" called Joey Pye.

The Handsome Man stopped.

"What is it?"

"Did you see anything of two strangers hanging about in the bushes between this and the village?" asked Joey Pye. Carson started violently.

"Two strangers?"

"Yes."

"No, I've seen nobody," said Carson. "I suppose there are plenty of strangers to us knocking about, though."

"Yes, I suppose so; but these two chaps looked as if they were up to no good."

"Well, I haven't seen them."

And the Handsome Man passed on.

"They might be wobbahs," said Arthur Augustus, with a thoughtful look. "Pewwaps it would be a good ideah to go and look for them and make them explain."

"Not much! Come and grub. There's the performance in half an hour."

"Vewy good!"

The lamps were being lighted now, and they shed a yellow light on the path leading up to the road which ran from the neighbouring village.

Ere long the glare of the lights and the blare of the band had their usual effect of attracting a crowd.

Joey Pye, in full war-paint, took up his station at the entrance of the big tent and addressed the gathering public in his usual strain of flowing eloquence.

"Walk up, gents! Walk up, ladies! Roll up in your thousands and in your motor-cars! Come and see the show that the crowned heads of Europe and America jostle one another to see! Come and see Joey Pye, the wonderful, the unequalled, the inimitable mirth merchant!"

"Bai Jove! That chap knows how to blow his own twumpet!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Jack Talbot laughed.

The circus lad was entering his van to don his tiger-tamer attire. It was not time for the riding act yet, and Arthur Augustus had nothing to do for a while.

The swell of St. Jim's stood leaning on the van looking towards the crowd before the tent and the clown mounted upon a bench haranguing them. The eloquence of Joey Pye came clearly to his ears upon the wind.

Suddenly a footstep close at hand made D'Arcy look round. A dark, roughly clad figure loomed up in the dusk, and D'Arcy, remembering what Joey Pye had related, started a little.

But the man's manner was quite civil; he touched his cap.

"Master D'Arcy," he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I've a note for you, sir."

D'Arcy looked at him in surprise.

"A note for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"From whom?"

"From a lady, sir." The man fumbled in his pockets. "There was to be no answer, sir, but the lady said you would give me a shilling."

"Certainly!" said D'Arcy.

He had already received some cash for his services in the circus, and he was not without money now. He felt in his pocket and extracted a shilling, and handed it to the man as he received the letter.

The rough-looking fellow touched his cap again.

"Thank you, sir!"

And he disappeared. Arthur Augustus looked at the envelope in his hand in blank amazement.

Whom could it be from?

The only lady D'Arcy was acquainted with in the neighbourhood was Clotilde, the Queen of the Ring, except for Signora Tomsonio, the signor's wife.

It was not likely that either Clotilde or the signora would send him a letter by messenger, when it would be easier to speak to him.

It was some moments before the puzzled junior opened the letter. There was no name written on the outside.

He opened it at last, carefully slitting the envelope with his penknife, and took out the folded sheet within.

There was a brief message in a small, round hand:

"Will you meet me after the performance, under the big oak? It is very important. I have something I must say to you. Not a word to a soul. I trust you!"

"CLOTILDE."

D'Arcy read the message with difficulty in the gloom. He took the note under the little window of the caravan, and read it again in the light.

His heart was beating. It was from Clotilde, and she asked him to make an appointment—to meet her in a secret way. It was very curious and very gratifying. Had she perceived the state of the junior's heart? Was that what the message meant?

Arthur Augustus was considerably excited. He was puzzled, too. But one thing was clear, he could not neglect the message. He must meet Clotilde as she wished. There was no doubt whatever upon that point.

The big oak was at some distance from the camp, and was a very conspicuous object in the daytime. It was invisible now, but the junior knew exactly where to find it. After the performance he would be there. What was it that Clotilde had to say?

D'Arcy's eyes were sparkling as he folded the note and placed it in his pocket. Not for a moment did any doubt of the genuineness of the message cross his unsuspecting mind.

CHAPTER 13.

Run Down!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS did not see Clotilde until they rode together in the ring for the trick-riding act. Then he glanced at the girl, expecting to receive a glance of intelligence in return. But Clotilde's manner was quite unconscious.

She met the junior's glance, and smiled; but the smile was as usual, and there was nothing in her manner to indicate that anything was amiss.

What was it she had to say to D'Arcy in secret? Was she in some difficulty—some danger—and requiring his help?

The thought made D'Arcy's heart beat with the fire of knight errantry.

If it was not that—what could it be? D'Arcy found himself thinking more of the coming meeting than of the act he was engaged in, and his horse fell out of time.

Signor Tomsonio cracked his whip.

The sound recalled D'Arcy to himself.

"Wake up, kid!" said Talbot, looking at him in surprise.

"You're putting us all out!"

"I'm sowwy! I was thinkin' of somethin' else."

"Well, you'd better think of the act."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And D'Arcy gave his whole attention to the work in hand after that.

Joey Pye was in the ring, and as the horses pranced round the arena the clown turned somersaults, and affected

(Continued on the next page.)

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to fall just in the way of the hoofs, always, however, squirming away just in time.

The clown jumped up from almost under the feet of D'Arcy's pony, and started and looked round quickly as a cheer fell upon his ears.

"Bravo, Joey!"

"By gum!" muttered Joey Pye. "I know that yell."

He glanced over the sea of faces in front.

In one of the seats there were four familiar faces in a row—faces that the clown remembered well.

They were faces that he had seen often while the circus was in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's. Tom Merry, Jack Blake, Figgins, and D'Arcy minor were sitting in a row there, cheering.

Joey Pye waved his hand to them, and Tom Merry waved back.

The clown pointed the juniors out to the signor.

"Look there, guv'nor!"

"I saw them, Joey. They've come for D'Arcy, of course."

"That's it."

"I shall be sorry to lose him," said the signor thoughtfully. "I suppose this means that he will have to go back to the school?"

"I rather think so."

"Well, it can't be helped; and, after all, it was bound to happen, and no doubt it's better for him."

"Bravo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus started violently as the shout fell upon his ears, and he very nearly fell out of time again.

"Bai Jove! It's the chaps!"

He glanced round and recognised the juniors.

Arthur Augustus was made up for the performance, not as a Redskin now, but in riding clothes, with an artificial moustache. But the chums of St. Jim's had recognised him.

Tom Merry's quest was at an end. The juniors had tracked the circus from place to place, and they had come up with it at last, and the performance had commenced when they reached it. They had come into the tent to see the performance in the usual way, pretty certain that they would recognise Arthur Augustus if he appeared in the ring, under whatever disguise he might appear.

And they had recognised him at a glance. They had found him.

"That's the ass," said Figgins, with great satisfaction, as the trick-riding act went on, D'Arcy having waved his hand to the juniors to show that he knew them. "There he is, as large as life, just as I expected."

"Just as I expected, you mean!" said Tom Merry.

"Rats!" said Blake. "Of course, it was my idea all along that Gussy would be found as soon as we found the circus."

"Oh, come off!"

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "Of course, if I

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hadn't been with you you wouldn't have found Gussy in a dog's age! I knew jolly well that he would be with the circus."

"Oh rats!"

"I tell you—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Well, it doesn't matter whom the credit is due to!" he exclaimed. "We've found Gussy, and that's the chief thing!"

"Well, there's something in that," added Blake.

"Well, yes," said Figgins, with a chuckle. "After all, that's the principal thing. We've found Gussy; and we've got to take jolly good care that he doesn't dodge us again!"

"What-ho!" said Wally, with emphasis.

"My idea is that we should go round and catch him immediately he leaves the ring after his turn."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Good egg!"

"It's a jolly good turn!" said Wally, surveying his major's performance with a critical eye. "I couldn't do that better!"

"You couldn't do it at all," agreed Blake. "Gussy isn't half the ass you'd expect from knowing his minor!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, kid!"

Wally glared. The chums of St. Jim's watched the trick-riding with keen attention. It was really a good performance, and the people cheered it loudly, and the juniors, of course, joined heartily in the cheering.

