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THE BOGUS DETECTIVE.

DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.



NO. 9.

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VOL. 1.

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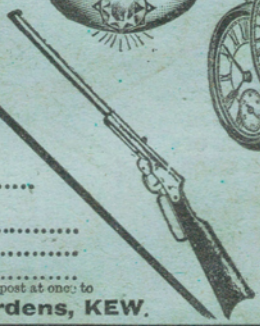
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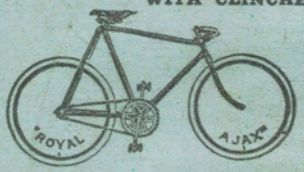
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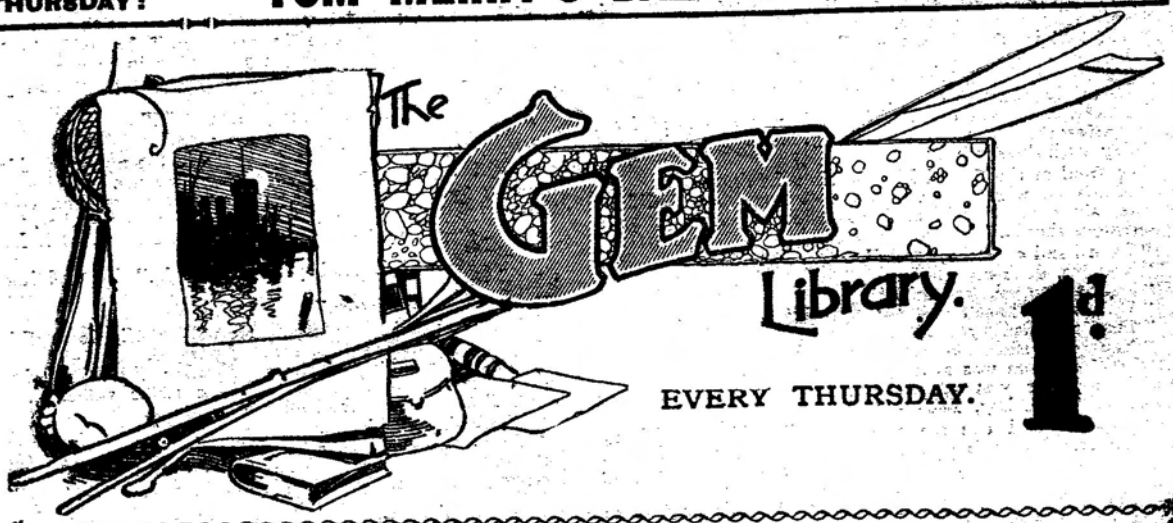




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. . By . .
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus Does Not Oblige.

TOM MERRY put his head in at the door of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's.

"I say, Blake!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, turned his head languidly. He was the only occupant of the study, his chums Blake, Herries, and Digby being conspicuous only by their absence. D'Arcy was seated in the easy-chair, quite upright, so as not to crumple his waistcoat, and reading the latest number of "The Magnet," with his eyeglass screwed into his right eye. He brought the eyeglass to bear upon Tom Merry in an extremely leisurely way.

"I am sowwy——"

"Where's Blake?"

"Pway do not speak in such an extwemely abwupt way, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy. "You put me into quite a fluttah!"

"I'm in a hurry."

"Yaas, you look as if you were! It's wathah bad form to be in a huwwy, you know," the swell of St. Jim's remarked. "I am sowwy, as I was about to say, when you so wudely interwupted me, that Blake is not here. He has gone——"

"Oh, never mind! I only wanted to borrow his watch. Mine has stopped. Yours will do" said Tom Merry. "Lend it to me for a few minutes, will you?"

D'Arcy hesitated. He laid down "The Magnet," and his hand went half-way to his watch-pocket, and stopped. A blush came into his cheeks.

Tom Merry looked at him in amazement.

"Did you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Well, lend me your watch."

"The fact is, Tom Mewwy——"

"I'm in a hurry! Hand it over. I've got to time a foot-race along the upper corridor, between Walsh and Hancock. Hand over that beastly watch."

"The fact is——"

Tom Merry made a quick step towards the swell of the School House. Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, looking flushed and uncomfortable. He put his hand over his

watch-pocket, as if he feared an attempt to take it from his possession by superior force.

"The fact is, Tom Mewwy——"

"I suppose you don't mind lending it to me for a few minutes?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Certainly not, deah boy!"

"I shall take care of it. I know it was a present from your governor, and cost twenty-five guineas. I won't use it to play cock-shies with."

The swell of the School House grinned faintly.

"That's all wight, Tom Mewwy. I know you would be extwemely careful with anothah fellow's pwoperty, as a gentleman should."

"Then hand over the watch."

"You see, deah boy——"

"Has it stopped, like mine?"

"Well, no, it hasn't exactly stopped."

"Then why don't you give it to me?"

"You see," stammered Arthur Augustus, who for some mysterious reason was evidently determined not to lend the watch, and yet was anxious not to appear disobliging—"you see, deah boy, I—I——"

"Yes, I see—I can see a silly ass," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "There's Walsh and Hancock waiting for me, calling me names by this time, and you keep me hanging about because you won't lend me your watch."

"The fact is, Tom Mewwy, that—that I disappwove of these wuff waces bein' held in the uppah cowwidah. It happened once that a fellow wan wight into me and knocked me wight ovah, and I was considewably hurt, to say nothin' of my twousahs bein' extwemely wumpled."

"You—you unutterable——"

"Now, pway don't be wude in your wemarks, Tom Mewwy, or I shall have no alternative but to thwow you out of the study," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone of remonstrance. "And I should weally find the effort most exhaustin'."

"You'd find it rather painful, too, I think," said Tom Merry, glowering at the swell of the School House. "Do you mean to tell me that what you've just said is your only reason for refusing to lend me your watch?"

"Well, no," said D'Arcy, driven into a corner. "To come down to absolute facts, that is not the only weason."

"What's the reason, then?"

"Well, you see, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, rats! If you won't lend me the watch, you won't!" said Tom Merry sharply. "I don't see what all this giddy mystery is about, though? Have you pawned your watch, and don't want anybody to know?"

Arthur Augustus turned crimson.

"I wegard that suggestion as insultin', Tom Mewwy."

"Well, I can't see any other explanation. But keep the beastly thing. I suppose I can borrow one somewhere."

And Tom Merry swung out at the door. Arthur Augustus took a quick step after him. To be considered rude or disobliging was very painful to the Chesterfieldian swell of St. Jim's, always the very pink of politeness.

"I say, Tom Mewwy!"

The hero of the Shell turned back.

"Well, are you going to lend me the watch?"

"Oh, no! But——"

"Well, have you got anything to say? I'm in a hurry."

"I hope you will not wegard my wefusal as at all wude."

"Well, I do. I think you're a pig."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, rats! I must be off!"

And Tom Merry hurried along the passage to where the rival foot-racers of the upper corridor were waiting for him. D'Arcy looked worried. He was sorry to send anybody away in a huff, and Tom Merry was certainly huffy now. And to be regarded as rude was anguish to Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry sprinted down the corridor, and nearly ran into three Fourth-Formers who were coming along towards Study No. 6. They seized him round the neck, and jammed him breathlessly against the wall.

"There, just in time to save you!" exclaimed Blake. "You'd have been over in another minute."

"Let me go, confound you!"

"Think you can stand steady?"

"Yes, you ass!"

"Let him go, Dig. You can leave off embracing him, Herries."

The chums of Study No. 6 released the hero of the Shell. Tom Merry gasped for breath, and looked daggers at them. He knew perfectly well that the Fourth-Formers had not really supposed that he was in any danger of falling over, and that this was only a little of Blake's fun.

Blake grinned genially.

"Glad I was in time to save you," he said, in his friendliest tone. "Where are you going in such a hurry? Is there a feed on anywhere, or has somebody told you you've got to wash your neck?"

"Oh, don't rot! Lend me your watch!"

"My watch!"

"Yes. I've got to time a foot-race in the upper corridor, and Walsh and Hancock are waiting for me. I have just been to your study, but you were not there, and Gussy wouldn't lend me his watch, for some reason or other."

Blake fished out a big silver watch, and detached it from the chain.

"Gussy wouldn't lend you his watch!" he exclaimed. "Why not?"

"I really don't know."

"But that's not like Gussy! He will usually do anything for anybody," said Blake, looking puzzled.

"Well, he wouldn't, anyway. Thanks; I'll let you have this back presently." And with the silver watch in his hand, Tom Merry dashed off again.

Blake looked at his chums with a wrinkled brow.

"We must see into this, kids!" he exclaimed. "We can't have our study's reputation for hospitality sullied by Arthur Aubrey Adolphus! We must see about it!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"My word!" said Digby. "It's not like Arthur Augustus to refuse to oblige anybody. Why, I know for a fact he lent his watch to a kid in the Remove. Perhaps he's got something up against Tom Merry. You know they had a little difficulty, but I thought that was all over."

"So did I," said Blake. "That little misunderstanding caused by Mellish telling tales was wiped out. It can't be that. Let's go and see Gussy."

The three juniors entered Study No. 6. They found Arthur Augustus with a somewhat worried expression upon his face.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he exclaimed. "Have you passed Tom Mewwy in the cowwidah?"

"Yes, we have," said Blake severely. "And——"

"Did he look wathah offended?"

"Yes, I think he was wathah offended."

"I am extwemely sowwy. Circs. ovah which I have no contwol forced me to appear wantin' in politeness, and I weally am extwemely twoubled in my mind about it. I do not like appeawin' wude to anybody."

"Why wouldn't you lend Tom Merry your watch?"

"Oh, so he has told you, then?"

"He mentioned it. Are you setting up in business as a hog, or are you off your rocker?" asked Blake. "Have you forgotten that this study has got a reputation to keep up? Or what do you mean, anyway?"

"Weally, I cannot quite explain."

"Why didn't you lend Tom Merry your watch?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Have you lent it to somebody else?"

"Not exactly; but——"

"Where is it?"

"You see, Blake——"

"I believe the image has been and pawned it, or something of the sort!" exclaimed Digby. "Let's have a look at it, anyway."

"Pway do not——"

"Hand it out."

"I am compelled to wefuse to do so."

"What on earth is all this mystery about?" exclaimed Blake, getting impatient. "Look here, I'm going to have a squint at that watch, so dish it out!"

"I wefuse!"

"Collar him!"

"Pway do not be wude and wuff!"

D'Arcy's appeal went for nothing. The chums of Study No. 6 laid violent hands upon him, and he was pinned to the wall. Then, while Digby and Blake held him, Herries jerked at his watch-chain, and dragged the watch from his pocket. D'Arcy gave a gasp of dismay, his chums an exclamation of astonishment.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Where did you get that watch?"

"Brass, by Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy's pawned his watch, and he's wearing a brass one instead! Ha, ha, ha!"

ANSWERS



"Ha, ha! Hear us smile. This is where we grin," said Figgins from the wall. "Of course, I don't want to keep you out all night, Tom Merry. It wouldn't be good for youths of your tender years."

CHAPTER 2.

Gussy's Secret.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY turned red with indignation.

"I have done nothin' of the sort!" he exclaimed.

"Then what are you wearing this thing for?" demanded Blake, holding up the watch to general inspection.

It was a "rolled gold" watch, and of an exceedingly cheap description. At a distance it might have passed for gold, but at a close view it was seen for what it was. What D'Arcy was doing with such a watch in the place of his twenty-five guinea timekeeper was a mystery, unless Blake had hit upon the correct explanation.

"The fact is, deah boys——"

"Hallo, what's that about a brass watch?" asked Mellish of the Fourth, looking into the study. Mellish had a knack of turning up in the most inopportune places, at the most inopportune moments, and anything that ever came to his knowledge was certain to spread all over the house; if not all over the whole school. "What's that, Blakey; Gussy wearing a brass watch?"

"Pway mind your own business, Mellish!"

"This is my business," said Mellish; "I'm interested. The whole Form will be glad to know about it, I should think."

"If you dare to uttah a syllable——"

"Ha, ha! I expect I shall utter more than a syllable! Fancy Gussy with a brass watch!"

"It is not bwass," exclaimed D'Arcy; "it is wolled gold!"

"What on earth is 'wolled gold'?"

"He means rolled gold!" chuckled Digby. "Fancy Gussy going in for rolled gold in his old age! How much did you give for it, Gussy; tenpence?"

"I gave fifteen shillin's."

"Then you were done—absolutely done!"

"Does it go? asked Blake.

"Well, no; it doesn't go," confessed D'Arcy. "The man said it would go, but so far I haven't heard it tick, and I've wound it up a lot of times!"

"Ha, ha! But what are you doing with this watch, instead of your own one?"

"He's pawned his watch!" cackled Mellish. "Oh, this is too good to keep! Fancy the great Gussy hanging round a pawnshop!"

"It is absolutely untwuthful!"

"Ha, ha! I can't keep this to myself; I must be off!"

And Mellish bolted down the corridor.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face was a study. To say that he was vexed would be putting it mildly. He jammed the offending watch back into his pocket.

"Weally, Blake, I wegard your conduct as most thoughtless and inconsidewate!" he exclaimed. "You have exposed me to the widicule of the whole Fourth Form!"

"My dear chap, if you persist in buying sham jewellery without asking my permission——"

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! You know vewy well that I have a gweat howwah of sham jewellery!"

"Then what do you mean by wearing a brass watch?"

"It is not bwass, as I said before; it is made of wolled gold. I bought it to wear in the place of my own ticker, because I have lost it."

"You've lost a twenty-five guinea ticker?"

"Yaas, wathah! Wotten, isn't it?"

"Well, I should say so! Where did you lose it?"

"I weally haven't the faintest ideah, you know! I missed it one day last week——"

"And you never said anything about it?"

"You see, I am taking steps to wecovah it," explained D'Arcy. "It is best not to say anythin' at first. If it has been stolen, I don't want to put the beastly thief on his guard by lettin' him know that I am huntin' for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And as a mattah of fact, you know, it must have been stolen, for it's a mowal impossibility for it to have come off the chain, without the chain bein' bwoken in any way."

"Well, I should say so," agreed Blake. "But surely you don't suspect anybody in the school of having stolen your watch?"

"I should be extwemely sowwy to suspect anybody of havin' stolen it," said Arthur Augustus. "But if it has been stolen, it stands to weason that somebody must have stolen it, doesn't it?"

"Yes, yes; I suppose it couldn't steal itself," said Blake sarcastically. "But I don't believe there's a thief in the school. There was one once, a chap named Sleath—you remember him; he tried to fix the thing on me, and old Figgins got the facts out to light. Well, he was expelled, and I'm certain there's not one here now."

"In that case the watch must have been stolen in the village."

"When did you miss it?"

"On Saturday evening, when I was goin' to wind it up. I thought pewwaps I had left it somewhere, and I hunted for it, but couldn't find it. Then I wemembahed that I had it on when we went down to the village tuckshop."

"We had a row with the Grammar School kids there," said Digby thoughtfully.

"Yaas, wathah! I should be sowwy to suspect one of them of havin' boned my watch; but somebody must have taken it, you know."

"You're absolutely sure that you haven't pawned it, and squandered the money in riotous living?" demanded Blake.

"I wefuse to weply to such a widiculous question," said the swell of the School House, with much dignity.

"Well, I don't see how you expect to get the watch back by saying nothing about it," said Digby. "My idea would be to go to the Head about it at once."

D'Arcy smiled in a superior manner.

"Nothin' of the sort. He would call up all the fellows in hall and question them, and, if the watch wasn't found, he would send for the police. You know what the local police are like. They would nevah find the watch, but they would in all pwobability spwead a weport in Rylcombe that there was stealin' goin' on up at the school."

"By George, D'Arcy, that's really very thoughtful of you, you know!" exclaimed Blake, in genuine admiration.

The swell of St. Jim's nodded sagely.

"Yaas, wathah! If I were not thoughtful, deah boys, I don't know how any thinkin' would get done in this beastly study, with your limited bwain powahs!"

"Oh, cheese it! But what I want to know is, how are you going to get your watch back if you take no notice of its being stolen?"

"I have alweady taken measuahs."

"What are you doing in the matter, then?"

"Undah the circs., I am compelled to keep that a secwet," said D'Arcy. "I am afwaid that if I confided it to you, you would chattah it about the coll., and pewwaps defeat the ends of justice, deah boys."

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked daggers at him.

"You young ass——" began three voices in unison.

"I wefuse to be addwessed as an ass! If you cannot addwess me with pwopah wespect, I decline to listen to your wemarks at all!"

"But you can't lose a twenty-five guinea watch as if it were a pegtop, or a glass marble!" exclaimed Blake. "What would your governor say if he came down and saw you wearing a brass ticker?"

"It is not bwass, it is wolled gold. But I hope to wecovah my own watch before my governah comes down to St. Jim's again."

"And you have really taken some steps in the matter?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you refuse to tell us what they are?"

"Yaas; under the circs., I am weluctantly compelled to keep the secwet."

"I know what it is!" exclaimed Digby, with a sudden chuckle. "He is employing our tame detective, Skimpole, to look into the matter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Blake and Herries.

The idea was rather comical. Skimpole of the Shell was a youth with ideas, and had lately fancied himself in the Sherlock Holmes line, and his exploits had furnished St. Jim's with considerable amusement.

"Good!" exclaimed Blake. "I suppose that's it? Well, I hope Skimpole will discover the watch, Gussy!"

"It is not twue! I should certainly not be such a widiculous ass as to twust the mattah to Skimpole!"

"Then what have you done?"

"Undah the circs., I am weluctantly compelled to——"

"Oh, cheese it! Kids," said Blake, looking at Dig. and Herries; "under the circs., I think I ought to explain the matter to the Head, and let him see to it. We can't have our respected friend D'Arcy losing a valuable watch, without taking any steps in the matter at all."

"Right-ho!" said Herries heartily.

"Pway don't do anythin' of the sort, Blake. I should wegard any interfewence in the mattah as an unfwiendly act," said D'Arcy. "I am sowwy to have to wefuse to take you into my confidence ovah the mattah——"

"Come along, kids; we can't let D'Arcy lose his watch!"

The three chums moved to the door. Arthur Augustus looked greatly distressed.

"Pway don't be in a huwwy, Blake! Wemain here a moment, Dig.! Pway sit down, Hewwies! Pewwaps, aftah all, I may be able to explain!"

"Buck up, then!" said Blake tersely.

"The fact of the mattah is——"

"Oh, get on; can't wait here all night!"

"Well, deah boys, the weal fact of the mattah is—— Of course, you won't go chattewin' it all about the beastly coll., you know?"

"Of course we won't! Go on."

"Well, the fact is that I—I am employin' a detective to look for my watch, you know!" said D'Arcy, with a smile of conscious importance as he made the startling announcement.

The chums of Study No. 6 stared at him in blank amazement.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy's Latest.

JACK BLAKE was the first to find his voice.

"You are employing a detective?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What detective? Tom Merry's friend—Ferrers Locke?"

"Oh, no! I thought of givin' him the case, but I weflected that pwobably he would not leave town to come down here and look for a lost watch."

The juniors grinned.

"Well, I think you're about right there," agreed Blake. "But what on earth detective are you employing, then? I didn't know there was a private detective in Rylcombe!"

"You surely don't think I would waste time on a countwy detective, if there were one, do you?" asked D'Arcy, with withering scorn.

"Then what—where——"

"I am employin' a famous London detective."

"What is his name?"

"Joseph Link."

Blake shook his head gravely.

"I never heard of him before! Is he any relation to the missing link?"

"Pway, don't be fwivolous! He is a famous detective; he says so himself in his advertisement in the 'Daily Telephone!'"

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"Ha, ha, ha! Well, he ought to know, I suppose! How did you come across the advertisement, Gussy?"

"Oh, I had seen it before, you know, and I looked it out and wrote to him! I have the pawagwaph cut out, if you would like to wead it!"

"Rather!" said Blake, Herries, and Digby together, with a simultaneous wink to one another.

D'Arcy opened a Russia leather pocket-book, and produced a newspaper cutting, which he smoothed out for the chums of the Fourth to read.

It ran as most of the similar advertisements in the daily papers run:

"Do You Want a Detective?—Evidence obtained for any purpose. Suspected persons watched unknown to themselves. Male and female shadowers. Uninterrupted successes for many years.—JOSEPH LINK, the famous detective, No. 1c, Flamsbury Chambers, E.C."

"And you've written to that rotter?" exclaimed Blake.

"I weally do not know why you should chawactewise him as a wottah, Blake," said D'Arcy, in a tone of mild remonstrance.

"He advertises the fact," grunted Blake. "People watched unknown to themselves! Ugh! I call him a mean beast!"

"Well, it would be weally no good warnin' a cwiminal that you were goin' to watch him," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "Of course, it would be more like playin' the game, I know, but it wouldn't be any good."

"Evidence obtained for or against anybody!" growled Digby. "I wouldn't touch the rotter with a barge-pole!"

"Weally, Digby——"

"Joseph Link, the famous detective," said Herries. "Famous in the police-courts, I expect, and his favourite place the dock."

"Then I gathah that you do not appwove of my employin' this person to discovah my watch," said Arthur Augustus.

"Of course not!"

"I am sowwy for that; but I weally wely upon my own judgment more than upon yours, so it weally does not mattah," said the swell of the School House thoughtfully.

