

TOM MERRY & CO. IN THE SCHOOL AT SEA!

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ST. JIM'S AT SEA!

DOUBLE-
LENGTH
TALE OF
TOM MERRY
AND CO.

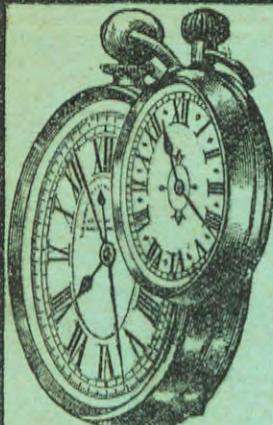
BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



NO. 29.

VOL. 2.

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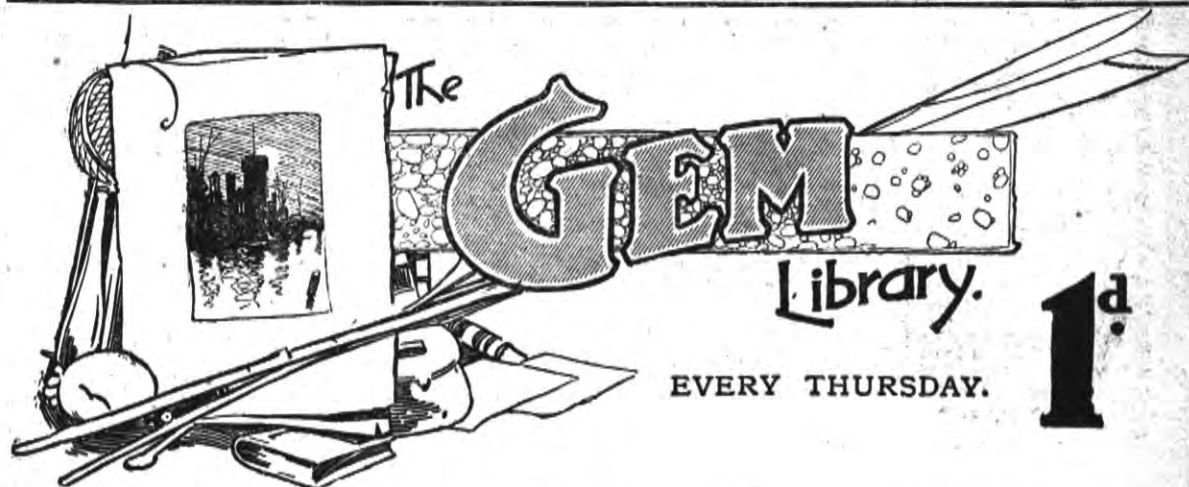
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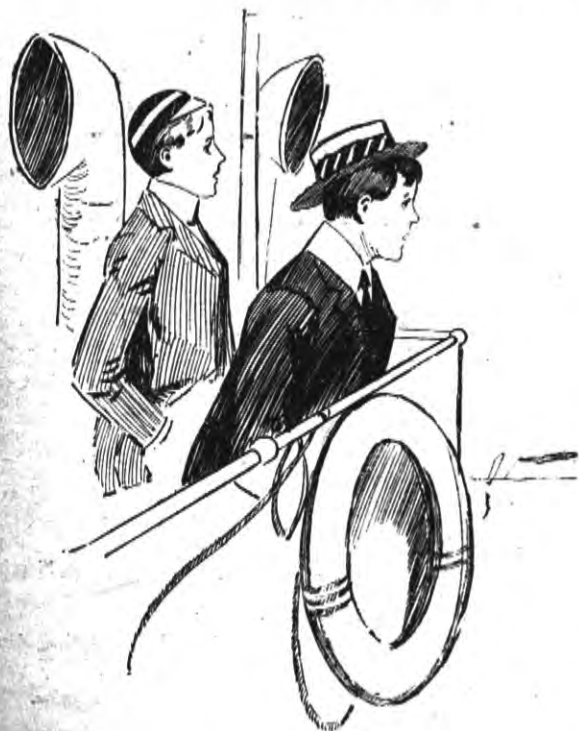
EVERY THURSDAY.

Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

St. Jim's at Sea!

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. Afloat.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD



CHAPTER 1. St. Jim's Afloat.

"BAI Jove, deah boys, this is all wight!" It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who spoke. He leaned back in his chair at the long table in the dining-saloon of the Condor, with a satisfied smile upon his face. The Condor was throbbing her way through the darkness that lay on the waters of the English Channel. The boys of St. Jim's who were spending their August holidays on the salt water, had finished supper—with the exception of Fatty Wynn. He was still busy, and was likely to be so long as any pudding remained on the table. D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his right eye, and surveyed the table and the cheery faces round it. It was the first evening at sea, and most of the fellows had got over

the early attacks of mal-de-mer. Most of them had made a good supper, and Arthur Augustus had done pretty well.

"Bai Jove, this is all wight! I weally think we shall enjoy this vac., deah boys," said the swell of St. Jim's. "It was weally a wippin' ideah of the Head's!"

"Pass the apple-tart, D'Arcy."

"Certainly, Wynn. I only hope it won't be a wuff night. I haven't been seasick yet, and—"

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "You haven't been what?"

"Seasick. I—"

"What were you groaning about on deck for, then?"

"I wasn't gwoanin'."

"What were you sprawling on the canvas for?"

"I wasn't spwawin'."

"What were you looking like a boiled codfish for?"

"I wasn't lookin' like a wotten boiled codfish. Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, you made a jolly lot of row for a fellow who wasn't sick," Blake remarked. "You could be heard all over the steamer."

"I wasn't aware that I made a wow. I felt a little bit queer, pewwaps, but not what you would call seasick. I hope it won't be a wuff night."

"The ship seems to be rolling more than she was," Tom Merry remarked. "You know the English Channel! Fatty Wynn will have a high old time to-night, after that supper he has put away!"

"I haven't eaten much," said Fatty Wynn, looking up from his apple-tart. "Only some beef, and Yorkshire-pudding and potatoes, and ham, and tongue, and sausages, and cold chicken, and a few other things not worth mentioning."

"You must still be jolly hungry," said Blake sympathetically.

"Well, not exactly hungry; but I think I can manage the rest of this apple-tart. And perhaps some of that pudding, and some cake. I get so jolly hungry in this August weather, you know. I haven't eaten enough to be nervous about to-night. I'm being moderate on purpose."

"Bai Jove!"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY

"It's safest to be moderate the first night at sea," said Fatty Wynn. "Pass the pudding, will you, Lowther? You may as well put the marmalade-tart this way; I shall be ready for it in a minute. And the cake. Those bananas look nice, too. As I was saying, it's safest to be moderate, however hungry you are. That's my maxim."

"You live up to it, Fatty."

"Yes, rather. Well, yes, the oranges as well, Manners—yes, and the muscatels. The worst of it is that this ripping grub won't last. If we had a feed like this every day, it would be something like. I've a jolly good mind to have a big feed now; but I suppose I had better be moderate. It's safer."

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House at St. Jim's, looked in. Mr. Ratcliff, the senior housemaster, was sick in his cabin—a fact not much regretted by the boys, for Mr. Ratcliff was not a pleasant-tempered man.

"Bedtime, my lads," said Mr. Railton, with his cheery smile. "I hope you have had a good supper."

"Ripping, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have weally enjoyed my suppah vewy much, sir. It was wathah a treat."

"The School House boys take the aft berths, as I have pointed out to you," said Mr. Railton; "the New House boys go forward. I hope you will have a good night's rest."

"Is it likely to be a wuff night, sir?"

"The sea is freshening up a little, but it is nothing like rough. The prefects will switch off the electric lights in a quarter of an hour. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

And Mr. Railton, who had been very busy and over-worked that day, withdrew to his cabin for a quiet smoke before turning in.

"Well, I feel rather fagged," said Tom Merry. "We've had a busy day. Lights out in a quarter of an hour."

"Yaas. I suppose we had better make a move. I am vewy glad we are to have the blunt end of the ship. It is more appropwiate for the School House to have the best quarters, as we were the cock house at St. Jim's."

"The what?" asked Figgins, of the New House.

"The cock house at St. Jim's, deah boy."

"Rats! As a matter of fact, we have the forward berths because the New House always took the lead."

"Wats!"

"Oh, come, draw it mild, Figgy!" said Blake, in a tone of remonstrance. "You know that old casual ward you called a House at St. Jim's was always lagging behind us, and if we hadn't upheld the honour of the school, what I want to know is, what would have become of it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Echo answers what," said Tom Merry.

"Look here—"

"Excuse me," said Skimpole, the brainy man of the School House, interrupting. "I don't quite understand your remark, Tom Merry."

"I said echo answers what."

"But it is quite impossible for echo to answer what. D'Arcy said—yes, rather. How could echo answer what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"There is nothing to laugh at, Figgins," said the scientific Skimpole. "Echo could not possibly have answered what, unless there is a most singular state of acoustics in this room. I—"

"Ass!" said Tom Merry politely.

"That is almost rude, Merry. I—"

"Oh, wing off, Skimpole, deah boy! You are a feahful ass, you know! I fully endorse the statement of my honourable friend, Tom Merry. Echo answers what."

"Echo answers rats!" said Figgins, with a sniff.

"If you say wats to me, Figgins, I shall have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Rats!" said Figgins.

D'Arcy rose from his chair. Jack Blake promptly pushed him back into it.

"Pway don't be a wuff ass, Blake."

"No rows, now," said Blake. "Rows on the first night at sea are barred. You must ring off, and Figgins can go and eat coke!"

"I wufuse to ring off. I warned Figgins, and he was impertinent to me in the most delibewate way poss. I have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I decline to cheese it. If Figgins pwefers to withdwaw his words and pwoffah an apology—"

"Catch me!" said Figgins.

"Welease me, Blake."

"Oh, hold him!" said Figgins. "You can see what a state of funk I am in. I'm all of a jelly with t-t-trembling."

"Welease me, Blake. As a mattah of fact, I feel that I ought to thwash Figgins for borin' my Cousin Ethel so

much when she came to see me off at Southampton. I hardly got a word from her, because Figgins was borin' her all the time."

"Ass!" said Figgins.

"Welease me, Blake!" Arthur Augustus jerked himself away, kicked his chair backwards, and rushed towards Figgins. "Now, you New House wottah—"

"School House ass!"

"Bai Jove, I'll give you a feahful—"

"Hold on," yelled Tom Merry. "You'll have the things over in a minute!"

"I wufuse to hold on!"

And Arthur Augustus, with his eyeglass flying at the end of its cord, rushed upon the chief of the New House juniors.

The grinning Figgins closed with him, and they staggered to and fro, and D'Arcy, feeling himself going, clutched out wildly to save himself.

His wild grasp caught the tablecloth, and as he went down, he dragged it from the table.

Figgins and D'Arcy fell together, and rolled on the floor, and the tablecloth, and a terrific shower of crockery and eatables poured over them.

D'Arcy gave a gasp of horror as a jam-pudding squelched in his face, and an opened bottle of lemonade gurgled in his ear.

Figgins yelled with a dish of gravy depositing itself on the back of his neck, and a custard mixing up with his hair.

The crash of the crockery rang through the saloon.

"Bai Jove!"

"You utter ass!"

And the two combatants, smothered in gravy and stickiness, sat up in dismay in the midst of smashed plates and dishes.

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus Goes to Bed.

"PWAY assist me, Tom Mowwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lend me a hand, Blake, deah boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howwies, please dwag this wotten tablecloth off me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I wegard you as a set of cacklin' asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is all this noise about?" exclaimed Mr. Railton, entering the room hastily, and gazing in astonishment at the two juniors in the midst of the wreck. "Dear me, what has happened?"

"Only a slight accident, sir," said Tom Merry, trying to control his merriment. "D'Arcy and Figgins fell over, and—"

"Surely the motion of a steamer was not sufficient to cause this accident!" said the housemaster, looking sternly at the culprits, who had scrambled up. They looked a pitiful pair of objects, with all kinds of conestibles spattered over their faces, and clothing, and hair.

"Well, you see, sir—"

"I caught at the tablecloth, you see, Mr. Wailton," explained Arthur Augustus. "The boastly wotten thing came off, you know."

"That's how it was," said Figgins.

"As a matter of fact, I suppose you were fighting?" said Mr. Railton.

"Fightin', sir!"

"Fighting!" exclaimed Figgins.

Both the juniors looked surprised at the accusation; but Mr. Railton was not to be easily deluded.

"Have you not been fighting?" he rapped out.

"Well, if you put it like that, sir—" began Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah, if you put it like that—"

"Yes or no?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yaas, Mr. Wailton."

"I thought so. You will do fifty lines each to-morrow, and now you will go to bed at once."

And, shaking a warning finger at the juniors, the School House master left the room. Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye and looked at Figgins.

"I suppose you see what a silly ass you are now," he remarked. "I suppose, as a fellow of honah, you will do those lines for me to-morrow."

"I suppose I shan't! You ought to do mine."

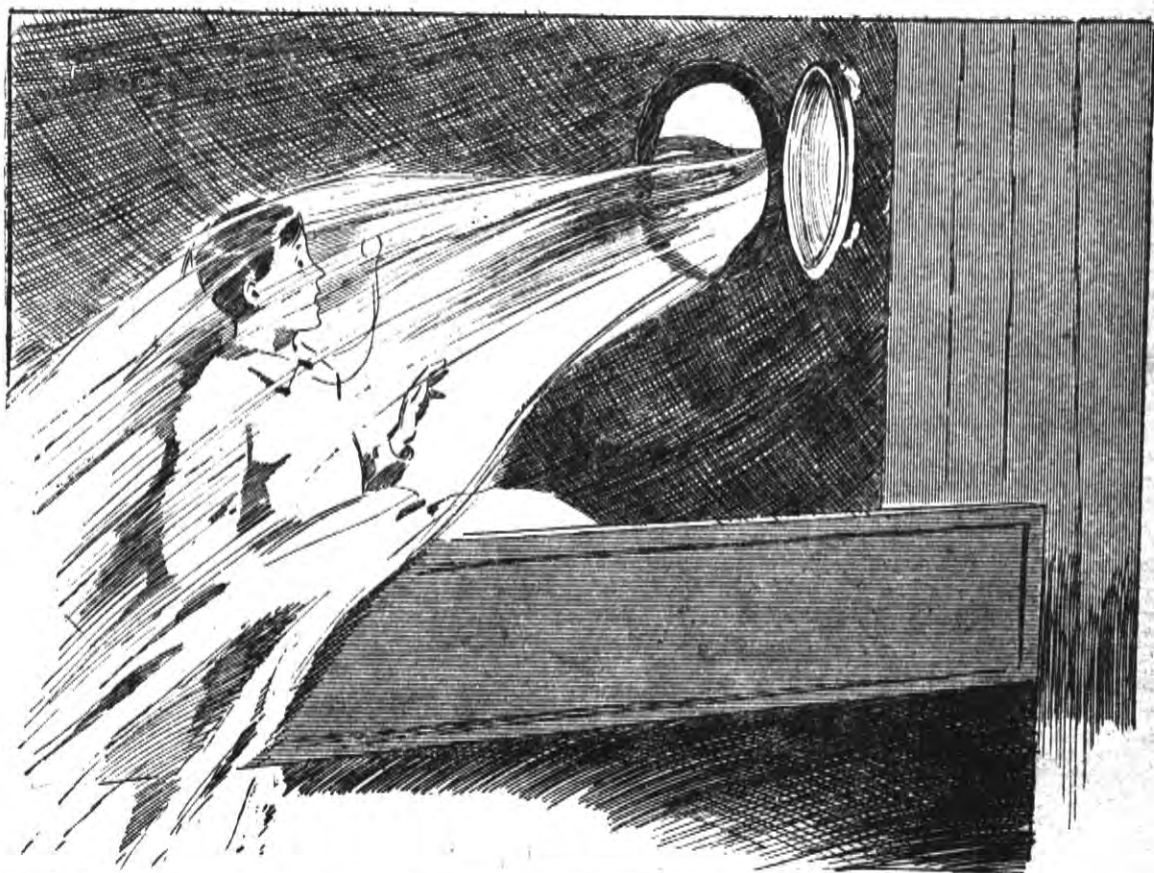
"Weally, Figgins—"

"Of all the utter asses—"

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as an uttah ass—"

"Oh, shut up, both of you!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Get to bed, and leave your rowing till to-morrow. Gussy is growing into a regular hooligan."

"I wufuse to be weferred to as a wegulah hooligan."



"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "It is wainin'."

"Take him away, Blake. He belongs to you. Good-night, you New House wasters!"

"Good-night, you School House rotters!"
And the juniors went to their quarters.

Space on board the Condor was not so extensive as in the old school at home, of course; but there was plenty of room for the hundred boys who had embarked on the August cruise.

Most of the fellows were inclined to take things easily, as they came; but the swell of St. Jim's was a little more particular.

He surveyed his berth with a very disapproving glance.

"Bai Jove! Does Mr. Wailton weally expect me to sleep there, Tom Mewwy?" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I imagine so. Did you expect to have a cabin to yourself, ass?"

"It would have been more appropwiate. Undah the circes, I weally don't see how I can wetire for the night with any comfort."

"What's the matter with your berth?" demanded Blake.

"Always grumbling at something."

"I am not gwumbin', Blake, I am merely pointin' out that it is imposs. for me to wepose for the night on a sort of shelf."

"Then you'd better wepose on the floor," said Blake.

"Unless Mr. Railton would give up his cabin to you."

"I am afraid that is wathah impwob, even if I asked him."

"Yes, I think it's not very likely myself. He might give you a licking, though, which would do you good."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, cheese it and get to bed!"

"I wefuse to cheese it—"

"Now, then, lights out!" said Kildare, coming in. "You three are the last, of course. I've got a longer round to make than I used to have at St. Jim's, and I've got no time to waste."

"I am not quite weady yet, Kildare."

"Then you'd better be quick."

"I weally do not see how I am to wepose for the night on that shelf."

The captain of St. Jim's laughed.

"Well, we can't get you a special dormitory by wireless telegraphy," he remarked, "so I am afraid you will have to make it do. If you are not in bed in two minutes you will have to get in in the dark."

"I am afraid that will be imposs."

"Look here, you young ass, all the electric light in the state-rooms switches off at a single switch. When it goes out you will be in the dark."

"I wegard that as a wathah wotten awwangement."

"It has been arranged specially for your benefit," grinned Kildare. "You can't expect a Sixth Form prefect to take too much trouble over a pack of fags."

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Light goes out in two minutes," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, Kildare!"

"Pway wait about ten minutes, Kildare—"

Kildare closed the door and walked away.

Arthur Augustus bestowed an extremely indignant glance upon his two companions in the cabin.

"I weally do not see anythin' to laugh at, Tom Mewwy."

"No, there isn't a looking-glass here."

"Weally, you wottahs—"

"Oh, get into bed!" said Blake. "You're jolly lucky to be in this little den with only three berths. Some of them have four or five, I believe."

"I should wefuse to occupy a cabin with four or five berths."

"Oh, rats! I'm going to take the bottom berth."

"I think I should pwefer the bottom one, if I am to attempt to wepose in these extremely cwamped quartahs at all."

"More rats!" said Blake cheerfully. "It's rather rotten that we should have this boulder of the Shell with us, instead of old Dig or Herries. There's some ass been making these arrangements, or else we've got the numbers wrong."

"We're all a little mixed to-night," said Tom Merry. "I know jolly well I'm going to berth with Lowther and Manners, or else there will be a row. It's too humiliating to be shoved in with a lot of Fourth Form kids."

"I regard that remark as dispaawagin'—"
"You'd better get undressed, Gussy, instead of wagging your lower jaw so much, the light will be out in two ticks."

"This is comfy enough," said Blake. "It would be larger if it were bigger, of course, but I shall be all right here if Gussy doesn't snore."

"Weally, Blake—"
"And I shall be all right in the second berth," Tom Merry remarked. "I can't see anything to grumble at myself."

"Yaas, but it doesn't matter so much about you chaps, you know— Oh!"

D'Arcy broke off as the light suddenly went out.
"Bai Jove! The light's off, deah boys."

"Well, we warned you, you know."
"It is uttally imposs. for me to undress in the dark."

"You'd better go to bed with your boots on, then," said Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to go to bed with my boots on."
"Well, don't make a row, whatever you do. I'm sleepy."

"Bai, Jove! Somethin' will have to be done, you know. Has either of you fellows got a bicycle-lamp?"

"Yes, people usually take bicycle-lamps to sea," said Blake. "You'll find a large collection of them, also some large motor-car acetylene lamps, in my watchcase."

"Pway don't wot, deah boy. A candle-end would do—"
"Haven't any. Have you, Tom Mewwy?"

"Gr-r-r-rood!"
"He's asleep. I'm nearly off. Shut up, Gussy!"

"How am I to get to bed?"
"You have to climb up to the top berth, ass!"

"But I am not yet undressed."
"Undress then, imbecile!"

"I cannot undress in the dark."
"Then wait for morning, idiot!"

"I wefuse to wait for mornin'."
"Then shut up, donkey!"

"If there were any beastly light in this beastly woom, I would thwack you for those extwemely oppwobwious expressions, Blake."

Blake snored.
"It is uttally imposs. for me to fold up my beastly clothes in the beastly dark! Do you know where the switch of that beastly electric light is, Blake?"

Blake snored again.
"I say, Blake, don't go to sleep, you know, and leave me stwanded. Don't be a beastly wottah, you know. Blake—I say, Blake!"

"Snore!"
"Bai Jove, the wottah's asleep! I suppose I shall have to shake him up. This is weally puttin' me to a feahful lot of twouble."

D'Arcy groped in the dark for Blake's shoulder, to shake him, and poked a thumb into his mouth, and then a finger into his eye.

Jack Blake came out of his doze and gave a terrific yell, and D'Arcy, startled, jumped away from the bed, caught his foot in a bag, and sat down with a heavy jar.