When the act was over they stood up and stamped and clapped and yelled.

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Good old Augustus!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, St. Jim's!"

The three riders cantered out of the ring, but a roar from the audience brought them back again. Three times they had to take the call before the people would let them go, and the next turn could commence. The next turn was the acrobatic performance of the Handsome Man, and Carson stood at the ring entrance gnawing his lips while the applause continued, and Talbot, D'Arcy, and the Queen of the Ring took their call.

There was a spiteful gleam in the Handsome Man's dark eyes as he glanced at D'Arcy, as the swell of St. Jim's retired for the final time.

And he was smiling in a peculiar way as he went into the arena for his turn. Anyone who had scanned the face of the Handsome Man at that moment would have fancied that he was plotting mischief.

Arthur Augustus was not thinking of the Handsome Man, however, and was far from dreaming that Jim Carson could have had anything to do with the mysterious appointment at the big oak on the common.

He looked for an opportunity of slipping away without attracting attention.

Talbot went into his van, and the swell of St. Jim's, without delaying to remove his ring costume, stepped away to cross the dark expanse outside the radius of light from the circus. He had no doubt that Clotilde would reach the rendezvous in a quiet way unobserved.

But the swell of the circus was not destined to go unobserved. Four forms came looming up in the dimness, and he was stopped.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"Here he is!"

"Found you at last, you ass!"

And the four juniors surrounded their old comrade, and D'Arcy's progress was effectually barred.

The swell of St. Jim's jammed his monocle into his eye, and a curious effect it had along with the sunburnt complexion and the twisted moustache.

"I am glad to see you, deah boys!"

"Good!" said Tom Merry, slipping his arm through D'Arcy's. "Are you ready to come back to St. Jim's?"

D'Arcy jerked his arm away.

"Certainly not!"

"But—"

"I belong to the circus now," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I'm earning my bread. Besides, I could not return to St. Jim's without an infraction of my personal dig—a most serious infraction. I should have to wefuse to be flogged."

"That's all right!"

"I decline to wegard it as all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "It would be too uttably dewogatory to my personal dig to submit to a floggin'."

"It's all right, I tell you. The Head is going to let you off the flogging!" exclaimed Blake.

"Oh, I see! Are you sure?"

"He said so."

"But how—why—?"

"Wally owned up, you see."
 "Bai Jove! Then he is expelled!"
 Wally chuckled.
 "Of course not, ass! I—"
 "I wufuse to allow my minah to address me as an ass."
 "Oh, do listen! I worked it all right. I'll explain afterwards. But I'm not expelled, and you're not to be flogged, and everything in the garden is lovely," said Wally. "Now you can come home."
 "I will think about it, deah boys," said D'Arcy hesitating.
 "Of course, what you say althahs the case completely."
 "Then come on," said Tom Merry. "We've been hunting you for days, and we've your props, too."
 "My pwops?"
 "Your property. We came upon the tramp who robbed you, and made him disgorge," said Tom Merry. "We've got your gold watch—"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "And your diamond pin."
 "Gweat Scott!"
 "And your scented handkerchiefs—"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
 "And your hair-curlers, and—"
 "I wufuse to listen to silly jokes," said D'Arcy. "I am vewy glad you have wecovahed my things, howevah. That tickah was a pwesent fwom my go'nah, and I should have been extwemely sowwy to lose it. But I must be off—"
 "Right-ho! We're ready."
 "You fail to compwehend. I have an appointment,"
 "Yes, with us."
 "No, no! I must wun like anythin'!"
 Tom Merry caught the swell of the circus by the shoulder.
 "Now, look here, Gussy, you're not going to give us the slip!"
 "I was not thinkin' of givin' you the slip."
 "Then where are you going?" demanded Blake.
 "I am goin' to keep an appointment."
 The juniors looked at him curiously.
 "Where?" demanded Figgins.
 "That is wathah an impertinent question, Figgins; but I do not mind tellin' you. Undah the big oak-twee yondah. You will see it when the moon is up. And now I must be off. I cannot be so howwibly wude as to keep a lady waitin'."
 Four voices ejaculated at once:
 "A lady!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Do you mean to say that you are meeting a lady?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in blank amazement.
 "Yaas, certainly!"
 "Gussy!"
 "Pway don't be an ass, deah boy!"
 "Gussy!"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
 "I think we ought to go along and see fair play," said Blake, with a serious shake of the head.
 "I wufuse to take you, Blake."
 "That wouldn't make much difference, my son, if I wanted to come," said Blake, with a smile.
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Look here," said Tom Merry, "it's honest Injun, you know. You're not going to give us the slip?"
 "Certainly not!"
 "Honour bright?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Oh, all right. We'll wait for you here, and if you don't come back—"
 "I shall come back, Tom Mewwy. I am not likely to bweak my word of honah, I hope."
 "But—"
 "I weally must go now, deah boys, or I may keep a lady waitin'. I'm awfully glad to see you, you know, and I think I shall return to St. Jim's with you."
 "I know jolly well you will!" chuckled Blake.
 "Excuse me, Blake, it wests with me entirely. But I will see you latah; I must be off now. Au-wevoih!"
 And the swell of St. Jim's hurried away.
 He disappeared into the darkness, and left the chums looking rather blankly at one another.
 "It's all right," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "Gussy wouldn't break his word for worlds. He'll come back."
 "I don't understand it, though," said Blake thoughtfully.
 "It's all rot about his having an appointment with a lady. Somebody's rotting him."
 "Yes, that's very likely."
 "Of course it is," said Figgins. "It's some blessed practical joke, of course. It serves Gussy right to be japed for being such an ass. But I don't think we ought to let a fellow from St. Jim's be japed, all the same."
 "Rather not," said Wally.

"We might chip in," said Blake thoughtfully. "Of course, it's a jape of some sort. Gussy is being taken in."
 "Yes, rather!"
 "Let's get after him," said Tom Merry abruptly.
 "Good egg!"
 "That's the tree, I suppose—the moon's just showing over it."
 "Yes; come on!"
 And the juniors hurried on the track of the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 14.
 Attacked!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS plunged into the shadow of the big tree. The moon was emerging from behind a great bank of clouds, and a dim glimmer of silvery light fell upon the common. But in the shadow of the great tree all was dark, and the bushes growing wildly round were wrapped in gloom.
 Arthur Augustus stopped.
 "Clotilde!"

Burglars at St. Jim's!



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One of the thrilling incidents from next Wednesday's super story of the Chums of St. Jim's, starring the amazing adventures of a mystery new boy. Don't miss reading
"The MYSTERY SCHOOLBOY!"
 Order your copy of the GEM to-day.

There was no reply.
 "Miss Clotilde, are you here?"
 There was a rustle in the bushes.
 D'Arcy started forward. He had no doubt that it was Clotilde.
 "You are here, deah gal!"
 The next moment a strong grasp was laid upon the junior in the darkness, and he was thrown to the ground.
 The surprise was so great that D'Arcy could not make a movement to defend himself.
 He fell heavily to the ground, dazed by the shock and the suddenness of the unexpected attack.
 "Bai Jove!" he gasped.
 The strong grip was still upon him.
 A rough voice muttered in the darkness.
 "Don't let him get away!"
 And D'Arcy recognised the voice of the man who had brought him the supposed note from Clotilde.
 The junior's brain was in a whirl.
 He did not realise yet that it was all a trick—that Clotilde's name had been forged to draw him into a trap.
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But what did it all mean? Where was Clotilde? Why was he seized like this?

There were two assailants, and he dimly made out their forms in the growing moonlight. One of them knelt upon him, and fastened his wrists together with a thong, and then thrust a gag into his mouth.

"Now then, Badger!"

"All right!"

Thwack!

Arthur Augustus writhed as a heavy blow descended upon his shoulders.

The gag in his mouth prevented him from uttering a cry, and he could only gasp and gurgle faintly.

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

The blows reigned down heavily.

It was a thick and heavy stick, wielded by a strong hand, and the blows were savage ones. Arthur Augustus writhed and gasped with pain. But one of the ruffians was holding him, while the other lashed him, and he could not help himself.

