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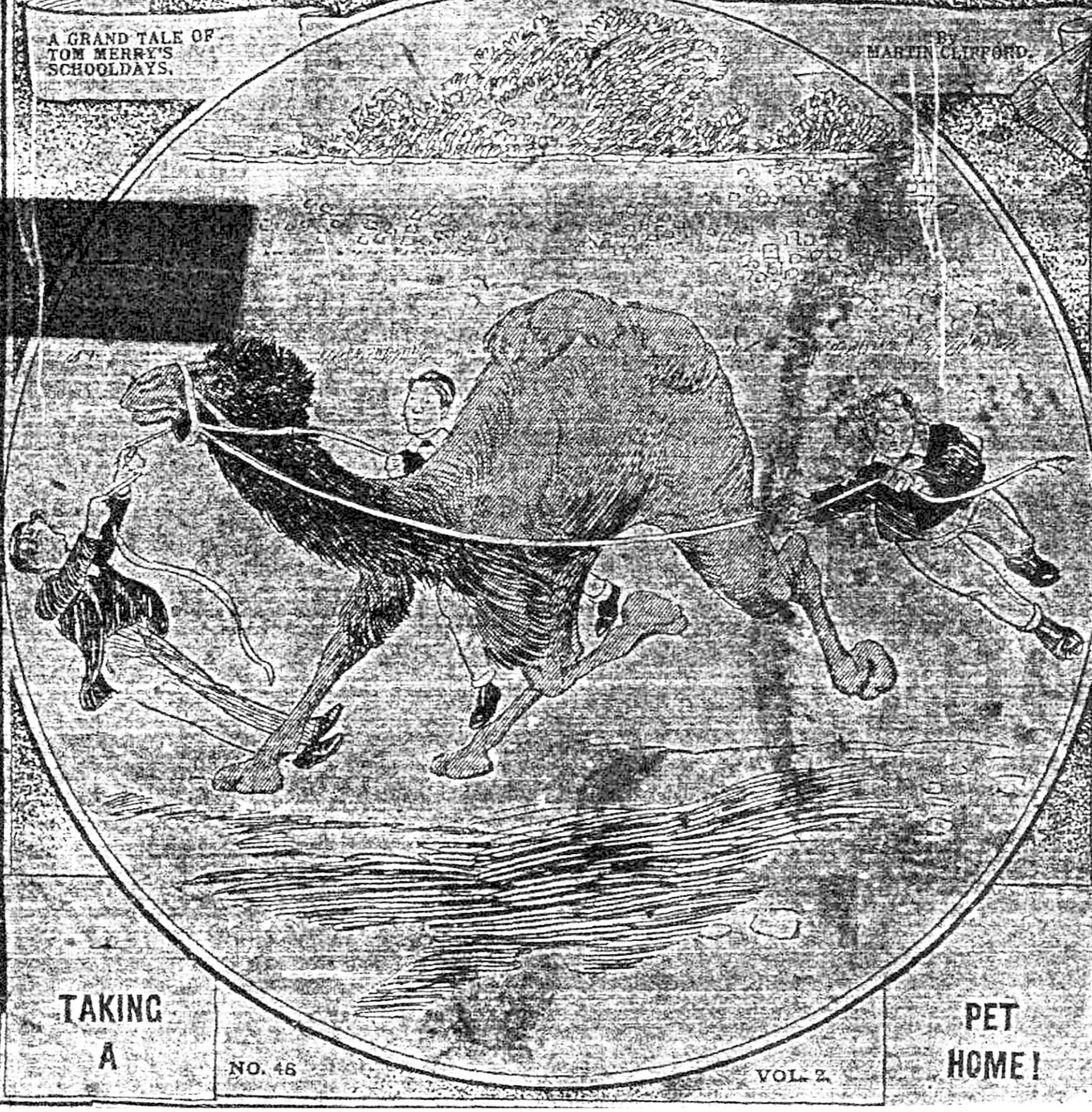
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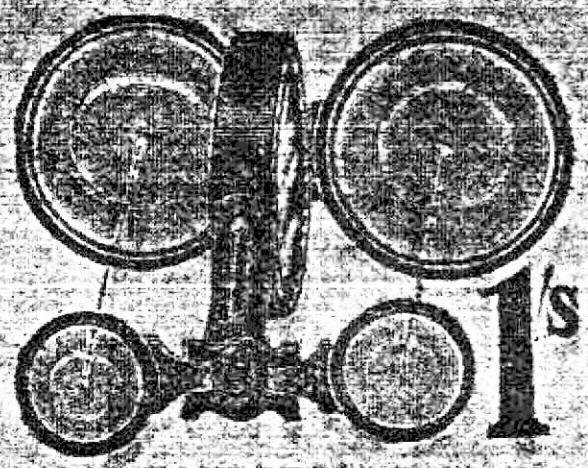
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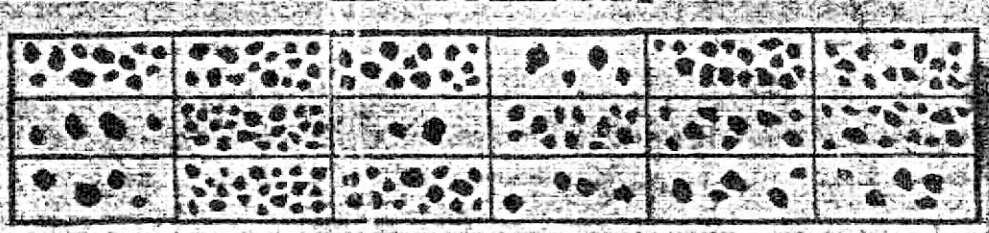
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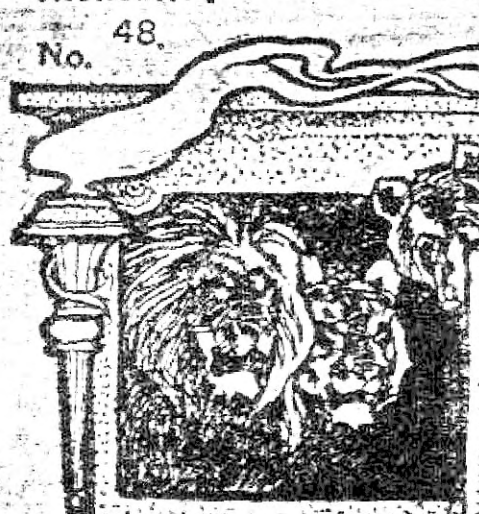
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Dear Chums,

Take a tip from your uncle, and do what the Editor tells you.

(Signed) TOM MERRY.

P.S.—Yaas, wathah!

(Countersigned) D'ARCY.



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# THE PETS OF ST. JIM'S.

## A Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### CHAPTER 1.
### D'Arcy's Great Idea.

"BAI Jove, you know!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking round Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's. "Bai Jove, deah boys——"

"Oh, rats!" said Jack Blake, who was deep in Euclid, without looking up. "Shut up now, Gussy, for goodness' sake."

"Bai Jove, you know——"

"Dry up!" growled Herries, raising his eyes for a moment from the imposition he was scribbling at express speed. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Bai Jove——"

"Ring off, ass! If you want to talk, go out into the corridor, where we can't hear you!" howled Blake.

"I wefuse to go out into the cowwidah," replied Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I uttahly wefuse to do anythin' of the kind!"

"Then shut up."

"But I have an ideah."

"Keep it! Boil it! You're interrupting the washing!"

"But, you know, it's a weally wippin' ideah."

"Go and tell it to Tom Merry, then."

"Bai Jove, you know, that wouldn't do. It's too wippin' an ideah to be given away to those boundahs in the Shell. The Tewwible Thwee can think out their own ideahs. Now, this ideah of mine is weally a——"

Whizz!

Euclid came whizzing through the air, and D'Arcy dodged just in time. The work of the great geometrician crashed into the clock on the mantelpiece, and there was a scatter of falling glass.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his eye, and surveying the smashed glass of the clock with great composure. "You have bwoken the glass, Blake, which I considah vewy clumsy. It has not been bwoken for nearly a week. I wegard you as a clumsy ass!"

"It was your fault, fathead."

"Now, don't be unweasonable, Blake, and pway don't call me a fathead. I object to it. I wegard it as a diswespectful expwession. Pway do not hurl that wulah at me, Hewwies. You might bweak somethin', too."

Herries grinned feebly as he laid down the ruler he had caught up.

"Calm yourselves, deah boys," said D'Arcy, gazing at the exasperated chums through his eyeglass. "I have been thinkin' a long time, and have thought out a weally wippin' ideah, and it would be a beastly pity to waste it, you know."

Blake sank into his chair with a groan of resignation.

"Oh, it's no good, Herries," he said. "He's bound to go on, and we may as well listen as not. There won't be any more work done in this study till he's finished, so the sooner the quicker. Go on, D'Arcy."

"Oh, I don't want to wowwy you," said the swell of the School House, very considerately. "If you'd wathah not hear the ideah just now——"

"Go on, you innage!"

"I object to bein' chawactawised as an image!"

"Will you get on with the washing?" howled the exasperated Blake. "We've left off work to listen to you, now get on."

"Yaas, wathah; but if you'd wathah not——"

"Get on with it!" roared Herries.

"Vewy well, as you are so pwessin', I will explain the ideah," said D'Arcy gracefully. "I don't want to leave you in a state of gweat anxiety and suspense, you know. I am too considewate——"

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"Will you come to the point?"

"I am comin' to it as fast as I can, Blake; but I don't see how I am evah to awwive at it at all, if you and Hewwies keep on intewwuptin' me. When I am intewwupted I am always gweatly thwown off the twack of my ideahs!"

"Get on, ass!"

"And when these oppwobwious epithets are applied to me, I am thwown out of my twain of thought——"

"You'll be thrown out of the window if you don't get done."

"I wefuse to be thwown out of the window. If you would not intewwupt me, I should come to the point like anythin'. Now, my ideah is this—of course, I couldn't have told it to Tom Mewwy, and allowed those thwee boundahs to get the cwedit of it."

"The credit of what?"

"Of startin' such a wippin' wheeze," said D'Arcy. "Figgins & Co., too, would have jumped at it, if I had taken you at your word and depwived this study of the benefit of my bwainy efforts. But I wouldn't do that, deah boys. When I get a weally good ideah, you may wely upon it——"

Blake and Herries rose to their feet. They did not speak, but their looks meant business, and Arthur Augustus went on rather hastily:

"But to come to the point. It is weally vewy flattewin' of you to be so eagah to hear the ideah, but, of course, you know what to expect fwom a fellow of my bwains."

"We do," groaned Blake.

"Shall we bang his head against the wall, or chuck him out of the window?" asked Herries, with the air of a fellow weighing the only two possible alternatives.

"I wefuse to have my head banged against the beastly wall, or to—— Pway stop, deah boys. You are wuffiin' my collah!"

But the dear boys did not stop. They seized D'Arcy by the shoulders, and jammed him against the study wall. He wriggled in vain in their muscular grip.

"Now, ass," said Blake, in a concentrated voice, "now, maniac—now, fathead!"

"I object to all those expwessions!"

"Now, lunatic—now, duffer, explain the idea, if you've got one—which I don't believe for a moment——"

"Unless he's boned it," said Herries.

"I have not boned it," said D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' about the pets, you know, which we keep in the menagewie behind the New House, and all of a sudden it flashed into my bwain——"

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Herries. "How could the New House flash into your brain?"

"I didn't say the New House flashed into my bwain. I meant that——"

"The menagerie flashed into his brain," said Blake.

"The ideah!" shouted D'Arcy. "The ideah flashed into my bwain."

"Well, I expect it found plenty of room there," said Blake. "Now, if you don't want your valuable brain knocked against the wall, you'll buck up with the explanification."

"I am explainin' as fast as I can, deah boys. But you are weally incommodin' me with that wuff gwip on my shouldahs, and——"

D'Arcy broke off as his head biffed against the study wall.

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"That's for a start," said Blake ominously. "That was only a gentle tap. If you want a first-class, thorough-going, non-skidding bang, you've only got to say so."

"I do not want anythin' of the kind. I wish you would leave off intewwuptin' me, and let a fellow come to the point. As I was sayin' when you intewwupted me so wudely, the ideah flashed into my bwain all of a sudden when I was thinkin' about the pets we keep in the menagewie. Nearly all the juniahs in both houses are keepin' pets now, since the doctah gave us permission, and it stwuck me——"

"What did?"

"Why, it stwuck me that it would be a wippin' ideah to hold a sort of an exhibition in the coll., you know, a sort of animal show, with pwizes offahed for the best-kept and nicest pets, or the gweatest numbah of white mice, and so on, deah boys."

The idea was out at last!

Blake and Herries released the swell of the School House, their brows quite thoughtful. D'Arcy carefully smoothed out his somewhat rumpled jacket and collar, and a crease in his fancy waistcoat. The youthful scion of the house of D'Arcy was very fastidious in these matters.

"Well, what do you think of the ideah, my deah fwiends?" he asked. "Take your time to think it out, you know, and don't weply in a huwwy. It isn't often, I know, that you have such a weally wippin' wheeze to think out as this one."

"Well, there's something in it," said Blake. "Did you really think of it all on your own lonesome, Gussy?"

"Weally, I did; it was entirely my own ideah from start to finish," said Arthur Augustus. "I thought it out all by myself. It flashed into my bwain!"

"Well, in the first place, D'Arcy ought to have a tin medal," said Blake solemnly; "and I think this date ought to be kept up at St. Jim's. It's worth while commemorating the day when Arthur Augustus got his first idea."

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"It's not a bad idea," said Herries. "Of course, we shall have to knock it into shape a little——"

"Oh, weally, Hewwies!"

"Of course," assented Blake. "That'll be necessary. A competition of this kind will go down at St. Jim's, and as nearly everybody is keeping pets, there will be plenty of entries. This study will get the credit of starting the idea——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And it must be clearly understood," went on Blake, "that the idea did originate in this study. We'll get Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther to join in it first of all, and then try to carry it out. But they'll have to admit that the wheeze is ours."