"Bai Jove!"
Blake looked over the edge of his berth in the dark, and began to talk to Arthur Augustus in measured tones and strong expressions, while he rubbed his mouth with one hand and his damaged eye with the other.

"You dummy! You ass! You shrieking idiot! You've damaged my mouth, you lunatic! You've nearly punctured my eye, you maniac! Go to sleep! Shut up! Get out!"

"Bai Jove!"
"Make another sound to-night, and I'll get out of bed and out you into little tiny pieces, and throw you to the sharks."

"You howwid wuffian—"
"Shut up!"

And Jack Blake settled down to sleep again. Arthur Augustus staggered up, and caught at the wall to steady himself. He felt for his eyeglass, but it was not to be found.

"I say, Blake, I've lost my eyeglass."

Blake snored.
"It is quite imposs. for me to undress in the dark, too. I must have a light of some sort. Do you know where the switch of the electric light is?"

There was no reply.
"Bai Jove, the wottah is asleep again! It's weally too wuff that I should have the twouble of keepin' on wakin' him up like this," murmured D'Arcy.

D'Arcy groped for Blake's head again. But Jack Blake was not asleep; he was waiting vengefully. As D'Arcy

groped for him, he groped for D'Arcy, and caught his nose in a strong and powerful grip.

"Ow, ow! You have got hold of my nose! Ow!"
"Yes, I thought it was that, Gussy."

"Ow! Leggo!"
"Are you going to bed quietly?"

"No, certainly not."
"Then I'll jolly well keep hold of your proboscis till you do, that's all, you noisy young villain! Does that hurt?"

"Ow, ow! Yes!"
"I thought so. If it didn't I could hold it tighter. Are you going quietly to bed without making any more noise?"

"No—yaas! Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"
"Honest Injun?"

"Ow, ow! Yaas! Leggo!"
Blake released the swell of St. Jim's. D'Arcy staggered against the wall, clapping his nose in both hands.

"Ow! You uttah wottah! You have hurt me!"
"If you weren't a chum I'd have chucked you out of the cabin, to sleep in the passage," said Blake. "Now go to sleep like a Christian, and don't let's have any more of your rot!"

"If I hadn't promised—"
"But you have, so shut up and go to bed."

"I shan't be able to fold up my clothes in the beastly dark, and I can't even find the beastly hooks to hang them on!"

"Chuck 'em on the floor, then."
"It is weally vewy hard cheese on a tidy fellow like me—"

"Ring off!"
Jack Blake turned over to go to sleep again. Arthur Augustus, grumbling to himself, undressed, and disposed of his precious garments as best he could. Then he essayed to climb into his berth.

In the dark, it was only natural that he should miss the step, and send a foot plunging into Blake's berth. The swell of St. Jim's gave a gasp, and clung to the edge above, and Blake gave a yell, and sat up so suddenly that he bumped his head.

"Bai Jove!"
"Ow! I've busted my napper!"

"I'm awfully sowwy, deah boy, but in the dark—"
"You howling ass!"

"I am sowwy, but— Bai Jove!"
D'Arcy had extricated his leg from Blake's bunk, and his other one went plunging in upon Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shoal gave a roar.
"Ow! What's that?"

"Don't be alarmed, deah boy! It's only I!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I'm weally vewy sowwy to disturb you, but—"

"You shrieking ass, you've jammed me in the neck!"
"I am sowwy!"

"Get your hoof out of my bunk!"
"I wefuse to have my foot alluded to as a hoof!"

"My hat! I'll give you a twist!"
D'Arcy jerked his foot out of the bunk so suddenly that he knocked his knee on hard wood, and gave a howl of anguish.

"What's the matter with you now, you image?"
"I've knocked my knee!"

"Serve you right! Go to bed!"
"But I have hurt myself."

"I'll hurt you some more if you don't shut up and go to bed."
"We'll shove him out of the cabin!" growled Blake.

"He can sleep in the feeding-room, or on deck."
"I wefuse to be shoved out of the cabin."

"Out you'll go, if you make any more row, so mind!"

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There was a ring of determination in Jack Blake's voice. Arthur Augustus sniffed indignantly, but he got into his bunk, and there was peace in the cabin at last.

CHAPTER 3.

The First Night at Sea.

"FIGGINS!"

"Sn-r-r-n-n-nor!"

"Kerr!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Both you fellows asleep?"

"Sn-r-r-r-rgr-r-r-r-r!"

"I say, I'm feeling rather queer," went on Fatty Wynn pathetically. He was sitting up in his bunk in the New House quarter of the ship—the sharp end, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had named it.

Fatty Wynn was beginning to regret that big supper. The ship was rolling a little. It was a fine boat, and a good size, but the Channel was growing rough in the night, and the Condor rolled accordingly.

Fatty Wynn had dropped off to sleep, only to wake again. It was pitchy dark in the little cabin, and he could hear nothing but the engines and the steady breathing of two sleepers close at hand.

And Fatty Wynn was feeling queer.

"Figgins! I say, Figgins! You can't be asleep, old chap! I say, Figgins!"

"Wharrer yer want?" came a sleepy voice from the lowest of the three berths.

"Figgy, old chap—"

"Wharrer marrer?"

"I'm feeling queer."

"Go to sleep, then."

"I—I can't."

"Then stay awake."

"I—I—I feel very queer."

"That's all right, you'll soon sleep it off, Fatty," said Figgins encouragingly. "I'm jolly sleepy."

"So am I; but I'm queer. I say, Figgins, I can't go to sleep. You might stay awake and keep a chap company. Figgy!"

"Snore!"

"I say, Kerr!"

"Go sleep!" murmured Kerr drowsily.

"But I can't go to sleep."

"Go and eat coo, then."

"I—I think I will get up and walk about a little," murmured Fatty Wynn. "I shall feel easier then."

He carefully climbed out of his bunk. The motion of the ship was making him feel qualmy, and the motion of himself made it worse. He had to pause several times, a hot perspiration breaking out over him, before he was safely landed on the floor.

The cabin was very dark, and he groped his way blindly to the door. There was a thudding sound as he dragged clothes off hooks, and knocked over a bundle and a travelling-bag. A growl came from the berths.

"What silly beast is making that row?"

"Sorry, Figgins!"

"Hallo, is that you, Fatty?"

"Yes."

"What are you getting up for?"

"I—I feel bad."

"Oh," exclaimed Figgins, waking wide, and sitting up, "I'm sorry, Fatty, old chap! I told you how it would be if you bolted such a feed."

"I don't think it was the feed, Figgy."

"What do you think it was, then? I'm not sick."

"Well, it wasn't the feed. I think it's the stuffiness of this little cabin, and I'm going out for some fresh air."

"Like me to come with you?"

Fatty Wynn would have liked Figgins to come with him, but he knew what an effort it cost Figgy to make that offer to leave his warm and comfortable bed, and so the Welsh partner in the Co. heroically refused.

"No, that's all right, Figgy."

"I'll come if you like."

"Don't bother. I shall be all right when I get a niff of fresh air."

"Very well. Don't lose your way coming back. All the lights are out, you know."

"I'll be careful."

Fatty Wynn left the cabin. He was thinking more just then of the dreadful feeling within him than of finding his way back. He groped along in the darkness, and a door opened under his hand.

Fatty Wynn stopped suddenly in alarm. He did not want to wander into a cabin in the dark and alarm the inmate. A voice came from the gloom.

"Who is there?"

Fatty Wynn remained as still as a mouse.

For the voice was that of Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House at St. Jim's—Fatty Wynn's own housemaster.

"Who is that?"

The junior slowly and silently withdrew, and groped his way onward. In the thrill of his narrow escape he almost forgot his seasickness. A glimmer of light caught his eye, and he groped his way up the stairs to the promenade deck.

He caught a glimpse of dark sky, and rough curling water and falling rain. Then a burly figure in oilskins loomed up.

"Who's that?"

It was the voice of Mr. Thropp, the ill-tempered chief mate of the Condor.

"It's I," said Fatty Wynn, in a quavering voice. "I'm feeling rather ill, and I should like some fresh air."

"Get below."

"But—"

"It's too rough for you youngers to be up here. Get below."

Fatty Wynn felt too sick to argue the matter. He crept down again. The whole place was in darkness. Masters and prefects, as well as the boys, were gone to bed. Fatty Wynn did not know what hour it was. A strange sense of desolation fell upon him. In the midst of a hundred sleepers he felt lonely, and sick, and forlorn.

And sick he was, as he sat on the lowest stair in the gloom, in the shaking of the ship. For half an hour the fat junior did not move from that step, and he might not have moved till morning, had he not been moved.

He did not hear a step behind him, and had no idea that someone was descending the stairs. A foot suddenly plunged against his back, and then there was a yell as a man went flying over him, to fall on his hands and knees on the planks.

"Wh-wh-what's that?"

It was Mr. Thropp's voice.

Fatty Wynn did not reply. He rose quietly and stole away, and the chief mate of the Condor was left to grunt and growl to himself.

Fatty Wynn scuttled off as fast as he could, without noticing much in what way he was going, and feeling considerably better now, he decided to return to his cabin.

But that was not easy.

Where his cabin was, he had not the faintest idea, and in the gloom it was almost impossible to find it.

He dared not return near the spot where he had left Mr. Thropp grunting and growling, so the only thing he could do was to keep on, and trust to fortune.

He kept on, and opened several doors in the dark, in the hope of finding the right one by a whispered inquiry.

"Figgy! I say, Figgy!"

"Who's that?" growled the voice of Kildare in the darkness.

Fatty Wynn bolted.

The voice of a School House senior showed him that he was in the wrong part of the ship; he had wandered into the territory of the "blunt-enders."

"Great Scott!" he murmured. "What on earth am I to do? Where the dickens is the rotten cabin? Where's Figgy?"

He wandered on again, till a sudden idea occurred to him.

"Good! I'll ask Kildare for a light to show me the way. He's a decent chap, and he'll understand I'm not larking."

And Fatty groped his way back to the cabin he had left. Unfortunately, in the gloom he found the wrong cabin. He opened the door, and put his head in.

"Kildare! I say, Kildare!"

"Who's there?" growled the voice of Knox, the worst-tempered prefect in the School House at St. Jim's. "Is that you, Wynn? I know your voice."

"Yes, Knox. If you please—"

"I'll report you to Mr. Railton to-morrow morning."

"If you please—"

"I'll teach you to come and play your larks on a prefect!"

"If you please, Knox, I'm not larking. I've lost my—"

"You'll find something if you don't get out of this cabin!"

"But, I say, Knox—"

"Get out!"

"Yes; but can you— Ow!"

Fatty Wynn yelled as a hand gripped him in the darkness, and another hand commenced to box his ears.

"Ow! Ow! Let me alone! You beast!"

"Take that, and that!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"And that!"

Fatty Wynn, desperate, hit out wildly, and the prefect gave a grunt and staggered back. He seemed to collide with something, for there was a crash and a bump. Fatty Wynn scrambled away and ran.

There was a patter of feet in the passage. The School House prefect was in pursuit. Fatty ran on, with his hands outstretched, and brought up against a wall. His hands

groped round and felt a door, and in a moment he had opened it, stepped into the room, and closed it again.

Then he stood shivering in his pyjamas and listening. He heard the angry prefect come along, and growl to himself outside. But Knox did not think of looking into the cabin. Fatty Wynn drew a deep breath of relief.

"That rotter's gone! I'd better stay here a bit until the coast's clear."

"Bai Jove, who's that?"

Fatty Wynn started. He knew the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, which came from the topmost of the three bunks in the cabin. He had wandered into the quarters of Study No. 6, the ancient rival of Figgins & Co.

The New House junior stood quite still. He felt that if he revealed his presence it would be taken as a New House raid, and he might be pitched neck and crop out of the cabin into the arms of the vengeful Knox.

"Bai Jove, I'm certain I heard somebody in the beastly place, you know! I shouldn't be surprised if it were a burglah, Blake."

"Gr-r-r!"

"I say, Blake, wake up, there's a burglah in the beastly cabin, you know!"

Fatty Wynn stood breathless.

"Blake! Tom Mewwy! Wake up!"

There was a growl from Blake's berth.

"You shrieking ass, are you making a row again? What's the matter with you? Blessed if it isn't like being in a monkey's cage or a lunatic asylum."

"Weally, Blake, eithah would be a vewy appropwiate place for you."

"What are you making a row about?"

"I am not makin' a wov."

"You called me."

"I am perfectly aware of that, but that cannot be pwopahly chawacterised as makin' a wov."

"You shrieking dummy, what's the matter?"

"There's a burglah in the cabin."

"What?"

"There's a beastly burglah here."

"You ass! Where should a burglar come from in mid-Channel?" roared Blake.

"It is weally no good askin' me conundwums, Blake."

"You duffer!" said Tom Merry, awakened by the altercation. "How could there be a burglar? Go to sleep, and don't be a silly ass."

"I weally fail to perceive why anybody but a burglar should entah the cabin at this extwemely late hour of the night."

"Well, has anybody entered the cabin, ass?"

"Yeas, wathah!"

"Oh, you're dreaming! Go to sleep."

"I am not dweamin'. Someone has entered the cabin, and he's here still, and if he's a burglah, he's vewy likely got a wovolah. He may have come as a stowaway fwoin Southampton, and if he finds my gold watch—"

"Ass! There's no one in the cabin."

"I distinctly heard him come in and close the door."

"Rot!"

"I wefuse to have my wemarks alluded to as wot. There is somebody in the cabin, and if it isn't a burglah it's a New House waid."

"Ah, that's a great deal more likely."

"It has only just flashed into my bwain. Now I come to think of it, it's certainly a waid of those New House wottahs, pwobably because I thwashed Figgins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothin' to cackle at in that wemark, that I can see, Tom Mewwy. If there is a waidah in the cabin, we ought to capchah him."

"I suppose it's all rot, but I may as well look," grunted Blake. "I'll strike a match."

Blake fumbled for a matchbox. Fatty Wynn waited anxiously. He could hear Knox moving about in the passage, and he did not dare venture out, but to be discovered where he was would not be pleasant. The School House boys were certain to jump to the conclusion that it was a raid, and they were not likely to listen to any explanations.

Scratch!

The match glimmered out, but before it was fairly burning Fatty Wynn, acting on the impulse of the moment, gave a slight puff, and the flicker died out. The cabin was plunged into darkness again before it was lighted.

CHAPTER 4.

The Mystery of the Matchbox.

JACK BLAKE gave a growl.

"Seems windy in this cabin," he remarked. "I wonder if the door's open? The draught blew my match out."

"Stwike anothah, deah bcy."

Scratch!

Fatty Wynn, with a silent grin, gave a slight puff of his breath, and the second match also failed to reach a flame.

Blake uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"The door must be open, I suppose. There's a fearful draught here."

"Stwike anothah!"

"Oh, rats! There's nobody here—nothing but a beastly draught. I'm going to sleep."

Fatty Wynn breathed again.

"Wats, Blake! I tell you there is a waidah—"

Snore!

"Give me up the matches, then, and I will stwike one."

"You can't reach them from there."

"Tom Mewwy can hand them up."

"Right you are!" said Blake. "Take this beastly matchbox, Merry, will you?"

There was no reply from Tom Merry.

"My hat, the image is asleep again! Reach down for them, Gussy."

"I am afraid I might tumble ovah."

"Then you can't have them. Good-night!"

"Pway hand them up, Blake, and I will twy to weach them."

"Here you are!"

Blake reached up the matchbox towards the upper bunk. Fatty Wynn grinned in the darkness, and reached out too, and took the box from Blake's hand. Blake, under the impression that he had given the matchbox to Arthur Augustus, turned over in his berth. D'Arcy was still groping in the gloom.

"Weach a little highah, Blake, will you?"

"Eh?"

"I say, weach a little highah with that matchbox."

"What are you talking about?"

"The matchbox, deah boy."

"I've given you the matchbox."

"Now, don't be an ass, Blake! It's no time for your wotten jokes in the middle of the night, with a New House wottah in the cabin playin' some twick on us."

"I tell you I gave you the matchbox."

"And I tell you you're dweamin'."

"Do you mean to say that you didn't take it from my hand?"

"Of course I didn't."

"Then it's that ass Merry playing a silly ass trick on us. He's not asleep at all."

"The uttah wottah!"

"Merry! Tom Merry!"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, waking up again. "What's the trouble? What a fearful row you fellows keep up all night! I shall be jolly glad when I get into the other cabin with Manners and Lowther. Chance to get some sleep then."

"Where's that matchbox?"

"What matchbox?"

"The one you took out of my hand when I was reaching it up to Gussy."

"Off your rocker?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly.

"I tell you—"

"And I tell you—"

"Bai Jove, deah boys—"

Fatty Wynn had stolen silently towards the door. He opened it without a sound. Knox was gone back to his cabin, and the coast was clear. Wynn stayed only to listen to the altercation that was rapidly growing excited.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Look here, you Fourth Form kid—"

"Bai Jove, deah boys, an ideah has just stwuck me!"

"You'll get struck by something else if you don't shut up and let a fellow get some sleep," growled Tom Merry.

"I've just thought of it—"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"It may be that waidah who has taken the matchbox. He might have collahed it."

"By Jove," said Blake, "something in that! I'll jolly soon see."

He scrambled out of his bunk, and Fatty Wynn silently closed the door and scuttled away. He chuckled as he went, wondering what would happen when the School House juniors discovered that there was no one beside themselves in the cabin. Blake hunted for a matchbox, but could not find one and he struck an odd vesta he found in his pocket.

The light flared out, and was quite sufficient to illuminate the little cabin. There were only three persons in it—Blake, standing there match in hand, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy looking out of their bunks.

"I knew there wasn't anybody here," grunted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I didn't think there was, either," said Tom Merry.



"Wait here a minute while I get my camera, Gussy!" said Manners.

"Why can't you Fourth Form kids be quiet and let a fellow go to sleep?"

"Where's that matchbox?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Look undah the bunks, Blake."

"The boxes are there, ass. There's no room for a fly, let alone a burglar. There is no one in the room beside ourselves, and there hasn't been."

"You are quite mistaken there, deah boy; I distinctly heard somebody."

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Blake, I shall have no alternative but to get up and give you a feahful thwashin'."

Blake grunted.

"Where's that matchbox, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, blow your old matchbox!"

"Now I come to think of it, it was very curious the draught should blow my match out in that manner. I suppose that was another of your little jokes."

"Good-night!"

"Where's my matchbox?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Wake up, you rotter! Where's my matchbox?"

Snore!

The vesta had expired. Blake had no more matches, and he was in the dark again. He groped his way to the berths, and groped for Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell Form at St. Jim's was settling down to sleep, when Blake grasped him.

He gave a sudden jump.

"Oh, you ass, you startled me!"

"Where's my matchbox?"

"If you say the word matchbox again, I'll get up and give you a licking!" roared Tom Merry, exasperated.

"Matchbox," said Blake promptly.

"If you say that again—"

"Matchbox!"

Tom Merry returned Blake's grasp, and rolled out of his bunk. They grappled in the darkness, and a battle royal commenced.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy peered anxiously over the edge of his bunk, without seeing anything in the gloom.

"You Fourth-Form silly kid—"

"You stupid Shellfish—"

"I'll teach you to worry me about matchboxes in the middle of the night!"

"I'll teach you to collar my matchbox!"

"Go it, deah boys! Give him a feahful thwashin', Blake!"

"I'm going to."

"You're going to get one, you mean!" gasped Tom Merry.

There was a sudden crash. The juniors bumped on the floor, and several loose articles in the cabin bumped down with them. There was the sound of an opening door. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shouted a warning.

"Cave, deah boys!"

The door opened.

"Pax!" gasped Blake.

"Rather!"

The two juniors separated, and, in the twinkling of an eye they were in their bunks, pulling the bedclothes over themselves. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with wonderful presence of mind, snored as he laid down.

The door opened wider, but there was nothing suspicious to be seen in the cabin. Mr. Railton looked in, with a puzzled expression.

"I am almost certain that the noise I heard proceeded from this cabin," he muttered. "Blake!"

There was no reply, but a steady snore.

"Merry!"

Another snore.

"D'Arcy!"

Snore!

"Dear me, I suppose I was mistaken! Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir!" said D'Arcy, without thinking. Mr. Railton, who was turning away, turned quickly back.

"D'Arcy! So you are awake?"

Snore!

"D'Arcy!"

Snore!

"D'Arcy, you cannot delude me. You spoke just now, so it is impossible for you to be asleep. D'Arcy!"

Snore!

Mr. Railton smiled slightly, and after a moment's hesitation left the cabin, and closed the door. D'Arcy gave a chuckle.

"Bai Jove, I pulled the wool ovah his eyes, that time, deah boys!"

Blake and Tom Merry gave a simultaneous snort.

"You ass, you gave it all away!"

"I wufuse to admit anythin' of the sort. I pulled the wool ovah his eyes a twent!"

They did not argue the matter. Blake and Tom Merry had had enough of warfare for that night, and they settled down to sleep, leaving the mystery of the matchbox still unsolved.

Meanwhile, Fatty Wynn, aided by striking the vestas contained in that same matchbox, had found his way back to Figgins's cabin. He entered it with a great deal of relief, and climbed into his bunk. Figgins woke up.

"Hallo, is that you, Fatty?"

"Yes, Figgins."

"Feel better?"

"Yes, much better. Rather empty, though. I say, Figgins—"

"Good-night!"

"I say, Figgins, is there anything to eat in the cabin?"

Figgins was already asleep again. And Fatty Wynn, after repeating his question twice, turned over and went to sleep, too.

CHAPTER 5. The Trousers.

TOM MERRY was the first of the St. Jim's juniors to awaken in the morning. There was a watery gleam of sun through the closed porthole and a dash of rain on the glass. The morning was not a fine one.