"Have you seen the beast yet?"

"Pway do not call him a beast!"

"Well, the rotter, then! Have you seen him yet?"

"No. He has w'itten to make an appointment with me, you see, and I am seein' him this evenin' for the first time."

"You don't mean to say that he's coming down to St. Jim's!" exclaimed Blake in astonishment.

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, he can't come weally to the school. I am goin' to meet him outside the walls, you know, and tell him the facts, and pay him a wetainin' fee."

"And how much are you going to give him for a start?"

"Oh, he is vewy modewate! He says he will accept two pounds for pweliminary expenses, and then five guineas in case of success."

"Why, you young ass——"

"My deah chap, that is not vewy much to wecovah a twenty-five guinea tickah," said D'Arcy. "We must be weasonable, you know."

"And you're going to break bounds to meet this—this detective?"

"Yaas. One of you fellows can help me ovah the wall."

"It would be better to help you into a strait-jacket!"

"I wegard that womark as distinctly personal. I weally think the discussion had bettah close," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I will tell you when I am weady for you to help me ovah the wall."

And the swell of St. Jim's walked out of the study.

The chums looked at one another, and broke into a simultaneous chuckle.

"Well, I think Gussy's latest takes the cake," said Blake, with conviction. "Of course, this detective fellow is a fraud. Most of these advertising detectives are, I've heard, though I must say that I don't know much about them. He'll get fees and expenses out of Gussy, but if Gussy sees his watch brought back by Mr. Missing Link, I shall be surprised."

"My word," said Digby, "so shall I be! The chap will swindle Gussy right and left. But, of course, it's no good telling him so."

"Not a bit of it!" said Herries. "He'll go on with his own idea, whatever we say. But if we're going to help him break bounds to meet a bogus detective, it seems to me that we're entitled to squeeze some fun out of the matter."

"Ha, ha! Yes; we'll all be at the meeting," grinned Blake. "We'll see Mr. Joseph Link, and see what kind of a hoss he is, and—— Hallo, Tom Merry!"

The hero of the Shell came in at the open doorway, the watch in his hand that he had borrowed of Blake.

"There's your watch," he said, "and many thanks."

"You're quite welcome. Who won the foot-race?"

"Oh, Hancock, an easy first! Have you discovered why Gussy won't lend his watch to anybody? I heard Mellish saying that he's pawned his ticker and bought a rolled-gold one, and is passing it off as the original," grinned Tom Merry.

"Well, that's partly fact and partly fiction, like most of Mellish's yarns," said Blake. "You'd better ask Gussy for the rest."

"Oh, I'm not curious!" said Tom Merry. "As I came in I heard you saying something about being present at a meeting. Anything on?"

"Why, what should be on?" said Blake evasively.

Tom Merry looked at him keenly.

"Well, I thought it might be a meeting of the hobby club, or something of the sort, or a feed, and you might want us to come."

"Oh, no; nothing of the kind!"

Tom Merry nodded and walked out of the study. As he went along the corridor he came in sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, walking with his head very erect, and a flush of indignation on his aristocratic face—probably caused by some remarks which were being addressed to him by a group of juniors lounging on the stairs.

"What price rolled gold, Gussy?"

"Who's pawned his watch?"

"Ha, ha! Three cheers for D'Arcy's uncle!"

Tom Merry grinned and passed on. He joined his chums, Manners and Lowther, in the corridor. Lowther tapped him on the shoulder.

"Going to play chess?" he asked.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, my sons, I'm not. I'm going to checkmate somebody, though, I think."

"What's on?" demanded Manners and Lowther together.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry frankly. "But there's something brewing in Study No. 6. I don't know what it is, but I expect it's something up against us, as Blake's especially friendly now with Figgins & Co., of the New House. We had better look into it—which means keeping an eye on those bounders this evening."

And that evening the Terrible Three were on the alert.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy's Detective.

"BAI Jove, there goes eight o'clock deah boys!"

The hour was booming out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's through the dim April night. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose to his feet.

Blake glanced at him over the teacups in Study No. 6. The chums of the Fourth were by no means finished tea yet.

"Is your appointment for eight?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah; as soon after eight as poss."

"Well, your bloodhound will have to wait a little bit; we haven't finished tea yet."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Another cup, Dig?"

"Well, yes; I don't mind if I do."

"Pass the sardines!" said Herries.

"Here you are! Cut us some bread, Gussy!"

"I am afwaid I have no time to cut any bwead," said D'Arcy, moving from the table. "I must keep my appointment with Mr. Link. Which of you fellows is goin' to come and help me ovah the beastly wall?"

"None, till we've finished tea."

"But my deah chap, I can't keep a man like Mr. Link waitin'!" expostulated D'Arcy. "He is feahfully busy now; he told me so in his letter, and clients are waitin' for him to be disengaged——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I cannot possibly keep him waitin'. Now, do come, like a decent chap, Blake, and help me ovah the beastly wall."

"How can I come when I am drinking my tea?"

"Hewwies, will you come?"

"How can I come when I am eating sardines?"

"Dig, I weally wish you would come and help me ovah!"

"How can I come when I haven't finished my jam-tart?"

"I wegard you as selfish boundahs. You place your wotten feedin' before wecovahin' my twenty-five guinea tickah. I wegard your conduct as wotten, and I despise you feahfully," said D'Arcy, glowering at the chums with his monocle screwed into his eye.

The Fourth-Formers only grinned.

"Well, if you wefuse to assist me, I suppose I must ask Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "He will pwobably want an explanation, which will be beastly awkward——"

"Wait a minute or two, Gussy, and we'll all come."

"Will you weally? Now, I wegard that as decent of you, and I withdwaw my words about you bein' wottahs," said D'Arcy gracefully. "Pway be as quick as you can!"

The chums of the Fourth were obliging in this respect. Herries bolted his sardines, Digby devoured the jam-tart in record time, and Blake swallowed his tea at a gulp. Then they rose and announced that they were ready.

"Follow me, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

And the four chums made their way from the study, and out of the School House, into the dusky quadrangle. Three pairs of eyes followed them from along the passage.

"They're going out!" murmured Tom Merry.

"And so are we!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Right-ho! Come along!"

Unconscious of the fact that the Terrible Three were on the track, Blake and his chums crossed the quadrangle to the familiar spot where they had broken bounds before. The wall was shaded by a thick, overhanging tree, which aided the ascent, though it was difficult to get up without assistance. Arthur Augustus halted under the big tree and put his eyeglass in his pocket.

"Now give me a bunk up, deah boys."

"Right-ho! Here goes!"

Blake and Herries seized the swell of the School House, and hoisted him up with such suddenness that his breath was taken away.

"Pway—pway don't be so beastly quick!" gasped D'Arcy. "And I cannot get hold of the wall! You are on the w'ong side of the twee."

"My mistake," said Blake. "Haul him round, Herries."

And D'Arcy was brought against the wall with a bump.

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Anything wrong, now?"

"You have bumped me most bwutally, and soiled my coat. My necktie, too, has become disawwanged, I believe. I cannot help suspectin' that you did that on purpose."

"What a suspicious chap you are! Have you got hold of the top of the wall yet?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Then we'll let go."

"Don't let go yet!" shrieked D'Arcy! "I shall fall to the gwound! Wait till I have got a good hold."

"Oh, all right! You're a long time about it, you know!"

"I have to waste so much time wemonstwatin' with you silly asses."

"All right now?"

"Yaas, wathah! That is all wight."

And Arthur Augustus pulled himself upon the top of the wall.

"Now, deah boys, are you goin' to wait for me, to help me come in again, or shall I let down the wope fwom the twee?"

"You had better let down the wope fwom the twee," said Blake, grinning. "We're not going to hang around this romantic spot on a damp evening, I assure you."

"Vewy good! It's just as you like, deah boys."

Arthur Augustus drew a knotted rope from a hollow in the tree, above the lower branches, and looped it over a branch, and let it fall on the outside of the wall. The knotted rope had often served the juniors of St. Jim's well.

"Au revoir, deah boys!" said D'Arcy.

And he swung himself down the rope and disappeared.

Blake gave a chuckle.

"We shall see him again sooner than he thinks," he murmured. "We're not going to miss this interview! Give us a bunk up, Dig!"

Digby obliged, and then Herries did the same for him, and then Blake and Digby reached down and helped Herries to the top of the wall. Blake looked out into the dim night, and discerned the figure of Arthur Augustus on the other side of the road.

"Come on, kids!"

The chums dropped silently into the road. On the other side was a row of thick trees, and under the trees the swell of St. Jim's had disappeared. It was evidently here that he was to meet the detective by appointment.

"Quiet does it!" murmured Blake.

The three juniors were soon in the shadow of the trees. The sound of the School House swell's voice came to their ears.

"Are you there, my good fwiend?"

"Here I am, sir!"

It was an oily voice, with a tone in it that made Blake take a dislike to the speaker without even seeing him. A man of spare frame, with a bowler hat and a rather seedy coat, loomed up in the shadows.

Arthur Augustus looked at him curiously.

"Are you Mr. Link?" he inquired.

"Certainly, sir!"

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and took a keener survey of the stranger. Seediness was Mr. Link's most pronounced trait. His coat was seedy, his trousers were seedy, his boots and hat were seedy. His face looked the seediest of all, bearing traces of strong drink and irregular habits discernible even in the dusk of the evening.

"Bai Jove, I am wathah surpwised!"

"Indeed! How do you mean? You are Master D'Arcy, I presume?"

"Yaas, wathah! But you are not weally like the person I expected to see."

"Indeed! What did you expect to see?" asked the stranger, with a rather unpleasant note in his voice.

"Well, weally, I don't exactly know," said Arthur Augustus. "Somethin' like Fewwahs Locke, I suppose—decently dwessed and clean-shaven and wespectable, you know!"

The stranger's eyes glinted for a moment. But the next he broke into a chuckle, which was very well assumed if it was not genuine.

"My dear young sir, you surely did not expect me to come here in my own proper person?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I see! You are in disguise?" said D'Arcy, greatly interested.

"Of course! Surely you do not imagine that a famous detective like myself wears these seedy clothes from necessity?"

"That was weally what surpwised me."

"My dear sir, this is a skilful disguise, and I flatter myself that no one looking at me would guess that I was a man of great wealth, and known in every corner of the country as the greatest detective of modern times."

"No, bai Jove, I don't think anybody would!"

"I am so well known that it would not do for me even to come to a quiet place like this without disguise," explained Mr. Link. "Some reporter would be certain to find me out, and my movements would be chronicled in the daily papers."

D'Arcy was greatly impressed.

"Bai Jove! Would they weally?" he murmured.

"Certainly! What do you think of my make-up, Master D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus surveyed his features.

"You look as if you were in the habit of dwinkin' spiwits," he said, "and as if you did not wash vewy often."

"Ha, ha! It took me two hours to make-up like that."

"Did it weally? I weally beg your pardon, Mr. Link. I thought it was quite weal, you know, when I saw you," said D'Arcy.

"Good! That is a testimony to the excellence of my disguise, so I freely accept your apology. But now to come down to business. You have lost a watch?"

"Yaas; a twenty-five guinea tickah!"

"Has it been stolen?"

"I am afwaid so. I don't see how it could get lost, you know. I think it must have been stolen in the village. I had a stwuggle with some of the Gwammah School boys in the tuckshop on Saturday. I should be sowwy to suspect any of them of takin' it. But it was gone on Saturday night."

"Have you made the loss public?"

"No. I thought it bettah to keep it a secwet, and inform no one that I was employin' a detective," said D'Arcy.

Mr. Link seemed relieved.

"Good!" he said. "You had better keep my presence here a profound secret."

"I have alweady had to take thwee fwiends of mine into my confidence on the mattah, but I can twust them."

"Mind that they keep the secret! My presence here must be known to as few as possible. I shall put up in the village, and begin investigating the case at once."

"Vewy good! The Wylcombe Arms is a most wespectable inn——"

"Ahem! To keep up my assumed character, I think I had better go to a cheap and common place. The Golden Pig will be nearer the mark. In fact, I engaged a room there when I arrived in Rylcombe this evening. I shall take up the investigation at once. You remember that I require two pounds for preliminary expenses. I suppose you are prepared to pay that at once?"

"You wemembah I sent you a postal ordah for a pound as a guawantee——"

"Certainly; but that was an advance of the fees. I require two pounds simply for preliminary expenses."

"Do you mean that I am to pay you two pounds now, instead of one?"

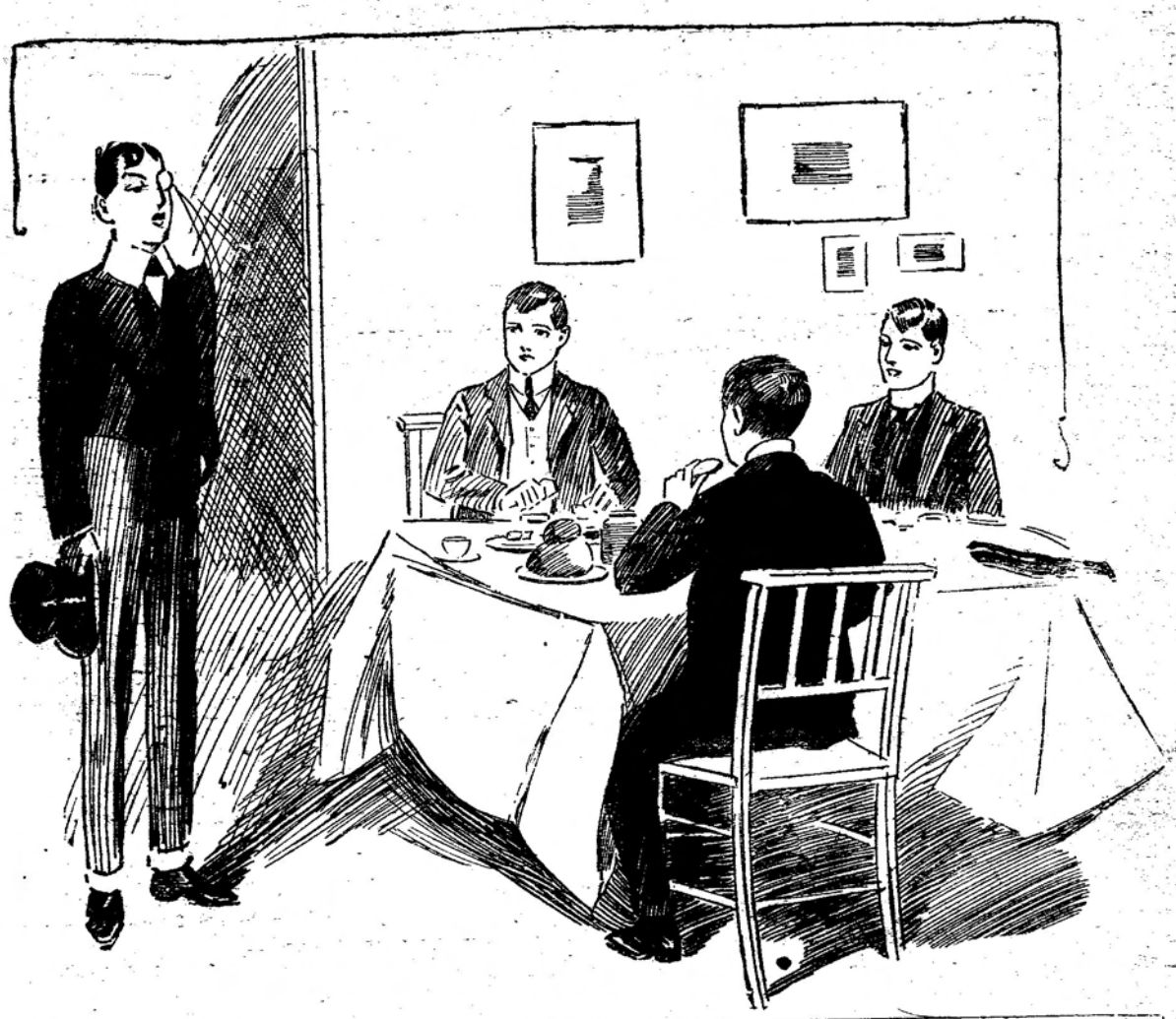
"That is it. I am sorry that there has been any misunderstanding, but I am afraid I could not depart from my usual rules."

Arthur Augustus hesitated a little. He was not mean, and he had ample pocket-money from his father, a noble earl; still, a pound was a pound.

"Of course, I may as well tell you now that I am quite certain of success," remarked the detective. "A case of this kind is simply child's play to me, after handling cases of international importance."

"Yaas, I suppose so. I will make it two pounds, Mr. Link."

"Thank you! It will come to the same thing in the long run, as you will have a pound less to pay me when I have finished the case."



"You place your wotten feedin' before wecovawin' my twenty-five guinea watch!" said D'Arcy.

"Yaas, that is vewy twue."

Two glimmering sovereigns changed hands. A grin of satisfaction overspread the seedy, flabby face of Mr. Link.

"Thank you!" he said. "Now I will get to work at once. If you want to see me again, come to the Golden Pig in Rylcombe."

"We are not allowed to go there. It is a wotten place!"

"You can manage it secretly, I suppose. Or you can write to me there, and I can meet you somewhere else. It will be necessary for us to consult from time to time."

"Yaas, I suppose so."

"I will get along to the village now, and commence my investigations."

The thirsty twinkle in the detective's eye might have betrayed to one more observant than D'Arcy that he was eager to get to the Golden Pig for other reasons. But Arthur Augustus was not of a suspicious nature.

"Vewy good. Pway weport to me as soon as you are on the twack of the beastly thief, you know. I particulahly want to wecovah my watch before my governah comes down to the school."

"I think I can answer for that. The case will not occupy me more than a few days at the most."

"Good. Look here, to-morrow is a half-holiday at this place, and I will meet you aftah dinnah at the stile in the lane—you know it, near Wylcombe. Then you can weport pwogwess."

"I will be there, unless, of course, the exigencies of the case require my presence elsewhere. Good-night, Master D'Arcy."

"Good-night, Mr. Link."

The seedy detective disappeared down the lane. D'Arcy rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Bai Jove, I weally think he is a wippin' detective," he murmured. "He is certainly vewy clevah at disguisin' himself! Anybody seein' him now would take him for a low, drunken blackguard, by Jove."

There was a chuckle in the gloom.

Arthur Augustus started, and looked round hastily. Three youthful forms loomed up to view under the trees.

"Bai Jove! Who's that? Is that you, Figgins?"

"No, it isn't."

It was Blake's voice. D'Arcy frowned.

"Blake, Dig, Hewwies, I wegard this intwusion as impertinent!"

"Ha, ha! You see, we're watching over you, Gussy! We're not going to allow you to be done. How did you know that Mr. Josephus Link wouldn't knock you on the head, and go through your pockets?"

"He is a famous detective."

"A famous swindler, rather!"

"Of course, he was in disguise."

"Ha, ha! It took him more than two hours to get that complexion on, I fancy," Blake chuckled. "More like ten years, and it wasn't put on outside, either. It was manufactured by pouring whisky down the inside of his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you are only betwayin' your ignowance of the subject!" said D'Arcy. "I wegard Mr. Link as an extwemely clevah detective, and his disguise was simply perfect. I have evewy hope of wecovahin' my watch."

"If Mr. Link discovers it, do you think he will return it to you?" asked Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I fancy you'll find that's a little mistake," grinned Blake. "Still, as he won't find it, there's not much chance of his pawning it and sloping with the proceeds, which, I'm pretty certain, is what he would do."

"You are widiculously pwejudiced against Mr. Link," said D'Arcy loftily. "You will see how the case will turn out. Pway let us weturn now to the school before we are missed."

The chums chuckled as they crossed the lane again to the wall. They had heard nearly all the interview, and they had a pretty clear idea as to the true character of Joseph Link, detective. But D'Arcy was obstinate, and his faith in the detective was great.

"Hallo! Where's the rope?" exclaimed Blake, feeling in the darkness against the wall for the knotted rope. "It's gone!"

"Gone!" ejaculated Digby.

"Yes; look!"

"Bai Jove, there's someone on the wall!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"There's three!" grunted Blake, straining his eyes upwards. "And by George, I know who they are! Tom Merry, you rotter, let down that rope!"

Three distinct chuckles from the top of the school wall answered that request. In the dim night, the three chums of the Shell could be seen sitting on top of the wall, in the place where the Fourth-Formers had crossed it. The rope had been pulled up, and the Terrible Three were masters of the situation.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry Makes Terms.

"TOM MERRY!"

"Hallo?"

"Let down that rope!"

"Any hurry?" asked the hero of the Shell, in a leisurely tone.

"Yaas, wathah! We want to come in!"

"They want to come in, kids," said Tom Merry, addressing his two companions. "This is where we obey their orders in fear and trembling—I don't think!"

"Let down that rope!" howled Blake. "If I have to climb up, I'll make it warm for you!"

"If you climb up, with us here to push you down, you will be a cleverer kid than I take you for, Blake!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry shook his head solemnly.

"I'm afraid it can't be done, Blake," he remarked.

Blake appeared to think so, too, for he did not make the attempt. He gave the Terrible Three a withering glance, which did not appear to affect them much, however.

"Are you going to let down that rope?" exclaimed Digby.

"Not yet."