"Mine, you mean, Blake."

"And we mustn't forget," said Blake considerately, "that the first suggestion came from Gussy."

"Oh, weally, Blake, why the whole ideah was——"

"We'll give Gussy his due," said Herries heartily. "He's several sorts of an ass, but I admit that the first slight outline of the idea came from him."

"Oh, weally, Hewwies——"

"And before Gussy starts talking it all over the school," said Blake severely, "we'd better take the Terrible Three into it and get the thing started."

"Good. No good letting the grass grow under our feet."

"Come along, then. The impot can wait, and as for my Euclid, blow Euclid. Come on, Herries, and let's explain our idea to Tom Merry."

"Righto!" said Herries.

"But I say, deah boys——"

"Oh! don't bother now, Gussy, when we're busy with our new plans!" exclaimed Blake. "Just get some chestnuts roasted like a good fellow."

"But I——"

"Now, don't be disobliging, Gussy. Get some chestnuts roasted; we shall be back before long, and we like 'em hot."

And Blake and Herries marched out of the study.

"Well, weally," murmured D'Arcy, "if that's all the cwedit I get for a weally wippin' ideah, I shall not take the twouble to use my beastly bwain at all."

And the swell of the School House went to the cupboard to look for the chestnuts.

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Chairman.

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther, the chums of the Shell, had finished their preparation, and were about to leave their study, when the door was kicked open, and Blake and Herries presented themselves.

"Busy?" asked Blake, looking round.

"Just finished," said Tom Merry. "We were just going out. Want anything?"

"No, only we've got a little wheeze on."

"Go ahead!" said the hero of the Shell tersely.

"Of course, you understand, before we explain, that it's our idea."

"Certainly. But what is it—something up against the New House?"

"No, not exactly; we shall have to let the New House fellows join in, but we want it understood that the credit of the idea belongs to the School House, and to our study in particular."

The Terrible Three nodded solemnly.

"We won't try to borrow any of your credit," said Monty Lowther. "If it were cash, now, instead of credit, we might."

"Go ahead with the idea," said Tom Merry. "I expect it's some mouldy old thing that's been worked out a dozen times."

"Nothing of the sort," said Blake indignantly. "It's a real, first-class, brand-new wheeze, that will make a stir in the school, I can tell you."

"Well, we're waiting to hear it," said Manners politely.

"It's understood that it belongs to our study. As a matter of fact, the first hint of the idea came from D'Arcy——"

"Then it's bound to be something really ripping," said Tom Merry. "Get on!"

"You know that since the Head gave us permission to keep pets, and the place was built for them behind the New House, the idea has cauht on, and most of the fellows here are keeping pets. Well, our idea is to obtain permission to use the big hall some time—say on a half-holiday—and hold an exhibition, and give prizes for the best-kept or finest specimens of pets, and——"

"That's it!" said Herries. "It will be a competition, and we shall have to whip round to raise the prizes."

"Or we can offer things of our own, things of value,"

suggested Blake. "Tom Merry can put up his diabolo set, and Manners could offer his camera as first prize."

"Catch me!" said Manners.

"Well, old chap, I don't think you ought to be selfish about it," said Blake. "I don't like to see a good idea spoiled for the sake of selfish considerations."

"Well, if you want a good first prize, just you put up your new football," said Manners. "You gave fifteen and six for it, and it would make a decent prize."

"Oh, you're talking rot now, and you know it."

"I don't see——"

"Well, about the idea?" said Blake, rather hastily. "We can arrange about the prizes afterwards. What's your opinion?"

"It's a good idea," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Leave it in our hands, and we'll knock it into shape a little."

"Will you?" said Blake, with an ominous glitter in his eye. "If you start knocking my ideas into shape, there's a fellow's nose that will get knocked out of shape, and that's yours, Tom Merry."

"Look here, my dear fellow, we want the thing to be a success. It was very right of you youngsters to come along and ask us to take it in hand."

"And ask what?" roared Blake.

"And ask us to take the matter in hand."

Blake looked for a moment inclined to commit assault and battery upon the person of Tom Merry there and then. But he restrained himself.

"I didn't come here for a row," he said, with an effort. "My idea is that we should put our heads together, and run this thing for the credit of the School House. But it must be understood at the start that the wheeze belongs to Study No. 6, and that Study No. 6 is to run the show."

"Yaas, wathah!" said a voice in the doorway, and Arthur Augustus came in. "Yaas, wathah, deah boys! Pway let that be wecognised at the beginnin'."

"Have you roasted those chestnuts?" asked Blake.

"There aren't any left," said D'Arcy, "so it was quite imposs. for me to woast them. The only chestnuts in the study are in your contwibution to the 'Weekly.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries.

Blake gave him a chilling glance.

"Don't make that fearful row in Tom Merry's study, Herries, old chap," he said. "Blessed if I can see what there is to bark about!"

"I thought I had bettah come along, upon reflection," said D'Arcy. "I want Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah to understand——"

"That's all right. I've explained."

"To understand——"

"I tell you I've explained!"

"To understand that it was my ideah," said D'Arcy calmly. "I was afwaid that you might not lay sufficient stwess on that circ——"

"Oh, rats! You made the first suggestion, I know."

"Wats! The ideah flashed into my bwain."

"Oh, don't argue. Look here, you Shell bounders, are you coming into the scheme or not?" demanded Blake.

"Certainly," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "But I don't see how we can follow the lead of the Fourth Form."

"We must consider the dignity of the Shell," said Lowther.

"Rats to the Shell!"

"Oh, weally, Blake, if it is a question of dig, I must agwee with Tom Mewwy that it wequires careful considewation," said D'Arcy. "We cannot expect any gentleman to do anythin' not consistent with his personal dig.——"

"I'll give you a personal dig, if you——"

"Pway be quiet, Blake, and leave this mattah in my hands!"

"Yes, I'm likely to leave anything in——"

"I weally insist! On mattahs of etiquette and dignity, I am bettah fitted to deal with the question," said D'Arcy. "Pway shut up!"

"That's right!" grinned Tom Merry. "Leave it in D'Arcy's hands. It is imposs. to leave a question of dig. in better hands."

"Yaas, wathah! Now, I wegard the Fourth Form, to which I have the honah to belong, as the most wespectable Form in the coll.," said Arthur Augustus. "But there is no accountin' for tastes, and it is quite poss. that Tom Mewwy may wegard the Shell in the same light. Therefore I suggest that a committee should be formed, containin' equal numbahs fwom the Shell and the Fourth Form, to deal with the mattah."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, that would do," said Blake reflectively. "But, of course, Study No. 6 would have to have the casting vote."

"Yaas, wathah! As the owiginatah of the ideah, I should be chairman of the beastly committee, and have the castin' vote."

"You! Why, you image——"

"I object to bein' called an image, and I appeal to Tom Mewwy if my ideah is not quite wight?"

"Quite right," said Tom Mewwy. "I back up Gussy! Where shall we find a better chairman in the school than Arthur Adolphus Algernon Aubrey FitzPercy de——"

"Oh, pway don't wot!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Is it agweed, then, that I am to be chairman?"

"Certainly," said the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"Vewy well! I will take the chair, if Blake does not object."

"Oh, you can take the chair, and the table, too, if you like," said Blake.

"Then it is agweed. I am weally the last fellow in the world to put myself forward in any way," said D'Arcy, "But undah the circs. I think this mattah will flouwish bettah in my hands. Now that it is amicably awwanged, we had bettah call a meetin' and see if Figgins & Co. would like to join in the ideah."

"Righto!" said Tom Merry. "I'll send a note over to the New House."

"Excuse me!" said D'Arcy, with dignity, "as chairman, I will send a note over to the New House."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good old chairman! Well, you send the note, Gussy, and let us know when the first meeting is to be held," laughed Tom Merry. "Now come on, kids, or we shan't get our little run before dark."

And the chums of the Shell went downstairs.

## CHAPTER 3.

### Figgins & Co. Join the Committee.

"COME in!" shouted Figgins.

Figgins & Co. were at tea in their study in the New House at St. Jim's. Figgins was pouring out the second cup of tea, and Kerr was cutting the loaf. Fatty Wynn was eating sardines as if for a wager.

Figgins looked up from his tea-pouring as a knock came at the door of the study.

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Curly Gibson of the School House entered. Curly was a Third Form boy, with flaxen hair and a rather cheeky grin.

"Hallo, kid," said Figgins, "and what may you happen to want?"

"Nothing!" said Curly promptly.

"Take it and go!"

"Put it in paper for me, and send a commissionaire to carry it!" retorted Curly undauntedly.

Figgins frowned darkly.

"My dear kid, you've got too much to say for a youth of your tender years," he said, putting down the teapot, and wagging a warning finger at Curly Gibson. "If you've come with a message, spout it out, and buck up. No more talk, or you'll go out of this study on your neck."

"Rats!" said Curly cheerfully. "I've brought you a message from D'Arcy."

"Oh, what is Gussy sending messages for?"

"It's a feed, of course," said Fatty Wynn, half rising from his chair. "And here I've been filling myself up with these cheap sardines."

"It's not a feed," said Curly.

"What is it then, you young rascal?"

"Here's a note."

"Hand it over and clear."

Curly Gibson grinned, and handed the note over and cleared. Figgins opened the note, his chums looking at him curiously the while.

"Read it out!" said Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co.

"Righto! Here goes!"

And the chief of the New House juniors read out the note from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Dear Figgins,—We shall be glad if you will attend a meeting of the Committee of the Pets Competition, to be held in the club-room in the School House at seven o'clock this evening. Your assistance in carrying out a really ripping plan is cordially invited.

"(*Signed*) ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY,
"Chairman of the Committee."

Kerr gave a whistle.

"What's that competition? I've never heard of it."

"Never heard of the committee, either."

"It's some new silly wheeze they've got on in the School House, and they want to rope us into it," said Fatty Wynn discontentedly. "And I thought it was a feed! B-r-r-r!"

"Better go, though!" said Figgins thoughtfully. "If the School House kids are in a fix and want our assistance, we ought to help them out, if only to show that the New House is cock-house at St. Jim's."

"That's right enough; but they'll want us to follow their lead. You'll see! I know those School House wasters!"

"That would be absurd, of course. We could not consent to anything of the kind. But we may as well buzz along and see who's in it, and what's it about. I suppose the whole gang are in it!"

And after tea Figgins & Co. put on their caps and walked across the quadrangle to the School House.

A good many School House fellows stared at them as they came in, but no one offered to interfere with them, which was a pretty conclusive proof that Tom Merry and Blake had given orders that "pax" was to be the order of the day.

There was always active warfare between the rival houses of St. Jim's, as far as the juniors were concerned, unless the leaders agreed to a truce, when the smaller fry were bound to keep the peace on peril of being licked.

"Where's their giddy club-room?" asked Kerr, looking round.

"Oh, it's the room their hobby club meet in," said Figgins—"an old, disused study, that the housemaster lets them have. This way! Hallo, here's Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was advancing towards them, with a beaming smile upon his face. He bowed politely to Figgins & Co.

"I'm weally glad that you have come to the meetin'," he said. "It is vewy nice of you to come. Follow me, deah boys!"

"We thought we'd look into the thing," said Figgins.

"That's wight!"

"But what's it all about?"

"We'll explain that in committee."

Figgins & Co. followed D'Arcy to the study which the Merry Hobby Club were allowed to use for their meetings, by the kindness of Mr. Railton, the housemaster. The other members of the committee were already there.

Tom Merry occupied the easy chair, and Manners and Lowther stood leaning on the mantelpiece. Blake and Herries were at the table, deeply engaged in watching a hedgehog which was curled up there. The hedgehog belonged to Jack Blake, and was his particular pet.

"Hullo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry. "So you've come!"

"So it seems!" grinned Figgins. "I say, what's all this piffle about a Pets Competition? We thought we'd better look into it."

"Pway excuse me," said D'Arcy, "but I object to havin' my wippin' ideahs descwibed as piffle. The descwip. is not at all cowwect."

"Oh, it's your idea, is it?" said Kerr disparagingly.

"Yes, Kerr, it is my idea, and I weally think it is a good one. Blake and Hewwies are wathah inclined to take the cwedit of it——"

"We knocked the idea into shape!" explained Blake loftily.

"Blake, I must weally chawactewise that statement as incowwect. The ideah was mine fwom start to finish. It flashed into my bwain——"

"Never mind that," said Fatty Wynn. "Cut the cackle and come to the hosses! What is the idea?"

D'Arcy went to the head of the table, and sat down upon a chair, the seat of which had been raised by a couple of dictionaries added to it, enabling the chairman to take a lofty survey of the meeting.

"The meetin' of the committee is now open," said D'Arcy. "Pway take your seats, gentlemen. I will explain the objects of the committee for the benefit of the New House wottahs, who are at pwesent ignowant——"

"The what?" exclaimed Figgins & Co., with one voice.

"I beg your pardon, that was a slip. I should be far fwom statin' my weal opinion of you at a fwiendly meetin'," said D'Arcy. "You would natuwally be offended."

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

"Pway do not disturb me by untimely mewwiment," said D'Arcy. "We are met togethah now for a weally important purpose, and I must beg evewy gentleman to be sewious. The object of the committee is to encouwage the juniahs of St. Jim's in keepin' pets and takin' pwopah care of them."

"They don't need much encouraging," said Figgins. "Nearly every fellow in the school keeps pets now, and there are always rows at their being found in the studies. I heard that Herr Schneider sat down on a hedgehog the other day——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It was my hedgehog," said Blake indignantly. "This pretty, harmless little thing. It was rough on him. Schneider is no light weight."

"Ha, ha! Wasn't Schneider hurt?"

"Schneider! Oh, very likely! I was thinking about my hedgehog."

"To wesume," said D'Arcy. "The competition will be held in the school hall, with the doctah's permish, which we shall obtain, and we'll have a whip wound to make up the pwizes for the best exhibits."