But Tom Merry felt very well and fit, and he had awakened with a first-class hunger, as he would have termed it. He rolled out of his bunk, and gave Blake a shake. The Fourth-Former grunted.

"Taint rising bell yet."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're not at St. Jim's now, kid. Get up!"

Blake rubbed his eyes.

"Hallo! Is it time to get up?"

"Of course it is!"

"Well, wake Gussy. I say, can you open the porthole? It's pretty stuffy in here. I'd rather sleep with the porthole open, if it were allowed."

"You're right; it is close. I'll try."

Tom Merry reached up towards the porthole, which was over D'Arcy's bunk. The swell of St. Jim's was still sleeping the sleep of the just. The porthole had been fastened over-

night by a seaman, but Tom Merry succeeded in opening it. The next moment he wished that he hadn't, for a dash of wave came furiously in, and in a second his pyjamas were soaked. And Arthur Augustus, who lay directly under the shower, was soaked too. He started, gasping, out of his sleep.

"Bai Jove, it's wainin'!"

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "It is! I'd better get this thing shut again, or we shall have the Channel in."

"Well, you were an ass to open it," said Blake.

"Why, you told me to."

"I didn't know it was a rough morning; besides, you're not bound to do as I tell you," said Blake, keeping in his bunk out of reach of the spray. "You're an ass!"

"Help me get this thing shut!"

"No good two of us getting wet!"

"There are two of us wet already!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wogard Tom Mewwy as a feahful ass! Have you got that thing shut?"

"Yes, at last."

"Pway get out of the way, then, and let me get up. I am simply soaked. The wave has dashed in all ovah me, you ass!"

"Blake's fault."

"Blake is an ass, too. I am feahfully wet! Bai Jove," went on D'Arcy, as he skipped out of his bunk, "there isn't much room for three fellows to dwess in this cabin. Do you think you could manage to dwess outside, Tom Mewwy?"

"I'm afraid not!"

"Pway don't be inconsiderate."

Tom Merry laughed, and dressed. Arthur Augustus made a long face as he examined his clothes. He had left them anywhere the previous night, having had to undress in the dark. The splashing through the porthole had reached them, and they were decidedly damp.

"Bai Jove, I can't wear those things!" he ejaculated.

"Well, you've got others, I suppose, haven't you?"

"No, that is the unfortunate part of the mattah," said D'Arcy, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow. "You see, I packed three twunks to come to sea with me, and Mr. Wailton vewy inconsiderately stopped two of them at Southampton. I had no opportunity of unpackin' them and sortin' out the things on the landin' stage."

"No, I should say not."

"I chose the largest twunk, but, you see, I had packed my coats and waistcoats in that, and some linen, and so forth. All my extwa pairs of twousahs were in one of the othah twunks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah, Tom Mewwy. You have caused my twousahs to be soaked with watah, and I have no othahs to change into."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you cackle at my howwid misfortunes in that mannah, I shall lose my tempah, Tom Mewwy, and I might be pwovoked to stwike you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's rough on Gussy," remarked Blake, with a grin. "The unfortunate part is that I haven't any extra trucks to lend him. I've only brought two pairs, and one of them is the Sunday pair, and I couldn't have them profaned by a fellow like Gus."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Besides, they're locked up in my box, and the key is on Digby's bunch. I put it there for safety!" chuckled Blake.

"That is watah wotten. I shall have to bowwow a pair of twousahs of you, Tom Mewwy. Your twousahs are not of a cut that I particularly admire, and it will be watah wotten to have to wear them, but I suppose I must put up with it for once."

"You won't have a chance," said Tom Merry coolly.

"I suppose you are not going to wefuse me the loan of a pair of twousahs in such an extwemity," said D'Arcy, with great dignity.

"My dear chap, I'd share my last pair of trousers with a chum, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Blake.

"Oh, pway stop goin' off like a beastly alarm clock, Blake, deah boy! This isn't a laughin' mattah, at all. Why can't you lend me a pair of twousahs, Tom Mewwy?"

"Because my box isn't in this cabin at all. It went along with Lowther's."

"I suppose you could wun along in your pyjamas to Lowthah's cabin, couldn't you, and let me have a pair?"

Tom Merry laughed, and slipped his trousers on.

"Hardly, Gussy."

"Then I shall have to wear Blake's."

"Will you?" said Blake, jumping out of bed, and seizing his trousers. "Not much, you won't, you young bounder!"

"But I cannot go out without any twousahs on, Blake."

"Well, can I, aas?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that! What am I to do, deah boy?"

Tom Merry winked at Blake.

"The only thing is for you to remain here, Gussy, while Blake and I go scouting and find you a pair of trousers."

"Good! That's vewy thoughtful of you, Tom Mewwy. Pway go at once!"

"In a jiffy, kid!"

And as soon as they were dressed, Tom Merry and Blake left the cabin, and Arthur Augustus sat on the edge of the lowest bunk to wait. Tom Merry grinned at his companion as he closed the door of the cabin.

"I've got an idea," he said.

"Ha, ha! I thought you had."

"What price getting Gussy a pair of seaman's trousers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can get them from the steward, I think. He's a jolly-looking codger. Let's get along to his room and see, anyway."

The juniors found Mr. Price, the steward, in his room. Mr. Price was a red-faced, jolly-looking Welshman, and looked as if he loved a joke; but he looked amazed when Tom Merry made his request.

"You want what?"

"A pair of trousers."

"I suppose this is a joke, look you," said Mr. Price. "Run away; I'm busy."

"But we want a pair of seaman's trousers; the older and farrier the better," said Tom Merry. "A chum of ours has got his trousers wet in the rain, and hasn't a second pair. We're helping him in the hour of need."

"That's it," said Blake. "We're out to buy a pair of trousers, and we're ready to pay for them if any of the hands has a pair to sell."

Mr. Price laughed heartily.

"I see, you young rascals! You needn't buy them. I can lend you a pair, and you can return them to me."

"Thanks awfully! You're a Briton!"

Mr. Price disappeared for a few moments, and returned with a pair of trousers which had certainly seen better days, and seen the last of them some time since.

"I wear them when I have anything very mucky to do," exclaimed Mr. Price. "They're not the latest Piccadilly style."

"Ripping!"

"First-rate!"

"They're rather large for me—"

"Ha, ha! They'll be larger still for Gussy. Thanks awfully! You shall have them back safe and sound."

And Tom Merry and Blake returned to the cabin, carrying the precious garments between them. Arthur Augustus was waiting anxiously.

"Bai Jove, you've been a long time, deah boys!" he exclaimed, as the juniors entered.

"We've nearly broken our necks hurrying," said Blake.

"Don't be ungrateful, Gussy!"

"I don't mean to be ungrateful, deah boys, but it's wathah uncomfy sittin' here with nothin' on. Have you got a pair of twousahs for me?"

"Of course. I suppose you know you can depend upon us in case of need?"

"Yaas, wathah! Where are the twousahs?"

"Here they are."

Blake brought the ancient pair of breeches into view. Arthur Augustus looked at them. Then he put up his eye-glass and looked at them again, and then he turned a freezing glare upon Blake.

"I pweasume this is a joke, Blake?"

Blake looked surprised.

"No! at all; it's a pair of trousers."

"I mean, you have brought them to me for a wotten joke."

"I've brought them for you to wear."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Do you think they are rather large?" asked Tom Merry.

"Large!" howled D'Arcy. "They're big enough for a whole family in my size. And look at the cut!"

"They're not cut."

"I mean the make, you aas! And they are dirty."

"Well, you can't expect everything in this world. They're trousers, and trousers are what you want."

"I should uttably wefuse to wear any twousahs like that!"

"Then I don't see what you are to do."

"Go and find me a pair belongin' to one of our chaps."

"That's all very well, but chaps aren't so willing to part with their trousers. Nobody's going to lend you his best pair to fool about in."

"You can twy, anyway."

"My dear chap, we've tried, and we've borrowed these trucks of a very generous man who was willing to help in the hour of need—"

"I wefuse to wear those trucks!"

"Oh, you'll get used to them," said Tom Merry, picking up D'Arcy's damp garments. "I'll take these to the steward and ask him to get them dried."

"Don't take my twousahs away, Tom Mewwy—"

"But they have to be dried."

"I shall have to wear them. I cannot wear these howwid garments you have brought here. I have to considah my dig."

"You can't wear damp trousers, Gussy. As your medical adviser, I couldn't allow it."

"I insist upon doin' as I like!"

"You can do anything you like except wear damp trousers. I cannot have you catching rheumatic fever, pneumonia, and lumbago under my very eyes. Why, a chap who wears damp trousers is booked for the coffin. You are a reckless young aas! I suppose you don't want to be buried at sea tied up in a hammock, do you?"

"Oh, pway don't wot!"

"I can't let you run such risks!"

"I insist upon wunnin' the wisk if I like!"

"Well, you won't!" said Tom Merry, and he bolted from the cabin with the trousers under his arm.

Arthur Augustus dashed excitedly after him.

"Tom Mewwy—Tom Mewwy! You wottah! Bwing my twousahs back!"

But Tom Merry had disappeared. Blake caught the excited swell of St. Jim's by the arm just in time to stop him from commencing a pursuit in his pyjamas.

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"Wefuse me!"

"You can't go out without any trucks."

"I want my twousahs!"

"Suppose you meet the stewardess?"

Arthur Augustus at the mere suggestion jumped back into the cabin, and closed the door. Blake grinned.

"Bai Jove, deah boy, I nevah thought of that. But what am I to do, now that wottah has taken away my twousahs?"

"He's saved you from catching rheumatic pneumonia—"

"Yaas, but what am I to do for a pair of twousahs?"

"Here's this ripping pair we've found for you. You can't say they're not big enough."

"They're too big!" hooted the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's.

"Great Scott! There's no satisfying some people," said Blake. "I believe you would find something to grumble at if we brought you a first-class, gilt-edged pair of trucks hung with pearls and diamonds."

"I should look a widiculous object in a pair of twousahs big enough for a fat man of fifty."

"You'd look worse in your pyjamas."

"Can't you go and find me a bettah pair?"

"It seems to me that we've taken a lot of trouble over you already, Gussy. Still, I'll go and look round. If I don't come back in five minutes you'll know I'm not coming."

And Blake left the cabin before Arthur Augustus could remonstrate. He ascended to the upper deck, to the dining-room—which had been the first-class dining-room when the Condor was a passenger ship. The massive glass dome was blurred with rain, but the scene within was cheerful enough. Stewards were preparing the breakfast for a hundred or more eaters, and the breakfast was of a solid description. Digby and Herries had just come in, and they at once greeted Blake.

"What's the matter with the image?" exclaimed Dig, looking at his chum in amazement.

"Off his rocker!" said Herries.

Blake's conduct was certainly surprising.

He turned round slowly on his heel, describing a complete circle, so as to take a complete survey of the dining-saloon. He came slowly back to his original position, and grinned blandly at his amazed chums.

"Qualifying for Colney Hatch?" asked Dig.

Blake shook his head.

"No. I promised Gussy I'd have a look round, and I've had it, that's all."

"What do you mean?"

Blake explained. Digby and Herries roared.

"My hat!" gasped Dig. "I shall be glad to see Gussy come up to breakfast in the steward's old trucks!"

"He won't come," grinned Herries.

"He'll have to. I say, Tom Merry?"

"Hallo!"

ANSWERS

"What have you done with Gussy's trucks?"

"Given 'em to our steward to dry."

"Good!"

"He doesn't know which cabin they belong to, so they can't get back to Gussy. We have saved the one and only Gus from catching cold in his legs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What are you kids doing all that cackling about?" grunted Knox, the prefect, coming up from the main-deck in a yachting-cap.

The juniors looked at him.

"We were thinking how nice you look in that cap, Knox," said Blake. "It would suit you a little better if your face weren't the colour of putty!"

The prefect reached out, and the juniors dodged away. Mr. Railton came up and took his seat at the head of the Sixth Form table. The electric bell was buzzing, and the boys of St. Jim's were flocking up to breakfast. But there were two persons who did not appear. One was Mr. Ratcliff, the senior housemaster, who was still sick in his cabin; the other was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus Wears Them!

MR. LATHOM, the little, quiet gentleman who had the honour of taking the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, came along to the dining-room, and sat down at the head of the Fourth Form table. The Forms dined at separate tables, just as if they had been at home at St. Jim's. Indeed, but for the lofty glass dome over their heads and the motion of the ship under them, the boys might have fancied themselves gathered in the dining-room in the old School House.

Mr. Lathom glanced down the table, and noted the vacant place. He peered again through his spectacles.

"Where is D'Arcy?" he asked.

As no one was particularly addressed, no one felt called upon to answer.

"Where is D'Arcy, Mellish?"

"I think he hasn't come up, sir."

"Surely he knows it's breakfast-time?"

"I should think so, sir."

"Go down and tell him to come up at once!"

"Yes, sir."

Mellish went down to the main-deck, on which deck all the juniors were berthed, the masters and most of the Sixth having berths on the next deck above.

There was silence at the Fourth Form table. Tom Merry and the others who were in the joke waited with great interest for the appearance of the swell of St. Jim's. Mellish came back grinning, and alone.

"Well, where is D'Arcy?" rapped out Mr. Lathom.

"In his cabin, sir."

"Did you tell him to come up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, why is he not here, then?"

"He says, will you please excuse him, sir, because—"

"Is he ill?"

"No, sir."

"Then tell him to come up at once, or he will be punished severely!"

"Certainly, sir."

Mellish went down again. In a minute, or less, he reappeared, grinning more than ever. He was alone.

"Well, Mellish?"

"He says, will you please excuse him, sir."

Mr. Lathom turned red with wrath.

"No," he thundered, "I will not excuse him! If he is not ill there is no reason why he should not appear at the breakfast-table. Go down and tell him that if he does not come up instantly I shall send down a prefect."

"Yes, sir."

Mellish carried the message. When he reappeared he was choking with laughter. Mr. Lathom eyed him sternly.

"What are you laughing at, Mellish?"

"Ha, ha! I, sir? Was I laughing?"

"Yes, you were."

"I—I—Ha, ha! He's coming, sir!"

And Mellish went to his place, and choked. All the juniors looked round to see Arthur Augustus enter, wondering what there was about the swell of St. Jim's to amuse Mellish so much. The fellows were looking curiously from the other tables.

There was a yell as Arthur Augustus appeared. The swell of the School House was dressed with his usual care—and with his usual good taste—with the exception of his trousers. He wore a fancy waistcoat and the whitest of white linen, a gleaming collar and beautiful shoes, and a jacket that fitted like a glove.

But his trousers were large—not to say immense—and were

of the commonest and coarsest blue cloth. They were rolled up at the ankles to render it possible for the junior to walk, and tightened round his waist in folds, and secured by a cricket-belt.

The contrast between the huge, flapping trousers, with their stains of tar and grease, and the natty attire above was very striking.

A roar of laughter rang through the dining-saloon. Arthur Augustus's face expressed a fixed indignation, and he marched straight on to his place with a very red countenance. Mr. Lathom peered at him in amazement.

"D'Arcy!" he jerked out.

"Yaas, sir," said Arthur Augustus, stopping and facing the master, with great dignity.

"What—er—what do you mean by appearing here in those—those—er—ridiculous garments, D'Arcy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" ran up and down the table.

"Silence, boys! Explain yourself, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, sir—"

"How dare you appear here in that ridiculous garb?"

"I had no choice in the mattah, sir. A silly aas—"

"What?"

"A silly aas, sir, opened the porthole in my cabin and drenched my twousahs, and I could not put them on!"

"Surely you had a second pair?"

"No, sir; they were left behind at Southampton by Mr. Wailton's ordahs."

"But—but you could have found something better than—than those absurd things, I am sure, D'Arcy!"

"These were brough't to me, sir, by a person who called himself my friend," said Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me! Your appearance is most absurd!"

"Yaas, sir, I am perfectly aware of that, and I did not wish to appeah in public until my twousahs were dwy, but you insisted."

"Dear me! You may take your place, D'Arcy."

"I should pwefere to go and look for some othah twousahs, sir."

"Take your place!"

There was no help for it. Arthur Augustus sat down between Blake and Digby, trousers and all. He began to eat in stony silence, keeping his eyes fastened upon his plate, while the whole length of the table was in a giggle.

"Find those bags comfy?" whispered Blake.

Arthur Augustus made no reply.

"I say, Gussy, do you find those trucks all right?"

"I wefuse to hold any conversation with you, Blake!"

"But I'm anxious to know if I've pleased you."

Arthur Augustus gave him a freezing look.

"You have not pleax'd me, Blake!"

"After all the trouble I took, too!" said Blake, with a sigh. "You're a very difficult fellow to please, Gussy."

"You have made me look widiculous!"

"We did our best. There's not another pair of trousers like those in the whole room."

Digby giggled.

"That's so; nor in the whole ship," he remarked.

"You are a pair of wottahs!"

"Catch me ecouting round looking for trousers for you again!" said Blake. "Next time you can come up to breakfast in your pyjamas."

"I no longah wegard you as a friend!"

"Silence there!" said Mr. Lathom.

And the conversation ceased. Arthur Augustus maintained his manner of reserved dignity when breakfast was over, and it assorted oddly enough with his absurd trousers. When the juniors left the tables, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came over to make affectionate inquiries of D'Arcy.

"Find the trousers all right?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and fixed him with a stony glare.

"I wefuse to speak to you, Tom Mewwy!"

The hero of the Shell looked amazed.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"You and Blake have succeeded in makin' me look widiculous."

"Well, that wasn't very hard."

"Quite easy," said Lowther. "Nature started it, and there wasn't much to do."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I say, I'd like to take a snapshot of you in those trousers," said Manners eagerly. "I haven't unpacked my camera yet, but I can do it, and if it leaves off raining—"

"It's clearing off now," said Tom Merry.

"Good! I should like to put Gussy on a picture-postcard like that, and send some off to the fellows left at home."

"I should wefuse to give my permish for anythin' of the sort!"

"Then you don't like the trousers?" asked Tom Merry.



The cornered Fatty Wynn, acting on the impulse of the moment, gave a slight puff, and the flicker died out. Jack Blake gave a growl. "Seems windy in this cabin," he remarked.

"I wegard that as a widiculous question."

"They're roomy. It's not a tight fit," said Tom Merry, surveying the garments in question. "I don't see that you've got anything to complain of."

"I'm going to unpack my camera," said Manners.

Arthur Augustus turned on his heel, and strode haughtily away. He left the Terrible Three chuckling away like lunatics—chuckles that were joined in by everyone who caught sight of D'Arcy and his trousers.

CHAPTER 7.

No Lenders.

"I SAY, Skimpole, deah boy—"

Skimpole, the brainy man of the Shell, looked up as Arthur Augustus tapped him on the shoulder. He was sitting in a corner with a pencil in his hand and a pocket-book on his knee, making notes.

"Did you speak to me, D'Arcy?" he asked absently.

"Yes, wathah! I want to know—"

"Ah, you want to know what I am engaged upon," said Skimpole, beaming through his glasses. "Very good. I have unpacked the notes for the great book I am writing on Socialism, and am adding to them. In the clear atmosphere of the sea I hope to be able to think out—"

"I wanted to know—"

"Yes, I am explaining. I am now engaged upon the three hundred and forty-fourth chapter of my book. It deals with—"

"I wanted to know if you could lend—"

"No, I couldn't very well lend you my notes, but I will explain the matter to you fully, so that you will quite understand. In the first place, this chapter deals with the subject of Determinism and the higher ethics—"

"I wanted to know if you could lend me—"

"I point out in the clearest possible way that, if everything is the result of heredity and environment, heredity and environment are unmistakably the cause of everything. This

great and profound truth is one of the triumphs of Determinism—"

"I wanted to know if you could lend me a pair of—"

"This profound truth once established—"

"Of twousahs—"

"Eh?"

"I wanted to know if you could lend me a pair of twousahs."

"Trousers! I'm talking about Determinism."

"I'm talking about twousahs."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I cannot bring my mighty brain down to such trivial matters. What does it matter whether one has, or has not, trousers, so long as the great truths of Determinism are established. I say, my friends," said Skimpole, waving his hand, and addressing an imaginary audience, "what does it matter if—"

"Oh, wing off, deah boy. I want to borrow a pair of twousahs—"

"The combined influence of heredity and environment—"

Arthur Augustus gave it up. He stopped his ears, and hurried away. Skimpole looked after him, and shook his head.

"Curious," he murmured. "Curious how little these deep questions seem to interest the average youthful intellect. Strange that Nature should have endowed me with mental powers so far in excess of those of any other boy—or even man. It is my duty to exercise these great powers for the benefit of humanity. If the fellows here are not converted to Socialism it will not be because I have neglected to preach to them on the subject."

Arthur Augustus looked anxiously round for someone of whom he could borrow the required pair of trousers. It had been arranged for lessons to take place on board the Condor in the same way as if the boys were at St. Jim's; but, during August, they were to be shorter. It was getting near the time for morning lessons, and D'Arcy shrank from taking his place in class in those absurd trousers. Fatty Wynn was

sitting on one of the tables, looking over a printed card, and Arthur Augustus came up and tapped him on the shoulder. Fatty looked round.

"I say, Wynn," said D'Arcy affably. "Can you lend me—"

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"How much?" he asked dubiously.

"I don't mean tin, I mean—"

"Oh, that's all right! Have you seen this paper?"

"No. Can you lend me—"

"You see what it is, don't you?" asked Fatty Wynn. "It's the tariff of a tuckshop run here by Mrs. Price. Price is our steward. They've opened a tuckshop on the upper deck, on the other side of the entrance there, and the steward's wife is running it. Good wheeze, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah! Can you—"

"We can get feeds, you see, the same as if we were at St. Jim's. There's time for one before morning school, if you like. It's closed during lesson hours."

"What I want is—"

"There's a fine assortment of pastries. Mrs. Price makes them herself. I will show you the place, if you like."