The swell of St. Jim's understood at last what it all meant.

The note from Clotilde had lured him there, and these scoundrels had been in wait for him, and D'Arcy could not be at a loss to know to whom he owed it all. He had only one enemy in the circus. He knew as well as if he had seen it done, that the Handsome Man had forged the note from Clotilde. This was the Handsome Man's way of showing his dislike.

D'Arcy writhed under the lashing blows.

A dozen had fallen, when there was a sudden rush of footsteps in the grass. Four juniors had come round the dark shadow of the oak, and in the glimmer of the moonlight the scene had burst suddenly upon them.

For a moment Tom Merry & Co. stood petrified.

They had expected to discover that Arthur Augustus was being japed in some manner, but anything like this they had never dreamed of.

It was only for a second that they stopped.

"Into them, you chaps!" shouted Tom Merry.

They rushed forward and seized the two ruffians, and in a moment had them pinned to the ground.

The two roughs struggled, but they had no chance against the indignant juniors. Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins held them down, while Wally released his major.

Arthur Augustus staggered up.

He dragged the gag from his mouth, and gasped for breath.

"Bai Jove, deah boys! I've had a most howwid expewience!"

"Which of these is the lady you came to meet?" demanded Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"You ass!"

"I have been twicked!" said Arthur Augustus. "I received a note sayin' that a lady wished to meet me here, and I am convinced now that it was a twick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have been used most bwutally!"

"Poor old Gussy! Lend us a hand, and we'll yank these fellows off to the circus, and they can be locked up," said Tom Merry. "I don't think I ever saw anything quite so cowardly and brutal in my natural."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Old on, guv'nor!" gasped Badger, wriggling in the grasp of Figgins and Blake. "Old on! We didn't want to 'urt 'im, you know, only——"

"What did you do it for?" demanded Tom Merry abruptly. "It looks to me like a piece of sheer hooliganism, as you were not robbed."

"I am afraid they were put up to doin' it," said D'Arcy. "I am convinced now that the note I received was a forgewy."

"We was!" gasped Badger. "It was the dark chap—the gent they call the Handsome Man in the circus. He paid us a pound each. I swear it was!"

"The hound!" said Tom Merry wrathfully.

"I swear it was, guv'nor; and we was 'ard up!" whined Badger. "We——"

"You wotten scoundwels!" said D'Arcy in disgust. "I wegard you with absolute loathin'. Pway take that stick, Wally, and give them a feahful thwashin'! I would do it myself, but I am feelin' wathah knocked up!"

"What-ho!" said Wally, with alacrity.

He picked up the stick and used it with such hearty good will that the two ruffians were soon yelling at the full force of their lungs.

"I wathah think that will do, Wally."

"Rats! They've only had twenty each," said Wally.

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Tom Merry laughed.

"That's enough, Wally. Let them go, you chaps!"

And the two roughs, groaning from the effect of their castigation, slunk away in the darkness.

"And now," said Tom Merry, "if you've finished keeping appointments with ladies, you may as well come back to the circus!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, come on!"

The juniors left the spot.

Arthur Augustus took the forged note out of his pocket, and tore it into little pieces. He was looking rather worried.

"I say, you chaps, bettah not say anythin' about this in the circus," he said suddenly.

"Why not?"

"Well, it's no good makin' twouble there," said D'Arcy. "As I am going away, Carson won't be able to play any more of his twicks; and it would place the signor in an awkward posish, as he can't afford to part with the acwobat, you know. Bettah say nothin'."

"And it would make you look an ass if we told the story, too," chuckled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Gussy's right," said Tom Merry. "Better keep mum."

The juniors reached the circus. The Handsome Man was coming out of the ring exit after his turn. He started as the swell of St. Jim's stood before him.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and stared directly at him.

"You cad!" he said.

"What!"

"You wotten cad!"

The Handsome Man gritted his teeth. But he looked at the accusing faces of the juniors, and the colour wavered in his cheeks. He saw that his cowardly treachery was known.

"What—what——" he faltered.

"My fwriends came in time to wescue me," said Arthur Augustus quietly, "othahwise I should have been vewy woughly used. The wascals you sent there have confessed!"

"I—I——"

"You ought to be sent to pwison, you cur!"

"I—I——"

"Bah, you are not worth punishin'!" said Arthur Augustus contemptuously. "Get away! The sight of you makes me feel wathah sick—it does weally!"

And the Handsome Man, for once utterly confused and speechless, simply slunk away from the scornful glances of the juniors.

* * * * *

"Sorry to lose you," said Signor Tomsonio, when he heard that the swell of St. Jim's had decided to return to school with Tom Merry & Co.; "but, of course, you couldn't have remained with us much longer, you know. And it's all right now at the school?"

"All wight, thank you!"

"Good! I hope I shall see you all again."

"What-ho!" said Mr. Pye.

"And I, too," said Clotilde softly.

And the juniors of St. Jim's, who had passed the night at the circus, under the hospitable tent roof, took their leave of the signor and their friends of the circus.

Joey Pye walked with them to the railway station, and saw them off.

"Sorry to lose you!" he said, as he shook hands with D'Arcy. "If you ever decide to take up a circus life in earnest, mind you come to Tomsonio's!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And if I ever decide to come to a Public school, I shall come to St. Jim's and chum up with you," said Mr. Pye seriously.

Arthur Augustus stared.

"Bai Jove!"

"Yes, I shall, really," said Mr. Pye. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

The train rolled off, Arthur Augustus sat silent and thoughtful for a few moments.

"I think Mr. Pye must have been joking," he remarked at last.

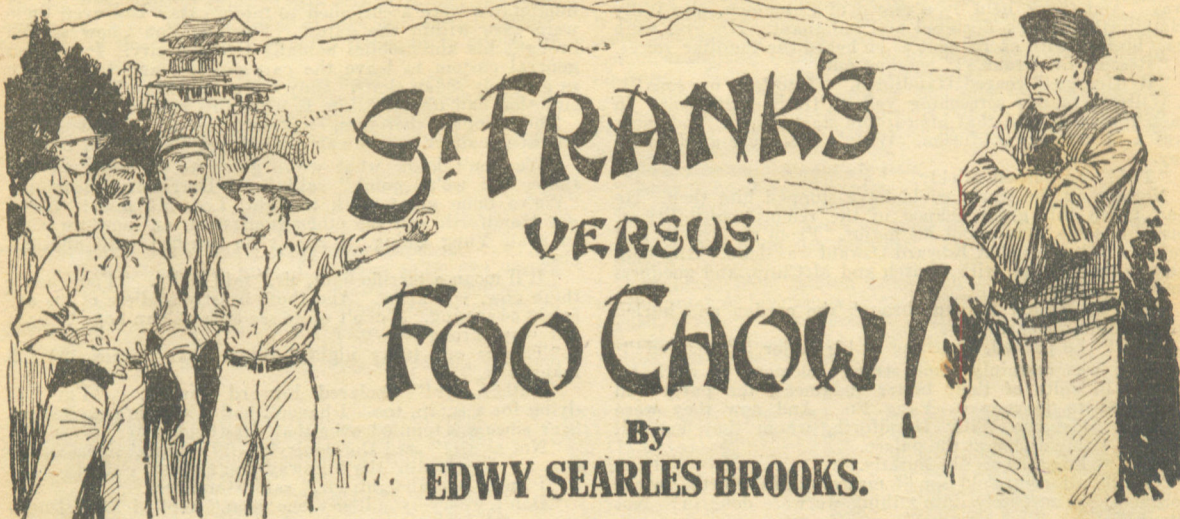
To which Tom Merry rejoined simply:

"Go hon!"

THE END.

(Something new in new boys is Richard Thurnel, who arrives at St. Jim's next week. Read all about the newcomer's amazing adventures in "THE MYSTERY SCHOOLBOY!"—next week's best school story.)

STOP HERE FOR NON-STOP THRILLS!