"What's your confounded game?"

"Hand up the grub."

"The what?"

"The grub!" said the Terrible Three in one voice.

"What gwub?" demanded D'Arcy. "There's no beastly gwub here? What are you talkin' about, you duffahs?"

"Do you mean to say that you haven't been out to get in a feed?" demanded Tom Merry.

Blake chuckled.

"No, we haven't, so you're done this time. You may as well let us come in."

"No hurry. I must be satisfied first——"

"I hope you do not doubt the word of any gentleman here pwesent, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"I wouldn't dream of it," said Tom Merry. "But if you haven't been out after a feed, what have you been out for?"

"That's our own pwivate affaih, Tom Mewwy."

"Not at all. As a member of a higher Form——"

"How much higher?" demanded Blake rather excitedly.

"And as a fellow older than any of you——"

"Two months and seven days!" ejaculated Blake disparagingly.

"And much more experienced——"

"Rats! And many of 'em!"

"And as head of the juniors of the School House——"

"Wats!"

"I feel compelled to look into this matter," said Tom Merry. "If you kids——"

"Who are you calling kids?"

"If you kids," went on Tom Merry imperturbably, "have been up to some mischief, you must explain all about it before we let you in. In this matter we are acting from a sense of duty—aren't we, chaps?"

"We are," said Lowther.

"We is!" said Manners solemnly.

"You see how the case stands, Blake. Explain yourselves——"

"I for one wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Yes, by Jove, you cheeky Shell bounders——"

"Then you stay where you are," said Tom Merry. "We can sit on top of this wall till bedtime, if you like."

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"I'm looking."

"Let down that rope!"

"Rats!"

"We can't stay out here."

"Oh, you'll get used to it! You can get used to anything in the long run."

"You horrid rotters——"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as thwee extwemely howwid wottahs, deah boys! But wathah than wemain out here, I am willin' to explain, on condition that you let the mattah go no furthah."

"I think we can agree to that," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Certainly!" said Manners and Lowther.

"Vewy well. I have lately lost my watch——"

"The brass one?" asked Tom Merry.

"It is not bwass; it is wolled gold. But that is not the one I have lost—I lost my own twenty-five guinea tickah, and I have been wearin' this wotten wolled gold thing in the place of it, you see."

"I see. That explains the mystery. I thought you were rather a pig for not lending me your watch."

"I am sowwy that you should have labouwed undah a misappwehension, Tom Mewwy. The fact is that I have lost my watch, and am employin' a detective to find it or to discovah the thief, and I have just met him."

"A—a—a what?"

"A detective—the famous detective, Mr. Joseph Link!"

"My only hat!"

"Why didn't you give Skimpole the job?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Pway don't be fwivolous, Lowthah. Now, Tom Mewwy, I have acquainted you with the circs., so pway let down the wope."

"I don't know whether I can approve——"

"It weally does not mattah to me whethah you appwove or not," explained D'Arcy. "I wegard your pwesence here as wathah impertinent. I—— My only aunt! Whatevah is the mattah?"

There was reason for D'Arcy's sudden amazed ejaculation. For all of a sudden, without the slightest warning, the Terrible Three came tumbling off the wall, as if pushed by unseen hands behind. They clung and clutched at it desperately, and held on for a moment, and as they hung there, four heads rose into view in the gloom above the wall.

"Figgins!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

There was a chuckle, and strong hands pushed the chums of the Shell from their hold upon the wall. They dropped into the lane, and Figgins & Co., the chums of the New House, sat grinning on the wall in their place.

CHAPTER 6.

Caught.

TOM MERRY alighted upon his feet and rolled over, but he was up again in a moment. Lowther and Manners sat down in the lane, and were slower to rise. From Blake, Digby, Herries, and D'Arcy came a simultaneous chuckle. The sudden fall of the Terrible Three from their coign of vantage seemed funny to the chums of the Fourth.

Figgins & Co. grinned down at the School House boys.

"I really think we score here," said Figgins. "What do you think, Kerr?"

"My idea exactly," said Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co. "Of course, these School House kids can't expect to have any show against us."

"Of course not," said Marmaduke Smythe. "I hope you haven't bumped yourself too hard, Tom Merry. Sorry we couldn't give you notice."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Fatty Wynn. "My word! If you're not off, you kids!"

"Well, they are off, and no mistake," Blake remarked. "Now, Figgins, let down the rope like a good chap; we've been out here long enough."

Figgins laughed.

"Yes, I've heard all about it. So D'Arcy is employing a detective to look for his watch! My only hat! This is too rich for anything."

"Weally, Figgins——"

"You ought to have given the case to Skimpole, and supported home industries," said Kerr, with a shake of the head.

"Oh, don't wot, you know!"

"Let down that rope!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Any hurry?" grinned Figgins. "You weren't in any

great haste, that I noticed, to let it down yourself when you were up here."

"Confound you——"

"Ha, ha! Hear us smile. This is where we grin," said Figgins. "Of course, I don't want to keep you out all night. It wouldn't be good for youths of your tender years. As head of the juniors of St. Jim's——"

"Rats!"

"I regard you as being under my wing," said Figgins benevolently. "I think we will let you in, if you promise to be good little boys——"

"Catch us!"

"And admit that the New House is cock house of St. Jim's."

"No fear!"

"Then you can stay where you are," said Figgins comfortably. "We don't mind sitting on this wall till bedtime, as Tom Merry remarked."

The School House boys looked at Figgins, and at one another. The New House quartette certainly had matters entirely in their own hands, unless the seven lads outside could scale the wall and displace them. And that did not seem a hopeful task.

"Well, what do you think?" said Figgins, after a pause.

"We're coming in," said Tom Merry resolutely. "I say, you fellows, will you back me up in getting over the wall?"

"None of your nerve," grunted Blake. "You back us up, and that will be good enough."

"Oh, come, be sensible!"

"Here goes!" exclaimed Herries. "Follow me!"

"Follow me, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, at the same moment.

He dashed at the wall, and made a spring upward. His hands did not reach the top, and as he dropped back Figgins reached out and flattened the cap over his eyes. Herries just touched the wall, and was pushed back by Marmaduke.

"That's no good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You must bunk us up——"

"You bunk us up, then," said Digby.

"Oh, all right—anything for a quiet life!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You're out of it, Gussy. Here you are, Blake!"

"I wefuse to be out of it. You can bunk me up instead of Blake or Digby or Hewwies. I uttahly wefuse——"

"Now get out of the way, Gussy."

"I distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Oh, let Gussy come up!" called out Kerr. "Give me a chance at his fancy waistcoat."

The swell of the School House stepped back.

"Upon second thoughts, Tom Mewwy, you needn't twouble to bunk me up. Go ahead, deah boys; go in and win!"

And the Terrible Three "bunked up" Blake, Herries, and Digby. But the New House juniors were ready for them. Figgins & Co.'s position was too strong. They simply had to reach out and push away their assailants. And they did! Blake went backwards, dragging Tom Merry with him in a heap to the ground. The hero of the Shell gasped as he bumped down with the Fourth Form leader sprawling across him.

"Well, you are a clumsy ass!" he exclaimed.

"What do you call yourself?" said Blake hotly. "If you had stood steadier on your pins——"

"If you had caught hold——"

"If you hadn't stumbled——"

"If you had had the sense of a mouse——"

"If you'd been anything but a howling lunatic——"

"Oh, pway don't wag one another, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "It was weally an unavoidable occuwwence. Lowthah is down, too, with Digby—and there go Mannahs and Hewwies."

It was true. Figgins & Co. had repulsed the attack without turning a hair, and were grinning down upon their defeated foes from the top of the wall.

"Going to admit that New House is cock house?" asked Figgins pleasantly.

"No!" shouted Blake.

"Never!" said Tom Merry.

"Then—— Hallo! Cave!" said Figgins hastily.

The four New House juniors disappeared into the tree. A voice was heard on the inner side of the wall, a voice quite audible to the juniors standing out in the lane, and which they knew well.

"What is all this noise about?"

It was the voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. Blake gave a grunt.

"The game's up now!"

"Not a word!" whispered Tom Merry. "He mayn't discover anything——"

"Bet you he will, though!"

"Who's in that tree?"

Kildare's voice rang out sharply. Figgins & Co.'s hasty retreat into the branches had not been made without a swaying and rustling, and though they were hidden from sight in the gloom, the captain of the school knew perfectly well that they were there, although he did not know their identity.

There was no reply.

"Who's in that tree? Show yourself at once."

"Oh, very well, Kildare!" said Figgins, showing himself. "I really don't see why you should be so particular about a chap's climbing into a tree for exercise."

The captain of St. Jim's looked up grimly at the New House junior.

"Did you climb into that tree for exercise, Figgins?"

"Well, yes, and—and——"

"And for other reasons?"

"Perhaps so. You ought not to be so curious, Kildare. It used not to be one of your failings," said Figgins reproachfully.

"You climbed up there to get over the wall and break bounds," said Kildare.

"Nothing of the sort."

"Come down here—all of you."

"All of me? I'm not likely to leave any of my arms or legs in the tree, Kildare," said Figgins, as he made his way down the gnarled trunk.

"I don't mean that, Figgins. I mean all of you who are in the tree. I don't think I'm mistaken in supposing that Kerr, Wynn, and Smythe are with you."

"How suspicious you are this evening, Kildare!"

"Are they there?" demanded the captain of St. Jim's.

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact, they are!" admitted Figgins.

"Then come down, all of you, and sharp!"

The four juniors descended from the tree, and stood before the captain of the school, looking very sheepish. Kildare eyed them.

"What were you doing in that tree?"

"Oh, we just climbed up, you know!" said Kerr.

"You did not intend to break bounds?"

"Certainly not," said the four promptly.

Kildare looked puzzled. He did not believe that any of the four would tell him an untruth, but if they had not intended to break bounds, he could imagine no possible reason for their being in the tree.

"Where is Tom Merry?" he asked. "I heard his voice as I came up. Where is he?"

"Tom Merry!" repeated Figgins, to gain time. "Did you say Tom Merry, Kildare?"

"Yes, you know I did. Where is he?"

Figgins looked round in the gloom, and shook his head.

"I can't see him," he said. "Can you, Kerr?"

"No," said Kerr, "I can't."

"Nor I," remarked Fatty Wynn. "You see, Kildare——"

"I don't expect you to see him," said Kildare. "But you know where he is, and you had better tell me, before I march you off to your House prefect for a licking!"

"Well, as a matter of fact——"

"We may as well own up, Tom Mewwy!" came a voice in the silence, from over the wall. "It is imposs. to pwevent Kildare learnin' the facts now."

Kildare gave a start.

"You utter young idiot!" growled Lowther. "You've given the whole show away now!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I suppose we should have had to own up," he said. "It's all right, Kildare. Go and open the gate for us like a good boy. We're out of bounds."

"H'm! I thought something of the sort," said Kildare. "Go along to the gate, all of you, and I will let you in."

The captain of the school went to the side gate, and opened it. The School House juniors came in, with painful anticipation in their looks. Kildare closed the gate, and locked it again. Then he looked grimly at the penitent seven.

"Where have you been?"

"In the lane," said Tom Merry.

"Nowhere else."

"No."

"H'm! I can take your word for it," said Kildare. "I don't know whether I ought to report you to the Head. But I know I can take your word, and that you are not the sort of fellows to go down to the Golden Pig, like some of the juniors. You can take fifty lines each, and, mind, no more of this!"

And the captain of St. Jim's walked away.

The juniors breathed more freely.

"Bai Jove, Kildare is a bwick!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"We might have been taken up before the Head, you know, which would have been deuced awkward, deah boys. I shall weally do my fifty lines with pleasure."

"Then you can do mine, too, if you are so pleased," said Blake. "Figgins, you ass!"

"I say, we're sorry," said Figgins. "Couldn't foresee that, you know. After all, it was really your own fault. Little boys should keep within bounds.

"Bai Jove, you know, deah boys, I weally think that we ought to wade in and give Figgins & Co. a feahful thwashin'!"

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed half a dozen voices

But Figgins & Co. were already retreating to their own house, and they vanished into the darkness as the School House seven made a forward move.

"Oh, they're gone!" grunted Blake. "I vote that we frog's-march Gussy round the quad, for going out to meet that bogus detective. That was the beginning of all the trouble. Why, where is he?"

D'Arcy had vanished, too.

CHAPTER 7.

Skimpole Takes the Case.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came into Study No. 6 rather breathlessly. He had left his friends in the quad in rather a hurry. The gas was burning in the study as the swell of the School House entered, and a well-known form was sitting in the easy-chair before the fire. A youth with a large head, a bumpy forehead, and a big pair of spectacles, rose to his feet as D'Arcy came in.

"Bai Jove, it's Skimpole," said D'Arcy. "What do you want, Skimpole? I weally twust that you haven't come here to talk Socialism, deah boy!"

Skimpole shook his head.

"I am no longer doing the propagandist work of Socialism," he replied. "I am giving that a rest for the present, since I have discovered my remarkable vocation for amateur detective work. I hear that you have lost a watch, D'Arcy."

"Oh, do you?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Either lost or stolen."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Some of the fellows say you have pawned it, and blued the money, and are wearing a brass watch in the place of it," remarked Skimpole.

"It is not bwass; it is wolled gold."

"But your old watch—is it really pawned, or is it lost?"

"Oh, wats! Do I look like a fellow to pawn a beastly watch? It's lost, as you are so extwemely cuwious about the mattah."

"Lost, or stolen?"

"My dear chap, I am not goin' to talk about it. I have taken steps to wecovah the thing, and that is all wight."

"Not at all." Skimpole drew out a huge notebook and a big pencil. "Pray place the case in my hands, and I assure you that I shall discover your watch. I shall claim no fee or reward, not even personal expenses. I am working simply for fame."

"I wegard you as an ass, Skimpole."

"Never mind. Give me the case, and I will find the watch. Where did you lose it? Were you attacked and robbed, or——"

"Or robbed and attacked?" said Blake, entering the study with Digby and Herries. "I see you're going in for some more detectives, Gussy. Why not have an army of them, while you're about it?"

Skimpole glanced at him frowningly.

"Don't interrupt, Blake, please. I am taking down the details of the case. Where did you lose the watch, D'Arcy?"

"I weally don't know."

"It disappeared, I suppose?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Were you wearing it at the time?"

"Yaas."

"Then we must conclude that it was stolen, as it could hardly become accidentally detached from the chain, could it?"

"Vewy pwob."

"Good. I shall immediately take up the case of the stolen watch."

"What about the works?" asked Blake.

"Eh? What works?"

"The works of the watch."

"I don't quite understand you."

"Then you're an ass. You say you're going to take up the case of the watch, and I want to know what you are going to do with the works."

"Ha, ha! That is wathah funnay!"

"Don't be frivolous, Blake!" said Skimpole. "This is a grave matter, as until the watch is found, suspicion rests upon every inhabitant of the school."

"Ass!"

"I mean what I say. The watch has evidently been stolen, and if a theft is committed, there must be a thief somewhere."

"Did you work that out in your own brain, without the aid of a net?"

"Certainly," said Skimpole, who was never known to see a joke. "Suspicion in the first place rests upon the occupants of this study."

"What?" roared Blake, Digby, and Herries together.

"I mean what I say," said Skimpole firmly. "As you three fellows have every opportunity of stealing one another's things——"

"You unutterable idiot!"

"Please don't call me names. Suspicion rests upon Blake, Herries, and Digby."

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Skimpole."

"You are not a detective," said Skimpole, with a lofty wave of the hand. "A detective is no respecter of persons. I suspect everybody till I have found out the true culprit. If the watch were insured, I should, of course, suspect you of having made away with it yourself."

"Bai Jove!"

"As it is, suspicion rests, I say, upon your study-mates. I will now proceed to question them."

Blake, Digby, and Herries looked at one another. They were usually very patient with Skimpole, who was a good-natured fellow, though very trying at times. But this time their patience was rapidly getting exhausted.

"Blake, have you lately been expending a larger sum of money than would be reasonably accounted for by the extent of your allowance?"

"My only hat!"

"Has anyone here observed whether Blake has been doing so?"

"Yes," said Digby. "There's that motor-car he bought the other day."

Herries grinned.

"And the fancy-dress ball he gave in the wood-shed," said Herries.

"That must have come expensive," said Digby, "to say nothing of a thousand pounds he lost at bridge."

Skimpole looked annoyed.

"You are simply rotting, you fellows!"

"Well, you wanted some information."

"Yes; but seriously."

"Sewiously," said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as a gweat piece of feahful impertinence on your part, Skimpole, to come here and talk your silly wot about suspectin' my fwiends. Get out of the study!"

"But I must have the details!"

"Outside!" roared Blake.

"But I must——"

"Oh, collah him, deah boys, and thwow him out!"

"Hands off! I really must—ow! Oh!"

Skimpole was promptly collared and thrown out. He sprawled in the passage with a bump. His notebook went one way and his pencil another. He sat up and looked indignantly at the four grinning faces in the doorway of Study No. 6.

"I have been treated outrageously——"

"You will be tweated more outwageously if you come here again with your silly wot!" said Arthur Augustus, wagging a warning finger at him.

The amateur detective of St. Jim's rose to his feet.

"I shall not give up the case!" he exclaimed. "I shall pursue my investigations in spite of this absurd opposition. Blake's violence proves to me that my suspicions are not without foundation."

"What do you mean?" roared Blake.

"I know what I mean! An innocent man does not immediately proceed to violence. I shall recover your watch,



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D'Arcy, and you will then have proof that your confidence has been misplaced."

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Blake. "I'll——"

He rushed from the study. The amateur detective of the School House skipped along the passage with remarkable agility, and disappeared. Blake came back with a wrathful countenance.

"I shall be the death of that funny merchant if they don't take him off to a lunatic asylum!" he remarked. "He'll spread it all over the school that I've stolen your ticker. Of course, it's all your fault, D'Arcy."

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"Yes, it is! What do you mean by losing your watch? And I shouldn't be surprised if it was lying about somewhere under your very nose, too, all the time!"

"My dear kid, it's all wight; Mr. Link will soon find the watch——"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.

CHAPTER 8.

Mr. Link keeps his Appointment.

"COMING out, kids?"

It was Tom Merry who spoke. He came along with Manners and Lowther after dinner the next day, which was Wednesday and a half-holiday at St. Jim's. The chums of Study No. 6 were standing at the door looking out into the quadrangle. The quad was bright with April sunshine, and the old trees were growing very green.

"Where are you going?" asked Blake.

"We were thinking of a run up to the ruined castle," said Tom Merry. "It's ripping in the woods on a fine afternoon like this!"

"Right-ho, we'll come along!"

"Excuse me, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "I am afwaid it will be imposs. for me to accompany you. I am weally sowwy!"

"Why, what are you going to do?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I have to keep an appointment, deah boy!"

"Oh, of course, with that detective chap!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, keep it! Come along, kids, let's get out!" said Tom Merry; and the juniors crowded down the School House steps, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy standing alone.

The swell of the School House glanced absently at his watch, forgetting for the moment that the rolled-gold timekeeper would not go. Then he smiled and stepped out into the quad, and glanced up at the clock-tower.

"Bai Jove! It's about time I started," he murmured.

To go into the house and fetch a silk hat was the work of a few minutes. Moments would have been enough for anybody else, but D'Arcy had to carefully brush the hat. Then he sallied forth, and leaving the school behind, went down towards the stile in Rylcombe Lane.

Arthur Augustus was looking very nice this afternoon. His fancy waistcoat contained all the colours of the rainbow, and a few more skilfully worked in, and his boots were aggressively shiny, his trousers creased to perfection, his collar as high and as white as could be desired. His necktie was tied as only Gussy could tie it, and his silk hat reflected the sunshine almost like a mirror.

D'Arcy picked his way along the lane. The ground was muddy from a recent April shower, and the ditch was running full. The swell of St. Jim's came in sight of the stile, shadowed over by great oaks and beeches, a shady and picturesque spot. There was no one there.

"Bai Jove, I suppose I am wathah early!"

D'Arcy would have leaned against the stile to wait, but he was afraid of soiling his coat. He would have sat upon it, but he was afraid of soiling his trousers. He had no resource but to stand upright like a sentry and watch the lane from Rylcombe for the detective to appear in sight.

"Ah, there he is!" he murmured at last.

The seedy figure of Mr. Joseph Link had come into view. In the bright April daylight the detective seemed seedier and squalider than ever. And there was a peculiarity in his motions which D'Arcy observed at once, and which puzzled him considerably.

Instead of walking straight along the lane, Mr. Link was lurching from side to side in a strangely unsteady and wholly unaccountable way.

First to one side, and then to the other, and sometimes appearing nearly about to fall. But considering the wide lurches he made, he displayed a wonderful skill in keeping on his feet.

"My hat!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "What can possibly be the matter with him? I am weally surpwised!"

The detective came closer to the waiting junior. His face was flushed, and his eyes had a fishy look. He looked at D'Arcy as if not recognising him.

"Good-aftahnoon, Mr. Link!"

"Yes, certainly!" said Mr. Link. "You are the—er—of course——"

"I am Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

"Yes, certainly. You have stolen a watch!"

D'Arcy gave a start.

"Weally, Mr. Link, this is no mattah for joking!"

The detective nodded solemnly.