"Can you lend me a pair—"

"If you're coming, you may as well come along," said Fatty Wynn. "The things are jolly good, and the prices are reasonable. I've sampled 'em already. I'm feeling a little bit queasy this morning, which was why I didn't eat much breakfast. I only had some bacon and eggs and sausages and bread and marmalade, so I sha'n't be able to make much of a feed. Still, if you feel inclined to come, I'll come along with you."

"I want you to lend me a pair of twousahs."

"A pair of what?"

"Twousahs."

"Oh, rats! Do you want to come to the tuckshop, or don't you?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"I want a pair of twousahs."

"Well, I'm going, anyway."

And Fatty Wynn, still consulting the tariff, walked away.

"I say, Wynn—"

But the New House junior turned a deaf ear. Arthur Augustus staggered and dropped his eyeglass as he received a sounding slap on the shoulder. He swung round indignantly, and found himself looking at the grinning face of Reilly, of the Fourth.

"Weally, Weilly—"

"Faith, and it's a foine sight you look, intirely," said Reilly.

"Manners is getting out his camera—"

"He can put his camera away again, then. I say, Weilly, can you lend me a pair of twousahs, dear boy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you lend me a pair of twousahs, you wottah?"

"Faith, and I wouldn't spoil the fun for anything, darling. Sure, it's a thing of beauty and a joy for ever ye look now."

"You wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Reilly was doubled up with laughing. The indignant swell of St. Jim's reached out and gave him a push, and Reilly sat down violently on the floor. Arthur Augustus walked away. There was a buzz of an electric bell.

It was time for morning lessons.

The swell of St. Jim's made his way slowly to the aft dining-saloon—formerly devoted to second-class passengers, now taken up as a class-room for the Fourth Form. The Fourth-Formers were gathering there for morning lessons, and every face but D'Arcy's wore a huge grin. Arthur Augustus sat upright at his desk, with a fixed expression of indignation upon his face.

CHAPTER 8.

On View.

MR. LATHOM looked sharply at his class more than once. He knew that D'Arcy's trousers had caused a considerable amount of merriment, but that did not account for the wave of mirth that seemed to pass over a portion of the Form. It was suppressed whenever the little Form master's eyes turned that way, only to break out again. It centred round Kerr, the Scottish partner in the New House Co. More than one fellow seemed eager to see his "Ovid," though what they could find of interest in it was a puzzle.

The class was droning through the *Metamorphoses*. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been construing, and as he stood up there was a fresh giggle.

"Really, boys," said mild, little Mr. Lathom. "I must—er—ask you to be a little more quiet. Go on, D'Arcy—Monte suo senior iudex consedit—"

Arthur Augustus went on.

"Kerr, you will construe now."

Kerr started.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go on."

"I—I've lost the place, sir."

"Bring your 'Ovid' here," said Mr. Lathom sternly.

"My—my 'Ovid,' sir?"

"Yes. You have been drawing something in the book."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Bring it here at once!"

Kerr rose to his feet. Under cover of the desk he changed books with Figgins, and then stepped out virtuously before the class.

"Give me your book, Kerr."

"Certainly, sir."

Kerr handed the "Ovid" to Mr. Lathom. The master of the Fourth went through it, looking at the blank leaves at the beginning and end.

Then he looked decidedly puzzled.

"I thought I saw you drawing in this book with a pencil, Kerr."

"Did you, sir?"

"Why were the other boys looking over your shoulder?"

"I will ask them, sir."

"Never mind; go back to your place, and construe."

Kerr obeyed. His book was passing from hand to hand in the Fourth now, and the flyleaf caused a chuckle wherever it was passed.

Kerr was something of an artist, and he had drawn a very good representation of Arthur Augustus in his famous trousers. He had exaggerated the picture a little, making the trousers much larger than they really were, and the effect was decidedly comical.

The book passed along, almost under the eyes of the short-sighted, little Mr. Lathom, and when it came to Mellish, he passed it to D'Arcy.

"I say, D'Arcy, have a squint at this," he whispered.

D'Arcy glanced at the drawing carelessly. Then a flush came into his face, and his eyes gleamed.

"I wogard you as a disrespeetful wottah, Mellish," he muttered. "If we were not in class, I should give you a feafuhl thwashin'."

"See the likeness?" grinned Mellish.

"No, I do not see the likeness."

"D'Arcy, you are talking," said Mr. Lathom, turning, with a frown, towards the swell of St. Jim's.

"I am sowwy, sir, but—"

"You will take fifty lines."

"Pway allow me to explain."

"One hundred lines, D'Arcy. If you speak again, I shall give you a more severe punishment than lines."

That was Mr. Lathom's way. He was very patient and amiable, and would put up with almost anything, but all of a sudden he would come down like a hundred of bricks, and generally upon the wrong person.

But D'Arcy, in his present irritated mood, was not disposed to take it lying down.

"Weally, Mr. Lathom," he said, "I must explain, with your permish, that in the pwesent instance I was not to blame."

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, wathah, but undah the cires, sir—"

"Come out here, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Lathom, laying down his book with an angry look. "Come out before the class, sir!"

"If you will give me permish to explain the possish—"

"Stand out here!"

"Rut, weally, sir—"

"Will you obey me?" cried Mr. Lathom, making a stride towards the desk.

Arthur Augustus skipped out before the class.

"Yaas, sir, certainly, but—"

"You will stand here," said Mr. Lathom, taking Arthur Augustus by the shoulder, and leading him to the wall. "You will stand there till next lesson."

D'Arcy, and his celebrated trousers, were in full view of the whole class, and there was a general giggle. The swell of St. Jim's flushed scarlet.

"Weally, Mr. Lathom—"

"Stand there!"

"I object to bein' made to look widiculous."

"Silence!"

"That's all gowy well, but—"

"Another word, D'Arcy, and I will send you in to Mr. Ralton to be caned."

Arthur Augustus relapsed into indignant silence. But Kerr was on his feet now.

"If you please, Mr. Lathom, it wasn't D'Arcy's fault. It was I who caused him to speak. You see, I—"

"Indeed! Come out here, Kerr."

Kerr came out.

"Stand beside D'Arcy. You will both remain there till

the end of the lesson," said Mr. Lathom, whose temper had been considerably ruffled.

"But, sir—"

"A word more from either of you, and you will be caned. We will resume our work, which has been interrupted quite long enough. I will keep order in this class, or I will know the reason why."

And the lesson went on. Arthur Augustus stood looking the picture of unhappiness, with the eyes of the class upon him and his trousers.

The Latin lesson was fortunately the last of the morning, and when it was over the class were dismissed. Blake tapped D'Arcy on the shoulder as they went out.

"I say, Gussy, I'm sorry you had to—"

Arthur Augustus jerked himself away.

"I do not wish to hold any communication with you, Blake."

"But I say—"

"I no longer regard you as a friend."

"Now, look here, aas—"

"I wufese to be called an aas, especially by a person whom I no longer regard as a friend," said D'Arcy frigidly. "I will thank you not to address me."

"Oh, very well; I was going to offer to get you a pair of trousers."

"Oh, in that case, pewwaps I may be willin' to accept your apologies."

"Hold on! I haven't offered any yet," said Blake coolly.

"And as you no longer regard me as a friend, I don't think I'll offer any trousers either."

And Blake put his hands in his pockets and walked away whistling.

"I say, Blake—I say—"

But Jack Blake did not turn his head. Arthur Augustus looked round for Digby, and found him.

"Dig, old fellow, you might get me a pair of twousahs."

Digby shook his head.

"Can't be did. If you no longer regard Blake as a friend, it can't be managed. I'm standing by old Blake."

"In that case, I shall drop your acquaintance."

"Drop it, then," said Digby.

"Vewy well. I say, Hewvies, old man—"

"Oh, don't talk to me," said Herries. "I'm standing by Blake and Digby. If you drop their acquaintance you drop mine, too."

"Vewy well; I drop the wotten lot of you."

"Much obliged."

Arthur Augustus marched off haughtily. He met the Terible Three as he made his way down to the main deck, determined to rummage among the berths until he found a pair of trousers. They stopped and looked at him.

"Same old trucks!" said Tom Merry.

"They're not so bad when you get used to them," said Monty Lowther. "I rather like a fullness about trousers, now I come to think of it."

"Wait here a minute while I get my camera, Gussy," said Manners.

"I wufese to do anythin' of the sort. And I will thank you wottahs not to address me. I drop your acquaintance."

Tom Merry pretended to faint in the arms of Manners and Lowther, and the swell of the School House sniffed indignantly and walked on. He went into his cabin, hoping to find some garments belonging to Blake or Tom Merry, and the first object that caught his eyes was a pair of trousers hanging over one side of the bunk. They were his own!

They were quite dry, and had been nicely folded out. Arthur Augustus gave a gasp of relief, and—contrary to his usual habits—he changed his garments in record time.

"Bai Jove, that feels bettah!"

The red-faced Mr. Price looked in at the door and grinned.

"Done with those trousers of mine, sir?"

"Oh, they're yours, are they?" said D'Arcy.

"Yes, sir. The young gents asked me to lend them as yours were wet. They didn't fit you very well, did they, sir?"

Mr. Price's face was perfectly innocent, and he looked like a man who had done a very good-natured action.

"No," said D'Arcy, "they did not fit me. But—but I am vewy much obliged to you for lendin' them, and for dwayn' my twucks. I should be glad if you would accept this half-crown."

"Thank you, sir."

"How long have my twousahs been here, Price?"

"Oh, I put them in here immediately after breakfast, sir," said Mr. Price; and he took his departure.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt as if he could have kicked himself. All the time he had been trying to borrow a pair of trousers his own were waiting for him in the cabin, if he had thought of it, and he had endured untold sufferings for

nothing. He was inclined to kick himself; but he felt that it would afford him more satisfaction if he kicked somebody else, and he left the cabin with a glint in his eyes.

CHAPTER 9.

Justice is Satisfied!

FATTY WYNN came out of the cafe—as Mrs. Price called the tuckshop she had started on the upper deck for the St. Jim's juniors—with a contented smile and a smear of marmalade upon his plump face. The fat junior of the New House had quite recovered from his sea-sickness, though the wind was still blowing hard, and the steamer was far from steady. He had done full justice to Mrs. Price's marmalade tarts, and he felt satisfied with himself and things generally.

"Looking for the tuckshop, Gore?" he asked, as the cad of the Shell came along, with a discontented look upon his face. "I'll show you—"

"No, I'm looking for a match," said Gore. "Have you got one?"

"What on earth do you want a match for?"

"A smoke."

"You ain't allowed to smoke."

"You ain't allowed to gorge yourself like a prize porker, but you do it," said Gore. "I'm not allowed to smoke, but I do it. See? Got a match?"

Fatty Wynn grinned as he felt in his pockets for a matchbox. He still had the box he had taken from Blake's hand in the dark the previous night, and he was rather anxious to get rid of it. He had a feeling that it would not be conducive to his comfort to be discovered as the raider of that occasion. Tom Merry's nose and Blake's eye told how the argument over the matchbox had ended.

"Here's a matchbox," he remarked. "You can have it if you like."

"Thanks!" said Gore.

He took the matchbox and walked away. The rain had ceased, but the promenade was wet and cheerless. The Condor was grinding on through a sloppy sea, and the men on deck were in oilskins. Some of the boys were out on the sheltered way, and others in the common rooms. Gore made his way below with the matchbox in his hand, seeking a quiet corner where he could smoke.

George Gore of the Shell was very much given to smoking. He was the leader of the junior "Smart Set" at St. Jim's, a smart set that had been made to smart more than once by Tom Merry & Co. Gore had pretty well spoiled his wind by smoking, but that did not break him of the habit. He kept it up to show that he was independent, and could do as he liked, though he was very careful not to show it in the presence of a prefect.

As he came downstairs he met Arthur Augustus coming up. D'Arcy had changed his trousers, and looked himself again. The glimmer of the metal matchbox in his hand caught the eye of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Where did you get that matchbox, Goah?"

"Mind your own business," retorted Gore, who was on very ill terms with the chums of the Fourth Form. "Let me pass."

"Where did you get that matchbox?"

"What the dickens has that got to do with you?"

"It's Blake's matchbox."

"Rats!"

"And it wasn't a New House waidah in the cabin last night, aftah all, then," said Arthur Augustus. "It was a School House fellow. It was you, you wottah!"

"Off your dot?" asked Gore.

"Give me that matchbox."

Gore stared.

"What on earth should I give you this matchbox for?"

"I shall return it to Blake."

"Oh, get away!"

"And also I am vewy stwongly inclined to give you a fearful thwashin' for the twick you played on us, Goah."

"Ha, ha! You couldn't thrash one side of me."

"Weally, Goah—"

"Oh, get away; your face worries me!"

"I will wowwy you more sewiously, then," said D'Arcy, whose usually calm and serene temper had been disturbed by the affair of the trousers, and who was more than usually ready for a dispute. "Undah the cires, I considah that it is impos. for me to let you off without a thwashin', considewin' that you woke us up and made a fearful bothah last night."

"You're dreamin'!"

"I am not dweamin', and pwevarication will not do you any good, Goah. I know Blake's matchbox when I see it."

"Fatty Wynn gave me this matchbox."

"Pway don't take the twouble to tell me any whoppahs,

Goah. I shall not believe them. I know you too well. I will trouble you for an apology."

"Oh, travel along!"

"I refuse to travel along without the apology."

"Then I'll jolly soon shift you."

"I'd weally like to see you do it, Goah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

As he would really like to see it, it probably did not matter that Gore gave him a shove that sent him staggering down two stairs, to lose his footing and roll to the bottom. Yet when he sat up again, he looked as if he had not been pleased.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Gore, as he followed the swell of St. Jim's down the stairs. "Are you setting up as an acrobat, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove, I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Get away!"

"I absolutely refuse to get away."

And D'Arcy clutched hold of Gore, who struggled with him savagely. There was a patter of feet, and Tom Merry and Blake came on the scene.

"Hallo, Gussy's changed his trousers!" said Tom Merry.

"Now he's trying to collect up the dust with them."

"I am not twyin' to collect up the beastly dust."

"What are you doing, then?"

"I am thwashin' Goah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was justified in laughing, for, but for D'Arcy's assurance on the point, he would really have thought that Gore was thrashing D'Arcy. The Shell boy had jammed the Fourth-Former up against the stairs, and was pommeling him.

"What has Gore been doing, Gussy?"

"He waiked our cabin last night."

"Rate!" said Blake. "There wasn't any raider. It was Tom Merry who took the matchbox out of my hand."

"It wasn't, ass," said Tom Merry.

"If you call me an ass—"

"I've just disavowed the matchbox in Gore's hand."

"By Jove, he's got it! Look, Blake, is that your matchbox?"

Blake uttered an exclamation.

"Yes. I scratched those initials on it myself with a pocket-knife. What were you doing with my matchbox, Gore?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Dwag him off, deah boys! He is wumplin' my collah!"

Blake and Tom Merry seized Gore, and dragged him off. The bully of the Shell struggled fiercely in their grasp.

But he struggled in vain. He was not a match for either of the two young athletes, and together they held him helpless.

"Let me go, you rotters!" he gasped.

"No hurry," said Blake. "You raided our cabin last night—"

"I didn't."

"Where did you get that matchbox, then?"

"Fatty Wynn gave it me."

"That's a whopper," said Blake, who was justified in doubting Gore's word, knowing by past experience that he never hesitated at an untruth when it served his purpose. "I know that Wynn was sick last night, and he couldn't have been in much condition for a raid. You raided our cabin—"

"I tell you I didn't."

"You might tell me till you were black in the face, but I shouldn't believe you," said Blake coolly. "You raided our cabin, and scooped my matchbox, and started me punching Tom Merry's head by mistake"

"And me blacking Blake's eye by another mistake," said Tom Merry.

"And both of the wottahs bein' vewy wude to me," said D'Arcy.

"I tell you—"

"After the feast," said Blake, with a shake of the head, "comes the reckoning. I don't bear malice for any sort of a jape, but one good turn deserves another."

"Exactly," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Therefore, I think it stands to reason that Gore ought to be ducked in the sea—"

"You silly duffer!"

"Or, as there might be some difficulty about that, he ought to be ducked in a bath-room as the next best thing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then bring him along. Gussy has dropped our acquaintance, but we will accept his aid as that of a stranger in helping to get Gore to the bath-room."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Lend a hand, and yank him along."

Gore struggled and shouted, but he was yanked along

forward, along the passage upon which the bath-rooms opened, and jerked into the nearest.

Tom Merry started the tap running, and Blake jammed Gore's head under it, and the bully of the Shell wriggled and roared.

"Are you sorry you raided our cabin?"

"I didn't!"

"H'm! He says he wants some more!"

"I don't! I didn't! I won't!"

"So often as you tell a prevarication, Gore, I shall take it to mean that you want some more," said Blake, turning on the tap again. "Now, are you sorry you raided our cabin last night, Georgey?"

"I didn't, you beasts! Yes, I'm sorry!"

"Are you awfully, fearfully sorry?"

"Ow! Yes! Ow!"

"You won't never do no such thing no more, not if it was ever so?" demanded Blake, with the solemnity of a judge.

"Ow! No! Oh! No! No!"

"Good! Justice is satisfied," said Blake. "Gore can now go and dry his mop. I hope this will be a lesson to you, Gore, not to raid the cabins of your elders in this reckless way," said Blake severely.

"Ow, you rotter! I'm wet!"

"Yes, I thought you were getting wet when I turned the tap on," assented Blake. "The water is wet here, the same as at St. Jim's. No good blaming me; the fault is in Nature, and—"

But Gore did not wait to hear any more. He rushed furiously from the bath-room, to seek some means of drying his dripping hair. The juniors followed him laughing. As they came back amidships, they were met by Figgins & Co.

"Hallo, what's the matter with Gore?" asked Figgins, looking at the School House boys suspiciously. "He's just rushed past us with his head wringing wet."

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's just had a ducking. He raided our cabin last night, and started us fighting by mistake, and we thought that one good turn deserved another."

Figgins & Co. burst into a roar.

"He told us a yarn about Fatty Wynn having given him my matchbox, when I found it in his hand," said Blake.

"When I found it in his hand, deah boy!"

"Don't talk to me, Arthur Adolphus D'Arcy. You've dropped my acquaintance, and I don't know you from Adam. Of course, we knew Fatty Wynn hadn't given him the matchbox."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House Co.

"Look here, what are you cackling at?"

"Nothing," said Figgins, with the tears streaming down his cheeks. "Nothing, only Fatty Wynn did give him the matchbox."

"Eh?"

"Fatty Wynn did give him the matchbox."

"How did Fatty Wynn get it?"

"I took it from your hand last night, when you thought Tom Merry took it," said Fatty Wynn, with a gurgle.

"You—you—you— Then it was you?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys, justice is not satisfied after all!"

"Oh, yes, it is!" said Fatty Wynn. "Gore borrowed that matchbox to go and have a smoke against rules, so he deserved a ducking. Make it pax. Somebody's been punished, so justice is getting along all right. That's good law."

And the School House boys assented, and pax it was accordingly.

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy's Dig.

AFTERNOON lessons on board the Condor finished at four o'clock, and as the rain had long ceased, most of the boys went up to enjoy the sea breezes. Mr. Ratcliff was still keeping his cabin. The senior house-master was the worst of sailors, and the sea was still very rough. Mr. Railton had tried to persuade him to venture on deck, but the sick man refused so abruptly that the School House master did not renew the subject.

The steamer was throbbing on through a choppy, sloppy sea. The sun was glimmering in the west through watery clouds. The prospect of the Channel was decidedly uninviting. Tom Merry held on to the rail with his hair blowing about his ears, and his collar turned up, and looked over the expanse of water. Here and there the black smoke of a steamer loomed through the watery haze. Here and there was the brown sail of a small craft scudding before the wind.

"This is all right," shouted Tom Merry, in Lowther's ear. "It's a change from the old quad at St. Jim's, old fellow."

"Yes, rather," said Lowther. "Bit wet, though, isn't it? There's more rain to come down yet."



"Bai Jove! Does Mr. Wallton weally expect me to sleep there, Tom Mewwy?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Never mind, it's jolly here, all the same. This breeze makes you as hungry as a hunter. I'm beginning to feel like Fatty Wynn. Hallo, Gussy, don't go too near the side, or you'll be over."

Arthur Augustus, holding his cap on with one hand, and his eyeglass with the other, stared haughtily at Tom Merry.

"Did you address me, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes. Don't do your Piccadilly walk too near the rail, or you'll go over when she rolls, ass."

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"You'll be a drowned donkey if you get into the water," said Lowther. "Jolly hard work to pick anybody up in a sea like this."

"I shall not get into the watah."

"Do be careful, Gussy!"

"Pway don't address me, Tom Mewwy!"

"Why not?"

"Because I wefuse to wecognise you as an acquaintance any longah. Aftah the outrageous affaih of the twousahs, I cannot wegard you as a fwiend. I have to considah my dig."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus walked on with an air of extreme dignity. He left the Terrible Three holding on to the rail, and cackling.

Arthur Augustus was not holding on to the rail. He sauntered along as if he were safe at home on the Piccadilly pavement, or in the quadrangle at St. Jim's. The grace of his movements was somewhat impaired by the necessity of holding his cap on, and by the fact that his monocle was

continually being blown off, and fluttering at the end of its ribbon.

Blake, Herries, and Digby came along, clinging to one another, and staggering in the gusts of wind that blew over the steamer.

"Catch hold, Gussy!" called out Blake.

"I wefuse to catch hold."

"It's not safe for an ass like you to prom. on his own. Catch hold, and we'll see you safe," said Digby.

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

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

"What's the matter with you, duffer?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a duffah!"

"Catch hold, then!"

"Pway do not address me, Blake."

"Eh?"

"I do not wecognise you as an acquaintance. I shall be extremely obliged if you will not force your conversation upon me."