"It's not a bad idea!"

"If you thwee boundahs——"

"Eh?" said Figgins & Co.

"I mean if you thwee gentlemen care to join the committee, we shall be pleased to welcome you, and the body will then be wepwesentative of both houses."

"Good!" said Figgins.

"Here, that won't do!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "You can't have six Fourth-Formers to three of the Shell!"

"Now, my deah Lowthah, don't be unweasonable! The New House will natuwally expect to be wepwesented on the beastly committee!"

"That's all very well, but——"

"Fair's fair!" said Figgins, grinning. "If we're to come into the scheme, we must have seats on the committee, of course!"

"The New House representation will be limited to three—us three," said Kerr. "You can't grumble at that, Lowther."

"That's all very well——"

"Well, we'll put it to the vote," said D'Arcy. "Hands up for Figgins & Co. being allowed to join the committee on equal terms!"

Three hands went up, including D'Arcy's own, the other two voters being Blake and Herries.

"Now hands up against!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther put up their hands.

"The numbahs are equal," said D'Arcy. "As chairman I have the castin' vote, and I cast it in favah of Figgins & Co."

"Hear, hear!" said the New House trio.

"That bein' settled——" went on D'Arcy.

"Rats!" exclaimed the Terrible Three hotly. "If there are six of the Fourth on the committee, there ought to be six of the Shell!"

"My deah boys, we can't have the whole coll. on the committee."

"Perhaps not," said Tom Merry. "But——"

"We'll put it to the vote again," said D'Arcy patiently. "Figgins & Co. now belong to the committee, and will vote with the rest. Hands up for incweasin' the numbah of the membahs of the committee."

The Terrible Three voted.

"Hands up against it."

Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. promptly elevated their hands. D'Arcy's casting vote was not needed this time.

"You are outnumbahed, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

"I twust that you will play the game, Mewwy, and not object to the workin' of the wules which you helped to fwame."

"That's all very well——" said Lowther.

"That's what I say!" exclaimed Manners. "I——"

"Oh, never mind," said Tom Merry, "anything for the sake of peace in the family! Get on with the washing!"

"Yaas, wathah! Tom Mewwy, Mannahs, and Lowthah bein' completely satisfied, we will now pwoceed to business," said Arthur Augustus, beaming round upon the committee.

## CHAPTER 4.

### The Committee's First Meeting.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS adjusted his monocle in his right eye, and tapped the table with a businesslike air.

"We will now pwoceed to business," he repeated.

"Well, proceed then!" said Blake.

"Pway pay attention to the mattah in hand, Blake, and let that beastly hedgehog alone, deah boy!"

"My hedgehog is not beastly, Gussy. I call him Adolphus because he's so nice," said Blake. "Let my hedgehog alone."

"I'm not likely to touch him, but weally——"

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"Pay attention, then. In the first place, havin' agweed that there is to be a competition, we must lay down——"

"What do you want to lie down for?" asked Herries. "I don't see why we can't sit as we are."

"You are vewy dense, Hewwies. We must lay down some wules——"

"Some what?"

"Some wules to govern the competition."

"Oh, some rules! I see! Go on!"

"Some wules with wegard to the entwants," said D'Arcy. "Now, in the first place I think a pwize ought to be given to the most unique pet——"

"That's a good wheeze," said Herries. "My big bulldog——"

"My hedgehog——" exclaimed Blake.

"My squirrel," began Lowther.

"Oh, pway dwy up, and allow your wespected chairman to speak. The pwize will be awarded when the competition opens, of course. Now we have only got to decide what the pwizes are to be."

"Well, first prize to the most unique pet," said Blake. "That's settled. What's the first prize to be?"

"Oh, I don't know. I should suggest a fivah!"

"I suppose you mean five bob?" said Figgins.

"Just as you like, deah boys; I am not particular about a twifle," said D'Arcy. "The first pwize is to be five bob, then. Is that agweed?"

"Yes, passed unanimously, and without the aid of a net," said Lowther.

"Pway do not be funny, Lowthah! This is a sewious mattah. I think the second pwize should be for the largest

"numbah of pets of any kind—say, white mice or wabbits——"

"Passed!"

"The third pwize for the best-kept pet, of any kind whatsoevah."

"Good!"

"That will do for the pwesent, with wegard to the pwizes," said D'Arcy. "Now as to the othah conditions. An exhibition of the pets to be held in the Hall on Saturday afternoon next——"

"Suppose the Head won't allow us the use of the Hall," suggested Manners.

"Oh, he will, for such a laudable object, I am assured!" replied D'Arcy. "If he will not, we shall have to use the wood-shed. But I should pwefer the Hall, as bein' more dignified, as well as considewably largah."

"Hear, hear!"

"The terms of the competition will be published to all the school, and evewyone who entahs for the pwizes will have to contwibute a pwoportionate amount towards them," said D'Arcy. "It will pwobably not amount to more than a few pence each, if the pwizes are of the widiculous smallness suggested by Figgins."

"It's the honour of the thing," said Tom Merry.

"The filthy lucre is nothing," said Blake loftily.

"Yaas, wathah!" assented the chairman. "As Tom Mewwy vewy pwopahly obsewves, the honah is what we want. Any boy of either house can entah the competition, by payin' the entwance fee in advance. All the money received to be divided in the form of pwizes. That will be satisfactowy to all concerned."

"Good!" said Figgins. "We'd better draw up a notice to that effect and post it in both houses."

"You mean, I had better draw up a notice!"

"Oh, rats! Go on!"

D'Arcy produced a fountain-pen and drew a sheet of paper towards him.

"You fellows may wead it ovah aftah I have w'itten it," he said condescendingly. "I shall be glad to have your opinions——"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake, looking round. "Where's Adolphus?"

The hedgehog had disappeared.

Blake jumped up from his chair, and began to look anxiously about the room. He had lost his hedgehog once before, and had had a great deal of trouble in recapturing it. But Adolphus had vanished

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "The door's ajar, and he's gone! What silly ass left the door open——"

"Nevah mind the hedgehog now," said D'Arcy, "the business in hand is to dwaw up the notice wegardin' the competition——"

"Oh, blow the competition——"

D'Arcy rose to his feet with a great deal of dignity. He adjusted his eyeglass and stared chillingly at the chief of Study No. 6.

"Blake, it is imposs. for me, as chairman of this honowable meetin', to allow such an expwession as that to pass."

"Oh, rats, rats, rats!"

"I wefuse to have such contemptuous expwessions used in this club-woom. I call upon the honowable membah to withdwaw those words!"

"I tell you I've lost my hedgehog"

"Wats to your hedgehog! Are you goin' to apologise?"

"Catch me, ass!"

"As chairman of the committee, I must uttahly wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass. I call upon the honowable membah to withdwaw his words, or to wetire fwom the meetin."

"I'm going to retire, to look for Adolphus!" grinned Blake, going to the door

"Vewy well. You are wequested not to attend the next meetin' of the committee, Blake. You cannot be admitted to the sittin's till you have pwopahly apologised."

"Oh, go and eat cokernuts!" said Blake disrespectfully.

And he retired from the committee meeting, in search of the truant Adolphus. D'Arcy frowned darkly, and took up his fountain-pen again.

"We will now pwoceed to dwaw up the notice," he said. "I will wite it out, and then I shall be glad to have your opinion."

"But I say, Gussy——" began Tom Merry.

"Don't intewwupt me now, deah boy. I'm just getting an idea."

"But——" said Figgins.

"I must wequest silence in the committee-woom."

"Yes," said Kerr. "But——"

"Pway dwy up for the pwesent."

The committee dried up. D'Arcy leaned his head on his left hand, and jabbed at the paper thoughtfully with the pen in his right. He was too deeply engrossed to observe the movements of the committee.

The juniors winked at one another and stole quietly on tiptoe to the door. One by one they passed out, and D'Arcy was left alone in the committee-room. Quite unconscious of the fact, he proceeded with his task of drawing up the notice.

"Yaas, I think this will do," he murmured, and his pen began to scratch.

"NOTICE.

"An exhibition will be held in the School Hall on Saturday afternoon next, of pets kept by the boys of St. James's Collegiate School.

"Prizes will be offered for the most unique pet, for the greatest number of pets kept by any single exhibitor, and for the best-kept pets.

"First prize: 5s.; Second prize: 5s.; Third prize: 5s.!

"All boys, of both houses, may enter the competition. The seniors are not barred, but if they take part they will be expected to behave themselves.

"Signed, for the Committee,

"ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, Chairman."

"There, I think that will do," said D'Arcy, reading the notice aloud. "You can take a copy of this, Figgins, and stick it up in the New House."

There was no reply from Figgins.

"I weally think I have worded it pwetty well," went on Arthur Augustus. "Don't you think so, Tom Mewwy?"

Still no reply.

The dead silence in the committee-room made D'Arcy look up from the document. He glanced around him in amazement.

"Bai Jove! They are gone! How extwemely wude of them to go without sayin' a word! Weally, undah the circs, I think I had better go, too."

And the swell of the School House turned out the gas and quitted the committee-room.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Hunting a Hedgehog!

"DEAR me! What can have happened here?"

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House at St. Jim's, stared at his desk in dismay. He had just come into his study, and turned up the gas, and the state of his desk at once caught his eye. He had left it open in quitting the room hastily, and now——

"Dear me! Who—what can have done this?"

A cheerful face looked in at the door.

"If you please, sir——"

"Blake!"—Mr. Railton glanced at the junior—"what do you want?"

"If you please, sir, have you seen my hedgehog?"

The housemaster started.

"So you have lost a hedgehog, Blake?"

"Yes, sir; and Skimpole says he saw it near this study, and——"

"Come and look at this desk, Blake!"

The junior, with a wondering look, obeyed. The interior of the desk looked as if it had been burrowed in by an army of rats. Blake looked dismayed. He guessed that Adolphus the hedgehog had been at work there.

"What do you think has caused that havoc among my books and papers, Blake?" asked the housemaster severely.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Do you think it possible that it was a hedgehog?"

"It—it might have been, sir."

"I see no harm in keeping a hedgehog as a pet, Blake," said the housemaster, after a pause; "but you know that it is forbidden to bring them into the house. The doctor went to the expense of having a special building erected for their accommodation, and——"

"I only brought Adolphus into the club-room to show to the fellows there," said Blake ruefully. "While we were talking, he got away."

"You will take a hundred lines for bringing a pet into the house, Blake."

"Y-e-e-e-e-es, sir."

"And when the hedgehog is recaptured, he must be taken back to his proper place, and in future kept there."

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

And Blake left the study with a solemn face. He was sorry for the damage that had been done to the housemaster's papers, and sorrier still that he had an imposition of a hundred lines in consequence.

"Have you seen my hedgehog?" he asked, as he met Mellish in the passage.

Mellish, the cad of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, assumed a very thoughtful expression.

"Hedgehog?" he repeated. "I say, Gore, was that a hedgehog we saw in Knox's study?"

"I suppose so," said Gore. "It wasn't a sea-serpent or a hippopotamus."

Blake looked alarmed. Knox was a prefect, and the worst bully in the School House at St. Jim's, and he was known to be cruel to animals. If he found Adolphus exploring his study, and perhaps working as much havoc as in the housemaster's room, there was no telling what he might do.

"I say, are you potting?" he exclaimed. "If my hedgehog is in Knox's study——"

"All right, you can doubt my word if you like," said Mellish. "That's what I expect from you when I try to do you a good turn."

"Well, you're such a fearful fibber," said Blake.

"I don't care! The beastly animal may have been there, or it may not. Knox may have shut it up in his coal-locker and piled coal on it, or he may not. Go and find out."

"Look here, Mellish——"

"I've got no more to say. Go and find out."

"Oh, I say, that's hardly fair, Mellish," said Gore. "You'd better speak out, and let Blake go and get his hedgehog. It's cruelty——"

"I'm not going to say more. I should get into a row with Knox if I told what he was going to do with the brute——"

Blake waited to hear no more. Although Mellish was not famous for truthfulness, the corroboration of Gore seemed to be sufficient, added to what he knew of the brutal character of Knox the prefect.

The anxious junior raced away to Knox's study at once. He knocked at the door, and there was a shuffling sound inside the study, as of someone hastily moving, but no voice bade him enter.

Blake knocked again. Then the voice of the prefect was heard.

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Blake, of the Fourth!"

"Go away, then, you young hound!"

"I want my hedgehog!"

"Eh?"

"My hedgehog is in this study!"

"It isn't! I haven't seen it. Cut off!"

But Blake's suspicions were too strong now. The door was locked, as he found when he tried the handle. What was the door locked for, unless something was going on in the study which would not bear the light?

The junior thumped on the panels again.

"Go away!" roared Knox.

"Why can't you let me come in?"

"Because I don't choose! I'll wring your neck if I come out to you! Get off!"

"I won't go till I've seen whether you've got my hedgehog there."

"You fool! What should I want with your hedgehog?"

"You're beast enough for anything!"

This remark would certainly have made the prefect open the door and come out with a cane unless he had been particularly occupied. But the door did not open. Blake banged on it again, and kicked forcibly at the lower panels. There was a growl of rage from within.

"Are you going away?"

"Not till I've got my hedgehog."

Still the door did not open. The prefect, for some reason best known to himself, had apparently determined to leave the junior's persistence unpunished. There was the sound of a whisper in the study, and Blake caught it.

"Are you going to stand that cheek, Knox?"

It was the voice of Sefton, of the New House, a crony of the School House prefect, and quite as big a bully as Knox.

Blake did not catch Knox's reply, but the door remained shut. He kicked again for a minute or two, and then desisted. It was evidently useless.

But Blake was not to be beaten. He knew that most of the Sixth Form studies had locks of the same pattern, and he went along the corridor and took the key out of the lock of the first unoccupied study.

Then he returned to Knox's door. The key was in the lock inside, but by its barring the light, Blake knew that it was in a position to be pushed out. He gently inserted the new key on the outside, and with a click the inside one dropped on the floor of the study. The next moment Blake had turned the key in the lock and thrown the door open.