Yung Ching, of the St. Frank's Remove, has been kidnapped by Dr. Foo Chow, an all-powerful war lord of Inner China, who covets the province of Hu Kiang, ruled over by Yung Ching's father. A holiday party from St. Frank's sets sail to rescue him, but they are captured by Foo Chow and imprisoned in his island stronghold. Edward Oswald Handforth and his chums, however, succeed in escaping and make for Yang Fu, where Yung Ching is a prisoner. Meantime, Willy Handforth also makes a getaway by hiding in Foo Chow's car; but he is recaptured. Next, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrmore, learning that Yung Ching is to be tortured, escape in a car and set out for Yang Fu. On the way they pick up Handforth & Co.

Another Shock!

TRUTH to tell, Nelson Lee was so overwhelmingly relieved to find Handforth & Co. alive that he found it impossible to raise any objections. And something was beginning to tell him that this course of events had been planned by some strange trick of chance. It seemed useless to fight against it.

Lee was about the least superstitious man in the world; but, at the same time, there was something almost uncanny in the manner in which the various happenings of the night had fitted into the general scheme.

And the great detective was beginning to feel, too, that even further success would crown their mission. There was such a feeling of confidence in the whole party that failure was out of the question. It was impossible to tell what would actually happen, but everybody had a fixed conviction that good would come of the whole reckless escapade.

Lee wondered how it was that Willy Handforth had been so utterly positive of his brother's safety. He had felt deeply sorry for the Third-Former, but now realised that his sorrow had been wasted. For Willy hadn't been pretending. He hadn't fooled himself. In some strange fashion he had known. And Lee wanted to take Handforth back at once, so that all the other members of the party could learn the good news.

Indeed, this desire compelled him to change his views. As the car was speeding onwards again, with Handforth & Co. talking excitedly to Umlosi in the rear, Lee touched Lord Dorrmore's arm.

"Haven't we been successful to-night, old man?" he asked. "Don't you think we'd better return to the palace and let the others know of our good fortune? The party will then be intact again."

"Hang it, Lee, you're not goin' to be a wet blanket again?" protested Dorrie. "Didn't you tell us—"

"That's hardly fair, old man," said Lee quietly. "I'm not the kind of fellow to be a wet blanket anywhere."

"Sorry!" apologised Dorrie. "Didn't mean it."

"I can't help feeling the same as you do—that we ought to go ahead," continued Lee. "Against my better judgment I have an instinctive feeling that we shall do right. At the same time, it's only a vague impression. As a man of caution, I think we ought to turn a deaf ear to this voice of recklessness, and let well alone. And yet, hang it, I want to keep straight on!"

His lordship grinned.

"Then let your caution go by the board for once, an' listen to the voice of the wicked sprite!" he chuckled. "Rummy thing, but I've got exactly the same hunch myself, old son! Let's go the whole hog while we're about it."

"Hear, hear, sir!" said Handforth, from behind. "After all, they can't do much. We're all prisoners in this country, anyhow, so why not have some fun while we're about it?"

"A darned sound argument," said Dorrie approvingly.

The Armstrong-Siddeley was now proceeding at a ridiculously sedate forty, but it was quite fast enough to carry its occupants to the great gateway of Yang Fu within a very few minutes. From a good distance they could see the enormous wall, towering high above—a formidable battlement.

"The gates are open!" exclaimed Dorrie exultantly. "Plenty of soldiers there, too, by the look of it, but we'll soon scatter 'em. These Chinese aren't half so dangerous as they look. As for the army, it's a comic-opera affair. I don't care two straws for it!"

"The fact that the gates are open is an excellent sign," declared Lee. "Our assumption that there is telephonic communication was wrong. Otherwise the gates would have undoubtedly been closed against us."

There was truth in this belief, for as the car approached the Chinese soldiers not only cleared the roadway, but stood at attention. They clearly understood that the car contained a superior officer.

"Don't you see, sir, we've got all the advantage?" asked Handforth eagerly. "Those headlights are dazzling, and they won't know who we are until we've got through."

"Yes, that is a great point in our favour," agreed Lee. "Don't go too quickly, Dorrie. Don't give them any chance to suspect."

"Trust me," said his lordship.

"You boys had better crouch down—below the edge of the car," went on the detective quickly. "Umlosi, you do the same. I'll follow your example—"

"What strange words are these, my master?" asked Umlosi, amazed. "Is it that we are to have no fight?"

"It is," said Lee grimly. "We'll fight when we have to, but there's no sense in asking for trouble. We're not all fire-eaters like you, Umlosi. Quickly, now, all of you—down!"

Nelson Lee's plan was excellent. The chances were that the soldiers would not take any particular notice of the man at the wheel. Dorrie was crouching as low as possible. And the car glided smoothly towards the gateway, the soldiers still at attention. Suddenly Dorrie brought the car up with a jerk.

"By all the whiskers of Methuselah!" he ejaculated, in amazement.

Lee glanced up sharply.

"What is it, Dorrie?" he asked, his voice keen.

"What is it!" roared Lord Dorrmore. "D'you think we can go ahead, an' leave this youngster in the hands of the Chinks? It's Willy!"

"Willy?" shouted Lee.

"Willy, as I'm a livin' sinner!" retorted Dorrie. "All right, Willy, young 'un! We're here!"

By this time every attempt at subterfuge was at an end. Handforth and Church and McClure were standing upright, staring. The car had come to a halt half through the gateway. And there, held by a crowd of Chinamen, was Willy Handforth, looking flustered and indignant. His eyes were now blazing with excitement as he heard the familiar voices.

"Rescue, St. Frank's!" he sang out.

"By George!" roared Handforth. "Into 'em, my sons!"

Willy gave one screeching yell of fresh excitement. In fact, it was so wild that his captors started back, and there was a momentary confusion. Willy's eyes were alight with joy.

"Ted!" he gasped thickly.

Nothing in the world could have stopped him then. He had taken this great chance in the remote possibility of learning some news about his major. From the first he had refused to believe that Edward Oswald was dead. And here he was, in this car, with Church and McClure, and goodness knew who else!

With one bound he ran through the cordon and hurled himself into the car.

"Ted!" he panted, clutching at his major. "Oh, Ted!"

There was certainly some strange element at work tonight. In spite of their better judgment, the party had continued to journey to Yang Fu. And now they were enabled to rescue Willy Handforth, whom they had all thought safely asleep at the palace.

"Ted!" breathed Willy huskily.

"That's all right, old son!" muttered Handforth, rather touched. "You surely didn't think we were done in? Not likely!"

"Of course not!" breathed Willy. "I knew you were alive all the time; I told everybody so."

"When you youngsters have done perhaps we'd better get a move on," suggested Lord Dorrimore. "All settled there? Good! Look out!"

He sent the car lurching forward again before the surprised Chinese guards could recover. Everything had happened within a few seconds, and the soldiers were not particularly brisk in their movements. The car won clear of the cordon, and sped on without being hindered.

"I knew you were alive all the time," went on Willy, pumping his brother's hand with vim. "You should have seen the way the girls were blubbing."

"Blubbing?" said Handforth, with a start. "Over me?"

"Over you and the other chaps."

"I say, what rot!" protested Handforth uncomfortably. "I mean— All the same, it's rather ripping to know that— But look here, Willy. What the dickens are you doing here at the gates of Yang Fu? I'm all mixed up! I'm blessed if I know—"

"By jingo, yes!" interrupted Willy tensely. "I say, Dorrie," he added, with breathless excitement, "I know where Ching's prison is! If you follow my directions we can dash straight there."

Lord Dorrimore fairly shouted.

"What did I tell you, Lee?" he exclaimed gleefully. "Didn't I say there was somethin' in the air to-night? I'm hanged if Willy doesn't know the very thing we're lackin'! Yung Ching's prison! Gad, it seems too good to be true!"

"But are you sure, Willy?" asked Lee.

"Of course, sir," replied Handforth minor. "I'm so jolly happy to find you all here, and to know that Ted's safe, that I can't think clearly. You see, I came to the city with Foo Chow, sir."

