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TOM MERRY'S RUSE.

LONG, COMPLETE
TALE OF
TOM MERRY.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



FIGGINS'S
NEW
DISGUISE.

(See page 12.)

NO. 23.

VOL. 1.

"MY
ONLY AUNT
JANE!" SAID TOM
MERRY. "IS THAT
REALLY FIGGY, OR
IS IT BILL SIKES?
FIGGY, IS IT REALLY
YOU, OLD MAN?"
"GR-R-R-R!"

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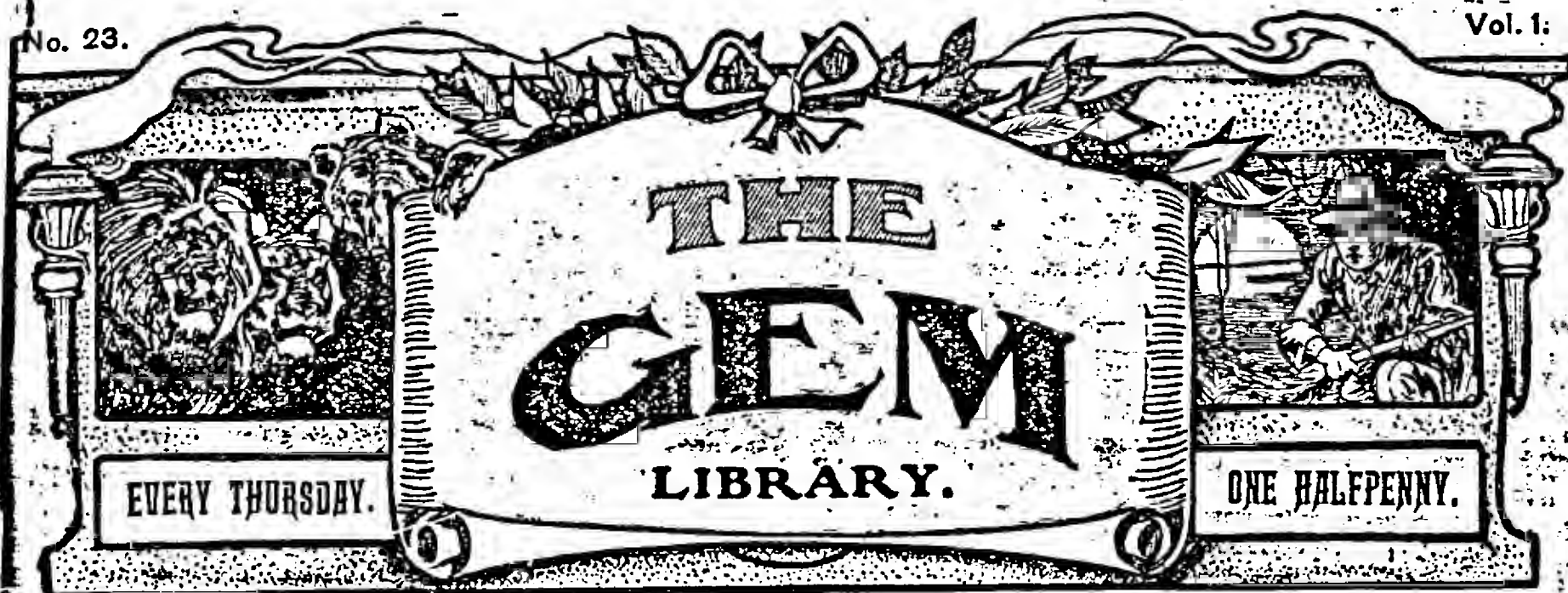
NEXT
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"EXPELLED FROM ST. JIM'S,"

A TALE OF
TOM MERRY.

No. 23.

Vol. 1.



A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

TOM MERRY'S RUSE



A Tale of
TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.

By
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Startling Encounter.

BOOM!

Tom Merry gave a sudden start.

"Did you hear that, Manners?"

"I'm not exactly deaf," said Manners. "It was a gun from the prison."

Boo-oom!

It was the echo of the distant report dying away in the lonely depths of the wood.

The chums of the School House at St. Jim's stopped and looked at one another, the light, cheery expression fading for the moment from their faces. They were following the footpath through the wood hard by the old school when the sinister sound struck upon their ears. Tom Merry gave a slight shiver.

"You know what that means, Manners?" he said, in a low voice.

Manners nodded.

"A convict escaped from the prison."

"Yes. Some poor wretch made a bolt for it."

"Hope he won't come this way," said Manners. "I expect the warders will soon lay him by the heels. I say, we're losing time."

"Let's get on."

The Terrible Two resumed their way through the wood, but Tom Merry's usually happy face was very thoughtful now. He could not help thinking of the hunted man, whose escape from the prison over the hill was proclaimed to the world at large by the boom of the distant gun.

"I say, I believe we've lost Figgins & Co!" exclaimed Manners, after a few minutes. "I can't hear a sound of them, and they've vanished from sight. We shall have to give it up, Tom."

Manners was staring round with an exasperated expression into the dark, thick wood on either side of the path.

"The horrid bounders must have guessed we were tracking them," he went on. "We've lost them, Tom, and we may as well give it up."

"Rotten bad luck!" said Tom Merry.

There was certainly no sign of Figgins & Co. in the wood. A quarter of an hour before the Terrible Two had seen them enter the wood from Rylcombe Lane, Figgins carrying a lunch-basket. The bright idea had immediately entered Tom Merry's head of tracking them down in the wood and "lifting" that lunch-basket. Figgins & Co. were the leaders of the New House juniors at St. Jim's, and the feud between the two houses of the good old school was as lively as ever. A recent raid by the New House faction remained still un-

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avenged, and the Terrible Two were glad of a chance to go on the warpath. As Tom Merry said, revenge was sweet, and the jam-tarts Figgins certainly had in that basket were sweeter.

But Figgins & Co. must have smelt a rat, for they had completely vanished in the wood, and the School House juniors hunted for them in vain.

"It's horrid!" said Tom Merry. "Those New House bounders are scoffing cake and tarts somewhere here, perhaps only a dozen yards from us, and grinning at us into the bargain. I'd give a week's pocket-money to get on their track!"

There was a faint rustle in the thickets. Manners nudged Tom.

"You heard that?"

Tom's eyes were blazing with excitement. He had heard that sound, which showed that someone was cautiously retreating from the vicinity further into the wood.

"Yes, rather, Manners. We're on their track, after all."

"Let's follow them."

"Good! I wish there were more of us. Pity we hadn't time to get Study No. 6 to join us. We're only two against three. Still, they're only New House bounders!" said Tom Merry. "We'll give 'em the kybosh, and scoff the lunch!"

"Cautious, now!" whispered Manners. "Not a sound!"

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors of St. Jim's stole from the footpath into the trees, in the direction of the rustle they had heard. They went on tiptoe, and at the same time listened intently for a repetition of the sound to guide them. It was repeated—the unmistakable sound of a retreating form brushing through the thick and clinging underwood. Close on the track went the Terrible Two.

"It sounds like only one of them, Tom," whispered Manners.

"Yes; I expect they've separated, so as to dodge us more easily."

"Ah, very likely!"

"We'll track this bounder to the giddy rendezvous, and then make a rush for the lunch-basket," murmured Tom Merry. "I'll tackle Figgins, and you go for Kerr. Fatty Wynn doesn't count very much in a scrap. He's got plenty of pluck, but he's too fat to give us much trouble. I wish Blake was with us."

From time to time the faint sound of the retreating form was heard, and the juniors, as stealthy as Indian hunters tracking their prey, followed it through the wood. To the very heart of the deep and lonely wood the sound led them. Suddenly it ceased. The chums listened intently, but the sound was not repeated, and they came to the conclusion that the fugitive had stopped. They exchanged glances.

"He's heard us, of course," whispered Manners. "We've made as much noise as he has. I expect the three of them are waiting for us now."

Tom Merry made a grimace. There was likely to be a tough tussle for the lunch-basket if Figgins & Co. were all there, and waiting for the onslaught. But neither of the Terrible Two was inclined to retreat.

It was School House against New House, and they did not care for the odds. Even if they got the worst of the encounter, they were not afraid of a hard knock or two; but they meant to get the best of it somehow.

"I expect they're waiting for us," assented Tom Merry. "We're not going to give it up. We had better make a rush for it. Come on!"

"Right-ho!" said Manners.

And, abandoning all caution, the chums of the School House dashed on. Right through the thickets they went with a crash and a trample, and burst into a terrific war-whoop at the same time.

Tom Merry stumbled over a form crouching in the thickets, and the next moment he was down on the ground, with an iron grip on his throat. He gave a shriek of horror.

It was not Figgins; it was not one of the "Co." into whose grip he had fallen. A man with a rough, savage face and glinting, wild eyes—a man with closely-cropped head and the hideous garb sprinkled with broad-arrows, that proclaimed the convict!

Tom Merry realised all in a moment. It was not one of the New House juniors whom they had tracked through the wood. It was the escaped convict! And Tom Merry, rushing on to the attack, had come not upon his rivals of the New House, but upon a hunted and desperate criminal!

"Help!" gasped Tom Merry.

He was on the ground, helpless under the ruffian's weight, and the grip on his throat cut short his voice after that one cry. A savage face was glaring down upon him in black and deadly rage.

But Tom's chum was at hand. Like Tom, Manners grasped the situation in a moment. He rushed on, and took a flying kick at the convict as he scrambled on Tom Merry, a good deal as if he were on the football-field.

The man gave a gasp as Manners's boot came crashing upon his ribs, and rolled off Tom Merry, sprawling into the grass. Tom was on his feet in a twinkling.

"Run—run!" he gasped.

Not for an instant did the juniors delay. The convict was scrambling up, with fury and wild hate in his savage face, and what he meant to do they did not know; but that the man was as dangerous as a wild beast at that moment was plain.

They tore off through the crashing thickets at top speed, with a pace that they had never shown on the cinder-path, though they were two of the best junior runners in the School House at St. Jim's.

There was a sound in the thickets behind them—whether of pursuit or not they did not know, nor did they pause to ascertain. Right on they tore, and in a couple of minutes came out into the footpath, and turned into it to race along towards Rylcombe Lane.

A figure started up in their path. It was that of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House at St. Jim's—a personage very much disliked by the juniors of the School House.

But at that moment the two youngsters were too wildly excited to recognise him, or even to look at him. They only saw that someone had appeared in the path. Their only thought was that the convict had somehow got ahead of them, and they threw themselves frenziedly upon the supposed foe who had cut off their escape.

Monteith, utterly amazed and taken by surprise, went down heavily, with the two juniors scrambling and sprawling on top of him.

"Why, what the—"

"Hallo!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's Monteith!"

He jumped up as if the prefect had become suddenly red-hot. Manners scrambled off the fallen Sixth-Former as quickly as Tom Merry. Monteith staggered up, his thin, sour face black with rage.

"You young whelps—"

"I say, Monteith, we're sorry. We—"

The prefect grasped the juniors each by a collar.

"I'll teach you to knock me down!" he spluttered.

"You've been asking for a hiding ever since you came to St. Jim's, Tom Merry. You shall have it now!"

"Monteith, I tell you we couldn't help it! Do listen! There's an escaped convict after us, and—"

"Don't tell lies!" said the New House prefect sharply.

"You can't take me in with a yarn like that."

"It's the truth! He's after us. My hat, there he is!"

There was a crash in the underwood, and a running form came out with a bound into the footpath.

Monteith started, and quickly released the juniors. He saw the cropped head, the convict garb, and knew that Tom Merry's tale was true, and, big Sixth-Former as he was, he felt a thrill of uneasiness.

The convict stopped, panting, at the sight of the prefect. The two juniors stood by Monteith, with their fists clenched, and the three of them would have made a very big handful for anyone to tackle, and the convict stood in doubt. Probably his purpose in chasing the juniors had not been very clear. He had been actuated more by rage than by any clear intention. He stood panting, his eyes glinting, his breast heaving. The eyes of the convict and the prefect met. Then the former gave a sharp cry.

"You!"

Monteith started. He looked more closely at the evil face, and turned deadly pale. Tom Merry and Manners saw, with utter wonder and surprise, that he recognised the convict.

"Good heavens!" muttered Monteith.

A strange smile came over the face of the convict. Something of assurance came into his manner. He made a gesture which the prefect understood. Monteith turned to the juniors.

"Go back to the school," he said, in a husky voice.

"Aren't you coming, Monteith?"

"No, no."

"You won't be safe—"

"Do as I tell you!"

Tom Merry looked into the prefect's face, and saw how white and worn and haggard it had become in a few moments; and, much as he disliked the bullying prefect of the New House, Tom Merry's heart was touched.

What was the cause of the terrible dismay and misery he saw in Monteith's face Tom Merry had not the faintest idea, but there was no mistaking it.

"Very well, Monteith," said Tom quietly.

And he made a sign to Manners, and the chums of the Shell walked away together. Monteith looked after them till a turn of the path hid them from sight, and then he fixed his gaze upon the convict again.

"Ralph!" he said, in a low, strained voice. "You?"

The convict grinned.

"Yes, my dear cousin! You're not glad to see me?"

Monteith shuddered.

"I heard the gun from the prison. I never dreamed——"
 "That it was I who had escaped? I suppose not. I have been free for two hours, but they seem to have only just discovered it. I had thought of you, but I did not hope for this stroke of luck. You are a friend in need, James."
 Monteith shivered again. Then, with a gesture of assent, he followed the convict from the path into the wood.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgins & Co. Make a Discovery.

FIGGINS & CO. were enjoying themselves. In the heart of the deep wood the three were sitting under the beeches, with the lunch-basket open between them—the long-limbed Figgins, chief of the New House juniors, Fatty Wynn, short and plump, and Kerr, the cautious, canny Sootsman.

Figgins leaned back against a thick bush, with a glass of lemonade in one hand, and a jam tart in the other, and an expression of seraphic happiness upon his face.

