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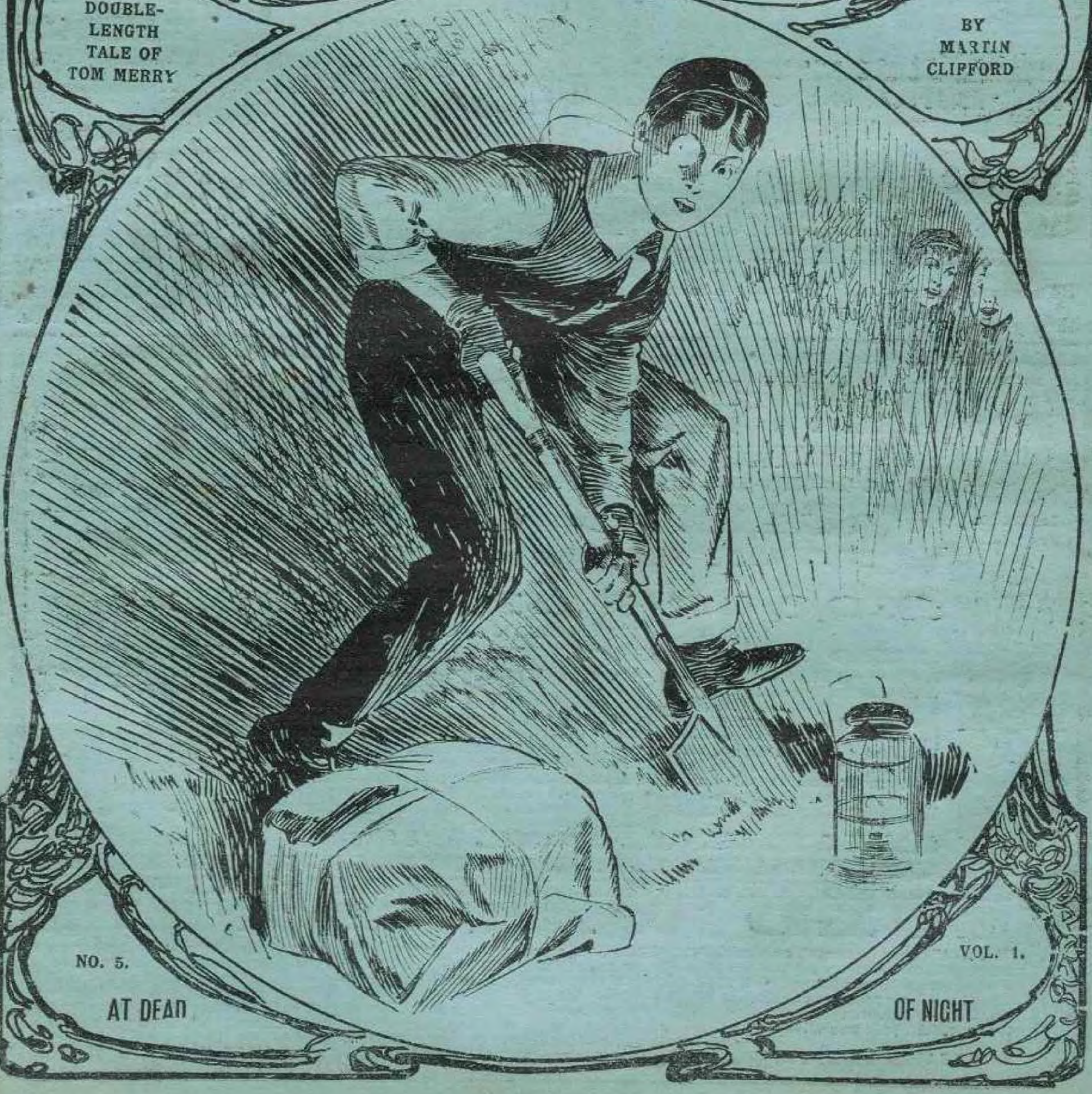
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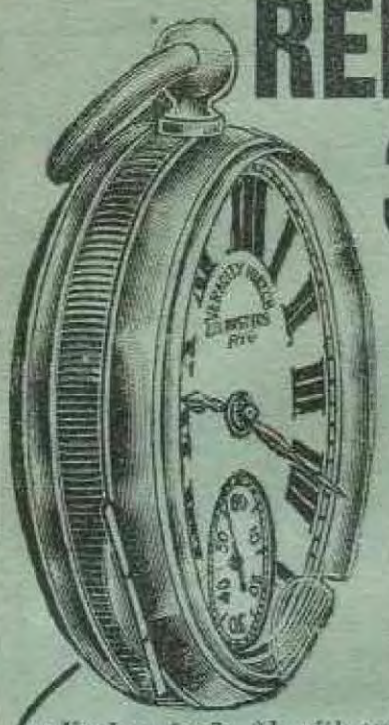


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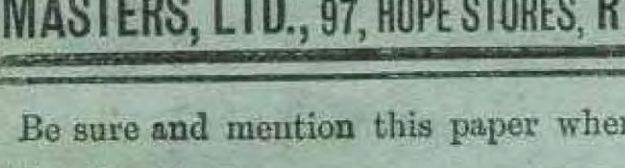
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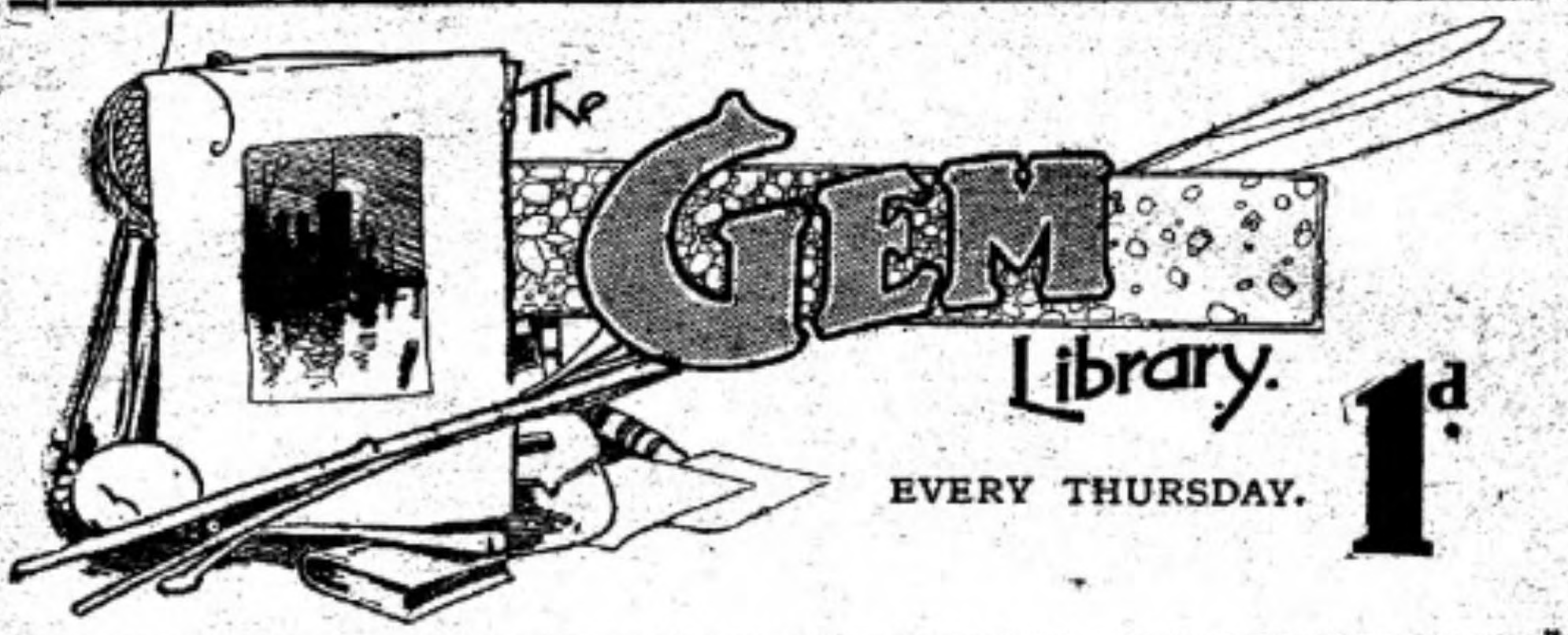


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D'ARCY THE DUDE.

A Double-Length Complete Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

What's the Matter with D'Arcy?

"LOOK!"

"What is it?"

"Just look!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry was puzzled. He had just come downstairs from his study in the School House at St. Jim's, to find half a dozen juniors crowded at the hall window, looking out into the quadrangle as if some matter of unusual moment was proceeding there. Every face wore a grin, and it was evident that the School House juniors were highly amused by what they saw under the old elms in the quadrangle.

"But what's the——"

"Come and look," said Manners; and, catching Tom Merry by the arm, he drew him to the window. "It's too funny for words!"

Tom Merry craned his neck to look over the heads that already crammed the window.

"He doesn't know we can see him!" chuckled Lowther. "My word, look at him! Isn't it enough to kill a cat?"

Tom Merry looked out of the window.

"By Jove! D'Arcy!"

"Arthur Augustus, as large as life!" grinned Lowther.

"But look at him—look at his togs—look at his collar—look at his hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was amazed as well as amused. From the hall window a junior could be seen walking under the elms. He was walking slowly to and fro, and was quite unconscious of the fact that he was watched by seven or eight grinning juniors from the window.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, was famous for his faultless attire. His waistcoats were many and gorgeous, his hats the highest and shiniest in the school; the crease in his trousers was the envy and despair of the Sixth Form dandies. Nobody at St. Jim's could tie a necktie or wear an eyeglass like D'Arcy. In his own particular line the swell of the School House reigned supreme.

But now there was a change.

It was D'Arcy who was slowly pacing to and fro under the elms, but a changed D'Arcy. His Eton jacket wanted brushing, his trousers had a scarcely perceptible crease, and showed a terrible tendency to bag at the knees. His collar had evidently been worn for two or three days, and his necktie was a little on one side. His waistcoat was as gorgeous as ever, because D'Arcy possessed no waistcoat that was not gorgeous; but it was slightly crumpled, and one button was carelessly left unfastened. His silk hat was

cocked over one ear, and presented a furry appearance, having been brushed the wrong way, a fact of which D'Arcy was apparently ignorant. His eyeglass dangled at the end of its cord, and his hands, ungloved, were thrust into his trousers' pockets. Taut ensemble, as Monty Lowther, who was proud of his French, put it, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked a mere wreck.

Tom Merry ran his fingers through his curly hair, and stared at Lowther and Manners.

"What does it mean?"

The chums of the Shell chuckled.

"Blessed if I know!" said Manners. "Keep quiet, you kids, and don't give the alarm. I'm going to fetch my camera, and snap him like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

Unfortunately for Manners's project, the roar of laughter reached the ears of the junior pacing outside under the elms.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started, and looked up.

He looked up to see a window crammed with grinning faces, and his own face went crimson as he saw them.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of the School House turned away with a glowing countenance. The juniors at the window roared themselves hoarse.

"But what's the matter with him?" exclaimed Gore, of the Shell. "Fancy D'Arcy going about in that style, and mooning under the elms as if he had something on his mind."

"Perhaps he has," said Mellish of the Fourth. "He looks as if he has committed a murder, and doesn't know what to do with the body."

"Ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were laughing, too. The chums of the Shell could not help being tickled by the latest peculiarity of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But the Terrible Three were a little concerned, too.

"There must be something the matter with him, you know," Tom Merry remarked, as they moved away from the spot.

"Yes, by Jove!" said Manners. "I've never seen him like it before."

"I wonder——" began Monty Lowther. Then he stopped, a grin overspreading his face, and a glimmer of fun coming into his eyes. His chums looked at him.

"Well, you wonder what?" asked Tom Merry.

"I wonder——"

"Go on!" rapped out Manners.

"Well, I wonder whether he's in love again?"

Tom Merry and Manners stared blankly at Lowther.

They had not thought of that explanation, simple as it was.

"D'Arcy in love!" chuckled Manners.

"Why not? He's been in love before? You surely remember how desperately gone he was on the Head's niece when she was at St. Jim's?"

"I should say so! It was simply screaming!"

"In love!" murmured Tom Merry. "I shouldn't wonder! You see, a fellow may get into the habit—it's easy to get into a habit——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there isn't any girl at St. Jim's," said Manners. "It's absurd to suppose that D'Arcy has descended to the kitchen for an inamorata——"

"And it can't be Dame Taggles——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or Mrs. Mimms, the housedame——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It may be somebody outside the school," said Lowther. "It might be Frank Monk's sister at the Grammar School. It might be—anybody."

"Well, yes, it might be; there's no accounting for anything D'Arcy does. But you remember that the last time he was in love he bloomed out as a bigger dude than ever. He was simply gorgeous!"

"You never know how a thing of this kind will take you," said Lowther, with the air of a sage. "Perhaps he's disappointed this time. I believe lovers always begin to neglect their personal appearance when they lose hope."

"We shall have to look into this," said Tom Merry. "We can't have our House masher going about looking like a wreck. If there's anything wrong with him, Blake ought to know. Let's go along to No. 6, and inquire."

"That's a jolly good idea."

And the Terrible Three went upstairs, to the corridor upon which the Fourth Form studies opened, and kicked gently at the door of Study No. 6.

Tom Merry's suggestion was a good one. As D'Arcy chummed up in Study No. 6 with Blake, Herries, and Digby, that was certainly the right place to go to for information.

"Come in, fathead!" roared a voice from within the study.

The Terrible Three entered the room.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were there, busily working at "lines." Blake looked up at the Terrible Three. Between the chums of the Shell and the Fourth-Formers relations were sometimes strained; sometimes very strained. They would always chum up like brothers for a row with the New House at St. Jim's, but on other occasions there was frequently war in the School House.

"Hallo, rotters!" said Blake cheerfully. "So they've let you out?"

"Let us out!" said Tom Merry. "Out of what?"

"The monkey-house."

"Oh, don't be funny! We've come to speak to you——"

"Please speak in as low a voice as possible, then, as I'm busy, and can't stop. The sooner you get it over the better."

"But it's serious, Blake; it's about Gussy!"

Blake laid down his pen.

"Hallo! Anything wrong with Gussy?" he said. "I've noticed for two or three days past that he's been a bit strange in his manner."

"Ah, you've noticed it, too!"

"Is anything wrong?" said Blake anxiously. Arthur Augustus sometimes tried the patience of his chums in Study No. 6, but the attachment between them was a very sincere one.

"Oh, he's all right," said Tom Merry. "Only he's going about looking like a wreck——"

"Yes, I noticed he had grown careless of his appearance."

"His hat was brushed the wrong way——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And when a thing like that happens," said Tom Merry, "it shows that there's something fundamentally wrong."

"I should say so. He bunked off a while ago!" explained Blake. "We all have some lines to do, and he said I could do his, as he couldn't give his attention to the matter now. What do you think of that?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It was just like Gussy!"

Blake scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I know what's the matter with him!" he said. "Do you think he's in love again?"

Jack Blake gave a jump.

"My only Panama aunt—I mean hat! You've hit it!"

"You think——"

"Of course! It's as plain as your chivvy—or nearly. Of course, nothing could be quite so plain as that!"

"Then——"

"Hush!" murmured Monty Lowther. "He's coming!"

"Who's coming?"

"Arthur Augustus!"

The next moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus Becomes Confidential.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS glanced at the chums of the Shell with a lack-lustre eye. Then he crossed the study to the fire, and sat down in the armchair. He put his feet on the fender, and sat there, his hands deep in his pockets, staring at the fire.

The juniors exchanged wondering glances.

Truly, there was something the matter with the swell of the School House, when he acted in this extraordinary manner.

Silence fell in the study. Tom Merry was the first to break it.

"I say, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus made no reply. He did not seem to hear the remark, as he stared gloomily into the fire.

"I say, Gussy!" repeated Tom Merry, in a louder tone.

D'Arcy gave a slight start.

"Did you addwess me, deah boy?"

"Yes, I did. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'."

"What are you moonin' about?"

"I am not moonin', Tom Mewwy."

"What do you mean by going about without a crease in your trousers, after what you've brought us up to expect of you?" demanded Tom Merry severely.

A momentary shade of anxiety crossed D'Arcy's brow, as he glanced down at his extremities. But it was only momentary.

"Aren't you going to explain yourself, D'Arcy?"

"I've nothin' to explain, deah boy!"

"Are you well?"



"I see you are making purchases, Master D'Arcy," said the girl, looking in some surprise at the growing pile on the counter.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you come and have a sprint round the quad?"

"Pway excuse me, deah boy! I weally do not feel up to any such wuff exercise just at pwesent."

"What's her name?" demanded Monty Lowther suddenly. There was a giggle in the study, and D'Arcy started and turned red.

"Pway what did you wemark, Lowthah?"

"What is her name?"

"Whose name?"

"Hers."

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet. He screwed his monocle into his right eye, and took a survey of the grinning Lowther, starting at his head, and descending to his feet, and then travelling upward again to his face. But Lowther seemed quite unabashed by the steady, scornful survey of Arthur Augustus.

"Lowthah, I wegard your wemark as fwivolous and impertinent, not to say vulgah," said Arthur Augustus, at last.

"Dear me!" said Lowther. "Now, I regarded it as quite select, not to say swaggah!"

The mischievous Lowther was repeating one of D'Arcy's own favourite phrases. D'Arcy looked daggers at him.

"You are a wude beast, Lowthah! I wegard your pwesence in this study as an intwusion. Pway twavel!"

"But, my dear Gussy, we're worried about you——"

"I wefuse to be wowwied about. Get out!"

"Then you won't tell us her name?"

D'Arcy's crimson countenance was a sufficient proof that the juniors had guessed correctly. D'Arcy's weakness had found him out again. The swell of the School House was in love.

"Lowthah! I should be extwemely sowwy, undah the pwesent circs., to use violence, but I shall thwow you out of this study if you make that wemark again."

"Oh, very well, keep your secret!" said Lowther. "As a matter of fact, I know what her name is well enough."

Arthur Augustus started.

"I wefuse to cwedit that statement, Lowthah!"

"Shall I guess?" grinned Lowther.

"It is a mattah of supweme indifference to me."

Blake had laid down his pen again, and he was looking interested. So were Herries and Digby. Blake looked inquiringly at Lowther.

"I say, is that a fact?" he asked. "Do you know what her name is, Lowther?"

"Well, I think I can guess, at least."

"How can you guess?"

"Why, D'Arcy always falls in love with girls named Ethel," explained Lowther. "There was his Cousin Ethel, and the Head's niece, Ethel. I'll bet Tom Merry's new cricket-hat that her name is Ethel."

"Lowthah, I wegard you as a beast! Your wemarks on this subject are fwivolous, and savah of diswespect towards a most estimable lady!"

"Nothing of the kind, Gussy. I know she must be a ripping girl, or you wouldn't fall in love with her! But you might take old friends into your confidence."

"Undah the circs., I must decline to wegard you as a fwiend."

"My dear Gus, I'm just the chap to help you!" said Lowther. "You're disappointed in love—I know what it's like, because I've been there myself, though I never reached the stage of wearing a soiled collar——"

Arthur Augustus turned crimson again.

"I'm the man to help you," said Lowther encouragingly. "If you're thinking of carrying off the fair charmer, I'll lend you my new tandem bicycle——"

"Lowthah, I have alweady wemarked that you are a beast——"

"Once aboard the tandem and the girl is mine!" said Lowther. "Really, Gussy——"

"Oh, shut up, Monty!" said Tom Merry, who saw that Arthur Augustus was really vexed. "Don't chip him! Gussy, old kid, I'm sorry for you. I fell in love when I was twelve years old, and it was awful. Don't worry!"

There was real sympathy in Tom Merry's tone and D'Arcy melted at once.

"I should like to speak to you, Tom Mewwy," he said. "Not in the pwesence of these wotten boundahs, though!"

Monty Lowther wept a little.

"Hark to the young rotter!" he said. "That's what he calls me, after all my sympathy and advice, and offering to lend him my tandem bicycle to carry off——"

"I wefuse to listen to your silly wemarks, Lowthah. You are a beast, and haven't any pwopah feelin's. If it were not for—for somethin' that westwains me, I would give you a feahful thwashin' on the spot. Will you come for a stwoll in the quadwangle, Tom Mewwy?"

Tom Merry hesitated for one moment. He knew that he was intended to be the recipient of the love-lorn secrets of the swell of the School House, and he did not fancy himself in the role of father-confessor. But his good nature, which was never known to fail, prevailed. He nodded his head.

"Certainly, Gussy, if you like!"

"Come along, then, dash boy!" said Arthur Augustus, going to the door.

Tom Merry stepped along with him, and Monty Lowther made a motion as if to follow.

"Did you ask me to come with you, Gussy?"

"No, Lowthah, I did not do anythin' of the sort!"

"But you want me?"

"Certainly not! I wegard you as an obstwepewous beast. I am gweatly inclined to administah a feahful thwashin' to you, Lowthah, and I weally find it difficult to westwain my wage, and so you had bettah not pwovoke me——"

Lowther fell back against Manners, apparently overcome with terror. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a threatening shake of the head, which made his eye-glass fall off, left the study, and went downstairs with Tom Merry.

The swell of the School House did not speak a word till they were out in the quad. The dusk was descending over St. Jim's now, and fellows were coming in tired from the playing-fields. Some of them spoke to the juniors in passing, and Tom Merry answered in his usual cheery way, but D'Arcy did not seem to hear what was said to him. Darrel of the Sixth stopped them on the steps of the School House.

"D'Arcy!" he exclaimed, tapping the junior on the chest.

Arthur Augustus looked up.

"Yaas, Dawwell, what is it?" he asked, in a bored tone.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'."

"H'm! I've seen you in that waistcoat before," said Darrel; and, shaking his head gravely, the Sixth-Former passed on.