Knox and Sefton started up in amazement. There was a suspicious haze in the study, and the two Sixth-Formers had their right hands behind them; but Blake in his excitement did not notice it. He burst into the study with blazing eyes.

"Where's my hedgehog?" roared the junior.

"You young rascal!" gasped Knox. "I'll—I'll——"

Blake made a dash for the coal-locker. Knox sprang in his way and hurled him back. As he did so, he dropped a lighted cigarette to the floor, and Sefton picked it up and threw it into the fire, and his own followed it.

"Are you mad, you young villain?" panted Knox.

Blake staggered from the rough push of the senior, and fell against the door. But he recovered himself in a moment.

"I'm going to have my hedgehog."

"The beastly thing is not here, I tell you."

"Yes, it is; it's in the coal-locker."

"You young ass! There's nothing of the kind there."

"Let me look, then."

"I'm not going to have a junior nosing round my study. You deserve a hiding for your cheek, but if you like to cut off at once——"

"I'm not going till I've got my hedgehog!"

"Get out!" roared Knox.

"Sha'n't!" said Blake defiantly.

The prefect said no more. He rushed at Blake and seized the junior in his powerful arms. The youngster was swung to and fro, but he struggled desperately, clinging to the senior like a limpet to a rock.

"Help here, Sefton!" gasped Knox. "The young beast is a regular tiger! Drag him off!"

The New House senior came to his friend's aid. He grasped Blake by the collar and dragged him off the Sixth-Former. Blake turned on his new assailant and hit out wildly. Sefton received a clump full in the face that made him yelp with pain.

"Hold him, Sefton!" gasped Knox. "Wait till I've got the door locked, and we'll get out a cane and thrash him within an inch of his life!"

"Righto!" said the New House senior. "By George! if I had this kid over in the New House, I'd make him think life wasn't worth living, and no mistake!"

Blake struggled desperately.

"Rescue!" he bawled. "Rescue, Fourth!"

There was a heavy footstep in the passage. Knox was about to slam the door and lock it, when a newcomer appeared on the scene. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked into the study with a stern brow.

## CHAPTER 6.

### "Bowled Out!"

KILDARE looked in, and took in the scene at a glance. Sefton, turning rather red, let go Blake as the captain's eye fell on him, and stepped back.

The junior was gasping breathlessly.

"What is the matter here?"

Knox the prefect glared at Kildare.

"What does it matter to you?"

The captain of St. Jim's made a step forward, and the prefect made a corresponding step back. There was a gleam in Kildare's eyes he did not like.

"It matters to me because I am captain of the school, and don't intend to allow any bullying if I can prevent it," said Kildare quietly. "When I hear a junior calling out for help in your study, Knox, I am pretty certain that something is going on that ought to be stopped."

"That brat came in here against my will," snarled Knox. "I had my door locked, and he found another key, and opened it himself from outside."

Kildare glanced at Blake.

"Is that the case, Blake?"

"Yes, Kildare, but——"

"He forced himself in here," said Knox savagely, "and I was going to throw him out when you came along. That's the whole story."

"I'm afraid that is not quite correct. You were slamming the door, with Blake still inside the study, when I came along."

"I was going to lick him for his cheek, if you want to know. Have you any objection to the licking of a junior who forced himself into a prefect's study?" said Knox, with a sneer.

"I want to know the rights of the case first. Why did you come in here, Blake?" asked the captain of St. Jim's, looking at the flustered and indignant junior.

"I came for my hedgehog. Knox has got it in here, and he won't give it to me," burst out Blake.

"It's a lie!" growled Knox. "What the dickens should I want with his rotten hedgehog?"

"How do you know it is here, Blake?"

"I was told Knox had shoved it into his coal-locker, and piled the coal on it, because he found it in his study."

"It's all rot!" said Knox. "I haven't done anything of the kind. I haven't set eyes on the rotten animal!"

"What was your door locked for, then?" demanded Blake. "And why wouldn't you let me look in the coal-locker?"

The prefect coloured uncomfortably.



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PRICE ONE PENNY.

"I'm not going to have you nosing round my study," he said. "Who told you I put the beast into my locker?"

"You'd lick him if I told you."

"Very likely. And I'll lick you if you give me any more of your cheek. Get out of my study, you young bounder!"

"I'm not going without my hedgehog."

"I tell you it isn't here," roared Knox, exasperated.

"Let me look in the coal-locker, then."

"I won't! That's flat! Now get out! Kildare, are you going to back up that insolent brat in defying a prefect in his own study?"

The captain of St. Jim's looked worried.

The conduct of Jack Blake was decidedly insubordinate, and yet, knowing Knox's cruel nature, the school captain felt that the junior's anxiety for his pet was probably well grounded.

"Why won't you let him look in the locker, Knox?" asked Kildare, at last.

The prefect scowled savagely.

"Because I don't choose," he replied. "Do you think I am going to be dictated to by a kid out of the Fourth Form in my own study?"

"Not likely, by gum!" said Sefton.

"You can shut up, Sefton," said Kildare. "This is no business of yours. Blake, if Knox will not let you look in the locker I will look myself, and that will come to the same thing, I suppose."

"Certainly," said Blake, at once. "I know you'll make sure about it, Kildare."

"I certainly will."

The captain of St. Jim's made a step towards the locker. Knox sprang in his way with a very flushed face.

Kildare eyed him steadily.

"Stand aside, if you please, Knox."

"I'm not going to. You've no right to come here searching my study."

"You will force me to conclude that the hedgehog is there, just as Blake says."

"Conclude what you like, but you're not going to search my room like a rotten detective as if I were a criminal," said Knox heatedly.

Kildare hesitated for a moment.

"I must look in the locker," he said finally. "I ask you to stand aside, Knox."

"I won't!"

"Then I shall make you."

For a moment the two seniors looked each other full in the face. Their glances seemed to meet and cross like rapiers. Then the meaner nature weakened.

Knox, with a muttered curse, stepped back.

"Hang you! Do as you like!" he snarled.

Kildare stepped to the locker and opened it. Then he uttered a sharp exclamation. There was no sign of a hedgehog there, but just inside the locker, where they had evidently been placed for concealment, and also to be ready at hand, were a box of cigarettes and a packet of cheroots.

The murder was out at last!

Kildare looked at the two packets with a moody brow. Blake saw them too, and burst into an irrepressible giggle.

"My only maiden aunt! Baccy!"

Kildare stepped back from the locker, and looked Knox full in the face. He gave one sniff at the atmosphere. The haze of tobacco was still perceptible there.

"So that is the secret," said the captain of St. Jim's scornfully. "You fellows were smoking here like a couple of silly juniors, and——"

"It's no business of yours," growled Knox uneasily.

"It is my business to put down any rotten blackguardism that goes on in the school," said Kildare. "You know that smoking is forbidden, and that you yourself have frequently punished juniors for transgressing the rules. Now you yourself——"

"I am a prefect——"

"And ought to know better. Bah! It is no use talking to you. I shall think what I had better do in the matter. Blake, your hedgehog is not there. You have started the wrong hare. Come along!"

Knox gave the junior a glare of hatred as he left the study. He really owed the discovery to himself, for it was Blake's knowledge of the cruelty of his nature that had made the junior so determined to look for the hedgehog there. Blake would have taken any other fellow's word that the animal was not there, but Knox was paying the penalty now of occasional untruthfulness.

He was extremely uneasy as to what Kildare might do. The captain's looks were by no means reassuring as he quitted the study.

Kildare walked away, and Blake went along the passage chuckling over the incident. He had been on a false scent, but Knox deserved to be shown up. But now the burning question was, where had Adolphus the hedgehog got to?

"Hullo! Found your little beast!" inquired Mellish cheerfully as he met Blake in the passage.

Blake's nostrils dilated a little, and his eyes gleamed. He knew that Mellish had been fooling him, and had sent him on a wild-goose chase to Knox's study in the hope of getting him a licking.

"No," he said, "I haven't found him."

"Sorry! Ha, ha! Wasn't he in Knox's coal-locker?"

"No, he wasn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was very kind of you to send me there, Mellish," said Blake, "very kind indeed, and I owe you a lot of thanks."

"Oh, don't mention it!"

"But I must mention it," said Blake. "I don't want to be ungrateful, and I must make you the return you deserve. There you are!"

Blake's left came out like lightning, and Mellish received it on the end of his nose. He gave a yell, and sat down in the passage.

Blake walked away laughing, and Mellish sat up and rubbed his nose, and stared after him ruefully. The joke had seemed a screamingly funny one at first, but it did not seem quite so funny now.

## CHAPTER 7.

### The Further Adventures of Adolphus.

BLAKE hunted high and low in the School House, but he did not find Adolphus. The hedgehog had evidently gone on an extended tour, and was not to be found.

Blake came up from a hunt down the kitchen stairs, and found a crowd of juniors collected before the notice-board in the hall.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had just pinned up a paper there, and the youngsters were reading it.

"Hullo!" said Blake. "What's the little game?"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon him.

"Is that you, Blake, deah boy? You look vewy gwimy. In fact, you have an extwemely dirty and diswepputable appearance."

"I've been hunting for my hedgehog," explained Blake. "It escaped while you were gassing in the club-room."

"I wefuse to have my weally sensible and weflective speeches chawactewised as gassing," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Well, the little bounder escaped, and he's made a wreck of Mr. Railton's desk, and got me a hundred lines, and a row with a prefect. I don't know where he is now."

"And you won't find him in a hurry," Tom Merry remarked. "I've kept hedgehogs, I know. But let's read Gussy's announcement."

The notice was read, and read again. Most of the juniors were grinning over it, but the competition was generally voted a good idea.

"I weally think that will meet the case," Arthur Augustus remarked, adjusting his monocle, and surveying the notice with much satisfaction. "I will write out a copy, and send it over to Figgins to put up in the New House. I should be glad to know, Tom Mewwy, what it is you find to grin at in that notice?"

Tom Merry was certainly grinning.

"Well, I was thinking that it's a queer idea to have all three prizes of the same amount of money," he remarked.

"Oh, it isn't the money; it's the honour of the thing," said D'Arcy. "Still, there may be somethin' in what you say. I'll make an altewation."

And D'Arcy took out his pencil, and made a couple of corrections, reducing the second prize by one shilling, and the third by two shillings.

"Anythin' more to disapprove of, Tom Mewwy?"

"Not at all. I regard that notice as a triumph of keen business sagacity and literary style," said Tom Merry solemnly.

D'Arcy purred with satisfaction.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it in the same light myself," he said. "There's not many fellows who could draw up a notice so well, I flattah myself."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, don't forget to send Figgins his copy, and to get the Head's permission to use the Hall on Saturday afternoon," said Tom Merry, and he walked away with Manners and Lowther.

"Do you think the Head will give his permission, Tom?" Monty Lowther asked, very doubtfully.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Hardly," he said. "I don't think he'll allow the Hall to be over-run with all sorts and conditions of animals. But it's no good talking to Gussy. He will have to find that out for himself. Now for the prep."

The Terrible Three entered their study.

Tom Merry turned up the gas, and put his hand into the box where he kept his books. He snatched it away with a yell.

He had run his fingers upon something extremely sharp. A little black object whisked out of the basket, and scuttled away in the gloom.

"Hallo! What was that?" cried Lowther.

"Ow! Look at my hand!"

"What is it?"

"Blake's beastly hedgehog, I suppose," growled Tom Merry, nursing his hand. "I'm getting a bit tired of that hedgehog. Did the brute go out of the study?"

"I think so."

Lowther was right. The ubiquitous Adolphus was gone, and where he had disappeared to was a puzzle. But the Terrible Three did not trouble their heads about him. That was Blake's business.

Blake and his chums, after the posting up of the notice, and its discussion by the juniors of the School House, repaired to Study No. 6. The copy of the notice had to be written out for Figgins. They entered the study, and Blake glanced round in the hope of seeing something of his hedgehog. But Adolphus was not on view.

"I wish I knew where that beastly hedgehog had got to," growled Blake, "I think it will come to harm if I don't find it."

"I'll set my bull-dog to find it if you like," said Herries obligingly.

Blake gave him a withering look.

"You ass—hallo, Gussy, what's the matter?"

"Look!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy was standing in an attitude of utter horror and dismay, staring at a hat-box he had just taken from the cupboard. It certainly bore signs of ill-usage, having apparently been gnawed through by rats. Gussy opened it with a trembling hand, and took out the gorgeous silk topper it contained. Then he sank into a chair, too overcome for words.

In the side of the silk hat was a big, ragged hole. The topper was done for; it was fit only for the dust-heap.

"My hat!" said D'Arcy faintly. "My new hat! My toppah!"

Blake and Herries stared at the hat, and then burst into a roar.

D'Arcy put down the hat, rose to his feet, and stared at them indignantly.

"Blake! Hewwies! You unfeelin' wuffians! Is it a laughin' mattah, to see a new toppah gnawed away by wats."

"It wasn't rats," gasped Herries. "It must have been Blake's hedgehog."

"Oh, Adolphus!" cackled Blake.

"Blake! I wefuse to have my toppahs devoured by your objectionable hedgehog. I uttahly wefuse to submit to anythin' of the kind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard the conduct of that beastly hedgehog as outwageous. I considah that it is not a pet to be kept by a respectable person. An animal that will not respect a silk toppah will not wespect anythin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway cease this untimely and diswputable mewwiment. My silk toppah has been wuined, and it isn't a seven-and-sixah like the howwid things you fellows wear. It is a new one in the latest style, with the latest thing in bwims, and now I shall have to go out in an old-fashioned hat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am uttahly disgusted! I wegard you both with pwofound contempt!" roared D'Arcy. "I despise you feahfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed the swell of the School House as he stared at the two almost hysterical juniors. He felt that nothing he could say would be equal to the occasion, and he turned with a disdainful sniff and strode from the study. He left Blake and Herries rocking to and fro with laughter.