"This is jolly!" he remarked. "Did you see those School House bounders following us in the lane, kids? They had a sheep's-eye on this lunch-basket."

Kerr chuckled.

"Yes; I knew what Tom Merry's little game was, but we have done them this time."

"I think so," assented Figgins. "They're not likely to track us down in this little lair. We have been one too many for Tom Merry this time. Not that we're afraid of those School House kids. We are three to two, and we'd give 'em a warm time if they did find us. But we came out to have lunch under the trees, not to look for trouble."

Fatty Wynn looked up from the remnant of a rabbit-pie.

"That's so, Figgy. A scrap is all very well in its way, but we couldn't allow that sort of thing to interfere with a meal."

"I don't think you'd allow anything to interfere with a meal," said Figgins. "This is your tenth lunch to-day, isn't it, Fatty?"

"No; it's only the fourth," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "We get such small meals at St. Jim's; I have to eke it out somehow. Hallo, did you hear that?"

Figgins held up his hand for silence. It was the sound of a footstep in the wood that had fallen upon the ears of the chums of the New House at St. Jim's. The sound came from behind Figgins, on the other side of the thick, almost impenetrable bush he was leaning against. The chums looked at one another with deep-drawn breath.

"They're on the track," whispered Figgins. "Not a sound! We can't have a scrap just after a big feed, kids. And they may have Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy with them. They always chum up with Study No. 6 when it's a question of going for us."

Kerr and Wynn nodded. The New House trio waited, and listened with bated breath. Even Fatty Wynn left off eating.

There was a murmuring of voices on the other side of the bush. The speakers had stopped there, right in the heart of the wood, and little dreaming that three juniors were sitting round a lunch-basket on the other side of the thicket.

"Safe enough here," said a harsh voice. "We can talk now. No chance of being discovered unless the warders are searching through the wood, and they're not likely to be here yet."

Figgins gave a jump. It was a strange voice to his ears—but the words told him who the speaker was. Figgins & Co. had heard the gun from the prison that announced the escape of a convict, and the mention of the word "warders," was sufficient to tell them that the man on the other side of the bush was the escaped prisoner. The juniors exchanged looks of consternation. They had intended to lie low if the School House youngsters were on the track, but the necessity for keeping their presence a secret was greater than ever now. It would hardly be safe to fall in the way of a hunted and desperate criminal.

Figgins made a sign for silence, and the Co. remained motionless.

"I want you to help me," went on the voice. "You must help me! I broke in this direction because I thought there was a chance of getting a word to you."

There was a pause. The convict's companion, whoever he was, did not speak.

"I suppose you are willing to help me?" the man went on sharply. "You are not thinking of deserting me, and leaving me to the bloodhounds, James?"

"I shall be ruined!"

The reply was in a husky, sunken voice, but the juniors of the New House recognised it at once—the voice of James

Monteith, the head prefect of their house! Monteith, of the New House, meeting a convict secretly in the wood! What could it possibly mean. Figgins & Co. stared at one another in silent dismay. The convict's voice replied crisply:

"Ruined or not, you must help me! I must have clothes, and food, and money, to escape. I tell you there are five years remaining for me at yonder prison, and I will die rather than go back! Die a thousand times! You must help me!"

"I—I can't! You should not have come here. You nearly disgraced me before. When you stole the Glyndon diamond, and sent it to me, and I never knew——"

"I had fixed it on Kildare's brother, and if you had taken care of the packet I sent you, the truth would never have come out!" growled the convict.

"I did not know the diamond was in it—and if I had known——"

"You would have betrayed me?"

"I am not a thief!"

"Bah! But it is useless to discuss that now. The diamond was found, Kildare's brother was cleared, and I was sent to penal servitude."

"I wish you had remained there!" said Monteith, bitterly. "If they had chosen to believe ill of me at St. Jim's, I should have been deemed your accomplice. As it is many of the fellows know that I have a cousin a convict, and it has done me harm at the school. And it would be worse but for Kildare."

"Your enemy?"

"I was his enemy," said Monteith, "when I discovered his brother hiding in the old castle, I used the knowledge to dictate terms to him. And then—then his brother was proved to be innocent, and my cousin proved to be the thief. Yet Kildare was all kindness and consideration. He forgave what I could never have forgiven. We have been pulling together better lately; and now you must come to bring utter ruin on me. Don't you know that a fellow may be sent to prison for helping a convict to escape?"

"I know that you must help me! Will you send one of your own blood back to that hell upon earth?" said the convict hoarsely.

There was a long silence.

"No!" said Monteith at last. "I suppose I must help you."

"Good! If you did not, the disgrace you fear would not be escaped. I would see to that! How would you like me to come to the school?"

"Are you mad?"

"Not at all! But I swear that if I am arrested, it shall be within the walls of St. Jim's, and if you could remain at your school after that——"

"You—you scoundrel!"

"Help me, then, to escape. I want but little; but I am desperate. They shall not recapture me if I can help it. You must save me."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Bring me a change of clothes, a razor, food, and money, and a disguise if possible," said the convict. "Then I will shift for myself."

"But how—where?"

"Here! I was thinking of the old castle; but they are sure to search that first. This place is as secure as any I can think of; and I can hide in the branches of the trees if the hunt comes close. Keep the mouths of those juniors who saw us shut, that's all."

"Tom Merry and Manners are not likely to chatter, I think. Still, I will speak to them."

"Make them keep the secret. Tell them you will flay them if they talk."

"Not much use using that method with Tom Merry. But I think he would hold his tongue if I asked him. You are going to remain here?"

"Yes! This big beech is hollow. Come here after dark, and put the things in it, and I shall find them. I may have to leave this spot. Come at night, or suspicion may be excited. They know I have a cousin at the school."

Monteith was silent.

"I suppose I must do it," he said. "When you have the clothes, what will you do?"

"Make a break for freedom, as soon as it is safe to do so. In twenty-four hours I hope to be far away from here."

"I hope so," said Monteith, with a shiver. "It will be difficult for me to get away from the school——"

"I suppose you have broken bounds after dark before," said Ralph Monteith, with a sneer.

"Yes; but it will be more difficult now. Some of the St. Jim's fellows have been going down to a public-house in the village after dark, and the Head has told Kildare, our captain, to look into the matter. Kildare means business, and he is on the alert."

"That is unlucky; but it can't be helped. You must contrive to get out, somehow."

"I shall manage it, I suppose. There's no more to be said?"

"No!"

They parted without a word of farewell. Monteith strode away through the wood, the way he had come. Figgins & Co. on the other side of the bush, were still sitting quite silent, and staring at each other with wide eyes.

Without making their presence known it was impossible for them to leave the spot, and so they had heard almost every word uttered by Monteith and the convict. They heard the perfect stride away, and then a rustle in the bushes told that the convict was also gone. Figgins rose silently to his feet.

"Let's clear!" he muttered briefly. Kerr and Fatty Wynn, who were both rather pale, nodded assent. The remains of the lunch were silently hurried into the basket, and Figgins picked it up, and the three juniors stole away through the wood.

They went on tiptoe, fearful of making a sound for the convict to hear, which might draw the desperado on their track. Not a word did they utter till they were out of the wood, in the open, sunny lane, leading to St. Jim's. Then Figgins broke the silence.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated the great Figgins. "My giddy aunt Selina!" said Fatty Wynn. "This is a go, and no mistake! You remember that affair of Kildare's brother, of course?"

"Rather, don't you remember how we came on the poor chap in the old castle, when we were tracking Study No. 6," said Figgins, with a chuckle at the recollection.

"Yes! It's the tables turned now, with a vengeance," remarked Kerr. "Monteith has got a bit of what Kildare had then; only there's this difference, that Micky Kildare was innocent, and our captain knew it, while Ralph Monteith is guilty, and—"

"And our prefect knows that," said Figgins. "Monteith isn't a sweet individual, but one can't help feeling a little bit sorry for him under the circumstances."

"He ought to let the rotter be arrested."

"Well, the chap's his own kin," said Figgins, with a shake of the head. "It's a lot to expect of Monteith, to let him be taken back to the prison. Besides, you heard what he said—he'd show Monty up before all St. Jim's if he could."

"Nice, pleasant sort of a relation to have."

"I'm sorry for Monteith, and I'm sorry we've learned anything about the matter," remarked Figgins. "Can't be helped, though, as Tom Merry always says. I've noticed an improvement in Monteith lately, too—he isn't half the rotter he was. The whole school used to call him Cad Monteith; but they've rather dropped that of late."

"We'll keep mum," said Kerr.

"That's the word."

And when they returned to St. Jim's, Figgins & Co. thought a great deal, but they said nothing. Monteith's miserable secret was safe with them.

CHAPTER 3.

The Great Idea of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

"HAVE you heard the news, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming into Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's.

Blake, who was oiling his cricket-bat, and the carpet, looked up inquiringly. Herries grunted, and went on making toffee.

"What news?" said Blake. "Have you been and gone and bought a nice, new fancy waistcoat?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Has your noble pa sent you a nice, new topper for a birthday present?"

"Weally—"

"Has Tom Merry got a new idea, about up to the mark of his hobby club idea, and his triple alliance idea, or anything of that sort?"

"I haven't seen Tom Mewwy."

"Then what's the news, image? Why don't you tell me?"

"I'm twying to."

"You're so long-winded, Gussy."

"I'm twyin'—"

"Expound! Explain! Spout! Talk!"

"I'm twy—"

"Never saw a chap so long-winded," said Blake resignedly.

"If you wouldn't intewwupt," said D'Arcy, "I would tell you the stwange news. I think it may lead to an adventuah."

"Well, get it off your chest, fathead!"

"That is an extremely wude expression."

"Oh, go on!"

"Well, deah boys, it is a startling piece of news. I had it fwom Gore, who had it fwom Fwench, who had it fwom Taggles, who had it fwom—"

"Go on!" said Blake. "This sounds like the house that Jack built. Any more?"

"There is a despewate chawactah escaped fwom the pwison on the hill," said D'Arcy. "A wardah has been up to the school to speak to the Head, so that the boys mayn't fall in with the feahful wuffian. John, the footman, heard it all, and told Taggles, and Taggles told Fwench, who told Gore, who—"

"House that Jack built again," growled Blake. "Can't you leave out all that and come to the point? There's a giddy convict escaped from the prison?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And where is he?"

"He is supposed to be hidin' fwom the wardahs in the Castle Wood," said Arthur Augustus. "The wuins of the old castle have been searched alweady, but nothin' has been discovahed of the wuffian there. The wardahs and the police are goin' to hunt for the dweadful wuffian and wun him down."

"Let 'em!" said Jack Blake.

"I've been thinkin'—"

Blake jumped up and laid down his cricket-bat.

"You've been doing what?"

"Thinkin'."

Blake stared at him in amazement.

"Have you really? Did it hurt?"

"Blake, I weally—"

"You shouldn't start these things suddenly. A complete change is best taken by degrees," said Blake warningly.

"Do you want to wreck your constitution?"

"Upon my word—"

"When you start thinking you ought to do it on the instalment plan," said Blake solemnly. "Think of your noble governor, and don't bring his lordly whiskers down with sorrow to the cemetery. Take it gently, and you may survive it, but—"

"Blake, if you wish me to continue to wegard you as a fwend, I must beg of you to wefwain fwom these wemarks," said Arthur Augustus. "It would go against my conch. to quawwel with you if it could be avoided, but weally—"

"But, weally," said Blake, "you are a champion ass! And now get on with the washing. What have you been thinking about, now you've started?"

"I was thinkin' that it would be a feathah in our cap," said D'Arcy, "if we were to captuah that extremely despewate chawactah and delivah him up to the wardahs."

Blake looked at Herries, and Herries looked at Blake.

"Well, my only pyjama hat!" said Blake. "Gussy is coming out! Fancy Gussy going on the warpath! My Aunt Maria Jane Jackson!"

"Good old Gussy!" said Herries. "I can see him tracking a giddy convict, armed with an eyeglass and a gold-headed cane."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is extremely wude of you to cackle when I have been thinking."

"Of course it is. It isn't as if such a thing happens often. But I say, Gussy, what is your grudge against this convict chap?"

"I stand up for law and ordah," said Arthur Augustus. "The chap ought to be in pwison, and he may do some damage if he is fwee. He is an awful wottah!"

"Do you know who it is?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then why don't you tell us, you owl?"

"You haven't given me a chance. You keep on intewwuptin' me in an extremely wude mannah. I weally never get a chance to speak in this study."

"It seems to me you have a long innings sometimes. But who's the chap, and how do you know, anyway?"

"I heard it fwom Gore, who had it fwom Fwench, who had it fwom Tag—"

"Bother all that! Who's the chap?"

"You wemembah the stwange case of Kildare's bwothah, who was suspected of stealin' a diamond or somethin', somehow, somewhere. Somebody suspected him of somethin', anyhow, and he dodged into the old wuined castle and hid there. He must have found it extremely uncomfy, and what he did for a change of linen I cannot imagine."

"Perhaps he did without one. I remember that old yarn; it turned out to be Monteith's cousin who did the business, and he went to chokey," said Blake. "He was an awful beastly rotter, for he managed to throw the guilt on to Micky Kildare at first."

"Yaas, wathah! Well, this is the chap. Gore says"

that Fwench told him that Taggles said John the footman heard the wardah say to the Head that it was Convict No. 20 who had escaped, and that he had a relation in the school."

"Oh, I see! That's why they've sent here; they fancy that Ralph Monteith will try to get help from his cousin in the New House!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, that is vewy pwob."

"Monteith's not the sort of chap to go out of his way to help anybody, I fancy," said Herries, with a shake of the head.

"You're right there; the warders needn't be afraid, I think. So it's Ralph Monteith who's dodging in the Castle Wood, is it? Well, I could feel a little pity for most chaps who bolt from prison, but that scoundrel ought to be sent back, and no mistake. It would be a jolly good thing to collar him, and by Jove, it would make the Terrible Two and Figgins & Co. green with envy!"