Tom Merry broke into an irrepressible chuckle. D'Arcy looked at him with an annoyed expression.

"I suppose Dawwel was jokin'," he remarked. "I weally do not see why people should take the feahful fweedom of makin' jokes about me. I wegard it as impertinent. Pway be sewious, Tom Mewwy! I have chosen you to speak to in this feahful difficulty I am in because you know how to be sewious on a sewious mattah."

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, growing grave again. "I'll be as solemn as a judge, Gussy. What have you got to talk about?"

"Pway come undah the elms; I should not like any of those wotten boundahs to hear us," said D'Arcy.

Tom Merry followed him under the shadowy elms, and D'Arcy halted under one of the great trees.

Then there was silence. D'Arcy's lips opened several times and closed again. Tom Merry waited, but no words came forth. The school clock chimed out.

"I'm afraid I was under a misapprehension," said Tom Merry, at last. "I didn't understand that you were inviting me to a Quaker meeting, Adolphus."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I thought you had something to say to me, old fellow. I don't want to hurry you in any way, but really it's a bit cold standing out here on a March evening."

"Is it cold?" said D'Arcy indifferently, as if he had not noticed the fact himself.

"Well, yes. And it's windy, too!"

"Bai Jove, so it is. Yaas, wathah; it's beastly cold and beastly windy. I hadn't noticed it. I was thinkin'. I say, Tom Mewwy."

"Yes," said the hero of the Shell. "Go on!"

But Arthur Augustus did not go on. He remained as dumb as an oyster, and the silence lasted a full minute till Tom Merry himself broke it.

"You were going to say something, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, why don't you say it, then?"

"I'm going to. Certainly."

"Well, go on, then!"

Tom Merry heard D'Arcy draw a deep breath in the dusk under the elms. He could see the School House swell's face only very indistinctly.

"I say, Tom Mewwy——"

D'Arcy broke off again. He evidently had every desire to speak, but the words simply would not come. Tom Merry waited patiently for another minute. Still the swell of St. Jim's was silent.

"Well, get on with the washing!" said Tom Merry, at last, shivering as the keen March wind blew round his legs. "What is it?"

"I say, Tom Mewwy——"

Tom Merry made a motion to return towards the house. D'Arcy put out a hurried hand and stopped him.

"Tom Mewwy! I was goin'——"

"So was I," said Tom. "I shall have to go in if you don't buck up. You don't want me to get rheumatism in my legs, do you?"

"Rheumatism? I am afwaid I cannot think of such twifles at a moment like this! But I will speak—I weally do not know exactly how to put it, but—but—but—— Oh, Tom Mewwy! She's such a wippin' girl!"

Tom Merry repressed a strong inclination to laugh.

"Who is?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah; of course, you don't know her."

"Does she live at St. Jim's?"

"Certainly not! There is no girl livin' here——"

"There is the School House maid——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And Mrs. Mimms. She's a widow——"

"Tom Mewwy, I weally——"

"Then where does she live?" asked Tom Merry. "In the village. Let me see—is it Mother Murphy, who keeps the tuck-shop in Rylcombe?"

"Pway be sewious——"

"Is it the young lady in Short's, the draper's?"

D'Arcy gave a start.

"Ha, ha, ha! I mean excuse me, I didn't mean to laugh! But——"

"I weally do not think I can take you into my confidence on that point," D'Arcy remarked, after a pause. "The identity of the dear girl should wemain a secwet with me, locked up in my bweast, until——"

"Until when?"

"Until I can ask her to mawwy me?"

Tom Merry burst into a roar.

"If you cannot be sewious, Tom Merry——" began Arthur Augustus, in a very huffy tone.

"It's a bit hard to be serious, Gussy, when you talk like a giddy ox," said Tom Merry. "You are about fifteen, I think?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And she is—eighteen, the same as the last——"

"I think she is twenty-one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah, Tom Mewwy. It is dweadfully sewious. She is such a weally wippin' girl. You should see her playin' the violin——"

"Oh, she is musical, is she? That's nice!"

"Yaas, wathah! Her governah is wathah an old boundah, you know, but Ethel——"

"Ethel!" shrieked Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus turned very red in the dusk.

"Yaas, her name is Ethel, you know."

"My word! If you're not off! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway cease that widiculous cackhin', Tom Mewwy, or I shall wegwet havin' chosen you as my confidant!"

"I shall regret it, too, if you keep me here freezing in this beastly wind much longer," murmured Tom Merry.

"What did you say, Tom Mewwy?"

"Oh, nothing! Go on—what is she like?"

D'Arcy turned his eyes up towards the stars that were

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beginning to gleam between the dark, heavy branches of the elm-trees.

"What is she like?" he murmured. "Ah, Tom Mewwy!" Then he paused, and heaved a deep sigh.

Tom Merry waited for him to continue, but he remained quite silent, staring up at the glimmering heavens.

"Are you taking up astronomy as a special subject, same as you do the violin, Gussy?" asked the hero of the Shell.

D'Arcy came out of his reverie with a start.

"Astwonomy! Certainly not, deah boy!"

"Then leave off blinking at those giddy stars, and get on with the washing."

"What a vulgah expwession to apply to such a subject," said D'Arcy, with a shudder. "I weally wish you would be a little more select in your weferences, Tom Mewwy. I was tellin' you what she was like. Her eyes—oh, Tom Mewwy, her eyes——"

"Well, what's the matter with them?"

"The mattah! What do you mean?"

"Are they crossed, or does she wear blue goggles——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!"

"Then go on with the description."

"Her eyes are like—like two beastly stars, you know," said D'Arcy, "and her mouth——"

"Anything the matter with that, too?"

"Oh, it's so—so—so——"

"Oh, it's so-so, is it?"

"No, Tom Mewwy, it is not so-so. It is—it is——"

"Never mind, Gussy; I'll take the description for granted. You've taken such a long time over her eyes, that we shouldn't get through all the features if we stayed out here till midnight. It's cold, you know."

"Ah, I do not feel the cold, Tom Mewwy!"

"But I'm not in love with a draper's young lady, you see——"

"It's not the dwapah's young lady!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Oh, isn't it? Is it her mother?"

D'Arcy gave the hero of the Shell a freezing glare.

"Tom Mewwy, I wefuse to tell you anothah word! I wegard you as a beast, almost as gweat a beast as Lowthah!"

And the swell of the School House turned indignantly away.

"Oh, I say, you know, Gussy, I didn't mean——"

But D'Arcy was stalking off. Tom Merry called him back, but he would not come. Perhaps, in spite of his breaking heart, he was getting cold, too, in the bitter March wind. Tom Merry smiled, and hurried into the School House. His legs were nearly frozen, and his hands like ice. He dashed up to the study at full speed. He found Manners mending a camera, and Lowther sitting in the easy-chair before the fire. To seize the chair by the back, turn Lowther out in a heap upon the hearthrug, and plump himself into the chair before the fire, was the work of a moment, as a novelist would say.

Lowther scrambled up indignantly.

"Well, of all the fearful cheek!" he howled. "Of all the——"

"Hands off!" gasped Tom Merry. "I'm frozen to death!"

"You're jolly lively for a dead ass!" growled Lowther. "Still, you do look beastly cold. Where have you been?"

"Under the elms in the quad."

"In this wind? Well, I hope you enjoyed it. Where's Gussy?"

"Looking at the stars, I expect."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 8.
D'Arcy Does Not Turn Up!

"HAVE you seen D'Arcy?"

It was the day after Arthur Augustus's unfinished confidence in the March wind under the elms. In the Fourth Form-room that morning D'Arcy had been so absentminded in class that Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, had noticed it, and descended heavily upon the swell of the School House several times.

D'Arcy left the class-room indebted to the Form master for a total of two hundred lines, but that circumstance did not seem to worry him.

He was evidently thinking of other things.

After dinner he disappeared. And after he had disappeared, the voice of Tom Merry was heard up and down St. Jim's inquiring for him.

For it was Wednesday, and a half-holiday, and a House match was to be played at St. Jim's between the juniors of the two Houses. The rivalry between School House and New House at St. Jim's frequently found vigorous display on the football field, and the juniors entered into the matches with great zest. D'Arcy, in spite of his "dudish" ways, was a keen footballer, and played in the School House junior eleven. He was wanted that afternoon; but he was not to be found.

"Have you seen D'Arcy?"

Tom Merry asked that question in Study No. 6, and Blake, Herries, and Digby shook their heads simultaneously.

"Saw him at dinner," said Blake. "I expect he's lying about somewhere."

"He sloped off just after dinner," said Digby. "I thought I saw him go down to the gates."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Herries. "He must have gone out, because I saw him shove a five-pound note into his pocket just before dinner. I suppose he's gone shopping."

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"The young villain, to go shopping when he's wanted in the match this afternoon!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, but there's plenty of time for that," said Blake, looking at his watch. "The kick-off is not till three."

"But he's got lines to do," said Tom Merry.

Blake, Herries, and Digby chuckled.

"Yes, rather!" ejaculated Blake. "He was mooning all the time in class this morning, and when Lathom looked at his exercise-book, what do you think he found?"

"Give it up!"

"There was a girl's name scrawled all over it!" grinned Blake. "Lemme see—was it Agnes, or Jane——"

"Ethel," said Digby.

"Ah, that's it, of course! You know it's not safe for a girl named Ethel to come near Gussy; he always falls in love with 'em. Well, it was scrawled all over his book, and Lathom squinted at him through his glasses as if he thought the chap was dotty. Gus has captured two hundred lines, and he's got to show them up by tea-time."

"Yes, so Mellish told me. Mellish wants his place in the eleven this afternoon, if Gussy can't play; but my idea was to help D'Arcy do his lines. Mr. Lathom will never know the difference in the hand."

"Good! Better find D'Arcy and tell him. We'll all do some, and the lines can be knocked off before three. Otherwise, Gus won't be able to play."

"If it comes to that," said Tom Merry wrathfully, "there will be a row. I'm not going to have a member of my team standing out when he's wanted to play."

"Well, I know it's rather rotten, but——"

"If he stays out of this match to please himself, he can stay out of the next to please me!" Tom Merry said grimly.

Blake shook his head decidedly.

"I'm sorry, Merry, but I can't agree with you there," he said. "It's impossible for a member of this study to be left out of the House team."

"Rats!" was the emphatic if not exactly Chesterfieldian reply of Tom Merry.

Blake's eyes sparkled.

"Did you say rats to me, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, I did."

"If you came to this study in quest of a thick ear——"

"Stuff! I came to this study in quest of a tame lunatic, and I've found three," said Tom Merry. And he walked out of Study No. 6, and slammed the door before Blake could reply.

He went down the passage, asking everyone he met for news of D'Arcy. No one had seen him in the School House. Monty Lowther and Manners were quite ignorant on the subject. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was standing at the door of his study, talking to Darrel, of the Sixth. Tom Merry asked them the question.

Kildare shook his head.

"No, I haven't seen him. Have you, Darrel?"

"Yes, I think I saw him going down to the gates," said Darrel.

Tom Merry hurried away.

It seemed pretty certain now that D'Arcy had left the school, and if he had really gone shopping, Tom Merry had little hope of his returning in time for the football match, let alone for the imposition beforehand.

"Hallo, Merry! Have you lost something?"

Tom was crossing the quad to the gates, when he was suddenly hailed from the direction of the New House, by a familiar voice. He turned round and stopped as he saw Figgins & Co. coming towards him.

Figgins, long-limbed and muscular, Kerr the canny Scotsman, Fatty Wynn, the plump, good-natured lad from Wales, and Marmaduke Smythe, the heir of millions—were known all over St. Jim's as Figgins & Co., and they were the leading lights of the New House junior eleven.

"Lost something?" repeated Figgins, looking at Tom Merry as he noted his worried expression. "What is it, kid? Tuppence or a ten-pound note?"

"Neither," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's a tamo lunatic!"

"Lowther or Manners?"

"Ass! It's Gussy!"

"Oh, Gussy! Where did you lose him?"

"He's been and lost himself," said Tom Merry ruefully. "He's got two hundred lines to send in before he can play this afternoon, and the young villain has gone off somewhere, shopping, I suppose, as Herries saw him put a fiver in his pocket before he scooted. Have you seen him?"

"Anybody seen D'Arcy?" asked Figgins, looking round at the Co.

"Yes," replied Kerr. "I saw him go out as I was coming in, half an hour ago. And he looked ripping, by Jove!"

"He's been looking slovenly of late," remarked Figgins. "I thought he must have something on his mind. I've seen him in a soiled collar, and the same waistcoat for three days running."

"He had his necktie crooked yesterday!" said Marmaduke.

"And he wouldn't have a jam-tart when I offered to stand treat at the tuck-shop," said Fatty Wynn seriously. "Now, there must be something wrong with a fellow when he won't have a nice, new, fresh jam-tart."

"Lowther was saying that he was in love again," Figgins remarked. "Is there anything in it, Tom Merry?"

"Better ask him," said Tom Merry. "Which way did he go when he went out, Kerr?"

"Down to the village."

Tom Merry snorted.

"That settles it! He's gone shopping, I suppose. The young ass will get into a row with Lathom for not showing up the lines, and into a fearful row with me if he misses the House match."

"With you?" asked Figgins curiously.

"Yes, with me."

"Are you somebody of any importance?" queried Figgins, with the air of a simple and guileless youth merely seeking useful information.

"I am captain of the School House junior eleven."

"H'm! Rather rotten, ain't it, to be captain of a lot of cripples out of a sort of old casual ward?" said Figgins sympathetically.

"Fearfully rotten!" said the Co.

Tom Merry turned red.

"You New House wasters——"

"You School House ass!"

"You——"

"You——"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"No time for a row now, Figgy," he said. "I've got to look for Gussy. Go and eat coke!"

And he walked away to the gates of St. Jim's.

He looked up and down Rylcombe Lane from the gates, but no Arthur Augustus was in sight. Figgins & Co. strolled after him.

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?" cackled Figgins.

Tom Merry took no notice. He looked up and down the road, and then turned in again. It was pretty certain that Arthur Augustus was absent, but Tom Merry would not lose a chance. He met Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, near the gates, and asked him if he had seen D'Arcy.

"Not lately," said Monteith, shaking his head.

"Has anybody seen our cat?" said Figgins, addressing the desert air.

Tom Merry stalked on; Figgins & Co. faithfully followed him, as if they had constituted themselves his shadows. The New House quartette were chuckling to themselves; it seemed to them a screaming joke; but Tom Merry was growing redder every minute.

"I say, Rushden, have you seen D'Arcy?" he asked, as he met the School House prefect.

Rushden shook his head.

"Think a minute, Rushy," urged Figgins. "We've mislaid a lunatic——"

Rushden laughed and walked on. Tom Merry gave Figgins & Co. a warning look.

"Can't you shut up, you silly asses?"

Figgins & Co. chuckled in chorus.

"You cackling idiots!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear us smile?"

Tom Merry walked on; Figgins & Co. faithfully followed. They burst into sudden song, after a whisper from Kerr, who was the poet of the Co.

Tom Merry could not help grinning as the refrain of a well-known comic song burst upon his ears, slightly altered to suit the occasion:

"Has anybody seen our Gus?"
"Has anybody seen our Gus?"

"Oh, shut up!" shouted Tom Merry, turning round.

But Figgins & Co. only roared the chorus louder.

Tom Merry went up the steps of the School House, and the yell of the New House jokers followed him. In the exuberance of their spirits, Figgins & Co. followed him up the steps, and yelled the chorus into the hall. But in the hall Tom Merry had found Lowther and Manners, talking to Blake and Digby. A word to them was sufficient, and they were ready for Figgins & Co.

"Give 'em socks!" muttered Tom Merry.

"What-ho!" murmured Blake.

And as Figgins put his head in at the door, the School House juniors made a sudden rush. Back went Figgins from the charge, and in a second he was rolling down the steps with the Co.

The School House juniors grinned at them from the top of the steps. Figgins & Co. picked themselves up, rather dusty and rumpled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "It's my turn to smile! How do you like it?"

"You School House rotter——"

"Why don't you come up?"

"Do you think we couldn't?" shouted Figgins, wrathfully.

"Yes, rather!"

"I'll show you! Come on, kids!"

The Co. were not the fellows to hang back where their leader led them, and Figgins was too excited to think of caution.

Up the steps they went charging; but five School House fellows lined the top step to receive them, and the upward chargers had simply no chance.

Figgins & Co. were rolling down the steps again in next to no time.

"Any more coming on?" asked Tom Merry politely.

Figgins rubbed his shoulder ruefully.

"We'll lick you this afternoon," he growled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll wipe up the football field with you!" yelled Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come on!" growled Figgins crossly. And the Co. limped away to their own side of the quadrangle, followed by the laughter of the School House juniors.

CHAPTER 4.

The House Football Match.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS did not reappear before the time fixed for the kick-off in the House match. If he had gone shopping, he was making a day of it, as Lowther remarked, and the wonder was what he found to buy in a sleepy little place like Rylcombe. The imposition remained unwritten, and, as soon as it became clear that D'Arcy would not play, Tom Merry had the task of finding a substitute.

Mellish of the Fourth wanted the place in the team, and he assumed in an off-hand manner that he would have it; but the young football captain had his own ideas about that.

"I hear that D'Arcy hasn't turned up, Merry," the ambitious youth remarked, coming up to Tom as he stood outside the pavilion, with a worried look on his face.

"No," said Tom wrathfully.

"Ah, I'm sorry; but I'm quite willing to play!"

"Are you?" said Tom Merry, looking the generous volunteer up and down.

"Certainly," said Mellish easily. "A good many fellows think I ought to have my cap for the junior eleven!"

"Do they?" said Tom Merry. "I really don't see what can have put the idea into their heads, Mellish!"

"I suppose that means that you don't think so?" said Mellish, with an unpleasant look.

"Yes, exactly."

"Then I'm not to have my cap for the House match?"

"Can't be done."

"Now look here, Tom Merry; I expected——"

"Sorry, but you certainly had no right to expect anything of the kind," said Tom Merry. "As football captain, I am the judge of whom I ought to put in the team, and you are certainly not a recruit I should choose."

"You take jolly good care to choose all your own friends!" retorted Mellish.

Tom Merry's eyes glittered.

"Do you mean to say that there is any favouritism?" he asked, his hands unconsciously clenching themselves as he spoke.

Mellish took a step backwards.

"Oh, no—no!" he said hastily. "But really, Merry, I think I ought to have the place; I play good footer. What chap is there in the School House better than I am?"

"Well, Gore is better, for one; but——"

"That's just it," said Gore, coming up. "It's not often I



"How much a dozen for these giddy neckties, D'Arcy?" asked Tom Merry. "My word! They beat your waistcoats hollow!"

agree with you, Tom Merry, but I must say you're right in choosing me to play in Gussy's place this afternoon!"

Tom Merry looked at him.

"But I haven't chosen you," he said coolly. "You are better than Mellish, but there are two or three better than you."

"Now look here, Tom Merry, I'm not——"

"There's Walsh, for one; and there's Reilly. Reilly is about the best, and I shall put him in."

"I don't think you ought to do anything of the kind! I think——"

"I'm afraid I haven't any time to listen to what you think now, Gore. I say, Reilly!" said Tom Merry, calling to a stalwart junior, with a keen, intelligent face, who was looking at him with a half-expectant look. Reilly was a Belfast lad, and a keen footballer, and about the best player in the School House who was not already included in the eleven.

"Yes, Merry?" said Reilly eagerly.

"I shall want you this afternoon."

"Good for you; I'm ready!"

"Get into your things, then."

"Sure, and I'm ready in a jiffy!"

And when the School House eleven turned out, Reilly was in the front line in place of the missing Arthur Augustus. Gore and Mellish stood in the crowd of juniors to look on at the match, with most unpleasant expressions upon their faces. They disapproved heartily of Tom Merry's choice, and they would have given Reilly a boot or two, but for one thought that restrained them; and that was that the Belfast lad had a hot temper and a hard fist, and was not to be "ragged" with impunity. So Gore and Mellish contented themselves with growling to one another.

Figgins & Co. turned out in fine form.

The two elevens seemed equally matched as they fronted one another. Tom Merry had won the toss, and he chose, of course, the goal from which the keen March wind was blowing. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, who took the keenest interest in junior football, had consented to act as referee, and a great many of the Fifth and Sixth had come down to the junior ground to look on and cheer.

The whistle went, and the ball flew from the foot of Figgins. The House match commenced.

With the keen wind in their faces, the New House fellows were under a disadvantage, but Figgins & Co. played up wonderfully well.

Figgins's long legs always stood him in good stead on a football ground, and when he fairly got going, with the ball at his feet, he was not easily stopped.

Now he brought the ball right up the field, dribbling it through the School House defence in fine style, and he sent in a shot for goal before the backs could get at him.

But the ball came away from the foot of Manners in goal, and Herries cleared, sending it well out to the forwards, who were on it in a twinkling.

Then came the chance of Tom Merry and his comrades. Passing the ball in beautiful style, with the wind behind them, they came down in a deadly rush upon the New House citadel.

Then shots rained in; but Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the Co., proved himself a foe worthy of the School House steel.

Whatever they sent in to Fatty came out again, and the New House goalie seemed to be all eyes, hands, and feet. Fatty was a splendid goal-keeper. Monty Lowther insinuated that it was because there was no room for the ball

to pass him between the posts, but this was an exaggeration. Fatty Wynn was plump, but not so plump as that. But he was keen, active, vigilant, and it needed a very smart kick to catch him napping. Figgins & Co. rallied, and the School House rush came to nothing.

The first half was fought out obstinately, but no goals were taken by either side. And during the rest in the interval, Figgins & Co. chuckled over that circumstance with great glee.

"If they can't score goals with the wind behind them," said Figgins, laying down the law in the dressing-room, "how are they going to do it with the wind in their faces?"