"You are quite right, my lad. As you—h'm—say, it is no—h'm! I am Joseph Link, the detective, the famous detective, I may say!"

"Yaas, I am perfectly aware of that," said D'Arcy, more and more amazed by the strange manner of the detective.

Any commonplace man appearing with that flushed face, thick voice, and unsteady manner, might have been supposed to be intoxicated. But, of course, such a supposition was quite inadmissible in the case of Mr. Link.

"I am glad you are aware of it," said Mr. Link aggressively. "I am very glad indeed that you are aware of it. I had a feeling that you had some doubts upon that point—upon the subject, I should say, Master Carson——"

"D'Arcy—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy——"

"I prefer to call you Carson. I suppose I can please myself in this manner, without asking permission of a boy."

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Looking at you?" murmured the amazed D'Arcy.

"Yes, sir! You were looking at me," said Mr. Link. "Don't deny it! I distinctly saw you looking at me!"

"Bai Jove! Why shouldn't I look at you?"

"Yes, yes, that is very true! A cat may look at a king—certainly, a king may also look at a cat, in all probability," said Mr. Link, in an extremely thoughtful way. "Have you ever turned that question over in your mind, my young friend?"

"What question?"

"The—the question—whether a king—lemme see—I've quite forgotten. As I was saying, however, I will not stand any of your impertinence!"

Arthur Augustus could only gasp.

"You think because you see me in a shabby coat that you can treat me with insolent disdain," said Mr. Link. "You do not seem to be aware that this is simply a disguise—adopted for the purposes of my profession."

"Yaas, don't you wemembah tellin' me so last night?"

"If you say I told you so, you lie," said Mr. Link, with surprising directness. "Yes, I repeat it. You lie. I am an actor—I have distinguished myself upon the Thespian boards. I have played detective parts with great success. Aha! I have a clue! It is you who are the red-handed assassin!"

He lurched towards D'Arcy. The amazed junior retreated in alarm. Mr. Link took a grip upon the top bar of the stile to steady himself.

"Yes, it is you who have stolen a watch," he went on, rather dazedly. "I can see that you are looking at me. If you imagine that I am intoxicated, you are a fool! I repeat it! It is true that the April sunshine has somewhat dazzled me!"

"Bai Jove! The fellow's dwunk!" murmured D'Arcy.

"I received two pounds last night," said Mr. Link. "Have I those two pounds now in my pockets? Certainly not. They have been expended for the good of trade. The ruby wine has flowed. It flowed last night. It flowed again at my lunch to-day. But if you imagine that I am in the slightest degree intoxicated, I repeat that you lie in your teeth. I am Joseph Link, the famous detective."

And, possibly by way of proving that he was not intoxicated, Mr. Joseph Link, the famous detective, clung to the stile with both hands.

Arthur Augustus surveyed him in utter disgust.

Even the unsuspicious swell of St. Jim's could entertain no further doubt that the man had been drinking at that early hour of the day, and had become intoxicated. The sight of a man under the influence of drink is always a painful one to a thoughtful lad, and D'Arcy was as much distressed as disgusted.

"I weally think you had bettah go home, Mr. Link," he said.

"I have not the slightest desire to go home," said Mr. Link, fixing a glassy stare upon D'Arcy. "Pray, why should I go home?"

"You ought to lie down."

"Certainly not! I have no intention whatever of lying down. Perhaps you think that I am a trifle under the influence of liquor? I will show you how straight I can walk, you impertinent young scoundrel!"

Mr. Link left the stile, and started to walk across the lane. D'Arcy dodged out of the way as the famous detective zigzagged through the mud, and finally collapsed in the middle of the road with a splash.

"Bai Jove!"

Joseph Link sat up in a puddle with a dazed expression.

"Let me help you up," said D'Arcy, approaching him rather gingerly. "I—I will help you to the village, if you like."

"If you mean to insinuate that I am not able to help myself, you lie!" said Mr. Link. "It is true that, with the earth moving about so quickly under one's feet, it is rather difficult to keep footing. Before I leave this district I shall speak to the local authorities upon this subject. It is simply infamous that a public road should be in this wobbling and unsafe condition, to the danger of pedestrians."

D'Arcy could not help grinning.

Mr. Link staggered to his feet and lurched about wildly, and the good-natured swell of St. Jim's caught him to steady him.

"Ah, so I have caught you at last, have I?" exclaimed Mr. Link, clutching hold of D'Arcy. "Come with me at once to the lock-up!"

"I say—what are you dwivin' at?" gasped D'Arcy.

"You are the rascal who stole the watch!"

"No; it was my watch that was stolen!"

"It makes no difference. I am Joseph Link, the famous detective. A trifle like that is of no consequence. Come to the station!"

And Mr. Link lurched along the road, dragging the perplexed and struggling swell of St. Jim's with him.

"Pway don't be an ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Welease me, you intoxicated wottah! If you wowwy me like this I shall lose my tempah and stwike you."

"Ah! You would strike Joseph Link, the famous detective? Come to the station! If you show fight I shall use force, and anything you say will be taken down in shorthand to be used in evidence against the person who stole the watch. Come along!"

"Welease me!"

D'Arcy struggled violently. They reeled to and fro, Link retaining his hold with all the obstinacy of an intoxicated man. The result was inevitable; the two of them went to the ground together. D'Arcy was underneath, and a mighty splash followed his plump into a muddy puddle.

The swell of St. Jim's gave a gasp of dismay. He was not much hurt, but he was thinking of his clothes. His coat and trousers would be muddy from end to end.

"You howwid wottah!"

The detective rolled off him into the mud. He sat up on the grass by the side of the lane, and stared with owl-like solemnity at Arthur Augustus. The latter picked himself up, and shook off as much of the mud as he could.

"Oh, you wottah, you uttah wottah!" groaned D'Arcy. "I have a good mind to dwop on you and woll you in the mud, you wascal!"

"I am Joseph Link, the famous detective. I have handled cases of international importance, and anyone who insinuates that I am intoxicated lies in his teeth."

"You howwid beast!"

"I am Link—Joseph Link, the famous detective."

D'Arcy gave a growl of disgust, and turned away to go up the lane to the school. He left Mr. Link still sitting on the grass, his feet in the mud, and still informing the empty air in a murmuring voice that he was Joseph Link, the famous detective, and had handled cases of international importance.

CHAPTER 9.
Rough on Arthur Augustus.

"HALLO! It's the one and only Gus!"

D'Arcy started. Three youths were speeding down the lane, and they stopped all at once, at the sight of the drenched and muddy swell of St. Jim's.

A look of vexation came over D'Arcy's face. The three youths were the chums of Rylcombe Grammar School—Monk, Lane, and Carboy. They were about the last persons in the world whom Arthur Augustus would have wished to meet in his present plight.

"My hat," exclaimed Frank Monk, "it's really Gussy! What have you been doing, Adolphus? Wrestling with a road-scraping machine?"

"He's started in life as a crossing-sweeper, and he's been using the seat of his trousers as a broom," Carboy remarked.

"He looks nice, doesn't he?" said Lane. "Smells rather nice, too. Have you been having a day out, Gussy, and is this your idea of enjoying yourself?"

Arthur Augustus looked daggers at the facetious youths from the Grammar School.

"Pway do not addwess your fwivolous wemarks to me," he exclaimed. "I have met with a beastly accident."

"Looks like it," agreed Monk. "We were going for a little sprint——"

"Pway go for it, then, and don't mind me."

"Not at all. We're going to give it up for your sake."

"Please don't do anythin' of the sort."

"My dear chap, we respect you so highly," explained Monk; "you can't go alone to the school in that state. You need an escort."

"I don't need anythin' of the kind."

"Your mistake! Have you got your mouth-organ, Lane?"

"Certainly; here it is."

"Good! I've got my tin whistle. We'll escort Gussy to St. Jim's with musical honours. Go on, Gussy!"

The swell of St. Jim's glowered at the Grammarians; but the crushing dignity he assumed was rather spoiled in its effect by the muddy and dripping state of his clothes, and the big splashes of mud across his face.

And the unabashed Grammarians only chuckled. It was only a short walk to St. Jim's from the spot where they stood, and they were willing to expend ten minutes on a little fun. Lane produced his mouth-organ, and started blowing on it, and Monk blew fearful blasts on his tin whistle. There was no doubt that when they reached the school they would attract general attention to D'Arcy.

"I wefuse to take a step so long as you wotten boundahs wemain with me," said Arthur Augustus.

"Now, Gussy, don't be obstinate."

"I mean what I say. I wegard your actions as distinctly impertinent. If I did not feel so beastly wotten at the pwesent moment, I would give you a feahful thwashin'."

"He feels too rotten to walk without assistance," said Frank Monk, pretending to misunderstand the swell of St. Jim's. "Take his left arm, Carboy, and you can take his right, Lane. You can blow the mouth-organ with the other hand—I mean, you can hold it in the other hand and blow it."

"Right you are!"

"I will help him from behind when he lags," said Frank Monk. "I'll just stick a pin in the toe of my boot, and a little lift every now and then will be enough for him."

"You howwid wottahs!"

"March!"

"I wefuse to."

D'Arcy's refusal did not count for much. With a Grammarian holding either arm in a firm grip, it was not of much use to struggle. He was marched on, and Frank Monk marched behind, playing his tin whistle.

"Welease me, you beasts!" expostulated D'Arcy. "If I awwive at the school like this I shall look a widiculous ass, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you welease me?"

"Certainly not. You are too fatigued to walk alone. Hallo, there's the school, and we've got an audience already!"

The great gateway of St. Jim's came in sight. There were several boys lounging there, and they stared in amazement at the approaching four.

D'Arcy struggled violently, but he was held in a firm grip.

"Strike up the 'Bogey Man,' Lane!" exclaimed Frank Monk. And mouth-organ and tin whistle blared out the tune to the well-known words.

There was a yell of laughter from the juniors at the gate.

"Here comes the bogey man!" exclaimed Gore. "Ha, ha! How did you get like that, Gussy?"

"Welease me! Wescue, you wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha! No, this is too good a joke to spoil," said Gore.

D'Arcy was marched up to the gates. The terrific noise of the mouth-organ and whistle brought fellows from near and far to see what was going on. D'Arcy was the centre of interest. But all of the Saints were not of Gore's mind, and there was a rush to make reprisals on the Grammarians.

Monk, Lane, and Carboy promptly released their prisoner and fled. Arthur Augustus pushed his way blindly through the crowd and went into the quadrangle. But he was not left in peace. He was rid of the Grammarians, but a curious and mirthful crowd followed him towards the School House.

The shouts of laughter made Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, look out of his window, and he could not help smiling at the sight of Arthur Augustus in his draggled state, with his numerous following.

He stopped to the window and called out:

"D'Arcy, what is the matter with you? What do you mean by walking about in the quadrangle in that state?"

"I weally could not help it, sir. I have had the gweat misfortune to be wolled in the mud by a wotten wascal."

The housemaster smiled.

"Then go and get yourself cleaned. Boys, you must not make so much noise in the quadrangle."

The fellows dispersed, chuckling over the incident, and D'Arcy made his way into the School House. He met Skimpole in the corridor as he made his way towards a bath-room. The amateur detective of St. Jim's stared at him.

"Pway let me pass, Skimpole!" said Arthur Augustus, more irritably than was his wont. The late happenings had rather tried his temper. "Pway——"

"I want to speak to you, Gussy."

"Wats! Do I look in a state to speak to anybody? Get out of the way, you silly ass, or I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"

Skimpole got out of the way, and D'Arcy strode on towards the bath-room, but the amateur detective followed at his heels.

"I say, D'Arcy, you know I've taken up the case of the stolen watch, and I've got a clue already."

"Pway don't bothah me!"

"But I've got a clue," said Skimpole eagerly; "I want to warn you, too. Upon fuller investigation I have decided that it was not Blake who stole the watch."

"You uttah idiot!"

"That is really not a polite way to speak to a chap who is giving you his services free of charge," said Skimpole, still following the swell of St. Jim's. "Of course, if you suspect Blake yourself, I am ready to modify my present theory."

"You confounded ass!"

"Then I take it you do not suspect Blake. I have more to tell you—Herries and Digby, too, are practically cleared of suspicion."

"You—you unspeakable duffah!"

"My theory is quite changed, owing to a clue I have discovered."

"Oh, twavel off, you ass!"

D'Arcy had reached the bath-room and entered it, and was trying to close the door, but the amateur detective put his foot in the way.

"But I must tell you, D'Arcy——"

"Get out!"

"But the clue—you ought to know it. I have discovered that Manners has been spending a great deal of money lately—more than can be explained by the amount of his allowance—that is the system I go to work upon——"

"Clear out!"

"And he must have raised the money from somewhere. He has bought a lot of new films for his camera, and some frames and other things, and I hear he is going to have a new bicycle. Where did the money come from?"

"That's no business of yours, you silly ass."

"Of course, those fellows are always popping in and out of your study. It's clear enough that Manners had the watch and pawned it."

"Will you take your foot away and let me close this door?"

"But I want to tell you——"

"Get out!"

"But I want——"

D'Arcy glared round him, and his eyes fell upon a wet sponge. He grasped it, and plumped it full in the face of Skimpole, squeezing it as he did so. The amateur detective of St. Jim's staggered back with a howl, and D'Arcy slammed the door to and shot the catch. Skimpole rubbed the water out of his eyes. He heard a chuckle from within the bath-room.

"I call that ungrateful," he murmured, as he went off in search of a towel. "I am devoting all my spare time to the case, without fee or reward, and this is how I am treated by the fellow I am trying to serve. But I will not be deterred. I shall not slacken down in the least, and I hope soon to have the case fully worked up against Manners."

CHAPTER 10.

Trouble for Skimpole.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS filled in about an hour cleaning himself, after his painful experience in Rylcombe Lane, and changing his attire. When he looked in at Study No. 6 afterwards, to see whether his chums had returned, he found Blake, Herries, and Digby there. An April shower had cut short the afternoon's excursion. Herries was lighting the fire, and Digby was cutting some bacon that they had brought in from the school shop on their return, while Blake was cleaning the frying-pan with impot paper.

The three Fourth-Formers looked at D'Arcy as he came in, and grinned. It was easy to see that they had heard of the remarkable circumstances of his return to the school.

"Hallo! So you've got yourself scrubbed down!" said Blake cheerily. "I hear you've been mud-collecting up at Rylcombe."

"And coming home with an escort and musical honours!" said Digby.

"Quite an ovation!" Herries remarked.

The swell of the School House turned pink.

"Oh, pway let that subject dwop, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "I am weally tired of it. I never saw such a set of silly asses in my life as the juniahs of this coll.!"

"But what happened to you, Gussy?"

"Oh, nothin' of any consequence."

"Did you meet the detective?"

"Ya-a-a-as."

"What did he have to report?"

"Oh, nothin'."

"Has he discovered the watch?"

"Er—no," said Arthur Augustus uncomfortably. "He hasn't exactly discovahed the watch. N-no, Blake."

"Is he on the track?"

"I weally did not ask him."

Blake stared at the swell of St. Jim's.

"I don't quite catch on to this," he remarked. "You seem to have lost interest in the matter all of a sudden. Don't you believe in your famous detective any longer?"

"He's found him out," said Digby.

D'Arcy's pink complexion became crimson. His chums were quite right, but the School House swell was by no means disposed to admit as much. He would not tell anything like an untruth, but he could not bring himself to confess that he had been so egregiously deceived and taken in by a common charlatan.

"Behold, he blusheth!" said Blake. "You've hit it, Dig. He's found Mr. Link out. Is he a missing link yet, Gussy?"

"Oh, pway don't wot!"

"Can't you tell us what's happened?"

"Yaas, wathah! But I don't believe in encouwagin' cuwiosity among boys of your age!" said D'Arcy loftily.

"My word! Listen to the young ass!"

"I object to bein' called an ass!"

"We all object to your being one."

"I must wefuse to discuss the mattah furthah," said D'Arcy. "And I weally wish you would not cook bacon in this woom. It makes the study smell feahfully."

"My dear kid, we're all hungry. You needn't have any of the bacon."

"I am hungwy, too."

"Perhaps you'd prefer your bacon raw?" suggested Blake humorously. "Of course, it's a piece of neglect on the Head's part not to have a kitchen and a chef attached to every Fourth Form study. Perhaps we shall have that when Skimpole brings in Socialism. Meanwhile, you will have to put up with the smell of frying bacon."

"And a jolly nice niff, too, when you're hungry!" said Herries, looking up with a glowing face from the lighted fire, with a smear of soot upon his nose.

"Yes, rather! Lend me a silk handkerchief to wipe out this pan, D'Arcy, will you? I can't get all the grease off with paper."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"Then this will have to do. That bacon ready, Dig.?"

"Yes, here you are. Shove in the rind, too, you know; it all makes gravy. D'Arcy hasn't washed the plates yet."

"I wefuse!"

"Let's get the bacon on. I'm as hungry as a hunter. Fill the kettle, Gussy, will you, and I'll see to the plates."

"Yaas, wathah!"

D'Arcy took the kettle, and went out of the study to fill it at the tap in the corridor. He was greeted by three familiar voices in unison, "Hallo, Gus!" He saw the Terrible Three before him, and Tom Merry and his chums had evidently heard of the adventure in Rylcombe Lane.

"Sorry we were not here to meet you when you came in, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "I hear you've started in business as a road-cleaner, using yourself as a broom."

"What price the giddy detective?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Was it Joseph Link who rolled you in the mud?"

"You would have done better to give the case to Skimpole, after all," remarked Manners. "You'd have just as much chance of getting back your watch, and——"

"Oh, let me pass, you silly wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus.

And he marched on indignantly, and filled the kettle. The giggles of the chums of the Shell followed him back to Study No. 6. Tom Merry and his comrades walked on to their own quarters, and entered their study, and a youth who was rummaging in the table drawer looked up with a jump. It was Skimpole.

The Terrible Three exchanged glances, and then Manners closed the door quietly, and set his back to it. Skimpole was looking alarmed, and at the same time he essayed a feeble, propitiating smile.

"N-n-nice afternoon, isn't it?" he murmured.

"Yes, jolly nice!" said Tom Merry. "Nice and rainy. Will you kindly explain what you are doing in our study, rummaging in that drawer?"

Skimpole looked helplessly at the drawer, and then at Tom Merry. He was trying to think out some explanation, and this was so evident in his face that the hero of the Shell could not help smiling.

"What are you up to?" he rapped out. "Come, out with it!"

"You see, Merry, I—I——"

"Yes, I see you're here, where you have no business to be, turning over our things. We keep money in that drawer, when we have any," said Tom Merry. "If you were anybody but asinine Skimpole, I might think something serious about this. As it is, I suppose it is some more of your silly rot!"

"Yes," said Manners, his expression relaxing, "I remember now, he took up a case for Gussy the other day, and undertook to find my camera and hand it over to Gus. You know we found him here looking for it. Is that the little game, Skimmy?"

Skimpole looked nervously at Manners.

"N-n-no, not exactly, Manners!" he stammered.

"He wasn't looking for a camera in that little drawer," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Now, Skimpole, we know you are a harmless ass, as a rule, but we can't overlook a thing like this. You'll explain at once what you were after, or you'll be sorry for yourself."

Skimpole looked from one to another of the chums of the Shell. He read grim determination in every face.

"Well, as a matter of fact, Merry, I—I——"

"Get it out!"

"I—I was looking—was—er—looking——"

"I know you were. What were you looking for? That's the question."

"I—I can't explain that exactly without giving away the case I am working up," said Skimpole. "Please don't ask me questions!"

"So you are working up a case, are you?"

"Yes, that's it. And I—I was searching for a clue. I assure you I meant no harm, and your property is quite safe. It was not your property I was looking for."

"I know our property is safe, Skimmy, or you'd have been chucked out of the room on your neck before this. But what do you mean by saying that it isn't our property you are looking for? Do you mean that you are looking for somebody else's property in our room?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Skimpole hesitated.

"Now, look here, you ass," said Tom Merry, taking him by the shoulder with a grip of iron, "what's the little game? Tell me what you were looking for, or I'll rub your head in the cinders in the grate! Honest Injun!"

"I—I—— The fact is, Merry, I—I was looking for a clue. I thought—— You see, as a matter of fact, I have taken up the case of the stolen watch."

"You are looking for D'Arcy's watch, do you mean?"

"Yes, that's it."

"And you expected to find it hidden in our study?" asked Tom Merry, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"Oh, no, Merry; I didn't expect to find the watch here, but I thought that perhaps I should find the pawnticket."

The Terrible Three uttered a simultaneous exclamation.

"The pawnticket!"

"Yes. Of course, I don't suppose for a moment that Manners took the watch with the idea of wearing it as a timekeeper," explained Skimpole. "Besides, that would not fit in with the theory I have based upon his late expenditure of money——"

"Manners! Manners took the watch!"

"I?" said Manners, looking dazed. "I took the watch?"

"Are you mad, Skimpole?"

"Certainly not. I did not mean to explain my theory till all was ready for the denunciation of the rascal——"

"Are you calling me a rascal?" roared Manners, with a forward step.

Tom Merry pulled him back in time, or the amateur detective of St. Jim's would have fared very badly just then. Manners was excited; naturally enough, under the circumstances.