"That's what I was thinkin'," said D'Arcy. "I thought it was wathah a good ideah, deah boys, and I think it would be awfully beastly jolly, you know, to lay the wascal by the heels."

"We're on," said Blake. "On it like a bird. Hallo, Kildare, what do you want? Have you come to tea?"

Eric Kildare, the big, handsome captain of St. Jim's, looked into the study. He smiled at Blake's remark.

"No," he said, in his cheery tones, "I haven't come to tea. I've come to tell you kids—"

"Us what?"

"You fellows," amended Kildare. "I've come to tell you that the juniors are restricted to the precincts of St. Jim's for the next few days."

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said. The bounds are drawn in, you see, and no one in the Lower School may go outside the limits until further orders."

The chums of the Fourth stared at the captain in dismay.

"My hat!" said Blake. "You're joking, of course."

"Must be," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am not joking. Such are the instructions from headquarters, and you are expected to observe them," said Kildare. "I thought I would speak specially to you three, as you are the leaders of all the mischief in this house—except for Tom Merry."

"You're joking, old fellow. You know what nice quiet chaps we are. I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to oblige you in this matter, Kildare."

The captain shook his finger warningly at Blake.

"Mind what I've told you, you know."

"But what's the reason?"

"Yaas," said D'Arcy. "What's the weason, old fellah?"

"There's an escaped convict lurking in the neighbourhood," explained the captain of St. Jim's. "The prohibition will last till he is captured, which may be a few ours, or a few days."

"Why, I was just thinking—" began D'Arcy.

He got no further, for a Greek lexicon, deftly aimed by Blake, caught him under the chin, and he sat down suddenly on the floor of the study. He jumped up again in a fury.

"You howwid boundah, what did you do that for?"

"Oh, be quiet!" said Blake.

"I wefuse to be quiet. I distinctly wefuse to be assaulted in such an extwemely wuff way without inflictin' a thwashin' upon the assaultah!" said Arthur Augustus.

Kildare grinned.

"Remember what I've told you," he said, going to the door.

"Shut up, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to shut up!"

"You silly ass, I—"

D'Arcy was hugging Blake round the neck, apparently bent upon vengeance, though by his actions he might really have been supposed to be in the act of demonstrating an exuberant affection. Blake ran him against the wall and held him there.

"Are you going to be quiet?"

"Certainly not! No, wathah! I wefuse to be quiet—I distinctly wefuse!"

"Shut the door, Herries!"

Herries slammed the study door.

"Now, ass," said Blake severely, "I shied that book at you, fathead, because you were just going to give the game way, owl! Do you understand, cuckoo? If we let Kildare now that we were going to hunt the convict, lunatic, he would jolly soon stop us, idiot! See, dummy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, restored to peacefulness by the explanation.

"Time you did, owl!" said Blake, releasing him. "Now, kids, what do you think of this giddy prohibition? Are we going to remain quietly inside the walls of this ancient and honourable establishment?"

"We are not!"

"That's the idea. Not, not, not! Carried unanimously. Are we going to hunt the convict?"

"We are!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Now, I think as he's such a despewate chawactah, as D'Arcy puts it, we had better have Tom Merry in the thing—don't you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go and ask him," said Herries.

"No good—losing time," said Blake, nodding. "Come along!"

In two mintues Study No. 6 presented themselves at the door of Tom Merry's study, and Blake announced his presence by a bounding kick.

"Come in, and don't kick the door down!" said a cheerful voice.

The three marched in. Tom Merry and Manners were having tea; in fact, had nearly had it, and they had made a good meal, having come in hungry from their run in the wood.

Blake took a disparaging view of the table, and as there was only some bread and a single sardine left, he decided not to ask himself to tea.

"Hallo, you kids!" said Tom Merry. "What can we do for you?"

"You can address us with pwopah wespect," said D'Arcy. "I have on pwevious occasions stated my stwong objection to bein' weferred to as a kid, Tom Mewwy."

"Any objection to being referred to as an ass?" asked Tom Merry. "If so, I'd better not refer to you at all, because I was brought up to be truthful."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up, Gussy, and listen to your uncle Blake. Tom Merry, we've come here to propose—"

"Oh, this is so sudden!"

"Don't be an ass! We've come here to propose your joining us in a little excursion. It will be jolly fun—"

"Yaas, wathah! Awfully beastly jolly, don't you know, deah boys."

The Terrible Two looked interested.

"Well, we're always ready to help anybody to fix up a little fun," said Tom Merry. "What's the game?"

"There may be a certain amount of risk in it," Blake remarked. "Would that make any difference to you, Merry?"

To which Tom Merry replied with a counter question as to whether Blake had come to that study in quest of a thick ear.

"Very well!" said Blake, grinning. "Now, this is my idea—"

"Oh, wats!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It was my ideah! Blake, I wefuse to allow you to claim the honah of havin' owiginated this ideah!"

"Well, it was Gussy's idea," said Blake. "He naturally doesn't want to be robbed of it, as it is the only one he ever had!"

"Blake, I must weally we remark—"

"Dry up! Now, this is the idea, Tom Merry. Have you heard that there's an escaped convict lurking—Kildare said lurking, didn't he?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Lurking," said Blake, "or dodging, or hiding in the neighbourhood. It doesn't matter which he's doing, but he's got to be stopped."

The Terrible Two exchanged glances.

"I see you've heard about him," said Blake. "Now, the Head, with that ridiculous idea of his that us juniors don't know how to take care of ourselves, has ordered us all to remain within school bounds till the bounder's caught. Isn't that a good reason for catching him as soon as possible?"

"Jolly good reason!"

"Then we have discovered that he is no other than that horrid rascal Ralph Monteith, who tried to send Kildare's brother to chokey."

"That was before I came to St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, "but I've heard the story. The chap was a fearful rotter."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"For all these reasons, we are going to hunt him down and give him up," said Blake, with a look of importance.

"We owe him a oner for old Kildare's sake, you see, and we've got to get that order about the bounds rescinded. Are you chaps willing to take a hand?"

"How are you going to hunt him down if you're kept to school bounds?"

ANSWERS

Blake winked solemnly. "I've heard," he said sagely, "that kids have been known to break bounds. I say I've heard it. Of course, I don't know anything about it myself."

"So you're going to break bounds and start hunting the convict?"

"Well, we couldn't do it by sticking in the school, could we?"

"I suppose not," agreed Tom Merry. "But suppose you get on his track—"

"Oh, we shall get on his track all right."

"And suppose you track him to his lair—"

"We shall manage that."

"Then what are you going to do with him?"

"Capture him, of course."

"Suppose he won't be captured?"

"Oh, that's all rot! Of course we shall be able to capture him! If he won't go quietly, I shall punch his head!" said Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I wish you luck! Good-afternoon!"

"But, I say! Ain't you going to take a hand in the little game?"

"You must excuse us. Good little boys like us couldn't think of breaking bounds. It would lie too heavily on our little consciences."

"Look here, Tom Merry, if you're afraid—"

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"With or without gloves?" he asked, in a casual sort of way.

Blake grinned.

"Pax! I admit you're not afraid; but why don't you come into the game? You're not usually backward in coming forward when there's any fun going."

"We've got our reasons," said Tom. "Sorry, but you must excuse us. Go and ask Figgins & Co."

"So we will!" exclaimed Blake. "I'd rather have you two, for the credit of the School House, because it would make the New House chaps green with envy if we captured a convict."

"I wish we could take a hand," said Tom Merry regretfully; "but it can't be did. Better ask old Figgins."

Blake and his chums, considerably puzzled, quitted the Shell study. Tom Merry and Manners looked at each other mournfully.

"This," said Tom Merry, "is distinctly rotten! Blake will get lots of glory over this job. If they get the convict roped in, and the bounds are enlarged again through Blake, he will be frightfully cocky. But we can't take a hand."

Manners shook his head.

"We couldn't very well, after what Monteith asked us."

"Confound Monteith! He had no right to ask us anything of the kind!" said Tom Merry. "But a promise is a promise. We said we wouldn't say anything about having seen the convict, and it wouldn't be exactly the thing to help hunt him down after that. Yet he's an awful rascal, and ought to be in chokey. No mistake about that! And then, that question about the bounds! Why, they may be weeks before they find the convict, if Monteith helps him, as I suppose he will! And we shall be gated all the time!"

"Beastly!" said Manners.

"Well, it can't be helped!" said Tom Merry, with his usual optimism. "Finished your tea? Let's go down and get some cricket."

CHAPTER 4.

No Takers!

Figgins & Co. and an empty lunch-basket came into the study in the New House, where the famous trio lived and moved and had their being. Figgins plumped the basket down on a chair, and then he snorted.

He had reason to snort.

For there, in the study sacred to the New House chums, were to be seen the forms of Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, the three School House juniors, from Study No. 6, over the way.

Blake was sitting in the only armchair, with his feet on the only hassock, with his head resting on the only cushion, in an attitude of unaffected grace, as a novelist would say.

Herries was sitting on the table, absent-mindedly jabbing a penknife into Fatty Wynn's Robinson Crusoe. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood at the window, looking out at the pigeons, and bestowing a good deal of admiration upon a resplendent new pair of diamond sleeve-links.

"I say!" yawned Blake. "That long-legged freak is a long time coming! Hallo, Figgy!"

The long-legged freak glared at him wrathfully.

"What are you bounders doing here?"

"I'm sitting in the armchair," said Blake. "Herries is

sitting on the table. What are you doing, Aubrey Adolphus?"

"I weally wish you'd not address me in that extremely absurd mannah!"

"And D'Arcy is playing the giddy ox," concluded Blake. "Any more conundrums to ask, old Figgy?"

"No," said Figgy. "Only one: Which way do you prefer to go out—the door or the window?"

"I prefer the door as a rule," said Blake, jumping up and looking warlike. "But on this occasion I prefer the window—if you can put me out!"

"I'll jolly soon do that!" said Figgins.

"Weally—weally, deah boys, we did not come here to quawwel!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Blake, I weally wish you would keep your tempah-bettah! Why don't you explain to Figgins that we have come to make a pwoposal?"

"Pax, old Figgy!" said Blake, holding up his hand. "We came here on business."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

"Yes. You surely don't think we came to this measly hole for nothing? Now, then, don't get your wool off! I mean this palatial mansion of yours. Have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"About a giddy convict lurking—that's the word—lurking in the wood."

"Oh, yes, we know all about that! More than you can tell us, I expect."

"You know a lot, of course," said Blake. "What you know would fill a little book—a very little one. We are going to hunt down the rascal."

"It was my ideah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I thought it would be awfully beastly jolly, you know, to hunt the wascal down."

"Sounds like one of your ideas," agreed Figgins. "Want a microscope to see any sense in it. Do you know who that convict is, Blake?"

"Yes; a relation of your esteemed prefect."

"Yes; and Monteith mayn't like it we if start hunting down his relations," said Figgins.

"Oh, rats! The fellow nearly got Monteith into a fearful fix."

"Still, blood's thicker than water, you know."

"Yes; and some heads are thicker than wood!" growled Blake. "Stands to reason that Monteith would be glad to see the awful bounder safely shut up again. Besides, don't you know that the Lower School are confined to the school boundaries till the warders have succeeded in capturing the convict?"

"Oh, I say! Is that a fact?"

"Honour bright!"

Figgins & Co. looked at each other.

Figgins shook his head.

"It can't be did!" he said. "The chap's a beast, I know, but we can't start hunting down Monteith's family. Can be did! Ask Tom Merry!"

"Asked him, and the bounder suggested asking you."

"Well, we can't come into it! Better go it alone."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "After all, these New House wottahs pwobably wouldn't be of much use!"

"Take that thing away, Blake," said Figgins, pointing to Arthur Augustus, "otherwise, I shall probably kill it!"

"I have a strong objection to bein' alluded to in such a mannah!" said D'Arcy. "I came here with fwiendly intentions; but I am afraid that Figgins's wemark leaves me no alternative but to thwash him!"

Figgins trembled so much that he had to hang on to the shoulder of Fatty Wynn for support. Blake caught the belligerent Gussy by the shoulder and yanked him to the door.

"Come on, Aubrey!"

"I insist upon an apology fwom Figgins befoah I go fwom—"

"Get moving!"

Blake shoved D'Arcy along to the staircase, and ran him down at full speed with a grip on his collar. Arthur Augustus arrived at the bottom in a rather dazed and breathless condition, and not feeling fit to make any further objections.

Figgins & Co. grinned.

"Good wheeze this, hunting the convict!" said Figgins. "I'm sorry we can't take part in it. Blake will never get hold of him. What are you thinking about, Kerr? You're looking as solemn as a moulting owl."

"I'm thinking that Blake will be disappointed if he doesn't catch the convict."

"I dare say he will be, but—"

"So, like kind schoolmates, we ought to help him."

"What?"

"Not that same convict, of course!" exclaimed Kerr. "Any old convict will do! It would be rather a good wheeze to let those clever kids discover a mare's nest."

CHAPTER 5.

In the Dead of the Night—A Good Turn for a Bad One.

Figgy caught on; and Figgy grinned.

"Good idea! We'll put our heads together over that!"

And Figgins & Co. put their heads together, and plotted a plot.

What that plot was, we shall see later.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, in peaceful unconsciousness of the machinations of their deadly rivals—to borrow another expression from the novelists—sauntered away from the New House feeling pretty satisfied with themselves.

"Hallo, there's old Monteith!" said Blake. "I wonder if he knows?"

The head prefect of the New House had just come in at the gates.

He was looking very worried, and decidedly bad-tempered.

The chums glanced at him without any intention of giving offence, for none of them would have dreamed of being guilty of the meanness of twitting even an enemy with a disgrace brought upon him by a relation.

But Monteith was evidently in a bad temper.