"They can't!" said Kerr confidently.

"Of course they can't! It's imposs., as that ass Gussy says! By the way, I wonder where Gussy is? Tom Merry was going to play him!"

"They're playing Reilly instead," Fatty Wynn remarked thoughtfully. "He sent in one or two good shots that I found it hard to stop. He's a good forward, and I shouldn't wonder if Tom Merry kept him in the team and left Gussy out in the cold!"

"Serve him right!" said Figgins emphatically. "A chap who fails to turn up for a football match deserves to be jumped on by wild elephants!"

"Rather! And I expect Gussy will get jumped on when he gets back to the School House! Anyway, I fancy he's lost his place in the House eleven for the rest of this season!"

The brief rest was over, and the footballers turned out again.

The change of ends brought the wind against the School House team, and Tom Merry and his comrades had to fight with the keen breeze in their faces. The New House team showed that they knew how to make the best of their advantage. Led by the indefatigable Figgins, they made rush after rush at the School House goal, and Manners was called upon again and again to save.

Twice the ball bounced from a goal-post back into the field of play, and the goal had the narrowest of escapes.

Then the School House rallied, and the tussle went into the New House half, and Fatty Wynn was put to the proof again. But the Welsh partner in the Co. proved himself equal to it. Tom Merry's surest kicks did not materialise, and the School House fell back in a goal-less state, as when they came on.

There remained twenty minutes to play, when, hard pressed by the New House team, Tom Merry's men were forced to concede a corner.

The corner kick was eagerly watched for.

The ball flew from French's foot, and a few seconds later Figgins slammed it into the goal.

There was no chance for Manners that time. The leather went past him like a four-point-seven shell, and plumped into the net, and the New House crowd round the ground burst into a roar.

"Goal!"

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

It was first blood to the New House. Figgins & Co. had broken their duck, so to speak, almost at the end of the game. The School House lined up again with deadly determination in their looks. They meant to equalise, or break something, as Tom Merry tersely put it.

They were in deadly earnest, but the New House players fought them hard. At last, however, the School House forwards got away in line, and, passing the ball with splendid precision, they drove their way goalward. Even Figgins was panting behind, and halves and backs were nowhere. Fatty Wynn was called upon to save, and he responded to the call with his usual alertness.

Right in went the ball from Tom Merry's powerful kick; but a strong Welsh fist was ready, and out it came again like a champagne-cork.

But the School House forward was ready. It was Reilly, the new recruit. He sprang at the leather clear of the ground, and in a flash he had headed it right into the net, long before Fatty Wynn knew what was coming.

The School House simply yelled.

"Goal!"

"Good old School House!"

"Goal—goal!"

Tom Merry gave the boy from Belfast a hearty slap on the back.

"Well done, kid!"

Ten minutes remained to play, but in that ten minutes neither side succeeded in altering the score. When the whistle finally went, it remained goal to goal, and the House match had ended in a draw.

As the School House youngsters moved off the field, Tom Merry tapped Reilly on the shoulder. The Irish lad looked at him brightly.

"You've won your cap for the junior eleven," said Tom Merry. "There isn't much of the season left, but you'll play till we stop footer."

And Reilly's eyes sparkled.

"Here, I say," exclaimed Blake, "what price Gussy?"

"Gussy? Gussy can go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry. "He's not an inch above Reilly's form, and he has failed to turn up for a match."

"In my opinion," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "the new recruit Reilly is the better of the two."

"Oh, none of your rotten puns!" said Blake crossly. "I want to know what Tom Merry means by saying that a fellow belonging to our study is going to be left out of the House eleven."

"I mean what I say," replied the hero of the Shell; "and if you were football captain, Blake, you would say the same."

"Well, I dare say I should," agreed Blake, after a moment's consideration. "I didn't look at it in that light before. But there will be a row with Gussy."

"There will!" said Tom Merry grimly. "I am going to have a row with him."

CHAPTER 5.

The Return of the Absentee.

"HAS Gussy turned up?"

That was the question the School House footballers asked as they came in after the match, but the answer was in the negative. Arthur Augustus had not yet turned up.

"What the dickens has become of him?" Blake said, looking a little worried. "I hope there hasn't been any accident."

The juniors looked grave. They all liked Arthur Augustus, and liked him all the better for some of his ways that they chipped him about.

"Not likely," said Digby. "If he's shopping, you know, he's not likely to leave off so long as he has any of his fiver left."

"Not if he was in Bond Street," said Monty Lowther. "But what is there for him to buy in Rylcombe? There's no fancy waistcoats there, and it would be a hunt to find a silk hat. Even neckties are at a premium. It's safe to say that Gussy wouldn't wear anything that was sold in Rylcombe."

"That's so," agreed Tom Merry. "But if he's not shopping, what did he want with a fiver in his pocket?"

"And I saw him take it out of his desk and shove it in," testified Herries.

"He can't have gone off to town, surely!" exclaimed Blake, in alarm.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I shouldn't wonder. Gussy is capable of anything, if he once got the idea into his head."

The juniors were standing in a group outside the door of Study No. 6, discussing the question. They had just looked into the study to see whether Arthur Augustus was there, but it was empty. And the Terrible Three did not care to go on to their own quarters till the question was settled, though it was high time for tea.

"Perhaps——" began Monty Lowther; and then he paused.

The others looked at him.

"Perhaps it's Ethel!" grinned Lowther. "We were asses not to think of it! I forgot about Gussy being in love again, in the excitement of the football match."

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "And he's forgotten all about the football match, in the excitement of being in love!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He's gone philandering, the young ass, and forgotten about the match! He——"

"Pway make woom for me to pass, deah boys!"

The juniors jumped at the familiar voice.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along the passage, with a huge parcel under his arm. He evidently wanted to enter Study No. 6, but the group of juniors were in the way. They stared at the swell of the School House.

In spite of the careless habits D'Arcy had fallen into in the last few days, he had dressed himself with more than his accustomed care for that visit to the village in the afternoon.

His trousers were beautifully creased, his waistcoat resplendent with all the hues of the rainbow, his silk hat shiny and well-brushed.

The reason was not far to seek. The beautiful unknown dwelt in the village, and Arthur Augustus could not run the risk of being seen by her in any but a really elegant state.

"Sowwy," went on D'Arcy; "but you fellahs are in the

beastly way! Pway stand aside, and allow me to entah the study."

"You—you—you image!" said Blake. "Where have you been?"

"I've been in Wylcombe, deah boy!"

"What have you been doing?"

"Pway do not make impertinent inquiwies, Blake!"

"You—you—— I—I'll——"

"I weally have not time to stay here and listen to your incohewent wemarks," said D'Arcy. "I am wathah tired, and I want to go into the study, deah boy."

Tom Merry took him by the waistcoat button.

"Do you know that we expected you to play in the House match this afternoon?" he demanded sternly.

Arthur Augustus gave a start.

"Bai Jove! I had forgotten all about it, deah boy!"

"You—you had forgotten all about the House match?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You image!" roared the indignant football captain. "And you have the cheek to stand there and tell me so?"

"My dear Mewwy, I suppose you would not pwefer me to tell you a whoppah?" said D'Arcy, with great dignity.

"You forgot the match! You had the unspeakable nerve——"

"It weally quite slipped my memowy, deah boy! I was thinkin' about more important mattahs, as a mattah of fact."

"More important matters than a House football match, you apology for a dummy?"

"I wefuse to be called an apology for a dummy!"

"You ass!"

"I wegard that as a most objectionable expwession, sir. I am sowwy I forgot about the football match; and, as one gentleman to another, I expect you to accept my sincere expwession of wegwet, and let the mattah dwop."

"I'm going to let you drop, too!" said Tom Merry grimly. "More important matters than a House football match! My word!"

"Weally, I hope the School House won the match," said D'Arcy. "I weally hope that you did not miss me vewy much. But I suppose they wan you all ovah the gwound?"

"As a matter of fact, we did not miss you at all."

"Pway confine yourself to the twuth, Tom Merry!"

"The frozen truth, my dear ass! We didn't miss you at all, as Reilly played up quite as well as you could have done. If we had missed you, we should have frog's-marched you for failing us."

"I should have uttahly wefused to be fwog's-marched!" said D'Arcy frigidly. "And I certainly cannot cwedit that Weilly played as well as I should have done. I am not the fellow to blow my own trumpet, as you all know; but I must say that my football is a bit above the avewage among the juniahs here. I suppose you lost or drew with the New House?"

"It was a draw," said Blake.

"Yaas, I expected as much," said D'Arcy, with a nod. "Nevah mind, deah boys; I will take particulah care not to fail next time, and we will simply bwush up the gwound with the New House wottahs!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"There won't be any next time for you—this season, at least, Gussy."

"I fail to compwehend the dwift of that wemark, Tom Mewwy."

"I mean that Reilly has played up well enough to keep his place in the team, and that he's going to keep it."

"He is goin' to keep my place?"

"Exactly!"

"I shall absolutely wefuse to give my permish. for anythin' of the sort!"

"I sha'n't worry about your permission, kid!" Tom Merry assured him. "The matter's settled, and you're done with junior eleven football for this season."

"Nothin' of the sort! I shall not allow Weilly to usurp my place in the eleven," said D'Arcy. "It is twue that I have more important mattahs on my mind just at pwesent, but this is a question of dig. with me. It is simply imposs. for me to allow Weilly to take my place in the juniah eleven. If he pwesumed to do anything of the sort, I should considah it impewative to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha! You'd better give him one, then," grinned Monty Lowther; "only, make your will before you start. Reilly is a hard hitter."

"I do not care whethah he is a hard hittah or not. I wefuse to allow him to take my place in the team. But weally, deah boys, I am quite exhausted, and I want to go into the study. Pway let me pass!"

"What have you got there?" demanded Blake, ignoring the request of the swell of the School House. He indicated the bulging parcel that D'Arcy carried.

Arthur Augustus turned slightly red.

"Nothin' much," he said. "Pway let me pass into the study, deah boys!"

"What have you got there?" repeated Blake, without moving.

"I wefuse to tell you!"

"Is it a feed?"

D'Arcy made a gesture of disgust.

"Certainly not!"

"Then, what is it?"

"That is weally my affair, deah boys, and I wefuse—— Let go that parcel, Blake! Digby, you wottah, don't catch hold of my collah, or I shall stwike you! Howwies, you howwid beast, dwop it! Dwop it, I say, or I shall no longah wegard you as a fwiend!"

But the protests of the swell of St. Jim's were ineffectual. Blake and his chums had been anxious about Gussy, and they were exasperated at his having got himself left out of the junior eleven. They could not dispute the justice of the sentence; but it was a slight upon Study No. 6, and they didn't like it. As Blake put it, they were getting "fed up" with the worries of Arthur Augustus. And they laid rude hands upon his bulky parcel, which, as it was wrapped only in paper and tied with twine, came to pieces in a twinkling under their grasp.

"You howwid wottahs!" yelled D'Arcy.

The contents of the parcel tumbled out in the doorway, and over the floor of the study. The juniors stared at the heap in blank amazement.

Some of them had thought that D'Arcy had gone shopping, but none had suspected that he would buy a variety of drapery goods such as chints curtains, table-cloths, mufflers, socks, towels, and silk handkerchiefs. Yet such were the articles that tumbled out on the floor as the parcel was burst open.

Blake and the rest simply staggered back. They looked at the strange variety of purchases, and they looked at D'Arcy. D'Arcy was crimson. Blake was looking alarmed. The only explanation that occurred to him was that Arthur Augustus was wandering in his mind.

"Poor old chap!" said Blake feelingly.

D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass and stared at Blake.

"What do you mean, Blake, by that widiculous observation?" he exclaimed.

"Poor old boy!" said Blake soothingly. "Don't get excited. Calm yourself——"

"I wefuse to calm myself!"

"Hush, hush! I know about it—all about it——"

"Blake, I weally——"

"Yes, yes. Come up to the dormitory, old chap——"

"I wefuse to come up to the dormitowy. What the beastly dickens should I come up to the dormitowy for?" demanded the amazed Gussy.

"You had better lie down for a bit."

"I wefuse to lie down."

"But you must, you know; you're not well. I'll get Mrs. Mimms to bring you a soothing draught——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Terrible Three.

Blake glared at them indignantly.

"I think you might be a bit more serious, Tom Merry," he exclaimed, "when you can see as well as I can that the poor kid is off his rocker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to be wegarded as off my wockah, and if Mrs. Mimms bwings me a beastly soothin' dwaught, I shall thwow it at you, Blake!" exclaimed D'Arcy, getting excited.

Blake waved his hand pacifically.

"Now, look here, Gussy, you know perfectly well that you're wandering in your mind, or you wouldn't have bought all this rubbish."

"I had a weason for buyin' that wubbish."

"What was the reason?"

"I pwefer to keep that a secwet for the pwesent."

Blake nodded, with a knowing smile.

"Of course, all lunatics are fond of imagining that they have secrets," he said, looking round. "I suppose all you fellows agree that he must be a bit balmy on the crumpet."

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

"Rather!" said Herries and Digby.

"I am not balmy on the cwumpet! I wefuse to be considahed balmy on the cwumpet!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I ha've good weason for buyin' those things, but I pwefer to keep it a secwet at pwesent."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I think I can guess. Come along, kids, and let's get in to tea! If you think of having a whip round to raise the cash to buy a strait-jacket for D'Arcy, Blake, we'll subscribe to it."

And Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, laughing like hyenas, went up the passage to their own study, and as they went they could still hear the voice of Arthur Augustus excitedly maintaining to his unbelieving chums that he "weally was not off his beastly wockah."

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins Scents Fun.

"I SAY, Figgins, see if you can make anything of this beastly sentence, will you?"

It was Marmaduke who spoke, in Figgins's study in the New House at St. Jim's. Figgins & Co. were all there. Figgins was sitting on the broad window-ledge, his hands in his trousers' pockets, his long legs stretched out, and a shade of thoughtfulness upon his manly brow.

Marmaduke looked up from his Latin exercise to ask the assistance of the great Figgins. He would rather have asked Kerr, for Kerr, the Scottish partner in the New House Co. was a marvel of knowledge, his keen, Scottish brain assimilating all kinds of learning with perfect ease. But Kerr was busy with a German imposition, of which he had a hundred lines to write to please Herr Schneider, the German master of St. Jim's, a terrible giver-out of impots.

"I say, Figgins!"

Marmaduke repeated his remark, but Figgins did not reply, or even look up. He was evidently in a brown study.

"Hang!" said Marmaduke.

Kerr looked up wearily from the spider-legs he was tracing on a sheet of foolscap, which were to be palmed off on the German master in the morning, with the pleasant fiction that they were German characters.

"Figgins, old fellow, you seem to have nothing to do. You might write in twenty lines or so for me. They'd never be noticed among the rest!"

Still Figgins did not speak.

Figgins was thinking something out, that was evident, and had no time to heed, or even to hear, the remarks that were made to him.

Fatty Wynn was roasting chestnuts at the fire. Anything in the least like cooking always appealed to Fatty Wynn, and he was a famous roaster of chestnuts. He glanced up with a glowing face.

"Have some chestnuts, Figgy?"

Even to that remark Figgins made no answer.

Fatty Wynn looked astonished.

"I say, Figgins, the chestnuts are done. Will you have some?"

"Yes—er—no," said Figgins absently.

"Will you help me with this beastly sentence, Figgy?" said Marmaduke. "Listen—sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam ingrata revolvo? Now——"

"Come and do a dozen for me, Figgy," said Kerr. "You go on from here—und schlag auf schlag——"

"Better have some chestnuts," said Fatty Wynn persuasively. "They're roasted simply beautiful, Figgy!"

"Sed quid ego haec autem ne——"

"Und schlag auf schlag, werd ich zum Augenblicke——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Figgins. "I'm thinking!"

"These chestnuts——"

"Blow the chestnuts!"

"Well, you ungrateful rotter, after I've taken the trouble to roast them!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"Sed quid ego haec autem ne——"

"And they're done to a turn——"

"Werd ich zum Augenblicke sagen——"

"You worrying asses," shouted Figgins, "I'm thinking!"

"Oh, all right, I can manage the chestnuts," said Fatty Wynn, beginning on them. "I only thought you might like some."

"Eh—what? Oh, I'll have some of those chestnuts, Fatty!" said Figgins, appearing to wake up to his surroundings.

"H'm! Well, here they are!"

"Will you come and do some of this German for me, Figgy? Verweile doch, du bist so schon——"

"Can't be did! I'm busy!"

"What with—eating chestnuts?"

"Yes, and thinking."

"You might listen to this disgusting Latin, some of you!" growled Marmaduke. "Sed quid——"

"What's that about a quid?" said Figgins. "What are you doing?"

"Virgil; second book of the Æneid."

"Well, you've got it wrong. Virgil doesn't talk slang——"

"Ass!" howled Marmaduke. "Is this a time to be funny, when I'm getting an ache in my brain over it? Listen to this—sed quid ego haec——"

"Now, look here, Marmy, just keep that for private consumption——"

"Sed quid ego haec autem——"

"My word, he goes on like the little brook!" grunted Figgins. "Men may come, and men may go, but Marmaduke Smythe goes on for ever."

"Sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam——"

"Don't! I haven't done anything to you!"

"Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen," said Kerr, reading aloud as he wrote.

"These chestnuts are all right," said Fatty Wynn. "Have some more, Figgy?"

"Yes, I think I will. If these silly kids would only be quiet I'd tell you what I've been thinking about?"

"Is it a wheeze?" asked Kerr, laying down his pen.

"Yes, and a ripping one!"

"Then let's hear it. You can shove the chestnuts this way, Fatty."

"Right-ho! There's plenty. Go ahead, Figgins——"

"Sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam ingrata——"

"Shut up, Marmaduke!"

"Sha'n't! I'm going to make this thing out, or burst something!" retorted the heir of Samuel Smythe, millionaire.

"Well, do it off your own bat, then."

"Rats! Sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam——"

"Oh, help him, Kerr; he won't leave off till somebody does," said Figgins. "You know what an obstinate pig he is. I'll scoff some of these chestnuts while you work it out for him. Blessed if I know why he can't construe a simple sentence!"

"Why can't you do it, then?"

"So I could, easily, but I'm eating chestnuts just now. Now do it for him, Kerr, like a good chap, and make him shut up!"

"Sed quid ego haec autem——"

"What do you want to know, Marmy?"

"Lemme see. Does it mean that the chap is an ungrateful storyteller——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or that he—he—he——"

"Oh, ring off with your he, he, he! Give me the beastly thing! Sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam ingrata revolvo—any silly ass could construe that sentence——"

"Go ahead, then!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, go ahead!"

"But why do I, however, relate here these unpleasant things?"

"Blessed if I know! You're always saying something unpleasant. What I want to know is, how to construe the rotten thing."

"You—you ass! That's it—sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam ingrata revolvo—but why do I here, however, these unpleasant things relate——"

"I don't see why you couldn't have explained that before."

"Lot of good trying to explain anything to an ass like you!"

"Oh, leave off talking a bit, Kerr, while I write it down!"

"Write yourself down an ass!" said Figgins. "Now, kids, are you ready to listen to me? I've nearly finished the chestnuts."

"You might shove some over this way," said Marmaduke. "Let me see, it goes on with—quidve morer——"

"If you go with that rotten Latin, now, Marmaduke Smythe, you'll be given your choice between the door and the window as a mode of exit from this study," said Figgins darkly.

"But I've got to——"

"You've got to shut up! I've been thinking——"

"Oh, I suppose we'd better all shut up, to celebrate such a rare event!" said Marmaduke, turning down the leaf of his Virgil and closing the book. "Hand over those chestnuts. Now, you can get on, Figgy!"

"I've been thinking——"

"We've heard that before. You ought to go on from the point you left off at."

"If you interrupt me again, Marmaduke Smythe——"

"But you're wasting time——"

"Give me your Goethe, Kerr, will you, to shy at that ass, if he will go on talking——"

"Not much; here's your Latin grammar, you can have that."

"Well, it's a shame to chuck a book about; it spoils it."

"What about my Goethe, then?" howled Kerr.

"Oh, blow your old Goethe! But as I was saying, I've been thinking——"

"And, as I was saying, we've heard that before," said Marmaduke obstinately.

The Latin grammar flew through the air, and Marmaduke gave a terrific yell as it biffed on the side of his head. It flew back the next moment from Marmaduke's ready hand, and Figgins dodged just in time, and there was a crash of a breaking pane of glass as the volume went through the window. Figgins gave a yell.

"You ass, you've broken the window!"

"You've nearly broken my thinking apparatus!"

"That means two bob for a new pane!" growled Kerr.

"You'd better put up a shilling each. If somebody walks off with your Latin grammar, Figgy, it will serve you right. But are you going to tell us the wheeze, if there is one. If not, I'll finish my beastly impot."

"I was coming to the point, only Marmaduke kept on interrupting me."

"I'll jam his head against the table if he speaks again. Go on!"

"Well, I've been thinking about the case of Arthur Augustus, and I've come to the conclusion that there's something up."

The Co. were interested at once. Anything like a "wheeze" up against the School House was always certain of their hearty sympathy and support. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was, as it were, the weakest spot in the School House armour.

"Some of the fellows are saying that he's in love again," said Figgins. "I shouldn't wonder if it was so. Anyway, there's something on. If he's not in love, he's in some kind of a bother. My idea is that we should look into the matter——"

"And screw some fun out of it——"

"Well, yes, if possible. We had a good wheeze last time, when Kerr dressed as a girl and pulled the aristocratic leg of Gussy. Of course, we can't work the same wheeze twice. That wouldn't be worthy of the great traditions of the New House."

"And Gussy wouldn't be caught the same way twice, either."

"Well, I was thinking of that, too. Now, my idea is to look into the matter, and if we can get up a jape against the School House masters, we'll do it. But if Gussy should happen to be in any real trouble, we'll help him out."