"But you have forced me to explain before I intended to do so," went on Skimpole, unheeding. "Perhaps it is better, as Manners may now give up the pawnticket, and D'Arcy can redeem his watch, and a scandal may be avoided. Of course, I do not desire a scandal, or anything of that sort. My only object is to recover the stolen article, and prove the correctness of my theory."

"Is it possible that you believe that Manners boned Gussy's gold watch?" said Tom Merry, in measured accents. "Keep your wool on, Manners! You can slaughter him after he's explained."

"The facts speak for themselves," said Skimpole, with a smile of self-satisfaction. "I have not studied the methods of Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake for nothing, I can assure you. My trained intellect——"

"Oh, rats! Come to the point."

"Very well. My deductions lead irresistibly to the conclusion that Manners is guilty. Don't lose your temper, Manners. I have studied the theory of heredity, and I exonerate you from actual blame. You are what you are made by your heredity and environment."

"Oh, keep off that, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Are you going to explain yourself, or are you ready to be broken up into little pieces?"

"I will explain. Gussy's watch has been stolen. Who had the opportunity of stealing it? All you fellows are always going in and out of Study No. 6. Has any one of you lately been in possession of an unusual amount of money? Yes, Manners has. You see, the case is worked out satisfactorily. The only thing now is to find the pawnticket. That is what I was looking for when you came in."

"The pawnticket?"

"Yes. Yes. Manners evidently took the watch to raise money on. He could hardly sell it. But pawning it would be easy. Therefore——"

"You unutterable duffer!"

"It is easy to call names, Tom Merry, but it is not so easy to disprove a theory worked out on the very best Sherlock Holmes' methods."

"You ass!" said Manners, calming down somewhat, as the ridiculous side of the matter became more apparent to him. "I haven't had a lot of money lately. I've been nearly stony, and have borrowed of both Merry and Lowther."

"You cannot throw dust in my eyes, Manners," said Skimpole, shaking his head. "You have lately had a lot of new, expensive films for your camera, a new printing outfit——"

"You dummy! I have them on tick from the photographer's in Wayland, and I sha'n't pay for them till near the end of the term."

Skimpole's face fell.

"Ow! I—I wasn't aware of that, of course."

"Don't you think you had better make a little more certain next time before calling a fellow a thief?" asked Manners, in a tone of menace.

"Oh, I didn't call you a thief, Manners! I wouldn't apply such a word to you! I merely——"

"Merely said I had stolen a watch," said Manners,

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Skimpole drew out a huge notebook and a big pencil. "Pray place the case in my hands," he said, "and I assure you that I shall discover your watch."

grinning, in spite of himself. "Of course, there's a lot of difference there!"

"I regard the matter from a purely professional standpoint," explained Skimpole. "A detective cannot afford to be a respecter of persons."

"And a fellow with a fat head like yours cannot afford to set up as an amateur detective," said Manners darkly, "He's likely to get hurt—I may say, certain."

Skimpole cast an uneasy glance towards the door.

"Of course, Manners, I'm sorry I suspected you, as it turns out. I shall have to form a new theory. I should like to leave this study——"

"So you shall," said Manners, taking a grip upon his collar. "Open the door, Merry, please."

"Right you are!"

Tom Merry threw open the door, and Manners marched the amateur detective out of the study with an iron grip on the back of his neck. Along the passage he marched him, down the first flight of stairs, and into the first bath-room. The helpless Skimpole could do nothing but wriggle, and he did wriggle with apprehension as he was marched into the bath-room. Manners held him firmly, and turned on a tap with his left hand.

"Manners! I—I say, old fellow——"

"Well?" said Manners pleasantly.

"Wh-what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to duck you, as a lesson to chuck up amateur detective work—at least, as far as I'm concerned," said Manners genially.

"Look here, Manners——"

Splash!

Skimpole's head went under the running tap, and then he was flopped, head and shoulders, into the rapidly-filling bath. He wriggled and squirmed and broke loose, and rose from the water gasping and grunting. Manners, with a roar of laughter, slammed the door upon him, and left him. There was a smile of satisfaction upon the face of Manners as he rejoined his grinning chums in the study.

"I don't think that funny merchant will give us any more of the benefit of his detective investigations," he remarked. "If he keeps on at that Sherlock Holmes business, I fancy he will give this study a wide berth."

And Manners was right.

CHAPTER 11.

Figgins Has an Idea.

THERE was a letter lying beside Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's plate the following morning. A frown came over the face of the School House swell as he recognised the handwriting of Joseph Link, private detective.

"The wascal!" murmured D'Arcy. "I suppose this is an apology. But he won't evah have any more of my beastly cash, the wottah!"

He opened the letter, and a change came upon his features as he read the contents. A look, first of incredulity, and then of amazement.

"Dear sir," the letter ran, "I hope you were able to see through the little plot of yesterday afternoon. As I came to meet you at the stile in Rylcombe Lane, I saw that I was observed by a person whom I have had under suspicion. It would never have done for that person to have learned that I was a detective in consultation with you, or probably you would never have seen your watch again.

"What was to be done? A brilliant idea struck me, upon which I immediately acted. I pretended to be intoxicated, and the shadower who was watching me undoubtedly came to the conclusion that I was a common drunken person, and his suspicions have now been allayed. It will be an easy matter for me to complete the case against him, I think, but before proceeding with it, I should like to consult with you again. I flatter myself that the scene yesterday was well acted upon my part, and would have taken in almost anyone, and I was only sorry that I had not the opportunity of enlightening you as to the true facts before you left me. Can you meet me outside the school—say, at midday?"

"Yours faithfully,
"JOSEPH LINK."

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy in amazement.

"Hallo, what's the news?" called out Blake.

"Oh, nothin' of consequence!"

"Silence at the table, boys!" said Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form.

Arthur Augustus put his letter into his pocket, and after breakfast went out into the quadrangle to read it over again.

His first feeling of incredulity had vanished. He was filled now with admiration for the wonderful skill of Mr. Joseph Link.

Certainly the part had been well acted if the detective had been sober at the time. D'Arcy was glad now that he had not related the circumstances to his chums. He made up his mind to meet the detective when the boys were let out of school after morning lessons. It would not be difficult to get out unnoticed for a few minutes.

"Hallo, is that letter for me?"

D'Arcy gave a jump as Figgins of the New House suddenly caught the letter from his hand from behind.

"Oh, you wottah, you startled me!" ejaculated D'Arcy, whirling round. "Give me that letter immediately, Figgins!"

Figgins held it in his hand, but did not look at it. He put his hand behind him as D'Arcy approached him excitedly.

"Is it a love-letter?" he asked humorously. "Are you in love again, Gussy?"

"It is not a love-lettah, you boundah!"

"Then you haven't met any more girls named Ethel?"

"Pway don't wot on a sewious subject, Figgins. Pway weturn my lettah immediately, or I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"Mustn't I look at it?"

"Certainly not! I know you would not be cad enough to wead anothah fellow's lettah, Give it back to me, you beast!"

Figgins handed the letter back to the swell of the School House. As D'Arcy said, he would never have dreamed of looking at it without permission.

"If it isn't a love-letter, what is it, to make you wrinkle your manly brow over it so much?" he inquired. "Oh, I think I know! It's a report from the giddy detective!"

"That is my affaih, Figgins!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Figgins, with a grin, as he imitated D'Arcy's beautiful accent. "Of course, it is, deah boy! But I should like to know how you are getting on with the noble man-hunter."

"I am gettin' on all wight, thank you!"

And D'Arcy, crumpling the letter in his pocket, walked away. Figgins looked after him, with a grin, and then walked off in search of the Co. He found them exchanging badinage with Tom Merry on the School House steps. Figgins made a sign to them, and they immediately followed their leader, leaving the chums of the Shell to themselves.

"What's the wheeze?" asked Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the Co., as soon as they were out of hearing of the School House lads. "Are you getting up a feed, or anything of that sort?"

"That's you all over, Wynn," said Kerr, "thinking of a feed when we've only just had breakfast."

"I never get enough to eat for breakfast," said Fatty Wynn plaintively. "I'm a growing chap, and I need solid meals. Of course, there's plenty, in a way. But I often think I could do with a few more eggs and half a dozen sausages."

"Don't think about it," said Figgins kindly; "it will make you hungry. And don't talk about it. I'm going to do the talking."

"But is it a feed?"

"No, it isn't!"

"Oh, go on, then!" said Fatty Wynn, without much interest in his manner.

"I've been thinking, kids, whether we can't get up a wheeze out of this detective business," said Figgins. "D'Arcy's latest is funny enough, and there ought to be room for some fun in it. This is where I think Kerr could come out strong."

"I'm willing to do anything I can," said the Scottish partner modestly. "What's the idea? Is it a question of impersonating anybody?"

Kerr, the shining light of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, was famous in the school for his impersonations. He had been able to disguise himself so well as to deceive even fellows like Blake and Tom Merry, who knew every line on his face. The chief of the Co. nodded.

"That's it, Kerr. I haven't worked it out in my mind yet; but if you impersonated the detective, say, and met Gussy, and dotted him on the nose——"

"Ha, ha, ha! That would be a surprise for Gussy!" ejaculated Marmaduke.

"I've never seen the chap," said Kerr. "Rather difficult to impersonate a fellow you've never seen."

"Then work it the other way round, and impersonate Gussy, and dot the detective in the eye," said Fatty Wynn.

"That's not a bad wheeze."

"Wait a bit," said Figgins, rubbing his forehead hard, as if to ease the works, so to speak, and assist his train of thought. "I've got something better than that. This detective chap, from what we hear, is evidently an impostor——"

"According to Blake, he's an absolute out-and-outer," Fatty Wynn remarked.

"I don't suppose a real detective would come down here to see a schoolboy about a stolen watch," said Kerr, with a shake of the head. "It's pretty plain that he's just a rascal who advertises in the papers to catch mugs."

"And he's caught one," grinned Figgins.

"Exactly!"

"That being the case, he's pretty certain to be a rogue as well as an impostor. He's getting money out of Gussy, and will probably go on getting it out of him till he's stopped, or Gussy has no more to spend."

"Very likely!"

"Then if we chip in, it will be a real service to Gussy," said Figgins. "It will be a lesson to him, too. What I was thinking was that a real detective might arrive at St. Jim's looking for this fellow Link——"

"My only hat!"

"He might want him for something or other he had done in London," said Figgins reflectively, "and might arrest Gussy on suspicion of harbouring a burglar."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you think, Kerr? Would you care to take it on?"

Kerr looked very thoughtful.

"You'd have to take in Study No. 6 as well as Gussy," Figgins remarked; "and, to do those kids justice, they're not exactly what you'd call fools!"

"We've taken them in before, though," Fatty Wynn said. "Kerr made up as Lathom, and took in Blake himself, and he took in Tom Merry as well when he impersonated old Schneider."

"Yes, that's true enough. And in this case it wouldn't be impersonating a fellow they know, but just getting up as a stranger," Figgins observed. "I don't see why it shouldn't work. Hallo, there goes the bell! We'll talk it over again!"

And the New House juniors went in to morning lessons with the idea working in their minds—an idea that was to take definite form before the day was out.

CHAPTER 12.
Mr. Link Explains.

"AH, I am glad to see you, sir!"

Joseph Link, the famous detective, spoke sincerely enough, as D'Arcy came through the trees beside the lane that April midday. The detective was looking seedier than ever. His face showed very plain traces of the previous day's excess, and his hand was shaking visibly.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass and looked at him suspiciously. The man's appearance told very much against him, and D'Arcy, who was neat and clean almost to a fault, could not help feeling a sensation of disgust.

"You had my letter, of course, Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah! I weceived it this mornin'."

"You understand how it was yesterday, then?"

"Ya-a-a-as, I suppose so," said the swell of St. Jim's slowly. "I understand your explanation, Mr. Link, but——"

"But what? You surely have no doubts?"

"Pewwaps not, but——"

The detective drew himself up with a dignified air. Unfortunately for the effect of it, his bleary eyes and puffy face discounted the dignity very much.

"I hope you do not doubt my word!" he exclaimed. "If I thought you did, our business relations would, of course, cease at once."

"Bai Jove! Then you would return the fees, of course?"

"What you have paid so far has, of course, been swallowed up in preliminary expenses. But don't let us have any talk of that kind. If you doubt me, I am willing to make any explanation you please."

That was quite true. Words were cheap, and anything like a regard for facts would not have troubled Mr. Link. He was perfectly willing to give any explanation that was likely to satisfy Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, as a mattah of fact——"

"Ask anything you like," said Mr. Link liberally. "I can see that you have some doubt lingering in your mind, and I shall be extremely pleased to expel it."

"Well, I certainly thought you were dwunk yesterday."

"But I have explained that in my letter of this morning."

"You stwuck me!"

"I was watched by the person I suspect of having stolen the watch, my dear sir, and so I had to act so as to keep up the character."

"Ah, yaas; but you wolled me in the beastly mud, you know."

"A painful necessity under the unfortunate circumstances."

"I was quite a widiculous object when I came back to the coll., and I wegarded it as a sewious infwaction of my dig."

"I can only express my heartiest regret."

"And now you say that that wotten intoxication was assumed."

"Certainly, as I have explained."

"But, as a mattah of fact, you look like a person who has been vewy dwunk," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

The detective laughed.

"Ha, ha! But that is a part of my disguise, of course."

"A—a part of——"

"My disguise. Exactly. I have been watched to-day as well. If I had been intoxicated yesterday I should naturally show some signs of it to-day, and I have therefore assumed those signs."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

Mr. Link smiled in a superior way.

"You are not a detective," he remarked.

"That is vewy twue."

"I hope I have completely satisfied you now, Master D'Arcy. If there is any other point I can explain I shall be very pleased."

"No; I think that's all wight," said D'Arcy. "What pwogwess have you to weport on the case, Mr. Link?"

"The very best, sir," said the detective, rubbing his hands.

"You haven't found the watch?"

"Not exactly, but I am on the track of the thief."

"You are sure that you have the wight fellah?" asked the swell of St. Jim's eagerly. "I shouldn't like you to make a blundah, you know, and cause twouble to an innocent party."

"I am not in the habit of making blunders, Master D'Arcy. The record of Joseph Link, the private detective, stands clear of——"

"Yaas, I am sowwy I expwessed myself like that. But are you quite certain that you are on the twack of the weal wascal?"

"I am quite certain of it."

"And who is the wottah? Is it anybody I know?"

"I think so. You told me that just previous to the theft of the watch you had had a struggle with some Grammar School boys."

"Yes, I wemembah. You don't mean to say——"

"You thought one of them might have taken the watch?"

"No, I didn't say that!" interposed D'Arcy hastily. "I said I was sure that they wouldn't be such wottahs, or something to that effect."

"Well, I am sorry to have to tell you that it is in that direction that I shall have to look for the thief, Master D'Arcy."

"A Gwammah School fellah?"

"Yes, certainly!" said the detective, with a nod and a peculiar glimmer in his eye. "I am sorry the news is unwelcome to you."

"Oh, that's all wight! I am glad to know that it wasn't a fellow belongin' to St. Jim's," said D'Arcy. "But which of the Gwammarians was it, Mr. Link?"

"That I had perhaps better not tell you yet."

"It surely wasn't Fwank Monk, or Lane, or Carboy?"

The detective pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Describe Frank Monk to me," he said.

Arthur Augustus did so, rather anxiously. The detective listened with a keen and thoughtful expression.

"H'm! I am afraid suspicion rests upon that youth—he and two others," he said. "But I shall soon know for certain."

"Pway don't take any step in the mattah without consultin' with me," said D'Arcy anxiously.

"You mean about the arrest?"

"Yaas, wathah! Of course, if either Frank Monk, Lane, or Carboy took the watch, the wottah ought to be shown up, and yet——"

"You would not shield the criminal?" said Mr. Link.

"Well, no; but—but, weally—— You see, there is a wivalwy between this coll. and the Gwammah School, and the fellows there might think I was actuated by spite," D'Arcy explained. "Undah the circs., I would wathah keep it quiet."

"I see. I will certainly consult with you before any step is taken," the detective remarked. "There is nothing like tempering justice with mercy, as I have often found in the course of my long and varied professional career. I am glad to see that you are disposed to be lenient with these young criminals."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I will make a note of it. Now, as to——"

"If they westore the watch," said D'Arcy, "the whole pwoceedin's can be dwopped, and I myself will stand to lose the fees I have paid you for wecoverin' it."

"That is very generous of you. But suppose they have already pawned the watch and spent the proceeds?"

"Then the young wascals must give up the ticket."

"Ah! They may have sold the watch, and have nothing to show for it. Suppose I find out for certain that such is the case?"

"I hope you won't; but, in that case, I suppose I must let the mattah dwop," said D'Arcy, looking very blue. "I weally hope they haven't sold the beastly watch, you know."

"Good! Now, as to the fees——"

"Yaas, you will have your fees in that case, of course, the same as if you had westored the watch to me."

"Ah, yes; but that was not what I was going to say. About the fees—the preliminary expenses you gave me are quite exhausted."

"Bai Jove, are they?"

"Yes, certainly; and if I am to continue the case, I shall require a couple of guineas to go on with."

"Oh, my hat! This is comin' it wathah stwong!"

"Of course, it will be deducted from the final amount of the reward."

"That will leave only a pound to come at the finish."

"All the easier for you to meet the bill, then, sir."

"Yaas, there's somethin' in that. But I haven't more than a pound or so with me now till I get some more tin from my governah."

"That is rather unfortunate."

"Yaas, wathah, isn't it?"

"Still, I can take the pound now, and we will see."

"Oh, vewy well!" said D'Arcy resignedly. "I suppose it's no good gwudgin' a pound in wecoverin' a twenty-five guinea watch, and, after all, as you say, it will come out of the weward at the finish."

And the golden sovereign was handed over. The detective's eyes glimmered with greed as he slipped it into his waistcoat-pocket.

"I had better get along now," he remarked. "I hope soon to wind up the case, and I trust not too late to recover the watch. I am practically certain that it is in the hands of Frank Monk. We shall see. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, deah boy!"

The detective went hastily down the road. Perhaps he was in a hurry to get to the Golden Pig again. Arthur Augustus turned and walked towards the school gates again. Four heads appeared in view as soon as he had disappeared, and Figgins & Co. came out of cover among the trees.

Figgins looked at the Co., and the Co. looked at Figgins. Then all of them burst into a chuckle.

"Well, it's lucky we thought of keeping an eye on Gussy, and spotted him coming here," Figgins remarked. "Did you ever see such a young ass?"

"It's a case of fools and their money," said Kerr. "Catch me parting with tin like that."

"Well, Gussy has plenty, and I suppose it's a case of easy come and easy go. But what an utter rotter the fellow is. Fancy his hinting that Frank Monk might have had Gussy's watch. We all know that Frank Monk wouldn't do such a thing."

"Of course, we do!" Fatty Wynn exclaimed.

"Don't you see the scoundrel's game?" said the canny Scottish partner in the firm. "He's going to make out that

Monk has had the watch, and sold it, so as to account for not bringing it back to Gussy, and to get paid for his investigations all the same."

"Yes. I suppose that's his idea. As for his investigations, I don't believe he ever investigates anything but the beer at the Golden Pig."

"That's my idea."

"He ought to be collared and ragged," said Figgins. "But I think the wheeze we have been planning will take the cake. You can buzz down to the village on your bike, Kerr, and hire the things you will want; the costumier knows us well enough to let you have them without a deposit now. We'll give Gussy a lesson to-night about employing stray detectives, by Jove!"

And Figgins & Co. chuckled at the prospect.

CHAPTER 13.

D'Arcy's Treat—An Unwelcome Visitor.

"ANYTHING for tea?" said Jack Blake, coming into Study No. 6 about six o'clock that evening. "I'm famished!"

"Yes; it's Gussy's treat—ham-and-eggs and sausages, jam and pickles, and some of those jolly little jelly tarts of Dame Taggles's," said Digby.

Blake turned to the swell of the School House, who was carefully polishing his silk hat. Whenever D'Arcy found himself unoccupied, the brushing of his silk hats was an unfailing resource for filling up time.

"By George, Gussy, that's really good of you," said Blake, giving his aristocratic chum a slap on the back that sent him staggering.

The swell of the school gave a yell, and dropped the silk hat, and then, losing his balance, fell upon it, and crushed it into a very good imitation of a concertina.

"My word!" exclaimed Dig. "You've done it now."

D'Arcy jumped up like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Blake, you howwid wuffian!"

Blake looked at the crushed topper in dismay.

"I say, I'm sorry! What on earth did you want to fall down on that hat for?" he asked.

"You gave me a feahful thump!"

"That was only to express my appreciation of your generosity. Never mind the hat, Gussy. It was getting a little shiny round the brim."

"Was it?" said D'Arcy anxiously.

"Yes, and, besides, you've had that hat some time now, and you know they're making them a little flatter in the brim."

"Bai Jove, yaas! But was it enough to be weally noticed?"

"I should say so."

"Oh, in that case, it weally doesn't mattah," said D'Arcy. "But I might have given it away to some poor beggah-boy, you know."

Blake roared.

"Yes, I can see a beggar boy going around begging in a silk hat! You'll be the death of me, Gussy. But you really couldn't wear that hat."

"Not now, at all events," observed Dig.

"Shove it on the fire; it will make the kettle boil, at all events. Buck up with the tea, Herries; I'm anxious to sample the treat Gussy has laid in for us. I've got a splendid appetite that I wouldn't sell for its weight in gold."