"Get out of the way!" he snapped savagely, giving Blake a shove that sent him staggering against Herries, and then to the ground.

"You rotten cad!" rapped out Blake.

Monteith swung round upon him.

"What did you say?"

"I said you were a cad," said Blake defiantly, too angry to care for the fact that he was addressing a prefect, "and I say it again!"

Monteith gripped him by the ear.

"Leggo, you rotter!"

Monteith twisted his ear savagely. Blake struggled, but of course he was a child in the hands of the Sixth-Former. Herries and D'Arcy were rushing to the rescue, careless of consequences, when Kildare's cheery voice broke in:

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Monteith.

Kildare's brow grew stern.

"This is my business," he said. "You have no right to touch a School House boy, Monteith, and you know it. Let Blake alone."

"I shall do as I like."

The captain of St. Jim's stepped towards the prefect, a glint in his eyes.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Monteith. But you've got to let the juniors of the School House alone. You know that as well as I do."

Monteith returned him look for look; but only for a moment. Then, with a sullen scowl, he released Blake, and sent him staggering away.

"Very well," he said savagely. "The brat was cheeky, that was all. You back the juniors up in that."

"I do nothing of the kind. Cut along, you youngsters! I'm sorry to have any words with you now, Monteith."

The prefect's eyes gleamed.

"Why now more than at any other time?" he sneered. "You are alluding, of course, to the fact that my cousin is a convict."

Kildare was silent.

"It is like you to throw it in my teeth!" hissed Monteith. The captain of St. Jim's flushed.

"I would never throw it in your teeth, or any fellow's," he said quietly. "It is your misfortune, and I'm sorry for you, Monteith."

"So you say! Bah, I suppose you are glad enough of this disgrace that has fallen on me. I admit that I deserve nothing at your hands. You are right to make as much as you can of it. I did, when you were under the shadow of shame," said Monteith bitterly. "I don't blame you."

"I'm sorry you should think such hard thoughts of me," said the captain of St. Jim's. "I am only sorry for you, and I wouldn't dream of saying a word about it. But I know it's only this trouble on your mind that makes you quarrelsome, and I don't want to quarrel with you."

And, unheeding the bitter words that leaped in reply from the prefect's lips, Kildare turned and walked away.

"Well," said Blake, rubbing his reddened ear at a safe distance from the prefect, "Monteith is a pleasant sort of a beast, I don't think. Never mind; we'll make him sing small when we run some of his family in, kids. His proper place is over yonder in the prison along with his cousin, in my opinion."

"Yaas wathah!"

And from that moment the chums of Study No. 6 were really on the warpath!

NE!

The stroke boomed out from the clock-tower at St. Jim's. Dark and gloomy was the old quadrangle, dark the shadowy elms, and not from a single window of the dark old buildings gleamed a light.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, opened his door in the dead stillness that followed the boom of the hour. There was no sound in the house. All was dark and silent.

The prefect was very pale in the darkness, and his hand trembled as he stood at the open door listening like a thief in the night. He was fully-dressed. In his hand was a large bag, crammed full of articles destined for the lurking convict in the Castle Wood.

Silently the prefect stepped from the room, and closed the door behind him. He stole down the stairs, shivering at every creak of the wood under his stealthy steps. As head prefect, Monteith had a key to the side door, and he let himself out into the quadrangle without difficulty. Under the shadows of the old elms he stopped to listen again. The quadrangle was ghostly and deserted. Where the shadows of the elms fell it was black, but away from the trees there was a glimmer of starlight.

Keeping in the shadows, Monteith stole away to the spot where the high, ivy-clad wall looked out upon Rylcombe Lane. In this spot many a lad from St. Jim's had broken bounds, climbing the wall by the aid of the ivy, and dropping into the lane on the other side.

It was now the prefect's turn to do what it was his duty to prevent others from doing. Monteith drew a deep breath as he stopped at the foot of the wall. He laid down the bag, and fastened a cord to the handle, so that he could draw it up after him when he reached the top of the wall.

Suddenly he gave a start, and straightened up. A gasp of sudden terror escaped his lips.

"Who—what is that?"

A dim figure loomed up in the darkness. It approached the prefect rapidly. Monteith's first thought was of flight, but he realised that he had been seen, and he stood his ground, his fists clenched hard, his heart beating tumultuously. Was it a master who had caught him in the act of breaking bounds like an irresponsible junior? He trembled.

"You need not run," said a cold voice, "I have caught you."

Monteith drew a gasping breath of relief. It was the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's!

"Kildare!"

The captain gave a start.

"Monteith!"

"Yes."

They stood in silence, staring at each other in the darkness, for some moments. Both faces were pale.

"So you have spied on me," said the prefect at last, in a low tone of concentrated bitterness.

Kildare bit his lip.

"I have not spied upon you. I had not the faintest idea that I should find you here."

"Then what are you doing out of your bed at such an hour?" asked the prefect, with evident incredulity.

"You know what the Head's orders were," said Kildare quietly. "Some fellows of St. Jim's have been breaking bounds, and going down to a public-house at Rylcombe. The Head gave us both instructions, as head prefects of our houses, to look into the matter, and see that it was stopped, without a scandal, if possible."

"I know all that."

"That is the reason why I am here. I know that this is the spot which the young rascals would use to leave the school, and I resolved to keep watch for some nights. This is the third night that I have watched."

"How do you know that I did not make the same resolve?" said Monteith, with a sneer. "Perhaps I am doing sentry work to-night."

"You were about to climb the wall."

"That is your opinion."

"You do not carry a bag with you on sentry work, as you call it, I suppose," said Kildare. "You were about to leave the school, Monteith, and I can only conclude—"

"What do you conclude?"

"That you are one of the fellows the Head told me to look out for."

The prefect set his teeth.

"You think I am going down to the Hare and Hounds in Rylcombe then?"

"What else can I think?"

"Well, you are wrong."

"I should be sorry to believe such a thing of you, Monteith. I would do anything to avoid a scandal—such a

DAILY MAIL

NEXT
THURSDAY.

EXPULSED FROM ST. JIM'S.

A TALE OF
TOM MERRY.

scandal as a head prefect being discovered breaking bounds at night. I should like to believe the best of you."

"Thank you!" said Monteith bitterly.

"If you will give me your word not to leave the school," said Kildare slowly, "I will let this pass, and say no more about it."

"You are very kind."

"Do you agree? I believe I am going further than I have a right to go, as captain of the school, considering the trust the Head reposes in me."

Monteith was silent. Kildare waited a full minute for him to reply.

"Well, what do you say?" he asked. "Will you return to the New House, and give your word not to quit it again to-night?"

"I cannot."

"Monteith! Think! An exposure can only ruin you—you will lose your prefectship, even if you are not expelled from St. Jim's!"

"A thing you would be sorry for, of course."

"Extremely sorry," said the captain quietly. "I had hoped lately, Monteith, that we were getting on better terms, and that the old ill-feeling was dying away. If we are enemies, it shall not be by my fault."

"Leave me alone then—leave me to myself."

"You know that I have my duty to do."

"I must leave the school."

"Do you mean that you have an appointment with someone at this hour?"

"Yes; but it is not as you suppose."

"I have my duty to do; I cannot betray the Head's trust in me. You cannot go, Monteith."

"Do you mean to say that you will prevent me?" demanded the prefect, his breath coming thick and fast.

"Yes."

Monteith gritted his teeth. He was no coward, but he knew that he was not a match for the stalwart captain of St. Jim's. He had faced Kildare in strife before, and had been hopelessly worsted. Besides, a struggle at midnight in the quadrangle would cause a disturbance, and all would be lost. He reflected quickly.

The convict was waiting in the wood; he must go to him to-night. There was nothing for it but to tell Kildare the facts, and throw himself upon the captain's mercy. It was a strange step to take. For when Kildare had been under the shadow of a secret, when his brother under a wrongful suspicion, had been hiding from the police, and Monteith had discovered the secret, he had used it cruelly and mercilessly.

The case was reversed now; and would Kildare prove more generous? Was it to be expected? It was Monteith's only chance.

"Kildare!" The prefect's voice was low and husky. "You don't understand! I must go! Listen to me! Do you remember the time when your brother was a fugitive from justice—when he was hiding from the police in the ruined castle, and you went there to help him?"

Kildare started.

"Yes, I am not likely to forget."

"You know that when his innocence was proved, my cousin Ralph went to prison for the crime. You know that Ralph Monteith has escaped from the prison."

Again the captain of St. Jim's started.

"And what of that?"

"To-day," said Monteith huskily, "I met him in the wood."

"You met him?"

"Yes; and he asked me to help him."

"Good heavens!"

"You stood by your brother when all the world was against him. Can you blame me for standing by one of my own blood?"

Kildare was silent. He knew that the cases were very different. Micky Kildare had been innocent, and Ralph Monteith was guilty. Yet, even if Micky had been guilty, would he have deserted him? It was a painful question.

"I'm going to meet him, to take him the things he needs to escape," said Monteith hurriedly. "I throw myself on your mercy, Kildare. Yes; I know what use I made of your secret when I discovered it. I acted like a cad. I was a cad. I have no right to expect anything but retaliation from you. Yet—"

"I have no desire to retaliate," said Kildare quietly. "But have you reflected, Monteith—this man is a rascal, and nearly got you into a fearful fix, and he fully deserves his punishment; and it is a punishable offence to help a convict to escape? You did not think of that?"

The captain of St. Jim's was silent again. His generous heart was full of compassion for the prefect, and he was far from harbouring any thought of revenge for a past injury.

"You know now," said the prefect, "why I am going out. It is not for the purpose that you supposed, and it is not your duty to stop me. Kildare, I make an appeal to you—as I never dreamed once that I should ever do! Let me go—keep silent, and let me help that wretch to escape. I cannot let him go back to prison! Help me in this, and I shall never forget it!"

"He does not deserve—"

"I have promised."

"You have promised to help him?"

"Yes!"

"That alters the case. I consider you are rash; but I know how you feel about the matter. I will not stand in your way. I hope that I am not doing wrong. You can go."

"Thank you!" said the prefect huskily. "I sha'n't forget this, Kildare."

The captain nodded, and turning, disappeared into the darkness. A minute more, and Monteith was over the wall, and speeding along the dark lane towards the wood.

CHAPTER 6.

How Figgins & Co. Plotted a Plot, and the Terrible Two Counter-Plotted a Counter-Plot.

TOM MERRY gave a soft whistle. It was morning at St. Jim's—a sunny summer's morning, and school being over, the hero of the Shell was strolling in the quadrangle with his hands in his pockets. Tom Merry was feeling very unoccupied. Blake and his chums were busy with planning their convict hunt, and Tom was extremely exasperated not to be able to join in it. His promise to Monteith, given the day before, weighed on his mind. He felt that it would relieve him a little to have a row with the New House Juniors, and so he had strolled over towards the rival side.

Then he caught sight of Kerr. As a rule there was nothing remarkable in the appearance of the Scottish partner in the famous firm of Figgins & Co.; but just now Kerr's conduct was suspicious. He had a brown paper parcel in his hand, and he was stealing quietly into the wood-shed; and as he went in he gave a cautious glance round. He did not see Tom, who happened to be on the other side of a big elm, behind which he quickly dodged as he saw Kerr looking round. Then Kerr disappeared into the wood-shed. Tom Merry grinned. That something was on, was evident from Kerr's mysterious manner, and it did not take the School House hero long to decide that he was going to know what it was.

He remained in ambush behind the elm, keeping watch, and was not surprised a few minutes later to see Fatty Wynn coming quietly down to the shed. Fatty also glanced round before going in. Then he disappeared after Kerr. A minute or two later came the great Figgins himself.

Figgins, like the Co., looked round before entering, and the last of the great firm being in the shed, Tom Merry judged that the meeting was complete. He left his ambush, and stole quietly towards the shed. He knew that building well enough, and in a minute or two was behind it, concealed from casual observation, with his eye glued to a crack that gave him a full view of the interior.

Tom Merry looked in with considerable interest. Kerr was unfastening his brown-paper parcel, and Figgins and Wynn were watching him. Tom Merry watched, too, to see what would come to light.

"Got 'em all right?" asked Figgins.

"Yes; I think they are A1," remarked Kerr. "Look!"

Tom Merry started as he saw what Kerr extracted from the parcel, and held up for general inspection. It was a suit of clothes, such as convicts wear, marked with the Government broad arrows, and not in a very cleanly condition.

"Jolly good!" said Figgins. "When Tom Merry is rigged out in that little lot, the convict-hunters from the School House will capture a prize."

The Co. chuckled. Tom Merry was astounded for a moment. Then a broad grin came over his merry face. He understood the wheeze which Figgins & Co. had planned, and he looked on with interest to learn some details of it.

"I've got the cap, and the boots also," said Kerr. "The whole rig-out's complete. I've agreed to pay ten bob for the hire of the things, and to return 'em undamaged. They're wanted for a fancy-dress ball next week; old Phillips told me."

"They may get damaged a bit," said Figgins. "Never mind; ten bob is a good figure. But I don't grudge it for this wheeze."

"Rather not!"

"Have you got the make-up, and all that? It's no good



The flare of the match revealed that the affair was no hoax. There on the floor, bound hand and foot, lay a fearful-looking ruffian, in the garb of a convict. (See page 12.)

passing off Tom Merry as a giddy convict without disguising his mug a little."

"I've got it all here. We shall have to fix this gag in his mouth, so that he can't explain, and tie his hands behind his back. Then I'll make up his face, and fix a false moustache on, and blue his chin to make him look as if he wants shaving. It will be pretty dusky here, and he'll pass all right."

"Good! Better get those things hidden here somewhere, we shall want them on the spot when we capture the School House bounder."

"I'm going to shove them under that pile of wood," said Kerr. "Everything's here—the make-up, the rope, and the gag; the clothes, boots, and cap, and some old clothes for padding him out to the size of the suit. It's a man's suit, you see, and will be a bit loose on him."