"Right-ho!" said the Co. heartily.

"Then, you see, we take up the position of a sort of guardian angel—four giddy guardian angels, as a matter of fact—looking after the general welfare of the Lower School!" explained Figgins. "If Gussy is in trouble, and we fish him out of it, of course that means a lot of kudos for us. While if we find it possible to jape those outsiders, that serves our purpose equally well. In either case, the New House comes out ahead!"

"Good!"

"I've thought it over carefully. You know, I've played the detective before——"

"Yes, I know you have," said Marmaduke. "The School House hasn't left off chipping us yet about the show you made."

Figgins turned red.

"Of course, everybody is bound to fail at times," he said. "But I've studied the methods of Sexton Blake, and I really think I can work things out, you know. For instance, I've thought it out about Gussy——"

"You don't know what's the matter, though."

"But I'm on the track. You know he was absent from the football match this afternoon, and Tom Merry was simply wild about it. It must have been something awfully important in D'Arcy's eyes that kept him away. I saw him come in——"

"So did we, but he didn't tell us anything!"

"But he carried a big parcel under his arm," said Figgins. "I spotted that parcel. Now, I've been thinking——"

"You've said that before——" jerked in Marmaduke.

"Oh, shut up, old chap!" said Kerr. "Go on, Figgy. This is where it begins to be interesting."

"Why, in thinking it out," went on Figgins, "it occurred to me where to find the clue. What was in that parcel?"

"Grub, of course," said Fatty Wynn. "He was bringing in things for a feed in the study. That's pretty plain, Figgy!"

Figgins gave the Falstaff of the New House a withering look.

"That's like you, Fatty; always thinking about grub. It wasn't anything of the sort. The parcel was too big for D'Arcy to carry under his arm like that if it had contained anything as heavy as grub."

"My hat!" exclaimed Kerr admiringly. "That's a real good Sexton Blake deduction, Figgy, and no mistake!"

Figgins gave a gratified smile.

"You see, I've been thinking it out," he said. "Now, it wasn't grub, so what was it? If we knew what was in that parcel we should know where D'Arcy had been, and then we should be fairly on the track."

"Good! But perhaps he had only been shopping——"

"Of course he had been shopping. I know that. But what was it he was buying? Not fancy waistcoats and silk hats, as he did that time we were up in town, because they don't sell 'em in Rylcombe."

"That's true."

"Therefore, as he hasn't been buying things for himself, or for the study, what has he been buying?"

"That's a giddy mystery."

"Why, don't you see?" exclaimed Figgins triumphantly. "He's been buying something simply as an excuse to go to a certain shop——"

"My only hat!"

"You've hit it!"

"I think I have. D'Arcy is mashed on some giddy charmer in a shop in Rylcombe, if he's in love," said Figgins, with conviction, "and we've only got to see what it is he's bought, to be able to guess what shop it was. Then we're on the track—and I can see oceans of fun ahead."

And Figgins chuckled joyously.

"By Jove, I'm inclined to think you're right!" said Marmaduke.

"Thank you!" said Figgins. "If you're inclined to believe I'm right, that settles it!"

"I mean——"

"Never mind what you mean, Marmy. Our business at present is to discover what was in D'Arcy's parcel and get on the track."

"But how are you going to discover that?" asked Kerr.

"The easiest way in the world—by paying Blake a visit and keeping our eyes open," grinned Figgins.

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "And if it turns out to have been grub in the parcel after all, they can't do less than ask us to stay to the feed."

"Oh, you can go and eat coke!" said Figgins. "Come along, you chaps, and let's see Blake before the house is locked up."

And a couple of minutes later Figgins & Co. were crossing the dusky quadrangle to the School House.

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins on the Track.

"THEN you won't explain?"

"Certainly not, deah boy!"

"You cut a football match—a most important match, and——"

"I have already expwessed my sowwow to Tom Mewwy, our wespected football skippah, and a fellow can't do more than that, Blake."

"Then you come home with a bundle under your arm, as if you were a giddy old lady attending the sales——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Chintz curtains and lace handkerchiefs——"

"Pway, deah boy——"

"And you won't explain?"

"Certainly not!"

"And you persist that you are not off your rocker?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, kids," said Blake, turning to Herries and Digby, "what do you make of it?"

"Oh, he's balmy!" said Herries, pouring out a cup of tea. "After all, those chintz curtains will look very well up the window here. Ours have never looked the same since my bulldog worried them."

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Blake; "and I dare say we can make some use of the other rubbish."

"You are quite welcome to all the wubbish, deah boys!"

"Thank you for nothing! I—— Hallo, Figgins!"

Figgins put his head into the study. He glanced curiously round the room. The chums of Study No. 6 were finishing tea, and D'Arcy's mysterious purchases were piled on the floor and the bookcase. Figgy's keen eye caught them at once, but he assumed an appearance of indifference.

"Hallo!" he said. "Thought we would give you a look-in and see if you were still alive after the football match."

"Oh, come in!" said Blake. "Sorry we've just finished tea. There's some water we can shove in the pot, and there's half a herring left."

"Thanks, awfully, Blake; you're too generous, but, as a matter of fact, we've had tea——"

"You look pretty done up," continued Blake, surveying Figgins & Co. as they came into the study. "Of course, you would be."

"We don't notice it ourselves," said Figgins sarcastically. "But I say, have you been to the sales lately? Who's responsible for this little lot?"

Blake laughed.

"Oh, D'Arcy brought all that in! He's been shopping in Rylcombe."

"My hat!" said Figgins, with a glance at the Co. The work of investigation was turning out easier than he had expected. "If it's not an impertinent question, I should really like to know what D'Arcy is going to do with chintz curtains, and towels, and silk handkerchiefs, and tablecloths——"

"So should we all; but he refuses to divulge the dread secret. The only possible explanation is that he has an idea of opening a shop——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Or else he's off his rocker!" said Blake.

"Where did you pick up all these things, Gussy, old son?"

"I bought the beastly wubbish in Wylcombe," said D'Arcy, to whom the subject was evidently an unpleasant one.

"Then I know where you got them. It must have been Short's, the draper's."

"Yaas, wathah; there's no secwet about that."

"Well, Blake," said Figgins, with a great deal of seriousness, "I fancy that your second explanation is the one; Gussy is off his rocker."

"I am not off my wockah——"

"Yes, you are, Gussy. I've noticed it for some time. It has been creeping on you, as it were, unawares. Fellows often go off their crumpets without noticing it at the time," said Figgins solemnly. "My idea is that there ought to be a subscription to buy D'Arcy a strait waistcoat."

"If you are goin' to indulge in such wude wemarks, Figgins, I shall have no alternative but to wequest you to withdwaw fwom this study," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"I'm speaking for your own good. When I first saw you and your eyeglass, I realised that your brain was in a tottering condition——"

"My bwain is not in a tottewin' condition——"

"And now it has finished tottewin'——"

D'Arcy rose to his feet with a warlike look.

"And has gone right off," continued Figgins deliberately. "Of course, it hasn't been noticed much in this study, where the other brains are rather rocky——"

"What's that?" exclaimed Blake, jumping up.

"I say all the brains in this study are rather rocky."

"You New House waster——"

"You School House duffer——"

"Kick them out, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, sitting down again. "I am weally wathah exhausted myself, but pway kick them out of the beastly woom."

Blake, Herries, and Digby advanced upon the visitors. Figgins & Co. retreated from the study. For some reason Figgins did not show fight, but, followed by jeers from the School House juniors, went downstairs with the Co., and vanished into the quadrangle. The faces of the Co. were discontented as they walked towards their own House. They followed Figgins's lead unquestioningly, but this did look like a back-down before the School House.

"I say, why didn't you go for the rotters?" demanded Fatty Wynn. "There wasn't a feed after all, and so there was no reason to be peaceable, that I could see."

"Nor I," said Marmaduke. "We ought to have wiped up the study with them before we left."

"Just so," said Kerr. "I don't quite catch on, Figgy."

"My dear kids," said Figgins patronisingly, "we've effected the purpose we went to the School House for. That's enough. We've something more important than scrapping on the stairs to think about now. We've discovered the clue!"

"Yes, there's something in that. We know that D'Arcy has been shopping at Short's, the draper's, and has bought a lot of silly rubbish he didn't want."

"That's where we come in," grinned Figgins. "Next time D'Arcy goes into the village, four kids about our size go too. We'll shadow him, and see what he does. You know there's a good-looking girl in Short's, the draper's. She's not exactly D'Arcy's style, I should think, but it looks as if it was the case. I know she's engaged to a chap in Rylcombe, and I can foresee a heap of fun if she's the charmer."

And the Co. chuckled.

CHAPTER 8.

D'Arcy Does Some Shopping

"TOM MEWWY——"

"Hallo, Adolphus!"

"I have wemarked before, Tom Mewwy, that my name is not Adolphus, and I wegard the application of that name to me as a piece of widiculous fwivolity."

"Sorry; I meant Algernon," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Do you want to speak to me, Aubrey? If you do, buck up, Augustus."

"Yaas, wathah! I—I—you see——"

Tom Merry looked curiously at the swell of the School House. D'Arcy had met him as he was going down to the playing-field the day after the football match, and seemed to have something to say, but somehow was unable to say it.

"Well, get on, Gussy!"

"You—you—that is—do you think, Tom Mewwy——"

"Yes, sometimes, when my brain's in working order," said the hero of the Shell humorously.

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! This is a sewious mattah. Do you—do you think that your old governess, Miss Pwiscillah Fawcett, is likely to come down to the coll. soon?"

Tom Merry stared at him.

"What on earth do you want to see Miss Fawcett for?"

D'Arcy blushed.

"I—I want to see her. I want to ask her advice——"

"About what—if I may ask?"

"About a most important mattah."

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm afraid my governess isn't much of an adviser on love topics, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I don't exactly know when she will be here again," said Tom. "I'll write and ask her, if you like. I'll tell her you're in love, and she'll bring you some medicine for it."

"I wegard your wemark as beastly!" said D'Arcy; and he stalked away.

Tom Merry went on, laughing. Most of the School House junior eleven were at practice on the footer field, including Reilly, the new recruit; but Arthur Augustus did not turn up there. Blake looked for him to make him go, whether he liked it or not, but perhaps the swell of the School House suspected his kind intentions, for he kept out of the way till the chums of Study No. 6 were busily engaged.

Figgins & Co. were not at practice. They lounged in the gateway of St. Jim's, apparently much interested in viewing the country round about. They were waiting for Arthur Augustus. He came along at last.

Figgins almost gasped as he saw him.

Of late, as we know, Arthur Augustus had fallen into slovenly ways at St. Jim's. He had grown careless of his dress, and even of the parting of his hair. But now he appeared in all his pristine elegance.

His Eton jacket fitted him like a glove. His trousers seemed to have just come out of the press. His boots outvied the sun in brilliance, and his gloves were spotless. His collar was impeccable, his necktie tied with a finish that only the hand of Arthur Augustus could have given to any necktie. His silk hat had been polished till it shone again. His waistcoat simply dazzled the eye. His monocle was stuck in his right eye, giving an artistic finish to his appearance.

Figgins fell against Kerr, and clasped him for support.

"My word!" he murmured. "Is it D'Arcy, or is it a gorgeous dream?"

D'Arcy glanced disdainfully at the New House juniors as he passed them in the gateway. He saw that Figgins was making fun of him, and at any other time he would have been tempted to stop and give the New House junior what he termed a "feahful thwashin'." But at present his mind was occupied by more important thoughts.

The swell of the School House walked away towards the village, without once looking back. Figgins & Co. followed, taking care to keep out of sight as much as possible. But there was no need for their caution. D'Arcy was evidently too much preoccupied to think of anything but the matter he had in his mind. He walked into the village without the faintest idea that Figgins & Co. were after him.

"Careful!" murmured Figgins, as they entered the village street, and D'Arcy halted. "Keep in cover!"

Arthur Augustus had stopped in the street opposite the village drapery shop. He stood on the path gazing across at the building with great interest. The shop, like many others in the High Street of Rylcombe, had been built in the front of an old private house, and while the ground-floor was occupied by the draper and his family, the floor above, approached by the side door, was inhabited by another family. A brass plate beside the private door announced the fact, to all whom it might concern, that Professor Lightfoot, violin instructor, dwelt there.

Figgins nodded his head after glancing at the building which occupied D'Arcy's attention so much.

"That's where the young ass goes for his violin lessons," he said to the Co. "You know he's been taking violin instruction for the last few weeks, and the Head allows him to cut class two hours a week in the afternoon to come down here. That's how he came to meet the draper's young lady."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! He's going in now!"

D'Arcy appeared to suddenly make up his mind. He crossed the road, and disappeared into the drapery shop. Promptly enough Figgins & Co. crossed the road after him, and Figgins squeezed his nose flat on the glass door. D'Arcy was standing at the counter talking to the draper's young lady. The latter was rather a pretty, fresh-faced country girl, not particularly intelligent, and rather given to giggling. Figgins chuckled as he saw D'Arcy talking to her over the counter.

"Stay here, you kids!" he whispered. "I'm going in!"

"You'll scare him off——"

"Not I! I'll risk it, anyway!"

And Figgins entered the draper's shop.

As it happened, D'Arcy did not even glance to see whom the new-comer might be, and remained in ignorance of the fact that Figgins was in the shop at all. Figgins noted the fact with inward glee. He placed himself on the further side of a showcase, and sat down on a high chair. He was almost hidden from D'Arcy now, unless the swell of St. Jim's should come round the case. As there was only the one attendant in the shop, Figgins had to wait his turn to be served; and as he did not want to buy anything, this suited him very well.

The girl behind the counter was smiling in a rather curious way. Probably she did not know what to make of D'Arcy. His purchases of yesterday must have amazed her, and he seemed inclined to repeat them to-day. But Mr. Short's young lady was a businesslike girl, given to making hay while the sun shone. If D'Arcy chose to buy all sorts of things that were of no earthly use to him, that was his own affair.

"What can I show you, sir?" she asked, in a honeyed tone. "More lace handkerchiefs?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy bought a dozen lace handkerchiefs.

"Would you like to see some—er—socks?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

And a great variety of socks were spread out for his inspection.

The swell of St. Jim's looked them over carelessly.

His purchases were evidently an excuse for remaining in the shop, and he did not care in the slightest degree what he bought, and, in fact, probably did not even know what he was looking at.

Yet Figgins was puzzled.

He had expected to see Arthur Augustus giving the girl behind the counter languishing looks, but so far from doing so, D'Arcy appeared to be almost unaware of her existence.

The draper's young lady was evidently not the object of his adoration.

Figgins wrinkled his brows in thought over that problem. There was only one girl behind the counter at Short's, and that one was not D'Arcy's inamorata. Yet the swell of St. Jim's was running up a bill recklessly for no purpose other than that of remaining in the shop! It was a complete riddle.

D'Arcy purchased three dozen socks, hanging out the purchase as long as he could. The socks were of a coarse description such as were worn by the children in the village, and D'Arcy would never have dreamed of putting them on his aristocratic feet. Next he looked at some neckties, Mr. Short being a provider of men's haberdashery as well as of goods destined for the adornment of the gentle sex. The neckties were of a flaming description, and one shilling each, and in his calmer moments would have made D'Arcy shudder. But now he selected them at haphazard, and bought them recklessly, and six of them were added to the pile of his purchases.

"Can I show you some mufflers?" asked the girl demurely.

D'Arcy did not reply.

"Would you care to see some silk mufflers, sir?"

Still no answer!

"They are very comfortable in this March weather," the girl behind the counter hinted.

But Arthur Augustus was dumb!

His eyes were fixed upon a door at the back of the shop, which had opened quietly. A girl had appeared in the doorway, and D'Arcy's eyes were fastened upon her, as if he could not take them off.

The girl glanced into the shop, and saw D'Arcy. She nodded to the girl behind the counter.

"I did not know you were busy, Maud," she said, in a low, clear, and very sweet voice. And she made a step to return into the room.

D'Arcy, who seemed to have been held spellbound, made a quick step forward.

He raised his silk hat, and bowed to the girl, who gave him a smile and a nod.

"I am so glad to see you, Miss Ethel," said Arthur Augustus.

Figgins gave a jump.

The name told him everything!

He glanced towards the girl in the doorway. He liked her at the first glance. She was about twenty-one or two, and her face was very pleasant, and almost beautiful. It had an expression which told of troubles patiently and gently borne. She was dressed almost wholly in black, very plainly and simply, but with excellent taste. Figgins understood at once.

Miss Ethel—whomsoever Miss Ethel might be—was the object of D'Arcy's regard. She was the cause of his visits to the draper's shop, and he evidently knew of the acquaintance between her and the girl behind the counter, and hoped to see her while he was lingering about the place—it was clear enough now!

"I see you are making purchases, Master D'Arcy," said the girl, looking in some surprise at the pile on the counter.

D'Arcy turned red.

"Yaas, wathah, Miss Ethel! A few—a few things I want, you know!"

Miss Ethel smiled.

"Are you really going to wear all those neckties, Master D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy glanced at the neckties.

"Weally, Miss Ethel! You weally don't think I could wear those feahful-lookin' things, do you?" he said reproachfully.

"Then why are you purchasing them?"

The girl behind the counter giggled, but Miss Ethel did not appear to hear it. D'Arcy turned the colour of a beetroot.

"I—you see—weally——"

"Are they for someone else?"

"Yaas—yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I—I am goin' to give them away!"

"Oh, I see!"

"Yaas, wathah! You are not goin', Miss Ethel?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Bai Jove, you know—weally—give my kind wegards to the professah, won't you? And—and——"

"I will give your message to my father."

"Thank you, Miss Ethel."

The girl inclined her head and the door closed. A light step on the staircase was heard for a moment. D'Arcy stood gazing at the door as though his charmer still stood there.

"Will you look at some silk mufflers, sir?"

The swell of St. Jim's did not reply.

"Ahem! Would you care to see some mufflers——"

"Er—yaas, wathah—I will have a dozen," said D'Arcy absently.

"Anything else, sir?"

"Yes, a dozen."

The girl stared at him.

"A dozen what, sir?"

"Just a dozen, please," said D'Arcy, without looking at her.

"Yes, but what?"

"I—I weally beg your pardon!" said D'Arcy. "Let me see! I—I sha'n't want anythin' more, thank you!"

"Shall I wrap these up for you?"

"Yaas, wathah, if you will be so kind!"

"I could have them sent up to the school for you if you prefer it, sir."

"Pway don't! The chaps would get hold of them, you know! Pway w'ap up the parcel, and I will cawwy it undah my arm, you know!"

"Certainly, sir."

The girl proceeded to wrap up the parcel. It was a very bulky one. D'Arcy stood in a brown study. Figgins watched him curiously from his cover on the other side of the show-case. Arthur Augustus had not looked towards him once, and seemed to be quite unaware of his presence in the shop.

"There is your parcel, sir."

"Thank you. How much, pway?"

"Two pounds five shillings and threepence three-farthings, please."

Figgins gave a gasp.

"Pway change that fivah for me, miss."

The crisp note rustled on the counter. D'Arcy received the change and put it into his pocket without looking at it. Then he turned towards the door.

"You've forgotten your parcel, sir!" said the girl, giggling.

"Bai Jove, so I have, you know! Thank you! Good-aftahnoon!"

"Good-afternoon, sir! What can I do for you, please?" asked the girl, turning towards Figgins. The New House junior had to reply, and his voice caught D'Arcy's ear at once.

"I—I want a packet of shoe-buttons, please!" stammered Figgins.

D'Arcy turned round.

"Figgins!"

"Hallo, D'Arcy," said the unabashed Figgins; "fancy meeting you!"

"Figgins, I wegard you as a beast!"

And D'Arcy stalked from the shop with his parcel under his arm. Figgins grinned, took his packet of shoe-buttons and paid for them, and rejoined the Co. in the street. He found them staring after the figure of Arthur Augustus, labouring along with the huge parcel under his arm.

CHAPTER 9.

How Figgins & Co. Plotted a Plot, and the Terrible Three Counter-plotted a Counter-plot.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS walked on down the High Street of Rylcombe as if he were walking on air. In fact, it was only the weight of the big parcel under his arm that seemed to hold him to the solid earth.

He had seen his divinity!

It had only been for a few moments, and he had exchanged only a few, commonplace words, and the opportunity had cost him two pounds five shillings and threepence three-farthings! But what did that matter?

Nothing at all!

Arthur Augustus was happy. He was, of course, very much in love; but his love was of the noble and chivalrous kind which can find nourishment upon a sigh or a tear. D'Arcy would have been quite content to gaze at the object of his worship from afar. To exchange words with her was a boundless delight. To touch her hand was further than his thoughts travelled.

The swell of St. Jim's, however, had not forgotten the inopportune meeting with Figgins in Mr. Short's shop. He looked back several times as he walked home towards the college, and he saw Figgins & Co. strolling along the lane after him. They were apparently paying him no attention, but he knew very well that their eyes were upon him and his parcel.

That parcel was beginning to worry Arthur Augustus!

He knew very well that if he carried it into the School House he would be subjected to a fresh torrent of chaff from his study-mates, and the whole School House would soon be shrieking over the joke. But what was he to do with it? He thought of pitching it into a ditch and leaving it there. But there were those New House fellows just behind him. If he left the parcel anywhere en route it was pretty certain that Figgins & Co. would fish it out. Then the joke would be worse than ever, for the New House quartette would certainly bring the absurd purchases to the school, and parade them all over the place, with explanations. D'Arcy, in his mind's eye, could see all St. Jim's yelling with laughter, and he shuddered at the prospect.

It was impossible to get rid of that terrible parcel. As he carried it—growing heavier every moment, as it seemed—towards the school, he thought of Eugene Aram and the body he could not get rid of. He was doomed to carry that ridiculous parcel into the school. His only hope was to smuggle it into the School House unseen, and hide it somewhere before his chums could get sight of it. How to dispose of it afterwards he did not know, but he could think of that later.