"I say, D'Arcy," said Mellish, looking out of his study, "Come in here, will you? I've got something to show you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus entered the study of the cad of the Fourth.

"Anything wrong?" asked Mellish, looking at him curiously, "the serenity of your aristocratic brow seems to be disturbed."

"Yaas, wathah! Blake's beastly hedgehog has been makin' a suppah off my new silk toppah, and Blake wegards the mattah as a joke."

"Ha, ha! I mean horrid. It's too bad. But I say, I've something to show you. I found it in that box when I came into my study. Hand it out, will you?"

Mellish pointed to a box lying in a corner of the study. It was too dark there to see what was in the box, but D'Arcy unsuspiciously thrust his hand inside to take out the article there, whatever it might be.

"Ow!" he yelled, "I've wun my fingah on a needle."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Mellish.

"Why, it's a wotten hedgehog! I've wun my fingah on his beastly quills," said the swell of the School House. "You howwid wottah, Mellish, you did this on purpose. It was a beastly mean twick."

"Ha, ha, ha! I did the same myself, and I thought I'd give you a treat."

"You are a wotten rascal, and I think I had bettah give you a lickin'," said D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs, "you have been wequirin' a lickin' for a long time, Mellish, and it is imposs. for me to overlook a twick like this. You have made me hurt my beastly hand, you wascal. Look out!"

"Oh, rats; I——"

"I am sowwy to say that it is a question of dig. with me, and therefore I cannot see any alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'," said D'Arcy. "Pway wait a minute while I wemove my jacket, as I do not wish to cwumple it in thwashin' you. Why, the howwid boundah has wun away. Mellish, where are you goin'? I insist upon your immediately weturnin' so that I can thwash you."

But Mellish did not return, and Arthur Augustus quitted the study in an extremely indignant frame of mind.

## CHAPTER 8.

### A Disappointment for D'Arcy.

"D'ARCY!"

"Yaas, deah boy—I mean, yes, sir."

It was the morning, and the boys were going into the hall to breakfast. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, looked severely at D'Arcy through his big spectacles.

"D'Arcy, you are wanted in Mr. Railton's study after breakfast, before prayers."

"Yes, sir," said D'Arcy.

And the swell of the School House sat down at the breakfast-table. He did not look very much concerned, though a summons into the housemaster's study generally meant a far from pleasant interview for the junior so summoned.

"What's wrong now, image?" whispered Blake. "What have you been doing?"

"Nothin'," said D'Arcy, languidly. "Nothin' at all, deah boy. The housemastah is probably labouwin' undah some misappwehension, which I shall set wight when I see him."

Blake grinned.

"Better put an exercise book inside your garments, my son, in case of accidents."

D'Arcy gave him a disdainful sniff.

"I should certainly wefuse to do anythin' so extwemely undignified, Blake, to say nothin' of the fact that it would spoil the shape of my twousahs."

"Ha, ha, ha! I forgot the twousahs."

After breakfast, D'Arcy walked to the housemaster's study with a very dignified air. He knocked and went in. Mr. Railton was not there, but he came in a few minutes later.

"Ah, D'Arcy! I asked Mr. Lathom to send you to me."

"Yaas, sir. I am here."

"You are the author, I believe, of a notice that was placed on the board in the Hall last night," said the housemaster.

"Yaas, wathah, sir. I dwew it up all by myself, as chairman and secwetawy of the competition committee."

"Ahem! You announce some sort of an exhibition——"

"Yaas, with pwizes for the pets. First pwize, five shillin's——"

"Exactly. Now——"

"Second pwize, four shillin's——"

WE ARE GETTING HOT!

IT IS NEXT WEEK THAT

THE "GEM" LIBRARY will be enlarged to 1D. Order No. 49 NOW!

ORDER NOW!



"Ow!" yelled Darcy. "I've wun my fingah on a beastly needle!"

"What I want to say is——"

"Third pwize, thwee shillin's——"

"Will you listen to me, D'Arcy?"

"Certainly, sir. I always listen with gweat pleasure to a gentleman whom I wespect so highly."

The housemaster tried to hide a smile. It was really impossible to be angry with the swell of the School House.

"Very well, D'Arcy. You announce that this exhibition will be held in the school-hall——"

"Yaas, wathah, by the kind permish. of the doctah."

"I am afraid that it is quite impossible."

D'Arcy's jaw dropped. He stared at the housemaster in dismay.

"Weally, Mr. Wailton——"

"The lecture-hall cannot possibly be used for such a purpose. I am giving you this warning to save you from disappointment, so that you can make some other arrangement if you keep up the idea of holding an exhibition of the boys' pets."

"That is vewy kind of you, sir. It is weally a wippin' ideah, you know. It flashed all of a sudden into my bwain——"

"Yes, yes, exactly. But you cannot use the lecture-hall. It is impossible to have an animal show held in such a place. That is all. You may go."

"But pway listen to me for a single moment, Mr. Wailton. It is quite impos. to hold the show anywhere else——"

"Then I'm afraid it cannot be held at all. You may go, D'Arcy."

"But pway listen a moment. It is most important that this show should be held. The youngstahs would be disappointed. Then we have alweady been subscwibin' for the pwizes, and I have collected nine shillings towards them alweady."

"I am sorry, but——"

"Pway, one moment more. The lecture-hall is just the place for the show, and if any damage is done we will have a whip wound to waise the money to set it wight. We all want to do the honowable thing, you know. Besides, the pets won't hurt the place, my dear sir. Pewwaps Blake's hedgehog might do some damage, but I will make a stip. that the hedgehog is not allowed there——"

"You will make a what?"

"A stip., sir, that the hedgehog——"

"What is a stip.?"

"A stipulation, sir."

"Oh, I see. Well, I think I said a few moments ago that you might go, D'Arcy. I repeat the remark. You may go. Can you understand that, or must I enforce and amplify my meaning with the aid of a cane?"

"Pway do not be angwy, Mr. Wailton. This is a most important mattah. Am I to undahstand that the Head has wefused his permish.?"

"The Head knows nothing about the matter, but it is ridicu-

lous for you to suppose that he will allow the lecture-hall to be used for any such purpose," said the housemaster impatiently.

"Yaas, but have I your permish. to ask him, sir?"

The housemaster smiled.

"Certainly, you can ask him if you like. Meanwhile, cross out that line on the notice on the board; I cannot allow it to remain there."

"Certainly, sir. I am always weady to oblige a gentleman whom I wespect——"

"You may go."

"——so highly as I do you, sir. I wegard——"

"Will you go?"

"Certainly, sir. I wegard——"

Mr. Railton made a step towards the swell of the School House, and D'Arcy popped out of the study with more haste than aristocratic calm for the nonce.

The swell of St. Jim's crossed out the part of the announcement on the notice-board to which the housemaster took exception, at the same time determining to carry his appeal to the Head. D'Arcy was very thoughtful in class that morning, settling in his mind the little speech he intended to make when he interviewed the doctor.

His inattention in class earned him fifty lines of Schiller from Herr Schneider; but D'Arcy was too full of his ideas to care for a little thing like that. When morning school was over, the Fourth Form trooped out, and met the Shell in the passage as they came out of their class-room. Arthur Augustus tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder, and the hero of the Shell looked round with a good-humoured smile.

"I want you to come with me, Tom Mewwy, if you will have the kindness," said D'Arcy.

"Certainly. To the tuckshop?"

"No," said D'Arcy hastily. "I am goin' to the Head to ask permish. to use the lectuah-hall for the show on Saturday. Mr. Wailton says I cannot have it, but I have his permish. to ask the Head, and so——"

"It won't be any good——"

"I shall put it to the Head in a pwactical way, as one gentleman to anothah," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I weally cannot see how he can fail to listen to weason. But I don't want to go alone. Will you come with me?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I don't mind. Are you going now?"

"Yaas, wathah, before the Head goes to lunch."

"Come along then," grinned Tom Merry. "Do you want me to do the talking?"

"Certainly not. You are wathah a clevah chap in some wespects, but in a mattah of this kind tact and judgment are the chief things wequired; and so it will be bettah for a fellow of my bwain powah to do the talkin'."

The juniors arrived at the door of the Head's study, and D'Arcy tapped. A deep voice came from within:

"Come in!"

D'Arcy hesitated for a moment, and pressed Tom Merry's arm.

"I say, Mewwy, I feel just a twifle nervous, you know."

"Do you really?" grinned Tom. "Well, no wonder."

"Do you think the Head will wegard it as a feahful cheek?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Come in!" said the deep voice again.

D'Arcy opened the door, and the juniors entered the study. Dr. Holmes looked up from his writing-table, adjusted his pince-nez, and fixed his eyes on the two.

"Well, D'Arcy, Merry, do you want to speak to me?"

"Ya-a-a-a-a-as, wathah, sir," said D'Arcy, with an effort.

"You may go on."

"The fact is, sir," said D'Arcy, trying in vain to recall the neat little speech he had prepared for the occasion—"the fact is, sir, that—that the fact is, sir——"

The Head smiled.

"Well, what is the fact?" he asked.

"The fact is, sir—that we—are going——"

"Yes?"

"We—we are going——"

"Very well, D'Arcy," said the Head quietly. "You may go."

"I—I don't mean that, sir——"

"We are going to give an animal show, sir, an exhibition of pets," said Tom Merry, to help out the floundering swell of St. Jim's.

"Pway do not intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy."

"Why, I was helping you to explain."

"Yaas, yaas, I dare say your intentions are good, deah boy, but you confuse me with your intewwuptions," said D'Arcy. "Pway leave me to explain to the doctah."

"Why, you image——"

"Wemembah our agweement, I am to do the talkin'," said D'Arcy. "Pray be silent, you are wastin' the valuable time of our wespected Headmastah."

"You are indeed wasting my time," said the Head. "May I request you to come to the point at once, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir. I should have explained in a moment if Tom Mewwy had not persisted in intewwuptin' me. He is so beastly obstinate——"

"I am very busy now, D'Arcy."

"Certainly, sir; that is why it is so vewy unweasonable of Mewwy to keep on intewwuptin' a fellow who is weally in a huwwy to come to the point."

"Oh, get on, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"You are intewwuptin' me again——"

"You may go, D'Arcy," said the Head, taking up his pen.

"Thank you, sir; but I am not finished yet. If Tom Mewwy will keep silent I will explain in a moment. We are goin' to give an exhibition of pets in the lectuah-hall——"

"Really!" said the Head.

"Yes, sir. We want your kind permish. to use the hall for the purpose."

"I am afraid I cannot grant it. An exhibition of that kind would be more suitably held in a less select spot than the college hall," said the Head.

"But pway allow me to explain, sir."

"I cannot discuss the matter with you, D'Arcy."

"But pway——"

"You may go."

"But——"

"Go!" thundered the Head, in a voice that made the swell of the School House jump.

"Certainly, sir," said D'Arcy. "I should be extremely sowwy to intwude anywhere where my pwesence was not appweciated."

And he left the Head's study. Tom Merry managed to restrain his merriment till he was safely out of the study, and then he gave a roar.

"Oh, Gussy, Gussy! You'll be the death of me!"

"I weally fail to see anythin' to gwin at, Tom Mewwy. In my opinion the Head has acted in a hasty mannah, and he weally owes me an apology."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway do not cackle like that, you weally fatigue me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned on his heel, and swung away indignantly. And Tom Merry went off chuckling, to detail to his chums in the Shell the interview with the Head of St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Trouble on the Committee!

"HERE we are again!" said Figgins, coming up to the door of the committee-room, and kicking it open. "Hallo, all in the dark!"

It was evening, and Figgins & Co. had arrived for the committee meeting, and they had evidently arrived early. The room was empty and in darkness.

"Strike a light, Kerr," said Figgins.

The Scottish partner in the Co. struck a vesta, and lighted the gas. The Co. proceeded to make themselves comfortable in the chairs. A few minutes later Arthur Augustus came in.

"Glad to see you, deah boys," said the swell of the School House, with a polite bow. "I see you are the first. Ah, here come the Shell boundahs."

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came in. Herries appeared a few minutes later, and the committee numbered nine. Then Arthur Augustus took the chair.

"Aren't we going to wait for Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

"Blake is no longah a membah of the committee," said D'Arcy. "He has wefused to tender an apology to the chairman for his conduct on the night of the first meetin', and so he will not be——"

D'Arcy was interrupted by the entrance of Blake into the committee-room. The swell of the School House rose to his feet, adjusted his monocle, and surveyed the late comer.

"I'm in time, I see," said Blake cheerfully.

"Pway stand back, Blake! You cannot sit down here."

Blake regarded the swell of St. Jim's with amazement.

"Hallo! what's the matter with you, Gussy?" he exclaimed. "Are you off your noble rocker, old kid?"

"Certainly not. But you cannot join this committee again until you have tendahed an apology to the chairman."

"Oh, rats to you!"

"Pway wetire," said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "Pway wetire, John Blake, and do not place me undah the painful necessity of usin' violence."

Blake cackled.

"It would be a painful necessity for somebody, I think," he replied. "Now, Gussy, don't be an ass. You're not in Colney Hatch now."

"I leave it to the committee," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "whethah they shall be tweated diswespectfully in the person of their chairman——"

"Never!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Apologise!"

"Apologise!" roared the committee, with one voice.

Blake looked round, and grinned.

"Oh, very well!" he exclaimed. "I bow to the voice of the majority. Arthur Algernon, I hereby and thusly do expressly and substantially withdraw and take back the words, expressions, looks, actions, thoughts, and other things, with which I did offend and anger your noble nibs."

"Vewy good," said D'Arcy, beaming. "As one gentleman to anothah, I overlook your wude expwessions, and you are permitted to wejoin the honouwable committee. Gentlemen, I have a communication to make to you."

"Half a mo," said Blake. "I have a question to ask."

"It is not in ordah."

"But it's very important."

"You must not intewwupt the chairman."