"I'm sure it will work," said Figgins, rubbing his hands. "If only the beastly convict isn't captured before we have time to work it. I hear that the police have drawn a cordon about the Castle wood, and that the giddy convict can't possibly escape them now. It's only a question of time before he is caught."

"Well, if he's caught to-day, we sha'n't get the news here," said Kerr. "Blake will make his big capture this evening."

"But how are you going to fix it?" asked Fatty Wynn. "That will want a bit of thinking out," said Figgins reflectively. "We've got to get Tom Merry here alone, some-

how, without that other bounder, Manners. When he's here we collar him, and the trick is done. Then we let out, accidentally, before Blake, that we've captured the convict, and are going for the police. If I know anything about Blake, he'll raid the wood-shed, and carry off our prisoner for himself. That's the game. But how to get Tom Merry here; that's the question."

The Co. looked thoughtful.

"Ask him to come and look at a dog," said Kerr, at last. "He'll come right enough, and we two will be hidden here ready to jump on his neck."

"Good wheeze!" agreed Figgins. "You two can hide here some time beforehand, so that no suspicion can be raised, and I'll undertake to get Tom Merry on the spot. It seems to me that it will be all plain sailing. We'll work the wheeze after tea."

"That's settled then."

"Shove those things well out of sight, Kerr. We don't want 'em lifted by any chap who happens to come into the shed."

"That's all right."

"I'll tip Taggles a bob to see that we're not interrupted. He'll be jolly glad of a chance to help us to take Tom Merry and Blake down a peg or two. That's settled, kids, so come on. We don't want to be found here."

Kerr's invaluable parcel having been carefully concealed, the three New House juniors quitted the wood-shed, chuckling over their plot. Tom Merry was also chuckling, but

silently. But for a stroke of luck, he would certainly have been taken by surprise that evening by Figgins & Co., and would have figured in the most ridiculous sense imaginable, and the New House would have had the laugh of both parties in the School House; the Terrible Two, and Study No. 6 coming in for equal shares of ridicule.

But it had already occurred to Tom Merry's active brain that forewarned is forearmed, and that it would be possible to turn the tables upon Figgins & Co. He waited till the New House trio were well off the scene, and then stole from his hiding place, and made a bee-line for the School House. Manners was in the study, and Tom Merry astounded him by rushing in like a whirlwind, seizing him round the neck, and executing an impromptu war-dance round the table with him.

"What's the row?" yelled Manners, struggling. "Gone off your rocker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme go!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo! Are you off your dot? Lemme go, fathead!"

Tom Merry let him go, so suddenly, that he sat down on the carpet.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners picked himself up.

"Now, what's the matter, you howling lunatic?"

"The joke of the season! Ha, ha, ha! Listen, and I will a tale unfold, whose lightest word shall harrow—"

"Dry up; amateur theatricals are off!"

"Right-ho! Well, shut the door, and your head, and listen. You know that Study No. 6 are going on a convict hunt? Good! Well, Figgins & Co. are going to capture a convict, and leave him in the wood-shed for Blake to sneak away from them. They've got a rig-out from the costumier's in Rylcombe, and they're going to capture a chap to stick into it—whom do you think?"

Manners looked keenly interested.

"Blessed if I know!"

"Me!" said Tom Merry. "Me! I! Ego! Moi!"

"You! How the dickens do you know?"

"I heard 'em plotting the plot, planning the plan, and scheming the scheme. I am to be made up as the convict, bound and gagged, and left till called for, so to speak."

"Jolly good wheeze; but as you've got wind of it it won't work."

"Yes, it will; it will work like a charm."

"You don't mean to say that you're going to—"

"Peace, child, and hearken. Figgins is going to lure me to the wood-shed with a tale of a dog—"

"The tail of a dog! What on earth has the tail of a dog got to do with it?"

"Fathead! T-a-l-e of a dog—a dog he wants to see!"

"See? Yes; I see—see!"

"Kerr and Fatty Wynn are going to be ambushed there, and they'll seize me, and the wheeze is worked. But I have thought of an improvement on the plan."

"Ha, ha! I think I can guess what it is."

"We are going to turn the tables on old Figgy. Blake will capture his convict, but it will turn out to be a long-legged specimen from the New House, instead of yours truly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hullo there! What's all this cackling about?"

Blake looked into the study and asked the question. He stared at the chums of the Shell in amazement.

"Nothing," said Tom Merry. "We were discussing your convict-hunt, that's all."

"Oh, were you?" said Blake, reddening. "Nothing to cackle about in that, that I can see."

"That's all you know. Have you caught any convicts yet?"

"Not yet."

"But you're going to, of course?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Yes, we're going to. You'll see."

"You'll have to keep an eye on Figgins, then?"

Blake stared.

"Figgins refused to join in the game," he said.

"That's because he's going in for convict-capturing himself."

"Is he?" said Blake, looking warlike. "If he starts capturing any of my convicts there will be ructions."

"Well, I've given you the tip. Suppose he captures the bounder—"

"Then he'll get a thick ear, that's all. I'm not going to have my good ideas boned in this way by a New House outsider," said Blake wrathfully.

"My ideah, you mean, Blake, weally!" came a voice from the passage.

"Oh, you dry up, Aubrey!"

"I wefuse to dwy up when I hear any person claimin'

my ideahs as his own!" replied Arthur Augustus. "It is bettah to stick to the twuth."

"Oh, travel along!" said Blake. "I'll remember what you've told me, Tom Merry. Let Figgins try to capture my convict, that's all!"

And Blake departed, looking extremely fierce. The Terrible Two roared with laughter.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "This looks like being the wheeze of the season, and no mistake. Blake means business, and he is certain to capture somebody or other. I only hope that he will be pleased with his capture."

CHAPTER 7.

Caught in His Own Trap.

DUSK was falling on the old school when Figgins & Co. came cautiously towards the wood-shed and slipped inside. There was no one near at hand to see them, but Figgins was always cautious.

The New House trio looked keenly round the little building, the interior of which was very shadowy. All was silent and still. At that hour no one was likely to come there, but Taggles, and Taggles had been bribed by Figgins to keep away.

"All serene!" said Figgins. "Now get out of sight, you two kids, while I go and lure his high-mightiness Tom Merry into the giddy trap."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr. "Mind you don't bring Manners along with him. Those two fellows are always sticking together."

"Oh, that's all right! I heard Manners say that he was going into the gym, so Tom Merry is pretty certain to be alone in his study."

"Good luck!"

"Buck up, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn. "We shall be anxious."

"I may be a little time; I can't let Tom Merry smell a rat by hurrying," said Figgins. "He may not be in the study, either, or he may be doing an impot. Just you wait here till I come back, and be ready to jump on his neck."

And the great Figgins quitted the wood-shed. Kerr and Wynn lost no time in selecting their ambush. In a recess behind a great heap of faggots they drew into the shadows and waited. They did not see two heads emerge from behind a pile of wood, and did not guess that two keen pairs of eyes were watching every movement they made.

They were watching the door, waiting for Figgy's return, and never dreaming of peril behind them. But peril undreamt of was very close at hand.

Suddenly, without a sound to warn them, two forms leaped upon them, and they were borne to the ground in a twinkling. Kerr gave a startled yell, which was choked by his face flattening into the ground. Fatty Wynn could only gasp.

"Got them!" said a well-known voice.

Kerr wriggled with rage.

"Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Caught!" said Manners, who was pinning down Fatty Wynn. "Caught!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Yes, so I will, presently."

Kerr struggled desperately. He realised that the "wheeze" must have become known to the Terrible Two, and that they had preceded their foes in the wood-shed, and waited in ambush for the arrival of Figgins & Co. But Kerr struggled in vain. Tom Merry held him down with a grip of iron, and Kerr, lying face downwards, was at too great a disadvantage, with Tom sitting on his back, to put up much of a struggle. He was desperate, but he was helpless.

"Let me go, you rotter!"

"Rats!" said Tom cheerfully.

"Figgins will be back in a minute, and—"

"No, he won't! Figgy is gone to speak to me in my study, and he won't be back till he's seen me," said Tom, with a chuckle.

Kerr gasped.

"What are you going to do?"

"Make you prisoners. Now, if you struggle you will very likely get hurt. I want your hands, please, to tie up."

Kerr opened his mouth to yell, in the faint hope that some of his comrades of the New House might hear him, but Tom promptly pressed on the back of his head, and the yell was choked off against the floor.

"Better keep quiet," said Tom Merry, with the tone of one giving friendly advice. "That can't be improving your nose, you know."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Is that a new language you talk in the New House?"

"Woorooo-g-g-g-r-r-r!"

"Blessed if I know what you're talking about! Anyway, I want your hands."

Tom Merry had drawn a looped cord from his pocket. He drew Kerr's hands up behind the helpless New House junior, and fastened the wrists together firmly. Then he turned round, and, still sitting on Kerr, bound his legs together with a liberal allowance of rope.

"Now for the gag."

He rolled Kerr over on his back.

"Don't you dare to—g-r-r-r-r!"

Kerr's protest died away as the handkerchief was thrust into his mouth, and Tom Merry proceeded to fasten it there with a cord passing round the back of his head.

"I dare say this is a little bit uncomfy," Tom remarked; "but you can't very well grumble, kids, as you intended the same thing for me."

"He can't grumble with that gag in his mouth, anyway," said Manners.

"Ha, ha, no! Now let's fasten up Falstaff."

Manners had held Fatty Wynn pinned down while Kerr was being disposed of. Between them the Terrible Two now soon had Fatty served the same as his fellow-member of the Co.

"Good!" said Tom Merry, surveying his prisoners with much satisfaction. "It is really lucky that Figgins sported a bob in keeping Taggles away. Now we sha'n't be interrupted."

Manners chuckled gleefully.

"Let's get along with 'em!"

Adjoining the wood-shed, with a brick wall between, was a shed where Taggles kept spades and other tools he used in his gardening work. It did not take the Terrible Two long to drag their prisoners into that building, and they were laid on the floor. To make assurance doubly sure, Tom fastened them both with a cord to a wheelbarrow. Then the Terrible Two locked the door on them, and returned to the wood-shed. Tom Merry chuckled hugely.

"Now, we've got rid of the Co.," he remarked, "it's time to deal with old Figgins. Get into ambush, Manners, old son! When I come in here with Figgy, instead of the Co. jumping on my neck, as he expects, you'll jump on Figgy's. That's the programme. It will probably be a bit of a surprise for Figgy; but life is full of surprises."

And Tom Merry quitted the wood-shed, leaving Manners in ambush. He strolled into the gym, and then went to the School House and ascended to his study. The light was on, and Figgins was sitting on his table, waiting impatiently. He looked at Tom as he came in, and Tom looked at him.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry.

"Glad you've come!" growled Figgins. "Where have you been?"

"I've just come from the gym," said Tom, with perfect ruth.

"Oh! Well, I want to speak to you."

"Speak away, Figgy! I'm listening."

"Would you like to see a dog—such a funny little ritter?" said Figgins. Figgins, like Tom, was a stickler for the truth, and he was careful not to say that he had a dog to show. He simply asked Tom Merry if he would like to see one, which, of course, was quite a different matter.

But he found the hero of the Shell in a singularly un-aspicious mood.

"That I would," said Tom.

"Will you come down to the wood-shed with me?"

"Rather!"

Figgins grinned to himself as he slid off the table. He was in luck; he had not expected Tom Merry to fall into the trap so easily as this.

"Come on, then," he said briskly.

"Right you are!"

And the two juniors went downstairs together, and out to the quadrangle.

"Race you to the wood-shed?" said Figgins.

"Right-ho!"

Again Figgins grinned. This was a cute device to get out of any awkward questions about the dog on the way, and again Tom Merry had fallen blindly into the trap. They raced to the wood-shed, and Tom was there first. He lepped inside and uttered an exclamation.

"It's all dark here, Figgy!"

Figgins followed him in.

"So it is, but we'll have a light soon."

"Where's the dog?"

"There isn't any dog, kid! I never said there was. Here's a donkey, though, and his name is Tom Merry!"

And Figgins gripped hold of Tom Merry.

Tom returned grip for grip, and they struggled. Tom

was fully a match even for the great Figgins, and the result of that tussle would have been very doubtful had no one been at hand to interfere. But there was a footstep in the darkness, and Figgins had no doubt that the loyal Co. were there to back him up.

"Come on!" he gasped. "The beast's as strong as a horse!"

The unseen individual came on and laid a strong grasp on Figgins. The chief of the famous firm of Figgins & Co. gave a yell.

"You've got hold of me, ass! Collar Tom Merry!"

"Not this time," said the voice of Manners.

Figgins jumped.

"Manners! Where's the Co.? I say, Kerr! Wynn! Rescue!"

But there was no rescue at hand for the trapped Figgins. Down he went to the floor, with Tom Merry on top of him, and Manners clutching at him, and in a minute he was panting, a helpless prisoner, under the grasp of the Terrible Two.

"Quick, Manners! The rope!"

Figgins tried to yell.

But Tom Merry's hand was over his mouth in a twinkling.

He gurgled and gasped and struggled, but he was powerless, and in a few minutes Manners had tied his hands and feet.

Then the gag was placed in his mouth and neatly tied there.

"Feel all right, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Very well! As you don't answer, I suppose you're all serene. Get a glim, Manners!"

"Here you are!"

Manners lighted a bicycle lantern. The door of the shed was carefully closed, to keep the light hidden. There was a shutter over the window, so hardly a gleam could escape that way. The light glimmered on Figgins's furious face. He was watching the Terrible Two with a painful interest, and his eyes nearly bulged from his head when he saw Tom Merry drag Kerr's precious parcel from its place of concealment.

A foreboding of what was to come struck him now.

Tom opened the parcel and pulled out the prison clothes. He grinned as he sorted them out.

"Now, Figgy, are you ready?"