It was dusk when he arrived at the school. There was a light in the gym., and he glanced in as he passed. Blake was on the vaulting-horse, and talking to Herries and Digby. Now was D'Arcy's opportunity. He hurried into the School House, and up to the Fourth Form dormitory. In a few moments more the obnoxious parcel was hidden under his bed.

D'Arcy breathed more freely now. He descended the stairs, and strolled out into the quadrangle with a careless air. Figgins & Co. met him at the door of the gym.

"Hallo, what have you done with it?" asked Figgins.

D'Arcy put up his monocle and surveyed him languidly.

"I fail to compwehend you, Figgins."

"Where's the parcel?"

"What parcel, deah boy?"

"The one you brought in."

"Bai Jove, Figgins, I weally think you must be dweamin'."

"Why, you fearful prevaricator, do you mean to say that you didn't bring a big parcel into the school only just now?" exclaimed Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins, you are eithah dweamin', or else takin' an impertinent intewest in a mattah that does not concern you!" said Arthur Augustus. And he walked into the gymnasium, leaving Figgins feeling rather flabbergasted.

"I wonder what he'll do with all that rubbish?" Figgins remarked, after a pause. "He'll get chipped to death if the fellows find it in the School House! But I say, chaps, we've run him to earth and found out the giddy secret!"

"We have!" said the Co. "Three cheers for us!"

"Gussy is in love with the music-merchant's daughter!"

"He is."

"The worst of it is," said Figgins seriously, "that she seems to be a really nice girl, and can't have any idea that Gussy is making such an ass of himself! If we work up any japes on this subject to give the School House rotters a whack, we shall have to be careful not to let her name be brought into it, you know."

"Yes, rather! Have you got an idea?" asked Kerr, who knew by the twinkle in Figgy's eye that something good was coming.

"That's just what I have got," said Figgins, with a grin. "Come back into the shadow here; we don't want to be overheard!" And Figgins & Co. drew out of the light, closer to the wall of the gym. "You know we thought at first that D'Arcy was spoons on Maud, the draper's assistant?"

"But that was a mistake!"

"I know; but the same wheeze I had in my head then will work all the same. You all know that Miss Jones is what they call walking out with a chap who serves the sugar at Sanders' grocery?"

"Well, we've seen 'em often enough in church on a Sunday," said Kerr. "But what good is all that?"

"Why, suppose young Sanders got jealous of Gussy?"

"But how can he, when Gussy isn't in love with Maud Jones, but with Miss Ethel?"

"Ass! I suppose he can be made to think that Gussy goes to the drapery shop to see the lovely Jones, can't he?"

"Ah, I didn't think of that!"

"Suppose he got a letter," said Figgins; "an anonymous letter, say; warning him that a rival was in the field, and that if he turned up at a certain place on a certain evening he would find his rival there?"

"Good wheeze! And Gussy?"

"Suppose he got a note asking him to meet Ethel at the same place, same time?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When the two silly jays get together, they could work matters out as they liked," grinned Figgins. "We could be laying round there somewhere to see the fun, and if it became too serious we could interfere!"

"It's a ripping wheeze!"

"Then let's get along to the study and get the notes written!"

And Figgins & Co., chuckling, vanished into the darkness. Scarcely had they disappeared when three heads came cautiously round the corner of the gym. The three heads belonged to Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. The Terrible Three had overheard every word that had passed between the New House quartette.

"They're gone!" murmured Tom Merry, looking cautiously round. "My hat; I thought the bounders were up to something, and now we're right on to the little game!"

"It's a jolly good wheeze!" said Lowther, chuckling. "If we had thought of it ourselves, it would have been a good jape up against Study No. 6!"

"True enough! But as we didn't——"

"We are going to hop in and spoil Figgy's little game?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"What's the idea, then?"

"Figgins can go ahead. It's too good a joke to spoil!"

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Right in went the ball from Tom Merry's powerful kick; but a strong Welsh fist was ready, and out it came again.

"But we can't let the New House score off the School House!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "That won't do at any price, Tom!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"I'm not thinking of letting them score off the School House, my son," he replied; "you can trust your uncle for that. I don't see any harm in letting them go ahead in rotting Gussy. He deserves to be japed for being such a screaming ass. But when the joke's over, Figgins & Co. won't be doing the laughing; we shall do all that. They're going to ambush themselves to watch the fun, and so are we."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if we take our squirts and, say, some red ink along with us, Figgins & Co. mayn't find the wheeze so screaming at the finish as they anticipate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But mind, mum's the word!"

"What-ho!"

CHAPTER 10.

"Buried Darkly at Dead of Night."

ONE!

The heavy boom from the clock-tower of St. Jim's echoed through the silence of the night, penetrating to the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House, and reaching at least one wakeful pair of ears there.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed.

Boom! came through the dim night again.

"Bai Jove, it is stwikin' twelve!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. The strokes boomed off dully, and silence reigned again over the great school.

D'Arcy put one leg out of bed. It was cold, and he shivered. Then the other leg followed, and he shivered again. Then the rest of D'Arcy followed the legs, and the swell of the School House groped for his clothes.

Crash!

A metal candlestick, placed on a chair beside the bed in readiness for use, went to the floor with a concussion that seemed absolutely deafening to D'Arcy, in the silence of the long, lofty room.

"Bai Jove, how beastly exaspewatin'!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He listened anxiously to learn whether any of the juniors had been awakened. Jack Blake sat up in bed.

"Hallo, what was that?"

Arthur Augustus remained quite still and silent. Blake looked up and down the dormitory, and then lay down again. Arthur Augustus breathed freely. He proceeded to dress himself with unusual haste; but Jack Blake was not asleep. The crash of the candlestick had awakened him, and he lay now in a state between sleeping and waking, and liable to be fully awakened again by the slightest sound.

There was a click in the darkness.

Blake started and sat up again in bed. He knew that it was the sound of the dormitory door closing.

"I say, who's that?" he exclaimed.

There was no reply.

"Anybody stirring?"

"Hallo! What are you mumbling about?" came Digby's sleepy voice. "What do you mean by making a row this time of night, Blake?"

"I heard somebody moving about," said Blake, striving to penetrate the darkness with his eyes, and failing.

"Oh, rats!" yawned Digby.

But Blake was certain of it, and he did not feel inclined to sleep again till his doubts were settled. There had been burglaries at St. Jim's in his experience, and it might be that another was planned for that night. He hopped out of bed, and struck a match. The light glimmered feebly through the long, dim dormitory. Blake looked round him quickly, and rather nervously, and then lighted a candle.

"Well, caught any burglars?" came Dig.'s sleepy voice.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake, in a tone of astonishment that made Digby sit up in bed.

"What's the matter, Blake?"

"Gussy's gone!"

"Gussy gone!"

"Yes; his bed's empty, and his clothes are gone, so is his candlestick. It must have been Gussy I heard leave the dormitory. I say, Dig.——"

Blake paused, his face very serious. D'Arcy had been so strange in his manner lately, and at midnight's solemn hour trifles light as air assume a deeper importance. Jack Blake was uneasy.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Digby anxiously.

"I'm a bit worried about Gussy."

Digby slowly got out of bed. The night was cold, and the bed was warm, and Dig. was sleepy; but the call of friendship could not be disregarded.

"The young ass!" he murmured. "What silly tricks is he up to now? Shouldn't be surprised if he's gone down to the village to gaze at a window."

"Ha, ha! I should think even Gussy would stop short of that. But I really think we ought to see that he doesn't come to any harm, wandering about in the middle of the night," said Blake. "Wake Herries."

Digby shook the slumbering Herries by the shoulder.

"Groo—groo—geroooh!" said Herries.

"Wake up, you lazy bounder!"

"Groo! Wharrer marrer?"

"You've got to get up!"

Herries blinked sleepily in the candle-light.

"Get out! 'Tain't rising-bell yet."

"It's more serious than rising-bell," said Blake. "Gussy has gone out to gaze at the stars, or commit suicide, or something. We want to be in at the death. Come out!"

"Oh, it's all rot, you know!"

"Come out, you lazy bounder!"

"It's so jolly cold!"

"Chuck us over that sponge, Dig."

"All right," said Herries hastily, "I'll get up! But it's a lot of rot, you know. But I don't mind. We'll run him down, and give him a hiding for worrying us."

The three chums dressed quickly, and left the dormitory. There was no sign of D'Arcy in the corridor, or anywhere about. The swell of St. Jim's had evidently left the house. A cold wind blowing on their feet as they descended the lower staircase warned them that the staircase window was open. It was an easy drop from the sill to the ground; and it was certain that D'Arcy had left the house that way.

"He's gone out!" muttered Blake uneasily. "Joking apart, it may be a serious matter. What on earth could he want to go out for at midnight, and a cold March night?"

"Off his rocker," said Digby.

"I'm really afraid it's something of the kind."

"Well, let's follow and see."

"Come on!"

Blake dropped lightly from the window to the path outside, and his chums followed. A minute more, and they were standing in the quadrangle, looking about them in the gloom. The darkness was less thick here than in the house, but it was still very dark.

"Can't see him!" growled Blake.

"Well, he isn't in sight," said Herries. "You can't expect to see him when he's not in sight, Blake."

"Scat! Can you hear anything, Dig.?"

"Yes, I thought I heard a sound from the Head's garden."

"He can't be there, surely!"

"What could he be doing there?" said Herries.

"Shut up and listen!"

The juniors strained their ears. They could hear at first only the whistle of the March wind in the branches of the trees. Then through the night came a heavier, duller sound.

It was the sound of a spade striking the earth!

Blake gave a low whistle.

"There's no mistake about that, chaps."

"He's digging!" whispered Digby excitedly.

"That's it."

"What on earth can he be digging in the doctor's garden for at twelve o'clock at night!" murmured Digby.

"Goodness only knows!"

"He can't be going to commit suicide, can he?" suggested Herries. "He might be digging a grave, you know."

"Well, he couldn't expect to be able to bury himself after he was dead, even if he had the grave all ready," said Blake sarcastically. "But we'd better go and see what he's up to. I'm convinced that he's off his silly rocker."

The chums of Study No. 6 stole towards the little gate, giving admittance to the Head's garden. It opened on the latch, and they entered. The sound of digging was now clearer to their ears. A light glimmered from behind a huge dark mass of laurels. It came from a lantern set on the ground. The sound of the spade was louder, but suddenly it ceased. Then a muttering voice was heard:

"Bai Jove, this is weally hard work!"

Blake chuckled silently.

"That's Gussy! Come on, and let's see what he's doing."

The juniors crept closer. They crept round the laurels, and came in sight of Arthur Augustus.

The swell of the School House had his back turned towards them. His jacket lay on the laurels, and he was working in his shirt-sleeves, having just recommenced after a minute's rest as the chums came in sight of him.

He was digging away for all he was worth, and already had a considerable hole excavated in the soft soil behind the laurels.

Blake almost burst into a laugh as he saw him. D'Arcy had a pair of thick woollen gloves on, to protect his hands while using the spade. Troubled in mind as he undoubtedly was, he was still D'Arcy the dude!

He stopped again, and rested, with one foot on the spade.

"My beastly hat! I'm gettin' quite exhausted! There was no weason why Howwies should not have come with me, and dug this beastly hole. He is as stwong as a horse, and it would be much more appwopwiate for him to be doin' beastly hard work like this, than for a chap like me. But it was no good sayin' anythin' about the mattah to those silly wottahs."

"My word!" murmured Herries.

Some faint sound apparently reached D'Arcy's ear, for he glanced round. Blake pulled his chums back in time behind the laurels.

D'Arcy saw nothing suspicious, and after a minute or two went on with his digging. The juniors remained quite silent in their ambush.

"What on earth is the meaning of it all?" muttered Digby, at last. "Is he stark, staring, raving dotty?"

"Looks like it."

"I saw a parcel lying on the ground," said Blake. "Perhaps he's going to bury it. Blessed if I know what for!"

"He can't have killed anybody, and——" began Herries.

"Ass! The parcel wouldn't hold a body, even if we could suspect D'Arcy of having started in the Fowler-and-Milsom line of business. What on earth he's burying, and what he's doing it for, is a mystery to me."

"Let's give a fearful yell, and frighten him out of his wits," suggested Herries.

"He hasn't any."

"Well, let's give a yell, anyway, and——"

"You can give a yell next time you find yourself looking at a football match. Shut up, now, like a good fellow! Let me think!"

Blake corrugated his brows, as an assistance in the process, and thought. Suddenly a gleam darted into his eyes. He drew his chums further away from the spot, so that they could talk without fear of being overheard. The sound of the spade still continued.

"I've got it!" he muttered.

"Got what—the cramp?"

"No, ass! I know what D'Arcy is burying in that parcel."

"Well, what is it?"

"Some more rubbish like that he brought in yesterday. He's been shopping again, and brought home a lot of stuff, and he doesn't want us to see it."

"My hat! But why should he blue his cash on a lot of stuff, just to bring it out at midnight, and bury it in the doctor's garden?"

Blake chuckled.

"Oh, I've got on to that!" he replied. "He's been buying that stuff at the draper's in Rylcombe, as an excuse for going to the shop."

"Oh, I see! It's Cupid again!"

"Exactly. He daren't admit the truth to us, and he daren't keep the things about, in case we see them. Hence these tears—I mean, this digging."

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose that's right."

"Depend upon it. It would be rather a good joke to tumble him into the hole, and make a grave of it for him."

"Good! It would cure him if we buried him alive."

"Ha, ha! It would be rather a joke, as I was saying, to bury him up to his neck, but perhaps it would be rather rough; and, besides, I've thought of a better wheeze. Come and let's see how he's getting on."

They crept back to the laurel-bushes. D'Arcy's spade was

silent now. The juniors heard a crumpling of paper as the parcel was placed in the excavation. Blake peered round the laurels, and saw D'Arcy shovelling in the earth upon the big package.

The swell of St. Jim's was evidently tired with his exertions. He shovelled in the earth in a perfunctory manner, and flattened it down with a few blows of the flat of the spade.

"Thank goodness, that's done!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "No one will evah know anythin' about it, which is one good thing. Those wottahs will nevah guess that I have been out of the beastly dormitowy at all!"

Blake nearly choked as D'Arcy blew out the lantern and picked it up, and then walked away from the spot with lantern and spade. Digby and Herries were chuckling spasmodically. Blake thumped them on the back.

"Don't!" gasped Digby. "I can't stand much more. I always said that Gussy would be the death of me, in the long run!"

"I must yell," said Herries—"I must!"

"Shut up! Wait till Gussy's gone. He's gone to put the lantern and spade in the shed again now. When he's cleared off, we'll soon have the spade out again, and have that giddy parcel up out of its untimely grave."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Gussy will find his dread secret is not buried so deep as he thinks," grinned Blake. "Quiet! We shall hear the gate click when he's gone."

"I say, if he goes back to the dormitory before us, he'll know that we're out."

"No, he won't. He's certain not to strike a light, and in the dark he won't see that our beds are empty. He couldn't."

"Ah, yes; I forgot that!"

Click! The sound came faintly through the darkness. It warned the chums of the Fourth that Arthur Augustus had left the garden.

"Now, then," said Blake.

And in two minutes more the sound of a spade again woke the midnight echoes among the laurels in the doctor's garden.

CHAPTER 11.

A Surprise for Gussy.

CLANG!

Arthur Augustus yawned and opened his eyes. It was not only the clang of the rising-bell that awakened him as the dawn came stealing in at the high windows of the School House dormitory. It was a mingling of sounds—sounds of mirth, which echoed from one end of the dormitory to the other.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "There seems to be some joke on. I weally wondah what the fellahs are laughin' at?"

He sat up in bed. It was a cold morning, and D'Arcy felt rather sleepy, from having lost so much rest the previous night. The rest of the Fourth Form—the School House portion of it—seemed lively enough, however. Fellows were sitting on their beds, or standing up, and all were grinning, or chuckling, or laughing. And, strange to say, their attention seemed to be turned towards D'Arcy's bed.

The School House swell rubbed his eyes.

"Pway, what's the joke, deah boys?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter redoubled as it was seen that D'Arcy was awake. The dormitory door opened, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, fresh from an early-morning sprint round the quadrangle, looked in.

"Now, then, kids!" said Tom Merry severely. "What do you mean by these untimely sounds of revelry by morning? Have you suddenly discovered what a collection of asses you are, and has it struck you comical all of a sudden?"

"Hallo! Look at Gussy!" ejaculated Manners.

And Lowther went into a roar.

D'Arcy gave the Terrible Three an indignant glance. Then his eyes travelled round the giggling dormitory. Finally, he looked closer round him, and discerned the reason of the unusual hilarity of the Fourth-Formers.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

He had reason to be amazed. At the rail at the foot of his bed hung a remarkable selection of neckties. Pinned to his counterpane, to form a kind of fringe round the bed, were a dozen glaring silk mufflers. Over the head of the bed, silk and lace handkerchiefs were mingled with gorgeous socks in a kind of trophy.

D'Arcy could scarcely believe his eyes. The purchases of the day before, which he had so carefully buried at midnight behind the laurels in the doctor's garden, had in some mysterious manner come to light again, and become arranged in ornamental fashion round his bed.

"My—my beastly word!" murmured the astounded swell of St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy gazed at the juniors, and then at the purchases. Then a card attached to the trophy of socks and handkerchiefs caught his eye. It bore the words:

"Arthur Algernon Augustus, Dealer in Socks and Neckties! Sale now on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Hear me smile! Are socks going cheap this morning, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"How much a dozen for these giddy neckties?" asked Tom Merry. "My word! They beat your waistcoats hollow!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"What price the lace handkerchiefs?" howled Monty Lowther. "I'd like to have some, to send as a present to a charming young lady in Rylcombe."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"What's all this fearful row about?" demanded Kildare, putting his head in at the dormitory. "What are you all yelling like hyenas for?"

"D'Arcy has got a sale on," explained Tom Merry.

"Eh? What?"

"Sale now proceeding!" said Lowther. "Sweeping reductions! Socks of the greatest variety and most startling designs going for next to nothing!"

Kildare stared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's bed, and burst into a laugh.

"Great Scott! What have you rigged up your bed in that fashion for, D'Arcy?"

"I haven't wigged it up at all!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Some wotten boundahs wigged it up like this while I was asleep!"

"Ha, ha! But where did all the things come from? Surely you haven't been buying those terrific neckties and those fearful socks?"

"It's all good for twade, Kildare."

"Hum! You had better get them cleared away before a master sees them here, or it may not be good for you," said Kildare.

"Weally, Kildare——"

But the captain of St. Jim's was gone. He went laughing down the passage, and the Terrible Three went laughing after him. And renewed yells of laughter followed them from the dormitory. The expression on D'Arcy's face as he hopped out of bed and began to gather up the purchases was too funny.

"I say, deah boys, you might lend me a hand with these beastly things, you know," said Arthur Augustus.

"Certainly!" said Blake. "What shall we do with them?"

"I weally don't know. Bettah w'ap them up in a beastly parcel, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't laugh, Blake! It is not a laughin' mattah. I took a feahful lot of twouble to get wid of this wubbish, but some wotten boundah has watched me, I suppose, and dug them up again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you wottah! Was it you?"

Blake yelled with laughter. The countenance of the swell of St. Jim's became crimson with wrath.

"Blake, I wegard you as a beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall decline to keep up your beastly acquaintance! I have always endeavoured to keep my circle of fwiends quite select, not to say swaggah. I wegard you as a boundah and an outsidah, and I wefuse to wecognise you any longah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake.

It was too much for Arthur Augustus. He doubled up his fists and went for Blake. The latter, laughing too much to defend himself, retreated till he stumbled on a bed, and then D'Arcy began to hit out.

"Hold him!" gasped Blake. "He'll kill me; I know he will! Oh, dear, some people are too funny to live!"

"I will give you such a feahful thwashin'——"

"Dear me! What is the matter here?"

It was Mr. Lathom's voice, as the little master of the Fourth, who boarded in the School House, peered into the dormitory.

"D'Arcy, are you fighting? Dear me! And I always thought you such a quiet lad. You will take twenty lines for fighting, D'Arcy."

"Weally, Mr. Lathom——"

"Not a word, D'Arcy! Boys, you must not make so much noise; and pray come down! You are already late."

Mr. Lathom passed on. Blake sat on his bed and gasped.

"Never mind, Gussy. I'll do the lines for you," he jerked out. "It's worth it, for the fun. Gussy—Gussy, you ought to go on the stage."

"Pway do not addwess me, Blake! I wefuse to wegard you any longah as a fwiend."

And D'Arcy began to dress himself with great dignity. The Fourth-Formers chuckled over the joke till they went downstairs, and they were still chuckling at breakfast. And at the breakfast-table itself, when D'Arcy passed his plate up, it came back to him with a pair of glaring socks upon it.

D'Arcy's feelings were too deep for words. After breakfast he refused to speak to Blake, Herries, or Digby in the quad. They did not seem much hurt at being cut, however. They only laughed like hyenas when he turned haughtily away.

D'Arcy was turning over in his mind what to do with his terrible purchases, but he could think of nothing. But after morning school fortune seemed to befriend him. A pedlar passed the gates of St. Jim's, and a sudden idea flashed into D'Arcy's mind, and he called to him.

"I have some things to give away," explained D'Arcy. "Would you like them—neckties, socks, and things? I will give you half-a-crown to take them away!"

The pedlar was not likely to refuse an offer like that. And five minutes later, to Arthur Augustus's great relief, the pedlar was marching off with a parcel under his arm and a half-crown in his pocket.

And Arthur Augustus breathed freely.

CHAPTER 12.

D'Arcy Does Not Propose.