"But I want to know——"

"Oh, vewy well; pway ask your beastly questions."

"Has anybody seen my hedgehog?" asked Blake, looking round.

The committee shook their heads. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned red with wrath.

"Do you mean to say, Blake, that you have intewwupted the business of the meetin' to ask a widiculous question about a hedgehog?"

"Well, he's still lost. You see——"

"Silence! Ordah! Gentlemen, I have a communi——"

"If I don't catch him," said Blake, "he'll do some damage, as sure as a gun. Fellows make such a fuss over trifles. You remember you didn't like his getting into your hatbox, Gussy."

"Silence! Gentlemen, I have a communication to make to you. The Head has somewhat inconsidewately wefused us the use of the lectuah-hall, and we shall be compelled to hold the exhibition in the woodshed aftah all."

"Rotten!" said the committee.

"Yaas, we must admit that it is wathah wotten, but as it cannot be helped we must make the best of it," said D'Arcy. "Aftah all, there is no weason why the show should not be held in the woodshed with gweat success."

"What about Taggles? He's monarch of all he surveys in that department," said Tom Merry. "He might object to our filling up the woodshed with boxes and cages."

"Taggles will not venchah to wowwy us," said D'Arcy. "If he does we will eithah tip him half-a-soveweign or duck him in the pond."

"Ha, ha, ha! I wonder which he'd prefer?" cackled Monty Lowther.

"The show will take place at the time awwanged in the woodshed instead of in the lectuah-hall," said D'Arcy. "That is the only change. I may mention that I have a scheme in my head for cawwyin' off one of the pwizes; but I shall not tell you what it is or you may get there first, deah boys."

"That's all right," said Figgins. "We've got a little scheme on, too, and it will come as a little surprise to you."

"What is the scheme, deah boy?"

"Oh, that's a secret, of course."

"Wathah not," said D'Arcy, "as chairman of the committee, I have the wight to know all about it, and I call upon you to explain, Figgins."

"You can call till you're deaf and blind," said Figgins, "and then you can call again till you're black in the face; but, I sha'n't let you on the wheeze."

"I wegard this language as diswespectful to the chairman. You must withdwaw your words and explain the wheeze, or else wetire fwom the committee."

"Oh, we'll retire, then," said Figgins. "Come along, kids, it's about time we had tea." And Figgins & Co. retired from the committee.

"I wegard Figgins & Co. as a set of wottahs," said D'Arcy. "It was extwemely diswespectful of them to wefuse information to the chairman. We shall settle who takes the pwizes by general vote of the committee, but we will make it a wule that no membah votes for himself——"

Mellish put his head in at the door of the committee-room. D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye and stared at him freezingly.

"Pway wetire, Mellish," he said. "These are pwivate quartahs——"

"I say, Blake!" exclaimed Mellish excitedly, without taking any notice of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Hallo! What is it?" said Blake, looking round.

"Pway wetire——"

"Are you looking for a hedgehog, Blake?"

"Yes, rather! Have you seen my Adolphus?"

"I wefuse to allow Mellish to——"

"I thought so," said Mellish. "You're looking for a hedgehog, Blake?"

"Yes, yes! What about it?"

"Oh, you can go on looking, that's all," said Mellish, and vanished. Blake jumped up in hot wrath.

"Sit down, Blake!"

"I'm going to wring Mellish's neck for him first," said Blake, and he dashed out of the committee-room.

"These pwoceedings," said D'Arcy, looking round, "are most iwwegulah. I shall have to sewiously considah whethah Blake and Figgins & Co. shall be allowed to weturn to the committee at all. Where are you going, Hewwies?"

"It's time I fed my bulldog."

"Pway sit down."

But Herries was gone.

The Terrible Three remained alone with Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's rose from his chair.

"Gentlemen," he said, with dignity, "the meetin' of the committee is now dissolved."

And in a minute more the club-room was empty and in darkness.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Mr. Ratcliff Finds the Missing Hedgehog.

TOM MERRY was looking thoughtful as he came out from morning school on Saturday. And Lowther and Manners inquired the why and wherefore.

"I was wondering what was that wheeze Figgins spoke of the other night," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "They haven't let on about it yet."

"Perhaps it was only gas," said Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, it wasn't! Figgins has some wheeze in his head for collaring the first prize, I believe. I think I am pretty safe for the third prize," said Tom, with pardonable pride. "Three bob for the best-kept pet, and I don't think there are any pets in the school to beat my white rabbits in that line."

"Good!" said Lowther. "But we must make sure of at least one prize coming to our study, for the honour and glory of the thing. The first prize is for the most unique pet. Do you think Figgins & Co. have unearthed one?"

"Yes, that's my idea."

"Then we'd better keep an eye on them."

"Yes. If there's anything up against the School House, we must be on to it, like a bird," said Tom Merry emphatically.

After dinner most of the juniors of St. Jim's were busy and excited.

The woodshed had been cleared to some extent, and all was in readiness for the show to be held.

It was to come off at four o'clock, and never was seen such a procession of cages, and boxes, and baskets. From the "menagerie," where the pets were kept, from all sorts of mysterious corners of the old buildings, from the recesses of the junior studies, pets came forth in great numbers for the exhibition.

D'Arcy was observed to wear an anxious look as the time passed on. He made frequent walks down to the gate to survey the road, as if in expectation of something. Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder as he stared down the lane, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a start.

"Hallo, Sister Anne!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Do you see anyone coming?"

"You quite startled me, Tom Mewwy."

"What are you looking for so anxiously, fathead?"

"Pway do not chawactewise me as a fathead. I wegard it as wude. I am lookin' for the awwival of the cawwiah."

"The carrier! Has he got something for you?"

"Yaas, wathah! You know the second pwize in the competition is for the largest numbah of pets kept by any single [illegible]——"

"Yes. Have you been sending to the circus in Rylcombe for a consignment of animals?"

"Oh, no! I have given an ordah to a London firm for two hundred white mice——"

"Two hundred white mice!"

"Yaas, wathah! They will be delivahed to the wailway station this morning, and the cawwiah was to bwing them along by dinnah time."

"Two hundred white mice!" repeated Tom Merry. "So that was the idea you mentioned in committee the other night?"

"Yaas, wathah! Not a bad ideah, eh?" said D'Arcy, with much satisfaction. "I get vewy good ideahs sometimes. They flash into my bwain——"

"Ha, ha, ha! But suppose your two hundred white mice arrive too late?"

"That would be too wotten! Pewwaps I could postpone the exhibition till Wednesday."

"Perhaps you couldn't do anything of the kind."

"Pway pardon me, but as chairman I have the powah to fix the time," said the swell of the School House, with dignity. "I hope, howevah, that it will not be necessawy. Ah, I can see the cawwiah now!"

ANSWERS

The carrier's cart could be seen at last lumbering slowly up the lane.

"But I say," Tom Merry remarked, "it must have cost you a pretty penny for two hundred white mice and their cages, to say nothing of the carriage down from London."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And all to take a prize of four shillings."

"Oh, you see, it's the honah and glowy of the thing!" said D'Arcy. "We were bound to get at least one pwize to our study. I think it pwobable that you will take third pwize for those fat white wabbits of yours, and I thought I'd make sure of the second. I don't know who will take the first."

"Figgins is going to have a try, I think."

"I say," exclaimed Blake, coming up, "have you seen my hedgehog?"

"Ha, ha! No. Haven't you found Adolphus yet?"

"No. He's been missing nearly a week."

"Bai Jove! And is there a twace of him yet?"

"Yes," grinned Blake. "Plenty of traces of him. He's gnawed about everything that was gnawable in the School House. He has a particular weakness for hat-boxes, and Knox's Sunday topper has been the latest victim."

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Knox!"

"Pway do not laugh at your schoolmate's feahful misfortune Tom Mewwy. An accident to a silk toppah is no subject for mewwiment. I know what it is like. I feel for Knox, though he is a howwid bwute."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom. "There are your two hundred white mice——"

"Two hundred white mice!" gasped Blake. "My only hat!"

The carrier had arrived. Cage after cage was carried to the woodshed. D'Arcy superintended the work with an air of great pride and satisfaction. Blake went off in search of his hedgehog. He met Figgins & Co. coming out of the New House, and asked them the usual question.

"No," grinned Figgins, "I haven't seen it. Those little bounders burrow away like anything, and you'll probably never see him again."

"Well, you are a giddy Job's comforter!" exclaimed Blake, in disgust. "I want him particularly now, to show in the exhibition. He's not in the School House that I can discover, and I thought he might have burrowed his way over to your side."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Figgins. "You can look round the New House if you like. It's pax for the afternoon. Come on, kids; we shall be late!"

"Right-ho!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn. Blake looked at them curiously.

"Are you going out? The exhibition is coming off in another hour."

"We shall be back in time."

"Anything on?" asked Blake, guessing from the looks of Figgins & Co. that something unusual was in the wind.

"You'll see," was Figgy's non-committal reply.

And Figgins & Co. walked down to the gates, and turned into the lane, and strode away towards Rylcombe. Blake would have been inclined to look into the matter, but at present the mystery of the missing hedgehog claimed all his attention.

He went into the New House, taking advantage of the peace that was established between the rivals for the afternoon, and inquired right and left for his hedgehog. Nobody had seen it, however.

"Hang it!" murmured Blake. "I suppose I shall have to give it up. Hallo! What's that?"

There was the sound of a heavy crash in Mr. Ratcliff's study. Mr. Ratcliff was the housemaster of the New House, and one of the sourest-tempered persons at St. Jim's, and Blake had not ventured to ask him any questions about the missing hedgehog.

But, as it happened, Mr. Ratcliff was the one person who could have afforded him information on the point.

Crash! Crash!

Blake was startled. Heavy objects seemed to be flying about in the housemaster's study, and something was certainly wrong.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "There's something up! I say, Monteith!"

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, stopped as Blake called to him. He heard the disturbance in the study, and came quickly towards the spot.

"There's something wrong in there," said Blake. "I believe Mr. Ratcliff's got tipsy and is smashing up the furniture."

"Don't be an ass!" said Monteith, laughing, and he went to the housemaster's door, knocked, and opened it.

There was a strange scene of confusion inside the study. Several articles of furniture were overturned. Mr. Ratcliff, his sour, sallow face aflame with rage, was in the act of hurling a heavy Greek lexicon. It certainly looked for a moment as if Blake's surmise were correct.

"Mr. Ratcliff, what is the matter?" gasped Monteith.

The housemaster whirled round.

"Look!" he shouted.

He pointed to an open drawer of a cabinet, full of books and papers. They were in rags and tatters. Blake gave a jump. He knew that Adolphus must have been there! The hedgehog had evidently visited the New House, and had taken refuge in that deep drawer. Undoubtedly it had been shut up there, and then it had set to work gnawing. The result was disastrous for Mr. Ratcliff's literary work.

"I opened the drawer, and the animal popped out!" said Mr. Ratcliff, gasping with rage. "I have not been able to seize it. Ah, there it is!"

Crash went the lexicon!

"Here, I say, hold on!" exclaimed Blake. "That's my hed——"

Monteith shook him quickly by the shoulder, as a hint to keep that piece of information to himself. Blake was quick to take the hint.

"Ah, I have him now!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

He had routed Adolphus out of a corner, and sprang to seize him. Instantly the hedgehog rolled himself up, presenting an impenetrable array of spikes to the hand of the housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff drew back his hand very quickly.

"It is a hedgehog!" he exclaimed. "See that it does not escape, Monteith, while I get the firetongs, and——"

He dashed to the grate. The hedgehog uncurled itself and scuttled out of the room in a twinkling. Blake dashed after it at full speed.

"Where is it?" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff, glaring round, brandishing the fire-tongs in his hand.

"I'm afraid it's gone, sir," said the prefect.

"Confound it! Do you know whom it belongs to?"

"I'll see if it's in the passage," said Monteith, apparently not hearing the question. And he followed Blake.

But Adolphus the hedgehog was not discovered; and Blake had to give up the idea of including him in the afternoon's exhibition.

## CHAPTER 11.

### The Exhibition—And an Exciting Finish!

THE quarter chimed out from the school tower, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out of the School House and walked towards the woodshed. He was joined by Blake and Herries, and in the quadrangle the Terrible Three came up.

"The exhibition opens in a quartah of an hour," said D'Arcy. "Pway do not be late, Tom Mewwy. The committee ought to be on the spot early."

"Right-oh, we're coming with you!" said Tom Merry. "Have you fixed it up with Taggles, though, about the woodshed?"

"Yaas, wathah! I have pwesented him with five shillin's, and explained to him that if we are intewwupted we shall wag him. He has agweed that we are to have the wood shed until half-past five."

"Good! We ought to make up the five bob between us——"

"Not at all, deah boy; that is all wight. Here we are. Come in, gentlemen! I see that most of the exhibitors are pwesent alweady."

There was already a goodly crowd in the wood-shed. The faggots and other impedimenta had been cleared back. There was really a great deal of room, but the juniors of St. Jim's pretty well filled it.

"Where are Figgins & Co?" asked D'Arcy, looking round. "Haven't the unpunctual boundahs awwived yet?"

"Haven't seen them," said Mellish. "They went down to Rylcombe some time back; and I heard Fatty Wynn say something about a circus. If they've gone to the circus they'll be late for the show."

"I hardly think that Figgins would tweat the committee in such an extwemely diswespectful mannah," said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "The show does not open till four o'clock, so he has five or six minutes yet."

"Pretty crowded here," remarked Tom Merry. "Clear a space here for the committee. Have you got the prizes with you, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The swell of the School House felt in his pockets. He produced a handful of silver, and laid it on the little bench which was serving as a table for the committee.

He put aside two half-crowns for the first prize, two florins for the second, and three shillings for the third. Then he swept the rest of the cash back into his pocket.

"There you are!" he said. "There are the pwizes, and they will be awarded accordin' to the general vote of the committee. I weally wish Figgins would awwive. If he is not here on the stwoke of four we shall open the show without him."