Figgins made no reply, for an excellent reason.

"We happen to have tumbled to your little game, Figgy," Tom Merry condescended to explain. "We're going to rig you up as a convict for Blake to capture."

Figgins wriggled convulsively.

"The Co. are tied up in the gardener's shed, and they can't rescue you. We've got you in a cleft stick. It's what you planned for me, so you've got nothing to complain about—have you, now?"

Figgins glared.

"Now, we're going to dress you, and you may get hurt if you struggle. That's a warning! If you are quiet, we'll treat you like the apple of our eye. His legs first, Manners."

Figgins's legs were untied. He began to kick violently; but each of the School House juniors clung to a leg, and he was helpless. His boots were taken off, and then the convict's knickers were slipped on him over his trousers, which were rolled up over his knees. The knickers secured, the barred stockings were placed on him and padded out to look fatter, Figgins's calves being of the slimmest. The boots provided by Kerr were next placed on his feet, and then his ankles were firmly tied together again.

Figgins looked as if he would explode with wrath, but he was perforce silent. He could only summon what philosophy he could muster, and be as patient as possible.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "The lower half of you, Figgy, looks a fearful ruffian! Untie his arms, Manners, old man."

Figgins prepared for a desperate struggle.

But the Terrible Two were too many for him. His arms were unfastened; but he hadn't much chance to hit out. The hideous convict's garments were forced upon him and secured, and then his arms were fastened again down to his sides.

Tom Merry began to prepare the make-up. During a recent period of amateur theatricals at St. Jim's, Tom had learned a great deal of the art of making up, and now he did his work almost as artistically as Kerr could have done it.

Figgins squirmed in vain.

His complexion was turned to a deep red, and a blue, unshaven appearance was imparted to his cheeks and chin.

His nose was reddened, his eyebrows darkened, and a thick false moustache gummed securely to his upper lip.

Tom Merry was startled himself by the change these artistic touches wrought in the aspect of the great Figgins.

Figgy was transformed into a fearful-looking ruffian, whom any peaceful person would have avoided in a lonely place.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Manners. "Is that really Figgy, or is it Bill Sykes? Figgy, is it really you, old man?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Jam that gag in a little tighter!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Now, I think that will do!" said Tom Merry. "Douse the glim! Now for the capture! Good-bye, Bluebell! You won't have to remain there long, Blake and Study No. 6 are coming to deliver you up to justice, you hardened ruffian!"

And the Terrible Two quitted the wood-shed.

Figgins heard a chuckle die away, a door close.

He was alone!

Alone, to wait for the coming of his old rivals—Study No. 6! He wriggled and squirmed in the gloom, but he could not wriggle or squirm himself loose. Figgins was fairly caught in his own trap this time!

CHAPTER 8.

A Brilliant Capture.

"WEALLY, Blake, I think we ought to be doin' some-
thin' or othah, don't you know!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who made that sage remark.

The chums were in the school tuckshop, and Blake had expended the sum of ninepence in tarts, which the three had just finished consuming.

It was then that Arthur Augustus delivered himself of the opinion stated above.

Blake looked at him.

"What do you want to do, Gussy?"

Blake was leaning against the doorpost. The door was half open, and he could hear a murmur of voices in the passage, but was not paying any attention to it.

"Well, we ought to be huntin' that convict, you know! What's the good of formin' a plan and then doin' nothin' to carry it out, deah boy?"

"Not much good, certainly. What's your idea?"

"Suppose we bweak bounds to-night and go and hunt the boundah!"

"No good!" said Herries. "Don't you know the police have drawn a cordon right round the wood, where he's supposed to be, from the old castle to Rylcombe Lane. We couldn't even get into the wood without being stopped."

"He may not be in the wood at all."

"Where do you think he might be?"

"Anywhah!" said D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy and Mannahs will have the laugh of us if we don't hunt that despewate chawacah afteh all! Yaas, wathah!"

Blake nodded.

"I've been trying to think out a plan," he said. "I—"

He suddenly stopped.

His chums stared at him in surprise.

"Well—" began Herries.

Blake made him a sign to be silent.

Herries and D'Arcy were amazed, but they were obedient. They watched Blake, and Blake's eyes were blazing with sudden excitement.

For, as he stood there, leaning against the doorpost, through the crack of the door had come the clear words from the passage, distinctly audible:

"Figgins has done Study No. 6 this time!"

And Blake jumped.

It was the voice of Tom Merry!

"You're sure, Tom?" said the familiar tones of Manners.

"Rather! I went down to the wood-shed with Figgy.

Blake saw us go, but he never guessed what was in the wind."

"Ha, ha!"

"The question is: Ought we to tell Blake?"

"No; we've no right to give Figgy away!"

"Well, you see, it was Study No. Six's idea to capture the convict, and the prisoner in the wood-shed really belongs to them by rights."

"Yes; but if Figgins and Co. had the trouble of capturing him, they ought to have the glory. Blake shouldn't be so awfully slow!"

"Well, that's right! He is slow, and no mistake! Fancy him not guessing that the convict would come here for Monteith to hide him!"

"Figgins must have guessed it."

"Of course! Figgy is sharp! He will crow over Blake! Quite right, too! Study No. Six are out of it this time, and no mistake!"

"I suppose we ought to keep it dark. It wouldn't be fair

for Figgins and Co. to find their prisoner gone when they come back with the trap to take him to the station."

"Certainly not! We won't say a word. Besides, Figgy relies upon us."

"Then mum's the word!"

The voices moved on. The Terrible Two passed on up the passage. Blake was quivering from head to foot with excitement.

His chums had heard Tom Merry's voice, but not his words. They stared at Blake in amazement and inquiry.

"Do you catch on?" breathed Blake. "Figgins and Co. have caught the convict. He came here for Monteith to hide him, and they have caught him and fastened him up in the wood-shed, while they're gone to Rylcombe to fetch a trap to take him to the station."

"Great Scott!"

"They won't find him when they come back!" said Blake determinedly. "We're not going to be robbed of our glory in this barefaced way!"

"We'll collar the beastly convict!" ejaculated Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose there's no hoax about it, Blake."

"We'll soon see by looking in the wood-shed."

"Good! That's easy enough!"

"Come along! We're not going to let the grass grow under our feet. Who'd ever have dreamed that the fellow would have the awful nerve to come here to hide! Figgins and Co. ought to have told us! They have no right to collar our convict!"

"I should wathah think not!"

"He's ours! We had the idea first!"

"Excuse me, Blake, but weally it was my ideah!"

"Dry up! It was our idea, and in the innocence of our hearts we told Figgins. Now he's boned the idea and collared our convict! It's mean!"

"It's not playing the game!" said Herries.

"No; that it isn't! Let him fetch his trap! He won't find any convict there when he gets back, that's all. That convict is ours."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll just look into the wood-shed to make sure that all is serene, and then we'll collar the prisoner and walk him off!"

"What shall we do with him?"

"Take him to Rylcombe and give him up to the police, of course! It will make a bit of a sensation."

"How shall we get the boundah to go to Rylcombe?"

"By Jove! I've got a good idea! We'll have Taggles's trap. We'll tell him what it's for, so he's certain to lend it us. You see, we can't risk losing the convict, or there's all our glory gone. If we tried to walk him to Rylcombe, some silly bobby would see him, and take him away from us, and make out he had captured him. If we gave him up here at St. Jim's, the masters would take charge of the whole matter, and we should be left right out in the cold. You may be sure of that!"

"Yaas, wathah! They wouldn't give us the pwopah cweedit."

"Besides, Figgins and Co. would claim him as their prisoner."

"They've got cheek enough for anythin', those boundahs!"

"So we'll make all secure by taking him to Rylcombe ourselves. We shall have to square Taggles with a few bob. Gussy can stand that, as he's rolling in wealth, and it's his idea. Gussy can square Taggles."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then!"

The chums of Study No. 6 speedily reached the wood-shed. Blake cautiously opened the door, and peeped within. He heard a faint sound as of a body wriggling on the ground. He struck a match. Then he gave quite a jump, and his chums behind him jumped too.

The flare of the match revealed that the affair was no hoax. There, on the floor, bound hand and foot, lay a fearful-looking ruffian, in the garb of a convict. The match went out. Blake withdrew from the wood-shed and closed the door. He was shaking with excitement.

"You saw him, kids?"

"I saw him," said Herries, with a shiver. "What a horrible-looking brute!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He doesn't look like a prize-beauty, I know," said Blake.

"They've fastened him up safe, and they seemed to have gagged him. They were afraid that if he made a noise we should be on the track. It's all plain-sailing now, kids. Gussy, go and negotiate with Taggles. It doesn't matter how much you have to give him, we must have the trap."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Give him all you've got, and promise him your next week's allowance, anything you like," said Blake generously.

"Only get the trap, and make him keep the gates open till we've gone. Cut off, and be quick!"

"I will wun all the way!"

And the swell of the School House cut off. Blake and Herries remained near the wood-shed. They were on guard, fully determined that if Figgins & Co. appeared there should be a desperate fight for the possession of the convict. Two forms loomed up in the gloom.

"Hallo, Blake! Hallo, Herries!"

"Hallo, Tom Merry!"

"What are you kids hanging about here for?"

"Mind your own business!" said Blake, his temper ruffled by the epithet "kid." "Don't ask any questions, and we won't tell you any fibs! Get moving!"

"But—"

"Oh, travel! Your face worries me!"

"Where's Adolphus?"

"I dare say he's attending to his own affairs somewhere."

"Look here—"

"Shan't! Rats! Are you looking for trouble? If you're not, you'd better get along before you find some."

"Oh, keep your wool on, Blake," said Tom Merry.

"How touchy you are this evening!"

"Are you going along?"

"Yes; certainly!"

"Then do so!"

The Terrible Two strolled on. They passed behind the angle of a building, and then they stopped, and leaned against a wall, and gasped with silent laughter.

"It works—it works!" murmured Tom Merry. "Blake and Herries are on sentry duty over the wood-shed! Ha, ha!"

"I wonder where Gussy is?"

"Perhaps they're waiting for him before they bring the prisoner out. Oh, my hat! There is some fun in store!"

And the Terrible Two, with shaking sides, strolled onward. Blake was looking after them in the gloom.

"I believe those bounders suspect something!" he growled. "They'd better not try to get our convict away, that's all!"

"Hallo, here's D'Arcy!"

The swell of St. Jim's returned breathless.

"It's all wight!" he gasped. "Taggles has agweed. He began to laugh when I asked him for the twap to take the convict to Wylcombe; I don't know why."

"Perhaps it was your face," suggested Blake politely.

"Go on!"

"That is an extremely wude wemark—"

"Oh, go on!"

"I wefuse to go on till you have apoligised for that wude wemark!"

"Ass! Fathead! Minutes are precious!"

"If minutes were as pwecious as gold, Blake, I should wefuse to be addressed in that wuff and wude mannah. Unless you apologise I will take no furthah part in the mattah!"

"Idiot! Imbecile! Owl!"

"I am waitin' for your apology, deah boy. I wefuse to weconsidah my decision."

"Ass! Lunatic!"

"You are gwowin' wudah and wudah, and unless you immediately withdwaw those expwessions I shall have no alternative but to leave you, and cease to wegard you as a fwiend."

"Gussy," said Blake, breathing hard, "if you're found suddenly dead some time you'll know the reason—I mean your relations will know the reason."

"I have not yet weceived my apology."

"Don't argue, Blake; he'll keep at that all night," said Herries. "There's no time to lose. Figgins & Co. may be here any minute."

"Look here, Aubrey—"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort till I have weceived my apology."

"I withdraw all those expressions, and trust that you will allow our friendship to resume its former footing," said Blake solemnly.

"I am satisfied, Blake, and I wegard you as a fwiend," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, to wesome what I was telling you—Taggles has agweed. He is puttin' the pony in the twap for a considewation of a sovereign, which I have given him."

"The horrid old extortioner!"

"He says he may get into a wow with the Head."

"I hope he will, the horrid Shylock."

"It is all wight. I had a fivah fwom my governah yesterday, and I am wolling in tin," said D'Arcy. "It is all wight. The twap would be weady in a few minutes, Taggles said, and we've only got to get the pwisonah to it."

"Taggles might come and lend us a hand."

"No, he won't! I asked him, and he said he couldn't have a hand in the mattah at all. He's afwaid of the wuffian, I suppose."

"Well, we can do without his help. Hallo, there's the trap ready outside his lodge. I can see the lights. Let's get the convict."

The trap was waiting. Blake was a good driver, and had frequently driven Taggles' trap, so the old fellow was not afraid to trust him with the pony. And the loan of the trap for an hour was a very easy way of earning a sovereign.

The three juniors re-entered the wood-shed. They came out again with their prisoner in their midst. Between the three of them he was easily carried, specially as his weight was nothing like what one would have expected from his size.

He struggled a little, but they took no notice of that. No one was about, and in a few minutes he was plumped into a trap, and a cloth thrown over him, and Blake unhitched the pony, and led it out into the road. Then he mounted into the trap and gathered up the reins. Herries and D'Arcy sat close to the prisoner, holding him, in case of any desperate attempt on the convict's part to throw himself out of the trap.

Blake cracked the whip, and the trap went bowling along the lane in the early summer evening bound for the police-station at Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 9.

After the Capture.

"MY hat!"

Tom Merry uttered the exclamation suddenly.

"What's the matter?" asked Manners.

"Did you see the trap go out? I believe— My only pyjama hat!"

Tom Merry did not stop to finish, but ran quickly down to the gates. Taggles was looking out of his door, and he gave a gasp at the sight of Tom Merry.

"I say, old Taggles!"

"Master Merry!"

"Do you think I'm a ghost, fathead? What's the matter with you?"

"Master Merry!"

"You ass! Who's gone off in that trap?"

"I thought it was—was you the young rascals had there!" gasped Mr. Taggles. "I—I—"

"Ha, ha! Do you mean Blake's prisoner? So you knew all about the little game?"