"GERMAN next," grunted Blake, the following afternoon. "I really think it most unreasonable of Herr Schneider not to fall ill sometimes. Hallo, Gussy! Where are you going? Aren't you going to honour Herr Schneider by cramming some of his lovely Deutch?"

"It is time for my violin lesson," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, yes, I forgot! Give my kindest regards to the professor, and don't forget to remember me to the young lady in the draper's shop."

D'Arcy stalked away without replying.

Since the idea had come into D'Arcy's head to study the violin, he had been excused in the afternoon, twice weekly, to go down to Professor Lightfoot's in the village for his instruction. Music was not included in the St. Jim's curriculum. D'Arcy had soon grown tired of the violin practice—though not so soon as his chums—but he still kept up the lessons. Whether he intended to recommence practice again some time, or whether he liked the run down to the village while the other fellows were working, or whether he had some deeper motive, he did not confide to his friends.

He walked out of the room, went to his study for his violin-case, and was soon in Rylcombe Lane. He was once more D'Arcy the dude, dressed exquisitely, with a beautiful flower in his coat. The splendour of his appearance would have been quite wasted upon old, dry Professor Lightfoot; but that splendour was not intended to dazzle the professorial eyes. There were more charming eyes in the place than the professor's.

D'Arcy reached Rylcombe and halted outside the side door next to the draper's shop. It was some minutes before he knocked, not finding enough nerve to do so. And in those minutes he became conscious that he was subjected to a keen examination by a young man in a white apron outside the grocer's shop opposite. D'Arcy, if he glanced round, found the young grocer's eyes fastened upon him like gimlets, and he grew uneasy under that steady survey. It really seemed as if the grocer's young man took a personal interest in his movements. Of course, that was impossible; still, D'Arcy felt very uncomfortable. He knocked at the door finally, hugging the violin-case which was his excuse for coming.

The maidservant showed him into the room where he usually received his instruction.

A dry-looking old man with a shaggy white beard rose to receive him. The room was over the draper's shop, and looked out into the village street. It served Professor Lightfoot for a dining-room, drawing-room, smoking-room, and study, according to the time of the day. But there was a neatness about the place which betrayed a woman's hand, although the old musician was evidently one of the untidiest of mortals.

"Aha, you are early for your lesson, Mr. D'Arcy!" said the professor, beaming upon his youthful pupil as he shook hands with him.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I like to see such keenness in a pupil," said the old gentleman, nodding his head. "I hope you have been keeping up the practice. Have you done as much this week as last?"

"Yaas, wathah, just the same!" said Arthur Augustus.

This statement was strictly true, and D'Arcy had done no practice at all either week.

"Good! Now we shall commence. Are you looking for anything?"

D'Arcy blushed.

He was indeed looking for something—Miss Ethel, who was sometimes in the room while he had his lesson, painting. D'Arcy knew that Miss Ethel more than half supported the little household by her painting, and that the professor's pupils might have been counted upon the fingers of one hand.

"No—yes—exactly—I am quite weady!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Very well, then."

The sounds which D'Arcy made to proceed from his violin were strange and mysterious. The professor shook his head. But D'Arcy did not hear the music he was playing. He was listening for a light footstep. He had noticed Miss Ethel's easel near the window, and expected that she would come in. A thrill ran through him as he heard a soft step on the carpet, but he dared not turn his head. But he made such a horrible scrape upon the violin that the professor shuddered and stopped his ears.

"Really, D'Arcy, this will never do!"

"Yaas, wathah!" stammered D'Arcy.

The girl sat down silently at her easel. The lesson proceeded, D'Arcy's inattention and clumsiness growing more pronounced. But the professor was patient. He was really a good musician, whom Fate had condemned to poverty and to teaching the violin to youths whose ambition was to play "tunes," and who usually had no more sense of music than might be found in the village-pump. And D'Arcy, at his worst, was not quite so bad as the village pupils. So he possessed his soul with patience, and bore with the swell of St. Jim's.

The end of the lesson was a relief to both master and pupil. Then the professor drew a deep, deep breath. He had to pay a visit next to a pupil who preferred to take his lessons comfortably at home, and thought the instructor might as well do the walking to and fro. D'Arcy knew that, and D'Arcy had laid his plans.

"I am sowwy I have been so stupid to-day, sir," he said. D'Arcy always addressed the professor in the most respectful way, in spite of his shabbiness and poverty—or perhaps because of that. "I am feelin' wathah fatigued. I did not have much sleep last night. Would you mind if I wested a little here before goin' back to the coll."

"My dear lad," said the old gentleman, "sit in this arm-chair, and rest as long as you like. I am compelled to go out now, unfortunately"—D'Arcy could not help smiling at that word—"but pray remain till I return. Ethel, my dear, I shall only be about half an hour."

"Yes, papa!"

And the professor departed.

D'Arcy heard him descend the stairs, heard the street-door close behind him. Through the window he caught a glimpse of the professor's spare figure crossing the street, and then it disappeared.

D'Arcy trembled.

His stratagem had succeeded more easily than he had dared to anticipate, and he felt a painful twinge of conscience over it. The professor had been so utterly unsuspicious.

But what was a loving adorer to do? It was impossible—D'Arcy would have called it "imposs"—to speak to Miss Ethel in the presence of the professor, and speak to her somehow D'Arcy felt that he must.

He stole a glance at the girl. She was painting quietly, steadily. She did not look round, and was evidently too hard at work to remember that he was in the room. D'Arcy's heart sank. At the same time he noted how charming her profile looked against the light of the window.

D'Arcy opened his mouth and shut it again. He did this at least a dozen times in succession, a great deal like a newly-landed fish, but no words would come. Finally he gave a cough.

It broke a dead silence. The girl looked round.

"Have you a cold, Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, Miss Ethel—I mean no, certainly not!" stammered D'Arcy, turning as red as a peony.

The girl looked puzzled, but she went on with her painting. D'Arcy's heart ached to see how busily she worked. He knew by instinct how the artist would have liked to linger here and there over a touch of colour, and could not, time being too valuable, and the price of the work too low to permit of any lingering.

The inequalities of the world had never appealed much to D'Arcy when they were the subject of the speeches of Skimpole, the amateur Socialist at St. Jim's. But now he dimly felt that there was something wrong somewhere, when this sweet girl was compelled to work hard and long, while he himself was rolling in money. But if Miss Ethel would



A thrill ran through D'Arcy as he heard a soft step on the carpet, but he dared not turn his head.

allow him to devote his life to her, as he wished, of course that would be all ended. And that was an excuse to his conscience for interrupting the busy worker.

"Miss Ethel!"

He had spoken her name at last! The words seemed to him to have a sound like thunder in the quiet room, yet he had spoken hardly above a whisper. His heart was beating almost to suffocation, and he felt that his face was burning. It was growing dusk, and the light was failing for work. D'Arcy was glad of it, for the dusk hid his blushes.

The girl turned her head. She laid down the brush with a sigh and passed her hand for a moment across her eyes. Then she looked at D'Arcy.

"Did you speak to me?"

"Ya-a-a-a-a-a-as, wathah!"

"Well?"

"Miss Ethel!"

"Yes."

"Er—Miss—Miss Ethel!" stammered D'Arcy.

The girl looked hard at him. She liked D'Arcy, but once or twice she had thought him rather odd.

"Yes; what is it?"

But poor D'Arcy was silent. Now that the moment had come, the words would not. Yet he had rehearsed a beautiful little speech in his mind as he came to the village. It was all gone now.

"Er—Miss Ethel!" he said again; and again stopped.

The girl looked anxious.

"Are you ill, Master D'Arcy?"

"Oh, no, nothin' of the sort, Miss Ethel!"

"You wish to speak to me?"

"Ya-a-a-a-as, wathah!"

"Well, go on, then."

"I—I—I—I—I——"

"I don't quite understand."

That was natural enough under the circumstances, and D'Arcy had to admit it. All at once a brilliant idea for gradually leading up to the subject flashed into his mind. He began again eagerly.

"Miss Ethel! Pway forgive me——"

The girl looked astonished.

"But what am I to forgive you for?"

"For a wathah wotten twick."

"A twick?" said Miss Ethel, puzzled. "Oh, a trick! What trick?"

"I told the pwofessah that I was fatigued——"

"Well, are you not?"

"Yaas, wathah; I always find the violin wathah exhaustin'. But that was not the weason—I weally said that so—so—so—so——"

"I really——"

"So that I could wemain aftah the pwofessah went out," explained D'Arcy.

Miss Ethel looked astounded.

"You see," went on D'Arcy hastily, "I wanted to speak to you, Miss Ethel, on a most important question."

"Me—an important question? I am very stupid, I suppose, but I really do not understand in the least. Will you explain?"

"Yaas, wathah. I—I—I——"

"Yes."

"I—I—I——"

"Go on!"

"Certainly. The mattah is that I—I—I——"

Miss Ethel shook her head.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand yet," she said.

"You see, I—I—I——"

"My dear lad——" said the girl kindly. She could only come to the conclusion that D'Arcy was ill in some way.

D'Arcy uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Oh, don't, Miss Ethel!"

"Don't what?" asked the amazed girl.

"Don't call me a dear lad.

"Why not?"

"You see, it—it implies that you are oldah than I am!" stammered D'Arcy.

"Well, so I am; five or six years older."

"Oh, don't mention such a howwid circ.!" murmured D'Arcy. "I shall gwow up, you know."

Miss Ethel smiled.

"I'm afraid you will never be as old as I am," she said. "You see, I shall be growing older at the same time."

"Yaas, isn't it wotten, Miss Ethel?"

"Well, no, I don't see why. Do you want to be my age?" said the puzzled girl.

"Yaas, wathah, or a few years oldah."

"Why?"

"Because I—I—I——"

"Yes?"

"You see, I—I—I—— Oh, Miss Ethel, can't you see that I—I—I——"

"I am afraid you are ill, D'Arcy."

"Oh, no—only in my heart, Miss Ethel. I—I—I——"

"You have a pain in your heart?" asked the girl, alarmed. "My dear boy, why did you not say so before? Sit where you are; don't move, and I will send the maid for a doctor at once——"

"Don't!" almost howled D'Arcy. "Pway don't, Miss Ethel! I entweat you."

"But you have a pain in your heart——"

"It is not a pain; it is an ache."

"Well, that is just as serious——"

"Yaas wathah, it is fearfully sewious; but weally, Miss Ethel, I don't wequire a doctah. I—I—I—— That's how it is. I—I—I——"

The door opened, and the professor came in.

"Dear papa, I am so glad you have returned," said Ethel. "Master D'Arcy is not well. He has a pain in his heart."

"Dear me!" said the professor. "That is bad. You should have said so before you had your lesson, D'Arcy. That accounts for your shocking bad playing—I mean—ahem!—you had better drive home to St. Jim's, and——"

"I am all wight now," said D'Arcy miserably.

"Are you sure?" said the kindly old gentleman, with an anxious look. "I have, now I come to think of it, several times noticed you go red and pale. Your face is very flushed now, and you look feverish."

"I assuah you that I am all wight, sir."

"You had better let me send for a conveyance——"

"Pway don't sir; the walk will fweshen me up, and I shall be all wight, honah bwight," said the unhappy D'Arcy.

"Very well, then, but really——"

D'Arcy escaped at last. His only comfort was the sweet sympathy in Miss Ethel's eyes as he left her. It was because she thought he was ill, of course; still, it was very sweet. D'Arcy could have kicked himself as he walked up the lane to the school. He had planned that opportunity, and it had come about more easily than he had had any right to anticipate; and he had allowed it to pass him by. He had not spoken out! When would an opportunity like that recur? Probably never!

And the swell of St. Jim's reflected miserably that if it did recur, he would probably never find the courage to speak. He would blush and stammer, and nothing more, and in the long run Miss Ethel would very likely come to the conclusion that he was a little weak in the head.

What was he to do?

Whose aid could he call in at this crisis of his life? As he entered the gates of St. Jim's, he caught sight of Tom Merry talking to Manners and Lowther. And then an answer came to his mental query.

"Miss Pwiscillah, of course!"

Tom Merry's old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, was the person he wanted to help him. He had thought of it before, and asked Tom Merry when she was likely to come to the school again. But she was not coming yet. Still, if the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet could always go to the mountain. Why should he not take a run down to Huckleberry Heath and consult Miss Priscilla? The idea was working in D'Arcy's brain as he entered the School House.

CHAPTER 13.

D'Arcy Keeps an Appointment, and So Does Mr. Sanders' Young Man.

"BAI Jove, that's for me!"

Arthur Augustus glanced at a letter lying on the table in Study No. 6. It certainly was addressed to him, and in a small and delicate hand. It looked like a feminine caligraphy, and the postmark was Rylcombe.

D'Arcy's hand trembled as he picked up the letter from the table.

Was it possible—

He opened the letter hastily. A little pale pink missive fell out, and he caught it up and read it eagerly.

"Dear Augustus! I must see you again. Will you be at the village end of the bridge, under the big elm, at seven o'clock? I shall be there. I will not sign my name, but you will know from whom this comes."

That was all!

D'Arcy kissed the letter. Know from whom it came! Why, of course he knew! It came from Ethel. She had seen, after all, what he had wanted to say to her yesterday, and was so sweet as to give him another opportunity! Perhaps it was only to tell him that it was impossible—that was very likely. But to meet her—that was happiness enough!

D'Arcy had never seen Ethel's handwriting, but he had no doubts. He put the letter away in his pocket, and went about like one in a dream for the rest of the day.

Lines fell upon him thick as leaves in Vallombrosa during school, but he did not care. What were lines to D'Arcy at such a time? His chums noticed his distraught manner, and questioned him. He did not even reply.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were puzzled.

"That chap gets rookier in the brain every day," Digby remarked. "He won't speak a word now. He had a new hat come home to-day, that he ordered last week, and he hasn't even opened the box."

"My word!" said Blake. "He's got it bad, then!"

"If it's love this time," said Herries, "he has got it bad. He's mooning about like a mummy!"

Arthur Augustus was indeed mooning about, whether like a mummy or not. That his affair of the heart was prospering seemed to be indicated by the total disappearance of slovenliness in his person. He had bloomed out again into D'Arcy the Dude with a vengeance. And the new hat which he had forgotten to unpack during the day, was unpacked right enough that evening, and carefully tried on and polished. D'Arcy had an appointment at seven, and meant to look his best.

Whatever was mysterious in the manner of Arthur Augustus might have been explained, perhaps, by Figgins & Co. But Figgins & Co. kept their own counsel. The Terrible Three might have cast some light upon the subject, too. But Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were as mum as oysters, or as Figgins & Co.

It did not cross D'Arcy's mind that either party knew anything of his hopes or plans. He had more important matters to think of than Tom Merry or Figgins. He had forgotten that Reilly had his place in the School House junior team. He had forgotten that there existed a rivalry between the School House and the New House. He had forgotten everything save that he was to meet Miss Ethel at seven o'clock at the village end of the bridge under the big elm.

After tea—during which meal in Study No. 6 D'Arcy spoke not a single word to anyone, in spite of remarks and questions hurled at him—he prepared to sally out, and Blake, Herries, and Digby watched him with great interest.

D'Arcy, who never spared cash when his personal appearance was concerned, had long ago furnished the funds to have



POLLIE GREEN
IS IN
This Week's
"Girls' Friend."

PRICE ONE PENNY.

a large mirror erected in the study. As space was limited, it was fastened up flat against the wall. It gave Arthur Augustus a full view of his whole person, and he was very pleased with it.

He turned round to look at his friends, and put his eyeglass into his eye. Blake, Herries, and Digby watched him.

"How do I look, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Lovely!" said Blake. "You look as if you had just got out of the Zoo!"

"Pway don't be wude, Blake."

"You ought to cover that waistcoat up, if you are going to meet anybody with weak eyesight," said Digby warningly. "It might blind them, you know."

"Weally, Digby——"

"Who's the victim?" asked Herries.

D'Arcy did not reply to that frivolous question. He walked out of the study, leaving the juniors chuckling.

The gates were not yet closed, and Arthur Augustus found no hindrance to his departure. He was glad to see that there was no sign of either Figgins & Co. or the Terrible Three in the quadrangle. If he had known where the rivals of St. Jim's were, however, he might not have been so contented.

It did not take D'Arcy long to reach the bridge over the Ryll. At the end nearest the village of Rylcombe the trees were thick, shading the end of the bridge and the lane which led up to it. The big elm stood a little way back from the road, and the spot was very shadowy. D'Arcy turned from the lane in the dusk, and halted under the spreading branches of the elm.

Rylcombe chimes told the quarter to seven. D'Arcy was a quarter of an hour early. But it was a fault on the right side. Anything was better than the risk of keeping a lady waiting. He waited patiently under the elm in the growing darkness, till a footstep sounded from the direction of the village.

D'Arcy gave a joyous start.

"She is coming!"

The next moment a look of disappointment came over his face. The figure that loomed up in the dusk was a man's—a rather squat figure, in an ill-fitting coat, with a round head surmounted by a brown bowler hat.

D'Arcy recognised the figure. It was that of Mr. Sanders's young man; the youthful grocer who had eyed him so keenly when he was waiting outside the professor's door the previous afternoon.

Arthur Augustus did not take much interest in Mr. Sanders's young man. He stepped back, expecting him to pass, but the youthful grocer did not pass. He stopped, and stared hard at D'Arcy.

"Blessed if it ain't a case, then!"

Such were the amazing words uttered by Mr. Sanders.

"Did you addwess me?" asked D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Yes, I did. So you're 'ere?"

"Yaas, wathah, but I weally fail to see how it concerns you, my good fellow."

"Don't good feller me!" said Mr. Sanders's young man. "I don't want any of your cheek, young shaver."

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Fellow! You—you dare to addwess me as a young shavah!" he ejaculated.

"How old are you?" said Mr. Sanders's young man contemptuously. "About fifteen, I suppose. I'm nineteen, and big enough to eat you. Ain't you ashamed of yourself, runnin' after a lady eighteen years old?"

"Whom are you speakin' of, pway?"

"I'm speakin' of Miss Jones, my feeongsee," said Mr. Sanders's young man. "That's who I'm speaking of, young shaver."

"If you call me a young shavah I am afraid that I shall be weluctantly compelled to chastise you," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

Mr. Sanders's young man grinned.

"Start!" he said laconically.

D'Arcy felt greatly inclined to do so. But he remembered that Miss Ethel was almost due, and it would never do for her to find him fighting.

"Upon second thoughts, I will ovahlook your wudeness," he said. "Pway depart, before you make me enwaged with your beastly impertinence."

"Not so much of your old buck," said Mr. Sanders's young man, who was apparently given to slang. "I ain't departing just now. We're going to 'ave this bout."

"I weally fail to see——"

"I dessay you'll fail to see after I've done with you," said Mr. Sanders's young man, darkly. "Very likely your heyes will be bunged up. I say very likely."

"You will tempt me to stwike you."

"What are you 'ere for?" demanded Mr. Sanders's young man. "Answer that question, young shaver."

"I am here to meet a lady," said D'Arcy, in his most stately manner; "and if it were not for that circ., I should certainly give you a feahful thwashin' for your impertinence."

"You—you've got the cheek to own up!" gasped Mr. Sanders's young man. "You hown up that you are 'ere to meet my Maud!"

"Your Maud! I fail to see the dwift of your wemark. I am here to meet a lady with whom you have no acquaintance."

"Miss Jones at Short's the draper's is my feeongsee."

"I weally wish you joy, then," said D'Arcy; "I believe I have seen the lady."

"Yes, I believe you 'ave," said Mr. Sanders's young man, with heavy sarcasm—"I really believe you 'ave. I believe you are always hanging about the shop, and goin' to the professor for fiddling lessons as an excuse, too. I believe you are always buying all sorts of things in the shop as an excuse for talking to my Maud. Ho, yes!"

D'Arcy turned red. It was a natural mistake Mr. Sanders's young man had fallen into, and the swell of St. Jim's had to admit that, and he realised that he had a jealous lover to deal with. How was he to get rid of him before Miss Ethel arrived?

"Weally, my good fellow——"

"Don't good fellow me!"

"Weally, you are mistaken. I have a gweat wespect for Miss Jones, whom I do no. weally know. I believe I wemembah her servin' me."

"Ho, yes; I believe you do!"

"But weally I have no appointment with Miss Jones. I have nevah addwessed her except acwoss the countah. I have been in the shop——"

"Haven't I seen you often enough?"

"But it was not to see her."

"I suppose you naturally want chintz curtains and dozens of ties and socks up at the school?" suggested Mr. Sanders's young man. Miss Jones had evidently related to him the curious circumstances of D'Arcy's purchases at the shop.

"No, that was weally a pwetext——"

"To see Miss Jones."

"No, to see somebody else who came into the shop once or twice to speak to her," said D'Arcy. "I considah that you are entitled to this explan.; and now pway take yourself off, and oblige me."

But Mr. Sanders's young man seemed as firmly planted where he stood as the big elm-tree itself. There was an exceedingly disagreeable look upon his face.

"So there's another lady in the case?" he sneered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And what's her name?"

"You weally cannot expect me to acquaint you with that."

"No, I s'pose not, seeing that she ain't born yet," said Mr. Sanders's young man, more sarcastically then ever. "I've seen you go into that shop and stay half an hour, and not another soul has entered all the time."

D'Arcy could have explained that easily enough. He had sometimes wasted half an hour in the vain hope of seeing Miss Ethel. Sometimes, he knew, the professor's daughter, resting from her tasks, came down to speak to Miss Jones, who was a kind and good-natured girl, though of a somewhat dull and unintelligent order. But naturally Mr. Sanders's young man did not see her, as she came from within the house. And of course D'Arcy would rather have suffered the tortures of the Inquisition than have allowed a lady's name to become mixed up in a quarrel.

"I cannot explain more," he said frigidly; "I expect you to take my word. Now pway go, as I expect——"

"Cheese it!"

"I wefuse to cheese it."