"Ready in a minute," said Herries.

"Good! My hat, I like the look of all this," said Blake, running his eye over the table, and unfastening some of the packages. "This is really ripping of you, Adolphus."

"Eh? What is wipping of me, deah boy?"

"Standing us such a ripping feed."

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and looked at the well-supplied table, and looked at Blake, and then at Digby, who was grinning.

"I weally do not quite compwehend," said D'Arcy, looking puzzled. "I have not stood any feed to my knowledge, deah boy!"

It was Blake's turn to look puzzled.

"Where did all these things come from, then?" he asked.

"Dig says you have stood them, and I know jolly well I haven't."

"Quite a mistake. I only came in a few minutes ago, and I bwought in nothin' with me," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Digby. "Gussy has a sovereign in his pocket, and I knew he would want to stand a feed, so I just ordered the things at the school shop in his name. They're not paid for yet."

"Bai Jove, did you weally?"

"Yes. It's all right; they only came to eight shillings," said Dig reassuringly. "It was done as a pleasant surprise for all of you, and I told Dame Taggles you would drop in and pay this evening. Don't forget, will you?"

"But, bai Jove, you know, I can't do it!"

"Now Gussy, you've never been a Shylock!"

"It isn't a question of that, deah boy, but I haven't any beastly money, you know. I know it's widiculous, but I'm actually bwoke."

"Why, you image, you had a sovereign in your pocket just before dinner, and I saw it with my own eyes!" exclaimed Digby. "You can't have blued it on a fancy waistcoat—they don't sell them at the tuckshop."

"I have had to part with it, deah boy."

"All of it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you call yourself a chum," said Digby, more in sorrow than in anger. "You lead me to order a really ripping feed in your name——"

"But, weally, deah boy, I nevah asked you to do anythin' of the sort," protested Arthur Augustus. "I weally nevah wequested you——"

"You leave me to order a feed in your name," repeated Digby, unheeding. "I take the trouble of selecting the things, a really ripping turn-out, as Blake and Herries will testify."

"Really ripping," said Blake and Herries heartily.

"And then you stand there as cool as you please, and tell me that you have expended all your wealth in riotous living!"

"I haven't done anythin' of the kind I have handed ovah the soveweign to Mr. Link, in advance upon his beastly fees, you know."

"So you've been meeting that rotter again to-day?"

"Pway don't chawactewise him as a wottah."

"And you've gone and busted yourself financially, and deserted your chums in the hour of need," said Digby. "And now what are you going to say to Dame Taggles?"

"Weally, Digby——"

"You know she never will leave a debt over a night. Pay up is her motto. She'll make a row—very likely ask me for the money," said Digby.

"Well, weally, Dig——"

"What I want to know, is, what are you going to do?" said Digby. "I've done my share of the business. I leave it to you now."

"Pewwaps the things had bettah be taken back."

"Perhaps rats!" said Blake emphatically. "I am really surprised at your suggesting a thing like that, Gussy. I suppose you don't mean to be disrespectful to the study, but really, your words are inexcusable."

"Quite so," said Herries. "Besides, I've already broken some of the eggs into the frying-pan, or I'm doing it now, which amounts to the same thing."

"Weally, deah boys——"

"We'll have tea," said Blake. "Over tea we may be able to think of some way of helping Gussy out of his difficulty."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Good!" said Digby. "Gussy can't be called a reliable fellow to have for a chum, but I don't want to see him held up to scorn as a defaulter if it can be avoided."

"Weally, Digby——"

"Buck up with the eggs, Herries. I'm hungry. After all, it's a ripping tea, and we'll put our heads together to help Gussy. He can always pawn his watch."

"Not now he wears a brass one."

"It isn't bwass, it's wolled gold," said D'Arcy. "But I'm afwaid that it wouldn't fetch much at a pawnbwokah's, and there isn't one in Wylcombe, anyway, and we couldn't go out to-night, if there were, deah boys."

"Then we shall have to think of something else," said Blake. "At the worst, Gussy can go and borrow it of Tom Merry, and we'll have a whip round later, when we're in funds, to pay the debt. We ought to stand by Gussy, you know, though he really is rather a trouble, always getting into difficulties like this. By Jove, those eggs smell really stunning."

"Weally, I must say, deah boys——"

"Oh, don't apologise, Gussy! We know you mean well."

"I wasn't goin' to do anythin' of the sort."

"Oh, let the subject drop! That's a thing you never will do. Sufficient for the evening is the feed thereof," said Blake. "Hallo, come in, fathead, whoever you are!"

This polite invitation was in response to a knock at the door.

The door of the study opened, and the chums looked in some surprise at the person who entered. They had expected to see some fellow of their own Form, or, at all events, somebody belonging to St. Jim's; but the individual who now presented himself was an entire stranger to them.

He was a little man, dressed in black, with spats, and a silver watch-chain. He had a silk hat, rather rusty, a



D'Arcy left the Fogus detective still sitting in the grass, his feet in the mud.

greyish beard, and long moustaches that mingled with the beard. His face was dark, and showed many wrinkles, his nose was slightly red, and he wore a pair of rimless glasses upon it.

"Hallo," said Blake, "I fancy you've come to the wrong shop, sir. Take the next turning on the right, then the second on the left, then the third straight forward, and keep on till you stop, and then you'll be there."

But the strange gentleman did not smile.

In fact, the gravity of his face was only equalled by the solemn severity of his garments.

"I think I have made no mistake," said the strange gentleman, in a low, but clear and incisive voice, with a slight nasal accent. "This is Study No. 6, I think?"

"Yes, that's right; but who——"

"A young gentleman of the name of D'Arcy is here, I think."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The stranger turned his rimless glasses towards the swell of the School House, who was regarding him with astonishment.

"Ah! Are you Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Yaas, certainly; but I do not wemembah havin' had the honah of makin' your acquaintance, sir."

"Very probably. Your business has probably never taken you to the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard," said the stranger, with a slight cough.

The four juniors jumped.

"Scotland Yard! Who on earth are you?"

"Detective Fix, of Scotland Yard," said the strange gentleman, with a little formal bow. "I am here on a rather painful errand."

"It can't have anythin' to do with me, I suppose," said D'Arcy uneasily. "I weally haven't committed any cwimes that I wemembah."

"That remains to be proved. Perhaps at the time you were not aware that you were committing a crime."

The swell of the School House looked utterly bewildered.

"I weally haven't——"

"The suspicion is that you have sheltered within the walls of the school a well-known criminal fleeing from justice."

"I haven't done anythin' of the sort. Why, I shouldn't be allowed to. I weally haven't seen any cwiminals since that chap Bullivant was here—the burglah who was awwested, and he's in pwison now."

"The man I speak of is known by a variety of aliases, but his latest is that of Joseph Link, and he passes himself off as a private detective," said the man from Scotland Yard severely. "Ah, I see by your face that you know him!"

It was easy enough to see that by D'Arcy's face. He turned quite pale, and sank helplessly into a chair, staring in utter dismay at the visitor to the study.

CHAPTER 14.
The Men from Scotland Yard.

"JOSEPH LINK!" murmured D'Arcy. "Joseph Link passes himself off as a pwivate detective! Oh, my only silk hat!"

"I see you are acquainted with the man," said Mr. Fix sternly. "Where is he? Produce him at once!"

And Mr. Fix looked round the study as if he expected to see Joseph Link hiding behind the door, or concealed in the coal locker.

"Goodness gwacious! He's not here!"

"Where is he, then?"

"I weally do not know."

"Prevarication will not serve you," said Mr. Fix. "You yourself may escape with a light sentence by giving up the rascal at once to justice."

"Oh, I say, that's a little too thick!" exclaimed Blake, recovering himself somewhat. "D'Arcy really believed that the fellow was what he represented himself to be."

Mr. Fix looked searchingly at D'Arcy.

"Is that the case, young gentleman?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"H'm! Perhaps the case is a little less black than it was represented to be. For the present I will not call in my men, as I see the rascal is not here."

"No, bai Jove, he isn't, you know."

"Where are your men?" asked Blake.

"They are waiting outside the house," replied Mr. Fix. "I did not wish to give the alarm too soon. I had better go to your headmaster now."

"Oh, pway do nothin' of the sort!"

"Don't do that!" exclaimed Blake. "D'Arcy would get into a fearful row. Of course, he had no idea that the man was a criminal. We all suspected him to be a rogue, and knew that he was swindling D'Arcy."

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"But that's the worst we thought about it. I say, Mr. Fix, aren't you hungry after your journey down from London?" said Blake, hospitably.

The man from Scotland Yard glanced at the well-spread board, and at the eggs in the frying-pan which Herries was holding in the air, as if petrified, as he very nearly was by this strange turn of events. The visitor was observed to smack his lips.

"Well, as a matter of fact, young gentlemen, I am hungry."

"Then sit down and have tea with us."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" said Mr. Fix, but with a very evident inclination to yield visible in his face.

Blake saw it, and pressed the point. He signed to Herries to put the pan on the fire again and finish cooking the eggs, and to Digby to pour out the tea. He pulled the most comfortable chair to the table for the guest. Arthur Augustus seemed like a fellow in a dream all the time.

"Oh, come, do sit down!" said Blake. "This is a really ripping spread, and I know you must be hungry. We can explain to you while you have tea."

"Well, you are very kind, young gentlemen."

"Oh, it's an honour to us to entertain a gentleman of your profession!" said Blake, with great politeness. "There, sit down here, please!"

"Thank you, I will!"

Mr. Fix sat down. The largest plate was placed before him, and several nicely-done eggs turned upon it. Knife and fork were forthcoming, and the gentleman from Scotland Yard began to eat. He certainly had a good appetite, for he walked through the ham and eggs at express speed. His plate was replenished. Little did the School House juniors care. It was worth while sacrificing a feed to propitiate their terrible guest and make things easier for Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's had certainly got himself into a difficulty this time, and the only question now was, how to get him out of it. And to that end the loyal chums were prepared to make any sacrifice.

"This is very good," Mr. Fix remarked. "Yes, I will have a couple more eggs, please, Herries. I believe your name is Herries," he added quickly.

"Yes, sir," said Herries, helping him.

"A little more ham, sir?" asked Digby.

"Yes, please—lean, if you please; I don't care for fat."

Digby helped liberally with the ham. Blake poured some more hot water into the teapot and gave it a shake.

"Another cup of tea, Mr. Fix?"

"Yes, certainly, and plenty of sugar and milk."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The chap is makin' himself at home, and no beastly mistake!"

Blake gave him a warning glance. The chums were not even thinking of eating anything themselves, though they were all hungry. So long as they could satisfy their guest that was quite enough for them.

"Jam tarts, Mr. Fix?" asked Digby, when the gentleman from Scotland Yard seemed to have become satisfied with the more solid portion of the meal.

Mr. Fix looked them over with a critical eye. He had evidently had plenty to eat, but the jam tarts were tempting.

"Thank you, I'll have a couple," he said. "I suppose you don't keep spirits here, do you, young gentlemen?"

"Bai Jove! Fancy spiwits in a juniah's study!"

"No, I'm sorry, we don't, sir," said Blake smoothly. "You see, we weren't expecting you; another time we'll have some ready——".

"I say, I could wun ovah to Knox's study and collar some," suggested D'Arcy. "You know, Knox keeps a bottle of beastly whisky in his study, chaps."

"Good!" said Blake, remembering that little habit of the black sheep of the School House. "Good! We can get you some whisky, Mr. Fix."

"Oh, don't trouble!" said Mr. Fix hastily. "Upon second thoughts, it would be a bad example to drink spirits before boys. I will have some of the jam tarts. And now to go into this unfortunate affair——"

"Yaas, wathah! Weally, sir——"

"We have received information that this criminal, known now as Joseph Link, usually known to his pals as Slippery Joe, is hiding in the neighbourhood of the village of Rylcombe," said the detective.

"That is quite cowwect."

"I have been making investigations in the village, and I find that the rascal has certainly been there, and has been seen to hold meetings with a youth belonging to this school, named D'Arcy."

"It is quite twue."

"The suspicion naturally arises that D'Arcy is sheltering him from the law——"

"Oh, no, my deah sir; that would be quite incowwect! Pway disabuse your mind of any such ideah," said the swell of the School House, greatly distressed.

"I must be satisfied upon that point," said Mr. Fix, with such sternness in his voice that Blake felt that the feed had been simply wasted. "Are you a relation of this man Joseph Link, alias Slippery Joe and Joe the Nobbler?"

"A welation?" wailed D'Arcy. "A welation of such a wascal? Goodness gwacious, no! Look at me, and surely you will see that it is imposs."

"Have you any relations or connections among the criminal classes?"

"I wegard the question as an insult."

"It must be answered. I should be sorry to have to take you away from the school with handcuffs on." Mr. Fix put his hand carelessly into his pocket, and there was a metallic clink.

The swell of St. Jim's shuddered.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Fix," said Blake persuasively, "don't be a cad, you know—er, I mean, it's all right! D'Arcy hadn't the faintest idea that this chap was such a rotter, and he wouldn't think of sheltering him from the law. We'll all put our heads together to help you to put him under lock and key."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"H'm! The question is, can you assist me to do so?"

"Oh, yes! The fellow will be meeting D'Arcy again, to screw some more money out of him, you know, and then you can drop on the rotter," said Blake eagerly.

"Good wheeze!" said Digby.

Mr. Fix looked very thoughtful. They could not see his face very clearly, as he kept it turned from the light, but it seemed to show signs of relenting.

"Well, if you can answer for that," said the gentleman from Scotland Yard slowly, "of course, that alters the matter."

"Oh, we'll manage it right enough!"

"Excuse me," said Arthur Augustus, after some thought on the subject. "If this man is weally such a wascal as you make out——"

"There's no doubt about that."

"Then I shall certainly wefuse to have any more dealin's with him, and I shall demand the weturn of my cash."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Blake. "You'll have to go to the host of the Golden Pig for that, I expect, Gussy."

"In any case, money weturned or not, I shall cease my communications with such a diswputable person, even to the extent of givin' up lookin' for my watch," said Arthur Augustus. "But about givin' him up to the police, that is quite a diffewent mattah."

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

Mr. Fix turned a severe glance upon the swell of the School House. D'Arcy had one of his obstinate expressions on.

"What do you mean, my lad?" asked the man from Scotland Yard sternly. "Do you mean that you will refuse to aid the police?"

"Yaas, wathah! You see, the man is undoubtedly a gweat wascal, but in comin' and speakin' to me on a fwiendly footin' he twusts to my honah."

"H'm——"

"If I let him come and talk to me, and betwayed him into the hands of the police, it would be a wathah dishonouwable action."

"But if he is a criminal——"

"Two w'ongs don't make a w'ight," said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "I should be a cwiminal, too, if I were guilty of tweachery."

Blake, Digby, and Herries looked at one another helplessly. There was something in what D'Arcy said; and in any case it was certain that the swell of the School House had made up his mind, and was firmly fixed in his views. The handcuffs clinked again in the pocket of Mr. Fix.

"Have you made up your mind upon that point, Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It amounts to a refusal to aid the police in the execution of their duty," said Mr. Fix sternly.

"I am afwaid that undah any circs. I could not possibly be guilty of tweachery," said Arthur Augustus.

"But such things are done every day in the detective line."

"I am vewy sowwy to hear it."

Mr. Fix rose to his feet.

"I can only regard this as a subterfuge," he said. "You are evidently an accomplice of the criminal."

"Nothin' of the sort, only——"

"You have connections in the criminal classes."

"On the contwawy, my fwiends are vewy select, not to say swaggah——"

"I have no alternative but to arrest you on suspicion."

"Pway don't do anythin' of the kind! It will weally be a most widiculous blundah," said D'Arcy. "And extwemely uncomfy for me, too."

There was a metallic jingle again in the pocket of Mr. Fix. But he did not draw out the handcuffs to view.

"Come," he said; "my men are waiting below! I will consult with them before I decide to take you away. But you must come down with me."

"Oh, vewy well!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Blake. "This is all rot! I shall go straight to the Head——"

Mr. Fix looked rather uneasy for a moment.

"Wait till I have consulted with my men," he said. "You can come down with me, Master D'Arcy. If I decide to take you away, I will come back and inform these young gentlemen."

"Vewy well. Pway wemain here, deah boys!"

"But——" began Blake.

"Oh, pway wemain here! You must not obstwuct the execution of the beastly law, you know. I don't want you to get into twouble too."

"Come along," said Mr. Fix, opening the door.

The man from Scotland Yard walked out of the study, followed by Arthur Augustus. Blake and his chums watched them go, undecided and bewildered. They passed down the staircase, and Tom Merry, coming upstairs, passed them and glanced at them curiously. He stopped at the open door of Study No. 6 and looked in. Three dismayed faces met his glance.

"Hallo! What's up?" exclaimed Tom Merry at once.

CHAPTER 15.

Absolutely Done.

BLAKE gave a groan.

"Oh, Gussy's done it at last!"

"What has he done?"

"You remember that detective chap he was meeting?"

"Yes, rather! What about him?"

"Only he turns out to be a criminal hiding from the police, that's all, named Nobbling Joe, or something, and there's a detective come down specially from Scotland Yard to look for him."

Tom Merry started.

"My only hat! Are you sure?"

"Didn't you see a fellow with Gussy on the stairs as you came up?"

"Yes. Was that the detective?"

"Yes, that was the beast!"

"H'm! He was in plain clothes. He didn't look much like a detective, either," said Tom Merry, who had Ferrers Locke in his mind's eye. "Are you sure it's all right?"

Blake stared at him.

"All right? Oh, yes! He had his men waiting outside."

"He had what?" yelled Tom Merry.

"His men, the men from Scotland Yard, waiting outside," repeated Blake. "What's the matter with you, Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh? What are you cackling at? I should think this was rather a serious matter!" exclaimed Blake indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the wheeze? Tell me what you are cackling at, you ass, before I dot you on the nose!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers advanced wrathfully towards the hero of the Shell. Tom Merry retreated to the door, still laughing almost hysterically. Blake began to have a suspicion that something was wrong somewhere.

"Merry! Look here——"

"Explain yourself, you rotter!" cried Digby. "Do you mean to say that we've been taken in? What do you mean, anyway?"

"Oh, my only pyjama hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "If this doesn't beat the whole record! My dear aunt! I passed some fellows waiting outside the School House as I came in——"

"They were Mr. Fix's men."

"I have no doubt about that. They were fellows you know, too."

"Eh?" ejaculated the three chums together, in amazement.

"There were three of them," gurgled Tom Merry, "and their names were Figgins, Wynn, and Marmaduke!"

"Figgins, Wynn, and Marmaduke!" said Blake dazedly. And Digby and Herries repeated, like parrots:

"Figgins, Wynn, and Marmaduke!"

"Exactly!"

"But—but what——"

"There weren't any others waiting outside that I saw. I wondered what the Co. were doing there, too. I asked Figgins, and he turned red. Ha, ha! Of course, they were waiting for Mr. Fix, of Scotland Yard! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but I don't see——"

"Can't you see that you've been done?"

"Done?" exclaimed the bewildered Blake. "How? No, I can't. How have we been done? What are you getting at?"

"Figgins, Wynn, and Marmaduke were waiting outside," chuckled Tom Merry. "Not Kerr—you understand? Kerr, the impersonator!"

The chums of Study No. 6 understood at last!

"Kerr," said Blake—"Kerr! My hat! Kerr! He took us in made up as Mr. Lathom. He made up as Herr Schneider and took us in! And now——"

"And now he's taken you in again! Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove, it's plain enough now!" cried Digby. "Let's get after the rotter! Oh, what utter asses we shall look if Kerr gets clear away after this!"

"He wolfed our feed," muttered Herries. "Fancy us feeding him up to the chin to put him into a good temper! And it was Kerr, after all."

"I'm not quite convinced yet," said Blake. "But——"

"Let's go and see," said Tom Merry, grinning. "It's up against the School House, anyway, so I'm on your side. Follow me."

And Tom Merry turned and ran down the stairs. The chums of Study No. 6 were after him in a twinkling. They ran out into the dusky quad.

"D'Arcy! Where are you?"

"Mr. Fix! Where are you?"

The echoes of their voices replied. The New House juniors whom Tom Merry had seen outside were no longer there. Mr. Fix, of Scotland Yard, had also vanished. But where was Arthur Augustus?

"Gussy! Gussy!"

A still, small voice from the darkness replied:

"Oh, pway come and welease me, deah boys!"

The voice was that of D'Arcy, and it came from the bottom of the School House steps. There was a stone balustrade beside the steps, and close to the lowest pillar of it a form could be seen. The School House lads ran down quickly, and Tom Merry burst into a chuckle. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was embracing the pillar, and his wrists were tied together on the opposite side of it. He turned a pathetic face towards the chums of the School House.

"Pway welease me, deah boys!"

"How did you come like this, Gussy?" demanded Blake, as he felt in his pockets for his penknife.

"It was that wascally Mr. Fix. I came out with him, and then I was seized in the darkness. I could not see the wottahs, but I suppose they were his men. Mr. Fix said they would leave me here till they had captured Slippery Joe, and they put my arms wound this beastly pillah and tied my w'ists togethah."

"You ass! Why didn't you call out?"

"I did not wish to be discovahed in such a widiculous position. Pway welease me. I am most uncomfy standin' like this."