"I—I—no—"

"Don't prevaricate, Taggles! I see you knew the game from start to finish, and you let those kids from Study No. 6 carry out their wicked plot because you thought it was up against me!" exclaimed Tom Merry severely.

"I—I—"

"I'm ashamed of you Taggles! If you go on like this I sha'n't remember you in my will, and then what will you do for an old age pension?" demanded Tom Merry.

Taggles recovered himself.

"Who was it they had in the trap?" he gasped. "I know they thought it was the convict, but—"

"But you thought it was I."

"Never you mind, Master Merry. That's telling. Master D'Arcy says to me, says he, 'We've captured the escaped convict within the precincts of St. Jim's,' says he. 'Will you lend us your trap,' says he, 'to take him to the pleece-station?' says he; and I did it like an honest man, and if there's any rows, that's my story."

"And a wicked story it is," said Tom Merry. "I suppose they tipped you pretty liberally, you horrid old sinner, and you were willing to wink your wicked old eye at a ghastly plot against a nice young man like me."

"But I wonder—"

"You needn't wonder any more. It's Figgins they had in the trap."

"Figgins!" gasped Taggles.

"Yes; we found out the wheeze, you see, and turned the tables on Figgins. But I never thought those kids would take him out of the school! My hat! I thought they'd march him into the School House, and give him up to the house-master to be sent away, and then the joke would come out."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. "Fancy old Figgy being given up at the station as a desperate criminal!"

"I say, we must stop it!" gasped Tom. "Go and get our bikes out, Manners, while I let the Co. loose."

"Right-ho!"

Manners shot off, while Tom Merry proceeded with equal speed to the gardening-shed, where the unhappy Co. languished in durance vile. Tom soon released them by the light of a match.

"Pax, kids!" he exclaimed. "We've got to rescue old Figgy!"

The Co. were looking extremely inclined to go for the School House junior, but Tom Merry's words made them refrain.

CHAPTER 10.

A Startling Revelation.

"What's the matter with Figgins?"
Tom explained. The Co. gasped in amazement.
"And has that ass Blake really carried him off from the school?" exclaimed Kerr.
"Yes; in Taggles's trap!"
"Poor old Figgy!"
"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose that's what they would have done if the wheeze had worked as you intended, and I had been the giddy prisoner."
"You made him up as a convict?"
"Yes; and he looks a frightful character!"
"Ha, ha! Poor old Figgy! It is up against him this time and no mistake!" gurgled Fatty Wynn. "Well, he can't grumble, it's his own wheeze, only it's worked out a little wrongly."
"I'm going to have a try to save him!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you coming?"
"Yes; but we can't get out. It's locking-up time."
"If Taggles dares to close the gates we'll snatch him bald-headed. But he won't. He would get into a row if we gave him away to the Head."
"That's so, I suppose."
Manners's whistle was heard.
"Hallo! There's Manners with our bikes. You'd better get your machines out, and follow on."
"Rather!"

Tom Merry hurried from the shed. Manners had the bicycles ready, and the chums ran them down to the gates. Taggles hesitated about allowing them to go out, and while he was hesitating the Terrible Two ran their machines out and mounted.

"Here, I say!" exclaimed Taggles.
They did not wait to hear what he had to say. The school porter stood in the gateway, looking doubtfully after the two when he heard a furious ringing and a shout behind him.

"Hi! Clear off!"
"Get out of the way!"
Taggles gasped, and jumped aside just in time. A tandem, with Kerr and Wynn mounted upon it, came buzzing down to the gates, and turned out into the road.

"Here, I say!" gasped Taggles.
The tandem did not wait. Away went the Co., pedalling for all they were worth. Taggles scratched his head.

"I say, what's all this row about?"
It was Monteith's voice. Taggles stared at the head prefect of the New House. He was about to blurt out the facts when he remembered the tale he had to tell to save himself from blame. If he had not believed the prisoner to be the real convict, he certainly had no right to let Blake have the trap, and he pitched his tale accordingly.

"It's that convict," he explained. "The young gentlemen have captured him, and they're taking him away to the piece-station."

Monteith started violently.
"The convict! What convict?"
"That there convict who escaped from prison yesterday. They found 'im lurking about the school—"

"Oh, the fool—the madman!"
"They've captured him and took him off to Rylcombe," said the veracious Taggles.

"Heavens!"
"I say—"
But Monteith, too, apparently had no time to listen to what Taggles had to say. He bolted down the lane like one possessed. Taggles scratched his head in amazement. It seemed to him that all St. Jim's was going insane that evening. Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, tapped him on the shoulder.

"What's all this noise about, Taggles?"
"It's them youngsters captured the convict, Master Kildare, and Master Monteith he's—he's bolted—"

Taggles stopped short. Kildare had bolted, too! For it had immediately occurred to the captain of St. Jim's that Monteith, hearing of his cousin's capture, might do something rash, and he wanted to be by Monteith's side at that moment.

Taggles stared after him, and then went into his lodge and slammed the door.
"The whole blessed biling is off their silly onions!" said Taggles to himself. "That's wot's the matter—they're right off their silly onions!"

PLUCK,

Now on Sale, Price 1d., Contains a Splendid
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A SPLENDID SCHOOL TALE IN "PLUCK" NEXT SATURDAY. PRICE 1d.

BLAKE drove the trap along the dusky lane at a good speed. He was extremely anxious to get his prisoner to Rylcombe, and delivered up in a duly impressive manner, before any untoward accident could occur.

Figgins—so the junior believed—had stolen a march upon him and captured his prisoner, and Study No. 6 had recaptured him in a masterly manner. Once he was delivered up in state at Rylcombe police-station the triumph of the School House juniors would be complete.

Little did Blake dream that his prisoner was none other than the great Figgins himself. There was no possibility of the discovery being made. Figgins could not speak, could hardly move, and the cloth thrown over him almost hid him from sight, even if his disguise had not been so good. Herries and D'Arcy kept good guard over him.

The trap dashed on through the summer dusk. Blake kept a wary look-out. For some considerable distance the lane bordered the wood where the convict was known to be hiding, and the cordon of police drawn round the wood were, naturally, partly posted in the lane.

Half the distance to the village had been covered when a rough voice called the trap to a halt, and a lantern flashed on the startled pony.

"Can't stop!" called out Blake. "We're in a hurry."
"You've got to stop."

"What's the matter?"
"Sorry, but we're ordered to look in every vehicle that passes to-night," said the constable politely. "It won't take a minute."

Blake snapped his teeth. He pulled the pony in, and the policeman stepped to the side of the trap. Blake was determined not to give up the convict. At Rylcombe police-station, in the full glare of light and publicity and glory, he intended to give him up; but he did not mean to be robbed of his captive in the lane, and robbed of his glory, too, for he felt pretty certain that the police would in that case take all the credit of the capture to themselves.

"Sha'n't delay you a minute," said the policeman, flashing his light into the trap.

Blake gripped the reins, and made a sign of the head to Herries. Herries understood. The constable jerked up the cloth, and gave a cry of amazement as he saw the form in the broad-arrow garb underneath. For an instant he was simply stupefied. Then he gave a shout.

"Here he is, boys!"
Herries reached out and gave the constable a sudden push, and he staggered back. Blake whipped up the pony, and the trap dashed on.

"Done 'em!" yelled Blake.
"Yaas, wathah!"

But the constable was not quite done. He had caught a glimpse of the convict, and in that hasty glimpse had not noticed that he was tied up. He could only conclude that the man was hidden under the cloth in a bold attempt at escape.

His whistle rang out piercingly—the signal arranged upon if the convict were sighted. Fresh whistles and shouts answered from various directions. In a few minutes a dozen policemen were tearing on the track of the trap, and mounted men came out of the wood and joined in the chase.

But Blake had a good lead, and he kept it. Right on dashed the trap, right on into Rylcombe, and up the old High Street to the lighted front of the police-station. Then Blake clattered to a halt, and in a twinkling the three juniors had the tailboard down and the prisoner out, and were rushing him up the steps into the station.

A minute later the pursuers were on the scene. Inspector Skeet was in the station, and he jumped up and stared in amazement at the boys.

"Why—what—who—how—"
Blake touched his cap respectfully.

"If you please, sir, we've captured the convict, and we've brought him here to deliver him up to the law."

"Thought we'd save you the trouble, sir," said Herries.
"Yaas, wathah!"

The inspector gasped.
"Bless my soul! Impossible! You boys— Yet here he is! Why—what does this mean—this is not the man!"

"Not the man?"
"No. Number Twenty hadn't any moustache. I suppose he's disguised himself, though."

The pursuers were bursting into the station now. Blake turned to them. He was as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

"You're too late," he said calmly. "We captured the convict. We brought him here. We've done it—us, Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's!"

The policemen looked at one another and grinned. They had jumped to the conclusion that the boys were helping the convict to escape, but Blake's action in bringing him to the

"He's in disguise," went on the inspector. "Hallo!

What is he gagged for?"

He took the gag from the prisoner's mouth.

"Got you again, No. 20!"

No. 20's reply was peculiar.

"You silly owl!"

The inspector jumped.

"Why, you—you—"

"I'm not a convict!" roared the prisoner. "I'm Figgins!"

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy turned quite pale. There was a buzz of bicycle-bells outside. Tom Merry and Manners rushed into the station, with the Co. at their heels. They had seen the trap outside, and knew that Blake had succeeded in getting his hapless captive there.

"It's Figgins!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's a—a joke! It's old Figgins!"

In the general amazement, Tom Merry knelt down and cut Figgins loose with his penknife. The New House junior staggered to his feet. He looked very wrathful.

"My word!" gasped Inspector Skeet. "So this is—is a joke, is it? You young rascals, you have conspired to defeat the law!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "It was a joke. And how were we to know that Blake would bring him here? We didn't think of that."

"Oh," murmured Blake, "what giddy asses we've made of ourselves! We shall never hear the end of this!"

"The whole school will have the grin of us," groaned Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"D'Arcy, you ass, this is what comes of acting on your ideas!"

"Now, weally, Blake, I pwotest——"

"Oh, dry up!"

"I wefuse——"

"Come along! No good sticking here."

The general attention was fixed upon Figgins. It was easy for the unhappy convict-hunters to steal quietly away, get into the trap, and drive off to St. Jim's.

"I'll make somebody sit up for this!" said Figgins, glaring round. "I—— Hallo, Monteith!"

Monteith had dashed into the station. His face was pale as death.

"Is he captured?" he gasped. "Is he——"

His eyes fell upon Figgins, and he broke off.

"Figgins, what is the meaning of this?"

"Yes, by Jove!" said Kildare, who had followed the prefect in. "What game are you playing, Figgins?"

"Somebody seems to have made Figgins up as a convict," said Tom Merry demurely. "Blake mistook him for the escaped convict in the castle wood, and captured him, and brought him here to give him up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith drew a tremulous breath of relief.

"Here, get out of this station!" said Inspector Skeet, frowning round upon the laughing constables. "By Jupiter! While you've been chasing this fool of a boy you've left the wood unguarded; the convict may——"

The words recalled the police to a sense of the situation. They poured out of the station to tear back to their unguarded posts.

"Come on, old Figgy!" said Tom Merry. "We'll help you off with that rig. No malice, old chap!"

And Figgy grinned.

"Well, it was a jolly good wheeze, though it worked out the wrong way!" he exclaimed. "No grudge, of course; though I've had a rough old time. Come along!"

The juniors left the station in a group. The two seniors followed them more slowly.

"I am glad of this, Monteith, for your sake," said Kildare, in a low voice. "I followed because I thought I might be needed. Did you hear what the inspector said?"

Monteith looked at him. The prefect was trembling.

"That the wood had been left unguarded," said Kildare.

"If your cousin is on the alert, he will not lose that opportunity. He has a change of clothes and money; this may mean that he is saved. For your sake, I hope so."

Monteith pressed his hand.

"Thank you, Kildare! You are a noble fellow. You have been better to me than I deserve; but if I ever have a chance I'll show you that I can be grateful."

And the captain and prefect walked back to St. Jim's on better terms than they had ever been before.

Kildare was right; Ralph Monteith had not lost his opportunity. He had seized upon the chance, and escaped from the wood; nor was he ever seen in the place again. Day by day Monteith watched the papers, but his arrest was never reported. He had escaped from England, and he never returned.

Monteith breathed more freely when he was once assured of that. The new friendship between the head prefect of the New House and the captain of St. Jim's bade fair to be lasting.

The excitement of the convict hunt died away; but it was long before the juniors of St. Jim's allowed Study No. 6 to forget their brilliant capture, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was made to wish that his dazzling idea of capturing the convict had never entered his head.

THE END.

(Next Thursday's complete school tale will relate the most important moment of Tom Merry's school-days. It is entitled "Expelled from St. Jim's." Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.)



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN

READ
THIS
FIRST

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers, who play many spiteful tricks upon them. A new boy named Alburton comes to Stormpoint, and the chums object to his swaggering disposition, so nickname him "Swipes." Bob is instrumental in getting the school a holiday, as it is Mr. Salmon's—Bob's Form-master—birthday. The three chums purchase a large amount of "tuck," and set out to hire a vehicle. They find they are being followed by the bullies. "You see, it would be a fine day's amusement for them if they succeeded in spoiling ours, especially if they were able to collar our grub," said Bob to his chums. (Now go on with the story.)

Off for the Day!

"However," continued Bob, "I have got a pair of horses, and the best waggonette; the only thing that worries me is the driver. I don't want the driver, and he insists on coming. If I hire the turn-out, it stands to reason that I am the proper party to drive."

"Ha, ha, ha! They won't trust you with a pair of horses, Bob!" exclaimed Rex.