"Hullo, what's the fearful row?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

There was a commotion outside. Tom Merry ran to the door,

said stared out, and then burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"What is the mattah?" asked D'Arcy, without moving from his place, as became the dignity of a chairman of a committee.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Figgins & Co. take the cake this time!"

There was a general rush to the door and window. Then a roar of laughter went up, mingled with cheers.

Figgins & Co. were coming towards the wood-shed, and in their midst strode a huge dromedary camel, guided by three ropes held by the New House trio.

St. Jim's had seen some strange sights in its time, since it had been founded by a pious Abbot in the reign of King John, but certainly it had never seen a camel within its ancient walls before.

"A camel!" gasped Blake. "My only Aunt Jane!"

"A camel! Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles, the school porter, was following the Co., staring dazedly at the camel. A crowd of fellows were following, too, laughing and shouting. Figgins & Co. seemed to be quite unconscious of the furore their appearance had excited. They held on to the ropes and guided the camel towards the wood-shed.

As a matter of fact, the animal was a powerful one, and not too tractable, and Figgins & Co. had all their work cut out to guide it.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as they reached the door. "Where did you pick up that pretty thing?"

"It's our pet," said Figgins loftily. "I think we'll take a prize with it. Come hon, you obstinate beast!"

"You take the cake, at all events."

The juniors crowded back from the door. Figgins & Co. strove to induce the camel to enter, but it was too tall, and it really seemed as if matters had reached a climax.

D'Arcy rose, with a dignified look.

"Take that howwid beast away, Figgins!" he said. "It can't come in here. There's no woom for it."

"Vewy well. Your claim is allowed, Figgins. That is, if you can get the beast into the exhibition. Othahwise——"

"Oh, I'll get him in," said Figgins confidently. "He's got too long a neck, that's all, and he won't nod his beastly head. His neck's long enough for one of D'Arcy's high collars——"

"Oh, weally, Figgins——"

"But we'll manage him. Come up, you brute! I say, Merry, hang on to his nose like a good fellow."

"I think I'd rather be excused, thank you," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Drag on the ropes, you chaps."

Figgins & Co. threw their whole weight on the ropes, and the camel was simply forced to lower its head by their combined weight. Someone smote it behind, and it lumbered into the wood-shed.

"Look out!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You are wunnin' into the cages containin' my white mice!"

Figgins dragged the camel back. It was brought to a halt at last in the middle of the shed, with a drooping head, the roof not being high enough to allow it to resume its former attitude.

The hour had struck from the clock tower.

"Gentlemen," said D'Arcy, "the exhibition is now open! The committee will inspect the pets in ordah, and then award the pwizes."

"Hear, hear!"

"Figgins, if you are to act on the committee, you must get somebody else to hold that wotten camel."

"Right, you are!" said Figgins. "I'm pretty tired of it, anyway."

"I'll take your rope," said Mellish, coming forward, with his most obliging air, which usually covered intended mischief.

Figgins gave him the rope unsuspiciously.

"Give me yours, Kerr," said Gore, exchanging a grin with Mellish. And the Scottish partner in the Co. gave him the rope.

Fatty Wynn relinquished the rope he held to Pratt.

"Now we're ready for business!" said Figgins. "Mind you don't let that brute go, kids! The showman said he wasn't very good-tempered. If he begins to kick, you're to hold on tight to the rope."

"Oh, are we?" said Pratt.

"Yes, certainly. If he got loose he might make a wreck of the shed and everything in it. You don't know what a camel's like when he gets his back up."

"He's got his back up already, I think," said Monty Lowther —"unless it's Figgy's face that has given him the hump."

"Pway let us pwocced to business——"

"And don't you play any games with that camel, Mellish," added Figgins. "He's got to be returned this side up with care—that is, of course, if the Head doesn't give me permission to keep him. The showman is coming to the school gates at five o'clock for him—if I don't keep him——"

"Pway let us pwoceed——"

"I don't see why we can't get to business now," added Figgins. "We're only waiting for D'Arcy. Aren't you ready, Gussy?"

"I have been weady——"

"It's no good hanging about," said Figgins. "Gussy ought to be ready. He's always keeping somebody waiting."

"Oh, weally, Figgins——"

"Let's get on with the washing. We ought to go round and inspect every one of the pets, and make notes. Hullo, where did all these giddy cages of white mice come from?"

"They're mine, deah boy! There are two hundwed of them——"

"My word! You'll take second prize, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But you'd take first prize as a champion ass."

"I wefuse to be——"

# IT IS ON THE OTHER SIDE!

"Oh, I'll get it in," said Figgins. "This is our exhibit, you know."

"It is not yours."

"Yes it is—and it's going to take first prize as the most unique pet at St. Jim's."

"You have simply bowwowed it fwom the circus in Wycombe," exclaimed D'Arcy. "It does not count unless it is your own pwoperty."

"That's all right," said Figgins easily. "I've paid a deposit on it, and I'm going to keep it for a pet if I can get permission from the Head——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I can see the Head giving you permission to keep a camel here, Figgins."

"Well, if the Head won't permit it that's not my fault, is it?" demanded Figgins.

"Certainly not," said the Co.

"If I can't keep it," explained Figgins, "the showman has agreed to take it back and to regard my deposit as the hire of the camel for the afternoon."

"Yaas, wathah, it's all spoof——"

"Not at all. It's my camel now, dependant upon the Head's permission to keep it. But we all have to get the Head's permission before we can keep any pet."

"That's true enough," said Tom Merry. "Figgins is quite right."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Blake. "It's right enough."

"I leave it to the committee," said Figgins.

"Very well," said D'Arcy. "The vote of the committee shall decide the mattah. Gentlemen, is Figgins's beastly camel to be wegarded as a bona-fide pet?"

"Certainly," said nearly every voice on the committee.

"Here's Tom Merry's white rabbits! They look nice. I say, are you holding that camel safely, Mellish?"

"Certainly," said Mellish. "You can trust me, Figgins."

"Rather," said Gore, winking at Mellish. "We'll look after him like the apple of our eye, Figgins."

"Pway let us pwoceed——"

There was a sudden shrill squeal from the camel and a trampling of wild hoofs. The ropes were jerked away from the hands that held them, and the camel reared, and knocked its head against the roof of the woodshed, trampling furiously to and fro.

There was a scamper of the juniors to escape.

"What's the matter?" shouted Figgins.

"Blessed if I know!" gasped Pratt. "The brute's mad, I think."

"Hold the rope——"

"I've let go!"

"Mellish stuck a pin into the camel," yelled Curly Gibson. "I saw him!"

"You beastly cad!" yelled Figgins, giving Mellish an open-handed smack that sent him reeling. "Catch that brute, kids!"

Mellish went to the ground; but it was not so easy to catch the camel. The animal was hurt and indignant, and its naturally bad temper was excited. The ropes whisked about as it moved, far too rapidly for the juniors to have any chance of catching hold of them. And the attempts to recapture it, and the shouting and confusion, only added to the excitement of the camel.

It trampled to and fro, and there was a crash as it dashed against the pile of cages containing D'Arcy's white mice and sent them hurtling to the ground.

D'Arcy gave a shriek.

"Capchah that bowwid bwute! It will twead on my white mice! There go Tom Mewwy's white wabbits! Figgins, I call upon you to capchah that scoundwel of a camel!"

Figgins was red and gasping with his exertions.

"Yes, all right, I only——"

"Call him off!" shrieked Figgins.

"Towser! Towser! Good dog! Come back! Here, Towser! Good dog!" shouted Herries, pursuing his pet across the quadrangle.

But the good dog did not obey. He clung to the camel as if he loved him, and it was in vain that the voice of his master called. But the camel suddenly jerked him off, and the bulldog rolled on his back. He was up again in a twinkling, and returning to the charge, when the hind hoof of the camel caught him in the chest, and hurled him a dozen yards away.

Herries dashed up and got a grip on his collar. But it was hardly needed. Towser had had enough!

The excited camel was tearing towards the gates. A man in a silk hat and a fancy waistcoat was there, and as the camel passed out, he seized one of the ropes, and led it away. It was the showman to whom the camel belonged, and it was fortunate that he was already on the spot.

"My word!" gasped Tom Merry. "What an afternoon! I say, Figgins, old chap, if you ever get any more original ideas, bury 'em at once, for my sake."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

"The exhibition is simply wuined," said D'Arcy. "It will take us all the afternoon to sort out our pets, and there is certain to be a wow about that camel."

"Ha, ha, ha! Not much doubt on that point."

"Never mind, the New House takes first prize," said Figgins. "I'm satisfied——"

"The prizes will want finding before anybody takes them," grinned Tom Merry. "Let's go and sort out the pets, and, as far as I am concerned, this is the last exhibition I'm going in for. I find it too wearing."

"The ideah was a good one," said D'Arcy. "It was you wottahs who wuined it. Pway let us get the pets to wights before dark."

It was a long task getting the pets sorted out and housed. Many of the cages had been broken, and all sorts of animals had escaped. The hunt for them was long and arduous, and it was not finished until long after dark.

And even then many of the animals had not been recovered. Everybody, of course, was down on D'Arcy. It was useless for him to protest that it was Figgins's camel that had wrought all the havoc. As head of affairs he was responsible for what had happened, so all the juniors maintained, whether in jest or earnest, and so it was solemnly agreed that all the blame rested upon the shoulders of Arthur Augustus.

And when all was over, and the weary juniors returned to their houses, they found fifty lines apiece waiting for them for the disturbance, with an extra hundred each for Figgins & Co.

"Never mind," said Blake, as he went into No. 6 and lighted the gas, "it has been exciting, at any rate, and it's all in the day's work. I suppose I shall never see my hedgehog again—hallo, hallo!"

Blake broke off. There, in the study easy-chair, was curled up the well-known form of Adolphus the hedgehog, fast asleep!

THE END.

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"How can I?" he gasped. "He's kicking like a giddy buck-jumper! Come up, you beast! I wish I had a gun! Hullo, there he goes!"

The camel knocked over the bench which served as a committee table, and the first, second, and third prizes rolled to the floor and mixed there.

Then crash followed crash, as the excited camel plunged about in the confined space of the woodshed and the various exhibits of the pet-keepers of St. Jim's rolled about in various directions, to an accompaniment of shrill squeals and squeaks and growls and snappings and yells. The juniors dodged thither and thither to escape the camel, and added to the wreck, and they dodged out of the shed as fast as they could.

"I can't catch it," cried Figgins, at last. "Drive the brute out of the shed, kids! Shove him out!"

"I'll set my bulldog on him," exclaimed Herries, struck by a bright idea.

"Don't!" yelled Figgins. "You——"

But Herries had already released the bulldog. The voice of that animal had already been added to the pandemonium that reigned in the woodshed, and now Towser took an active part in the proceedings.

"Seize him, Towser!" shouted Herries, excitedly.

Towser sprang at the camel.

The huge animal floundered out of the woodshed, and loped away, the bulldog clinging to him behind.

"My word!" gasped Tom Merry. "There will be a row over this! Call that fiend of a dog off, Herries, you fathead!"

"Call him off!" yelled Figgins, shaking Herries by the shoulder in his excitement.

"Righto," gasped Herries, "I only wanted to——"

"Call him off——"

***Next Thursday's number of "THE GEM" Library will contain a double-length tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays,***

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# TEMPEST HEADLAND

## A SPLENDID NEW SCHOOL TALE.

### By S. CLARKE HOOK.

### READ THIS FIRST!

Tempest Headland is a large school standing in an exposed position of Britain's coast.

A fearful storm is raging outside, when Cyril Conway tells Herr Ludvig, who is taking the class for German, that he can see from the window a ship being driven ashore. Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, Herr Ludvig, and the boys immediately make their way to the cliff, but on reaching there they find that the ship has sunk. However, the Head is instrumental in saving a little black boy. He is taken to the school, and notes to the amount of £1,000, with a request that it may be used for his up-bringing, is found on him. A medical man examines the nigger, and he finds the boy has had such a shock to his system as to affect all memory of the past. Billy Barnes and Cyril Conway decide to name their new schoolmate Snowy White Adonis Venus. He is taken as a fag by Graft, a bully. To pay out Mopps, the porter, for his zeal in reporting offences, Cyril Conway rigs up a ghost in the school tower. To test it's frightening powers, Cyril makes Venus go with him one night to the tower. Before leaving the dormitory, Conway pours a jug of water over Snigg, and tells him that he and Venus are going on a swimming excursion. Venus gets a terrible fright from the ghost, and, thus satisfied, Cyril and he make their way back to the dormitory.

*(Now go on with the story.)*

### Snigg's Fanciful Story!

The two got back all right, but Snigg was determined to have vengeance. Cyril took the precaution of tipping the servant to dry the bedding, and as there was a spare bed in the dormitory, Snigg passed the remainder of the night in comfort; but before breakfast the following morning, he made his way to the doctor's study and tapped at the door. He found the doctor reading, and that gentleman at once put down his book.

"Well, my lad, what is it?" he inquired. "I hope you have no complaints to make."

"Certainly not, sir! I would be the last to make a complaint. Frequently when the food——"

"What is wrong with the food now?"

"Oh, I'm not complaining, sir! I can put up with a good deal; but it worries me to think that two chums of mine should get pneumonia and inflation of the lungs——"

"I fear you do not pay as much attention to your lessons as you should do. You mean inflammation. I presume. Now, in two words, tell me what has happened."

"I can't tell you in two words, sir, because it is a very serious matter, and even if you thrash the culprits I must, for their own sakes, report a most disgraceful occurrence that occurred in the dead of the——"

"I do not require you to make a speech, boy. I have neither time nor patience——"

"I beg pardon, sir; I thought you were only reading a book, and——"

"I devote certain time to reading each day, and it is a great pity that you do not do the same. Are you going to tell me what has happened?"

"Conway and Venus went swimming last night."

"Absurd! They are making fun of you."

"They did! They broke bounds and went to the river, and——"

"If that is the case I shall cane them both. You can go."