Blake cut the cord that fastened the School House swell's wrists together. The dude of Study No. 6 drew away from the pillar, and dusted his waistcoat ruefully.

"The wottahs! My waistcoat has been simply gwound against that feahfully dirty stone, and it will be absolutely wuined."

"Never mind," said Blake comfortingly. "You'll get a new waistcoat when you go to Portland, you know—a nice new one done up in broad arrows——"

"Pway don't wot on such a sewious subject, Blake. Do you know, I am beginnin' to suspect that we have been done!" said D'Arcy. "I did not wecognise the fellows who collahed me, but one of them chuckled, and it sounded to me vewy much like Fatty Wynn."

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

"It is no laughin' mattah, Tom Mewwy. I have been tweated with gweat diswespect."

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly, as a voice hailed them from the gloom of the quadrangle.

"Figgins!" ejaculated Blake.

It was certainly the voice of the chief of the New House juniors.

"I say, kids, who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

And the voices of Kerr, Wynn, and Marmaduke answered the question in unison from the darkness:

"New House! New House!"

"Who's been diddled and done?"

"Blake has!"

"Who takes the cake?"

"We do!"

"Let them hear us smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The smile could have been heard the length of the quadrangle. Blake made a wrathful step in the direction of the smilers, but there was a sound of retreating footsteps. The laugh rang again from the direction of the New House. Figgins & Co. were gone! The School House lads looked at one another with a rather sickly expression.

"Done!" murmured Blake.

"Dished!" grunted Herries.

"Absolutely done!" growled Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I weally considah that you fellows are wathah to blame in this mattah," said D'Arcy. "You weally ought to have seen——"

"You're a good one to talk about it," grunted Blake. "Why, it was all your fault from start to finish. What did you get that rotten bogus detective down here in the first place for?"

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"Then you ought to have known that it was Kerr all along——"

"You mean you ought to have known, deah boy!"

"Oh, don't argue; you make me tired!"

"I never knew such a chap as Gussy for arguing," said Digby. "What I like is a fellow who can admit himself in the wrong."

"But weally, deah boy——"

"Oh, come along, and let's get in. The whole school will be singing this to us to-morrow," said Blake. "It's too rich to keep. We shall never hear the end of it, and Figgins & Co. will have something to cackle about for weeks to come."

"You're right there," grinned Tom Merry. "I fancy the whole school will help with the cackling. Good-night."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to my study. This is too good to keep; I must tell Lowther and Manners," chuckled Tom Merry, as they re-entered the School House.

"Don't be in a hurry, though. Gussy wants to speak to you."

"Well, go ahead, Gussy!"

"I weally do not wemembah wantin' to speak to Tom Mewwy, Blake."

"Ass! What about the eight shillings you want to borrow of him?"

"But weally you wottahs ought——"

"Oh, don't argue! I verily believe you'd argue the hind legs off a mule!" said Blake. "Settle it with Tom Merry."

And Blake, Herries, and Digby went into No. 6 Study, leaving the School House swell standing in the passage with Tom Merry. D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye.

"Vewy well, I suppose it's all wight," he remarked. "Can you lend me eight shillin's for a couple of days, Tom Mewwy? I have been standin' a feed, and that wotten New House wastah has scoffed it, too!"

Tom Merry laughed, and felt in his pockets.

"Four bob," he said, bringing his possessions to light. "But it's all right, Gussy! I'll get the rest off Manners and Lowther, and come back with it."

"Thank you vewy much, Tom Mewwy. You are weally a decent sort of wottah," said D'Arcy; and Tom Merry went up the passage, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 16.

D'Arcy Recovers His Watch.

THE chums of Study No. 6 were not looking pleased. They had been so utterly taken in by the little "jape" of Figgins & Co. that there was no possibility of explaining it, or, as Blake expressed it, crawling out of it. They knew that on the morrow morning all St. Jim's would be laughing over the story, how they had fed up the disguised New House junior to propitiate him, and how Arthur Augustus had been arrested by Figgins & Co. But while Blake, Herries, and Digby were troubled by that prospect, and were also taking a rueful survey of what was left of the feed, D'Arcy was occupied by another and, to him, much more important matter.

He stood before the glass, and examined the reflection of his waistcoat with a sad and sorrowful eye. There was no doubt that the waistcoat was spoiled. It had been ground hard against the stone pillar, and that stone pillar was none too clean, and had been wetted by a late shower of rain. The fancy waistcoat, one of the most startling in D'Arcy's possession, was grimed all over, and most of its brilliant colours were dulled.

"It's rotten!" said Blake, referring to the victory of Figgins & Co. "We shall never wipe it out."

"Yaas, wathah, that's what I was thinkin'!" said D'Arcy, looking at his waistcoat. "It can nevah possibly be wiped off, deah boys!"

"Oh, our turn will come," said Digby cheerily. "We'll think of something——"

"Imposs., deah boy. You can nevah think of anythin' that will wipe that off," said D'Arcy, shaking his head.

"What rot!" said Dig warmly. "I suppose we can get up wheezes as well as Figgins & Co., can't we?"

"Eh? Who's talkin' about Figgins & Co.?"

"You were speaking about wiping off this defeat——"

"Bai Jove, no, I wasn't! I was speakin' about wipin' this wotten gwime off my waistcoat."

Dig looked daggers at the swell of the school. D'Arcy did not notice it. He was taking off his jacket, with the view of removing the grimy waistcoat and making a closer survey of it. On a closer inspection the waistcoat looked worse than ever, and D'Arcy shook his head sadly.

"I'm afwaid it's weally done for, deah boys!" he said.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.

"I wegard that wemark as wude, Blake. Pewwaps when the gwime is quite dwy it may be bwushed off. You might do it for me to-mowwow, Dig."

"Catch me! Too much like work. Why can't you do it yourself?"

"It always makes my arm ache bwushin' mud off things."

"What about my arm?" hooted Digby.

"Well, of course that's weally not so vewy important. But please yourself, deah boy. I weally think you might be obligin', that's all. Upon the whole, I think pewwaps the thing is no good, and I may as well be chawitable and give it to the poor. Fortunately I have anothah waistcoat."

"More like a dozen, I should say."

"Let me see. There is the one I wore on Saturday—I haven't worn that for some days now, so I think I may as well twy it again," D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully.

"Oh, blow your waistcoats!" growled Blake.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

Arthur Augustus unlocked the box in which he kept his special best waistcoats, and turned over the four or five garments it contained, all carefully folded.

"Ah, this is the one, deah boys!"

He drew out a waistcoat which was really a triumph of colour. Then he uttered an ejaculation of surprise. The waistcoat sagged down with something weighty in the watch-pocket. Arthur Augustus stared at it.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter?"

"I am weally distinctly surpwised."

"What is it, you ass?"

"It's my beastly watch, you know."

"What!" shouted Blake, Herries, and Digby.

Arthur Augustus, still with that expression of surprise upon his face, drew a gold watch out of the pocket of the waistcoat.

It was certainly "the" watch—the famous twenty-five guinea timekeeper, the present from the School House swell's noble governor. There it was, as large as life.

Blake and his chums looked at D'Arcy with feelings too deep for immediate words. D'Arcy put the watch to his ear, and then commenced to wind it up.

"And so," began Blake, in measured tones, "you have been making all this bother about a watch that wasn't lost at all."

"Weally, Blake——"

"What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Weally—you see, deah boys, it's quite easy to explain. I changed my waistcoat on Saturday after I came in. I wemembah it was wumpled in the wow with the Grammarians in the village. I changed it, and I was feelin' wathah knocked up—in fact, uttahly exhausted—by the wow, and so I ovahlooked the fact that the watch was left in the pocket."

"You—you——"

"Pway don't be wude, Blake. I put the waistcoat away, and haven't looked at it since, so it was perfectly natuwal that I should not discovah the watch in the pocket."

"You—you——"

"I fail to see that I was to blame in any way. I was wathah absent-minded, pewwaps, but that was perfectly natuwal aftah the exhaustin' wow in the tuckshop with the Gwammah cads."



"Strike up 'The Bogey Man,' Lane!" exclaimed Frank Monk, as they dragged D'Arcy along.

"Hallo! That a new watch?" asked Tom Merry, coming into the study.

"No," said Blake; "it's the watch that was stolen—I mean that wasn't stolen. Gussy has just found it in the pocket of the waistcoat he took off on Saturday."

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What would you do with that thing if you had it in your study, Tom Merry?" asked Blake, nodding towards Arthur Augustus.

"I wefuse to be called——"

"I think I should kill it," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "or else take it out somewhere and lose it, Blake."

"I wegard these jokes as bein' in wathah bad form," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "I fail to see that I am to blame in the mattah at all. It is vewy fortunate that I have found my watch; and yet it's cuwious, too, for Mr. Link told me that he was on the twack of the thief, and the case was vewy stwong against Fwank Monk."

"The rotter!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "Frank Monk of the Grammar School? By Jove, that rascal ought to be horsewhipped!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus fastened the watch upon his chain, and restored it to the pocket of the fancy waistcoat, which he proceeded to don. The rolled-gold watch he looked at rather doubtfully, undecided what to do with it. Finally he locked it up in his desk. He had just turned the key when a large head was inserted into the study, and Skimpole blinked round through his spectacles.

"I say, D'Arcy—— Oh, I didn't know you were here, Merry. Never mind, I suppose you know all about it. I say, D'Arcy, I've wound up the case at last."

"Wound up what case?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"The case of the stolen watch."

"Well, that's a curious thing to do," Digby remarked thoughtfully. "Fancy winding up the case of a watch! And will it go, Skimpole?"

"Oh, don't be funny, Digby! I've wound up the case, with complete success. My earlier investigations cleared the fellows in this study from suspicion. The case looked very black against Manners for a time, but subsequent clues showed me that Manners was innocent. But now I've got the right man at last."

The juniors grinned at one another. It seemed rather funny for the amateur detective of St. Jim's to have discovered the thief of the watch which had never been stolen, but it was in keeping with the rest of Skimpole's brilliant efforts as a detective.

"And who's the heinous villain?" asked Blake.

"What's the name of the horrid rascal?" queried Tom Merry.

"Well, you can laugh if you like," said Skimpole, "but

I've got the case absolutely completed and settled. Of course, one doesn't like to suspect the captain of the school of——"

"Kildare!" yelled four voices.

"Yes, certainly," said Skimpole, pleased with the impression his announcement had made. "My clues have led me to the irresistible conclusion that Kildare was the one who took the watch from this study."

Arthur Augustus took the watch out of his pocket and silently held it up for the amateur detective's inspection. Skimpole stared at it.

"Is that a new watch, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"No, that's my old watch."

"Has Kildare restored it to you? Is it possible that he learned that I was on the track, and hastened to restore the loot? Yes, I suppose——"

"You uttah idiot! The watch has nevah been stolen."

"Eh?"

"I have just found it in the waistcoat I left off on Saturday. It was there all the time. It has nevah been stolen at all. It was all a mistake."

Skimpole looked dazed.

"Then—then there is something wrong with my latest clue," he murmured.

"Somethin' w'ong with your bwain too, I wathah think."

"I suppose I was—was mistaken about Kildare. It was all your fault, of course, for saying that you had lost a watch when you hadn't lost a watch. I think you are about the biggest ass in the School House, Gussy."

"You forget yourself!" chuckled Dig.

"I weally think, Skimpole, that undah the circs. I have no alternative but to administah to you a weally feahful thwashin'," exclaimed the swell of the School House, advancing towards the amateur detective.

The door slammed, and there was a patter of feet away along the passage.

"Weally," said D'Arcy, "of all the silly asses, I think that chap takes the bun, you know. I'm jolly glad I found the watch, as he would have suspected Mr. Wailton or the Head next, I suppose. Have you got that eight shillin's, Tom Mewwy?"

"Here they are!"

"Thank you. I will go and settle with Dame Taggles now, deah boys."

———

CHAPTER 17.
Exit Mr. Link.

"BAI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stood in the hall, looking at a letter he had just opened. There was an expression of unbounded amazement upon his face. It was the morning after the discovery of the watch, and the boys of St. Jim's were going in to breakfast.

"News?" asked Tom Merry, stopping and tapping the swell of the School House upon the shoulder.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy. "Wead that! Wead it, for goodness' sake!"

Somewhat surprised, Tom Merry took the letter and glanced through it. It was in the handwriting of Joseph Link, and it was certainly a strange communication, in the light of what had happened the evening before. Tom Merry gave a whistle as he read:

"Dear Sir,—I am pleased to be able to inform you that, having followed up my clues, I have fixed with absolute certainty upon the thief of the watch. I have actually seen the pawn-ticket in his possession, so there is no further doubt. Will you meet me at midday in the same place in the lane, and I will explain fully, and you can decide what measures are to be taken.—Yours faithfully,

"JOSEPH LINK."

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "This is what I call ripping! You can see the kind of a rotter he is now, I suppose, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose it's Frank Monk he's got in his mind?"

"Yaas. I told him that if it turned out to be a Gwammaiwian I should pwefer to hush up the mattah, and so——"

"And so his little game is to pretend that Monk is guilty, depending on you to say nothing about it. The utter rascal!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose your being such an ass tempts him to pull the wool over your eyes, Gussy; but, all the same, he's a fearful scoundrel to play a game like this."

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass."

"Oh, come in to breakfast! I must talk this over with Blake—yes, and Figgins, too. We'll give Mr. Joseph Link something to remember us by. We'll all be on the spot when you meet him."

"Bai Jove, that's a weally wippin' ideah, you know! The wascal ought to have a weally severe lesson," assented Arthur Augustus.

The letter evoked equal indignation among the chums of Study No. 6 when they saw it. In a matter like that the chums of the Fourth were at one with the Terrible Three. The bogus detective's scheme was so utterly despicable that the juniors agreed without a dissentient voice that he ought to be made an example of. And Tom Merry's suggestion that Figgins & Co. should be allowed to take a hand was cordially agreed to. After morning school there was a general discussion of the matter.

"The rotter!" said Figgins. "Of course, we know all the time that he was only stuffing up Gussy."

"Oh, weally, Figgins!"

"So did we all," said Tom Merry. "That was bad enough; but this is worse. He would have made Gussy believe that Frank Monk was a thief."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll all meet him," said Blake energetically. "We'll put him through it. We really ought to rag Gussy, too."

"Oh, weally, Blake——"

"Never mind Gussy; let's give Mr. Joseph Link a lesson," said Figgins. "Gussy can go out and meet him under the trees, same as before, and hold him in talk while we surround him. Then we'll drop on him."

"Good! We'll make the rotter run the gauntlet. Every fellow can take a bit of rope or a stuffed stocking," said Monty Lowther. "We'll give him a lesson that will keep him off the grass in this part of the world, at all events. Of course, it's no good thinking of getting the money back."

"Bai Jove, that's wathah wotten, you know!"

"Serve you right!" said Tom Merry severely. "If Gussy loses the money, we'll consider that his proper punishment for being an ass."

"I wefuse to be wegarded as an ass."

"And next time," said Figgins, "perhaps you'll have sense enough not to go in for anything without asking the advice of a New House fellow first."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

"And many of 'em!" added Blake.

"Considering the troubles you fellows are always getting into for want of a little fatherly advice," said Kerr, "I really think——"

"Is this a friendly meeting, or is it to be a House row?" asked Blake. "We're quite ready to wipe up the ground with you New House rotters!"

"Oh, pax!" grinned Figgins. "Keep your wool on! Let's settle about this detective humbug. It's about time you went to meet him, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then off you go! And mind you keep him talking till you hear me whistle!"

"Till you hear me whistle!" said Blake, with emphasis.

"Now, look here, Blake——"

"Look here, Figgins——"

"Till you hear us all whistle, then!" grinned Tom Merry. "Off with you, Gussy!"

"Wight you are!"

Arthur Augustus strolled out of the gates. The rest of the juniors followed more slowly. It was necessary to avoid giving the alarm to the bogus detective, who was probably a wary bird. But they were soon under the trees on the other side of the lane, and there they heard the voices of the swell of St. Jim's and Mr. Joseph Link, the famous detective.

"You have the case fully worked out, weally, Mr. Link?"

"Yes, certainly," said the detective, with a smile of satisfaction. "Suspicion was very black against the boy Monk from the start. I have now conclusive proofs that he is guilty."

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked at the sham detective curiously. Mr. Link's manner was quite serious, and the School House swell wondered how a man could stand with an unmoved face and utter such utterly unfounded falsehoods. D'Arcy had certainly never met so absolute a rascal before, and his indignation was rising to boiling-point.

"And what are the pwoofs?" he asked.

"The boy Monk pawned the watch in Rylcombe."

"But there is no pawnbrokah's in Wylcombe."

"Did I say Rylcombe?" said Mr. Link hastily. "Of course, I mean Wayland. A mere slip of the tongue, of course. As you very truly say, there is no pawnbroker's in Rylcombe. The boy Monk pawned the watch in Wayland."

"But how do you know?"

"I have interviewed the pawnbroker, and he gave me an accurate description of the lad. I have seen the pawn-ticket in Monk's possession."

"Bai Jove!"

"The pawnbroker still has the watch, and if any trouble

s made, the first step is, of course, the arrest of the boy Monk. I understood you to say that you did not want a scandal with the Grammar School, and that you would rather lose the watch."

"Yaas, that is vewy twue."

"In that case, my work is done. But I must mention that I have been put to very heavy and unanticipated expense in the matter, as I was compelled to bribe the pawnbroker's assistant in Ryl—in Wayland, and there were many other items. I will furnish you with a detailed list if you wish, although that is not my usual custom. I think if you now hand me four guineas——"

D'Arcy's eye gleamed behind his monocle.

"Are you sure that will meet all expenses?" he asked quietly. "I should weally not like you to be put to any loss in the mattah."

"Well, as you are so liberal, perhaps five guineas would be nearer the mark," said Mr. Link thoughtfully. "My time is very valuable, and you must take into consideration the fact that I have left cases in London of almost international importance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then if you will kindly hand over——"

"But weally, deah sir, you are too modewate!"

"Too moderate?" said Mr. Link, with a quick glance at the junior. "I don't quite understand you, Master D'Arcy."

"You might as well say twenty guineas, you know," said D'Arcy blandly. "Or you might as well make it fifty while you are on the subject. You would be just as likely to get it fwom me, too."

"What do you mean? I——"

"I mean that you are a swindlin' wascal!" said D'Arcy. "My watch was nevah stolen at all. I have found it in my study."

Mr. Link's jaw dropped.

"You haven't seen the pawnticket, as the watch was nevah pawned. You haven't interviewed any pawnbwokah on the subject. You know perfectly well that Fwank Monk is not a thief," said D'Arcy, his indignation boiling over. "You are a beastly wascal, and you have been imposin' upon me because I was unsuspicious, and expected to be tweated with common honesty."

"This is an excuse not to pay my fees. I demand the sum of four guineas, and if you do not pay, I shall go immediately to your headmaster."

"Bai Jove, I wish you would; and I'll come with you!" said Arthur Augustus. "I expect I should get a blowin' up; but I know jolly well that you would be sent to pwison for gettin' money undah false pwetences, you wascal."

An extremely ugly look came over the rascal's face. He knew perfectly well that he dared not go to Dr. Holmes, and his threat had been quite an empty one.

"You young hound!" he snarled, the whole evil nature of the scoundrel showing itself now in the moment of disappointment. "If you don't hand over the tin, I'll take it out of your hide! Do you hear? Pay up, or I'll give you such a thrashing that you won't be able to crawl about for a month!"

D'Arcy's eyes flashed fire.

"Bai Jove, just twy it!" he exclaimed. "Come on, you wascal! Bai Jove, I'll give you a feahful thwashin'!"

There was a whistle under the trees, and a shout. A rush of feet, and ten juniors of St. Jim's were surrounding the startled Mr. Link.

The exposed scoundrel cast a hunted look round. D'Arcy was dancing round him, flourishing his fists, but the bogus detective was not inclined to attack him now. He was thinking only of escape. But escape was cut off.

"Got him!" exclaimed Tom Merry gleefully.

"Got him!" said Figgins. "Collar the rotter!"

They collared the vainly struggling Mr. Link. The detective was pale now with apprehension. He saw that the juniors of St. Jim's meant business.

"Lemme alone!" he yelled. "I'll have the law of you. Don't you dare to touch me, you young whelps!"

But they did dare to touch him. They had him over in a twinkling, and Fatty Wynn and Herries, the two heaviest of the party, sat upon his chest to secure him.

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped the unfortunate Mr. Link.

"Wait a minute!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We're going to make an example of you, as a sort of warning to you in the future. You are a fearful rascal, aren't you?"

"Hang you! Let me get up, or——"

"Do you admit that you are a rascal, and that you have swindled D'Arcy, or shall I stick this pin into you?" asked Tom Merry.

"I—oh—yes—no—don't you dare—ow!—yes, I am a rascal—oh—I did swindle D'Arcy—yes, yes, yes! Don't! Yes."

"Good! You see, he admits it himself, chaps," said Tom Merry. "Now form up, and let him run the gauntlet."

"I won't!"

"Won't you? That's your mistake. You will. Form up!"

Tom Merry kept a firm grip upon the rascal, while the other ten of the party formed in a double row, five on each side. Each had a cap or a piece of rope in his hand, ready for the ordeal.