"Upon my word!"

"Only he didn't know it, sir!" explained Willy.

"Oh!" said Lee. "I can understand that better. By Jove! Foo Chow's car was standing on the terrace when I spoke to you—"

"That's it, sir," interrupted the fag. "I was on the balcony, and I managed to drop down into the car before it left— Round to the right, sir!" he added to Dorrie. "That's it—straight on! Don't mind the crowds. They'll get out of the way quickly enough!"

The car rolled over the uneven roads, and drew nearer and nearer to the prison where Yung Ching was held captive.

Breaking into Prison!

NOBODY made any attempt to stop the car. As the party had first anticipated, the inhabitants took it to be one of Foo Chow's automobiles, piloted by an officer. So the streets were emptied swiftly as the powerful headlights split the darkness.

Willy was so happy that he could hardly point out the way, although he knew it perfectly. He had memorised every section of the route, and it was necessary to have a good memory, too, for some of these narrow streets were

tortuous, and there were turnings in the most unexpected places.

Although this city was primitive to the last degree, the inhabitants were accustomed to motor-cars. But even these were rare within the gates. For Dr. Foo Chow seldom brought his automobiles actually into the city. It was his general custom to leave the cars outside, and to continue in a stately sedan chair. Only the emergency of the present situation had impelled him to alter this rule.

The people, therefore, scattered in an almost panic-stricken manner as the car glided over the uneven road.

"We don't know what we're going to do when we get there, but we're goin'," said Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "We've done great work to-night, Lee, old man! We've got Handforth and the other youngsters, an' now we want to grab Yung Ching. I shan't be satisfied with anythin' else."

"It'll mean a terrific fight, sir," said Willy. "Foo Chow's there now, you know. And those beastly soldiers of his are fairly swarming. I don't quite see how we can hope to fight our way through—"

"This is our lucky night," interrupted Dorrie. "We'll manage it."

"Rather, sir!" declared Edward Oswald. "I'm just dying for a scrap, too. I haven't had a minute's excitement ever since we toppled over that drawbridge."

"Not at all!" said Dorrie dryly. "Thumpin' tigers in the eye, an' barricadin' the highway don't count, eh?"

"I mean a real fight, sir," said Handforth.

"Don't worry—you'll get one soon," replied Lord Dorrimore. "I don't quite see how we're going to manage it— Which way here?"

"Straight on, sir," said Willy. "Don't take those other roads. Straight through, and then sharp to the left. We're nearly there."

"That doesn't leave us much time to make any plans," said his lordship. "We shall have to leave it to chance again, Lee. You wouldn't like to stop at one of these shops an' buy a few ornaments, or somethin'? We might as well do some shoppin' while we're in town!"

"I wish we were as care-free as you seem to indicate," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But we're committed to this affair now, and we've got to go through with it. We had better wait until the car stops, and then make a sudden dash for the main entrance of the prison. After that, we can only trust to luck."

"You don't happen to know which part of the prison Yung Ching occupies, Willy?" asked Dorrie.

"Sorry, sir—no," replied Willy. "In fact, it's only guesswork that Ching's there at all. Old Foo Chow went in the building, and I guessed the rest. But it seems pretty obvious."

"I'm satisfied, anyhow," said his lordship. "Foo Chow came here especially to superintend the first mutilation— Good gad! It's about time we arrived on the scene!" he added grimly, as he opened the throttle. "Even now we shall probably be too late, poor kid!"

"Now, sir—sharp to the left!" said Willy quickly.

"Get ready!" muttered Handforth. "Leave everything to me! I'll lead the way, and the rest of you can follow!"

"If it's all the same to you, Handforth, I'll do the leading," put in Lee dryly. "And Umlosi will be by my side."

"Welcome words, Umtagati!" growled the African chief. "Thou and I together will scatter these sons of vermin like straws before the wind! For are we not warriors?"

Dorrie turned sharply.

"Now, then, be ready!" he said tensely. "I'm goin' to shoot up quickly, an' stop with a jerk. Be ready to leap out the instant I pull up!"

"Good!"

"Buck up, St. Frank's!" murmured Handforth. "Remove to the rescue!"

"Hurrah!" breathed Church and McClure.

They had actually turned into the courtyard, and Dr. Foo Chow's car was still waiting outside the main doorway of the big, dragon-painted building. There were many soldiers there, too, and the rescue party could see that a grim fight was probable.

Lord Dorrimore opened the throttle wider, and the Armstrong-Siddeley shot across the courtyard. Dorrie was an expert driver, and he planned to pull up with the headlights of the car immediately facing the wall of the Yamen. He was going straight at the building.

At the very last second he trod heavily upon the pedal which operated the four-wheel brakes. Speed was everything in this desperate venture. But Dorrie's foot played him false—or so it seemed at the moment.

At that crucial moment it slipped off the brake-pedal, and jammed down hard upon the accelerator. Before the heavy car was even checked, it leapt forward like a mad thing.

There was no time for Dorrie to pull his foot back, for

the next event took place in the fraction of a second. The car, already travelling fast, fairly hurtled forward.

Crash!

It struck the wall of the building with a devastating commotion, and there arose a series of wild and excited shouts. But those in the car had no time to think, or to dodge, or to make the slightest move.

And, strangely enough, they were hardly jerked.

For the car, instead of mangling itself up against the wall, went clean through it as a clown will break a paper hoop. The wall of the prison simply burst, and the car plunged headlong into the jagged opening.

Victory!

THE whole affair was a staggering surprise.

Lord Dorrimore himself, reckless as he was, would never have adopted such a madly drastic enterprise as this. But Fate seemed to have taken affairs in hand thoroughly on this thrilling night.

Nobody in the car was even scratched.

The collision had been so abrupt that the plaster and lath

blazingly illuminated by the car's headlights, was a chair. And strapped to that chair, facing the Britishers, was Yung Ching, the little Chinese boy!

One of his hands was fixed to a wooden support, so that it was impossible for him to move it—a kind of projection from the arm of the chair. And over him bent a tall, venomous-looking Chinaman, a gleaming surgical knife in his hand! Here, indeed, was a miracle!

The rescue party had broken into this very chamber at the exact moment of the torture! A minute later, and Yung Ching would have been mutilated in cold blood, with Dr. Foo Chow callously looking on.

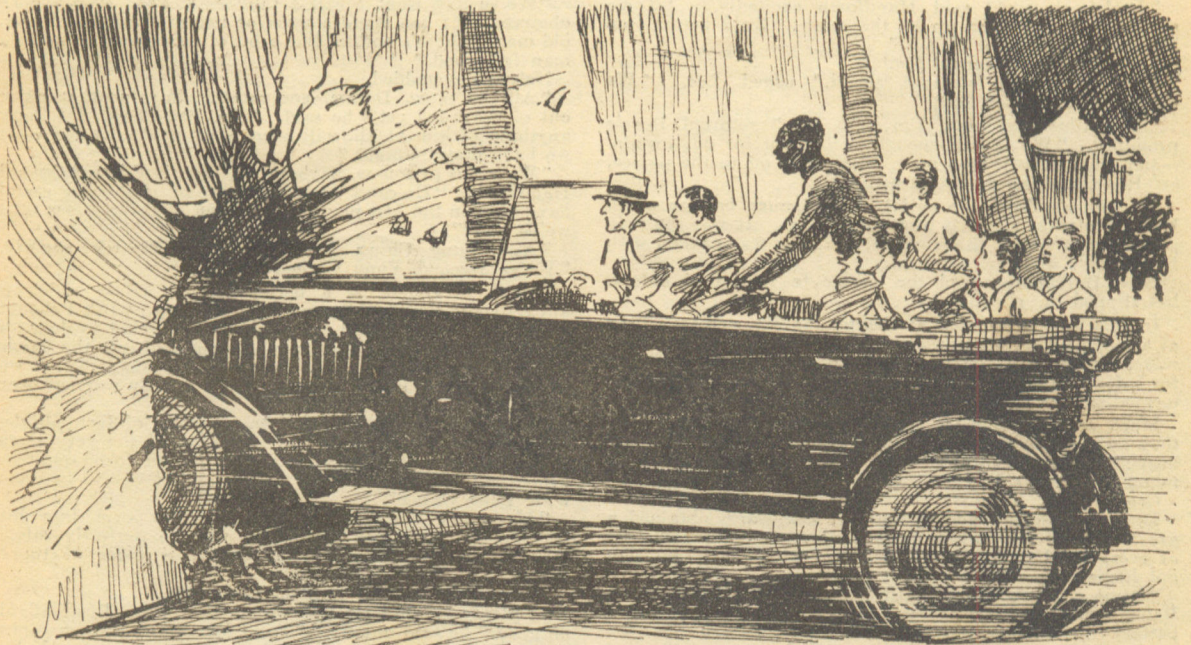
Nelson Lee went absolutely pale.