"That's what he says; but then, you see, he does not know what he is going to do. I have made up our minds that we will drive ourselves. Don't say any more about it, but leave it all to me, and if I can't shift that driver I shall be surprised. Jardon is making inquiries about us. I can tell by the wolf-like glares he is giving in this direction. Now, what you fellows have got to do is to look meek and lamb-like. Here comes Bill, the driver. What you have got to remark is that he has no whip. He did bring out a whip,

NEXT
THURSDAY.

EXPULSION FROM ST. JIM'S.

A TALE OF
TOM MERRY.

STORMPOINT (continued).

but I concealed it on the waggonette. Nice day for a drive, Bill!"

"May be for people as can enjoy themselves," growled Bill, who was a very bad-tempered man.

"Well, don't you think that you will enjoy your dear little self with us?"

"No, I don't! I'd as soon take out a lot of young tiger-cubs. Now, get in, will you?"

"Certainly, Billy. Are you sure your horses are quiet?"

"I only wish I was as sure you are quiet. Are you going to get in, or are you going to stop here all day, fooling about?"

"I think we will get up, thank you. Mind how you come, Bill; you are not so thin as you used to be when you were a pretty little waddling infant. You waddle all right still, but you have lost the gracefulness of your pretty little fairy form. I say, those boots cost you an awful lot of money. I'll bet, if you have to buy them by size! I feel sure that there must be three feet in those two boots."

"Bust! Where's my whip? Jest run into the stables and fetch it."

"With pleasure, Billy boy," answered the obliging Bob, bolting; and remaining away so long that Bill went to see what was the matter, entrusting the reins to Rex.

"Have you found that ere whip?" snarled Bill.

"Billy, I hev not. I hain't seed yer whip. Good-bye, Billy boy! I can't wait all day for you."

Bob dodged him, and Bill followed at the greatest pace that he could command, howling at the top of his voice for him to stop. But Bob did no such thing. He sprinted to the waggonette, and clambered up in next to no time. Then he collared the whip, and lashed the horses into a gallop.

"Farewell, sweet William!" cried Bob. "So sorry to part with your charming company; but the best of friends must part, and this is the point where we separate. Mind the ditch, Rex; you are not driving anything like straight."

"I am not accustomed to driving a pair."

"Neither am I, old chap, but we shall soon get used to it. What a row that man is making, to be sure! Still, we have no time to stop and argue the matter with him."

"Now, see the advantage in not bringing that noisy brute of a driver?" observed Bob, taking the reins, and nearly running the waggonette into the ditch as he did so.

"Quite so!" murmured Rex. "But I rather fancy, Bob, we shall have a smash-up before we get back."

"Well, we can have a smash-up without a driver, just as well as we can with one!" declared Bob. "Drivers are not the slightest use when you want to enjoy yourself at a picnic. If you have got to have a smash-up, it is far more satisfactory to have it of your own accord than to let a driver bowl you over. I would advise you fellows to hold tight, because I am going to turn a corner just here, and I am not at all sure about the movements of these horses. They appear to be the most awkward pair of horses I have ever driven; but perhaps that is because I have never driven another pair."

The way Bob whizzed round the bend was so alarming that the boys clung to the rail of the waggonette; and the unfortunate part of the matter was that a motor-car happened to be coming round the corner at the same moment.

"Get out of my way!" bawled Bob, drawing his horses to the right-hand side of the lane because that motor-car had swerved across the lane, and was on its wrong side.

Probably the chauffeur knew that he was in the wrong, and he did his utmost to avoid a collision, but he was not successful. The boss of his wheel

caught the front wheel of the waggonette, and the impact caused Rex to take a flying leap on the top of the head of the party who sat next to the chauffeur, and the next moment the motor-car and its two passengers and Rex pitched into the ditch.

The axle of the waggonette was so bent that the front wheel seemed to be determined to bowl away from the other one, while the motor-car did not look to be improved by the collision. It lay on its side in the ditch, and the noise it made was extraordinary, while it smelt like an oil-shop on fire.

The celerity with which Rex got back on the waggonette was really very creditable. He had an idea the owner of the car would be angry, and he was perfectly correct.

"You dastardly young villains!" he hooted. "How dare you drive in that reckless manner!"

"Look here, old boy," exclaimed Bob, "I have a good mind to give you fifteen months' hard labour for driving on the wrong side of the road! You ought to be horsewhipped! Don't you think he ought, Rex?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Certainly! A horsewhipping would do him all the good in the world! Why, it's old Jones!"

"Dear me, so it is!" exclaimed Bob. "I did not know the silly old owl in his goggles!"

Jones was the owner of the livery-stable, and, consequently, the owner of that waggonette, and when he recognised his own damaged vehicle his fury knew no bounds.

"I'll go straight to the college about this, you young blackguards! Mark my words, I will! What right have you to take one of my traps out without my leave?"

"I refer you to the Archbishop of Canterbury to answer that question," said Bob. "It has nothing to do with the case. You were on the wrong side of the road, and you know it. If it hadn't been for my presence of mind—and natural funk—in pulling this side of the road, you would have killed your own horses. As it is, you have only made yourself exceedingly muddy, and perhaps damaged your motor-car and your waggonette a little. You had better go home, and get your wife to scrub you down a bit. Go away, you horrid, bad-tempered man. You ought to be very grateful to me."

If Jones was grateful to the worthy Bob, neither his demeanour nor his language denoted it. He stamped about, and said he was going to do the most terrible things. Then he seized the horses' heads, and ordered all the boys to get out.

To complicate matters still farther, the dogcart, with Jardon, Symes, and Perkins, now came in sight, and it was quite impossible for them to pass. This made Jardon furious. He knew Bob's destination, and wanted to get there first, so that he could lunch off their provisions.

"Get out of my way, you little brutes!" roared Jardon.

"If you don't get out of my way I will lash you within an inch of your lives!"

"Go home, Jardon!" retorted Bob. "You are not safe to be allowed out by yourself. A cur like you ought to be muzzled and chained up in a kennel. If I had the training of you I would turn you into a respectable hound, but you would need a lot of lashing before I succeeded."

"Murder! Drive on, Bob!" yelled one of his chums. "He's lashing us!"

"I can't drive on, dear boys. I don't think he will hurt you."

"Wooroo! He is hurting me!"

"Bear it bravely."

"Oh, you silly cuckoo!" yelled the stricken one.

"It's all very well for you to talk about bearing it bravely when you are stuck up in front there and out of harm's way."

"Here, lend me your whip, Bob!" cried Jim Fisher. "If I can't stop him, I'll jolly well hurt him!"

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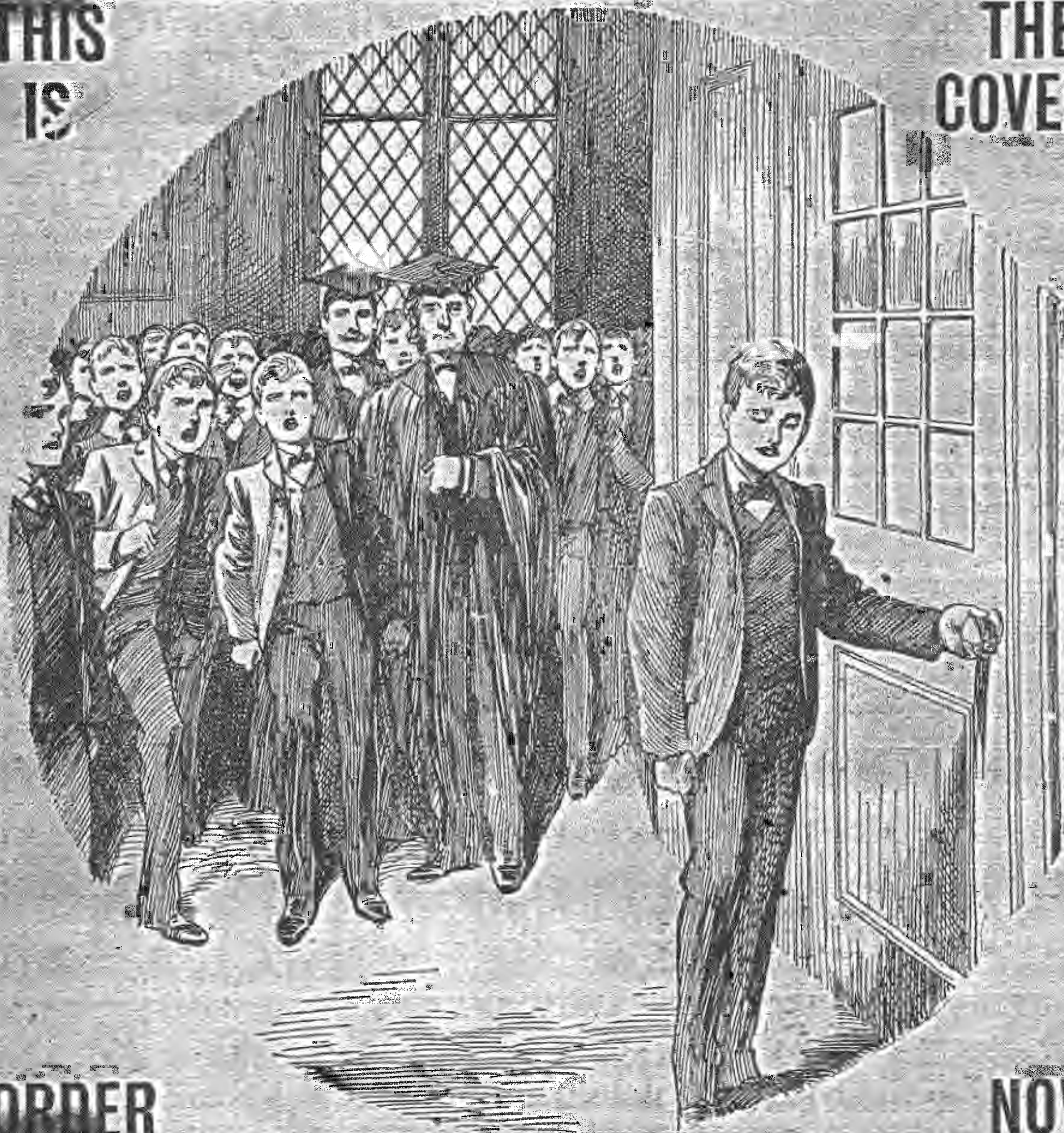
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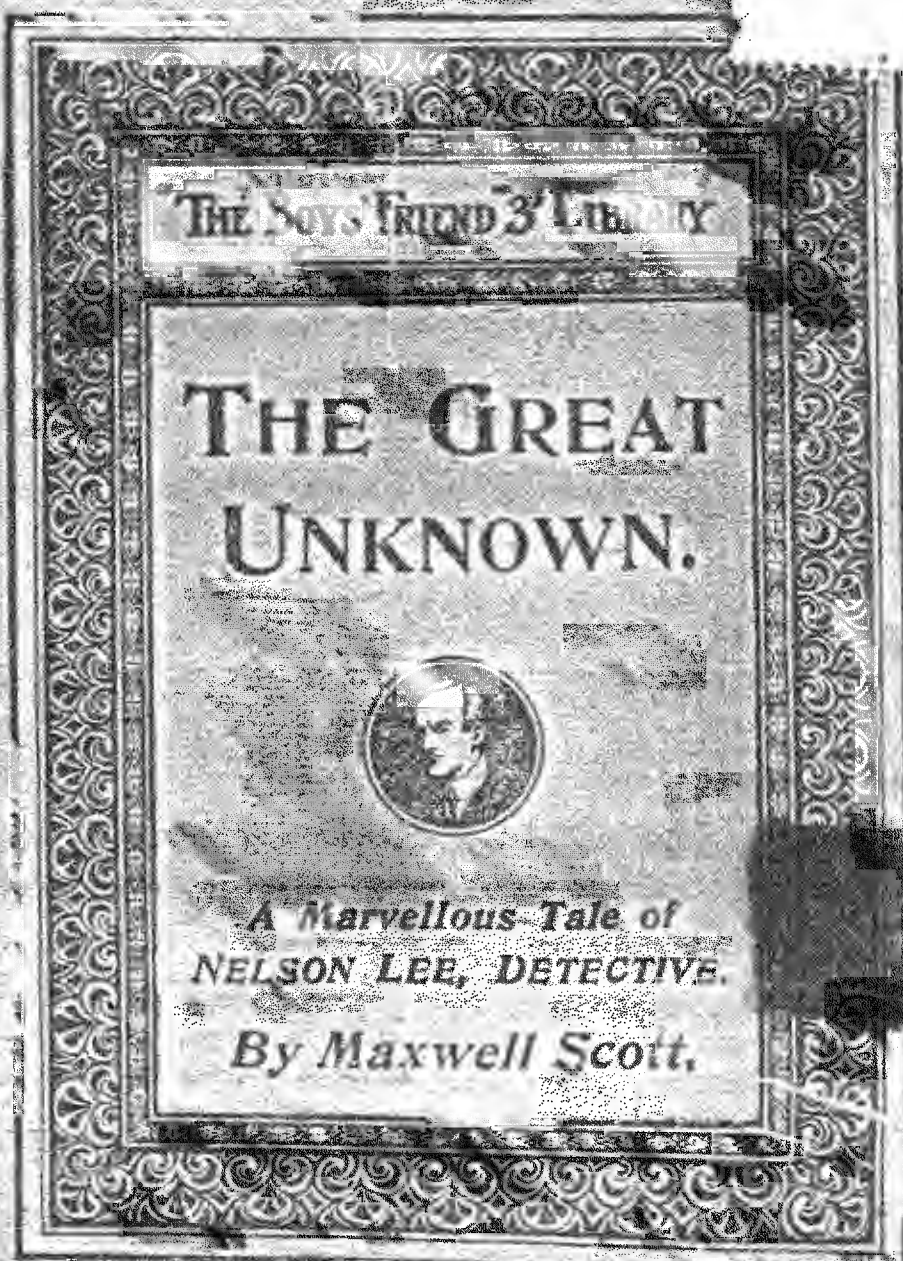
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