"Don't tell 'em!" said Mr. Sanders's young man. "I've had a letter, I have, a nonnymus letter, warning me that you was coming here to meet someone, and it didn't need much to tell me whom it was. I know Maud is a flirt, because she's met the young man from the Golden Pig before now. I gave him a 'iding," said Mr. Sanders's young man, in an extremely significant tone.

"Did you weally?"

"Yes, I did. If Miss Jones don't come, I shall know that the letter was a joke of some fellow who's jealous of me, but if she does——"

"I assuah you, my dear fellow, that I am here to meet quite anothah person."

"Who is it?"

"That is my secwet, of course."

"Of course," mimicked Mr. Sanders's young man—"of course! When was she to come?"

"At seven o'clock."

"There goes the quarter past."

Rylcombe chimes rang through the dusk. It was a quarter past seven, and D'Arcy gave a start as he noted the fact. He had hardly thought that a girl like Miss Ethel would be late for an appointment.

"Where is she, then?" grinned Mr. Sanders's young man.

"I weally do not know, but it is pwob. that she has been delayed, and I weally must wequest you to be gone befoah she awwives."

"Ho, yes! No doubt! Rather!"

"Pway depart——"

"I'll wait, thank you, and see who comes. If it ain't Miss Jones I'll apologise," said Mr. Sanders's young man—"I'll apologise like a gentleman if I'm mistaken. But if it is Miss Jones, I'll give her the pleasure of seeing me wipe up the ground with you, and bash your 'at over your heyes."

"I weally assure you——"

"Rats!"

"I am sowwy, young man," said D'Arcy firmly. "But you must go. It would nevah do for you to be hangin' wound here to wecognise the lady, and chattah about it among your acquaintances. I wegard you as a cad; so go."

"Try and shift me," suggested Mr. Sanders's young man.

D'Arcy allowed his monocle to fall.

"If you do not go, young man, I shall certainly shift you, and shall pwobably hurt you vewy much," he exclaimed.

"Come hon, then!" exclaimed Mr. Sanders's young man, striking a warlike attitude.

"I weally do not wish to have a quawwel with you——"

"I dessay you don't."

"But you weally must go."

"Oh, you couldn't shift a white mouse, you couldn't!" said Mr. Sanders's young man. "I don't know why I don't knock your blessed 'at over your heyes, I don't."

"Will you go?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then you have only yourself to blame for the violence I shall be compelled to use," said D'Arcy. "I am weluctant to stwike you, but I have no alternative."

"I don't mind," grinned Mr. Sanders's young man.

D'Arcy did not argue further. If there was to be a fight, it was better to get it over before Miss Ethel arrived. He rushed at Mr. Sanders's young man, intending to grapple with him and hurl him forth into the lane. Somehow it did not work out exactly like that. Mr. Sanders's young man apparently knew how to take care of himself. The next thing D'Arcy knew was that he was sitting down under the elm-tree, and that Mr. Sanders's young man was jamming his silk hat down over his eyes with mallet-like thumps.

"Oh, weally!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway dwaw it mild! You are simply wuinin' my beastly toppah!"

"Come on!" shouted Mr. Sandars's young man, dancing excitedly round the swell of St. Jim's. "Get hup and come hon!"

"Weally——"

"Get hup and come hon!" roared Mr. Sanders's young man.

D'Arcy got up and came on. He hit out scientifically now, and Mr. Sanders's young man took his turn at sitting down. And D'Arcy could do no less than return the compliment he had received by jamming the brown bowler hat down over the young man's ears with a heavy thump.

"Ow!" roared Mr. Sanders's young man.

"Awise and pway come on!" said D'Arcy, whose fighting blood was aroused now. "Since you have dwiven me to usin' violence, I shall give you a feahful thwashin' while I am about it."

Mr. Sanders's young man was not slow in getting up. He had plenty of pluck, and he was very angry. He rushed at D'Arcy, and this time they closed. D'Arcy's foot caught in a root, and he went heavily down, dragging Mr. Sanders's young man on top of him. They struggled in the grass, rolling over and over furiously, pommelling one another.

D'Arcy's elegant attire suffered in the course of the struggle. Mud and dust smothered him, his eyeglass was broken, his tall hat lost its last vestige of resemblance to a topper, his fancy waistcoat burst its buttons, his collar assumed the appearance of a soiled rag. But D'Arcy had ceased to think of these things now. The blood of all the D'Arcys was boiling in his veins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was an irresistible roar of laughter from the trees. The hidden spectators of the ridiculous scene could contain themselves no longer. Forth from their cover rushed Figgins & Co., yelling like hyenas.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 14.

Some More Fun for Figgins & Co.

D'ARCY and Mr. Sanders's young man released each other immediately. Figgins & Co. stood in a row, staring at them and shrieking with laughter. D'Arcy and Mr. Sanders's young man sat up and returned their stare.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House juniors.

"Hear me smile!" shrieked Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my only Panama aunt! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho! Hold me, somebody!" screamed Fatty Wynn. "Oh, this beats the biggest feed I've ever had! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally," said D'Arcy, with as much dignity as he could muster under the trying circumstances—"weally, Figgins, I wegard this mewwiment as most untimely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway cease that wude and fwivolous cacklin'," said D'Arcy, rising to his feet. "I'm expectin' a lady here, but I cannot wemain to meet her in this feahful state."

"Ho, no!" said Mr. Sanders's young man, staggering up. "Ho, no! She wouldn't look at you now, she wouldn't! She wouldn't look at the young man from the Golden Pig after I had finished with him. Ho, no!"

"I again assure you that you are under a misappwehension," said Arthur Augustus. "I say, Figgins, will you eject this obnoxious person? I weally feel too exhausted."

"It's all right, Sandy," giggled Figgins; "I believe you had an anonymous note."

"I did," said Mr. Sanders's young man, "warning me that this young shaver was here to meet somebody."

"And you jumped to the conclusion that it was Miss Jones?"

"Course I did!"

"Then you did that estimable lady a great injustice," said Figgins, with solemnity. "The best thing you can do is to go and beg her pardon."

"What do you know about it?"

"I know the fellow who wrote the note. He did it for a joke, to make you meet Gussy here and have a scrap up with him."

"Ho, he did, did he?"

"Yes, he did. It was only in fun."

"I wish I could meet that funny fellow alone!" said Mr. Sanders's young man, looking hard from face to face of the Co. "I'd make him look a bit funnier than he does now. Well, I'm off. I'm only half-satisfied, mind, young shaver!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a young shavah!"

"I tell you I'm only half-satisfied. Let me find you hanging round Short's shop again, and I'll—I'll jam you into a box of eggs," said Mr. Sanders's young man; and he walked away, trying, as he went, to thump his brown bowler out into something like its original shape, without much success.

"I weally cannot appweciate a joke like that, Figgins," said D'Arcy. "You have caused me to get into a feahful state."

"Don't worry, Gussy; you won't be meeting a lady this evening," said Figgins comfortingly.

"I weally fail to see how you can know anythin' at all about the mattah, Figgins."

"Oh, that was a joke, too!"

"Eh? I weally fail to compwehend!"

"I know the fellow who wrote that letter, too, you see," explained Figgins. And the Co. burst into a joyous laugh.

D'Arcy turned crimson with wrath.

"You—you uttah wottah! Do you mean to say——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have venchahed to make a silly ass of me!"

"No; we were too late to do that—you were born one!" chuckled Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha! The note was well done, wasn't it?"

"Which of you feahful wottahs w'ote that note?" yelled D'Arcy. "Bai Jove, I know, it was Kerr! I know he can imitate a lady's handw'itin'! Kerr, you beast, was it you w'ote that wotten note to me?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Kerr, imitating Arthur Augustus's beautiful accent. "Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Marmaduke.

D'Arcy was boiling with rage. He did not waste breath in words. He went for Kerr like a stone from a catapult.

"Here, hold him!" gasped Kerr. "He's dangerous!"

The New House juniors grasped Arthur Augustus. They sat him gently down upon the turf, and concertinaed his silk hat once more over his eyes. D'Arcy sat and gasped.

"Oh, you uttah outsidahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. danced round the swell of the School House in a circle, yelling like Red Indians.

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"



"Awise, and pway come on!" said D'Arcy, whose fighting blood was aroused now.

Their smiles might have been heard on the other side of Rylcombe Wood. But suddenly Figgins's yell changed its tone, and he stopped his war-dance.

"What was that?"

"What's the matter?" asked Marmaduke.

"Something wet came on my neck! Great Scott!"

Figgins put his hand to his collar, and drew it away again with the fingers stained red.

"My word! Blood!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

The juniors stared in amazement. The most amazed of all was Figgins himself.

"He's bleeding to death! Quick, and bind him up!"

"Let me alone!" exclaimed Figgins. "I'm not bleeding!"

"But that blood——"

"It's not blood."

"What is it, then?"

"Blessed if I know! It's—— Ow, ow!"

A sudden jet smote Figgins on the other side of his head. His face streamed crimson. Kerr gave a shout.

"It's red ink!"

"Red ink!" gasped Marmaduke and Fatty Wynn simultaneously.

"Yes. It's some rotter squirting red ink at us from the bushes!" exclaimed Kerr, staring round at the foliage.

The next moment he gave a terrific whoop. A jet of red smote him fairly on the nose, and splashed all over his face, converting him into a Red Indian in a remarkably short space.

"By Jove, you do look queer!" exclaimed Marmaduke, grinning. The next moment he looked queer himself, as a jet of red ink from a different direction caught him on the ear, and splashed over his face

Fatty Wynn came in for a jet at the same moment. Figgins & Co. were not laughing now. They were red—with ink and rage! Figgins made a rush for the bushes from which the hidden marksmen were aiming their squirts.

Swish, swish! came the ink again, and two jets struck him, one in the face, one in the neck. He reeled back, and clapped his hands to his neck. They came away red. The ink was running down over his shirt, and staining his collar and waistcoat.

"My word!" gasped Figgins.

"Better hook it!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn; and he set the example. How many foes there might be in ambush there, Figgins & Co. did not know; but the hunt for enemies armed with squirts and red ink was a serious undertaking.

Figgins hesitated a moment, and then followed Fatty Wynn, and Marmaduke and Kerr followed him.

The aspect of Figgins & Co. was comical enough. Their faces and collars were a bright red, and the more they rubbed them, the redder they became. In the dusk of the lane it did not matter so much; but at school their return was likely to create a sensation.

"We shall have to sneak in and get washed!" grunted Figgins, as they went up the lane. "I wonder who it was? Hallo, that sounded like Tom Merry's laugh!"

A laugh came floating from the dusk behind.

"Tom Merry! We might have guessed!"

"Let's go back!" growled Marmaduke.

"Rats! Let's go on and get cleaned! We can get even with them some other time, and it's no good getting any more ink now!"

And Figgins & Co. went on.

It was, indeed, Tom Merry's laugh that they had heard. The Terrible Three had come out of their ambush. D'Arcy stared at them, recognising them in the dusk.

"Tom Mewwy! Thank you vewy much!" he gasped. "Pway give me a hand up! I have had a wotten twick played upon me by those New House boundahs!"

Tom Merry laughed as he helped Gussy to his feet.

"We know all about it, kid."

"Indeed! Pway, how do you know all about it, Tom Mewwy?"

"We heard Figgins & Co. plotting it the other night!" grinned Tom Merry. "We've kept an eye on them since, you see, and when they came and ambushed themselves here, we knew the little game was coming off."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you might have told me!"

"Couldn't give Figgins away, you know; and, besides, it was too good a joke to spoil. You deserved it for being such a silly ass, you know."

"Exactly so," said Monty Lowther. "I wouldn't have missed this scene for anything. This is about the best turn you've ever given us, Gussy."

"Rather!" said Manners heartily. "I propose a vote of thanks to Gussy Adophus, as the founder of the feast—I mean the fun."

"I wegard you as thwee wotten boundahs," said Arthur Augustus. "You have made light of a gwave subject."

"Why are we like the cremation people?" demanded Lowther, whose weakness was for punning. "Because we make light of a grave subject."

"Weally, Lowthah, I am not in a mood for your wotten puns now. I wegard you——"

"Oh, let's get along!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I want to see what sort of a reception Figgins & Co. get at St. Jim's."

Even Arthur Augustus, in spite of his indignation, had to giggle at that.

"Bai Jove! They will cause a surpwise!" he remarked.

"I should say so. We don't want to miss it."

And the School House juniors hurried along the lane. They reached the gates of St. Jim's just as Taggles came to lock them, and dodged in in time. They were only a few minutes behind Figgins & Co., and a roar of laughter from the direction of the New House warned them that the unfortunate quartette had not been able to get into their quarters unobserved.

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. They raced over to the New House, and joined the crowd of juniors gathered round four curious-looking objects that were making their way to the House.

"Hallo, Figgins!" called out Tom Merry. "Wherefore these blushes?"

Figgins was in the light from the House, and the red glare of his face showed brightly up. He was trying to escape the unwelcome attentions of the boys, but they did not seem as willing to part with him, and it was difficult for Figgins & Co. to make their way through the crowd.

"Let me pass, you asses!" shouted Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where did you get that face?"

"What price beetroots?"

"Figgy! I say, Figgy, where did you dig up that face?"

The polite queries of the Terrible Three received no reply. Figgins & Co. lined up shoulder to shoulder, and charged through the crowd as if they were charging for goal. They went through, and disappeared into the New House, and a yell of laughter followed them in.

"Well, that was a ripping jape, and no mistake!" chuckled Tom Merry. "I say, Gussy—— Where's Gussy?"

But Arthur Augustus was gone. He was already changing his clothes.

CHAPTER 15.

Miss Priscilla Gives Good Advice.

MISS PRISCILLA FAWCETT stood at the door of Laurel Villa, at Huckleberry Heath, looking out into the pleasant sunshine of the Sunday morning, with a kind old face as pleasant as the sunshine.

A boyish figure stopped at the gate, at the end of the garden path, and the old lady uttered an exclamation.

"D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—for it was he—raised his hat. Then he opened the gate and came up the walk. Miss Priscilla gazed at him in amazement.

"D'Arcy. My dear boy, have you a holiday? What are you doing here?"

D'Arcy coloured.

"I asked the Head's permission to come and see you, Miss Fawcett," he said shyly.

"That was very nice of you, my dear boy, but——"

"Yaas, wathah; but you are surpwised, of course? Dear Miss Pwiscillah, I have come to see you because I am in a feahful difficulty, and I think you may help me!"

"Why, of coarse I will!" said Miss Priscilla cordially. "You were quite right to come to me. Come in, my dear lad. Sit down. Hannah, take Master D'Arcy's hat and cane. Now, my dear lad, what is it? Are you ill?"

"Oh, no, wathah not, thank you!" gasped D'Arcy.

"You are sure you have not a pain anywhere?"

"Quite sure, thank you, Miss Pwiscillah!"

Miss Fawcett looked disappointed. She was a great physician, and enjoyed nothing more than soaking invalids with medicine. She had hoped that D'Arcy was in quest of medical aid. She looked at him anxiously.

"You are looking rather feverish," she said doubtfully. "I think perhaps a draught of Dr. Bones's Sea-green Elixir for Peculiar Patients would do you good."

"Oh, weally, no, thank you, Miss Pwiscillah!"

"Did you leave Tom Merry well?"

"Yaas, wathah, quite well!"

"Did my darling boy send his love to me?"

"He didn't know I was comin', Miss Pwiscillah."

"Did you not tell him, then?"

"Wathah not! I am keepin' it a secwet! You see, dear Miss Pwiscillah, I am in a feahful state of mind!"

"You want me to help you?"

"Yaas, wathah! Miss Pwiscillah, I—I—I—you won't laugh?"

"Certainly not!" said the amazed old lady.

"I knew that you would sympathise with me. I have no one else to tell about it," said D'Arcy shyly. "Miss Pwiscillah, I—I—— Oh, Miss Pwiscillah, she is such a wippin' girl!"

Miss Fawcett looked at D'Arcy. Then she slowly took her glasses out of their case, wiped them, put them on, and looked at him again.

"I—I don't quite understand, D'Arcy."

"I think so much of her, Miss Pwiscillah." D'Arcy was fairly going now. "She is the daughter of my music pwofessah in Wyloombe. Her name is Ethel. She is a weally wippin' girl. She has to work hard at her beastly paintin', you know, and I've seen her look so tired, you know, sometimes, when she didn't know I could see her. And—and it seems so wotten, doesn't it?"

"Yes, very," said the old lady softly.

"You know, she's only twenty-one," said D'Arcy, with growing confidence. "I shall be twenty-one in six years two months and nine days."

Miss Fawcett smiled. D'Arcy had evidently worked that out carefully.

"I—I think so much of her," went on D'Arcy, who could not master his shyness sufficiently to pronounce the word "love." "She's so good to her governah, too, and he's wathah an old boundah, weally. I—I—— Oh, Miss Pwiscillah, you understand, don't you?"

"I think I do," said Miss Priscilla, her voice very soft.

"I knew you would," said D'Arcy brightly. "You were always so kind. Oh, Miss Pwiscillah, I twied to speak to her the othah day—to tell her—but I hadn't the cheek. She spoke as if she knew I was so much youngah than she is, but weally it's only six years, and I look more than fifteen, don't I?"

"Perhaps a little," assented Miss Fawcett.

"And when I gwow up I shall be awfully wich, you know, and she won't have to do any more of that beastly paintin'," said D'Arcy. "I wish I could tell you what a weally wippin' girl she is, Miss Pwiscillah."

"I quite understand."

"Yaas, I knew you would. Will you help me, Miss Pwiscillah, and tell me what to do?"

"Yes, my dear lad, I will."

"You don't blame me, do you?"

"Oh, no! I know exactly what your feelings are, dear boy, and I certainly do not blame you; but I must tell you that you are very foolish."

"Oh, Miss Pwiscillah"—and D'Arcy's hopeful face fell—"I—I thought you——"

Miss Pwiscillah smiled rather sadly. Love at fifteen was absurd enough, yet she knew that there was an element of the serious in it, and that D'Arcy—for the time, at least—was in deadly earnest.

"My dear lad, you must not think of such things—you are not old enough. When you are twenty it may be time. You do not even understand the matter yet, and this, which seems so serious to you, will pass from your mind in a few weeks."

"Oh, nevah, nevah!"

"It is very fortunate that you have not been able to speak on this subject to the young lady in question."

"But I must speak!"

"You must not."

"Oh, Miss Pwiscillah, I must—I weally must!"

"D'Arcy, listen to me! These people you speak of are poor, I gather?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then the fees you pay to the professor for music lessons will probably be a considerable object to him?"

"Oh, only five guineas a term!"

"My dear boy, that seems very little to you, but it is probably a godsend to the professor—a teacher of music in a village like Rylcombe."

"Yaas, I suppose so."

"If you leave him, then, it will be a loss to him, and will increase the trouble his daughter probably already has—as you have given me to understand."

"But I am not goin' to leave him, Miss Pwiscillah."

"If you were to speak to the young lady, as you have suggested, you could not possibly continue to go there," said Miss Fawcett quietly. "Don't you see, my dear lad, that, however much in earnest you are, the young lady could not take any possible notice of your—your attachment. And, under the circumstances, she would, if she were a girl of right feeling, realise that it was impossible to see you any more."

"Oh, Miss Pwiscillah!"

"That is certainly the case, D'Arcy. You would have to give up your lessons with the professor, and both of them would suffer."

"Oh, Miss Pwiscillah!"

"You do not wish that to come about? You would rather allow these fees to continue to be of service to this poor gentleman?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you must make up your mind at once to dismiss this thought from your mind," said Miss Fawcett firmly, "and never, above all, allow a hint of your feelings to escape you in the presence of the young lady."

Something moist glistened in D'Arcy's eye. Miss Fawcett affected not to see it. D'Arcy realised that Miss Fawcett spoke the truth, and that tear was a tribute to a banished love. For the swell of St. Jim's was "grit" to the backbone, in spite of his dudish ways. The path of right having been pointed out to him, he was not the fellow to blench or turn aside from it. He rose to his feet.

"Thank you, Miss Pwiscillah—thank you! You—you are wight—quite wight!"

He could say no more, his heart was too full.

* * * * * * * *

It was late that evening when Arthur Augustus returned to St. Jim's. But the quiet, serious look in his face prevented his chums from asking him questions. They knew that he had had the Head's permission to spend the Sunday away from the school, but they knew no more. Not till long afterwards did Tom Merry know of that visit to Miss Priscilla at Huckleberry Heath, and then he learned it from the lips of D'Arcy himself. But Miss Ethel never received a proposal. D'Arcy confined himself to dumb admiration.

THE END.

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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 they may be used for his up-bringing, are 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.

Cyril invites Venus and Billy to go on a hunting excursion. Billy, however, tells his chum he cannot ride.

"Well, you are not too old to learn," said Cyril; "and, as you must commence some time, you can do so this morning. What you have got to do is to stick your knees into his sides."

(Now go on with the story.)

Farmer Jorker!

"What, sort of kick him?" suggested Billy.

"Oh, Billy, Billy! I think you have put all your brains into that examination paper," said Cyril. "No, don't kick him. In fact, he is a lot more likely to kick you; but he won't do that unless you give him the chance. Of course, if you are thrown off you will get on again, and keep on doing that until you can ride. Venus tells me he can ride."

"Yes, dat's so. Least, I seem to hab had a recollection ob riding somewhere. I dunno weder it was before de wreck or after it, but dere's a sort ob memory 'bout dat riding. Must hab been on board ship, I fink."

Cyril sighed. His idea was to ride about forty miles, and he had hired three horses for the purpose; but although his comrades had both told him that they could ride, he began to have his doubts concerning the matter. However, there was a splendid opportunity of testing the matter, because at the back of the livery stables where he had hired his horses there was a large paddock, with a high hedge round it, and Cyril determined to test his chums' skill there before he took them across country.