Blake grinned.

"By Jove, I'd forgotten! I don't know this chap, kids. Run along, little boy."

"I wefuse to be addressed as a little boy."

"Go and eat coke!"

And the three chums swung on with linked arms, and D'Arcy staggered in the gusts of wind alone. He bumped against Reilly, who threw out his arms and caught hold of him round the neck, and righted himself.

"Faith, and I was nearly over, Gussy."

"Pway welease me."

"Sure, and it's savin' ye from a fall I was."

"Pway don't bothah me, Weilly. Aftah your bwutal conduct in wefusin' to lend me a pair of twousahs, I cannot regard you as a friend, or even as an ordinary acquaintance. I shall be extremely obliged if you will not address me."

"Faith, and I—"

But Arthur Augustus marched on with a dignified stride. He left the boy from Belfast cackling like a linnatic. Skimpole came staggering along with a bundle of papers under his arm.

"I say, D'Arcy, lend me a hand!" he gasped. "These beastly things are blowing about. I've already lost my notes for my chapter on the Effect of Causes in Producing Results, and I shall have to think it all out again."

"I refuse to lend you a hand."

"Eh?"

"You wefused to lend me a pair of twousahs."

"Catch!" yelled Skimpole, as a sheet blew from under his arm. "Save it!"

D'Arcy, his good nature proving stronger than his dignity, made a clutch at the escaping sheet, and missed, and sat down on the deck. The paper whistled off in the wind. It floated over a funnel. Then it travelled aft, and a gust carried it fairly into the face of Mr. Thropp, the chief mate, who was standing outside the chart-house on the bridge. Then it whisked away, leaving Mr. Thropp muttering things, and finally vanished over the stern.

Skimpole clung to the rest of his papers, and grunted.

"There go the rest of my notes on 'Determinism; or, the Theory that every Result is the Effect of a Cause, and that every Cause is the Producer of an Effect,'" he groaned. "I shall have to think all that out over again."

"Why don't you do all that below?" said D'Arcy. "It's wathah windy to bwing papahs on deck."

"Gore is such a pig, you know. He tried to set light to my papers. That is his idea of a joke, and he nearly destroyed the fruit of months of mental labour. But I am afraid I cannot— Oh, there goes another! That's the sketch of my chapter on 'Socialism and Sanity' considered as Synonymous."

And Skimpole dashed away after his notes on the subject of "Socialism and Sanity, considered as Synonymous," but he was not in time to prevent them from escaping over the lee rail.

"Bai Jove, that fellow is an awful ass!" murmured D'Arcy. "Fancy payin' so much attention to things like Socialism and Determinism, and wearin' waistcoats of such a fearful style. Some fellows nevah seem to know what things weally mattah, and what things don't."

And he resumed his Piccadilly walk. Tom Merry shouted to him down the wind.

"Look out, D'Arcy! She's rolling."

Arthur Augustus did not deign to look round.

But the steamer was rolling, and at the same time a fierce gust of wind swooped down. D'Arcy's cap went flying from his head, and he made a frantic clutch at it, and lost his footing, and rolled away. The next moment there was a shriek of horror from fifty throats.

"Man overboard!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was over the rail!

The splash in the sea was drowned by the wind and the throbbing of the steamer, but several fellows caught a glimpse of a white and startled face as it disappeared in the froth of the rolling billows.

For a moment or two horror held everyone petrified—with one exception.

The exception was Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell had dashed forward as he saw D'Arcy going, but too late. He stopped at the rail, but only for a second—to fling off cap and jacket. Then he threw his hands together and dived.

"Tom!" shrieked Lowther. Manners gave an inarticulate cry.

But Tom Merry was gone!

The rolling waters were over him, and the steamer throbbed on; and now it was life or death for two instead of one!

CHAPTER 11.

For Life or Death!

TOM MERRY cleft the water like an arrow as he struck it, and, as he came up, his hand struck something that floated in the waves. He had calculated well; his hand was upon Arthur Augustus, and his grasp instantly fastened upon the collar of the swell of St. Jim's.

The fall into the water had almost stunned D'Arcy, and he was helpless at the mercy of the waves.

He was not a good swimmer at any time, and in such a sea

he would have been powerless, even if he had had all his wits about him.

But it was different with Tom Merry. The champion junior athlete of the School House, the finest swimmer in the lower Forms at St. Jim's, was more fitted to fight for his life amid the surging waves.

He grasped D'Arcy, and kept himself afloat, and, as he was thrown up upon a billow, he looked round for the steamer.

His heart sank as he saw her.

The Condor had almost instantly reversed her engines, and stopped, but she seemed terribly far away to the swimming lad.

For the moment, from the top of the surge, he could see the great ship, the whole length of her, with the black smoke pouring from her funnels, and her rail crowded with anxious faces.

Then he went down into the trough of the sea, and the steamer disappeared from his view.

Tom Merry set his teeth hard. Whether a boat could reach him in such a sea, he did not know; but he meant to fight hard for his life, and keep afloat as long as possible.

To swim towards the steamer in that rough sea was almost impossible. It required all his efforts to keep himself and D'Arcy afloat. To that task he bent all his energies.

D'Arcy's eyes opened wide, and turned, with terrified inquiry, upon the stalwart lad whose grasp was holding him from death.

Tom Merry tried to catch the words at D'Arcy's lips moved.

"Bai Jove!"

"Buck up!" said Tom Merry, shouting to make his voice heard above the wind. "We shall be picked up."

"Bai Jove, I must have fallen into the sea!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Did you fall in, too, Tom Mewwy?"

"No."

"Bai Jove! You jumped in?"

"Yes."

"That was weally wathah wippin' of you, Tom Mewwy, after I had just dropped your acquaintance."

"That's all right."

D'Arcy's lips moved, but his reply was dashed away by a gust of wind, and Tom Merry did not hear a word. The hero of the Shell looked round anxiously as he was borne to the top of a surge.

The steamer seemed farther away than before. But a boat had swung down into the sea. Tom Merry could not see the boat, but his quick glance noticed that the place of one was empty, so he knew that it must have been lowered.

He lost sight of the steamer again. A rough, choppy wave overwhelmed him, and for some seconds both boys disappeared under a mass of water.

But Tom Merry did not lose his hold upon Arthur Augustus. He came up again, breathless and gasping, bobbing like a cork, and the swell of St. Jim's came up with him.

D'Arcy's face was deathly white now, but there was still intelligence in his eyes. He had not lost his presence of mind. Many duds ways the swell of St. Jim's had, but in the moment of terrible danger he showed that he belonged to the true British breed. He knew that he was in the grim shadow of death, and he faced it with cool pluck and nerve.

He was trying to speak, but for some moments the wind and water drowned his voice. Then Tom Merry heard at last.

"Is there a boat coming?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"It was lowered."

"Can you see it?"

"No."

The wind roared again, and words were dashed away. Tom Merry's clothes were soaked, his boots full of water. He felt as if an invisible giant's hand were dragging him down—down to cold death in the gloomy depths of the sea.

The buffeting of the waves was exhausting him, and D'Arcy was almost a dead-weight. The Fourth-Former was trying to swim, but his efforts were worth little. He was a weight upon the stronger lad, and Tom Merry's strength was giving out.

Would help come?

Could it come?

A chill ran through Tom Merry's veins.

It was hard to die!

Like a glimmer of strange light, scenes and faces flashed through his brain—the kind, old face of Miss Priscilla, the charming smile of Cousin Ethel, the old green, shady quadrangle at St. Jim's, the cricket field, with its white-clad figures, the glorious old river with the shadows of the trees mirrored in its depths.

The voice of D'Arcy brought him back to himself.

"Let go!"

Tom Merry stared at him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was pulling himself from his rescuer's hold, and for the moment Tom Merry thought that he had been overcome by one of those unreasoning fits of terror common to drowning people, and did not know what he was doing.

But the white face of the junior was earnest.

"Let me go!"

"What do you mean?"

"I—I can't swim, and you are goin' undah," gasped D'Arcy. "No good both goin'. Let me go."

Tom Merry tightened his grip.

"Both or neither."

"No good both goin'."

Tom Merry did not answer, but his grasp was fast upon the junior's collar. He did not regret his action, and he did not mean to go back on it. For life or death, he meant to see it through. It was sink or swim together.

"Tom Mewwy—"

"Buck up, Gussy! The boat's coming."

"Can you see it?"

"Not yet."

"Then save yourself, Tom Mewwy."

A choppy wave broke over their heads, and they disappeared under it. When they came clear again, D'Arcy's face was white and set and rigid. He was insensible. A groan left Tom Merry's lips.

His strength was almost gone. Would help never come?

"Ahoy!"

The boy started, and a thrill ran through him. As he was lifted on the wave-crest, he saw a boat labouring through the rough waves, and a hand was waved, showing that he had been seen.

He had no strength to shout back. He could only struggle for his life, and wait!

The boat drew nearer.

Mr. Green, the second mate of the Condor, was standing up in her, keeping his footing by a feat of balancing possible only to a sailor.

His eyes were fixed upon the floating junior, and he made signs in silence to the seamen at the oars.

"Help!"

Tom Merry gasped out the word.

"Ahoy!"

The boat came near. A great wave surged down upon it, carrying Tom Merry and D'Arcy upon its crest. Mr. Green stood ready, and his men backed him up well. With head and shoulders in frothing water, Mr. Green grasped Tom Merry, and, as the boat rose upon the wave, they came out of the water together.

"Got him!"

Tom Merry, still grasping D'Arcy, was dragged into the boat.

His brain was swimming now, and he fell blindly into the bottom of the boat.

"Safe now, lad."

But Tom Merry did not hear, did not know he was safe, for darkness had rushed upon his vision, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER 12.

The Right Hand of Friendship.

"TOM!"

Tom Merry started. It was Monty Lowther's voice, but not the usually light, careless tone of the joker of the Shell.

It was a low voice, with a strange shake in it—a shake Tom Merry had never heard in Lowther's voice before. What had happened? Where was he?

There was a glimmering of subdued light in his eyes, and around him several faces that were dim to his sight at first. He was lying in a bunk—a much more spacious bunk than his own in the junior cabin on the main-deck.

"Tom!"

In a flash recollection returned. Tom Merry sat up hastily, passing his hand across his eyes with a quick gesture.

"Is Gussy all right?"

"Yes," said the deep voice of Mr. Railton, "D'Arcy is all right, Merry. He has already recovered consciousness."

"I'm jolly glad!" said Tom Merry.

He looked round him a little uncertainly. His vision was growing clearer now, the strange buzz in his head subsiding. The cabin was glimmering with a subdued light. A shade had been placed round the electric lamp. Beside his bunk Mr. Railton and the ship's doctor were standing, and near them were Manners and Lowther. Dr. Pounce was feeling his pulse.

"I say, I'm all right," said Tom Merry.

The little, fat doctor smiled.

"I'm glad to say you are, my boy," he said. "Matters might have been a great deal worse. You will get up in the morning pretty nearly as well as ever."

"Oh, am I to stay in bed the rest of the day?" said Tom Merry, in dismay.

"It is night now, my lad."

"Night? Then I—"

"You have been insensible for two hours."

"My hat!"

The doctor spoke aside to Mr. Railton for a few minutes, and then left the cabin. Meanwhile, Manners and Lowther drew nearer the bunk.

"It's all right!" said Tom, strangely touched, as he saw that there was a wet streak down either of Lowther's cheeks.

"It's all right, kids!"

"I know it is," said Monty, with a gulp; "but—"

"it mightn't have been."

"We—thought—we—thought—" stammered Manners.

Tom smiled faintly.

"I suppose I looked like a goner?"

"Yes."

"Jolly glad I'm not, anyway! And Gussy is all right?"

"Yes; he came to some time ago."

Mr. Railton came back to the bunk, and the chums of the Shell withdrew a little. The housemaster's face was very kind as he looked down upon the junior.

"How do you feel now, Merry?"

"Rather seedy, sir."

"You will remain here for the night—"

"But this is your cabin, sir."

"Yes, it is mine."

"You—you can't be turned out like this, sir—"

"I shall make myself comfortable, Merry," said the housemaster. "Don't trouble about that. Heaven be praised that matters are no worse! I hope I shall never feel again as I felt when I saw you in the water, and thought that the boat could never reach you in time. You have performed a heroic action, Merry."

"Oh, sir!"

"If you had not dived in for him, D'Arcy would certainly have been drowned. As it is, he has suffered less than you. We owe it to you that our voyage has not commenced with a terrible tragedy." Mr. Railton's voice trembled for a moment. "And we owe it to a merciful Providence that the matter did not end with a double tragedy. Can I do anything for you now, Merry? Would you like your friends to remain with you?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"You must not talk too much," said Mr. Railton. "You must keep quiet."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton quitted the cabin. Manners and Lowther sat on the edge of the bunk, and Tom Merry sank down upon the pillow again.

"My hat!" murmured Lowther. "I never saw Railton so cut up in my life before. He looked as white as a sheet on deck."

"So did you," said Manners; "and you stood blubbing when they brought Tom up the side—"

Lowther turned scarlet.

"I didn't."

"Yes, you did."

"I was just gasping because the wind was in my eyes—"

"Oh, rats!" said Manners. "I felt jolly like blubbing myself, for that matter. Tom looked as if he was a gone coon, and so did Gussy. Poor old Gus! That's his last pair of trousers ruined. He'll never get the salt water out of them."

Tom Merry chuckled faintly.

"He'll have to wear the steward's old bags again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is Gussy still in bed?"

"No, I think he was getting up. He's not much the worse for it; he's only had a ducking. You had all the work. I say, we were watching you, you know. We saw you nearly all the time, and you held Gussy up a treat."

"He's a good little ass!" said Tom Merry. "He wanted me to let him go when he thought we were both sinking."

"Did he really? By Jove, I'll lend him a pair of my Sunday bags!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove, will you weally, Mannahs?" said a voice at the door. "I wegard that as wathah wippin' of you."

Arthur Augustus came into the cabin. He was wearing a dressing-gown of a gorgeous pattern, and looked not unlike an Eastern Sultan in full state.

"I came in to see how you were, Tom Mewwy," he remarked, coming towards the bunk. "I accept Mannah's genevous offah. That has been weighin' on my mind."

"What has been weighing on your mind?" asked Tom Merry.

"My twousahs. I was thinkin' while we were in the watah that even if we were rescued, my twousahs would be ruined."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "I wonder if anybody but Gussy would have thought of his trousers at such a time?"

"It's a wathah important mattah, Lowthah," said D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye. "I say, Tom Merry, you do look seedy!"

"Same to you!" grinned Tom Merry. "You've got a complexion like putty."

"I feel wathah wotten, but I was most anxious about the twousahs. I am afraid they will shwink; and, anyway, the shape will be spoiled, aftah bein' twice soaked and dried like this. If Mannahs is sewious in his offah—"

"Quite serious!" said Manners magnanimously.

"Good! I suppose you don't mind if I have the twousahs altered a little. You weally wear twousahs of a wathah provincial cut—"

"If you start altering my trousers—"

"They will be too long for me, too."

"You can turn them up at the ankle."

"Yass, but I should pwefer—"

"You're not going to alter my trucks, Gussy. Let me catch you damaging them, that's all!"

"Oh, vewy well. I weally wish, though, that you would wear twousahs of a more fashionable cut, Mannahs. Then the pwesent difficulty would not have arisen."

"Still the champion ass!" grinned Lowther.

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a champion ass! I want to speak to you, Tom Mewwy. You saved my life—"

"He's always saving up something that's no good," Lowther remarked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's all right, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I am weally vewy gwateful! You wemembah that I had dropped your acquaintance owin' to that wotten twick you and Blake played on me with the steward's twousahs. Undah the cires, I cannot do less than forgive you, and extend the wight hand of fwendship."

And Arthur Augustus extended it. Tom Merry laughed as he accepted the right hand of friendship, and gave it a grip which showed that his strength was returning.

"Can we come in?"

It was Blake's voice at the door. Digby and Herries were looking over his shoulders. Arthur Augustus gave them a glance of disdain.

"Pway don't bothah now!" he said.

"We want to congratulate you—"

"I cannot accept congratulations fwm persons with whom I am not on terms of fwendship!" said D'Arcy frigidly.

"My dear ass—"

"Pway wetire!"

"It has occurred to me that this is Tom Merry's abode, and you are rather off the line in issuing orders," Blake remarked. "Can we come in, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, undah the cires—"

"This is another chance for the right hand of friendship," explained Tom Merry. "You can extend it to these three rotters, too."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I am afraid that will be impos. unless they apologise."

"But I haven't apologised."

"You have saved my life, deah boy, which is bettah still."

"His own life won't be safe when that gets about," said Blake, darkly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"We've come to talk to Tom Merry. We can't allow any strangers in the cabin. You must extend the right hand of friendship, or else bunk."

"I wefuse to extend the wight hand of fwendship!"

"Now, Gussy—" began Tom Merry.

"I am sowwy to have to wefuse you anythin'. Tom Mewwy, aftah you have so bwavely wisked your life and spoiled your clothes to wescue me from a watewky gwave; but I cannot extend the wight hand of fwendship to these wottahs. If they wemain in the cabin, I shall have no alternative but to wetire."

"Well, we're going to remain," said Blake, sitting down. "I think you're ungrateful, Gussy! You've spoiled your trousers, and I was going to borrow the steward's old trucks for you again."

Arthur Augustus gave his erstwhile chum a withering look, and walked haughtily out of the cabin. A general chuckle followed him. Figgins & Co. looked in at the door while the School House fellows were still chuckling.

"What's the joke?" asked Figgins. "We looked in to inquire after a giddy invalid, but you seem to be enjoying your little selves."

"Somebody going to stand a feed?" asked Fatty Wynn.

Blake explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Figgins. "I firmly believe that Gussy will be the death of me yet. But after what has happened he must be brought round."

"He's as obstinate as a mule."

"I've got an idea—" said Kerr.

"Get it off your chest, my son."

"Gussy has forgiven Tom Merry because he rescued him. Suppose you three chaps were to rescue him—"

"But he's not likely to fall into the sea again."

"He could be chucked in," suggested Digby.

"I don't mean that," grinned Kerr. "Suppose three New House fellows had hold of him, and were going to souse his head in a bucket of tar, and you came along and rescued him in the nick of time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing heartily.

"Go ahead, my sons; and if Gussy extends the right hand of friendship, we'll all have a feed in here at supper time. As a giddy invalid, I'm allowed to have my way—and that's my way."

"Now you're talking!" said Fatty Wynn.

And so the plot was plotted.

CHAPTER 13.

Another Heroic Rescue.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS walked away from the cabin with a haughty stride, and it was not till he was on the main deck of the Condor that he remembered that he had not yet arranged with Manners about the loan of the trousers. His dressing-gown was a triumph of colour, but it had its disadvantages, being, in fact, rather airy on a windy evening. But the swell of St. Jim's shook his head at the thought of returning to Tom Merry's quarters. He had disowned the chums of the Fourth as acquaintances, and he meant to keep it up.

"I suppose it will be all wight if I go to Mannahs' cabin and borrow the pair of twousahs fwm his box?" he murmured. "I have weweived his permish, so it will be all wight. Anyway, I think I'll do it, and ask him aftahwards."

And he set forth in search of Manners' cabin. He found it after some time, and found there Manners' best pair of nether garments, and calmly appropriated them. They were not of the really fashionable cut of his own, and they were a little too long in the legs, and rather roomy about the waist. But they were a decided improvement upon a dressing-gown.

D'Arcy put them under his arm, and returned to his own quarters, and there proceeded to dress with great care.

He had an ample supply of all things but trousers, so he was able to make an elaborate toilet, and Manners' things really looked very well when they were turned up at the ankles.

D'Arcy surveyed himself as well as he could in a hand-mirror, and was pretty well satisfied with the result.

"Bai Jove, it makes a fellow feel bettah to be decently dwessed again!" he murmured. "I weally think I look wathah nobby. The twousahs are a little baggy, that's all. Bai Jove, what's that?"

The door of his cabin was suddenly opened. Three youths rushed in, and in a moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was lying on the floor, with Kerr sitting on his chest, and Fatty Wynn on his legs.

Figgins closed the door, and dumped down a pail that, from its colour, looked as if it had been used to contain tar.

"Got him!"

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Captured him at the first swoop," said Figgins, with much satisfaction.

"Let me get up, you beasts!"

"You're a giddy prisoner."

"I will shout for help, and—"

"Rats! You've quarrelled with Blake and Herries and Dig, and nobody else is likely to take the trouble to come."