"Quick!" he shouted tensely.

In one step he was out of the car. Foo Chow made a move towards him, but Lee took no notice. His whole attention was upon the torturer.

Smash!

That blow, from Nelson Lee's left, caught the torturer on the point of his chin with such devastating force that he turned a complete somersault, and went hurtling into a far corner. Behind that blow had been all the force of Nelson Lee's volcanic rage.



Crash! The car containing Nelson Lee and the St. Frank's chums struck the prison wall with a loud concussion. The wall simply burst under the impact, and the car plunged headlong into the jagged opening.

wall fell to pieces like powder, and before any of the falling debris could do any harm, the car was through—clean through into the room, and straight on through a papier mache partition into the next.

The air was choked with dust, but the car was not merely unharmed, but hardly battered. Even the wind-screen was intact. In just the same way a rapidly moving car will crash through the gates of a level-crossing and come off the victor. It was the speed that did the trick.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore blankly.

With a wild lurch the car had pulled up. Those in it were clutching at the sides, their hearts beating madly. They were dazed by what had happened a second before, and they could scarcely credit the truth.

Nelson Lee was the only one whose wits were acute.

And he took in that scene as an impression is flashed upon a photographic plate. It was a scene which burned itself into his vision.

This inner room was an extensive one, purely Oriental in design and character, and there were two yellow-flamed lamps burning. The car had come to a stop half-way through the shattered partition. The people in the room were momentarily stunned into inactivity, and stood there motionless.

And Nelson Lee saw everything in that one second.

Over on one side stood Dr. Foo Chow, as immaculate as ever, his face expressive of consternation. For once the Chinese potentate had allowed his emotions to betray themselves on his yellow visage.

Right in front of the car, in the very centre of the room,

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth. "Come on, the Remove!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

They piled out of the car, and Foo Chow's voice, issuing orders, was drowned in the general din. The whole affair was happening within the space of a few poignant seconds. It was about the speediest thing imaginable.

Before Dr. Foo Chow could take any action whatsoever, Handforth & Co. reached Yung Ching's chair. They wrenched helplessly at the straps. But Umlosi, with a roar of contempt, tore those leather thongs asunder as though they were made of paper.

"Into the car with him!" rapped out Nelson Lee quickly. "Dorrie, sit where you are—be ready to back out!"

"Right!" flashed Lord Dorrimore.

Handforth & Co. bundled Chingy into the car before the bewildered boy could understand what was happening. With a leap, Nelson Lee reached the footboard, and Umlosi was only brought back by a sharp command. The African giant was anxious for much more fighting than this.

But Yung Ching had been rescued, and it would be madness to remain.

"All ready?" roared his lordship. "Go!"

He jerked the clutch in, and the car lurched backwards, in reverse. It went clean through that hole in the partition, and then went out through the jagged rent in the outer wall. It was an amazing exploit in every sense, and looked like being successful.

"Hold tight!" called Dorrie. "We're goin' to swing round sharply here!"

Out in the open, he sent the car shooting round in a semi-circle, and deliberately backed it with tremendous force into the front wheels of Dr. Foo Chow's Rolls-Royce.

Crash!

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "You've hit something—"

"That's all right!" grinned his lordship. "Just an idea of mine!"

Dorrie's brain had acted quickly in this crisis. He knew that the rear of the Armstrong-Siddeley was protected by a bumper.

The body was dented badly, and the rear bumper was twisted a bit, but the gallant car was in no way impaired vitally.

But the unfortunate Rolls-Royce was out of commission in a moment.

The full force of that rear bumper struck the front wheels, twisted them round, and put the steering gear out of commission. The next moment the Armstrong-Siddeley was going forward again, having done its deadly work.

"Splendid!" shouted Lee. "They can't follow now!"

"My idea exactly!" grinned Dorrie.

"Look out, sir!" said Handforth excitedly. "These soldiers are swarming up by the score! We'd better stop and make a fight for it, sir!"

"Wise words!" boomed Umlosi.

"No, Dorrie—go straight ahead," urged Lee. "We daren't risk another fight."

"This time, old man, I'm with you," retorted Dorrie promptly. "We've had enough excitement for one evenin'—enough to satisfy even me! Now we're off to the palace, an' Foo Chow can do his darnedest!"

He took absolutely no notice of the human barrier which had collected at the exit of the cul-de-sac. It was the only possible way out of this courtyard, and it was packed with Foo Chow's soldiery.

Lord Dorrimore raced the engine to its fullest extent, but slipped the clutch.

In this way it sounded as though the car was travelling at a much higher speed than it actually was, and the effect was instantaneous. With yelps of alarm, the men sprang for safety. They scattered in every direction, and the car seemed to bore its way through the human mass.

Much as these soldiers feared the wrath of Foo Chow, they feared that car even more! For here was death itself bearing down inexorably upon them. They squealed in terror, and made way.

Crash! Biff! Thud!

Leaning over the side of the car, Handforth obtained a great deal of satisfaction from landing out promiscuously at every head within reach. Some of his forceful punches got home with deadly effect.

"Come on!" roared Edward Oswald. "We'll show you! Bah! Chinese rotters! You couldn't stop us if you had a battery of heavy artillery!"

"Go it, Dorrie!" yelled Willy. "We're through!"

"Of course we're through!" retorted his lordship "Hang on!"

The exit was won, and they found themselves out in the street. Here there was a dense crowd of the ordinary population, brought hither excitedly by the great commotion.

Lord Dorrimore went at a mere crawl, for these people were innocent, and in no way responsible for Dr. Foo Chow's villainies.

And a rearguard action was necessary.

While Dorrie sounded the powerful electric hooter continuously, and while the frightened crowds were cowering away, Foo Chow's soldiers were making a deadly assault upon the rear of the car. Only in the nick of time did Umlosi divert a bayonet blade which had been thrust with villainous aim at Nelson Lee's side.

He wrenched the bayonet aside, careless of the cuts which were inflicted upon his hands, and swung the butt of the got home with deadly effect.

By now the crowd was thinning, and Dorrie put speed on. And still the yellow fiends came swarming after the car.

Every inch of that escape was fought desperately.

The gates were in sight at last, and they were still open. But shouts were sounding all round, and the guards were on the move. The brilliant headlights revealed everything.

"They're closing the gates!" shouted Handforth desperately.

"On, Dorrie!" muttered Lee.

Those gates were no flimsy affairs like the wall of that building. They were enormously heavy, cumbersome gates of solid timber.

He knew that it was a desperate chance, but he took it. The gateway was wide, and the huge double doors had

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only just commenced closing, a dozen men pushing at either. And they closed from the outer side, which was favourable. With a deafening roar the heavy car plunged through the stone archway.

Crash!

One edge of the gates struck the off-side wing, and there was a shriek from the Chinamen as the heavy wooden structure was sent shooting back, shivering and trembling. But the car had passed through, out into the night—out upon that wide, concrete highway.

"All safe?" yelled Lord Dorrimore exultantly.

"Yes!" answered a victorious chorus.

And Dorrie stood on the throttle, and away went the rescuers into the gloom. Success had crowned their efforts! Yung Ching was rescued!