"Right hands up!" said Tom Merry.

Ten right hands went up like clockwork.

"Now, you rascal, you're going through it! If you don't run, we'll give you a ducking in the ditch, and then put you through it. Take your choice."

Mr. Link staggered to his feet. There was no escape. Tom Merry's grip was on his collar, and the rest were ready to pile on him. He cast a hunted look round, and then faced the double row, and hesitated.

"Look here——"

"Oh, go on!" said Tom Merry; and he gave the rascal a push, and then a powerful kick behind, which fairly started him on the run.

Mr. Link staggered between the double rows of waiting juniors, and a shower of blows descended upon him. Thwack—thwack—thwack! He yelled, and made a desperate dash to get through. The blows came down like rain, and he reeled to right and left; but finally he tore through. And then he did not stop. He kept on at full speed, and disappeared among the trees.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "By Jove, that chap can sprint! And he doesn't look much of an athlete either. I think we've seen the last of Mr. Link, chaps!"

And Tom Merry was right. St. Jim's saw no more of the bogus detective.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY.

"TOM MERRY'S BAZAAR."

A Splendid School Tale, dealing with the adventures of

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TEMPEST HEADLAND

A SPLENDID NEW SCHOOL TALE.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

READ THIS FIRST!

Billy Barnes, Cyril Conway, and Snowy White Adonis Venus, are three great chums at Tempest Headland School.

Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, finds them very troublesome pupils; as does also Herr Ludvig, the German master.

Venus is a black boy, and is taken as a fag by Graft, a bully.

The chums wage continual warfare on Mopps, the school porter, who is unpopular on account of his ill-nature, and the malicious delight he takes in reporting offences to the doctor.

(Now go on with the story.)

Mopps is Hurt—The Amateur Ghost.

"Good-evening, Mopps!" exclaimed Cyril, making his most polite bow, as he entered the porter's lodge, followed by Venus, who made another bow as near like Cyril's as he could manage, and both the worthies looked so remarkably grave that Mopps knew from past experience they were up to some prank.

"Now, see here," cried Mopps, shaking his fist at the intruders, "if you two don't clear out of this in two seconds, I'll make it hot for you!"

"But we hear, my dear Mopps, that you are going to give a little party to-night."

"If I choose to entertain my relations I suppose I can do so, without a parcel of boys interfering with me?"

"Quite so, my dear Mopps."

"Oh, clear out with your dear Mopps! I don't want none of your lip."

"Prefer the lips of your lady guests—eh, Mopps? Oh, you giddy young kipper. I know the widow has money in her own right."

"Who's been a telling you all this, now?"

"Never you mind, Mopps, we know all about it. Now, it has occurred to us, Mopps, that you would like to invite us to help entertain your guests, and——"

"What!" roared Mopps. "I'd rayther invite wild savages and bomb-throwing Anarchists to entertain 'em."

"Sorry, Mopps, but, don't you see, we could be entertaining the other guests while you were entertaining the widdy."

"You varmint! If you make them personal remarks I'll kick you out of the place; I will, straight. Now, jest you sling your hook, 'cos I'm busy."

"I thought perhaps you would like me to prepare a little speech to the fair lady. Something after this: 'Beloved! In hoffering you my 'and and my 'eart, I'm a hoffering what the most beaushust ladies in this 'ere land have sought in vain. I am, straight. You see, you are getting on in years, and are a bit plum-pudding shape——"

"Clear hout of it!" howled the indignant Mopps, seizing his stick, which was a thick one.

Cyril judiciously got to the other side of the table, so did Venus.

"All I need to make a 'appy 'ome is plenty of beer, and a bit of your love. I shall be able to find an outcome for your income, and I shall allow you five bob a week out of it for your dress."

Here Mopps aimed a blow at Cyril's head, but that worthy ducked in time, and Venus got a crack on the head that sounded like breaking cocoanuts.

"Here, steady wid dat stick, old hoss!" yelled Venus.

"My style of beauty," continued the exasperating Cyril, "may be a slobby sort of style, and my face may be like a badly-cooked dough-nut, but look at the lovely colour of my nose. Sweet charmer, be mine, and I'll get a clean shave and wash my face regular every week, whether it wants it or not."

By this time Cyril was dodging round the table, and Mopps broke two plates and a cup and saucer in trying to hit him with the stick. But Cyril made no attempt to escape by the door, although he could easily have done so. He dodged into Mopps' bed-room, sprang on the bed with his muddy boots, then dexterously leapt over the back of it; and now Mopps made a blow at his head that would certainly have knocked him silly. But Cyril went to the floor in a heap, and the stick descended on Mopps' jug and basin, smashing them to atoms, and deluging the floor with water.

Needless to say, Cyril was up like a chased cat. He felt that he would need some protection to his head from blows like that, and so he crawled under the bed, and the first thing that greeted his gaze was Mopps' hat-box, in which he kept his tall hat, which he used on Sunday and for other special occasions. Cyril had that hat out in no time, and pulled it on. It did not want much pulling because it came over his ears, making him look utterly ridiculous.

Mopps was in such a state of fury that he dealt a vigorous blow with the stick, and smashed his hat flat; then Cyril got out of the room, slamming the door after him.

"So vat is tis howling of laughter outside my study door?" growled Herr Ludvig, rushing out just as Cyril was knocking the unfortunate tile into something like shape. "Vhy does not te porter keep you quiet?"

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat man has been making us noisy, sah," answered Venus. "Dis is his goss, but de man is so bad tempered dat we don't care to return it to him."

"Prut! Te man has no control over boys. Give me his hat. I vill speak seriously to him."

Now Mopps knew that the chums would return the hat—at least, he thought he knew it. He was waiting behind the door for retaliation, and Herr Ludvig no sooner opened it than he got a crack on the head that nearly brained him, then he received a blow in the stomach that caused him to sit on the floor and groan.

Herr Ludvig was a very kind-hearted man, although a little peppery; but the best-tempered man that ever lived would not be likely to stand that sort of treatment. Leaping to his feet, he wrenched the stick from Mopps' hand, seized him by the back of the collar, and whacked at him in a manner that ought to have hurt, and judging by Mopps' howls it did hurt.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus. "Golly, golly! Ain't dis mighty funny? Yah, yah, yah!"

Herr Ludvig said something in German, released his victim, and, flinging the stick to the floor, strode from the room, while he trod on Mopps' hat as he stormed out.

"Woohooh! Oh dear, oh dear!" howled Mopps, writhing about. "Bust me! Woohooh!"

"Did he hurt you, Mopps?" inquired Cyril, gazing calmly at the damaged man.

Mopps deigned no reply, but he gazed round the room for something hard and handy to hurl at Cyril's head.

"Yah, yah, yah! Don't see how a few gentle blows like dat could hurt de man," observed Venus.

"Don't worry about it, Mopps," said Cyril. "You have got us many a caning, and now we have got you one by way of retaliation. Nice, ain't they? They smart while they

last, but they don't last long. It's lucky the stick wasn't any thicker, or it might have hurt you."

"Boys," roared a very angry voice, "come tis vay immediately!"

"It would be useless pleading a prior engagement," murmured Cyril, entering the dread presence. "We have had our fun, and now comes the reckoning. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he's vexed. Don't laugh, Venus."

"Don't feel a bit like laughing," growled Venus, entering the study, to find Herr Ludvig holding his aching head with one hand, and rubbing his waistcoat with the other.

"You write five hundred lines each in German," he cried. "They shall be in te German characters. Prut! Here I vish to study, and te noise of a menagerie bursts forth. Ten I receive a blow on te head mit a stick, and anoter mit a fist in te abdomen. Do you suppose dat is conducive to study?"

"Er—no, sir!" murmured Cyril. "Good-evening, sir."

"Come back, boy. Do you tink I hurt te—te man?"

"I have had some experience of that species of chastisement, sir," answered Cyril. "I would not like to give a wrong opinion concerning the matter, but my impression is that you did hurt him. I should say you hurt him most distinctly. Nor do I believe that he is merely shamming when he waddles about his room groaning, and desiring to be bust. Oh, yes, he was hurt right enough."

A grim smile came over Herr Ludvig's face.

"So vas I hurt," he groaned. "Still, you tink he vas hurt—eh?"

"I feel quite certain on the point, sir; at the same time, if you have any doubts on the point, we can easily hold him down while you do a little more slapdashing."

"Oh, go avay mit you! Be off; und you need not do tose lines on tis occasion, but do not let it occur again. You are sure he vas hurt?"

By way of answer Cyril held up his finger for silence, and they distinctly heard some dismal groans proceeding from the porter's lodge.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus.

"It is noting to laugh at. Go avay. Hush! Ach! Haw, haw, haw! Shut te door."

"Good again!" murmured Cyril. "But did you get the key while I slipped into his bed-room?"

"Golly! Yes, got dat first time."

"Sure you took the right?"

"Certain sure I took de top one on de left."

"That's right. Come along. If we can't catch that owl to-night it will be funny. He comes every night on the college roof, and hoots like a motor-car. I wish it wasn't raining, but you can't have everything your own way."

"Nunno! Mopps didn't get it dis evening. Yah, yah, yah! Can't help laughing when I tink about dat."

"We will unlock the turret door now, so as to have the net all ready."

"Do you tink de owl will want someting to entice him?" inquired Venus.

"Well, we will put a lantern, and he is sure to fly at the light, then we will pop the net over him."

The chums had now entered their dormitory, where the net was hidden, and, closing the door, they made their final arrangements, which for obvious reasons they desired to be kept perfectly secret; and so they would have been had it not been for Snigg's liking for plum-cake.

It so happened that Billy had received a hamper from home, and in this, amongst other things, was a huge plum-cake. Billy had eaten and given away about half of it, and Snigg had just helped himself to about half of that moiety, when he heard the approaching footsteps of the chums.

Snigg was under one of the beds in no time, and then he listened to the details of the owl-catching plot.

"All right, you little beasts," murmured Snigg, when they had gone; "I'll get in one this time. Dishonest little ruffians, sneaking out on the roof and stealing the doctor's owls! I believe it is poaching. At any rate, it is dishonest, because they have no right to the owl. I'll wring its neck if they do catch it. Beastly dishonesty, I call it. Now, I wonder if Billy would miss it if I took a bit more of that cake? It's jolly good, I will say that for it, and he only gave me a small piece, not nearly as much as he had himself, and that's disgracefully mean; besides, it's greedy, and there's nothing I hate more than that. He's a stupid ass, else he would not have left his hamper open, and I consider a chap is justified under such circumstances in helping himself. I know what I will do. I'll have it all, and shut the cat inside his hamper. He will think she has stolen the stuff. I'll jolly well have it all. That's a good idea, if I can only catch the cat; and if Billy brings out a lot of grub, it will stop those beasts playing their dishonest tricks. So I shall really be doing good, one way and another—teaching the little demons that it is disgusting dishonest to steal owls, and teaching Billy that it is very wrong to put temptation in the way of boys."

And arguing the matter out in this charming manner, Snigg made his way downstairs, where fortune favoured him, and he caught the cat. Then, having stolen all Billy's provisions, he shut the cat in the hamper, and fastened the lid so that it could not possibly get out.

Snigg ate no tea that night, neither did the cat. Snigg had supper by himself, and finished Billy's provisions at a sitting.

All went well until lights were out, and subsequently lighted; then Billy told them that he was going to stand a supper, and expectation ran high. It was generally known that Billy had a hamper, and he was a lavish sort of lad, though remarkably simple in most matters. He opened his hamper, and the cat jumped out, and concealed itself under the beds, because the door was shut.

Billy was generally supposed to be as soft as cream cheese.

"Why, the grub has all gone!" he cried.

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Snigg. "It's that beastly cat. How could it have got in? This is jolly rough on us, Billy, and I think, under the circumstances, you ought to buy a supper for to-morrow night."

"I haven't got any money," growled Billy.

"Cyril will lend it to you. Borrow five bob from him. You oughtn't to disappoint us like that, just because a blessed cat wolfs your grub."

"I'm not going to believe a cat has eaten a plum-cake, jam-tarts, nuts, and—— All right!"

Billy said no more, not being a boy of words. He went for Snigg and hit him on the nose, then between the eyes, next beneath the jaw, and after that in the middle of his body, and the last blow was delivered with a force that caused Snigg to sit on the floor. Billy sprang on him, and, seizing him by the throat, banged the back of his head on the floor; then he stood on him while he got a large piece of yellow soap from the wash-stand.

"You are hungry, are you?" growled Billy, sitting on his chest. "Well, eat that, you worm. You've jolly well wolfed my grub, now you shall wolf that soap. Eat it, you beast!" added Billy, ramming it home with his fist. "I'll make you swallow every bit. Don't make a noise, you chaps. He's going to eat that soap, or I'll know the reason why."

Snigg probably had the roughest five minutes of his life's voyage, so far. Billy jabbed the soap into his mouth, and kept scraping it on his tongue. Snigg tried to yell, but every time he opened his mouth Billy rammed the soap further down.

"Golly, de boy is habing fits!" exclaimed Venus, restraining his hilarity with difficulty. "He's foaming at the mouth. Yah, yah, yah!"

"That little guffaw ought to fetch the masters," growled Billy, releasing his victim, blowing out the light, and jumping into bed. "I saw the worm with the cat in his arms, and if I have guessed wrong, I'll apologise to-morrow. Good-night, you fellows! It's a beastly disappointment, but you have the consolation of knowing that Snigg has eaten a good two penn'orth of soap."

"Let'sope he likes it," murmured Cyril. "I'll stand a supper to-morrow, Billy, so you sha'n't be the loser. Get to sleep, you chaps!"

"I'll have vengeance for this villainy!" declared Snigg, who, being guilty, did not want to make sufficient noise to bring the masters up. "Just you see if I don't, Billy, you beast. You have accused me wrongfully, but I'll give you the worst thrashing you have ever had in your life to-morrow. I believe I'm poisoned."

"Soap won't poison you," growled Billy. "Of course, if you have eaten that top puff, you may die."

"I haven't touched your dirty puffs, you microbe."

"Well, that's jolly lucky for you, seeing that the top puff was tested with a teaspoonful of arsenic. I knew if I got that amount of arsenic from the laboratory, and shoved it in the top puff, that I should find out any fellow who collared it, because a teaspoonful of the stuff would be certain to upset him."

"What!" howled Snigg. "You mean to say that you—you put——"

"Oh, go to sleep, you silly idiot! It has got nothing to do with you. You say you didn't steal the puff."

"Of course I didn't; but if I had done so, why, you would have murdered me."

"Rats! It's justifiable homicide. Go to sleep!"

Snigg did nothing of the sort. He had his doubts concerning that arsenic, and tried to draw Billy; but that worthy would answer no more questions, and Snigg spent a very uncomfortable half-hour.

Meantime Cyril was hoping the fellows would get to sleep; but the disappointment over the lost supper made them feel hungry, and they would keep talking about Billy. The



(Continued).

TEMPEST HEADLAND

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only one who did go to sleep was Venus, and he was the very one Cyril desired to keep awake.

At last the voices died away, and then Cyril got out of bed and awoke his sleepy comrade, while he heard a slight rattle at the handle of the door as he did so. However, all became quiet again, and with some little difficulty Cyril got Venus out of bed and into his clothes.

"Now, don't make a noise, you image!" whispered Cyril, as they left the room. "I think it has stopped raining. The moon is struggling through the clouds, and it is just the sort of night for owls."

"Don't see much good in owls," growled Venus. "Would rader keep a hen or a cock robin, or some ob dose birds dat lay breakfast eggs."

"You don't know what is good for you."

"P'r'aps I don't; but I'm mighty certain it ain't good for me to wander about sloping roofs dis time ob night."

"The roof is as flat as a pancake, except just over the parapet, where it slopes, but it is in quite a gentle manner. I have been right down it before now, and got on to the roof of Billy's lodge. You can break bounds that way easily."

"Should hab tought it would hab been easier to break necks!" grumbled Venus, who was still very sleepy; besides, the night was cold, and he hated the cold.

"Follow me, you discontented nigger! Seeing that you have forgotten all about your past life, it stands to reason that you have to consider the present and the future, and get as much pure, undiluted joy out of it as you can. Very well, you are going to have some of the pleasures of life to-night in catching owls. They are jolly birds. We will keep it in a cage, and teach it all sorts of tricks, then we will——"

Cyril ceased speaking. He had gained the flat roof of the west wing of the college, and in the misty moonlight he saw the upper portion of a white and mystic form. Venus did not like ghosts, and he gave a gaspy sort of sound. A white arm was raised above the parapet, and it looked exactly as though that ghost were standing on air. But it so happened that Cyril knew better. The ghost was standing on the sloping roof of the lodge.

Cyril also remembered the rattling of the door knob just before he and Venus left the dormitory, and putting two and two together, in his customary rapid manner of thinking, he came to the conclusion that the ghost was a boy, and a boy from his dormitory. It also occurred to him that the likeliest boy on the face of the earth to try to make a fool of him would be Snigg, who had a good many points to score before he would be anything like level with the worthy Cyril.

"Comrade, this is awful!" he cried, in a voice that he intended to be audible to the amateur ghost. "There is the spectre of the tower! Hark at its hideous wails! How lucky that my aim with a revolver is deadly when anything gets in the way of the bullet! It is our duty to shoot the ghost! The doctor won't mind a few pistol-shots, provided we lay the ghost. I almost fear that pistol-shots don't take effect on ghosts. Still, if I try the five in this revolver, we shall be quite sure on the point. Gently! Perhaps it does not see us, and if I place the muzzle of the revolver close to its brain, I am sure to hit something, supposing it has any brains to hit! Follow me!"

Cyril pulled out his fountain-pen, and slowly advanced towards the ghost, which commenced to wail in a very dismal manner. Did it stop Cyril's advance?

Well, as Venus would have said:

"Nunno!"

And as the daring ghost-stalker advanced the ghost retreated down the sloping roof. It went backwards, because it wanted to keep its eye on the fountain-pen, fondly imagining it to be a deadly revolver—a thing that Cyril never possessed, because of a promise to his indulgent mother; and Cyril never broke a promise to anyone, least of all to the one whom he loved most on earth.

Now, the sloping roof of the lodge is quite twenty feet in length, after which there is a drop of, say, ten feet to the ground; but there is a skylight half-way down the slope.

Although it was not now raining, the slates were very slippery, and when the ghost commenced its retrograde movement, it also commenced to slide, slowly at first, then quickly afterwards.

What followed is worthy of a fresh chapter, but as we do not want to waste space by romping in fresh chapters, we will regard the incident from its nether point of view.

Mopps' guests had assembled. There were three of them. Mopps' male cousin—at least he had told the doctor the gentleman had the honour of being his cousin; a lady of thirty summers, according to her own assertion, and the widow, and the widow was just as charming as she could be—a little plump, perhaps, but none the less beautiful. Henry was the cousin's name. He had a farm in the neighbourhood, and was a bachelor of, say, forty years of age. Possibly his state of celibacy was due to his diffidence and to the fact that ladies had not taken advantage of the leap years, though more than one had been inclined to jump at him and his freehold farm.

With this slight disgression, we will now mention that the party were now at supper. A dish of prime stew, well seasoned with onions, was on the table, and Mopps was helping it.

"It's no good you telling me, 'Enery, that you are not a marrying man, with beauty before you. It's our dooty to marry. We owe it to serciety!"

Henry was not helped yet, and the stew smelt remarkably good, so he was not such an utter idiot as to ask Mopps why he had not married. He merely glanced at the widow, who was glancing at her plate. Then she glanced at Mopps and smiled, while Henry appeared to be trying to swallow his feelings, and the second lady winked at him, and made signs, which he pretended not to understand. She was a friend of the widow, and that charming lady had brought her there for a special reason.

"Cold beef your side, 'Enery! Stew this! What will you take?"

"I'll take stew, please!" said Henry.

And he did. He took about half a pint of it in his eye. Mopps took about a pint of it down his white shirt-front, and in his face, while he took the ghost's boots in his mouth, and a quart or so of smashed glass on the top of his head, to say nothing of a few pieces of broken framework from the skylight, through which the ghost had come, and it was now sitting in the large-sized dish of stew, with a sheet wrapped round it, and if ever a ghost looked like Snigg that one did, though it looked like Snigg surprised.

The awful crash had scarcely died away, and the widow's shrieks of terror were continuing when the widow's lady friend whispered in her ear:

"Now's your time with Henry, Maggie! Ask him to save you!"

Henry was not a quick thinker, he always needed time for thought, and he was wiping the stew out of his eyes with the table-cloth, when Maggie, the buxom widow, flung her arms round his neck, and implored him to save her.

(Another long instalment next Thursday.)



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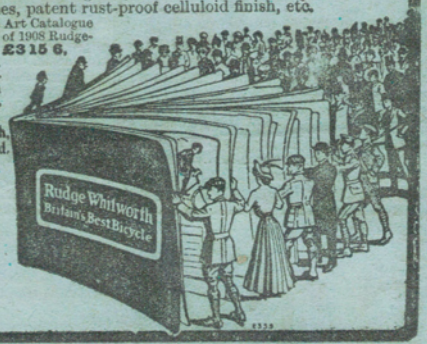
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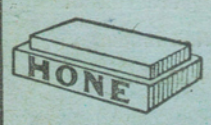
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