"Weally, Figgins—"

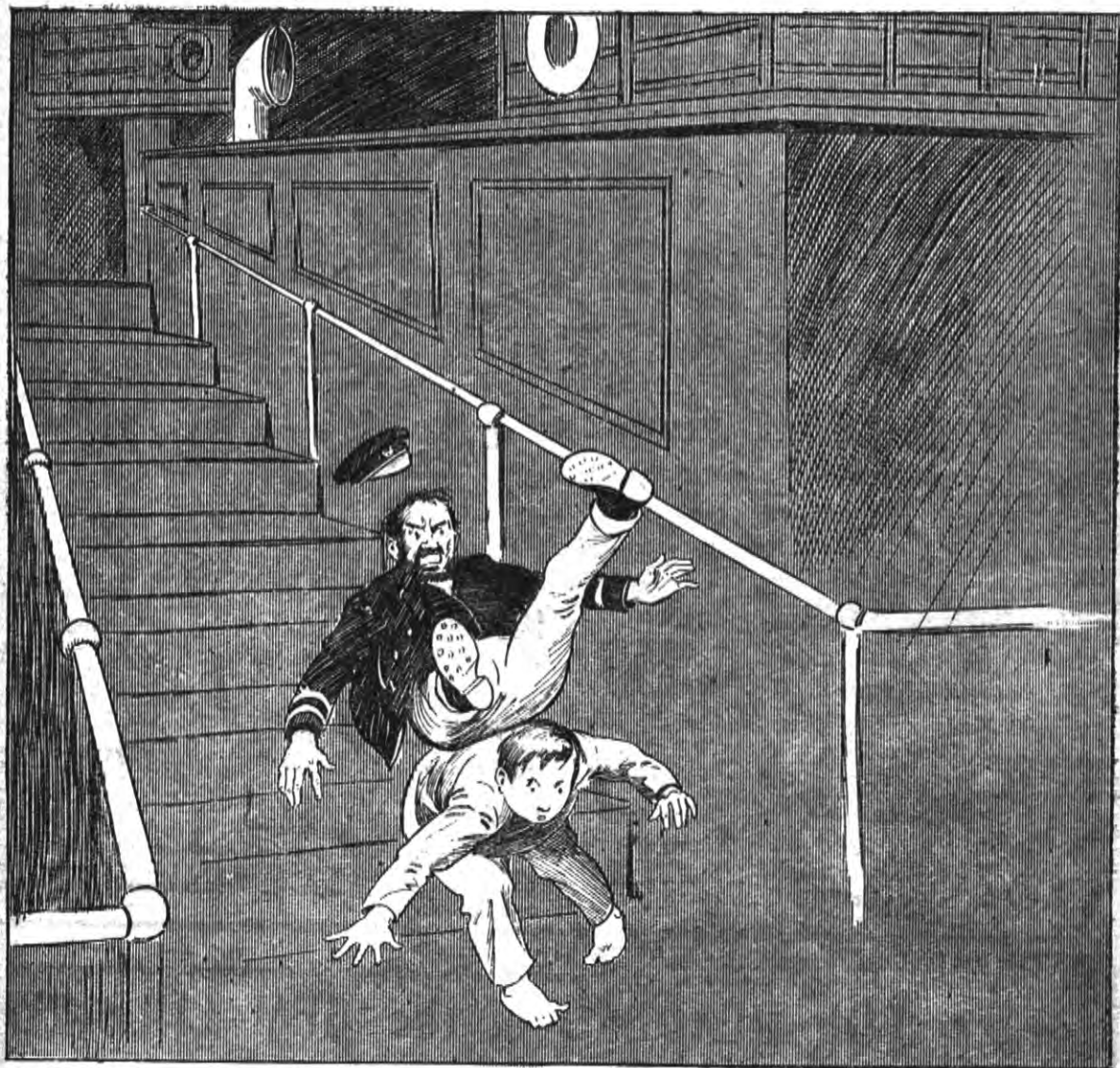
"Besides, if you yell we shall shove some of this tar into your mouth."

"I should uttably wefuse to have any tah shoved into my mouth."

"You won't have any choice, Gussy."

"What do you wottahs mean by this outwage? You are wumplin' my attire feahfully. I will give you a thwashin' when I get up."

"It's a House row," explained Figgins. "We're going



A foot suddenly plunged against Fatty Wynn's back, and then there was a yell as a man went flying over him.

to show you School House kids that the New House is the cock-house of St. Jim's, and the sharp end the leading end of the Condor. See? We're going to anoint you all in turn with tar, and we're going to start with a chap about your size."

D'Arcy shuddered.

"You feahful beast!"

"Roll him over this way. We shall have to pick him up by the heels and dip his head into the tar-bucket."

"Right you are!" said Kerr.

"I've got his legs," said Fatty Wynn. "Up he goes!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy struggled desperately. The thought of having his aristocratic head plunged in a tar-bucket was unspeakably horrible to him. When would he ever get his hair clear of the sticky tar?

"Pway don't be such feahful waffians!" he gasped. "Figgins, don't be a beast! Kerr, don't be such a wottah! Fatty Wynn—"

"Shove him over here!"

"He's coming."

"Pway don't! Help! Blake— Oh, you wottahs! Help!"

"Hallo, what's the row here?" exclaimed Blake's voice suddenly.

Blake, Herries, and Digby rushed in. There wasn't much room in the little cabin for six or seven juniors, and they tumbled right into Figgins & Co. and tumbled them over.

"Help!" gasped D'Arcy. "The uttah wottahs are goin' to stick my beastly head into a beastly tah-bucket, deah boys. Wescue!"

"Kick them out!"

"Go for the New House rotters!"

"Here, not so much of your rotters!" exclaimed Figgins warmly. "You'll jolly well get hurt if you begin any—"

"Out you go!"

D'Arcy, as he scrambled out of the way of the combatants, had no idea that it was a put up rescue. As a matter of fact, it was no longer one. The juniors had planned a sham fight, but as soon as it started the old hostility of the rival Houses proved too strong for them, and they were soon fighting in earnest.

"Kick them out!" roared Blake.

"Buck up, New House!" gasped Figgins.

They swayed and struggled in the narrow space. But D'Arcy, as soon as he had dusted down his clothes, joined in the fray, and the odds were then against the New House.

Figgins & Co. were ignominiously ejected from the cabin, and sent sprawling out. Blake slammed the door.

"Bai Jove, we have licked them!" said D'Arcy.

Blake rubbed a very swollen nose. Digby mopped the claret from the corner of his mouth with his handkerchief. Herries staggered breathless against the tar-bucket, fell over it, and bumped down.

"Well, we've licked them," grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! They were goin' to stick my head in the tah, deah boys, a vewy wuffianly pwoceedin' even for Figgins. I am awfully gwateful to you for wescuin' me in this hewic way."

"I'm afraid I can't accept your thanks, Master D'Arcy," said Blake coldly. "You see, I don't know you. I can only accept gratitude from a fellow I know."

"Same here," said Digby. "Who is this chap?"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Let's get out," said Herries; "I don't like being shut up in a small cabin with a stranger."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Blake turned to the door.

"Pway listen to me, deah boys. I am quite willin' to ovahlook any little differences we may have had, and to allow our acquaintance to wesume its old footin'."

"Oh, are you?" said Blake. "Well, if you apologise—"

"The apology is due to me."

"Well, we will waive the question of an apology," said Blake magnanimously. "Shall we admit this young person into our circle again, kids, and give him another chance?"

"That's not the way to put it. I'm givin' you permish to wenev my acquaintance," explained Arthur Augustus; "I'm not askin' it of you as a beastly favah."

"That makes no difference; we'll grant it as a favour."

"But weally—"

"We know you," said Blake, with a wave of the hand; "we are acquainted with you. We resume your acquaintance, as long as you behave yourself. Where's the right hand of friendship?"

The right hand of friendship was offered and taken and it was pax again between the chums of the Fourth Form.

"It would serve Figgins & Co. wight to take this tah along and duck them in it," D'Arcy remarked, with a glance at the pail that had been kicked over. "Bai Jove, deah boys, there isn't any tah in it!"

Jack Blake grinned.

"Sure, Gussy?"

"You can see it for yourself, Blake. It's as dwy as anythin'."

"So it is! Figgins must have forgotten the tar."

"Pewwaps he was only foolin' all tne time, and did not weally mean to tah me at all," said Arthur Augustus reflectively. "Still, I am vewy much obliged to you fellows, and I do not wegwet havin' wesumed your acquaintance."

"That is generous of you, Gussy," said Blake, with due humility.

"Well, as a mattah of fact, deah boy, it is my intention to be genewous."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally fail to see anythin' in that wemark to cacklo at."

"Oh, come along, Gussy! Tom Merry is going to have a spread in Railton's cabin, as a privilege of a giddy invalid, and we're all invited."

"Bai Jove! It's fortunate we have made it pax, then, or you wouldn't be able to come."

"I don't think it would have been us who were left out. But come along."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of the Fourth, on the most amicable terms again, made their way to Tom Merry's quarters. The table was drawn up beside the bunk, so that Tom Merry could sit to it, propped up with pillows and cushions. Lowther and Manners were there, and a steward was laying the table. The spread was really a good one, and showed Mr. Railton's thoughtful appreciation of Tom Merry's gallant conduct.

"Hallo, have you chaps made it up?" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We heroically rescued Gussy from Figgins & Co.," explained Blake. "After a gallant and desperate struggle, with casualties on both sides, we defeated the foe."

"Did you?" said Figgins, coming into the cabin, holding a slightly reddened handkerchief to his nose. "You mean, you were defeated."

"Oh, don't talk rot, Figgy!"

"Tom Mewwy, are these wottahs comin' to the spweed?"

"Please don't allude to my guests as rotters, Gussy," said Tom Merry severely.

"Bai Jove, I weally beg your pardon!"

"It is pax all round this evening," grinned Figgins. "Heroic rescues and the right hand of friendship are the order of the day. I hope that Gussy isn't going to start making a row in another fellow's quarters."

"I weally hope I am incapable of such extwemely bad form, Figgins."

"Then don't argue. This looks a promising spread."

"I was just thinking so," remarked Fatty Wynn. "How fortunate it is that we have got over our sea-sickness. We shall be able to do it justice."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry tersely.

And the juniors of St. Jim's went ahead.

The Condor was going ahead too, her great engines throbbing like the pulse of a giant animal as she plunged on over the deep waters, bearing the comrades of St. Jim's to new scenes and strange adventures.

THE END.

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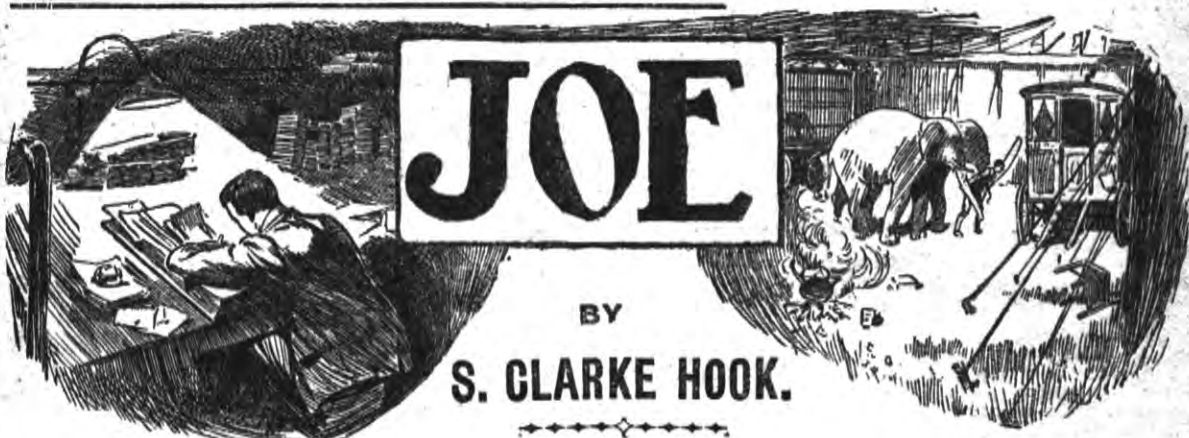
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READ THIS FIRST.

Joe throws up office work, and while tramping along a country lane meets Jim, who is running away from Muerte, a bullying circus proprietor. Joe and Jim chum up and join Muerte's rival, Ruabino. From motives of revenge, Muerte bribes Luigi, Ruabino's former lion-tamer, to let loose his one-time charges. Not content with this, Luigi, with Giles, his villainous accomplice, knocks Rubby into the river, from which he is rescued by Joe. Muerte swears he will follow Ruabino's circus and ruin him. This he endeavours to do by dashing his traction-engine into Rubby's caravans, which are, however, saved by Joe's presence of mind. One day Joe's guardian, Silas Read, who treated Joe with great cruelty before he joined Ruabino, turns up at the circus and claims his ward.

Ruabino refuses to give him up, but with the help of Giles, Read kidnaps Joe. The latter, however, manages to effect his escape. On hearing Joe's story, Ruabino and Jupiter—his strong man—set out with Joe to interview Read. As they are crossing a field on the way, a farmer stops them and assails them with a torrent of abuse for trespassing on his land.

(Now go on with the story.)

Silas Read at Home.

"Now, what you have been saying, my dear farmer man, may be perfectly correct," observed Rubby, about a quarter of an hour later. "I cannot tell you for certain, because I have not been listening to much of it. Still, I dare say it was rather clever in places. Now, we are going; and, with your kind permission, we will go right across your field. We shall want to come back this way; but as that is sure to be rather late, why, you will not be likely to see us, so that will be perfectly right. Good-bye, my dear fellow! You go home and tell your wife how you have frightened three wicked trespassers. It is just possible that she may believe you."

The farmer followed them up as far as the hedge, just to get in a few more polite remarks; and he continued to howl at them as they walked across the adjoining field.

"Now, look here, Joe," exclaimed Rubby, who had scratched himself getting through the hedge; "how much farther is it?"

"I don't think it is very far now."

"Dear boy, that's what you thought twenty miles further back!"

"We haven't come twenty miles, Rubby."

"Haven't we? It seems to me that we have come about forty."

"Well, at the rate you calculate, I don't believe it is forty miles further. We have to cross a wood, I know, and this is the wood. After that we have to cross a little more country, and then we come to the grounds surrounding the place. Cheer up, Rubby, and consider what a lot of fat this is taking off you. When you have finished the walk, you will be nearly as fit as Jupiter; and he feels in such grand order that he wants to go and fight those old bulls!"

"Bulls? What bulls? I object to bulls, on principle."

"That doesn't matter, Rubby, so long as they don't object to you. I must say that one with the shaggy head looks as though he would like to have a bit of fun with you. Hurry, else he will be having a fling at you!"

They got past the bulls without mishap, and then they crossed the wood; but it was growing dark before they caught sight of an old building, which was surrounded by a dense shrubbery.

"There you are, Rubby!" exclaimed Joe. "You see, it wasn't so very far, after all! Now, having got here—and I think we should have been much wiser not to have come—what are you going to do?"

"Talk to that double-dyed villain," answered Rubby. "I tell you, Joe, he is one of the greatest scoundrels unhung!"

"Wouldn't it be more appropriate to tell him? I had become convinced of the fact years and years ago!"

"Yes; I am certainly going to tell him what I think of him! There is a light in that sitting-room, so I dare say we shall find him there. The French window is open, so we will take the liberty of entering that way."

Silas Read was seated in an easy-chair reading a book when the party entered. He leapt to his feet and fixed a look of bitter hatred on Joe, then he glared at the other two.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"I am Ruabino the showman," observed that worthy, seating himself in the easy-chair that Silas had just vacated.

"I know you are, you ruffian, and the sooner you get out of my house the better I shall be pleased!"

"I have not come here to please you, Silas Read, but to impress on you the necessity of leaving this lad alone for the future."

"I shall act as I think fit in the matter."

"I am very glad to hear that. It will be the first time in your life, I should say, that you have acted as you saw fit; otherwise, you must have a very distorted vision. Now, I have already told you that I will not allow you to ill-treat Joe. I have been making inquiries concerning you, and I find that you have been living on money that in reality belongs to him. I can easily conceive that such an utter scoundrel as you are should be a liar and a thief; and, although I never doubted that you were a common thief, I was determined to get proof of the fact, so that I should be in a position to punish you in an adequate manner if you ever attempted any of your villainy on that lad again. He is in my employment, and although I do not say that it is good employment for him, or that his prospects are good, still, it is a comfortable living; and, as he prefers that to living with you, why, there is an end of the matter so far as I am concerned."

"Joe will remain with me for as long as he chooses, and even when he leaves and comes into the remainder of the money that you are surely robbing him of, I trust that we may always remain friends. Jupiter here will tell you that I never forget a friend, nor would I refuse him a helping hand in his need. Joe does not need a helping hand now, because he is earning a very munificent salary, and—"

"Rats!" growled Jupiter.

"I wish you would not interpose those rodents while I am speaking, Jupiter. You will certainly anger me, and you would not like me to punch your head. Take another year's notice; and you listen to me, Silas Read. Joe has already given you a thrashing, and you must know that you richly deserved it. I do not know how hard that thrashing was, but seeing that he administered it as a small punishment for your crimes, it stands to reason that it was not as severe as the thrashing Jupiter will administer if you do not amend your ways. And for this reason, Jupiter is far

stronger than Joe, and consequently would strike harder."

"You insolent hound!" cried Silas Read, showing his teeth in his fury. "Will you get out of my house?"

"Certainly—after I have finished warning you. I know that with a man like you the only plan is to deal sternly; to make him feel that he will suffer personal chastisement unless he alters his mode of life. I don't care about you in any way, but I do care about your treatment to Joe, and that is a thing I have come here to warn you against. Should you, on any future occasion, attempt to carry him off, as you did the other night, I will follow you up and give you in custody for theft. Do you understand, you dirty dog?"

"I understand that you are the most insolent ruffian on the face of the earth!"

"There is no necessity to discuss what I am. Jupiter and Joe know pretty well, and it is very certain that they know a great deal better than you do; besides, it is not the question we are dealing with."

"Once more! Will you leave my house?"

"Yes; when I have finished saying what I came here to say. I will not tell you all I know about you, but you may be confident that it is nothing to your good. More than that, Silas Read—and now, mark my words well—it is sufficient to send you to penal servitude. Do you understand that, you villain? And do you understand that I will surely exercise that power if you ever attempt any of your villainy on Joe again?"

"I have listened to you because—"

"Because you could not help it, you ruffian," interposed Rubby. "Silence, you hound, or I will shake you like this! Just show him how I will shake him, Jupiter."

Jupiter seized Silas Read by his coat-collar and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Something like that, Rubby?" inquired Jupiter, releasing him.

"Yes, exactly like that."

"I will make you suffer for this, you demons!" hissed Read.

"And if you were to threaten me for the chastisement, I would give you a longer and more violent shaking—like this."

Jupiter caught hold of him again, and shook him with such violence for about a couple of minutes that he tore his coat.

Silas Read was so breathless and dazed by the shaking that he seated himself in a chair, where he remained trembling with passion.

"I hope you understand my meaning, Silas," said Rubby; "but if not Jupiter will make you understand before you are much older. It is only a matter of time. Now, do you think you realise what will happen to you if you persist in your misconduct?"

"I know one thing, you insolent rascal," cried Silas Read, "and that is that you shall suffer for this! That boy can stand there grinning, but he will find it is not a laughing matter before so long!"

"All right, you utter rascal!" exclaimed Joe. "I'll back Rubby against you any day, because he's an honest man and you are a rogue and a vagabond—to say nothing of being a common thief. I shall be on the look-out for you in future. The only thing I care for is whether you are able to call in the aid of the law, and compel me to return to your house."

"He daren't attempt it, Joe," exclaimed Rubby. "His house, as he calls it, is undoubtedly kept up with the money that one day ought to be yours, and when that day arrives there will be a serious reckoning. However, we have not got to deal with that yet! I fancy I have made my meaning plain to the scamp, and as that is the case we will now return to the circus."

"I say, Rubby," exclaimed Joe, "it must be a frightfully long way, and I'm perfectly certain that we shall never get a train this time of night! Don't you think we had better try to get beds somewhere, and return to-morrow morning?"

"What is the lad thinking about?" exclaimed Rubby. "Have I not told you again and again that business must be attended to? Here I have a great show coming off to-morrow night, and not half my arrangements are made yet! No, we must get back to-night if we have to walk every inch of the way—and it's about a hundred miles."

"All right, Rubby!" exclaimed Joe. "I fancy I can see you walking a hundred miles!"

"I am not going to walk, dear boy. I hate walking."

"I thought you said you wished you could go for a long walk every day?"

"What?"

"You wanted to be able to go for long walks every day."

"I meant in a carriage—a carriage and pair, you know."

"All right, Rubby. Go on. I don't see how you could walk in a carriage."

"Well, I could walk down some of the shorter hills. Still, I am doing no more walking to-night."

"You can't get a train back."

"I know I can't, but Silas brought you here in a motor-car, and that car will be at the place. I shall go in that, and use Silas as my chauffeur."

"Why, you insolent scoundrel," roared Silas, "you surely do not think such a thing?"

"No, Silas," answered Rubby cheerfully. "I don't think it; I know it. You are going to drive us all to the circus. You brought Joe away against his will, and that fact brought me and Jupiter here against our wills; at least, it brought me here against mine. Jupiter is glad, because he knows that he is earning his enormous salary without working for it; and, like you, he hates work in any shape or form."

"You shut up, Rubby, and don't tell fairy-tales about enormous salaries," said Jupiter. "I have been working. I have severely shaken Silas, and that's pretty hard work."

"All right. You will have to flog him yet to make him obey my orders."

"I don't mind doing that in the least, but I don't think you ought to say that I have been doing no work. The way I shall flog him will be very hard work. Just go and find me a stick or a whip, Joe. I would rather have a whip, because I shan't hurt him with that."

"Are you going to hit with all your strength, Jupiter?" inquired Joe.

"Certainly! Why not? What are you grinning at?"

"I was only wondering how you are going to hit with all your strength without hurting him," said Joe. "But perhaps he will be able to explain that to me after he has received the floggings."

"Let this nonsense cease!" cried Silas, looking very uncomfortable, as Joe went in search of a whip.

"I can assure you that we are in deadly earnest," said Rubby. "At least, I know I am. You are going to drive me home in your motor-car."

"You are talking like a maniac! I have a most important engagement early to-morrow morning."

"So have I, and I mean to keep mine, for which reason you are going to drive us back to the circus. You did not consider Joe's appointments when you took him away against his will."

"I am his guardian, and have a perfect—"

"The less you say about that the better."

"I do not know how to drive a motor-car."

"In that case Joe will teach you. The boy has driven a traction-engine, and if he can't drive a motor-car he will have to learn. I am going to take you with us, so that you can bring the car back."

"I won't go!"

"Here's the whip, Jupiter!" exclaimed Joe, entering the room at that moment.

"Listen to reason!" cried Silas.

"I will listen to you for, say, five minutes, if you like," said Rubby; "but before you start, I may tell you that it will not make the slightest difference to my decision. You are coming with us to-night."