In the summer the horses at the livery stables got more exercise than they cared for, but at this time of the year they got far less than their master desired. Cyril was decidedly his best customer, because an over-fond mother

allowed that worthy more pocket-money than he ought to have squandered, with the consequence that when he wanted anything he had it.

"Well, Bob," he exclaimed to the jovial-looking proprietor of the mews, "you see, we have turned up a little before our time; but that doesn't matter. We shall be able to go all the farther. Besides, I want these two beauties to have a little practice. Horses fresh?"

"As daisies," exclaimed Bob, who admired Cyril greatly, because he was such a good customer, and because he could ride any horse, and feared absolutely nothing.

"That's right! Let's have the freshest one in the paddock, and we will put Snowy White Adonis Venus on his back, to see if his dim recollection of being able to ride is correct."

"Suppose he gets dropped on his head?"

"Pooh! That won't hurt it. You couldn't possibly hurt a head like that. Why, I will give you permission to smash a broomstick over it."

"See here, Cyril," growled Venus, "don't you be so mighty free wid your permissions. I would like to hab someting to say 'bout da permission part ob de business. Some ob dose broomsticks are mighty thick."

"What matter! They could not possibly be so thick as your head. But bring out the horse, Bob, and we will soon see if the beautiful lily knows how to ride or not. If he doesn't he's got to learn, because we are going riding to-day."

"You will look after the horses, won't you, young gent?"

"Yes; I'll be answerable for them, although I really don't believe they will be in as much danger as the riders. Don't give Venus any instructions, Bob," whispered Cyril, following him up. "Just hand him the reins, and we shall soon see what he's made of."

Bob grinned and nodded, while Cyril led the way to the paddock; then Bob led round the prancing steed, and placed the reins in Venus's hand. The horse jerked them over its head, and stood looking at Venus as though he wondered what he was.

"Golly!" exclaimed Venus, glancing round. "I wonder, now—— Seems I hab been here before. What does it all mean? Dere were tings dat I seem to remember habing forgotten—people sort ob kind to me—and—and—— Golly, dere must hab been a horse! Was it on de sea? Nunno, I don't tink so. Dere were trees, but dey were different to dis little lot, and—and—golly, I know dere were people who were kind to me! Makes me feel sort ob sad."

"Now, look here, you image," cried Cyril, gripping him by the arm, "haven't I been kind to you? Didn't I punch your head with the boxing-gloves the first day we got together? Didn't I tell the doctor to his face that he was a maniac to dive from Tempest Headland Height to save your life, and——"

"I dunno weder I shall go and forget how kind you hab been to me, Cyril, same as I seem to hab done wid oder people, 'cos I know at de sight ob dat horse dat dere were oders mighty kind to me, and I can't recollect dem."

"Wake up, you image!" cried Cyril. "Never mind about the past, nor the future. It is the present that we have to consider in this life, for the past and the future are in other hands than ours. Come, mount that horse, and don't break your neck, because the people whom you have forgotten, and those whom you remember, and who remember you, would be sorry."

Then Venus simply astounded the spectators. He flung loose the reins, took a run and a leap at the now prancing horse, and, seizing its mane, vaulted on its back.

"Yah, yah, yah! I believe I can ride! Go ahead, my boy. See if we can catch de reins."

It appeared inevitable that he must come off, for the horse was now galloping full speed across the paddock, and Venus was leaning far over in the saddle in his attempt to catch the dangling reins. He did catch them, and then jerked them over the horse's head, just as the animal was approaching the further hedge.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus, turning, and waving his arm to the astonished spectators. "I'm at home on dis little lot."

"Why, he's going to take the leap!" gasped Bob.

Straight for the hedge the horse dashed.

"Over!" bawled Venus.

And over they went in perfect style; then they were lost to view.

"I've only seen one other lad ride like that in my life!" exclaimed Bob, mopping his brow. "You are the other lad, Master Cyril, though I say it to your face. That nigger is a born rider. Haw, haw, haw! He don't trouble himself about stirrups, neither. Never shoved his toes in them."

"He'd easily beat me bare-backed," declared Cyril, "and the first thing that I can remember in this life is being on the back of a pony. See, here he is back again, and he takes the leap like a bird. He will be all right. Do you think you could do that, Billy?"

"I'm jolly certain I couldn't!" growled Billy. "The horse might get over the hedge all right, but the chances are, I would get into the ditch."

"Well, have a try," said Cyril. "Stick your knees in tight. You see him on, Bob."

Bob did, and he also saw him off; but Billy was accustomed to falls. He got on again, and although he got off and on once or twice more, he managed matters better after about a quarter of an hour's instruction; then Bob put him on a quieter horse, and the worthy three rode away down the lane, while Bob went into his house.

"That's right, Billy!" exclaimed Cyril. "You are getting on famously."

"Seems to me I'm better at getting off. However, that doesn't matter. I'm determined to ride, if I don't break my neck. I'd like to try a few leaps, 'cos if we are going hunting, we are bound to do some jumping."

"Well, canter along that grass at the side of the lane," said Cyril. "There are some little gullies running into the ditch, and you will find those broad enough for the start. Don't turn your toes out so much, and let him have his head. You are not holding your reins correctly. Shove that lower one over your little finger. Here, see how I have got mine."

Although Billy was frightfully slow at learning his lessons, he could learn anything he took an interest in fast enough, and he got on famously.

The jumps were quite insignificant, but they were big enough for a start, and by the time they had ridden a dozen miles, Billy was getting on remarkably well.

He had an idea that he would like to take a bigger leap, so he put his horse at the hedge, and the horse got over in brilliant style. Billy only got as far as the hedge, and he got frightfully scratched; but after the horse was caught, he jumped him back again, and this time succeeded in retaining his seat.

They put up at a little inn which Cyril knew, as he had often had lunch there before. Luck favoured them, for the landlord informed them that there was a nice piece of loin of pork for dinner. It would not have mattered much to them what sort of meat it was, as they were so hungry; but they made an excellent dinner, and then started off again.

"Now, we have got several hours before us," exclaimed Cyril, "and this is about the spot where the hunting will commence. If we don't happen to see a hare, we are absolutely certain to see half a hundred rabbits. The worst of them is that they don't give you anything of a run, because they always go down their burrows; all the same, we will have a jolly gallop across the fields."

The day being bright, and the air keen, the chums thoroughly enjoyed that gallop. Cyril had his doubts whether Billy would enjoy himself so much the following day, especially if he were destined to receive corporal punishment for having crawled out of class, for Billy, not being accustomed to riding, would not be in a fit state to receive such punishment. However, Billy was not the sort of boy to trouble himself about the morrow. That he was enjoying himself at the present moment was quite sufficient for him, and he "dismounted" twice in trying to chase a rabbit.

"I wish they would keep in a straight line," growled Billy. "When I try to steer the horse to port or starboard, the brute flings me off."

Billy knew more about steering a boat than a horse; however, he was not a lad to be easily daunted, so he got on again, and presently Cyril, who had sighted a hare, uttered a wild halloo!

Away they dashed, and the horses appeared to enjoy the sport quite as much as their riders; whether the hare enjoyed it was another matter, although it was not in the slightest danger. The risk its pursuers ran was ten times greater, for they went straight ahead, and took every leap that came in their way, while their yells echoed around the sunlit country.

Venus led the way. He was a regular demon rider, and simply feared nothing. Luckily no stone walls came in his way, or he would certainly have gone at them.

A high hedge lay before him, with a broad ditch in front; but a hedge and ditch were nothing to Venus, and where he led, Cyril was determined to follow; while poor Billy had not much choice in the matter. He had to give the whole of his attention to sticking on his horse, and he let it go the way it wanted to, which was in the same direction the other ones were taking.

A flock of white geese got in Venus's way, and the noise those geese made as they scattered, rose above his shouts.

The hedge was before him, but he took it at a bound.

Then other howls arose, for Venus had leapt into a kitchen

garden, and to make it worse, the owner of that garden was working in it. Venus went on, not seeing the slightest use in stopping. Cyril, who took the leap almost at the same moment, followed his example, and, having cantered across a cabbage-patch, and a large turnip-bed, they took the opposite hedge, and, having successfully cleared it, reined in to see how poor Billy was on.

The farmer, for such he appeared to be, was a burly man, and he was howling in a manner that gave the impression he was vexed; but his anger was quite a mild thing to the fury that seized him the next moment, for Billy came over the hedge in front of his horse, and, dropping in the farmer's chest, hurled him through a forcing-frame with a crash that told of splintering glass.

Now, no living person could have called Billy a quick-witted lad, but there are times when the slowest-brained of the worst of us think quickly, and this was one of them.

Billy was on his feet in an instant, and, being now quite desperate, and regardless of danger, he sprang at his steed, and luckily grabbed the reins. Perhaps that horse was tired. It stopped, and Billy got one foot in the stirrup and commenced to mount.

We all know that some people are born lucky, and some are born rich. Poor Billy was born neither, and his misfortune did not desert him on the present occasion, for the farmer man also regained his feet, and, seizing a piece of the broken frame, he got at the back of Billy, who was in a splendid position for corporal punishment.

Three whacks descended, three howls burst forth, then Billy was in his saddle; but he felt no comfort from that fact. His one idea was to escape from the irate farmer, who got in another fearful crack over Billy's back.

Then Billy urged his horse into a gallop. He did not care where he went so long as it was not in the farmer's direction; consequently, he went round his kitchen-garden, to which the galloping horse did no good at all.

The farmer howled until he was purple with rage, while Cyril and Venus howled with laughter.

The misguided man made a grab at the galloping horse as it came round, and got knocked head over heels once more; then Billy took the opposite hedge, and this time he did not lose his seat.

"Billy," exclaimed Cyril, "I opine that you have angered that man of geese!"

"I'm jolly certain he has angered me!" growled Billy. "What's worse, he's hurt me! I wish I had a carriage with an air cushion in it to ride home in!"

"I tink, Cyril," observed Venus—"yah, yah, yah!—dat it would be better to convince dat man he's in de wrong, 'cos he's yowling out dat he knows we belong to Tempest Headland College. Dat's de worst eb dese caps."

"How would you suggest that I should convince him?" murmured Cyril.

"I tink you—yah, yah, yah!—might be able to argue him down. I know when you start arguing dat you make me believe 'most anyting; p'r'aps you can make him believe dat he ain't hurt."

"I have my doubts!" exclaimed Cyril. "All the same, I will try. Er—my good man I would point out to you that hunting is a sport that every farmer ought to encourage."

"Hunting, you rat!" howled the irate man. "Do you call it hunting to come galloping over my turnips, and bash me through my forcing-frames? I'll make it hot for you! I know the college. If Dr. Buchanan don't punish this, I will!"

"You see, my dear fellow——"

"Your dear fellow be hung! If I had my gun I would shoot you—I would so!"

"I very much doubt if it would come under the head of justifiable homicide, although I will admit you have had some provocation."

"You worm! Some provocation! Look at my forcing-frame!"

"A case of force majeure!"

"Ain't de boy's knowledge wonderful?" murmured Venus. "Go on, Cyril, you will convince him just directly."

"I have my doubts," muttered Cyril.

"Try de man wid some more Latin."

"That was French, Venus. Still if you think Latin will have a better effect, I think I know one phrase. You see, my dear man, you must agree with me that ira furor brevis est. No, Venus, Latin does not do him a bit of good."

"Yah, yah, yah! Keep on at him!"

"Well, you stop your guffawing, because I believe that is not improving his temper, which I must confess is rocky. My dear fellow, I beg of you not to excite yourself. Take things calmly, it is always better. Little misfortunes will arise in life, and you can write this down as one of them. You see, we did not know where we were going to, any more than you knew where we were coming to. Had you known, you would naturally have got out of our way, and that would have saved us both trouble. Mind, I am not blaming you entirely in the matter. The fault was not wholly yours. I am particeps criminis, and that is about all the Latin I can hurl at the silly ass!" added Cyril, in a lower voice.

"You varmint!" howled the farmer. "I'll saddle my hoss, and ride straight to the college!"

"Gluckliche reise!" cried Cyril.

"Golly!" gasped Venus. "Are you going to be sick?"

"No, Venus. I am only wishing him a prosperous journey, in German."

"I tink I would try some oder language, 'cos dat might do an injury to de horses."

"Well, he has gone for his horse," observed Cyril. "Evidently my knowledge of foreign languages is not sufficient to soothe his savage breast. I think we had better ride home. We have lost a hare, and a man's temper. Don't let's lose our characters for punctuality as well."

"Look here," growled Billy, "I never had a character for punctuality, and I can jolly well tell you that I'm not going to lose anything more than I've lost already. I'm going home at a walking pace. You and Venus can go as fast as ever you like. My horse is going to walk."

"Look here, Billy," exclaimed Cyril, "I will admit that you have borne the brunt of it. Now, there is not the slightest necessity for you to get hurt any more. Venus must get flogged. He can't help it, because his face is black. I must be licked. I can't help it, because my face is white, and it will get whiter still when the operation is taking place. You see, that dear farmer man will identify Venus like lightning. The doctor will at once know that I led Venus astray, even if the farmer man did not pick me out; but you are X."

"What's that?"

"An unknown quantity. He only saw your back."

"I wish he had contented himself with only seeing it!" growled Billy.

"Well, you have had your share, and all you have got to do is to keep as mum as a maggot, and leave the rest to me. I shall point out that you have been punished, and that——"

"No, I'm not going to do that!" growled Billy. "Share and share alike!"

"What good will it do us?"

"None! And I know you would try to get me off, and perhaps succeed; but you've given me a splendid outing, and paid for everything, and I'm not going to shirk my responsibilities."

"Billy, Billy! Be smart!"

"I'm smarting, but I'll jolly well smart more before I turn coward!"

"It won't be turning coward."

"I know it won't; because I sha'n't do it!"

"All right! I know it's no good arguing with you when you are fixed that way; I will see if I can work it. We are in for a whacking, Venus; of that I'm positive!"

"You don't tink we can take any sort eb precautions?" inquired Venus.

"I will lend you another pair of trousers to go over those, and you can wear a few of my waistcoats buttoned the wrong way round; but beyond that, I fear we can do nothing."

"You don't tink dat foreign language you last spoke would so upset de doctor dat he would feel too ill to hit?"

"I fear not. He speaks it to perfection, and it is only the man who does that who can appreciate its beauties. Now we will have an early tea at the inn, and then get back."

The early tea was a great success. The landlord knew the sort of thing that would be required, and home-made bread, home-made strawberry jam—to say nothing of a home-made plum cake of huge dimensions—are all very nice.

"It's downright scrumptious!" declared Billy. "I only wish I had the brass to return the compliment, and——"

"Rats! My mother likes me to enjoy myself," interposed Cyril, "and it is certain I could not do so alone; it's very good of you fellows to come! Now, wire in! Plenty of milk in the tea, I suppose?"

It was a most enjoyable meal, and Billy changed his mind about returning at a walking pace. As a matter of fact, they went back at a gallop, and got in before time—but Mopps was amiable; in fact, he was hilarious!

"Haw, haw, haw! Ain't you in for it, my young shavers! Haw, haw, haw! Won't you enjoy yourselves! I'm going to listen outside the doctor's study! Haw, haw, haw! We sha'n't be long! Oh, no, not much! I don't think!"

"You could not think, my poor Mopps," observed Cyril; "you have no brain to think with, and if you were to think with your vacuum, why, nothing would happen. If you were to put a bucket of beer before Mopps, he would not be able to think about it. He wouldn't have the common-sense to do that. Instinct would teach him to sup it up; and he would

do so; on the same lines that a baby drinks. It does not think, because its brain is not formed. When Mopps was a dear little squalling infant he did not think, because his brain was not formed. He does not think now, because, although there has been plenty of time for the formation of the brain, there was no brain to form. Poor, dear Mopps, you will go to your grave without a brain! I don't mean to say that you are a maniac. A raving maniac has a brain, although it is a diseased one; but you, poor creature, have no brain!"

"I suppose you think you are clever, you little worm?"

"I wasn't thinking about that; I was only thinking what an utter idiot you are. Still, you can't help it, so we won't blame Mopps. There's one thing, Mopps, you will never have inflammation of the brain, or brain-fever. You might have the fever, but you will never have the brain. Have you had an 'addick for your tea?"

"You've got to come straight to the doctor's study, and so I tell you, you hutter varmints! Haw, haw, haw! Ain't he going to warm your jackets! There's Mr. Jorker, the farmer, with him now; Mr. Jorker knows me, and he's told me all about it! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Would you mind guffawing again, Mopps?"

"Haw, haw, haw! Ain't——"

"Thank you! When you open your mouth like that it always reminds me of the hippopotamus at the Zoo, and I'm fond of wild beasts. You are about the wildest beast I ever came across, Mopps, and if our pigsty wasn't always supposed to be kept clean, I would take you home and keep you there."

"Oh, you viper," snarled Mopps; "wouldn't I jest like to have the handling of you! You come this way, and, mind you, I shall listen to your bowls. Haw, haw, haw!"

"No opportunity to make preparations, Venus," whispered Cyril; "we must take it as it comes! I wonder if it is your fat that makes you waddle like that, Mopps? You always remind me of an old duck that has been gorging itself out of the hogwash tub! Here we are, Mopps. I often wonder the doctor doesn't cane you now and then; it would do you all the good in the world. I say, what a hideously ugly baby you must have been; I wonder your nurse did not strangle you!"

Mopps glared at the aggravating Cyril as though he would have liked to knock him down; but he knocked at the study door instead, and the three culprits were shown into the dread presence, while Mopps pretended to shut the door; but he left it ajar.

The doctor gazed at the delinquents very sternly for some moments, and then he spoke.

"This gentleman is Mr. Jorker."

Cyril bowed to the angry man as though he were pleased to meet him. That meek bow caused Venus to laugh, but he promptly stopped himself.

"I am informed that you rode three horses through his kitchen garden?"

"Quite an accident, sir," observed Cyril.

"I fail to see how it could have been an accident!"

"Well, sir, we saw the surrounding hedge, but we did not see the garden."

"They've smashed my forcing-frame to atoms, and they have ruined all my turnips!" declared Jorker.

"I must plead guilty to damaging your turnips," said Cyril, looking so lamblike that it was as much as the doctor could do to keep his countenance. "Being once among the turnips, the prancing steeds did the rest."

"They were jest coming on."

"Depend on it, they will come on again, Jorker. Turnips are hardy little things, and they ought to be pressed firmly into the ground. As for the frame—well, the same remarks will not apply to that. All you can do there is to get a competent glazier, and send the bill in to me."

"That 'ere is all right, as fur as it goes, but what about the damage to myself?"

"Well, my dear man, my estimate of that would be about two-pence; but we can leave the doctor to decide what he considers you are worth, and we will pay accordingly. As regards your turnips——"

"See here, you young cuss, I ain't allowing a brat of a boy to fool me! If you dare to give me any more of your thumping cheek——"

"Cyril Conway, how dare you make light of such an affair?" cried the doctor. "In the first place, I shall severely punish you for——"

"Don't mention it, sir," cried Jorker; "I trust as you will not think of punishing the young gentleman! You see, sir, it was quite an accident, and I can easy mend the frame. As for my turnips, well, they wasn't of much account, and I'm rather inclined to think with him that it won't do 'em any sort of harm. No, there was no damage to speak of, and if the young gent would like to come and ride over my garden, I shall always be pleased for him to do it!"

The doctor looked as though he were trying to awake himself from a strange dream.

"I really don't understand this!" he gasped. "Here you have been abusing these lads in every possible manner! You have told me that they have done a lot of damage to your garden, and that they have seriously injured you——"

"I was mistook, sir; I find I was not injured. I think it must have been a touch of the gout, or something like that. No, I wasn't hurt at all, and I shall always be glad to see 'em at my place!"

"Can you understand this, Conway?" inquired the doctor.

"Not in the slightest, sir! It makes me feel so light-hearted that I could start singing 'Rule, Britannia,' if I did not fear it might annoy you!"

"Why have you changed so, Mr. Jorker?"

"Well, you see, sir, I thought the young gent's face was sort of familiar to me, and now you mention his name, why, I recognise him at once! You see, sir, I used to rent a bit of ground from Mrs. Conway, and she wanted it for some other purpose. Well, she bought the farm I have now, and she lets me have it at a nominal rent that she never will take. Then again, she pays me top prices for all the things I send to her mansion!"

"I never heard her mention your name, Jorker," observed Cyril.

"Well, I can understand that, sir. You see, I only had a bit of a cottage, and was in a very small way; but she's put me into a nice little farm, and she has been downright kind and good to me in many a way. Bless you, sir, I'd no more think of getting her son into trouble than I would think of flying! Let the young gents amuse themselves as they like; I hope you won't think of punishing them in any way!"

"Well, Mr. Jorker," exclaimed the doctor, after a pause, "it would appear that the damage they have done was really unintentional. The greatest fault is that they rode across country instead of keeping to the lanes. However, if you wish them not to be punished——"

"I do, sir; indeed I do!"

"You are a downright good chap, Jorker!" cried Cyril, slapping his broad back. "I shall insist on paying for the frame; and if the turnips turn out rotten, why, you send them to my mother, and I'll get her to overlook their seedy condition. We can send them to the college, and the doctor can feed his pigs and Mopps on them!"

Jorker looked anxious, and, forgetting the doctor's presence, pulled out his snuff-box, for that was a habit of his.

In a second Cyril whipped that snuff-box out of his hand, and flung its contents over the top of the door.

Now, Mopps did not take snuff, and when he took about two ounces that time he burst into violent sneezes.

Cyril looked meekly at the doctor, who turned away and made no reference to Cyril's suggestion concerning the turnips, feeling that Mopps deserved it for listening.

Thus the matter ended, and Jorker parted good friends with the chums.

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A Watch for Skill.

N	O	N	L	O	D
N	E	D	E	U	D
N	L	U	D	B	I

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	5	

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