"Well, I will leave it at that," said Snigg, leaving the study. "I hope, sir, you will not mention that I reported the matter, because it is only done in their interests, and ——"

"I shall not mention your name; but, of course, they will know who has told. It is ridiculous! I am quite certain neither of them did such a thing. It was freezing hard, and Venus—as you have so absurdly named him—would be the last boy in this college to do such a thing."

"I don't see why he should be favoured, sir, just because you risked your noble life to save a dirty nigger——"

"That will do! You pretend to report the matter for the good of the two boys, and yet you speak of one of them like that. Go!"

"I hope the old idiot won't go and blab!" growled Snigg as he hurried from the study. "He's a cheat! He never favours me, and is always favouring that little brute of a nigger. Still, he's bound to lick them. I wish the beast had given me time to tell about the water; but when he gets like that he isn't safe."

All the same, the doctor was a perfectly safe man, and never by any chance favoured a boy in his college, although it is quite possible that he might have liked the natures of some better than others.

After prayers he called the "swimmers" up.

"I have been given to understand that you went swimming last night, boys," he said.

"No, thank you, sir," murmured Cyril. "I am extremely fond of swimming—under suitable occasions."

"You did not go swimming last night?"

"No, sir! We did not break bounds, and so it would have been impossible to have gone swimming."

"That is sufficient. I have never had cause to doubt your word. I have no cause to doubt it now. You can go to your seats."

And thus the swimming incident ended; but the incident of the ghost was destined to cause more trouble.

Saturday evening arrived, and Mopps the porter was having what he called a "bloater to his tea." He was muttering aloud, a habit he had got.

"Now this 'ere smells sweet. I do like a bloater to my tea—a soft-roed 'un by preference. This is one. Some people says hot buttered toast don't go with bloaters. Give it to me every time. Tea smells good, too. I will say that bully Graft buys good tea—whether he pays for it or not is another question, 'cos he ain't as honest as he ought to be, and——"

"My dear Mopps," interposed Cyril, entering the lodge accompanied by Venus, who as usual was grinning, though Cyril looked perfectly serious and very calm. "If Graft does not pay for his tea, it is extremely dishonest, and a matter that ought to be reported to the doctor. It is your duty to report him."

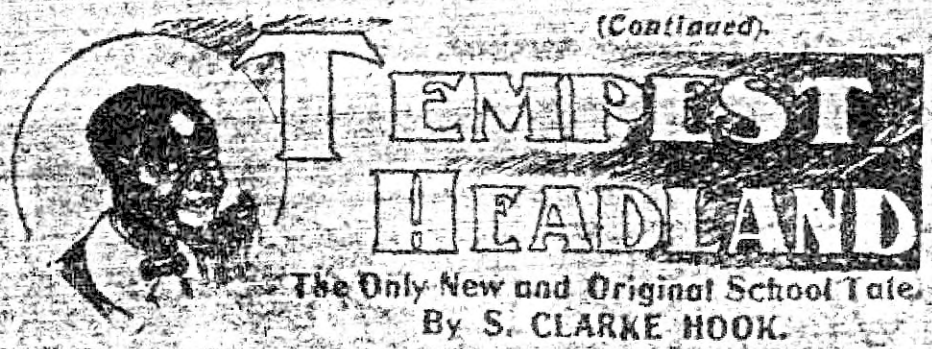
"Now, see here," growled Mopps, who found that his unfortunate habit of talking aloud had placed him in rather an awkward position, "I never said as he didn't pay for his tea."

"You certainly said he was not honest," observed Cyril. "You ought to be a good judge of dishonesty, seeing that you have admitted that you nick Graft's tea. Why don't you use the doctor's?"

"Why, de man does," declared Venus. "He nicks de doctor's tea ebery time he can't find his whisky."

"You little black varmint! If you tell them lies of me I will knock your head off your shoulders, and so I will."

"'Spect you will say next I didn't see you drinking de doctor's wine out ob de doctor's decanter," observed Venus, who had seen nothing of the sort, though he never doubted it occasionally occurred.




(Continued).

The Only New and Original School Tale.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

"You never saw anythink of the sort, and if you ain't careful I will report you for being in the doctor's private apartments."

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat's pleading guilty."

"You might have seen me putting the decanters tidy, as is my duty."

"You seemed to be taking a tidy lot out ob dose decanters," observed Venus. "I dunno weder dat makes dem tidy; but I can ask de doctor de question."

"You will get yourself into trouble, and so I tell you. Now be off with you. I'm going to have my tea. Bust you and your silly talk!"

"All right, Mopps," exclaimed Cyril, bolting. "We won't interrupt your herring to your tea. This way, Venus. Listen to me, now. Bolt into the kitchen, and get the cat. Bring her up to Mopps' bed-room window, which is always open, and shove her through when you hear the electric bell go. See?"

"But what is de cat going to do?"

"Find her way into the sitting-room, I expect. The door is open. I noticed that. When the doctor rings his bell, Mopps will have to go. It is ten to one he will lock his door, because he will be afraid we shall nick his bloater. Very well. Hurry off and get that cat. The cook won't mind if you tell her we are not going to hurt it. She knows neither you nor I would hurt the cat."

As a matter of fact, the cook was not in the kitchen. The cat was. Venus picked her up, and was upstairs again in something less than half a minute.

"How do you know dat bell will ring at de right moment, Cyril?" inquired Venus.

"I shall attend to the bell. You attend to the cat. Off you go."

Venus had scarcely reached the window when he heard that bell going like mad.

"Bust it!" growled Mopps. "I no sooner sit down to a meal than that bell goes. I believe he does it on purpose; no matter how I change my meal-times, he seems to know. Oh, hold your row, you brute. I'll keep my bloater warm on the fender and lock my door, to keep those young blackguards out of the place."

Venus put the cat through the open window as he heard the door slammed. It was not the cat's fault. That bloater smelt nice, and pussy, being of an inquiring turn of mind, soon found that it tasted nice. It was a full-sized, well-cured bloater—not the sort you get at eightcenpence the dozen. Mopps knew better than that. The doctor was fond of a good bloater, so was Mopps, so was pussy. It was the doctor's bloater; Mopps wanted to eat it; and pussy ate it. So, you see, that cat really scored. She liked a soft-roe bloater. She left the bones and the tail; and when she heard a rattle at the door, she left the room—by way of the window.

"Do you think she's got it, Venus?" murmured Cyril, coming round in rather a breathless state.

"I dunno," answered Venus, grinning; "but dat cat came out wid a sort ob self-satisfied air, and dere was an expression 'bout her eyes dat——"

"Rats! You never saw an expression in a cat's eyes, especially when it is as dark as this."

"You can see cats' eyes in de dark."

"All right. You come along with me, you smiling lump of black beauty. It is our duty to see if Mopps is enjoying his bloater to his tea."

Mopps, apparently, had had some little difficulty with his doorkey. He had just flung the door open when the two chums made their appearance. They did not make their appearance to him, but watched through the open door. Mopps strode up to the fireplace, then he clenched his hands and his teeth, and commenced to perform a species of skirt dance to quick music.

"My dear Mopps," exclaimed Cyril, entering the room and looking sorrowful, "are you not well?"

"Well, be blowed?" howled Mopps. "Look at that 'ere bloater."

Venus was doing nothing of the sort. He owed Mopps a few, and taking the cayenne from the cruet which was on the table, he commenced to dredge Mopps's toast with it. Then he cautiously opened the teapot, and had a turn at that; but unfortunately the top of the bottle came off, and dropped into Mopps's tea, so did the cayenne. Venus shut the lid, replaced the bottle, and backed to the door; and all the time Mopps was raving about his bloater.

"It's that thundering cat again!" he howled. "That's what it is."

"Well, never mind, Mopps!" exclaimed Cyril.

"But I do mind, you blear-eyed varmint!" howled Mopps. "The doctor worn't there!"

"Funny! Still, your toast will be getting cold. It's lucky you didn't put that down to the fire to keep warm, because the cat might have eaten that as well. You have some hot buttered toast, and that's very nice."

"It ain't nice when you've set your heart on a bloater, you stupid, blinking-looking boy!"

"Now, look here!" exclaimed Cyril, looking injured. "You haven't got the right to blame me just because the cat likes bloaters. It is the nature of cats, poor things, and you can't blame them for taking what they like. You know you do the same, Mopps, when you get among the doctor's luxuries. Don't let your toast get cold, else you will be toastless as well as bloaterless:

"Toastless and bloaterless, sadly I roam,
Child of misfortune, driven from 'ome.
No one to pity me, none to caress.
Cooky won't do it, however I press.
Bloaterless, toastless, hungry and ill,
Mopps of misfortune, I ain't had my fill."

Cyril's singing did not please Mopps. He hurled a boot at his head, and then poured himself out a cup of tea, while all the time he growled about the missing bloater.

"I 'ate toast alone!"

"Shall I eat dat toast for you, Mopps?" inquired Venus, although he would not have cared for the job, knowing the amount of cayenne that was on it.

"If you don't clear hout of my room, I'll do you an injury," howled Mopps, taking a huge bite of toast. Then his naturally red face turned redder still, and he gave some choking gasps.

"Bust it!" he spluttered. "It's red 'ot."

"Toast ought to be nice and hot, Mopps," said Cyril.

Mopps seized his cup, and took a drink; then he leapt to his feet, and seizing a teapot hurled it at Cyril's head.

It was a metal teapot, and received a bad dent against the wall, for Cyril took particular care that it did not strike his head, otherwise that might have received the dent. Venus put his foot on the unfortunate teapot, and smashed it flat, then the worthy pair fled, and listened to Mopps's ravings from outside.

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat man is mighty funny!" observed Venus. "Neber saw a man get so excited 'bout a bloater and hot toast."

"He will get more excited when he sees our ghost," observed Cyril.

"Did you return de key ob de clock-tower? I didn't see you hang it on de hook."

"No; I slipped it into his side-pocket when he was doing his fairy-like dance. It is about the last place that he will look for it, but I will give him a little information concerning its position later on. The doctor is certain to remind him to wind the clock, because Mopps so often forgets it. All we have to do is to keep our eye on Mopps. He will go at seven; if he doesn't, the doctor is bound to remind him before eight."

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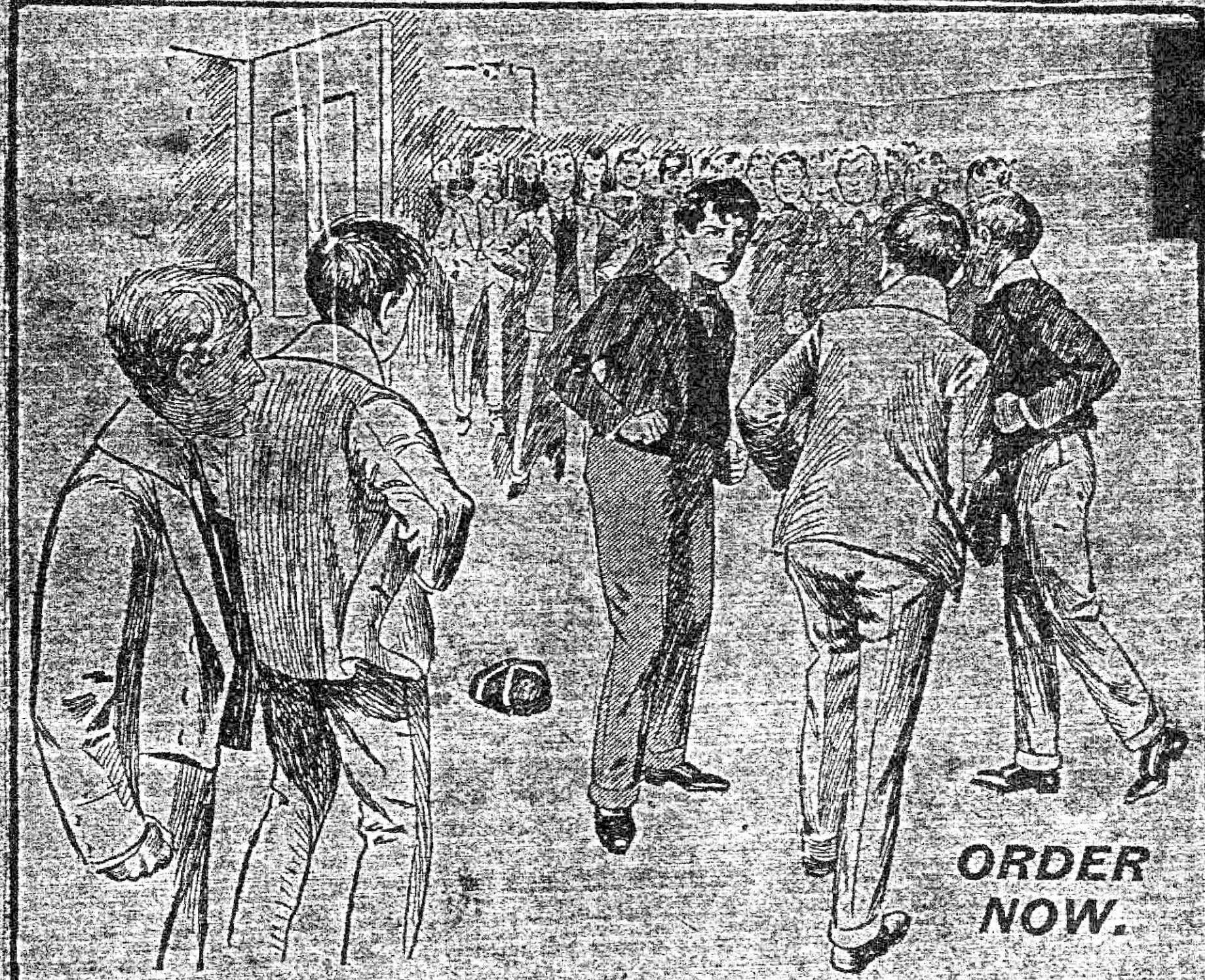
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