"I tell you that I have an important—"

"I don't care a bit about that. You half murdered Joe when bringing him here, and treated him in an utterly brutal manner while he was here, now you are going to take him back."

"I tell you I can't!"

"Very well. I tell you that you shall. We shall now see who is right. Jupiter, it rests with you to use your persuasive powers."

"Well, you have used force against me!" exclaimed Silas. "I shall ask the assistance of the first constable we meet."

"You are quite at liberty to do that," said Rubby. "I don't believe for a moment you will dare to do so; but I do not feel at all sure that it would not be all the better for Joe, because I should give you in custody, and then the whole matter would be sifted. Now, come along. We have wasted too much time already."

Silas Read obeyed, and brought out his motor-car, while he soon proved that he could drive very well. In some parts he went at a tremendous pace, but he appeared to know the roads well, and they had no mishap.

Day was just dawning when they reached the circus, and leaving Silas Read to find his way back as best he could, the little party got to bed at once.

"Now, look here, Rubby," exclaimed Joe, later that morning, "I am going to perform on that globe; running it up the spiral affair, you know!"

"You are going to do nothing of the sort, dear boy. It is far too dangerous."

"No, it isn't. There's no danger in it, if you know to do it, and don't fall."

"You don't know how to do it, and will fall."

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"Of course, I might fall; all the same, that is one of the risks you have to take in circus life. I do know how to do it, and if you like to come into the circus now, I will show you exactly how it ought to be done. I've been practising a lot, and have been to the top and come down again before now. Just you shove up some posters that I am going to perform the feat, and I promise you I will do it to the satisfaction of the people."

"It's too dangerous, I tell you."

"It is no more dangerous doing it in their presence than it is doing it alone."

"That may be, but you really have not had sufficient practice. It is most difficult to walk on the globe on level ground, let alone working it up a spiral slope and down again. That is deadly dangerous, unless you are well skilled."

"Well, consider that I am well skilled, Rubby, and that the matter is definitely settled. I'm off!"

Muerte Attempts a Dastardly Revenge.

The evening arrived, and Rubby ought to have been perfectly content and happy, for the people were swarming into his circus.

As a matter of fact he was nothing of the sort. Joe, who was preparing tea for him, looked quite content, not to say happy.

"A bloater is a nice fish, Rubby. He——"

"Bother the bloaters! You take a great deal too much on your shoulders, Joe."

"What are you grumbling about? I tell you, the people are crowding in, and by the time this tea is finished, and my first turn comes, we shall have the place packed. People will have excitement; you know that better than I do."

"Bother the people!"

"Now, look here, Rubby, you are going too far. It's all right bothering the bloaters, and I wouldn't be surprised if you do it when you start wolfing them; but you have no right to bother the people."

"They bother me often enough."

"That is only natural. You bother me. Look at all the trouble you are giving me cooking this tea."

"Well, you are going to eat it; at least, some of it."

"Yes, that is my intention, if you give me an invitation, and I'm cooking three bloaters with a view to getting that invitation; but every employer bothers the people who work for him. He has the right to do so, because he feeds them. Now, the public feed you. They bought these bloaters for you, and this best fresh butter—with salt in it—to say nothing of the tea and bread. Very well, that gives them the right to bother you all they require, and a good deal more than you require. But you must not bother them; they would sack you if you did, and take on Muerte, or some other scoundrel."

"I told you I would not let you go up that spiral platform on the globe."

"I know you did, Rubby, and at the same time I felt sure that you were quite wrong, because I had made up my mind to do it, and when I have once made up my mind I am very determined."

"I have noticed that, you young rascal, although I should have called it obstinate. You will break your neck."

"Well, think what a splendid advertisement that would make for your circus."

"You senseless young idiot! Do you think I want to gain notoriety by allowing my employees to break their necks?"

"I am not going to break my neck. I must go now, whether you like it or not, because I am billed, and if you disappointed the public they would about break your neck. I presume you would rather I accidentally broke my neck, than that yours was purposely broken."

"I don't want to joke about a matter like this."

"You would be bound to choke if someone broke your neck; however, if you require to be comforted, I may as well tell you that I have not the slightest intention of breaking my neck."

"Then you are not going to do it?"

"No! I'm not going to break my neck."

"You know what I mean, Joe, and I must request you to speak seriously, because this is a very serious matter. I told you distinctly that I would not allow you to go through the performance, yet, in face of my strict injunctions, you go and bill yourself to perform the feat. You had no right to do such a thing."

"I never said I had, but we all do things we have no right to do, occasionally."

"It seems to me that you do them pretty frequently."

"Never mind. Have your tea, and perhaps you will feel a better temper after it. A cup of strong tea is a fine

thing for the nerves, and you will find that strong enough to wrestle with Jupiter, or lift the roofs off houses."

"I don't like strong tea. I like weak tea."

"Then slop some water into your cup, and don't grumble."

"What did you do it for?"

"What, the two bloaters? Why, for your tea. The third one, and he's just nicely done, is for my tea, if you give me that invitation. Three bloaters are too many for you, that's why I cooked them, but I know you can dispose of a couple without winking. I'm going to cut the bread-and-butter jolly thick, because it is new bread, and you would over-eat yourself if I cut it thin; besides, look what a jolly trouble it would be for me to cut it. There you are, there's the first inch slab."

Rubby sighed, and started on his bloater. He did not give Joe an invitation, because he knew that it was perfectly unnecessary. Joe always had meals with him now, in fact, the kind-hearted little showman would not have cared to sit down without him—

"Now, what could be nicer than this, Rubby?" exclaimed Joe, helping himself. "I like new bread, and the bloaters are not a bit salt."

"I am not grumbling at my food. I never do."

"Then don't grumble at a performance that helps to bring that food; and, look here, you must not dawdle too much over it, we have only got a quarter of an hour or so before I shall have to dress."

"I don't like it, Joe."

"Well, try the other one. It looks a beauty."

"Bother the boy! I'm not speaking about bloaters, but about your performance. It's too risky. You want to practise for years before you can perform a feat like that with any degree of safety."

"Nonsense! You must go up for the first time. I'm going up to-night, and then I will go on practising as long as the public like to watch it. Excitement is what they want, and it is what I am going to give them to-night."

Rubby was rather quiet over the meal. He did not see how he could stop Joe now without enraging the people, who would naturally expect to see what they had paid their money for.

Joe, however, did enough talking for the two, and directly he had finished his meal he and Rubby went into the circus.

"It's a full house, Rubby!" exclaimed Joe gleefully.

"You have got a nice little penny there. Look there, that's your rival Muerte amongst the spectators. Won't he be delighted to see your circus packed like this?"

"He's a miserable brute, and not worthy of consideration," answered Rubby. "I expect he has only come here to get all the good ideas he can, so as to copy them for his own show, directly he can get it open."

"I hear that is going to be the day after to-morrow, Rubby."

"All right, dear boy, we will make hay while the sun shines. We have made a nice little load to-night, and the amusing part of the whole thing is that the people will be tired of the circus by the time he is ready to commence. It was a merciful thing for me that you made him go blundering into the ditch with his engine and caravans. If it had not been for that he would probably have had half these people. I hope it will be a lesson to him not to follow us up again, but don't expect it will. I believe he would beggar himself if he could only have the satisfaction of ruining me."

"Well, he's not at all likely to do that the rate we are going on now. I'm off to get ready, and just you do a little spouting for me, only don't tell them to expect too much, else I shall disappoint them."

"I don't like it at all," grumbled Rubby. "The lad tries to do too much, and I would rather he did too little."

Rubby entered the ring, just as Vera came ambling off.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "I am pleased to inform you that Joe the gymnast is now about to ascend that spiral platform on a large ball, or globe. Some of you may have seen grown men perform the feat, always a perilous one—but none of you have ever seen a lad ascend to such a giddy height; and then, as you will observe, the spiral plank is far narrower than those generally used. I need say no more. Here comes the hero of the hour."

The great sphere was bowled into the ring, and, running

THE OLYMPIC GAMES.

In the cycling events of the Olympic Games, it may be noted that Rudge-Whitworth's were the mounts of many of the riders. In addition to being ridden by prize-winners in almost every race, in the 1,000 metre and the 2,000 metre tandem races Rudge-Whitworth's were the machines that came in first.

after it, Joe sprang on, and worked it round the circus, bowing to the spectators, who cheered vociferously.

Now, Joe worked the globe to the foot of the spiral plank, which rose, corkscrew shape, to the top of the circus.

His task looked both dangerous and extremely difficult, and so it was, especially as he had not had nearly as much practice as should have been the case.

Gradually he worked his way up, and as he got higher and higher the people cheered.

"I wish they would keep quiet!" growled Rubby, mopping his brow.

He knew that a false step on the globe might mean death to Joe, and the sight made him feel very uncomfortable.

Joe, however, did not appear to be the slightest bit nervous. He ascended just as easily as he would have gone along the level ground; then, when he reached the summit, he stood for a moment on one foot.

Now he commenced the descent, and Rubby, who could not take his eyes off the daring lad, scarcely dared to breathe.

Joe commenced the backward descent very slowly, for he had no easy task before him, nor was he well accustomed to the work. His nerves, however, were perfect, and he never for an instant lost control of the globe, while he gradually quickened his pace.

He gained the ring in safety, then went round it again, while the spectators howled themselves hoarse with applause.

Muerte's face turned white with fury, and his dark eyes gleamed.

Joe's success, and the applause he gained, caused Muerte to hate him worse than ever.

"Perdition!" he muttered, leaving the place, for now that he knew the entertainment was a success, when he had hoped it would prove a failure, he cared to remain no longer. "I wish he had broken his neck! To think that this young demon, who actually dared to strike me, should now take money from my pocket, for that is what it signifies! He is drawing all the people to that brute Ruabino's show, and it was through that boy that my own circus was stopped. But I will have vengeance! Ah, I will have a terrible vengeance, and it will fall on Ruabino as well, for he has no right to allow a lad like that to perform such a perilous feat! My time will come, and that before so long."

Then the Spaniard made his way to the nearest inn, where he spent the remainder of the evening.

Ruabino had good cause to congratulate himself that night, for the whole performance went off without a single hitch, and there could not be a doubt that the spectators were thoroughly satisfied.

"You see, Rubby," exclaimed Joe, when they were seated at supper, "there was not the slightest danger in the performance!"

"Bother it, I don't see anything of the sort, and I have to be very thankful that there was no accident. I tell you, Joe, the thing isn't right, and even if I got howled out of the place, I would rather that than you should go through that performance again!"

"I tell you it's as safe as houses!" declared Joe. "I am not going to fall. It would be an awfully silly thing to do, because it might hurt, and I don't like pain of any sort."

"I don't expect you would have any if you fell from that height!" growled Rubby. "It would be instantaneous death!"

"Perhaps so. But don't you understand, you can't fall unless you are awfully careless? And it stands to reason that, as I am an interested party, I shan't be careless. It's as simple as shelling peas, when you know how to do it, and I'm beginning to learn that now. It would be a grand thing if I could work it up standing on my hands. I don't believe it would be much more difficult, because I can work it along the level ground standing on my hands. Think how it would take, Rubby!"

"It's not going to take in my circus, if I know it!"

"Well, I might do it without your knowing it. I mean some night when you are away. See?"

"You are going to do nothing of the sort. I won't have you risk your life to amuse people. It's an abominable thing, and I should be an utter scoundrel to allow it. I don't believe even Muerte would allow such a thing in his circus."

"Then you don't know the man as well as I do. I am perfectly confident he would willingly let me break my neck if it brought him any profit, and if he were sure of not getting into trouble over it."

"Well, you may be right there. I don't know. But I do know I won't have these performances at my show. Now, be off with you. It's getting late, and is time you were in bed; and, look here, Joe, don't you get fooling about with Jim and Leo, and sitting up half the night. Early to bed and early to rise. You know the rest."

"Yes, Rubby. I'm awfully sorry for you!"

"What do you mean?"

"That you always keep such late hours, and no doubt that is the reason why you are not wise. Good-night!"

Joe sprang out of the caravan, for Rubby was looking for something to throw at him, and Rubby's aim was straight.

"Your turn took splendidly!" exclaimed Jim, when Joe entered the booth where the three lads slept. "It was downright exciting, wasn't it, Leo?"

"Splendid! You will stand higher in Rubby's favour than ever now, Joe."

"Well, what of that?" exclaimed Jim. "I suppose you are not jealous?"

"Certainly not! Why should I be? I'm nothing to Rubby now you two have come."

"What a jealous ass you are, Leo!" exclaimed Jim. "You are an awfully decent fellow, but I must say you have got a jolly bad fault. You ought to be glad if Joe gets into Rubby's favour. It can make no earthly difference to you. You get your screw all the same, and, to my knowledge, it is a better one than Joe gets."

"It's not a matter of money at all," said Leo. "Neither am I the slightest bit jealous, only I do like fairness!"

"Surely you are not going to make out that Joe and I haven't treated you fairly?"

"I never thought such a thing, much less said it."

"Then don't make an utter idiot of yourself!"

"I am doing nothing of the sort."

"Yes, you are. If you don't want us to stay with Rubby, why don't you say so in a straightforward manner?"

"Look here, Jim, we have been chums for a long time, but I tell you that you may go too far with me."

"Rate! You are so jolly self-important, and unless the whole of the people are talking about you and your performance, you get vexed. Now, I know your turns are clever —"

"They are nothing of the sort. I know it, and Rubby is beginning to find it out."

"How do you know that?"

"Well, look at the difference he makes between Joe and the rest of us!"

"Well, he told me that Joe saved his life, and it is only natural that he should feel under deep obligations to him."

"I hope he doesn't!" exclaimed Joe.

"He must, my dear fellow," said Jim. "It is only human nature. At the same time, I do think Leo is an idiot to mind. I could understand it if you fared worse by reason of Joe being here, Leo; but not as it is. Rubby never treated you any differently to what he does now, I believe?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then shut up, and don't make yourself ridiculous!"

"I don't need you to teach me how to behave!"

"Perhaps not; but you need someone. I'm only telling you the truth."

"I'm glad to hear it!" retorted Leo, flushing angrily. "It sounds to me like gross impertinence!"

"That is because you are stupid."

"I have my feelings."

"Well, keep them to yourself. You don't need to have the feelings of half a dozen people, and you can't expect to go through life with everyone standing aside and saying or doing nothing because of your feelings. If you are so jolly sensitive, it's a pity you weren't a girl."

"I'll not stand that, even from you, Jim! I know you always speak your mind, but that only adds to the insult. Don't you speak like that again to me, and so I warn you!"

"Ha, ha, ha! 'Whoever dares these boots displace,

Shall meet Bombastes face to face,'"

quoted Jim.

"Don't you venture to make fun of me!" cried Leo.

"There is not the slightest necessity. You make yourself funny enough without the aid of anyone else."

"Do you want me to knock you down?"

"Not a bit of it. I dare say you could do it, because you are a grand boxer."

"Then you take back the words you have said?"

"I only said that you were making an ass of yourself, and so you are. You are as jealous and sensitive as a schoolgirl, and what you need is to have the nonsense knocked out of you, because, as you are now, you are a decent chap spoilt with your own conceit. If you want me to take back any of those words, I won't."

"Then we will settle the matter with fists, and perhaps I shall prove to you that there is nothing girlish about me. Put up your guard!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort. If you choose to hit at me, I shall hit back. That's all."

Now, Leo knew that he was more than a match for Jim with his fists. He also knew that such a fight would be absolutely unfair, for he was a professional boxer, having gained his knowledge under Jupiter's tuition. But his passion was aroused now, and he clenched his left fist, while a fierce light came into his eyes.

Jim stood calmly and fearlessly before him, with his own fists clenched, for he was not the sort of lad to take a blow without returning it.

Leo drew back his arm to strike, then his eyes met Jim's, and Leo turned away.

"Don't let's quarrel, old chap!" exclaimed Jim, placing his hand on Leo's shoulder. "We have been friends too long, and have seen rough times together."

"So we have, Jim; and I haven't so many friends that I can afford to lose the best of them. I am thankful I didn't strike you!"

"So am I. It would have hurt."

"It would have hurt me the most!" declared Leo. "For it would have parted us for ever!"

"Now, isn't that rubbish?" exclaimed Jim. "We should have had a mill, and I should have stuck to you till I was licked, then we should have been just as good friends as ever. I know that I am not your match with the gloves, and there would have been no disgrace in getting a licking from you, especially if I had done my best; but—"

"Now, what is the meaning of this?" demanded Rubby, entering the booth. "Didn't I tell you to get to bed at once, Joe?"

"That's right, Rubby," answered Joe. "But then, I don't always do what you tell me to, you know!"

"It's a question whether you ever do what I tell you to!" retorted Rubby. "All the same, I won't have you fooling about half the night. You won't be fit for work to-morrow. Besides, it is quite time you turned in."

"All right, Rubby," exclaimed Joe, "we are just going to turn in now! We shall be in bed within ten minutes."

This satisfied Rubby, because he knew that Joe always kept his promise, and, wishing them good-night, he went back to his own caravan.

It was a very rare occurrence for Joe to lie awake at night, but he had been sleeping in the morning, by reason of having been up all the previous night, and, consequently, he could not sleep now.

It must have been past midnight, and all was very silent in the circus, but presently Joe heard a thud. It was a sound as though something had fallen to the ground; but as all was silent afterwards, Joe at first thought little of the matter.

He allowed several minutes to elapse; then, not feeling quite assured, he hurried on a few clothes, and noiselessly left the booth.

The night was very dark, and a drizzling rain was falling; but now that Joe was up, he did not allow the rain to send him back.

First of all, he groped his way towards Rubby's caravan, but that was in darkness, and as he remained listening, he could hear the little showman's snore, which was rather a pronounced one. Next Joe went to look at the lions, but they were all quiet. He was about to leave the place, when he thought he heard something moving past the booth.

"Who's there?" he demanded, peering into the darkness, and as he received no reply, he moved towards the spot from which he believed the sound had come; but once more all was silent, nor was it possible for Joe to see many yards distant, owing to the intense darkness.

That he had heard someone he felt certain, though why anyone should come to the place, unless to rob Rubby, Joe could not understand.

There were plenty of places where a prowler could have concealed himself, but although Joe searched for upwards of half an hour, he saw no one, and now he determined to pay Rubby a visit, and inform him of what he had heard.

Not being a cautious man, Rubby did not lock the door of his caravan, as Joe always went in early to get breakfast ready, and join Rubby in the meal. He entered the caravan, and lighted a lamp, then drew the curtain aside, and found the little showman sleeping peacefully.

"Look here, Rubby!" exclaimed Joe. "Wake up!"

"It's not time to get up yet," growled Rubby, turning over.

"I know it isn't; but someone is in the place."

"Well, tell him to go away. I can't see him now. I'm engaged."

"I don't believe he has come to see you. I believe he's a thief of some sort."

"What's he like?"

"I haven't seen him."

"Then how do you know he is there?"

"I heard a thud as though someone had fallen."

"A cat."

"Bother it! A cat couldn't fall with a sound like dropping a sack of flour."

"It might have been chasing a mouse."

"Well, a mouse couldn't have made that noise. You had better come and search."

"I can't. I'm frightened."

"Rats! You are sleepy, and don't want to turn out in the rain."

"Correct, dear boy; and what is more, I'm jolly well certain I won't turn out in the rain this time of night. The thief can steal the lions first. I don't see what else he is going to steal, unless it is the traction-engine, and as steam is not up, he would find it rather heavy to carry away. It may have been Muerte come to steal my ideas while I am asleep; but whoever it was, I am not going to turn out this time of night. You can get Jupiter, if you like, and if you are lucky, but you won't get the great and only Rubby. The best thing for you to do is to go to bed."

Joe had another look round, but, finding nothing, he took Rubby's advice, and went to bed again.

The following morning at break of day he went out to search for any footprints; but in this he was unsuccessful, as the rain in the night would probably have concealed them, if they had once been there.

There was one part, however, close to Joe's booth, and at the spot from which the sound he had heard appeared to have come, where there was a mark on the ground as though someone had fallen, and it was just beyond one of the tent-ropes. It looked as though the prowler had stumbled over the cord, and fallen to the ground.

At breakfast that morning Joe told Rubby of what he had discovered, but that worthy did not bother himself much about the matter.

"I expect it was one of the beauties who had sneaked out, and was returning late at night. Probably it was the clown, and it wouldn't be the first time he has done it. I will take it out of him in the ring to-night."

"Don't you think that you had better make sure, first of all, that he was the delinquent, Rubby?" suggested Joe.

"Well, perhaps that would be advisable; but he is such an arrant idiot that a few odds always do him good, and it amuses the spectators. They can always tell the difference when I pretend to hit him, and when I really do."

"So can he, I expect. However, that is his look-out."

"Yes, it is part of the clown's work. He gets paid for it, you know. Now, about to-night's performance. We are short-handed, and it will not do to let the spectators know that. They would jump to the conclusion that they were not getting their money's worth."

Then Rubby went into business matters, and Joe spent the best part of the day with him, for some of Joe's suggestions were worthy of consideration, although others were utterly impracticable, and extremely wild. One of these latter was that Joe should teach Vulcan, the lion, to walk up the spiral platform with him.

"You are stupider than the clown," declared Rubby, glancing at Joe, as he made the suggestion.

"It would please the spectators, and give them excitement, I feel sure, Rubby."

"I haven't a doubt that it would excite them, especially if Vulcan leapt into their midst, and commenced to chew them up; although whether it would please them is quite another matter. There is only one thing to be said in favour of the brilliant scheme, and that is the chewed-up ones could not demand their money back."

"But I don't think he would do anything like that, Rubby."

"I am not going to give him the chance, though I admit that if the spectators will have thrilling work for their amusement, and work in which others risk their lives, they ought to take their own share of the risk. However, we will move on to the next idea; that one won't work at any price."