Seeking Safety

LORD DORRIMORE, at the wheel, was looking thoroughly pleased with himself, and there was an expression of serene content upon his genial features. He glanced round at Mr. Nelson Lee.

"We've had what I call a thunderin' good evenin'," he observed. "I can stand a week or two of sheer laziness now, old man. There's nothin' like a bit of excitement to make a man feel good."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"All the same, Dorrie, you mustn't imagine that we're out of the wood yet," he said. "Dr. Foo Chow, if I know anything of him at all, will exact a grim penalty for what we have done to-night."

"We're his prisoners, anyhow, sir," put in Edward Oswald Handforth. "He can't do us any more harm than he would have done in the first place. And think of the glorious time we've had!"

"And Yung Ching, too, sir!" said Church eagerly. "We've rescued Yung Ching!"

"That, of course, is a feature of the affair which is altogether to the good," agreed Nelson Lee. "But I should be far happier if I had the remotest idea what to do with the boy. He is rescued only to be delivered into the hands of his torturers again. You surely do not imagine that we can conceal him in the palace? I am greatly worried over the point."

There was a short silence. As a matter of fact, all the occupants of the car had been thinking of the very same thing, and they did not like to answer the unspoken question which had sprung into their minds. What was to be done with Yung Ching?

"My great desire is to take the boy over into his father's own province, where he will be perfectly safe," said Nelson Lee. "But what chance is there of that? None!"

Yung Ching himself touched Lee's arm.

"I plenty grateful for evelthing, Mist' Lee. But I afraid no good," he said quietly. "Foo Chow, he catchee me once more. Takee me back pison. Cuttee off fingers. Velly bad, but Yung Ching no coward. I spit at these enemies of my honourable father. They dirt!"

"Good man!" said Handforth heartily. "You've got plenty of spirit, but now that we've got away from those brutes, we're not going to let you go back. Leave this to me, sir," he added confidently.

"Indeed!" said Nelson Lee. "Have you a plan, Handforth?"

"Rather, sir!"

"We shall all be glad to hear it," said Lee dryly. "Unfortunately, the matter is a very serious one, and we cannot waste any time on your usual optimistic illusions. You must not believe that you can conceal Yung Ching anywhere within the palace."

Handforth smiled with superior carelessness.

"I've got a better idea than that, sir," he said. "Leave Chingy in my hands, and I'll see that he's safe. In fact, I want you to drop me off the car in another mile."

"You can dismiss that idea at once," replied Lee firmly. "We've got you back with us, Handforth, and we're not going to let you go again!"

"None of your hare-brained schemes, Ted," said Willy severely.

"You can jolly well mind your own business, my lad!" retorted Handforth, with a cold glance. "Look here, sir, I'm determined about this. In fact, I've fully made up my mind."

"I've already told you, Handforth—"

"Give us a chance, sir!" protested Edward Oswald indignantly. "You know when Church and McClure and I fell in the river, and everybody thought we were drowned? Well, we got ashore, and I happened to have a bit of an argument with a tiger."

"We've heard about that, young 'un," said Nelson Lee,

with a smile. "It's a wonder you weren't killed! Heaven knows what you will be up to next!"

"Well, the brute was trying to chew up a little Chinese boy," said Handforth warmly. "So I went for the tiger and biffed it! And old Ah Fong, the kid's father, was so jolly grateful that he invited us to dinner."

"You are sure this man was really friendly?"

"Rather, sir!" put in Church. "His whole family was in the same mood, too. They treated us as highly honoured guests, and did all sorts of things for our special benefit. That feed was a wonderful affair, I suppose, from a Chinese standpoint."

"But here's my big idea," interrupted Handforth. "I'll take Chingy to— Whoa! Wait a minute, sir!" he added, to Lord Dorrmore. "Pull up! This is where I've got to get off, sir."

Dorrie brought the car to a standstill, and glanced behind.

"Just as you say," he chuckled. "No sign of any pursuit yet. I don't fancy there will be, either. We smashed Foo Chow's car before we came away."

"Yes, I think it'll be safe to stay here for a minute or two," said Nelson Lee. "But how do you know this is the spot you want, Handforth?"

Edward Oswald pointed to a sapling just ahead, clearly visible in the brilliant light from the headlamps. It was a little tree which had been torn down and dragged to the side of the road.

"This is the place where we stopped you on the way, sir," he explained. "And Ah Fong's house is right across country in that direction," he added, pointing. "I can find the way all right."

Nelson Lee paused for a moment before replying.

"I wonder!" he murmured. "By Jove, I wonder!"

Handforth was rather impatient.

"It's no good wondering, sir," he said. "We've got to buck up, you know!"

"Eh? Oh, yes, perhaps so," admitted Nelson Lee slowly. "But I was wondering if I could allow you to undertake this task, Handforth. I think I had better come with you—"

"No fear, sir!" interrupted Handforth. "You'll be wanted at the palace when old Foo Chow comes along. Besides, Ah Fong doesn't know you, and he might not be so easy to handle."

"It's a good idea of the youngster's," put in Lord Dorrmore. "His suggestion is that he should take Yung Ching to this Chinaman, and get him to hide him—eh? Sounds promising to me."

"It's a cert, sir!" declared Handforth. "Ah Fong's got two or three sons already, and some daughters, too. One more wouldn't be noticed, particularly as his house is a sort of isolated place. He looks after the rice fields and sugar plantations. How would Foo Chow think of looking for Chingy in a place like that? He'll be as safe as houses, sir."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I agree with you, Handforth," he replied. "We couldn't suggest any better plan. In any case, it will be quite useless for us to take Yung Ching to the palace. But I am wondering about you. I don't want you to get lost again, to fall into the hands of these enemies."

"But what's the difference, sir?" asked Handforth, in surprise. "Even if I go to the palace I shall be a prisoner. We're all as helpless as chickens in a run! And I'll promise to come straight to the palace as soon as I've given Chingy over into Ah Fong's care. How's that, sir?"

"All right, Handforth—I'll agree," said Lee promptly. "Since you have made such a definite promise, I'll let you go. You must get back at the very earliest minute you can."

Church and McClure were looking very anxious.

"We shan't see him again, sir!" said Church worriedly. "You know what he is when he gets alone! Can't we go, too, sir?"

"I'm afraid not—"

"But we always look after him, sir," went on Church.

"Look after me!" roared Handforth. "By George! You—you silly fathead! I'm the chap who's always looking after you!"

Lord Dorrmore grinned.

"That's just a delusion of yours, old man," he said gently. "It's the other way about, really. Those chums of yours are always takin' care that you don't stray from the straight an' narrow path. I've been told that they lead a harrowin' existence."

"If we don't go with him, sir, he'll get himself into a hopeless mess!" said McClure, with deep concern. "We've got to go—"

"I wouldn't let you come now if you begged on your

giddy knees!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "Look after me—eh? Huh! Of all the blessed nerve!"

Nelson Lee hesitated for a moment. His anxiety concerning Yung Ching was keen. Without any question, the boy would be in terrible peril if he was delivered into Foo Chow's hands again. And here was a chance of having him effectually concealed. Edward Oswald Handforth was the only one who could accomplish this particular mission, since it was he who had saved Ah Fong's child from the tiger. The Chinaman, if his gratitude was genuine, would do this thing if Handforth asked him.

So Handforth was the only one who could go. Lee would have liked it otherwise, but there was no alternative. He turned to Yung Ching.

"You would like this?" he asked. "We are suggesting that you should be placed in the hands of a friendly Chinaman, and that you should pretend to be a member of his family."

"Heap fine idea, sir," said Yung Ching cheerfully. "I go. Vely grateful, but I not worth all this trouble. I cause you enough trouble already. I velly sorry, Mist' Lee. No wantee get Handforth into soupee."

"He'll be all right," said Nelson Lee. "Very well, Handforth—take Yung Ching, and be off at once. And remember—get to the palace as quickly as you can. I have your promise that you will not engage upon any other enterprise."

"That's right, sir," said Edward Oswald. "Leave this job to me, and it'll be done properly. Come along, Chingy! We've got a two-mile trudge in front of us, and we shall have to knock old Ah Fong up."

He climbed out of the car, and Yung Ching followed him. Handforth seemed to regard the whole affair as a mere trifle. He just waved his hand and vanished into the gloom. Church and McClure gazed after him with dumb misery. Their agony was apparent in every line of their features.

There was a strong, enduring bond between these three inseparable chums of Study D. Handforth was an aggressive leader, and he was just as liable to punch the noses of Church and McClure as he was to punch any other noses. But they knew his every whim, and they scarcely ever were parted from him. If he was going into danger, they wanted to share it with him.

"Oh, you ought to have let us go, sir," muttered Church reproachfully.

"Goodness knows when we shall see him again," said McClure, with misery.

"Wait a minute, boys—wait a minute!" muttered Lee. "You need not suppose that I shall let Handforth be unprotected. But he is a peculiar boy, and it would be inadvisable to let him know my true plans. Umlosi!"

"I am thy servant, Umtagati," rumbled Umlosi, the great African chief, who was Lord Dorrmore's staunch companion.

"Do thou follow the boys and see them safely to this house," said Lee. "Afterwards, keep the young N'Kose always in sight, and protect him in case of danger. Remain by him until he returns to the palace."

"Even as thou sayest, my master, I will obey," said Umlosi.

He had gone off into the night like a shadow, merging with the blackness.

"You don't mind, Dorrie?" asked Lee.

"My dear man, it's a brain-wave," said his lordship. "If I wasn't a dullard, I should have suggested the same thing myself!"

Church and McClure were looking happy.

"Of course, that's a different thing, sir," said Church, with relief. "Old Umlosi is as good as a hundred chaps like Mac and I. Handy won't come to any harm now. I say, what a ripping stunt!"

"An' all the more rippin' because Handy doesn't know about it," grinned Lord Dorrmore. "Personally, I'm feelin' quite comfortable. I suppose we'll push on now—eh?"

"Yes," replied Lee. "That is the very heart of the scheme. Foo Chow will imagine that we have concealed the boy in the palace, and will order a search—which will, naturally, prove futile. And that will be a lever in our hands, too. Our worthy host will be unable to proceed with his plans, and he will not harm us while we hold that secret. I pray that this man, Ah Fong, will be as easily persuaded as Handforth imagines."

The car continued on its way, and, in the meantime, Handforth and Yung Ching trudged across the silent countryside.

It was late now—getting on towards midnight—and the scattered villages were asleep. Nevertheless, Handforth

took care to avoid every possible habitation. And he was't exactly sure that he would be able to find Ah Fong's house, either, although he made no confession of this fear to his companion.

It was much more difficult than he had first believed.

The worst of it was that there were so many clumps of trees which looked exactly like other clumps. And Ah Fong's house, after all, was very similar to the other Chinese dwellings. The pair trudged on, floundering into the muddy rice fields, but generally managing to find a pathway again.

"Ah Fong dive long way off," said Yung Ching, at last.

"Oh, not so very far!" said Handforth carelessly. "We shall soon be coming to the place now. What have they been doing with you, Ching?" he added, in order to change the conversation. "Torturing you—eh?"

"Foo Chow velly bad man," said Yung Ching gravely. "Velly wicked lotter, Foo Chow a beast and a luffianly cad. Put me in dirty plison. Foo Chow mean to force my honourable father to surrender muchee land," went on the Chinese Removite. "But my honourable father notee having any. Notee likely! My honourable father is the big governor of huge plovince. Plentee soldiers. Plentee guns. Foo Chow makee flouble for nothing."

"Why doesn't he go to war, instead of trying these dirty stunts?"

"War notee good," replied Yung Ching, shaking his head. "Notee good for Foo Chow, anyway. My honourable father's soldiers and guns muchee greater. Foo Chow catchee it in neck if he tly any monkey business with soldiers. So he blingee me here to torture me."

"The miserabl' rotter!"

"Foo Chow believe that my honourable father sullender if he know that I catchee torture," said Chingy. "Velly simple—but velly foolish."

"But, all the same, your father—sorry, I mean your honourable father—would sooner give up his lands than allow you to be tortured, wouldn't he?" asked Edward Oswald gruffly. "You're his only son, and he looks to you to carry on the good work after he's gone. He wouldn't allow you to be carved up, finger by finger, and toe by toe!"

Yung Ching shook his head again.

"My honourable father notee afraid of Foo Chow," he replied. "No givee in because of threats. Allee same better for me to be safee. I velly grateful for evelything you do. I notee worth so much flouble."

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "Do you think we could leave you in that beast's hands to be tortured? This chap, Ah Fong, is only a humble sort of coolie, but he seems to have a good heart. With any luck, we'll get you stowed away as safe as houses."

And they went on through the night, with Edward Oswald still uncertain as to the exact position of Ah Fong's house—and somewhere in the rear came a silent black shadow.

Back to Prison!

ZURRR ZURRRRRH!

Lord Dorrmore cheerfully pressed the button of the electric horn, and the powerful blast awoke the echoes of the night. The Armstrong-Siddeley, containing the returning adventurers, had arrived at the drawbridge. But the headlights revealed nothing but a yawning

chasm, without any protective barrier. The drawbridge was raised, and the palace isolated.

"This is what comes of gettin' home with the milk," observed Dorrie genially. "We find ourselves locked out. It's a rummy situation, when you come to think of it, Lee. We're askin' to be admitted into prison again!"

"And yet it is our only course," said Nelson Lee. "We have had our hour or two of hectic excitement, and now comes the reckoning."

"You think Foo Chow will shove us straight into the torture chamber?"

"Frankly, Dorrie, I haven't the faintest idea what he will do," replied Lee. "Foo Chow is such an extraordinary man that it would be very unwise to make any predictions. Whether we get back into the palace or not, he knows that it is impossible for us to escape the country. So we can't do better than openly admit that we ran wild for a space."

Dorrie climbed out and walked to the front of the car. There was a sheer cliff at his feet, dropping straight down into the dark river. And across the water lay the dark bulk of the island stronghold, with its surrounding wall. In no place were the cliffs of the island less than fifty feet. There was something forbidding and sinister in the place at this hour of the night—with the great gateway illuminated by the headlamps of the car across the chasm.

"Nothin' doin' apparently," remarked his lordship. "How about makin' a trip down the causeway to the landin' stage? We might be able to pinch the yacht—"

"My dear Dorrie, the yacht is anchored in mid-stream, and guarded by a swarm of Foo Chow's troops," interrupted Lee. "The recapture of the yacht is our one hope, but I am afraid there is little or no chance of success in that direction. There are only two of us, remember—"

"What about us, sir?" put in Willy as he jumped out of the car. "Do we count for nothing? Church and McClure and I can help a bit if there's any fightin' to be done."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Imagine it!" he said dryly. "Two men and three boys—proposing to capture a yacht! I admire your optimism, Willy, but I am afraid—"

"Hallo! Here comes the bridge!" interrupted Lord Dorrmore. "I suppose the guards have had to turn out especially."

They watched in silence as the great bulk of the drawbridge slowly descended from the island. It fell into place with a soft thud, and now a clear road lay in front of the car. Lee and Dorrie and Willy got back into their seats, and they were soon gliding forward.

Once through the impressive gateway, further progress was hindered by a strong cordon of gaudily uniformed soldiers. These latter, however, held themselves in readiness to leap to safety in case the car failed to stop. But Dorrie applied the brakes.

"Well, here we are," he said genially.

One of Dr. Foo Chow's officers came forward and eyed the group keenly.

"You come back?" he asked in stilted pidgin English.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" remarked Dorrie, with a yawn. "The fact is, old man, we're all feelin' a bit tired an' sleepy. Heard anythin' from Foo Chow yet? We had a bit of a shindy in the city, you know, an' I've got an idea that Foo Chow will kick."

(What will happen to the rescue party when Foo Chow returns? And how does Handforth fare? Don't miss next week's thrilling developments.)

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