In the afternoon Rubby, at Joe's instigation, went for a walk with the three lads, and stood them an excellent tea, then Joe prepared to go through his daring exploit once more.

Now, some people believe in presentiments, and others do not. Joe was one who did not, yet on that night as he commenced the ascent on the globe, he felt far more nervous than he had felt the first time he went up the spiral plank.

It is true now that he had got the globe under far better control, but he could not conquer the feeling that something was going to happen; and when he glanced at the hundreds of upturned faces, it seemed to him that they looked more excited than usual, while there was absolute silence in the place.

All went well until he nearly reached the top, and then amongst the tense faces he saw Muerte's turned up to him.

There was something in that evil face, even at that distance that increased Joe's forebodings to such an extent that he was half-inclined to commence the descent; but, knowing that the spectators would expect him to go to the very summit, Joe went on.

He had scarcely a yard to complete his perilous journey, when the globe spun round beneath his feet.

He made a desperate effort to save himself, but it was in vain. The large ball shot from beneath his feet, and he

pitched headlong down the awful height, while a great cry of horror rang out.

Joe clutched at one of the crossbars, but his grasp was torn away, although his body turned. Again he clutched at one of the lower bars, and for an instant his progress was arrested, then down he sank once more, while the globe dropped into the circus with a loud thud, and, bounding onwards, knocked Rubby head over heels.

The little showman cared nothing for that. He was on his feet in an instant, and gazing upwards, he saw Joe clutch at one of the crossbars for the third time, and this time he retained his hold. For a moment he hung some twenty feet from the tan, then, releasing his hold, he dropped to the ground on his feet, and bowed to the excited spectators.

"Calm them, Rubby," he murmured, stepping to the little showman's side.

But Rubby was speechless. He stood gazing at the brave lad who had saved his life in the river, and although not much given to emotion, there were tears in the little showman's eyes now. Joe was quick to see how deeply Rubby was affected, and, knowing something must be done to avert a panic, for women and children were screaming, and a good many of the men had sprung to their feet, Joe raised his voice to its highest pitch.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "what has happened was through no fault of mine; but as I am not injured in any way, it does not matter. Something—grease, I believe—had been spread across the spiral platform, and naturally, the globe spun round on it. It was no accident, and I firmly believe there is but one man in this world who would have made such an attempt on my life. I believe I know that man, and he is amongst the spectators to-night. I saw his evil face. Every care is taken in this circus to avoid accidents, and although the various performances may be perilous, accidents are practically unknown. This, as I assure you, was no accident. It was a deliberate attempt on my life."

Joe hurried from the ring, and returned in a few moments with a cloth and small basket of sand; then, before Rubby could protest, he ran up the spiral platform, and, having carefully cleaned off the grease, sanded over the part.

Now he descended, and cleaned the globe; then, springing on it, he ran round in the tan, and the spectators cheered him vociferously; but every voice was hushed as once more he made the perilous ascent.

Joe was on his mettle now, and he was certainly the coolest person in the place. Higher and higher he ascended. He crossed the sanded part without mishap, and gained the top. Then he commenced the descent, but it was not until he reached the level ring that the cheers burst forth.

After that he put the two lions through their performance, but they had got to know him so well now, that they went through their tricks without the slightest hitch, and at the end Joe made Vulcan lie down while he lay beside the great brute and rested his head on its body.

"Ladies and gentlemen," cried Rubby, when the applause had ceased, "we are now going to show you the great race round the ring on horses, and that will end the entertainment. To-morrow night one of the finest shows that you have ever witnessed will be prepared for you. You may have noticed that a rival showman named Muerte has pitched his circus close to mine. For your information, I may mention that this fellow, unable to draw people to his circus, as he calls it, invariably follows me in the hope that my circus, where he knows the performances are simply grand, may cause people to visit his little show."

"Liar! It is bigger than yours!" howled Muerte.

"Hold your row!" cried Jupiter, giving him a bang on the head, for Rubby had told his strong man to get behind Muerte, in anticipation of some sort of interruption.

"That fellow who has had the temerity to interrupt me, is Muerte," continued Rubby. "He is a strange and stupid sort of fellow. It is possible that he does his best with his wretched circus; but if so, all I can say is, that his best is very bad, and I just give you this warning so that you may not be disappointed. The only clever and thrilling part of his performance is the posters he gets out, and these he invariably copies from mine; but although he can copy the posters, he cannot copy the performance. I will not detain you further, ladies and gentlemen, except to thank you for your kind patronage, and to assure you that to-morrow night's programme will be quite different to to-night's, and that it will even surpass it. Joe, amongst other things, will ride an untrained horse, and it is one that neither Muerte nor any of his people could ride for five minutes. To prove my words, I will hand Muerte the sum of ten pounds if he sits Buster—the charming horse's charming name—for ten minutes. I have the money here, and will deposit it with any gentleman who will hold it."

"Here, I will, mate," growled an awful-looking ruffian, climbing into the ring.

"Thank you very much!" exclaimed Rubby, bowing politely. "But I shall require my strong man to hold you. You see, something might happen to you, and you might not be able to turn up, and that would be very disappointing to Muerte if he succeeded in winning the amount. Muerte pretends to be a great rider. He had one try to sit Buster. I do not think he will have another one."

As soon as the circus was cleared, Rubby made his way to his caravan, where he found Joe preparing supper, which consisted of steak, fried onions, and fried potatoes, a very favourite dish of Rubby's.

"There's more in this than meets the eye, Joe," he said, shoving his tall hat at the back of his head, and seating himself in his favourite chair.

"Yes, Rubby, there's a second lot of onions keeping warm."

"I don't mean that, stupid. I mean the accident, and you know it just as well as I do. Did Muerte commit the vile deed?"

"Would you mind asking me another, Rubby? I can't answer that one while my mind is soaring to onions fried."

"You think he did it?"

"I think it was either he or someone whom he employed; but what's the good of thinking? Thinking won't bring it home to him, and even if it did you would not be so silly as to prosecute him."

"I might punish him. I would horsewhip him—by proxy."

"Well, I don't mind your doing that, because I am certain he deserves it. I do believe that he did it, although I do not see the slightest possibility of proving it. I am certain someone was prowling about the circus last night, and I discovered the part where that prowler fell; but I don't know the fall-pattern of Muerte's body. The best thing you can do is to leave the matter where it is, and take care the miscreant does not get the chance of making another attempt."

"I am going to do that, but you must remember that if the scamp is as vindictive as all that he will find means of having vengeance on you. Now, if I can prove his guilt, I shall give him a lesson that he will never forget in his life. That is the only way to deal with such men. You must make them suffer, and let them know that they will suffer again if they renew their villainy. However, I will think the matter over, and we will have supper before I commence the thinking. I shall require you to help me all you can."

"I don't see how I can help you at all, Rubby. The thing is done, and can't be undone. What's the use of bothering over the matter?"

"It is what I am going to do. I mean to find out whether Muerte is guilty or not, and if he is guilty then he shall be punished; of that I am quite determined, so that you will have to find out all you can in the matter. My idea at the moment is to pay the miscreant a visit in his caravan, and accuse him. You can make the accusation, and I shall watch him closely. We will take Jupiter with us, for the flogging purposes, and for other reasons. It is no good employing a strong man if you do not make use of him. I am determined to make use of Jupiter in every way, because he gets a big screw, although he pretends that it is a very small one, and only about half what he is worth. Of course, that is his idea; my idea is that he gets twice as much as he is worth, but although I often tell him so, I cannot convince him. Now, think it over, and we will decide to-morrow morning as to how to act. It will be a little excitement."

"So it will, Rubby, especially for Muerte, if Jupiter commences to horsewhip him."

"I don't know that he will go so far as that, but he will take a riding-whip with him in case it is required. We shall pay the brute a surprise visit early to-morrow morning."

"It won't be so jolly early if it is after you get up."

"Oh, you beauty, won't I get level with you directly! But no matter, serve up the steak. I'm famished. We have had nothing to eat since tea."

As a result of this conversation, Joe routed Rubby out at about seven o'clock the following morning, and having breakfasted with Jupiter, the three made their way to Muerte's circus.

"There is his caravan!" exclaimed Rubby. "You wait outside, Jupiter, and when I cough you come in. I don't want to frighten the brute at the start. If you can get into a position so that you can hear the conversation, so much the better."

"Leave it to me, Rubby!" exclaimed Jupiter, in a low voice. "I will manage all that, and I will manage the thrashing as well, though I think I ought to get extra pay for doing that."

"Then get it from Muerte, dear boy. He is the one who will get the benefit from the flogging, so that he is the one who should pay for it."

Jupiter did not look best pleased at this brilliant suggestion. He had an idea that Muerte would not feel disposed to pay for the sort of thrashing that he intended to give him, if he were proved guilty. Joe had an idea that there would be no thrashing, because it would be impossible to prove the miscreant's guilt; but Joe also knew that Rubby would not be at all particular concerning the legal point of view, and that if he were proved guilty to Rubby's satisfaction, then he would be bound to suffer.

Muerte was just finishing dressing when Rubby entered the caravan, followed by Joe, and he looked furious at the intrusion.

"Good-morning, dear boy!" exclaimed Rubby, selecting the most comfortable chair, and motioning to the owner of the caravan to be seated. "Nice morning, isn't it?"

"You get out of my caravan, you insolent hound, or else I will throw you out."

"You couldn't throw the pair of us out, dear boy," said Rubby calmly, "and we have come here to discuss a matter that you will prefer to remain secret; therefore, you will be very ill-advised to shout for help. It might make me cough, might it not, Joe?"

"Yes. You had better pay attention to what Rubby is going to say, Muerte."

"Well, what do you want, you insolent rascal? If it is for me to shift my pitch, then I may tell you at the start that I shall do nothing of the sort."

"No, dear boy!" exclaimed Rubby, lighting a cigar. "I don't want to speak to you about that, because I don't care where you pitch your circus. I have told the people what to expect at it, and that is nearly sure to keep them away."

"Yes, you demon, and what you said is libellous! I shall bring an action against you, and claim heavy damages."

"Ha, ha, ha! You are a funny Spanish tinker, Muerte. I don't believe Spaniards have the sense of human beings. You are a sort of bastard race, descended from Moors and other niggers; still, you can't help that, my poor brute. If I had a spare cage I would keep you in it, and let Joe train you. I believe Joe would make you almost respectable in a month or so. He has got a wonderful way with wild beasts, and I don't suppose you would be much more difficult to manage than a tiger."

"Have you come here to make a fool of yourself?"

"No, dear boy. I have come here to make a fool of you, although the journey was perfectly unnecessary, because you were born the biggest fool of any man I have ever met. Now, don't you see, Muerte, that your action in greasing that board was very silly?"

"Liar! I know, nothing about it, nor do I believe that the plank was greased. That young ruffian fell, and then lied to make out as though someone had caused his fall."

"It was so stupid of you in this way. If Joe had been killed, and there was every probability of such occurring, you would have been hanged. I would have brought you to the gallows, and—"

"You are talking like a raving maniac! I tell you that I know nothing about the affair."

"Of course, Joe, he tells us that," said Rubby. "It is only to be expected, because he does not know how much we know. Just question him a little, Joe, and then perhaps he will comprehend the terrible position in which he has placed himself."

"How did you get that graze on your shin, Muerte?" demanded Joe, pointing to Muerte's right leg.

Of course, this was only a guess; but Joe had an idea that if the miscreant had really stumbled over a tent-cord there would be a mark on his shin.

"What do you mean?" gasped Muerte, glancing at his leg.

Joe and Rubby gazed at each other and smiled. Words could never have made Muerte feel more uncomfortable.

"I don't understand a word of your meaning," said Muerte, after a pause, in which he waited in vain for the two to speak.

"You will understand, dear boy, before we have finished," said Rubby. "I do not expect a Spanish tinker to be very sharp-witted."

"Look here, you insolent scoundrel!" cried Muerte. "If you dare to call me a Spanish tinker again I will kick you out of the place! I don't for a moment believe that there has been foul play, but supposing that there had, I would be the first to help you fathom the mystery."

"A thousand thanks, dear boy!" exclaimed Rubby. "But there is no mystery to fathom. The proofs we have are quite sufficient for us to convict you. We have not come here for proofs, but only to point out to you the error of your ways, and to adopt such measures as will prevent your renewing your horrible action. It is not pleasant to

talk to a murderer, but we have decided on this occasion to do so, as we hope what we say will have a beneficial effect on you."

"The sooner you clear out of this the better I shall be pleased."

"I have not the slightest doubt about that, Muerte," said Joe; "but, you see, we have not come here to please you, neither have we come here to please ourselves. We have come here to convict you. It is not necessary for you to say anything before Rubby sends for the police, but if you are innocent, how do you account for having grazed your shin in tumbling over the tent-ropes?"

"I did nothing of the sort, you stupid young villain! I certainly grazed my shin in getting into the caravan last night, but that was at ten o'clock, and as I never left it again, how could I have been in your circus at midnight?"

"You see, Rubby, how he convicts himself," said Joe. "We never mentioned that we saw him there at midnight. The hour was not stated. If it should have been anyone else, how could he possibly know the time he was seen?"

"You spoke of the night, and I naturally thought you meant at a late hour," said Muerte, looking rather stupid, for he saw what a mistake he had made.

"Well, of course, that doesn't matter to us," continued Joe. "The fact may be mentioned in court, but we shall not rely on that to prove your guilt."

"You cannot prove a negative," said Muerte.

"Certainly not," retorted Joe. "We should not be doing so in proving your guilt. Don't you see, we are going to keep a little up our sleeves. We are not going to tell you all we know, because it would give you a better chance of defending yourself, and that is a thing we don't want. Knowing that you have been guilty of attempted murder, it is our intention to punish you for it. Shall I go for the police, Rubby?"

"Yes, dear boy. It is the only thing to be done; and look here, Joe, don't tell the constables all the evidence we have against him. He might tip them to let him know, and that would only give us extra trouble in convicting him."

"Stay!" cried Muerte, who had good cause to dread the police. "I do not want any trouble with the police."

"I can quite understand that," said Joe; "but, you see, they won't give you much trouble. They will only take you to the station, and keep you under lock and key till you are sent to the assizes for trial. The man most likely to give you trouble will be the goaler. I believe they sometimes make it warm for prisoners."

"I tell you, Ruabino, that I know nothing about this. You surely cannot believe that I would be capable of such an action."

"Well, if you were to ask my candid opinion of yourself, I should say you would be capable of committing any crime under the sun, dear boy. I know you to be a thorough-paced scoundrel, you gave me proof of that long years ago, and I also know you hate Joe for having helped to flog you. For that reason you have attempted his life. When he caught you prowling around my circus, what we ought to have done was to give you in custody. But you will see plainly enough that we had no proof of your attempted villainy then; and knowing that you were an idiotic sort of creature, of the third-rate, stage-villain type—why, we let you go. Now, Muerte, although you are such a contemptible miscreant, there is a large amount of vice in your nature, and you are, therefore, far more dangerous than you look. Your face, especially when you are in a passion, always makes me laugh. At the present moment, when you are in a state of terror, you are screamingly funny. Of course, I know that you cannot help your looks. No man would have given himself such an evil face as yours if he could have helped it."

"I can understand your feeling annoyed, if you really believe that I was guilty of the action," said Muerte, "and therefore, I make allowances for what you say; but the thing is utterly ridiculous. You, as a man of business, Ruabino, will understand the loss that your false accusation would cause me. You may say that I should have my remedy against you, but you know what going to law means."

"I never said you would have a remedy against me. How could you have one?" exclaimed Rubby. "We know that you are guilty, and as we shall be able to prove it to the satisfaction of the judge and jury, there is an end of the matter. Far from your having a remedy against me, I should be a benefactor to society for ridding the world for several years to come from such a dangerous miscreant as you are."

"I don't say that you are doing so intentionally," exclaimed Muerte; "but you are making a horrible accusation against a perfectly innocent man!"

"If you are perfectly innocent, why should you fear the police?"

"I do not fear them, but as you know it would be a difficult thing for me to prove my innocence."

"Extremely difficult," observed Rubby. "If it were my case, I should say absolutely impossible."

"I should have to abandon my circus."

"Another benefit to the public."

"It is no joking matter to me."

"I quite agree with you, dear boy. Were it my case, I should call it a downright serious matter; but, then, I would never put myself in such a shocking position."

"I suppose your object is to get me to leave the place, and in that case, I tell you plainly that I would rather do so than submit to the annoyance and expense of defending such an action."

"It is not a matter of defending an action," said Rubby. "You will be arrested for attempted murder. As for your offer to leave the place, I don't care whether your circus remains here or not. It is very certain that you will not remain here when you are arrested. I do not for a moment suppose that you would be let out on bail, seeing the seriousness of the charge. However, that is a matter that has nothing to do with me. Now, Joe, as you are my legal adviser, I will leave the matter in your hands. Shall I send for the police, and give him in custody—which is what I ought to do—or shall I cough?"

"Rubby, I believe the man is as harmless as drowned kittens, and as stupid as moulting owls. He is only dangerous when—when—"

"When he gets the chance," interposed Rubby. "Go on!"

"I wouldn't send the brute to prison. Suppose you give him his choice?"

"Well, it is easy to know which he will choose. We know he is guilty, and it stands to reason that he won't want to be given in custody. However, I will give the criminal creature his choice. Now, then, Muerte, you Spanish tinker, shall I send for the police, or shall I cough?"

"I don't want you to send for the police."

"Then you wish me to cough?"

"You can cough if you like, but—"

Rubby did cough, and when Jupiter entered the caravan with a whip, Muerte understood Rubby's meaning quickly enough.

Jupiter was a man of few words when there was business to be done. He seized Muerte by the collar, and flogged him with a severity that caused him to howl for help. Joe took the precaution of locking the door, and the man who tried it grinned when he recognised his master's voice. He made no attempt to burst the door open, but promptly went for the police, under the impression that his employer would commend him for his action.

Jupiter did not stop until Muerte was howling for mercy, while tears were running down his cheeks; and at that moment the door of the caravan was burst open, and a policeman, who happened to be just outside the circus, marched in.

"Now, what's the meaning of this 'ere?" demanded the man of law.

Rubby waved his cigar towards Joe, by way of reply.

"I refer you to my legal adviser," observed Rubby.

"It's all right, old chap," said Joe.

"But it ain't all right. You've been assaulting that gentleman. I saw one of the blows struck."

"That may be, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Joe.

"If you had come sooner, you would have seen more than one blow struck; besides, you, can see by the way he's crying that he has had it what you might call hot and strong. We want it to do him good, and hope it will have that effect. You may go."

"Well, I never did hear such cheek in all my life!" gasped the constable. "You have a clear charge against 'em, sir. If you like to give them in custody, I will take them."

"You are very kind,

my dear fellow," said Joe, "but he doesn't require to give us in custody, thank you all the same. If you really want a charge, you will have to go and catch some collarless puppy dog, and summon the owner."

"You mind your own business, young shaver!"

"Well, I think it is my business, if you are going to arrest us. I have not the slightest inclination to be arrested, and I feel quite sure Rubby has not, to say nothing of Jupiter."

"What is the meaning of this assault?" demanded the constable, turning towards Rubby.

"I refer you to my legal adviser, dear boy," said Rubby, enjoying his cigar.

"What's that boy know about the law?"

"A good deal more than you do, old chap," answered Rubby.

"Pr'aps I'll teach you a bit about the law afore I've done with you," said the constable.

"In that case, you will have to learn it yourself first, old fellow. I wouldn't care to be your teacher, either, for you look fearfully fatheaded."

"You jest take care, else I shall arrest you for obstructing the police in the execution of their dooty!"

"You go and ask cooky to give you some more of her master's pie, old chap," said Joe. "Mind you, I don't say that you need it, for you are a lot too fat already; but it will keep you quiet. I can fancy you doing your dooty each night by going from house to house making love to the cooks, and eating their masters' pies."

"Why, I never listened to such impudence in all my life, and from a mere boy, too! I can see they have assaulted you serious, sir, but you have only to give them in custody, and I will run the whole lot in."

"Go away!" groaned Muerte.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the astonished constable. "You don't mean to say as you ain't going to give 'em in custody after they have beat you like that?"

"I can deal with my own affairs without the aid of the police."

"If you really want a case," exclaimed Joe, "we can let Jupiter flog you, and then you will be able to run him in for assaulting the police. Muerte has a horror of the police; he thinks their remedial measures are worse than the smart of his thrashing."

"Then you admit he's been flogged?"

"What an extremely silly question to ask! You must have heard him howling, besides, you say you saw one of the blows struck. Then you have only to look at his face to see that he has been crying."

"What was he struck for?"

"To do him good. You can call it correctional punishment."

"Well, all I can say is, that if he don't give you in custody, I shall consider the matter in a very serious light, and I—"

"Look here, old fellow," interposed Joe, "we don't care what light you look at it in. You can go and discuss the matter with cooky, for all we care. All you have to do is to go."

"I shall go when I've got at the rights of things. I want to know what he has done to make you flog him like that."

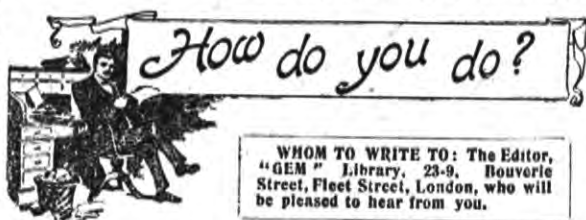
"Understand me, fellow!" cried Muerte, glaring fiercely at the constable. "This is my caravan, and I order you out of it! Begone!"

"Don't you try to come it over me," cried the constable, "for I won't stand it!"

"Got out of my caravan! You have no right here!"

"Yes, I have. One of your men sent for me, and it's natural that I must know the rights of the affair before I go. If you let a man flog you like that, and then refuse to give him in custody for the assault, it stands to reason that you must have done something very serious against him, and are more frightened of the police than he is."

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